

title: Resume case research

author: Sanneke Stigter

case: Franz West, *Clamp*, 1995

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Resume case research of Clamp

Case researcher: Sanneke Stigter
Contributors: Annick Kleizen, Evelyne Snijders

Introduction

'Clamp' is an object-based installation made by Franz West in 1995 characterized by interactive as well as a site-related aspects. The exhibition history shows that important initial features have changed gradually or even disappeared. It became apparent that loss of memory and lack of documentation on the actual role and nature of both the tangible and less tangible components that constitute the Clamp could have led to permanent loss of specific aspects of the installation. The research focussed on the history and development of the work as well as documentation combined with the practice of reinstalling the work to obtain a better understanding and develop a better way of managing the artwork.

Experience of the artwork

The 'Clamp' is an environment that is based on the artist's former studio with the actual floor of his studio included. Colourful objects made out of painted plaster and papier-mâché are placed in and around the Clamp as well as benches and tables made in a style that is typical of West. The visitor can make himself at home in this 'environmental collage' and make a telephone call for instance: the walls are covered with pages from the local phonebook.

Exhibition history

Documents of the exhibition history show how the Clamp has changed over time, before as well as after it was acquired by the Kröller-Müller Museum. The installation has been put together freely at every other occasion, changing its constellation, which is according to the artist ideas. The biggest change however appeared already after the first show, because at that time the visitors could actually use the telephones that were provided within the Clamp. This feature was never seen hereafter.

Research

The role of the telephone within the work is obviously an important one considering the fact that some of the works are called 'Telephone sculptures', the phonebook pages on the wall and that fact that the public was welcomed to make a telephone call in the Clamp during its first exhibition.

Upon acquisition Franz West provided the museum with a red stained telephone that is part of the inventory of the Clamp, but it is never seen in any of the installation photographs. The only reference found is a picture that shows Franz West talking on this particular phone in his studio while he is working on sculptures that are now part of the Clamp.

The nature of the detective work that was carried out during the research can be illustrated by the fact that a crucial answer was given by a note on a Post-it adhered to a text in one of the museum archives. This text was apparently the one that was initially provided by the artist as

part of the Clamp. The note on the Post-it stated that West had deviated from his own writing where he states that 'two telephones' had to be part of Clamp, because nowadays everyone has a mobile phone. Further research resulted in the existence of a different text that was used during the second the Clamp was exhibited and that does not mention the telephones anymore. The telephone seems to have disappeared from the scene.

The disappearance of the actual telephone(s) and the explanatory texts from the installation, the history of the walls that had weakened severely once they were cut with a jigsaw before transport to Otterlo and the reinforcement of the original floor panels have had a big impact on the character of the Clamp. The walls and floor can only be installed according to a certain lay out without weakening the material any further. The original floor tiles were fixed upside down permanently, so that the paint stains referring to the artist's studio can no longer be seen. These alterations have had a big impact on the use and experience of the Clamp but were not documented by the museum before. This may have been omitted because the changes were carried out in presence of the artist and this may have been experienced as a logical natural development of the artwork.

Results

Extensive detective work in the archives has uncovered new and interesting information. This has helped to answer some questions raised at the beginning of the project and has allowed us to reinstall the work according to the ideas of the artist. Conservation treatment has been carried out on several objects and preventative conservation measures have been taken to ensure that the various materials do not have a damaging effect on each other. Supportive constructions are fabricated for the transportation and storage of the fragile components and guidelines for handling and installation have been developed. The installation is thoroughly documented and it will be investigated how best to incorporate the information within our registration system. It is interesting to find that the people are still delighted to enter the Clamp and experience the environment Franz West created.

Conclusions

The conservator needs to understand what the physical and the less tangible aspects are that constitute an installation in order to consolidate the functionality of the artwork for the future. To communicate this a sound documentation is needed that foresees in future conservation and installation problems. The artist's ideas should be clearly defined and the different forms in which an artwork may (have) exist(ed) should be documented because only then contemporary art and its future history can be kept safe - in one form or another.



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drs. Sanneke Stigter
Conservator of Modern Art & Sculpture

Kröller-Müller Museum
Houtkampweg 6
6731 AW Otterlo
The Netherlands

www.kmm.nl

<http://www.inside-installations.org>