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# Keeping Artworks Alive in Museums: Discussion

## Colophon

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토론  
Discussion

미술관에서 작품이  
살아남는 법

Keeping Artworks Alive  
in Museums

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PARK SANG AE Thank you for listening to the presentations. Through various cases, we have discussed the exhibition and conservation of museum collections. I would now like to ask our three presenters some questions. As Pip mentioned, artworks acquire new contextual meanings when they enter museum collections. In this process, how can we objectively contextualize an artwork's history of installation and restoration? Furthermore, one of the most crucial aspects in the preservation and installation of artworks is upholding the original intentions of the artist. How significant should the previous history of installation and restoration be in the ongoing management of artworks? Also, I also wonder how the artist's intentions can be proven after their death? If there are conflicting ideas within the artist's words, interviews, signatures, emails, and documents, which should we prioritize in trying to understand the artist's intentions?

CHIN ZEEYOUNG I'm not sure if there's a definitive answer to this question. As we heard today, and as you mentioned, artworks can be presented in various forms, and there are many cases of artworks that markedly change in different ways while the artist is still alive. So I wonder if it's even permissible for us to put these intentions in an objective context, to stipulate or certify them as the official intentions of the artist. In a way, that seems a bit arrogant. Both of our institutions are museums, and I believe there should be some guidelines and philosophies for managing these artworks. It seems necessary to establish a basic system. I feel very strongly that there's currently a lack and insufficiency among institutions in the systematization of managing, preserving, and researching these types of artworks in collections. Therefore, I think we need to start by addressing that. Earlier, Pip briefly quoted Bruno Latour. Instead of considering artworks as singular entities, I think we should remember that artworks are composed of various components, and start by documenting those individual elements as thoroughly as possible. So rather than using the terms "objective" or "objectively," I believe we should think in

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terms of accumulating and interpreting data, and promoting open interpretations.

KIM HWANJU I agree with the serious concern expressed by Zeeyoung about the absence of a system for managing such artworks. In the case of conservation treatment, one of the most basic principles is to document every process. Therefore, we record all processes, create reports, and register them in a management system, so that they can be accessed at any time in the future. However, when it comes to artwork installation, there does not seem to be any separate system or regulations. In general, the artists may sometimes provide manuals, but they are not managed as systematically as conservation treatment processes. At the Daejeon Museum of Art, if we determine that an artwork that we wish to acquire needs an installation manual, then, even if the artist has not provided one, we request the necessary documentation for the installation. Then if those documents are also insufficient, we create video manuals. These manuals are uploaded to the management system for reference when the artwork is later being used. I believe that such records are one of the most important items in terms of preserving the artist's intentions and the authenticity of the artwork. As I mentioned in my presentation, if there had not been any exhibition photos from the original installation of Nam June Paik's **Fractal Turtle Ship** in 1993, it would have been very difficult to carry out the relocation and restoration with no data, and the outcome might have been different. Similarly, as I showed earlier, with Tom Shannon's **The Ball Ray**, the artist provided precise production and installation manuals. Then through discussions in preparation for this special exhibition, we secured a manual that could be used for indoor installation, which served as the basis for the restoration and installation. In my opinion, the continuous securing and management of documentation related to the production and installation of artworks is the most essential factor.

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PIP LAURENSEN Thank you so much. I agree with my colleagues on the panel, but I also think we have learned a lot in recent years, partly because time-based media works, complex installations and also live performances have increasingly come into collections. That has really pushed conservation forward, as we respond to these changing forms of artistic practice coming into the museum. And one of the things that I learned, partly through the research that we did in the Mellon-funded project called **Reshaping the Collectible** at Tate [Modern], was from working with a very complex sound and film-based work by Tony Conrad, called **Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plane**. This work was originally performed in 1971 and had been performed in very different and slightly different forms until it came into the museum in 2022. So it had had this long life before it came to the museum, and very practically, we set about learning from other disciplines like memory studies, for example, and gathering memories by interviewing everybody who had been involved in the previous performances of the work, everyone who was available—the producers, the sound engineers, the archivist—to really try and gather those rich records. So I think we now understand the importance of having all the very different voices around the work represented in that record. And we are developing technologies to enable us to do that, particularly around time-based media. Joanna Phillips,<sup>1</sup> when she was at the Guggenheim, developed this idea of an “iteration report,” where you can actually record all the different changes and shifts that happened. For reflecting on an artist’s sanction or intent, we often do that, and as we’ve seen through the scholarship that has been presented in this symposium, such methods actually provide quite a lot of information. So if we take what the artists have said, if we take all the scholarship from different sorts of records, press cuttings, photographs, things in archives, and if we try and gather the memories of those who’ve been intimately involved in the realization of these works, we actually have an extraordinary dossier that can help guide us. The challenge for the museum is that there’s a tendency to want to fix things. Enabling these dynamic works to unfold is actually a very big challenge for the museum, because of all of the issues about

1 Joanna Phillips is a time-based media conservator who worked at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from 2008 to 2019.

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respecting the artist. And we've seen some really nice ways in which bringing younger artists or different artists into dialogue with these works can be a really fantastic way of keeping them alive and very present.

**PARK SANG AE** Thank you. I will now ask a simple question. What if the artist's intention is focused on the present-ness or presence of the artwork, or if the artist says, 'If this work does not function, discard it,' or if the properties of the materials used in the artwork are inherently unsustainable, so that the artwork can only be exhibited once and then disposed of? What do you as museum professionals require to preserve and manage such artworks as part of the collection? What attributes would you consider, and how would you discuss the management of such artworks? In short, what do you think are the most important considerations for museums in collecting, preserving, and installing artworks classified as "ephemeral," with a short lifespan?

**CHIN ZEEYOUNG** If I may start, if the artist intentionally created a work with no sustainability and explicitly stated that it should be exhibited once and then discarded, then it probably would not be appropriate to collect it in the first place. We wouldn't make any special efforts to store or preserve such a physical work. However, if the artist's stance was ambiguous, we would need to carefully consider the situation. If it's clearly impossible to preserve or conserve the work due to the nature of the materials, then perhaps it would be recorded only through documentation. One of the key points would be whether there is enough physical space to store the work. Museum storage space is always limited, so the first thing to consider would be whether there is physical space to store such works. And the same goes for manpower. A close network of experts in various fields is needed to care for the artwork. We would consider whether all of this is realistically feasible.

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KIM HWANJU When acquiring artworks, practical considerations must be a crucial factor. At the Daejeon Museum of Art, in fact, there have been cases of acquisition proposals that were excluded from consideration, regardless of the aesthetic value of the work, due to practical constraints, such as the budget required for maintenance, the physical volume the artwork would occupy in storage, and the current capacity of the museum's storage facilities. Regarding the material properties used in an artwork, if we examine the collection procedures of national and public museums in Korea, they do not currently include any assessment regarding material stability. Of course, during the acquisition proposal process, some investigation and assessment may occur to achieve a certain degree of judgment, but it's usually based on the judgment of the proposer, rather than experts, making it challenging to ensure accurate evaluation. Also, there are very few cases where documentation accompanying conservation-related evaluations, such as condition reports or detailed investigations and photographs of damages, are secured. In contrast, many overseas art museums, such as the Smithsonian or the Getty Center, require the submission of condition reports and conservation assessment reports during the collection process. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York also stipulates that materials must be maintained in the best possible state in terms of material stability, and explicitly states that it only considers collection proposals for artworks with significant aesthetic value, which are thus worth the risk of potential disappearance or poor conservation conditions, as you asked about. Therefore, it seems necessary in Korea to establish regulations related to conservation assessment in order to ensure the safe acquisition and management of artworks.

PARK SANG AE What do you think, Pip?

PIP LAURENSEN I think there are a number of different strategies that are being developed. And it really depends on

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the particulars of the situation. We've seen some extraordinary work reconstructing complex environments, such as an amazing exhibition at the Haus der Kunst in Munich at the moment, which is the reconstruction of twelve environments from between 1956 and 1976 by women artists. It's a really interesting project in which there are no material remains from the originals and they have been completely reconstructed. And I think we will see, as my fellow panelists pointed out, increasing pressures, just thinking about the environmental impacts of storing very large works. There will be increasing pressures to really think about how important it is to preserve the material or whether we can, through documentation, reconstruct works. But as my colleagues have said, it's really taken on a case by case basis. And all of those conversations do normally happen within the museum when a work is being acquired, thinking about what the life of that work will be in the museum and what sort of strategies we can bring to bear, to recreate or to preserve, depending on the particulars of the work.

MARK PATSFALL I just wanted to say that I know that curators put a lot of weight on the artist's intentions, but the artwork exists outside of the artist. And so the meaning of that work is going to change over time. I think that's one thing that should be thought about, because it can be presented in a context which brings out the historical value of the piece better, if you know what I mean.

PARK SANG AE I would like to discuss the extent to which interpretations of the installation and arrangement of artworks can be understood when they are exhibited. The installation of **Transmission Tower** involved many curatorial decisions, such as arranging mini towers, establishing conceptual connections between the interior and exterior of the exhibition space, and selecting a collaborating artist who was capable of programming MIDI software. When making these decisions, there was a focus not only on reinterpreting the artist's intended message in a contemporary context, but also



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on directions for amplifying the original message. In particular, the Daejeon Museum of Art is currently holding an exhibition that reinterprets the 1993 Taejeon Expo exhibition. What do you think about these issues?

KIM HWANJU As you mentioned, when determining the scope of interpretation, it seems most important to consider how much research has been conducted on the artwork and on what basis will the judgments be made. In the case of Tom Shannon's **The Ball Ray**, which is exhibited at the Daejeon Museum of Art in the exhibition **Future Lies Ahead: Daejeon 1993/2023**, the final form of the installation differs from the original. Before making this decision, various aspects, such as the artist's intention and the practical conditions of the museum, were considered through discussions with the artist. Although it was installed in a different way from the original, the authenticity of the artwork was still preserved. There have also been cases in which, through decision-making processes with the artist, works were restored or reproduced in a way that maintains authenticity while satisfying practical conditions, even if it meant partially deviating from the original form. If installations and restorations are based on accurate grounds, then at least a minimum level of validity has been secured.

PARK SANG AE Thank you. Now let's take questions from the audience.

QUESTION You mentioned the volatility of artworks, and in my case, a long time ago, I bought a digital artwork that is programmed on a floppy disk. Now, Windows 95 is no longer serviced, and it's difficult to find compatible hardware. So I wonder if there's any way to restore the artwork, or if I should just be satisfied with the fact that I own the work.

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PARK SANG AE This is a case of an artwork that can no longer be enjoyed due to changes in storage media, as technology evolves. How can artworks stored on older media be sustainably maintained? From a technical perspective, processes such as migration or emulation could be solutions. These points are often of the utmost concern for museums when they replace their hardware. For the viewer, there are sensory aspects that can only be felt through the original medium, which cannot be expressed in words. The question always remains whether these aspects can be preserved through migration or emulation using the latest technology.

KIM HWANJU Similar issues have arisen at the Daejeon Museum of Art. Some artworks collected in the past were composed of media that could no longer be operated. In addition, some of them were in a state where they could not be restored or migrated due to malfunctions. Fortunately, the artist was still alive, and the artworks had been continuously migrated, which helped to resolve the issue. I think the point raised by this question will likely continue to be a recurring issue in the future, and it underscores the need for artists' guidance and ongoing management with regards to storage and utilization. There have been many discussions about preserving Nam June Paik's works, particularly about the preservation of CRT monitors. However, media preservation issues related to changing technologies remain a challenge that needs to be addressed.

PARK SANG AE I'll take another question.

QUESTION Hello, lately I've been thinking that exhibition services or exhibition content in museums are evolving to increasingly include visitor interaction and participation. In this respect, it occurred to me that perhaps the preservation and installation of artworks could also be viewed in the same way that historical research is done whenever the Joseon

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Dynasty is depicted in movies or dramas. To make depictions of the Joseon Dynasty in films or dramas, I believe that they not only try to reproduce the Joseon era as it is documented in historical records, but also add elements or imagery that viewers have in mind about the Joseon era. Therefore, I'm curious if museums also consider collection, preservation, and representation from a visitor-centered perspective.

CHIN ZEEYOUNG Yes, I think that's a very insightful perspective. I believe the future lies in visitor experiences and the memories that visitors have and can share. As I briefly mentioned in my presentation, when we're asked why certain artworks should be exhibited even though they're susceptible to damage in harsh outdoor environments, I tend to take a more liberal stance in terms of artwork conservation, asserting that the works should be exhibited if at all possible. I believe that, as visitors have experiences and we continue to document those experiences, that data accumulates to form the basis for exhibiting and preserving artworks in the future. This accumulation of experiences will serve as a foundation for us to interpret, exhibit, and preserve artworks in a richer way. So in the process of preserving the thirty-two cars, we plan to find ways to encourage public participation, share the process, and listen to various opinions about it.

PARK SANG AE We've taken up a lot of time, so I would like to end today's symposium by taking one last question.

QUESTION I'd like to ask about the volatility of artworks. For example, in the case of land art or performance, which have a one-off characteristic, I have some concerns that the original artwork may be edited or truncated during the process of being collected by a museum. Also, you mentioned that works that are difficult to preserve are recorded through documentation, but

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I'm also concerned that, when being recorded in written text, those works may become objectified and individualized, until they may become somewhat locked and rigid. So I'd like to hear your thoughts on this matter.

PIP LAURENSEN Yes. Thank you for your question. I think you're absolutely right to think about works that were never intended to be in museum collections. Although what's interesting is thinking about groups of artworks, like Net Art for example, that were created in an environment that was very much looking for alternatives to the museum as a place to enjoy art and to distribute art. Where the museum has recently become involved, and perhaps has a place, is in the conservation challenges of keeping those sorts of works accessible. And I think that there is a way to do this that acknowledges the very different context in which those works were created, that actually honors the artist's original sanctions and design for the work, but also contributes something useful in terms of being able to conserve the work.

I also just wanted to say something that I think is so interesting about the earlier conversation about obsolescence. What we see is an extraordinary persistence, actually, of so many technologies. With my students just last Friday, we were able to kind of access a CD-ROM work from the nineties, the likes of which haven't been seen for a number of years. And it's a very magical experience being able to use emulation and these tools to access these older works. So I agree that not everything was intended to be in the museum, and that it's important that scholarship and deep thinking help guide the way in which we respond to those works. But there is often a place that is appropriate in terms of keeping these works as parts of the historical record, as part of the narrative of history. And I think there is a job there for conservation, and for the museum. Thank you.

PARK SANG AE Thank you for spending so much time with us at today's symposium. Let's conclude today's discussion here.