

Monika Jadzińska

"After Us the Deluge?" The Preservation of the Art of Our Times

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Monika JADZIŃSKA

**“AFTER US THE DELUGE?”
THE PRESERVATION OF THE ART IN OUR TIMES**

This article outlines issues associated with the preservation and conservation of contemporary art and the role that documentation plays in this process. A contemporary artwork, in order to become an object of interest, analysis, purchase, collecting, exhibiting etc. must exist, and its existence must be preserved. Its preservation does not always mean, however, fixing the matter and halting the processes of deterioration such as in the case of traditional art, but it may adopt a totally different form, for example preservation in the form of documentation. The changeable character of ephemeral art, the use of perishable materials or readymades, as well as innovative concepts and techniques makes conservation a complex issue. An additional worrying factor is also often improperly conducted activities associated with exhibiting, transportation or storing of the artworks that cause a falsification of the artist's concept and destruction of an artwork's structure. The conservator must analyse, identify and preserve the matter in a professional way or, on the contrary, after an appropriate examination, act according to the artist's intention, and treat it in a way that is adequate to the artwork's character. This may involve the making of a replica, a reconstruction, an emulation, a re-enactment or preservation through documenting, or it may use entirely different possibilities of modern conservation. One must set a proper strategy of care and protection over the works of art and the proceedings must keep the authenticity of the artwork.

The author of this article analyses the notion of authenticity and shows the change in understanding this concept, and the influence which this change had on the form and method of preserving artworks in the past, in contrast with contemporary visual art. She writes about the new role of an artwork's matter and substance, and the challenges that result from it, and about the new role and relationship between a conservator, an artist and other 'stakeholders'. She describes the threats to preservation and the aims and limits of preservation and conservation, pointing out the key role of documentation. She also pays attention to various forms of documentation by illustrating the article with comprehensive examples of good and bad practices associated with documenting contemporary artworks.

Bibliography: see p.55