Unruly Artworks: Collecting The Uncollectable

Thesis Project

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Introduction

Ever since the dawn of modern art, Conservators have been presented with new and unfamiliar challenges. There has been a widespread rejection of conventional materials and methods. Modern and contemporary artists have revolutionised art practice in the last century, experimenting with new ways of making art. The techniques and materials used to make work have become a conscious choice; and lend more meaning than ever to a work of art. These developments have brought infinite possibilities for the future of art and a much more diverse and engaged generation of artists. With this rise in experimentation came an inevitable increase in the use of ephemeral materials such as newspaper, organic material, wax, dust, or water to name but a few. This revolution in art coincided with the inception of new technologies such as film, the internet, and television providing new spaces for visual art to exist. This new diversity of modern and contemporary art forced conservators to come up with new methods for preserving individual artists' work rather than well established techniques for conserving traditional genres like oil painting or marble sculpture. When discussing what he describes as the *'enduringly ephemeral'* Potts writes " *For an artwork to endure some aspect or trace of it has to survive in reasonably material form"* (Potts, A., 2007). The 'Inherent vice' is a term coined by conservators referring to a piece of work that contains a combination of materials that will eventually destroy the work itself. Over the last century, many works of art made using ephemeral materials have been quietly self-destructing in storage. Should this natural process be stopped? Is this process of decay part of the work if the artist doesn't specify it? Is it sufficient to present documentation of missing artwork? This essay will explore the challenges presented to conservators by analysing the history of conservation and modern art, will include an interview with the curator of the IMMA collection, and will raise the question whether we should always conserve ephemeral materials.

The History of Conservation of Modern Art

The field of conservation came about through the collaboration of art institutions and scientists in the 19th century. In the year 1850, the chemist Michael Faraday was commissioned to examine 'the dirty and obscure state' of a selection of works in the National Gallery, as it was said that works deteriorated more quickly there than in private collections (Brommelle, 1956). After some years of experimentation methods of preservation emerged that became conventional. These included temperature control in order to stop the expansion and contraction of works on canvas and the use of glass as a protective barrier. In 1926 Alan Burroughs from the Fogg Art Museum began to x-ray old master paintings and published his findings in 1938 (Hill Stoner, 2005). The x-ray along with ultraviolet light became new ways of examining work.

The inception of installation art and the expansion of sculpture in the early 20th century presented many theoretical challenges, amongst them the reproduction and conservation of ephemeral work. Tate in London and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam were the first institutions to address the issue.

In 1909 the poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published the Futurist manifesto, renouncing the tradition and formality of art as it was at the time. The Futurists believed that an entirely new form of art was necessary for the cultural renewal of Italy. The movement was closely linked to the rise of fascism in Italy, leading up to the second world war (Bowler, 1991). Although there is an emphasis on painting, this rejection of tradition led to an inevitable and radical departure paving the way for the 20th-century avant-garde and, thereby, ephemeral works.

'*Merzbau*' (1923-33) by Kurt Schwitters was a notably early ephemeral work. It was an installation consisting of 8 rooms in his own home. Each room was built up of layers of abstract forms borrowed from Futurist Paintings and was dedicated to an individual artist. The ephemerality, scale, and (for the viewer) immersive nature of the work led to it being considered a predecessor of the genre of installation art (Ferriani, Pugliese, and Celant, 2013). The work was destroyed in 1943 during the allied bombing of Hannover and has since been reconstructed by the designer Peter Bissegger and the artist's son, Ernst Swchitters (Orchard, 2021).

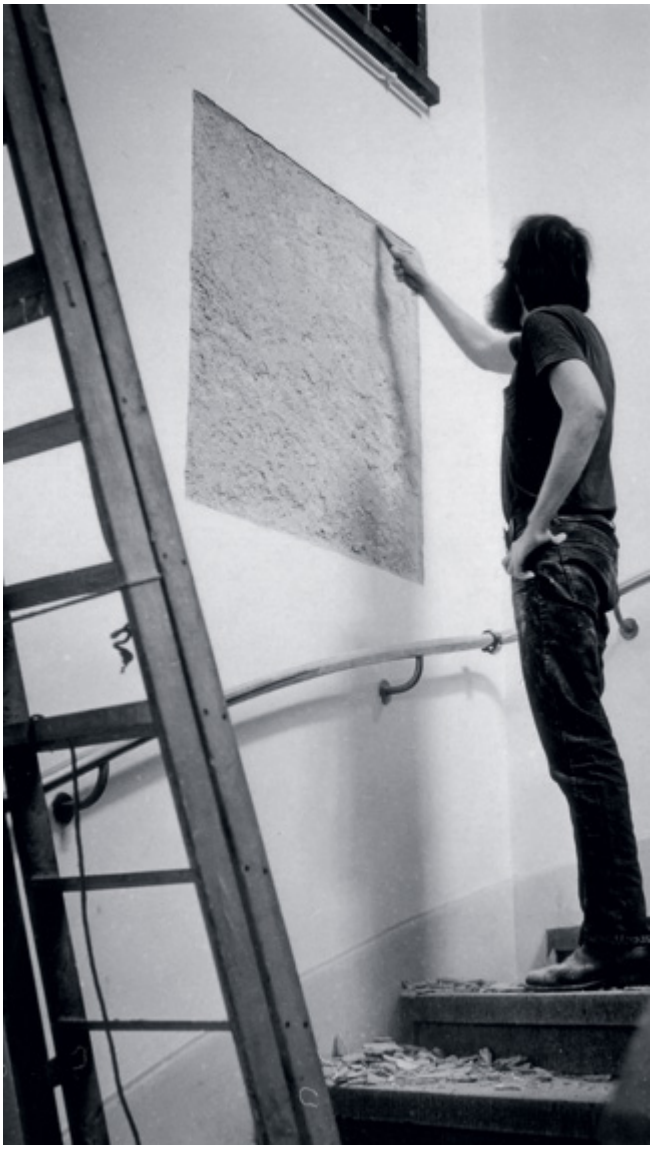
Fig 1

Schwitters' *Merzbau* (1932 Photo), Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum Hannover

Avant-garde installation art came to prominence in the 1970s, though, as we have seen, its roots can be traced back to the beginning of the century. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was an early adopter to the installation thanks to its forward-thinking director Willem Sandberg. In collaboration with Jean Tinguely, Sandberg organised *Dyllaby,* a 1962 exhibition featuring a foundational work of the same name by upcoming modernist Robert Rauschenburg . Another celebrated work in the exhibition was Niki De Saint Phalle's *shooting gallery.* It consisted of small bags of paint rotated by motors over an assortment of white figures, visitors were invited to shoot at them with BB guns, contributing to the work directly. The title of the radical show was short for dynamic labyrinth and it plunged the visitors into a disorienting maze of installations. Crucially Sandberg had become disillusioned with notions of conservation and took a futurist approach: "*Hardly any of the materials and objects used in these Happenings have been preserved, which accords with Sandberg's carefully cultivated image of a revolutionary museum director who was only concerned with the present and the future, and could not be bothered by the old-fashioned and 'capitalist' efforts of conservation and acquisition"* (Balk H, 2005). The exhibition could be seen to demonstrate the potential that visual art could have, if it only could break free from the constraints of institutions and their compulsive collecting of works.

In 1969 the pivotal exhibition: *Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* took place in Bern, Switzerland. This legendary exhibition championed the avant-garde works of many of the most important artists of the postwar period, and put into question the very approach to making and exhibiting art. The curator, Harold Sneezman was fired after the show ended a week earlier than intended (Schubert, 2013). Many of the works were created in situ and those exhibited were mostly finished in the weeks leading up to the opening of the exhibition. Lawrence Weiner carved a 36"x 36" square through the plaster of the wall exposing the brickwork describing "a presence of absence". Richard Serra splashed molten lead along the walls of the foyer and Michael Heiser destroyed the path outside the venue (Wolfe, 2021). Controversially, the exhibition has been recreated many times, most notably in 2013 by the Fondazione Prada in Venice. The curators at Venice were forced to acknowledge from the very beginning that it would be an impossible task. Only 53 of the 148 works were authentically displayed due to the ephemeral nature of the original exhibition. This is telling of the non-existence of efforts to preserve ephemeral art at the time (Schubert, 2013).

fig 2



Laurence Weiner, *A 36" X 36" Removal To The Lathing Or Support Wall Of Plaster Or Wallboard From A Wall,* 1969, Harold Sneezman archive

Efforts to conserve contemporary art began in the 1980s. The National Gallery of Canada's 1980 conference is one of the earliest organised discussions of the subject. However, the 1990s was the decade in which the most progress was made with many of the key conferences such as Tate Modern's *From Marble To Chocolate* in 1995 (Marçal, 2019). At the end of the decade, the Foundation of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) was established.

Notable Instances Of Intervention

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) was a german artist and an early adopter of context-based artwork, He states: "*All my actions are based upon concepts of basic human energies in the form of images*". His work is often composed of ephemeral materials and is context-based. Whilst serving as a Luftwaffe pilot on the eastern front in 1943 his junkers aircraft was downed over Crimea. Beuys created a myth that he was rescued by the Tatar people, who saved his life by wrapping him in fat and felt. Although this has been disproven and he often changed the details of the story, it was his reasoning for using ephemeral materials in his work. He believed that mythology held more truth than truth itself (Laing, 2016). Beuys saw his practice as being socially engaged and not bound by the historical baggage of the traditional discipline of sculpture (Small, 2009). He believed that society should be seen as sculpture and that every person is an artist. Many of Beuy's works are displayed as remnants of his lectures such as the very blackboards he used to illustrate them.

The end of the twentieth century (*Das Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts),* one of Beuys' most important works, consisting of felt, clay and forty-four quarried basalt stones. It underwent conservation during its relocation from the Munich Haus Der Kunst to Pinakothek Moderne in 2002. The primary dilemma was that the stones had been laid out by Beuys personally and had not been touched since 1984 when they were installed. As conservators examined the stones small details were discovered such as marks, scratches, and stains, most likely originating from the quarry where they were sourced. As these marks were in poor condition, it had to be decided whether or not to intervene to preserve them (Grün, 2006). It was decided not to intervene with the felt and clay which had deteriorated over time, as Beuys had collected, delivered and placed these materials in a very calculated manner and they bear traces of his working on them, although special care would have to be taken to protect the felt from insect damage. The conservators decided that their intervention on elements of an installation would hinder its expression by interfering with its aging ephemeral elements.

Beuys' exact placement of the material was crucial to the work because of his typically ritualistic approach to its making.

Jean Tinguely (1925-1991) was a Swiss sculptor, who was closely associated with the Stedelijk museum since his collaboration with Sandberg in the making of the exhibition *Dylaby.* Tinguely is known for his kinetic sculptures which he referred to as métamatics. The conservation of Tinguely's métamatics is uniquely challenging due to their delicate mechanical nature, which is subject to wear and must be maintained constantly for it to be displayed in motion as intended. His work satirises materialism and production and is a continuation of Dadaism, which he often refers to in his work. In 2015 the Stedelijk museum undertook an intensive analysis and conservation of the thirteen works they have in their collection. The métamatics had been altered from their original condition by both conservators and Tinguely to maintain them and this had to be documented. As the works, in their original form, were constructed from scrap materials they were often already in poor condition when they were created. Conservators were faced with many ethical dilemmas during the project, especially surrounding the presentation of the work in motion. Many of the métamatics were not in stable enough condition to be shown in motion (even infrequently let alone permanently). This is kinetic artwork, so movement can be seen as integral to its expression. If the work is too unstable to be in motion, can it be presented? The motion of the artworks, by their mechanical nature, generated damage through wear, changing their movement, sound and appearance over time. The deliberate alterations made to most of the works changed the original expression of the work, even though some alterations were made during the artist's lifetime and under his supervision. This challenged conventional conservation principles (Meijer, Meijer and Weerdenburg, 2016). Notably in 1988,Tinguely decided to 'retire' *Sculpture méta-mécanique automobile* (1954) (Bek, 2017) due to mechanical wear.

Fig 3

Jean Tinguely, *Sculpture méta-mécanique automobile,* 1954, Centre Pompidou

Many of the most notable early ephemeral artworks no longer exist in their original state and rely on documentation to be displayed. Inevitably conservation was neglected while artists liberally broke conventions and worked in pursuit of immediacy and original ways of expression. As time passes, and ephemeral works age, more and more ethically difficult conservation projects are necessary to preserve this art for future generations. When dealing with these ethical dilemmas, a multidisciplinary approach can be beneficial to concluding complex conservation efforts and answering ethical problems, providing a broader perspective.

Dilemmas And Compromise

Fundamentally, ephemeral works present many challenges for institutions engaged in collecting and displaying them. Ephemeral work largely came about to undermine the notion of the institution and is deeply counter-cultural in nature. The institutions are now collecting work designed to be uncollectible and which were intended to have no material value.

The principal objective of the conservator is to prolong the life of an artwork whilst preserving it in the most original form possible. The task of preserving the original presents the majority of the challenges faced by the discipline. Ephemeral material is unstable and unpredictable by definition, often requiring much more invasive conservation efforts. Such drastic measures can often encroach on the originality of an artwork, especially if the artist is not involved, and the intervention is not always reversible. The ephemerality of a work is often integral to its expression, making any conservation effort theoretically impossible.

New dilemmas have come about as a result of digital media based art which introduces more variables such as obsolete hardware and digital loss. This means the corruption of files leading to the loss of stored data. Pip Laurenson, head of collection care research at Tate describes an emerging protocol for collecting digital work:

"At Tate we have established fairly standard procedures for managing the conservation of the video elements of an installation. When [Gary] *Hill's work* [Between Cinema and a Hard Place] *was acquired the conservation department transferred the master material onto a non-compressed component digital tape format at a professional video facility. A conservator is always present for the transfer of master material and in some cases the artist is also present. The conservator's role is to check the authenticity of the master material as a copy of the original and to check that the colour, brightness and audio levels are correct. In addition, the conservator documents any specific features of the master material for the conservation record and confirms that there are no queries arising during the transfer which should be discussed with the artist before the new archival master is accepted."* (Laurenson, P., 2012)

Time-based media and work that relies on contexts such as a specific site, place in time or presence are consistently the most challenging when preserving the artist's intention. In some cases, often in performance art, an artwork can never be restaged in its original form because it is specific to a place or the artist's presence is integral. The artist's intention can contradict normal conservation values which aim at preservation of an art work intact for posterity. For example, performance artist Allan Kaprow was adamant that his happenings were to be once-off events and could not be presented in the form of relics. He did however collect documentation of his works, newspaper articles, photographs, or correspondence (Potts, 2007). Kaprow's archive allows the work to live on in memory whilst preserving its ephemerality which is the artist's intention.

Allowing a work of art to retire propagates mythology surrounding it, not allowing it to be seen in a context outside its own. However, going against the artist's wishes and reperforming

an artwork he or she deems extinct, would not be an authentic rendition of the work, and so it must be retired.

When an artwork is retired it is often displayed in the form of documentation of the original work or collateral objects left in its wake, serving as a relic but not the original, such as Tinguely's now idle *Sculpture méta-mécanique automobile* (1954). When a work of modern art is shown long after it was created, the passing of time can change its expression, such as in the increasingly self-destructive movement of Jean Tinguely's kinetic artworks. This can also be seen in the degradation of Naum Gabo's plastic sculpture. Of this Potts writes:

Gabo's works in plastic have aged in two ways, firstly through literal deterioration, and secondly because the plastic elements even in their original state, particularly in the earlier works, do not have the clean-cut perfection of form that modern perspex work has, and so no longer have the air of ultra-modernity they once possessed. Instead, they can almost look a little tackily hand-made (and as such acquire a slightly dowdy artisanal charm at odds with their original conception). This poses some interesting questions about the degree to which a replica should be made to look 'new', if at all. Should the replica seek to recreate for a contemporary audience the look of ultra- modernity the original work once had, or should it present itself as being more in the nature of a relic of such modernity? (Potts, A., 2007).

Fig 4

Naum Gabo, *Constructed Head No.2,* c1924, Dallas Museum Of Art

One solution for the exhibition of the unexibitable is to replicate the original work. If a ready-made is destroyed can the object be replaced, and if so is that artwork still the original? One of the many times Duchamp's notorious 'Fountain' was destroyed he instructed the gallery to purchase a replacement from a hardware shop (McGrath, 2004). It would appear that it is the intervention of the artist that made this new version of the work genuine and that if the gallery had simply gone ahead and replaced it without consulting Duchamp it would not have been so. The decision to present a replica or not is fraught with paradox and ethical challenges. When Fondazione Prada replicated *When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969/Venice 2013,* the integrity of the exhibition was affected. Firstly, only a small minority of the original works were shown, as discussed previously. Secondly, there was a lack of direct involvement with the artists in the restaging of the exhibition. This left open, crucially, the question as to whether the exhibition contradicted the ethos of the original: it did not allow each artist to decide if their work should retire or simply disappear.

This should be contrasted with the reconstruction of Schwitters' *Merzbau* which met with much less controversy than that of *When Attitudes Become Form*. This was an attempt at recreating a missing work of art that was probably not intended to be ephemeral and therefore did not directly contradict Schwitters' intentions. The direct involvement of the artist's son also lent credibility, providing insight into his father's practice.

In traditional conservation methodology documentation is most often used to record an artwork at each stage of intervention to aid reversibility, and for transparency. Increasingly it has been deployed as a means for displaying work that can not, for whatever reason, be displayed in its original form. Documentation has been accredited as a genuine version of a work, as was the case with *Quadrille* by Rose English. In its original form, *Quadrille* was performed twice at a horse show in England in 1975. English had made equine costumes for a group of dancers she had arranged to perform the dance which was popular in the 18th century. What set apart the performance was its unusual setting. It took place at the Southampton Horse Show, in front of an extremely conservative audience. English stated in an interview for Tate on the subject: *"The audience were given no warning about what they were about to see and just sat there, patiently, as if it were the police dog display team or the parachute regiment. Or any of the other events that were happening."* (Youtube.com. 2022. Life of an Artwork: Quadrille by Rose English). *Quadrille* exists in three versions: an initial installation, consisting of the first costume made by English for herself, the performance, and

the installation in the Tate collection. The work, which had not been performed since 1974, was collected by Tate Modern in 2013, in the form of surviving equine costumes, black and white photography, and a super 8 film made by English's brother of the original performance (Delaney, 2015). The installation and conservation of the third rendition in Tate were done under the supervision of the artist. Even with the sanction of the artist, presenting a work of art through documentation is not a perfect solution, prioritising the artist's vision over public access to the work. If the preservation of work for future generations is a core conservational value, it is being challenged, signifying a shift in power from the institution to the artist.

fig 5

Rose English, *Quadrille,* performance and installation, 1975, 2013, Tate collection

When collecting ephemeral art, some compromise has to take place, at the cost of either the traditional values of conservation or the artist's intention for the work. The presence of these contradictory challenges highlights the need for a new methodology to be developed to achieve a successful conservation. The dialogue between the artist and the organisation collecting the work is of amplified importance because this maintains the artist's vision whilst

rendering the work collectable. Paradoxically *Quadrille has* maintained its original expression more effectively than Gabo's plastic sculpture, by allowing itself to evolve as an artwork. *Quadrille* relies on documentation and relics of the original performance for its expression, without removing the work from its original context, whilst Gabo's plastics have not had any intervention, allowing their expression to be subject to the passage of time.

Artworks in an institutional context are often most successfully conserved when they are collected as ongoing projects or can be subject to change without diverging from the artist's intention and the original expression of the work. This is a radical departure from conservation methods intended for traditional art forms.

The Institutional Perspective: Interview with Johanne Mullan, Curator of the IMMA collection

For the last twenty years institutions have been grappling with the dilemma of acquiring the uncollectible. Time-based media conservator Dr. Brian Castreota describes these unruly works as being 'queer' and not compatible with the 'normative' methods of acquisition and exhibition (Castreota, 2021). The Irish Museum of Modern Art has been collecting ephemeral work since its foundation in 1992. This includes time-based work, work composed of biological material and projection. Johanne Mullan has been working at IMMA as a curator since 1994. I met with her to discuss some of these works, particularly those in the current exhibition: *The Narrow Gate of The Here and Now*.

The first work we discussed was *Berry Dress* by Alice Maher. This work is challenging because of its delicate nature and Maher's use of dried berries. In this instance, the work was damaged in transit and IMMA made the decision to intervene after consulting the artist.

JM: Its steel pins (they have not rusted). So a good example for conservation was the work was lent to an exhibition in China, And when the work came back, it had its custom made foam crate carved out to fit the dress which was conservation grade. But the pressure must have collapsed the dress, so it collapsed in on itself . So the textile conservator Rachel Phelan removed all of the berries and the pins, and then plumped up the dress again. It was quite an undertaking. We did have some berries in storage along with the work but I don't think we actually used them.

fig 6

Alice Maher, *Berry Dress*, 1994, IMMA Collection

Although the work is now part of the IMMA Collection, Maher is still very much involved in the ongoing process of storing and presenting the work. An interesting dilemma, and one that will occur more and more often, is exhibiting time-based or installation work posthumously. We went on to discuss some examples of recently collected performance works starting with Alastair MacLennan's performance work *Bled Edge* (1998).

JM: With Allister's work, It's all performance and time based, he makes daily drawings but they are separate from the performance works. But since the 70s he's kept an amazing archive. So he's photographed nearly all of them, all of his performances. He has kept notes and correspondence.

JM: So his archive is now with Dundee university. They're documenting it, they're scamming everything. So he's part of that. Part of the process is that when materials get scanned, They give copies to ourselves and various institutions.

IMMA is collecting documentation and scripts to aid the display of performance art. This is particularly important when the artist states that the work can not be re-enacted by anybody else. In this case, MacLennan has provided a script so that his work can live on past his lifetime.

JM: With Allister [MacLennan] *we were asking kind of an awkward question, we don't want to offend anyone. But could somebody else perform it? Whereas with Sandra her own body is so integral to her work that whenever she can no longer perform the work is no longer. We thought Allister would be the same but he said we would write a script. But we do have some support material, some video* [of Sandra Johnston's performance work].

Mullan addresses the inevitable challenge of displaying performance works posthumously. There is no set approach to dealing with the issue in the collection of time based-media. IMMA works with artists to decide on a "last will and testament" for each artist and their works in the collection. Some artists including MacLennan have arranged for their work to continue to be performed beyond their lifetime, whilst others will leave only documentation.

JM: There isn't a huge amount [of documentation] *with Bled Edge in particular . There are maybe a few photographs there.... I don't think there's any video documentation, but when we did show it to Brian* [Brian Castreota]*, he said this can't be re-performed because it was a hundred and eleven hours continuously. Stuff that you got away with in the 80s and 90s but you wouldn't now, just in terms of health and safety. So it will have to be adapted. So many hours or maybe consecutive days. So there's elements that it's never going to be performed the way it was originally in the same space, or may be different duration. That's something that we're really working through in terms of contracts.*

It is clear that Castreota and IMMA have to take a holistic approach to each stage of the acquisition process. Rather than working to protocols as they might while collecting paintings, they have to create new ones for each work and to work closely with the artists to build up as much documentation as possible. Performance work, in particular, has to adapt to new regulations on health and safety, to the absence of opportunity to cooperate with the artist on their death, and the evolution of technology, which we discuss next.

PN: How important is it to use the original hardware to display work?

JM: It depends, I know you asked that in reference to McNulty's pieces. So they won't buy the digital file with all the USB sticks. USB sticks are one of the worst in terms of their longevity. We did have an archive digitisation project at the start of 2018. We digitised a lot of the work from the nineties. Works that were starting to, one of them was starting to rip. We have laser disks and pneumatic tapes, VHS works, it's just difficult to find anybody to conserve them. So they went to England to be digitised. All of the digital files we now have are saved on a dedicated server and the server's backed up.

Collecting digital work might seem to be much easier at first glance, due to its ability to be backed up and stored in multiple locations at once. However digital work relies on hardware for its survival, and hardware is subject to physical damage as well as digital loss. The concept of conserving digital and time based-media is so new that there is a shortage of people working in the field, there are just two people in Ireland according to Mullan. As technology evolves certain pieces of specialist hardware become obsolete and so they go out of production and become difficult to obtain. IMMA has begun to accumulate this obsolete equipment, such as monitors designed to accommodate outdated display formats.

JM: What the issues that we're finding and you can see each box through there. The galleries, a lot of the works, if they're from the nineties would be four by three in scale, pre widescreen which is sixteen by nine. So that's caused us quite a few problems in terms of equipment. So a lot of the artists don't want to reformat or adapt , some of them have adapted.
So whether it's the format or the display is integral to the piece. So what we've done, what we did a couple of years ago was try and stockpile some monitors. One of the pieces, Jackie Irvine, Should the Ground Open Up, has five dedicated monitors.

It is clear that IMMA is proactively addressing the challenges of collecting ephemeral artworks and is engaged in the broader dialogue. Mullan confirms the need for a holistic approach to acquisition since many of the new challenges are equally philosophical as they are technical. The field of contemporary art conservation is being forced to part from the procedures and methods of conserving normative artworks and often to invent new procedures for each individual artwork. Due to the highly complex nature of the field, many of the issues are still under discussion and the discipline has yet to fully establish itself.

Contemporary art conservators are constantly being faced with new challenges as more and more works deteriorate and require intervention such as *Berry Dress.* International dialogue has been the catalyst of change and will continue to be an essential part of the discipline.

Conclusion

The most integral value of the discipline of art conservation is to preserve culturally valuable artworks for future generations. For the first time in history the art institution has been challenged directly by the very work it endeavors to collect. Artists have liberally engaged in newly expanded practices, producing the most dynamic and engaged generation yet, using ephemeral materials in pursuit of freshness and with the ambition of breaking with convention. The cultural impact of ephemeral artworks in the last century is undeniable, and it is therefore of paramount importance that they are preserved for posterity, despite the inevitable challenge and compromise of doing so.

The necessity of preserving these unruly artworks was highlighted by the failures in the restaging of *When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969/Venice 2013,* in which many works were not included in any form at all, and those that were included did not necessarily follow the intention of the artist.

During conservation of ephemeral works, normative methods of conservation of traditional artworks are often not appropriate or even possible. When the ephemerality of an artwork is integral to its expression, intervention would often be so invasive that it would be detrimental to the work. The resistance that ephemeral work has towards traditional conservation methods highlights the need for new methodology and a renewed, more holistic approach with a focus on discourse and the artist's ongoing involvement.

It is clear that a fundamental and positive change is taking place, but that the issue is far from resolved and a new methodology for conservation is yet to be developed. Providing the institutional perspective, IMMA is engaged in the collection and conservation of ephemeral artworks, and the international dialogue taking place. Mullan of IMMA confirms the need for a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to acquisition and conservation, and that there are just two conservators specialising in ephemeral art in Ireland (Brian Castreota and Pip Laurenson).

Proposal: Accepting the mortality of artworks

For an artwork to truly maintain its expression without corrupting the artist's vision and remaining collectible, it must exist in some tangible form. The original context of an artwork and its ephemerality must be preserved when they are integral to the expression of a work, and this can not often be achieved through intervention. This thesis proposes that for an ephemeral artwork to best be recorded (“preserved” may not be the word) without compromise, it must transcend its original material form and be allowed to take on other forms or become a new type of record in an ongoing process of dialogue between the artist, the curator and the viewer. There is an institutional fetishisation of the material art object, which has not been problematic historically but, in the context of ephemeral artworks, it is often a barrier in conservation. *Quadrille* by Rose English is now in its third incarnation, taking the form of an installation of the surviving relics and documentation of the second incarnation, which is the original performance of the work (the first incarnation being the prototype costume). The performance has been allowed to retire, but its expression lives on in

the collateral artefacts, the super 8 film, and the photography presented in the third and current incarnation. The expression of the work would be corrupted if it were restaged, because of the impossibility of recreating its original context -including the element of surprise-which was integral to the artist's vision. In short, *Quadrille's* conservation was a success.

The decay of the ephemeral art object is inevitable and resisting this inevitability through intervention or allowing the context of a work to change will eventually corrupt the work itself. Paradoxically, to preserve an ephemeral work for prosperity it must be allowed to evolve beyond its own material constraints, and its mortality must be accepted. There must be a dialogue between the conservator and the artist to plan the future of an artwork, beyond the lifetime of its material form (and the lifetime of the artist).

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