Deciding on refabrication

"Transparent Tubes", a plastic sculpture designed in 1968 by the British artist William Turnbull (1922–2012), who was consulted about preservation issues by its custodians in a London art gallery (Willcocks, 2002).

My observations were that the four case studies exhibited the same principles, e.g. a commitment to documentation, preventive conservation and to reversibility. Each conservation intervention had the goal of preserving and presenting what was considered significant, but very different decisions were made. Each intervention (whether the conservative *in situ* upholstery treatment, the radical reconstruction of the seventeenth century garments, the stabilisation and repainting of the sculpture or the refabrication of the plastic sculpture) sought to achieve similar goals of preserving and presenting what was considered significant and 'authentic'. In each case the interventions aimed to meet current needs while acknowledging future needs by thorough documentation and, in three cases, the use of reversible methods.

Authenticity?

My presentation at the SCD seminar extended the argument in the *Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* by asking questions about authenticity. I argued that conservation is dependent on the interaction of material and social change mediated through decision-making processes. The privileging of original form (materials, structure, and appearance) is usually taken for granted in conservation. This 'taken for granted' presumption is opened up for debate when a different option is proposed. In the four case studies listed above, three privileged the original appearance of the works, in the presentation of the upholstery (although some later repairs were retained), in the reconstruction of the embroidered garments and in the refabrication of "Transparent Tubes". A different option was adopted for the monumental sculpture in Hawai'i because the local community privileged the repainted form of the sculpture over the original unpainted finish. In this case, current views of local social significance took precedence over an art-historically informed view of authenticity vested in original form. The issues explored by Wharton in this case study provide a vivid example of cultural heritage as a site and process for negotiating identity (see Smith, 2007; and Wijesuriya, 2011, as below).

Each of the four examples were analyzed to show that conservation decision-making highlights different views of 'the real thing', i.e. that which is authentic. Definitions of authenticity were presented: "as being authoritative or duly authorized" and "as being true in substance". Recognizing that the word authenticity shares its roots with 'author', 'authority' and 'authorization', leads one to ask: who is the author of the conservation intervention; who decides and on what basis