

# Asking Specific Questions in order to Share Appropriate Responses for the Conservation of Contemporary Art

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on some specific aspects concerning the management of the care, mounting, displaying, restoration and conservation of contemporary art collections, as well as new bridges that we are building to improve relationships with the public, in order to achieve more understanding, interest and enjoyment of contemporary collections.

Through some real examples of masterpieces from the *Museo Reina Sofía* collection in Madrid, this paper shows the challenges faced as a result of the material and physical characteristics of modern art collections. It also deals with the evolution of criteria and knowledge of conservators and restorers of contemporary art, the exchange of information and documentation and the creation of working teams between museum professionals. Finally, it looks at how the demand for information by the public and their curiosity about specific aspects concerning the care and conservation of contemporary collections have inspired us to improve and promote new ways of communication through, for instance, temporary exhibitions, new websites and e-learning programmes in museums.

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine some of the characteristics and specific problems of contemporary art works using some real examples. In particular, some of the frequent dilemmas presented by complex and intricate objects, such as art installations, net.art or new media art, and the strategies that have been used to resolve these issues.

The development of alternatives and appropriate strategies to preserve the material and the conceptual meaning of these objects are based on an understanding of their sense and the technical needs. All departments and parts of the museum have to work together in order to show their collections in an adequate way and address conservation challenges. These themes can be represented by, or divided into, four principal aspects concerning the challenges of contemporary collections:

- The first is about the characteristics of modern art collections and the challenges presented by the material and physical complexity of some of these artworks.
- Secondly, coming from a classic education in art conservation, we have been acquiring new expertise to help us to respond to the additional needs of new artistic works.
- Thirdly, we have been using this practical knowledge and working together, in transversal teams, with all departments of the museum, in order to achieve an effective information exchange of new documentation.
- Finally, the increasing demand for information by visitors demonstrates a huge curiosity about our procedures and decisions in conservation and restoration, which helps to improve the level of comprehension and understanding of contemporary and modern collections.

This awareness increases recognition with regards to sharing responsibilities for the care of contemporary heritage between the museum and the public.