

Characteristics of contemporary collections

The Reina Sofía National Museum (MNCARS) has around eighteen thousand art pieces and consists of a large collection of drawings, engravings, paintings and sculptures which could be considered as ‘classic’ contemporary works.

Moreover, in the last fifteen years, our collection has grown, with an important number of acquisitions of recent and multifaceted artworks, involving all kinds of complex materials which represent new expressions and references of our present time.

The enormous diversity of supports and materials, the technologies employed, their dimensions, and the multiplicity of elements that can be involved present significant obstacles for their security and/or movement.

Art installations, net.art, or complex art projects may be the means of supporting conceptual proposals and new ways of public participation, or perceiving various kinds of experiences.

Sensorial experiences may change our point of view about the importance of the material originality or the importance of the idea.

Moreover, museums are increasingly facing the challenge of how to manage a greater dependence on computer or electronic experts for the installation and ongoing maintenance of artworks, and the difficulties facing these aspects as part of new protocols in the museum.

Considering that our collections are mainly formed by ‘classic’ contemporary pieces that also have specific challenges due to their dimensions and weight, we are frequently faced with some of these specific difficulties.

Our most famous painting is Picasso’s masterpiece “Guernica”, which measures 3.5 x 7.77 m. This creates a complicated handling challenge for the team involved, not only because of its size and weight but also because of its condition and fragility due to its age, the multitude of journeys it made during the Spanish Civil War and previous restorations carried out before it arrived at our museum.

When we decided to close the Guernica exhibition in May 2006 for just one week to carry out some studies and improvements, we faced not only technical difficulties but also many complaints from visitors who were not able to see this masterpiece. This goes to show that this painting does not belong just to us, but to everybody, because it is recognized as an object of significance on a global scale.

During that week, we accomplished a large and complicated number of studies and technical procedures, such as complete X-ray, infrared and ultraviolet scans, and changed the hanging systems and improved the environmental control through better equipment. All the teams in the museum took advantage of this opportunity to check some special aspects relevant to their fields.