The Conservation of Public Art: A Very Active Workshop
Presented at the Americans for the Arts Half-Century Summit/Public Art Preconference
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Presented by:
Cambridge Arts Council (CAC), Cambridge, MA and
The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), Washington, D.C.

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I. Many Public Art Programs Incorporate the Following Conservation Practices:

1. Assessment: carried out by conservators in conjunction with public art administrators and information provided by artists if possible. Uses a spreadsheet, a database program, and digital photo documentation.

2. Treatment: generally carried out by conservators and subcontractors. General Commercial Liability Insurance may be provided by the conservator, or covered by the Public Art Program. Treatment proposals should follow the American Institute for Conservation’s Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.

3. Maintenance: ongoing annual or semi-annual care carried out by conservation technicians and/or conservators under some supervision from a conservator. A collaborative process, requiring some training and clear documentation. What is a technician, and what training and abilities are required? See the AIC’s Requisite Competencies for Conservation Technicians and Collections Care Specialists (http://www.conservation-us.org/).

II. In Addition, a Public Art Conservation Program Should Include:

Pre-Fabrication Reviews: A Way to Save Money and Avoid Frustration

Pre-Fabrication Conservation Reviews provide an exceptional opportunity to review an artist’s intent, materials choices, fabrication techniques, and installation methods, as well as establish a clearly written long-term maintenance plan. The Pre-Fabrication Review also includes the artist’s and the commissioning agent’s discussions of expected longevity. Pre-Fabrication Reviews should not be viewed as a way to
“judge” the physical acceptability of a proposed artwork, but rather seen as a way to inform all involved in the process, and to discuss materials or methods improvement and future ongoing maintenance.

Pre-Fabrication Reviews are carried out for sculptures, public art integrated into buildings or other built environments, for paintings and murals, and electronic and time-based media art.

Pre-Fabrication Reviews are always carried out by a conservator and require collaboration with the artist, the fabricator, the administrator, and allied professionals such as landscape architects, structural engineers, or sound/media/light engineers. A Pre-Fabrication Review is the single most important preservation and long-term care document for a public work of art, and will save a significant amount of money by adjusting materials or installation methods that would require expensive treatment to correct.

At the Cambridge Arts Council, the conservator is included in discussions shortly after artists are initially identified or invited to make a proposal for a particular project. Ideas, materials, and attachment/installation methods are informally discussed as needed. Occasionally, the art conservator steps in during the process as artist advocate. The artist may suggest a change in alloy, paint, method of fabrication, or installation plan.

The resulting Pre-Fabrication Review is a source of long-term materials and maintenance information, and will be repeatedly referred to as a critical component to the life of the artwork (see form on page 3).

Definitions of terms: The Difference Between Maintenance and Treatment

Conservation maintenance is routine, basic care to prevent deterioration and enhance preservation of an artwork’s structure or surface. Examples of maintenance include regular cleaning, removal of simple accretions or tape residues, simple graffiti removal, applications of protective coatings, appraisal of the security of attachments methods, and documentation. Annual maintenance is clearly defined, is continual, and usually can be carried out by trained technicians with some oversight by a conservator. The technician may also carry out documentation with oversight from a conservator or public art administrator.

Conservation treatment is a structural or surface alteration to an artwork, is not routine, is corrective, and is considered an intervention for the preservation of an artwork. Examples of conservation treatment are structural repairs, re-installations, inpainting or repainting, patina repair, and replacement of original parts, complete removal of previous protective coatings and reapplication, and extensive removal of graffiti. The aesthetic properties of a work of art often change during treatment; conservators and highly specialized technicians carry out the work. The conservator is responsible for proposals, reports, and documentation, and all work must conform to the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice of American Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works.
Pre-Fabrication Conservation Review Form with Maintenance Plan
Cambridge Arts Council
Public Art Projects

Date:
Conservator:
PREPARED FOR: (commissioning agent/ owner of the artwork)

ARTIST:
address and contact

PROJECT:

LOCATION: briefly describe location
ENVIRONMENT: describe location, orientation, site analysis, and available water/electricity

GENERAL MATERIALS and SIZE:

SPECIFIC MATERIALS:
In list form, include alloys, exact type of paints, etc.
ACCESS: ladder? lift?

DOCUMENTATION: state who has provided information

ARTIST’S STATEMENT (proposal/description):

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: usually provided by the artist

REQUIRED MATERIALS TESTING: (including graffiti tests)

FABRICATORS: list with contact info

TRANSPORTATION: who is responsible for getting the artwork to the site?

BASE/METHOD OF INSTALLATION:
description, size, sketch, engineer’s diagram, person/firm responsible for installation

LIGHTING:

TIMELINE/PROPOSED DATE OF INSTALLATION:

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

CONCLUSION:

MAINTENANCE PLAN & EXPECTED COSTS:
The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
http://www.conservation-us.org/

Mission Statement:
The American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC) is the national membership organization supporting conservation professionals in preserving cultural heritage by establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. As the only national membership organization in the United States dedicated to the preservation of cultural material, the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works plays a crucial role in establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. AIC has over 3,500 members, including conservators, educators, scientists, students, archivists, and art historians.

Artists, public art administrators, and allied professionals are welcome to join! Please let us know how we can help you.

Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC)
For over 30 years, the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works has been supporting conservation education, research, and outreach activities that increase understanding of our global cultural heritage. In 2001, following a sizable endowment gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, FAIC was able to create a strong professional development program for conservators. FAIC continually strives to increase funding for grants and scholarships, to support a range of educational programs, and to help elevate the status of conservation in the eyes of the public.

AIC sources available online (http://www.conservation_us.org/) with direct application to the Conservation of Public Art:

HOW TO FIND A CONSERVATOR

REQUISITE COMPETENCIES FOR CONSERVATION TECHNICIANS AND COLLECTIONS CARE SPECIALISTS

CODE OF ETHICS AND GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE
FINDING A CONSERVATOR

Information on finding and interviewing a conservator is available online at the AIC web site. Click on “FIND A CONSERVATOR” and follow the directions. Note: there is currently no direct link to finding conservators specializing in contemporary public art. Choose “Objects”, then “Outdoor Sculpture”, then “Modern/Contemporary” to access potential conservators providing care for public art.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Heritage Preservation’s Rescue Public Murals

http://www.heritagepreservation.org/RPM/index.html

Rescue Public Murals, based at the national nonprofit organization Heritage Preservation, brings public attention to U.S. murals, document their unique artistic and historic contributions, and secure the expertise and support to save them. The project was officially launched in December 2006. Assisted by a national committee of Advisers, including muralists, conservators, art historians, and public art professionals, Rescue Public Murals has established four initial goals:

1. Create a database of individuals and organizations crucial to saving murals to establish a national network.
2. Develop plans for identifying and documenting U.S. public murals and providing on-line access to them.
3. Prepare a list of “Highly Endangered Murals” and assess the condition of those murals.
4. Raise funds to continue Rescue Public Murals’ work of saving and documenting community murals.

While Rescue Public Murals recognizes the significant historic and artistic value of public murals within structures, the project’s initial priority will be murals that are outdoors and thus especially vulnerable.

Rescue Public Murals has received funding from the Getty Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Booth Heritage Foundation, Friends of Heritage Preservation, and the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.
The Conservation of Electronic and Time-Based Media: Resources

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Electronic Media Group (EMG) of AIC
http://cool.conservation-us.org/coolaic/sg/emg/index.html

The mission of the Electronic Media Group is two fold: (1) to preserve electronic art, electronic-based cultural materials and tools of its creation; and (2) to provide a means for conservators and related professionals to develop and maintain knowledge of relevant new media and emerging technologies.

Areas of interest are reflected by the content of past meeting programs. Topics include: the preservation of audio, video, digital, web-based and "time-based" media and art; creation and maintenance of digital archives; digital imaging for preservation and access to collection materials; digital imaging in conservation documentation; preservation and conservation of digital prints; and the documentation and conservation of electronic playback equipment and computer software and hardware.

The International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA)
www.incca.org

INCCA is a network of professionals connected to the conservation of modern and contemporary art. Conservators, curators, scientists, registrars, archivists, art historians and researchers are among its members. Members allow access to each other’s unpublished information (artist interviews, condition reports, installation instructions etc) through the INCCA Database for Artists' Archives.

This INCCA website www.incca.org contains information on all kinds of activities in the field; projects, seminars and conferences via the news section, educational possibilities as well as links to numerous websites. The resource section provides direct access to good practice documents such as theoretical articles, case study descriptions and practical guidelines and formats. Student (PhD) theses are included in the resources section. Looking for relevant literature? You can start by accessing the INCCA literature database.

Matters in Media Art

Matters in Media Art is a multi-phase project designed to provide guidelines for care of time-based media works of art (e.g., video, film, audio and computer based installations). The project was created in 2003 by a consortium of curators, conservators, registrars and media technical managers from New Art Trust, <http://www.moma.org/MoMA>, SFMOMA and Tate. The consortium launched its first phase, on loaning time-based media works, in 2004, and its second phase, on acquiring time-based media works, in 2007.
Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP)
<http://www.imappreserve.org/>

Independent Media Arts Preservation, Inc. (IMAP) is a nonprofit service, education, and advocacy organization committed to the preservation of non-commercial electronic media. IMAP has grown from a New York–based consortium of arts organizations and individuals to a national resource for preservation training, information, and advocacy. IMAP’s core constituents include institutions, organizations, and individuals whose diverse media collections are underserved by existing preservation efforts. IMAP provides archivists, artists, conservators, curators, distributors, librarians, media makers, producers, registrars, scholars, and other professionals with accessible solutions to document and preserve media collections.

Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage (DOCAM)
<http://www.docam.ca/>

The DOCAM Research Alliance was created by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology (DLF) in 2005. It has been financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) as part of the CURA program (Community-University Research Alliances).

A multidisciplinary initiative, DOCAM has brought together numerous partners from Canada and abroad who have joined the Alliance from both the academic sector and from a community of interest that includes, among others, museums and research, dissemination and documentation organizations associated with technological arts domains. DOCAM is made up of conservators, information sciences specialists, computer experts, art historians, curators and technologists.

Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA)
<http://www.amianet.org/>

AMIA is a non-profit professional association established to advance the field of moving image archiving by fostering cooperation among individuals and organizations concerned with the acquisition, description, preservation, exhibition and use of moving image materials.

AMIA’s members range from those who work solely with moving images to organizations where moving images are only a small part of their collection to individuals who want to protect their personal collection - home movies or small gauge or video - to film buffs concerned with losing our visual heritage.

BayArea Video Coalition (BAVC)
<http://www.bavc.org>

The Bay Area Video Coalition, or BAVC (pronounced “bay-vac”), is a nonprofit media arts center that was founded in 1976 by a coalition of media makers and activists who wanted to find alternative, civic-minded applications for a new technology - PortaPak video. Our continuing mission is to inspire social change by enabling the sharing of diverse stories through art, education and technology.