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## Taking Stock

A Study of the Acquisition and Long Term Care of 'Non-  
Traditional' Contemporary Artworks by British Regional Collections  
1979 - Present

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My doctoral thesis engages with the acquisition of 'non-traditional' contemporary works of art by British regional public collections, and their commitment to and provision of care to such artworks over the long-term.

The long-term display and care of non-traditional artworks –those that significantly diversify from the core materials, techniques and formats familiar to painting, drawing, sculpture and even photography - poses material and documentation challenges as well as ethical ones. In the *Introduction*, I outline how, for museums that acquire them, maintaining such artworks in keeping with the artist's intentions can entail high levels of financial and practical resource and unfamiliar kinds of ethical commitments.

As I discuss in *Chapter One*, British regional collections are acquiring non-traditional art in greater quantities and with an increasing agency regarding how certain contemporary practitioners and trends will be represented within British cultural heritage. I propose that they are, therefore, emerging as legitimate stakeholders in the considerable international body of research into the ethical and effective long-term stewardship of non-traditional art forms.

In *Chapter Two*, I note that the international museum and conservation communities endorse the 'early' acquisition of non-traditional artworks, and assert that acquiring and documenting them soon after creation or first realisation can help mitigate the repercussions that their long-term care might bear. I summarise and evaluate some of the ways in which national and international museums have accommodated the challenges that non-traditional artworks present. Some have modified their pre-existing care procedures, where as others have responded with entirely new strategies.

Yet as *consumers*, I argue in *Chapter Three* that British regional museums raise salient questions regarding content, accessibility and usability of internationally authored research across a range of museum infrastructures. Regional museums are typically of limited infrastructure and means. As I contend, available case studies, procedures and decision-making processes do not currently take explicit account of, or directly provide for, differing museum contexts.

I also promote the legitimacy of regional museums and galleries as potential *contributors*. Indeed, I argue that scholarship within those museums and galleries into the ethical maintenance and long-term care of their non-traditional holdings must be developed and supported. I maintain that it should be situated alongside, and interact with, that of its national and international counterparts. In *Chapter Four*, I provide three inter-institutional case studies to give form to that claim.

Thus, I recommend the creation of a 'subject network' dedicated to the curation, administration and conservation of non-traditional artworks, and to be comprised of curators, conservators and administrators from across British galleries. I propose that it serve to foster information and practice sharing within that community. I also put forward that it could facilitate access to, and interpretation of, international research, and that it could develop and promote research agendas relevant to the needs of its constituents. I conclude this thesis with an 'acquisitions update' as proof that there is a real demand for such research as I present here to be applied and further developed.

For my mother – Sandra Fiske

### **Author's Note**

Over a nine-month period between May 2001 and March 2002, I conducted twenty-seven interviews with a range of curators, conservators and artists in support of my research for this thesis. Twenty-two of those I undertook with my colleague, Dr. Alison Bracker of the Royal College of Art. Five, I conducted individually. Before beginning the interviews, I was careful to establish with the interviewees the use to which I would put any information arising from our discussion. I asked them to clearly indicate within the flow of conversation where they would prefer any disclosed information to be considered 'off the record'. I have observed their indications regarding sensitive material in all instances. All of the conversations were tape recorded, with the exception of three. On all occasions, the interviewees were remarkably generous with their time, and with their engagement with the issues that I raised with them. I am extremely grateful for their contribution, and the interviews form a distinctive part of this thesis. Several of the interviews were followed with intermittent correspondence, and I have at all times been respectful of the information that those parties conveyed to me.

My thesis has thrived on collaboration. The vision at its core – a network to facilitate communication and cooperation – has been influenced, in no small part, by the willingness to share, which has been the presiding experience of my research.

I would like to thank Dr. David Hopkins, my supervisor, of the History of Art Department, University of Glasgow. I am grateful for his encouragement and support. I must also extend my gratitude to the Faculty of Arts, University of Glasgow, who awarded me a three-year scholarship with which to undertake this research. Next, I owe some debt of thanks to my friend and colleague, Dr. Alison Bracker of the Royal College of Art. I have been hugely appreciative of her intellectual companionship; her encouragement that I pursued my research directions; her wonderful company on numerous trips; and her generally faultless advice.

I must thank the artists for their open, frank and illuminating interviews, and for their readiness to share facts and stories about their work: Christine Borland; John Frankland; Anya Gallaccio; Andy Goldsworthy; Susan Hiller; Mariele Neudecker; Cornelia Parker; and Richard Wright. To Mark Dean and Hilary Lloyd, I am also especially grateful for their willingness to help. I am tremendously indebted to particular individuals at the four core galleries on which I focus in this thesis. They are: Jennifer Melville and Olga Ferguson, Aberdeen City Art Gallery; Corinne Miller, Leeds City Art Gallery; Godfrey Worsdale (now Middlesborough Art Gallery), Clare Mitchell and Vicky Isley, Southampton City Art Gallery; and Sarah Blessington and Matthew Rowe, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne. All (particularly Clare and Sarah)

were mercifully tolerant of my many questions, and I am truly appreciative of the time, thoroughness and enthusiasm with which they responded to my enquiries. Their contribution to the development of my research has been significant. I hope that those contacts will not terminate with the completion of my thesis, but can continue, and be fruitful, into the future.

By the same token, I am also beholden to the numerous others who were willing to participate in discussion and exchange, and who generously opened up their professional practices to me: Isobel Johnstone, Jill Constantine and Christie Coutin at the Arts Council Collection; Diana Eccles at the British Council Collection; Gill Hedley and Mary Doyle at the Contemporary Art Society; Roy Perry, Derek Pullen, Rachel Barker, Pip Laurenson, Sarah Joyce, Stephen Hackney, Stella Willcocks, Elizabeth MacDonald, Lyndsey MacDonald, Bryony Bery, Piers Townsend, Tim Green, Tom Learner, Jacqueline Ridge, Rica Jones, Calvin Winner, Jeremy Lewison and Tanya Barson at the Tate; Alice Strang, Patrick Elliot, Leslie Henderson, Michael Connor, Anne Budd, and Keith Hartley at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; Martyn Anglesea at the Ulster Museum; Wendy Law at the Scottish Arts Council; Matthew Withey, Liz Aston and Denise Raine at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; Rhonda Wozniak, at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA; Dr. Cornelia Weyer and Gunnar Heydenreich, Dusseldorf Restoration Center, Germany; Jane Warrilow at Edinburgh City Art Centre; Brendan Flynn at Birmingham City Art Gallery; Katrina M. Brown, Dundee Contemporary Arts; Andrea Kusel at Paisley Museum and Art Gallery; Dr. Heinz Althofer; Phil Young; and Bill MacKinnon.

I would like to express thanks to Heather Doherty at the Scottish Museums Council for the supply of documentation relating to the recent National Audit of Scottish museums and galleries, and I am also particularly obliged to the staff of Tate Gallery Archive for their assistance to my research, and for access to gallery documentation. I must also acknowledge Zoë Reid and her colleagues at Irish Professional Conservators and Restorers Association for inviting me to publish part of my research on Ernesto Neto. Likewise, it was with the financial support of ICOM-UK and the History of Art Department, University of Glasgow that I was able to travel to Rio de Janeiro in 2002 to deliver a paper at ICOM-CC's 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial conference.

Closer to home, I must show personal gratitude to the following colleagues and friends in the History of Art Department at the University of Glasgow: to Dom Paterson, Fran Halsall, Thea Stevens, Frances Robertson, and Alex Kennedy for their kinship through the research process; to Elaine Wilson for every kind of support; to Dr. John Richards and Dr. Robert Gibbs for many years of encouragement still accruing; and to Paul Stirton and Juliet Kinchin.

Closer still, many friends have cheered and steered me along the path: Rhian Nicholas, Lyn Ma, Siobhain Ma, Ailsa Boyd, Lucie Potter, Anna Lau, Cath Galloway, Jenny Bavidge, Helen Groothues, Alex Bennett, and Jill and Larry Carver.

And closest of all, to Zam, who was there at the start, thanks for the beginnings. To Paul, Lisa, and Kev, who have always been there – and to the newcomers Ben, Jayney, Tom, and Ryan – you see me right. And to my mum, Sandra, a simple thank you.

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the body of this thesis. Italics indicate an abbreviated publication title.

<b>Aberdeen</b>	Aberdeen City Art Gallery, Aberdeen
<b>ACC</b>	Arts Council Collection
<b>AGA</b>	Art Galleries Association
<b>BCC</b>	British Council Collection
<b>Birmingham</b>	Birmingham City Art Gallery
<b>CAS</b>	Contemporary Art Society
<b>CD</b>	Compact Disk
<b>DCF</b>	Designation Challenge Fund
<b>DCMS</b>	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
<b>DNI</b>	Department of National Heritage
<b>GAC</b>	Government Art Collection
<b>DVD</b>	Digital Versatile Disk
<b>HLF</b>	Heritage Lottery Fund
<b>HMF</b>	Henry Moore Foundation
<b>HMI</b>	Henry Moore Institute
<b>HMSO</b>	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
<b>ICOM-CC</b>	International Council of Museums-Committee for Conservation
<b>INCCA</b>	International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art
<b>Leeds</b>	Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds
<b>LACF</b>	Leeds Arts Collection Fund
<b>Manchester</b>	Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester
<b>MDS</b>	Museum Designation Scheme
<b>MEG</b>	Museum Ethnographers' Group
<b>MGC</b>	Museums and Galleries Commission
<b>MLA</b>	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
<i>Moving Targets</i>	Buck, Louisa (1997), <i>Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now</i> , London: Tate Gallery Publishing.
<b>NACF</b>	National Art Collections Fund
<b>np.</b>	Not paginated
<b>nt.</b>	Not transcribed
<i>Overview</i>	Porter, Gaby (2002), <i>Overview of Collections Information and Advice in the Museums Domain</i> , London: Resource
<i>Renaissance Report</i>	Resource (2001), <i>Renaissance in the Regions: a New Vision for England's Museums</i> , London: Resource.
<b>SAC</b>	Scottish Art Council
<b>SMC</b>	Scottish Museums Council
<b>SNGMA</b>	Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
<b>Southampton</b>	Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton
<b>Tate</b>	The Tate Gallery, London
<b>Towner</b>	Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne
<b>Wolverhampton</b>	Wolverhampton City Art Gallery
<b>UKIC</b>	United Kingdom Institute for Conservation
<b>VAGA</b>	Visual Arts and Galleries Association
<b>V&amp;A/MCG Purchase Fund</b>	Victoria & Albert Museum and Museums & Galleries Commission Purchase Fund



## List of Plates

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References take the following order:

Name and birth/death dates for artist

Title of work

Date of work

Medium

Dimensions [H x W x D]

Name and location of collection

All dimensions are given in cm

Plates are referenced in text where work is first named, and then when a new discussion of the work is made

With work titles, idiosyncrasies in use of upper and lowercase lettering are observed

Where the media for one work exceed seven, they are given as 'mixed media'

Three media references to video are used:

- 'video' denotes a work shown on single monitor
- 'video projection' denotes a work projected against one or more screens
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## Introduction



## Starting: Southampton

When I embarked upon this research, I did not anticipate the extent to which the process of travel would become such a feature of its undertaking. For sixteen months I toured around Britain, visiting numerous regional art collections that had accessioned recently made non-traditional artworks such as videos and installations, and interviewing several of the artists whose work they had acquired. In retrospect, it was in the course of a journey – from London to Southampton and back -- that the foundations for my research were laid.

When I made that trip, I was completing an eighteen-month contract as an assistant curator of contemporary art at the Tate Gallery in London, and I was heading down to Southampton to see an exhibition at the Hansard Gallery. Taking advantage of a little leftover time, I wandered into the City Art Gallery. I knew that the collection there did have some contemporary art holdings. I had previously read in Louisa Buck's *Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now* (1997), that Southampton owned 'strong works by Helen Chadwick, Antony Gormley, Rachel Whiteread, Richard Patterson, Gillian Wearing, Douglas Gordon and Ian Davenport'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed on display was a large video installation by Scottish artist Douglas Gordon – an impressive two-screen projection entitled **Hysterical** (1995) [Plate 1]. I was both delighted and somewhat taken aback, particularly when I realised that the work had been in Southampton's collection for a number of years already. I was aware that

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<sup>1</sup> Buck, Louisa (1997), *Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now*, London; Tate Gallery Publishing, p. 182 [referred to as *Moving Targets* in following instances].

Gordon was at that point represented in the Tate collection with a single screen projection<sup>2</sup>.

Moving back into the large central gallery, I was further surprised to find myself in the presence of a site-specific, wall-based installation by the renowned French artist Daniel Buren. There, adhered to the walls and vaulted ceiling, and articulating the space at regular intervals, were Buren's trademark stripes in red, grey and green. Again, I thought the Tate had nothing comparable to this by Buren in their collection<sup>3</sup>. One would have to look to the major public institutions in France or America to find examples of his work on a similar scale. Yet, here was an excellent representative example of Buren's practice, not to be found in the collection of the Tate, but rather in one of its regional counterparts.

During the train ride back to London, I continued to think about the Buren installation, **With the Arcades: Three Colours (work in situ)** (1994). I speculated about how long it had been on display. The strips had not looked as fresh as they might, and were in some instances damaged along the edges where most likely, people had touched them. Comprised as it was of coloured vinyl, it would be light sensitive and susceptible to fading and dust. I wondered whether Buren had particular stipulations about the 'appearance' and maintenance of his installations, and whether his feelings about those issues were established or made known at the time of the acquisition. Mostly, his installations were

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<sup>2</sup> The Tate Gallery acquired its first video installation by Douglas Gordon, **10ms-1** (1994) in 1997. It is a single projection & screen installation. It was not until 2002 that they accessioned a second video installation, **Déjà-vu** (2000), which comprises three projections onto three screens.

<sup>3</sup> The Tate holds **Framed/Exploded/Defaced** (1978-9), a set of etchings by Buren, which it acquired in 1980.

temporary occurrences or interventions. They lasted for weeks or months rather than for more extended phases, so that fading, or sustained wear and tear, would not generally be an issue. I ran through what its re-installation would possibly entail for the museum – did they have a stockpile of the different coloured vinyls, or was it the case that they would have to buy (ship in even) a fresh stock, hoping the exact vinyl (colour, width and amount) was still available? And, of course, at what cost? Then there would be the matter of installing the colours in proper order, seamlessly, and to the proper degree of spacing. The resource implications of the work were not inconsiderable. In an institution with the resources and infrastructure of the Tate, those implications might be more easily absorbed, but for Southampton I surmised their impact would be greater. Site and material specific, as **With the Arcades** appeared to be, it struck me that for Southampton it was cheaper to leave it up ‘semi-permanently’, and that some kind of compromise between its increasingly fatigued appearance and the logistics of installing it again (either immediately or at a later date) would factor into their thinking.

I was intrigued to know how the acquisition had arisen, whether **With the Arcades** had originally intended to be a ‘temporary’ installation that was subsequently considered for purchase, and about the terms by which Southampton had agreed its ‘permanence’ with the artist<sup>4</sup>. By virtue of my position at the Tate, I had become acquainted with the often-nebulous nature of such negotiations, particularly in relation to a non-traditional artwork like **With**

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<sup>4</sup> **With the Arcades: Three Colours (work in situ)** was initially installed at Southampton as part of the *Wall to Wall* exhibition, curated by the National Touring Exhibition office at the Hayward Gallery, London. The exhibition was staged between three venues: the Hayward Gallery, Southampton City Art Gallery and Leeds City Art Gallery. See Paley, Maureen O. (1993), *Wall to Wall*, London: South Bank Centre.

the Arcades, and I was aware of the many resource demands that such artworks can place upon those collections that acquire them.

## Early Objectives

Throughout this thesis, I employ the term 'non-traditional' to denote an artwork or art form that employs materials, techniques or formats other than (or in addition to) those familiar to the core disciplines of painting, drawing, sculpture and even photography<sup>5</sup>. I use it to designate artworks that comprise (and combine) highly unusual, potentially unstable, and occasionally disposable media, or those where the artist has manipulated his or her media in idiosyncratic ways. Frequently, they have no permanent physical constitution, may require extensive display arrangements, and be 'realised' for short, temporary periods. As such, they radically test the museum's task of collecting in perpetuity, which, cultural critic David Cosgrove suggests, has hitherto been premised upon 'an object-centred definition of heritage in need of conservation'<sup>6</sup>. That definition gives primacy to the artist's intention as embedded in the *original* material constitution of the artwork, the 'longevity' of

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<sup>5</sup> I derive my usage from Richard Morphet's 1974 essay 'A Note on Conceptual Art', published in The Tate Gallery (1974), *Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1972-74*, London: The Tate Gallery, pp. 29-33. Morphet, then Keeper of Modern Art at the Tate Gallery, opened his article by noting:

Over the past decade an ever-increasing quantity of new art has taken forms that go outside painting and sculpture...Materials employed in the 'conceptual works' acquired include video, sound cassettes, colour slides, photographs, maps, texts, diagrams and lines drawn direct on the Gallery walls [p. 29].

Morphet included photographs within his audit of 'new' media then recently acquired into the Tate. Within the context of this thesis, I consider photography as a 'core' medium alongside painting and sculpture. I do, however, refer to installations that have photographic components, such as Susan Hiller's installation *Monument* (1980-81) [Plate 12].

<sup>6</sup> Cosgrove, David E. (1994), 'Should We Take it All so Seriously? Culture, Conservation and Meaning in the Contemporary World', in Krumbein, W.E. (ed.), *Durability and Change: The Science, Responsibility, and Cost of Sustaining Cultural Heritage*, Chichester, NY: John Wiley, pp. 259-266.

which would be determined by the inherent properties of its material constituents, and by the demands made of those materials by factors such as construction, handling, display, and of course the onset of age.

In an article entitled 'Why Restore Works of Art?'<sup>7</sup>, Yukio Saito has framed the basis of that 'object-centred definition' thus:

the meaning of a work of art emerges from the physical material of the object. The particular design and structure of a work of art directly resulting from the artist's manipulation of the physical elements constitute the meaning and integrity of a work of art [Saito, 1985, p. 148].

This privileges the notion of an unambiguous relationship between the artwork's meaning and physical constitution, and typically fixes this to the moment of the work's completion or creation. As Saito adds, therefore, 'any alteration in the physical material of the object, hence, results in the change of meaning and significance of the art object' [Saito, 1985, p. 148]. I had become aware that non-traditional artworks simply do not oblige these correlations, where, for instance, an artwork's material constituents do not themselves propose their means of assemblage, the work's final form or its meaning. Or to state it another way, the artist's intentions for any given piece do not necessarily take any permanent physical embodiment, and are not necessarily materially self-evident. Moreover, the artist's attitude towards the materials comprising their work can vary and be multiple, even with regard to a single work<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Saito, Yukio (1985), 'Why Restore Works of Art?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Fall, pp. 141-151.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in *Chapter Four*, I discuss an installation by Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto. He views the various materials upon which the realisation of that work relies differently. The nylon 'pods' are to be retained and maintained, whereas the spices are to be disposed of and replaced from realisation to realisation.

The international conservation community has long recognised the many material and documentation challenges, as well as the ethical ones, that the long-term (and even short-term) display and care of non-traditional artworks can pose. Indeed, an international body of research has embraced the need to redefine notion of the 'material', and has undergone significant and wide-reaching strides over the last twenty years. Numerous large-scale symposia and institutional projects punctuate the last decade in particular: *From Marble to Chocolate* (Tate, 1994); *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 1993-7); *Mortality Immortality* (The Getty Institute, 1999); and the *Variable Media Initiative* (Guggenheim, 2001-) to name a few<sup>9</sup>.

When I joined its staff in 1999, the Tate was already well acquainted with the demands that maintaining the appearance or functionality of a non-traditional artwork to the intentions of its creator can make on its resources and ethics of care. In 1996, its sculpture conservation department had taken the step of inviting American artist Matthew Barney to remake a part of his large-scale installation **OTTOshaft** (1992) [Plate 2]. Acquired by the Tate only twelve months previously, one of the elements of the work made with resin-coated tapioca had begun to visibly compromise to the point where Tate conservators were concerned it would not withstand future handling<sup>10</sup>. That same year, it had acquired Gary Hill's video installation **Between Cinema and a Hard Place**

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<sup>9</sup> For early scholarship in this field, see National Museums of Canada (1981), *Abstracts from International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art* 7-12 July, Ottawa: National Museums of Canada.

<sup>10</sup> For further details of the re-making of part of **OTTOshaft**, see Jackie Heuman's essay published in Heuman, Jackie (ed.) (1999), *Material Matters: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, pp. 90-99. As Heuman noted, 'Barney felt it important to remake the tapioca so that in future it could be displayed as originally intended [...] With many contemporary sculptures, the artist's concept is as important as the materials, and thus the conservator has to strike a balance between conserving the materials and keeping faith with the artist's concept' [p. 95].

(1991) [Plate 3] -- which constitutes twenty-three monitors stripped from their casings across which a computer-controlled switching device distributes video images in a pre-determined configuration<sup>11</sup>. Both acquisitions have required considerable resource and time commitments on the part of the Tate, from the purchase of a cement mixer to the stockpiling of specific monitors. Indeed, in 1999, it was also in the process of co-initiating an international conservation project that would focus specifically on developing standards and techniques for interviewing artists about their artworks, their choice of materials, the meaning and status of those that they used, their methods of construction, their intentions and their views on maintenance. As Tate conservator Rachel Barker has since summarised:

There is international acknowledgement that sound preservation of modern and contemporary art in museums generally suffers from lack of material and technical information, especially in relation to meaning. This acknowledgment resulted two years ago in the formation of the International Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art [INCCA]. Tate's major consultative and contributing involvement in the INCCA project will enable Tate to offer its existing archive of artists' technical information and share the experiences and archives of other membership museums. It shall also consolidate Tate's existing conscientious approach to the conservation of these objects in an international forum<sup>12</sup>.

Where a collection such as Southampton's would have to make a case for match funding or to outlay its own purchase funds, or even potentially for its own eligibility to take receipt of a gift, I wondered how far they factored in the on-going costs that the care of media such as video invariably incur. I thought about

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<sup>11</sup> I discuss Gary Hill's *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* (1991) in greater detail in *Chapter Four*.

<sup>12</sup> Barker, Rachel (2002), 'Modern Art: A Lifetime to Consider' in Reid, Zoe (ed.), *Contemporary Art: Creation, Curation, Collection, Conservation*, Postprints of IPCRA conference September 2001, Dublin: Irish Professional conservators and Restorers' Association, pp. 1-8; p. 8.

whether Southampton consulted the Tate about maintenance or conservation issues arising with its contemporary acquisitions; about the level and kinds of resource commitment they might require; or about how to plan for their long-term care and document the artist's views on such matters. I knew that the Tate's conservation departments were happy to informally field enquiries and viewed it as one of their duties as a national collection, but that those would be necessarily prioritised according to its own heavy internal workloads.

Indeed, intermittent advice aside, it occurred to me that, on the basis of what I had seen of the contemporary holdings it had assembled, Southampton had a clear need of the procedures and expertise evolving at the Tate and internationally, in relation to the long term care of installation, video and the myriad of unusual media and formats that contemporary art practitioners now use. I hypothesised about how many of the regional collections in the UK listed in Louisa Buck's *Moving Targets*, and others beyond that, this might possibly apply to<sup>13</sup>. My first objectives, in undertaking this doctoral research, then, were to construct an overview of the collecting activities of local authority collections vis-à-vis non-traditional art forms and situate these in relation to their national counterparts. I would then analyse their acquisition and documentation processes, scope their infrastructures and resources, gauge their usual advice routes, and 'link' them up with relevant international, national or indeed regional references, scholarship and precedents. My aim was to create access to

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<sup>13</sup> I use the terms 'regional collection' and 'local authority collection' interchangeably throughout my thesis. I note here that I have not included university collections such as the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, or the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow (both of whom have collected examples of non-traditional art within recent years) within my discussion. The museums and art galleries that I discuss within the scope of this thesis are those whose governance and funding is the responsibility of local or national Government.



material by means of which regional collections could assess an artwork's resource implications, and the commitment they would entail, in light of their own resource capacities.

## Research Directions

To identify my constituency - those local authority funded galleries accessioning non-traditional artworks - I used, in the first instance, the listings that Buck had made in *Moving Targets*<sup>14</sup>, and then referred to three organisations: the Contemporary Art Society [CAS], the National Art Collection Fund [NACF] and the Scottish Arts Council [SAC]. I began by assembling an inventory of those museums and galleries across the United Kingdom that had in the recent past taken receipt of videos, installations and other non-traditional art forms as gifts. As a membership-based gifting organisation that specialises in placing contemporary art in public collections, the CAS's subscriber list pointed me towards some forty-four local authority museums and galleries<sup>15</sup>. In Scotland, the documentation relating to the dispersal of the Scottish Arts Council's collection in 1997 broadened my growing register even further to incorporate the Dick Institute, Kilmarnock, and the Highlands and Islands Council, based in Inverness<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, the distribution by the NACF of thirty-nine artworks from the Saatchi Collection in autumn 2000 amongst nine regional art

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<sup>14</sup> Buck lists UK-wide venues for contemporary art at the back of *Moving Targets*, [Buck, 1997 pp. 167-188]. Within that section, she names a good number of galleries which exhibit and collect contemporary art, and does occasionally specify individual works that they have. On the whole, her accounts offer brief descriptive paragraphs.

<sup>15</sup> In 2000, The CAS's membership includes museums and galleries in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It comprised fifty-four institutions in total. The other ten out of the fifty-four were national and university collections.

<sup>16</sup> Unpublished catalogue of Scottish Arts Council Collection, and notes on dispersal, supplied directly by SAC curator Wendy Law.

collections also identified Paisley Museum and Art Gallery's interest in extending its collection towards new media and art practices. I then began to refine my search by looking for those local authority museums and galleries in the UK that had taken their interest to a further level in actively generating contemporary acquisitions or by seeking to build holdings of particular non-traditional art practices. I cross-referenced the names of the museums and galleries that I had already gathered with the records of the NACF and the SAC, and also the V&A/Museums and Gallery Commission Purchase Fund [V&A/MGC], all purchase grant-giving bodies to whom regional collections can make applications for part financial assistance towards acquisitions.

In the main, a hub of collections stood out as making multiple successful applications over the previous ten to fifteen years for funding to acquire new or recently made non-traditional acquisitions - the city art galleries in Southampton, Manchester and Aberdeen in particular. In 1992, for example, the NACF had supported Southampton's bid to acquire Rachel Whiteread's **Untitled (Freestanding Bed)** (1991) [Plate 4] comprising dental plaster and polystyrene, and Leeds City Art Gallery had with the support of the V&A/MGC purchased several works from the mid 1980s onwards, for example Anthony Gormley's figurative sculpture **Maquette for Leeds Brick Man** (1986) in 1987. Indeed, those city art galleries at Southampton, Leeds and Manchester were amongst the museums and galleries such the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne and Wolverhampton City Art Gallery, participating in the CAS's 'Special Collections Scheme', a contemporary collecting initiative targeted at local

authority collections first piloted in 1996 in England and then running again for a second period.

Unlike their national counterparts, few of the core regional museums and galleries that I had identified had published catalogues of their collections or up-to-date addenda. I was reliant for the most part on the CAS's website to provide the details and destinations of artworks distributed from its buying round of 1998-2000<sup>17</sup>. The NACF maintains an on-line database of the acquisitions that it has supported and gifts that it has made, which can be searched by artist and by collection, and where possible carries images of the artworks<sup>18</sup>. Whilst these were useful, I wanted to gain a fuller picture of each gallery's collection. Those such as Towner Art Gallery had archived references to contemporary acquisitions displays on their websites, but they were usually summary in nature and gave only a partial view of their holdings. The relative inaccessibility of such information began to change within the lifetime of my research. Leeds City Art Gallery made an updated version of its catalogue available as a portable document file [pdf] via its website<sup>19</sup>. Increasingly, through the Designation Challenge Fund<sup>20</sup> grants allocated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.contemparts.org.uk>, retrieved 10 06 2001.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.artfund.org/9/9\\_0AboutArtFund.html](http://www.artfund.org/9/9_0AboutArtFund.html), retrieved 10 06 2001.

<sup>19</sup> The catalogue is available for download at [http://www.leeds.gov.uk/artgallery/art\\_cat.html](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/artgallery/art_cat.html). On the website it notes that the pdf. version 'supercedes all Leeds City Art Galleries' publications produced between 1898 and 1982, and covers the collections of the City Art Gallery (opened in 1888), Temple Newsam House (bought in 1922) and Lotherton Hall (given to the City in 1968) and the Centre for Study of Sculpture (established in 1982). Retrieved 04 03 2003.

<sup>20</sup> The 'Museums Designation Scheme' [MDS] was set up by the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1997 to identify amongst regional museums, collections that could be considered to be of 'pre-eminent national and international importance.' It was followed by the Designation Challenge Fund, through which the Government provided £15 million to be dispersed over a three-year period to those 'designated' museums. For further information on the Scheme: <http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/00desig.asp>. I discuss the MDS in further detail in *Chapter One*.

Council [MLA]<sup>21</sup>, many of the City Art Galleries such as those at Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton have been able to create on-line, searchable catalogues available through their websites<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the current development of centralised 'access routes' websites such as 'Cornucopia', first inaugurated in 1998, and 'Crossroads' promise to provide detailed listings of multiple collections for future reference<sup>23</sup>.

The task of not only accessing the collecting policies or purchase fund allocations of those individual local authority galleries, but also determining the criteria by which they formed their collecting remits vis-à-vis contemporary practices proceeded slowly in the early stages. Collecting policies or reports were difficult to retrieve as they were often documents intended for internal circulation. They also tended to be generic in nature where they would refer to the totality of a local authority's museum and gallery provision. As my research progressed, however, these became more accessible as numerous museum

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<sup>21</sup> The MLA is the national development agency that works for and on behalf of museums, libraries and archives in the UK and advises Government on policy and priorities. It has undergone several changes of identity since its founding as the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries in 1931. It became the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1987/88, then Resource in April 2000. Resource differed from the MGC in that it also absorbed the functions of the former Library and Information Commission, and also added responsibility for archives to its portfolio. Resource was itself renamed MLA in February 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Manchester City Art Gallery's collection can be searched at the following web address: <http://www.manchestergalleries.org/collections/Intro.php> retrieved 07 02 2004. Birmingham Museums and Art Galleries search facility can be accessed through their website <http://www.bmag.org.uk> or at the following address: <http://server1.minisisinc.com/minisa.dll/144/BMA?DIRECTSEARCH>, retrieved 07 02 2004. It was developed in 2002, supported by the Designation Challenge Fund.

<sup>23</sup> The Cornucopia website features data from the 62 museums in England holding collections which are 'designated'. For an account of its development, see Turner, Chris (2004), 'Cornucopia: An open collection description service', *Ariadne*, 40, available from <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue40/turner/intro.html>, retrieved 08 08 2004. Crossroads is a project that is working across the library, museum and archive domains to develop a unique access route to the collections held in the West Midlands. It was funded by Resource, and due for completion in Spring 2003. It can be accessed at <http://www.crossroads-wm.org.uk>, retrieved 03 05 2003.

services have made their collecting policies available on the Internet, either directly on their sites<sup>24</sup>, or as documents that can be downloaded in pdf format<sup>25</sup>.

The difficulties I initially experienced in ascertaining any information about the current financial and human resources and care infrastructures of individual museums were even more pronounced. I want to discover what in-house conservation provision did Wolverhampton City Art Gallery or Towner Art Gallery have? What percentage of their annual budgets was devoted to collections care? Did they have conservators on staff, and, if so, what were their trained specialisms and what were their responsibilities? If not, what were the typical advice routes that those organisations would take? What documentation procedures and systems did they have, and what storage facilities? In some cases, I found summarised accounts of the infrastructures within specific local authority institutions, and of the 'agency support' provided by their Area Museum Councils in various reports that dated from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s<sup>26</sup>. The Museums Association Yearbook does list gallery personnel by institution, and indicated where conservators were retained on staff. A wealth of literature authored over the last forty years focused more

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Wolverhampton City Gallery's accessioning and disposal policy 2002-2007 available at [http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/web\\_page/acquisitions\\_3.htm](http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/web_page/acquisitions_3.htm), retrieved 20 01 2004. The production and dissemination of collecting policies is now a requirement if museums and galleries wish to gain Registration with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

<sup>25</sup> Birmingham City Art Gallery (2003) 'Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery Collecting Policy 2003-2008' is available from [http://www.bmag.org.uk/maps\\_and\\_guides/collecting\\_policy\\_2003-2008.pdf](http://www.bmag.org.uk/maps_and_guides/collecting_policy_2003-2008.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries (1963), *Report on Provincial Museums and Galleries*, London: HMSO; Museums and Galleries Commission (1984), *Review of Area Museums Councils and Services*, London: HMSO; Museums and Galleries Commission (1986), *Museums in Scotland: Report by a Working Party*, London: HMSO. The Area Museum Councils were created in the early 1960s as membership organisations for representatives of museums and the organisations that run them, with a view to fostering coordination and improvement in services and standards across the local authority sector. They took on further functions as a means by which funding from central Government could be dispersed to regional museums. The AMCs no longer exist and have been replaced by single Regional Agencies, which cover museums, archives and libraries. Direct provision of services has diminished under the sRAs.

broadly on the conservation needs of the museum sector in the UK<sup>27</sup>. This gave me valuable insight into the development of collections care, and conservation provision specifically, across that sector, and the many challenges, deficiencies and backlogs that it still faces. Yet, where the compilation of those documents relied heavily on direct feedback from museum professionals, their presentation tended towards the statistical or general, and I found little information about 'named' galleries.

### **Gallery Visits and Interviews**

I was struck by the lack of 'in-situ' data about local authority collections that took a contextualised form. In response, I pursued a programme of gallery visits and interviews. The primary motivation for those interviews was to gain particulars about the collecting focuses pursued by regional collections in respect of non-traditional art forms and what factors determined those. I also sought to gauge the terms of acquisition relating to specific works, asking to whom it fell to establish those terms; the arrangements put in place for their long term care and management; instances where particular non-traditional artworks may have required conservation intervention; and any advice routes that they would typically take. I chose a geographically distributed number from my 'core group' to visit, encompassing galleries in the south of England, the Midlands

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<sup>27</sup> See in particular IIC UK sub-committee on conservation facilities (1974) *Conservation in Museums and Galleries: A Survey of Facilities in the United Kingdom*, London: IIC UK; Corfield, Michael, Keene, Suzanne, and Hackney, Stephen (eds.) (1987), *The Survey: Conservation Facilities in Museums and Galleries*, London: UKIC. Again, in the later stages of my research, several reports were published that provided a contemporary view. See Scottish Museums Council (2002), *Scotland's National Audit: A Collective Insight*, Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council, 2 vols., and Winsor, Peter (2000), 'Conservation in the UK,' *Cultural Trends*, London: Policy Studies Institute, 33, pp. 1-33.

and the North-West and North-East regions. Beyond England, I also made visits to collections in Belfast and in Scotland, focusing on those in the central belt – Glasgow, Paisley and Edinburgh- as well as Aberdeen in the North-East.

For the most part, it was curators that I interviewed – with the exception of Southampton where the gallery's paintings conservator was on hand. All were extremely obliging, and where they agreed, the interview was taped. In other cases, it proceeded in a more informal fashion. In all cases, those discussions were further supplemented by extended correspondence, and occasional repeat visits. In respect of the latter, Aberdeen City Art Gallery granted me direct access to their object history files, and acquisitions documentation. In addition to this, I also undertook, where possible, interviews with several of the artists whose artworks my selected regional collections had acquired. These included Mariele Neudecker, Anya Gallaccio, Cornelia Parker, Richard Wright and Andy Goldsworthy. Others that I was not able to meet with, such as Hilary Lloyd or Mark Dean, were happy to provide copies of the written documentation that they supply when pieces of their work are acquired, or respond to questions in writing.

## **Findings**

On the basis of those visits, interviews and correspondences, I was able to build profiles of individual organisations, from which it was possible to extract some

general trends with regard to their acquiring non-traditional artworks. Firstly, they confirmed the already discernible move amongst regional collections, within the later 1990s in particular, from predominantly passive or recipient collecting behaviours to those that were active. Furthermore, in some instances they revealed that they had the potential to be 'authorial'. By 'authorial', I mean to suggest that their collecting behaviours display an increasing agency with regard to how certain contemporary practitioners and trends will be represented within British cultural heritage. In some cases, those collections had formed core holdings of certain mainstream contemporary art practices that exceeded those assembled by their national counterparts. An outstanding example of this is the group of wall drawings that Southampton City Art Gallery have developed, which did (and still does) not have a corollary either in London or Edinburgh.

Where galleries took receipt of gifts, it was difficult to control documentation, but the majority were demonstrably pro-active in establishing direct contact with the artist within a relatively short period following accessioning. In the case of acquisitions that they generated, all maximised contact with the artist to secure written documentation, in some cases in a systematic form<sup>28</sup>. Almost every curator that I consulted confirmed that, where the artist was available, they would be invited to install the new acquisition on the first occasion. In some cases, the artist (or a deputy) would be invited on subsequent occasions too. Few of the collections took the opportunity to film the artist doing so, but amended the documentation that they had already gathered accordingly.

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<sup>28</sup> Southampton, for instance, has developed a documentation form specifically for video and film works, which it sends out to artists for them to return and complete.



The levels of resource and infrastructure amongst the collections I visited varied greatly. Southampton benefits from a well-established in-house conservation department, yet Aberdeen City Art Gallery has no in-house provision to call upon. Individual staff remits are often composite, combining responsibilities that would typically be distributed amongst several personnel within the national collections. In total, the management care procedures and capacities of regional collections are determined by minimal financial resources, which could not necessarily be anticipated into the future. The financial restrictions under which they operate are neatly coined by Simon Knell for instance where he notes:

Museums can only achieve their objectives by working effectively with the existing economic and political framework but this presents the collection care function of the museum with its stiffest challenge. *The museum's mission, as regards collection care, is simply located in a temporal dimension which bears no relation to the political and economic world in which museums operate.* While curators rarely seem to think of the life expectancy of objects in finite terms, few of the accountants or politicians who fund their activities have plans which extend beyond five years<sup>29</sup> (Italics mine).

For the regional collections that I visited, this tension between perpetual function and resource is particularly acute. For them, the short, mid and long-term resource implications that any prospective acquisition might pose are of primary importance. With almost all acquisitions made, the collections had to establish the short and long term resource implications of an artwork *in advance* of acquisition. Only in one or two instances had this occurred following acquisition. Consequently, many collections have felt that the re-formatting and support requirements of a medium such as video and film fall beyond their ability to project their financial resources into the future. Necessarily, they have excluded such media from their acquisitions focuses.

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<sup>29</sup> Knell, Simon J. (1994) *Care of Collections*, Leicester Reader in Museums Studies, London and New York: Routledge, p. 2.

With regard to advice routes, few of the curators were acquainted with international research, nor the paper-based or electronic means by which it was available. Most made direct reference to the Tate Gallery as their first port of call. Requests for guidance were generally made in relation to specific works rather than on general procedures. Gauging the efficacy of any advice received proved difficult. As Godfrey Worsdale, former curator at Southampton City Art Gallery noted:

The problem with taking advice from those major institutions is, a lot of the time they say: this is the way to do it. But of course I'm operating under local Government restrictions and financial limitations. And yes, usually if you hurl enough cash at a problem you can solve it, but of course I've got other problems to contemplate<sup>30</sup>.

The availability of alternative advice routes was influenced by peculiarities of geographical location. Other collections such as Leeds City Art Gallery benefit from local expertise, situated as it is in proximity to a rich vein of private practice sculpture conservation. In relation to new media, they also sourced advice from nearby organisations such as the Moving Image Touring and Exhibition Service [MITES] in Liverpool<sup>31</sup>. Where in some cases, non-traditional acquisitions required conservation treatment, several of the collections, such as Towner and Aberdeen would consider returning the work to the artist for attention. Conversely, and by virtue of its better-placed position, Southampton preferred, where possible, to conduct conservation work in-house with *guidance* from the artist.

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<sup>30</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001p), *Personal Interview with Godfrey Worsdale, Curator, Southampton City Art Gallery*, 14 12 2001, Southampton.

<sup>31</sup> MITES was founded in 1992 and offers technical support and subsidized exhibition technologies to artists and the museum sector across the UK.

## Thesis Arguments

From those interviews, I felt that several pressing needs were evident. Those collections that I have visited were all at different stages of procedural engagement with the non-traditional holdings that they had begun to put together. Several, such as Towner and Southampton, are comparatively advanced. Yet, across the board, there is a steadily accumulating level of experience. Generally, however, there is little cognisance between regional collections about who was acquiring what. Certainly there is awareness between 'near neighbours', yet this is more problematic amongst more geographically dispersed collections<sup>32</sup>. Such factors reinforced my initial supposition for a 'linking up' mechanism, but I felt it needed to be of more extensive, robust constitution. However, I increasingly questioned the way in which advice has hitherto been offered and adopted inter-institutionally. In the main, the national collections have continued to observe a 'yardstick and incentive'<sup>33</sup> principle, looking chiefly to represent 'best practice' to their wider UK community. On the basis of my interviews, however, it had become clear to me that for many regional collections, straight 'source' emulation was impractical and inappropriate, and that they required guidance to be context sensitive.

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<sup>32</sup> Godfrey Worsdale at Southampton City Art Gallery was interested in acquiring a wall drawing by Scottish artist Richard Wright, but considered the strong 'performed' element of Wright's practice impracticable for the collection. He was unaware that Aberdeen City Art Gallery took receipt of a wall drawing by Wright as part of their allocation from the Scottish Art Council Collection dispersal.

<sup>33</sup> This term was first used in 1974 in an article entitled 'A Growing Concern', published in The Tate Gallery (1974), *Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1972-74*, London: The Tate Gallery, pp. 9-12. On that occasion, the Tate Gallery noted of its permanent holdings, 'such collections set standards. They are focal points in the cultural life of the nation. They provide an incentive and a yardstick for those who are responsible for forming regional collections' [p. 11]. It is a principle that, I suggest, also applies to their collections care.

This in turn made me reflect upon the critical mass of international research into the documentation and conservation of non-traditional artworks as a useable, transferable resource beyond its community of well-resourced authors. Indeed, it is apparent that very few platforms for dissemination or feedback exist regarding the uptake or usefulness of scholarship by single or localised groups of institutions. It became clear to me that a mediating structure is highly desirable, which could intercede between those seeking advice and those able to provide examples of previous experience or particular forms of expertise, and make both relevant to particular consumers. Thus, identifying possible participants; contents; forms; and forums for such an organisation or service is a key intention of my thesis.

Ultimately, my investigation is not solely concerned with dissemination, feedback, emulation or interpolation of advice between a 'supplier' and a 'consumer', but seeks to propose terms for 'integration' and 'contribution'. In this, my thinking has been greatly informed by the currently unfolding climate of 'regionalism' within the UK. In December 2000, Chris Smith, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, appointed a Regional Museums Task Force [RMTF], whose specific task it would be to look into the issues affecting regional museums and galleries in England and to develop a national strategic framework for the future. Less than one year later, and following an extensive consultative process, the Regional Museums Task Force produced its landmark report, *Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's*

*Museum*<sup>34</sup>. The report that regionalism has reappeared in the late 1990s ‘(like devolution) [...] as a major political and constitutional issue’ [RMTF, 2001, p. 27] The national Governments in London and Edinburgh have recognized a direct financial and policy responsibility with regard to local authority museum services, acknowledging in particular the vital roles they can play in education, learning, community development and economic regeneration. In England particularly, significant monetary support has been made available to the regional museum community, which in turn has initiated considerable restructuring in order that that funding is most effectively apportioned and utilised. Most pertinently to my discussion here is the means of recognition offered by the ‘Museums Designation Scheme’, and the concept of a ‘distributed national collection’ that has recently entered sector parlance [Resource, 2001, pp. 88-89]. Germane to both is the acknowledgement that ‘not all the best or most important collections are held by the national museums and galleries [...]’. My own findings with regard to the representation of non-traditional art practices in public collections across the UK concur with this: not all the best examples of non-traditional, contemporary art are to be found in the national museums and galleries. Concomitantly, there is a case to be made for promoting scholarship on the part of regional museums and galleries in the UK into the ethical maintenance and long-term care of their holdings alongside that conducted by their national counterparts, and securing for them a means to deliver that scholarship not only nationally, but also internationally.

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<sup>34</sup> Regional Museums Task Force (2001), *Renaissance in the Regions: a New Vision for England's Museums*, London: Resource [referred to as *Renaissance Report* in following instances].

## Chapters

Thus, in *Chapter One – ‘An Emerging Collector-Group’* – I make a more extensive examination of contemporary non-traditional art patronage as pursued by my core group of regional galleries. A discursive framework has surrounded the patronage of non-traditional art forms by the Tate Gallery and Arts Council Collection since their first pioneering non-traditional acquisitions in the early 1970s<sup>35</sup>. Though collections such as Southampton, Leeds and Manchester have, where able, actively collecting fine examples of the latest British and international artistic practice since the late 1970s, it became apparent to me that the development of that practice amongst local authority collections has been largely unaccounted for, critically or historically. It reveals itself as a narrative subject to several ‘hiatus’ and considerably inflected with presumptions regarding ‘role’ and issues of ‘resource’. Those two factors have long inscribed – and differentiated – the relative status’ and remits of various ‘strata’ of the museum sector across the UK. Frequently, local authority collections – and in particular, the contemporary artworks that they acquire – have been viewed as microcosms of, or supplements to, the curatorial directions forged by their national complements. Their substantially more limited resources have always

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, in 1972, Richard Cork convened a round-table of representatives from the Tate, which he published the following year as ‘The Tate Gallery: Acquisitions, Exhibitions, Trustees, Future Developments,’ *Studio International*, 185, April, pp. 181-192. See also Peter Fuller’s 1978 article, ‘The Tate, The State and the English Tradition,’ *Studio International*, 194, pp. 4-18 or Colin Osman’s interview with Alan Bowness the Director of the Tate Gallery, published in 1982 in *Creative Camera*, 205, January, pp. 374-9.

qualified their ability to pursue more 'authorial' curatorship, and to assemble and promote distinctive, 'representative' holdings.

Such perceptions were still prevalent, though subject to incipient review, in the mid-1990s. As I outline at the beginning of *Chapter One*, the question of how regional collections might usefully *emulate* the collecting models or curatorial trends of the nationals were raised for instance during a seminar, entitled *Collecting for the Future*<sup>36</sup>, organised in 1996 by the Visual Art Galleries Association and Contemporary Art Society in conjunction with three 'new acquisition' exhibitions by the Tate Gallery, Arts Council Collection, and Contemporary Arts Society staged across the North-East of England<sup>37</sup>. A review article by Sheila McGregor, then assistant Keeper at Birmingham City Art Gallery, did initiate a critique of the curatorial consensus evident amongst the national collections, but she did not fully question just how far regional museums and galleries were able to emulate or perpetuate in any such consensus themselves, nor, indeed, how they might help define it, or counterpoise it<sup>38</sup>.

To redress that, in *Chapter One* I trace acquisitive activities through the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, focusing on three regional collections in particular – Southampton, Leeds and Aberdeen. I refer to the proceedings from a day conference organised in 1979 by the Art Galleries Association, which reveal the early active efforts and ambitions of the larger City Art Galleries such as those

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<sup>36</sup> Visual Art Galleries Association and Contemporary Art Society (1996), *Collecting for the Future*, seminar hosted at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, unpublished proceedings on tape. Contemporary Art Society Archive.

<sup>37</sup> The exhibitions were *Tate on the Tyne* at the Laing Art Gallery; *Take it from Here*, Sunderland Museum & Art Gallery, City Arts Centre & Library and the Vardy Gallery, University of Sunderland, and *ACE* at the Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle.

<sup>38</sup> McGregor, Sheila (1996), 'Spring Collections,' *AN: Artists Newsletter*, May 1996, pp. 26-28.

at Southampton and Leeds to establish holdings of more experimental art forms, and some of the hindrances they faced in doing so<sup>39</sup>. I then look at collecting initiatives in the early 1990s such as that created by the NACF, which assisted regional collections in maintaining an active curatorial engagement with contemporary art practices and bolstering their holdings. I conclude the chapter by examining the revisions that 'role' and 'resource' as determinants for regional galleries have undergone post-1996. I note the framework for more broadly recognising the distinct contributions of regional museum curatorship, which has emerged since 1997. Finally, I put forward the current collecting schemes, generated by the Contemporary Art Society as a means by which those collections are developing a broader curatorial sophistication, and are emerging as a bona-fide 'collector-group', able to forge discrete identities and collections.

*In Chapter Two – Accommodating the Non-Traditional: Issues and Approaches*— I turn my attention towards research and strategies that international museums have developed in respect of the long-term conservation of non-traditional artworks. As I have noted previously in this introduction, museum conservators are traditionally primed to preserve unique material artifacts in a state as close to their original condition as is possible. For some, the inherent and often rapidly manifested instability or obsolescence of the various 'new' materials that artists use directly contradicts the aims of preserving in perpetuity. Fredrik Leen, curator at the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, is one such who continues to urge museums to exercise caution regarding the acquisition of works comprising ephemeral

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<sup>39</sup> Howarth, Tony (1979), 'Reflection on the afternoon session "Who Buys What, Who Decides What?"', *Art Galleries Association Newsletter*, 2, April 1979, p. 1.



components because of their lack of adherence to a 'criterion of reasonable material stability'<sup>40</sup>. He suggests,

A basic condition for taking care of a museum's collection and for the preservation of the collection's items, i.e. works of art, is their material consistency and endurance. A museum should not collect objects that for the simple reason of their material nature do not belong in a collection of objects with a minimum life span of a few hundred years. Similarly, curators should not be confronted with a task that they cannot reasonably fulfil. Extreme example: it is not possible to conserve a fire longer than it is burning [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 376].

What Leen implies is that the resource and ethical implications posed by non-traditional artworks are simply too great for museums to reasonably absorb.

Despite this, however, I refer, in *Chapter Two*, specifically to the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation [UKIC], which recently noted: '*There should be a minimum impediment to supporting the conservation of recently created objects, so that they may survive long enough for their enduring value to be assessed*'<sup>41</sup> (Italics mine). By acquiring non-traditional artworks 'early', curators and conservators are better able to monitor and mitigate their material repercussions. However, what underpins the UKIC's mandate is an implicit prioritising of that 'temporal dimension' that Simon Knell refers to.

I then demonstrate that some organisations have sought to integrate their documentation and care strategies with regard to non-traditional acquisitions into existing practices, whereas others have generated entirely new procedures

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<sup>40</sup>Leen, Fredrik (1999), 'Should Museums Collect Ephemeral Art?' in Hummelen, I., & Sillé, D., (eds), *Modern Art: Who Cares? An Interdisciplinary Research Project and an international Symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: The Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, p. 376.

<sup>41</sup> United Kingdom Institute for Conservation response to Heritage Lottery Fund discussion document 'The Horizons of Heritage', posted on its website, <http://www.ukic.org.uk>, posted 09 09 2001. Retrieved 06 05 2002.

and systems by which to do so. These I put forward to two perspectives, one 'domesticating' and the other 'foreignising'. These terms I borrow from Literary Translation theory<sup>42</sup>. Using these concepts, I evaluate two international initiatives focusing on the conservation of non-traditional artworks in particular: *The Conservation of Modern Art* project organised by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (1993-1997) and the *Variable Media Initiative* created by the Guggenheim Museum in New York (2001-). I also suggest that a cross-fertilisation of recent scholarship between the fields of Literary translation and conservation would, I feel, prove timely for the latter in relation to strategies regarding non-traditional artworks.

In *Chapter Three – Variable Media/Variable Museums: The Need to Network –* I return to the resource implications that non-traditional artworks can pose. A museum's limits of responsible care differ from one institution to the next, be they national or regional. Where one is able to accommodate a work, another may not feel that they can, or will be able to, provide responsible care. Indeed, what separates those sentiments is often subject to very fine distinction. I begin the Chapter by considering three examples that illuminate those kinds of distinctions - a large complex installation, a work that 'exists' as a set of instructions, and 16 mm film. I go on to outline the care infrastructures of Southampton, Leeds and Aberdeen. With both the Tate and the Arts Council, their infrastructures approximate adequate reflections of their stewardship needs. For regional museums and galleries, I show that this will generally not be the case. In terms of transferable care practice from national to regional collections,

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<sup>42</sup> Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, in particular, uses the terms 'domesticating' and 'foreignising'. See Venuti, Lawrence (1995), *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London and New York: Routledge

I argue that, with painting or more discrete sculpture, regional collections have been informed more directly by Tate practice. With others, such as video or installation for instance, they often need to be considerably more strategic than their national peers.

Moving on, I then draw on two recent publications - a recent article entitled 'Mind the Gap'<sup>43</sup> by Sharon Heal and Gaby Porter's report, *Overview of Collections Information and Advice in the Museums Domain*<sup>44</sup> - to argue that regional collections require advice to be 'context-sensitive,' that is, advice rendered specific with its context of use in mind. I go on to consider the need for 'route maps' that identify and provide 'directions' to appropriate sources of advice. I also identify 'subject' networks as the best means by which inter-institutional advice can be organised and managed. In particular, I make a strong case for the creation of a network specifically dedicated to the curation and care of contemporary non-traditional art, and what shape it might take. I outline several existing international forums, but show how these do not fully meet the needs of the UK museum sector. The potential is that such a 'subject' network could assist collections in accessing national and international expertise and research, and in providing an editorial and advocacy function through which they can indeed contribute to their growing experience in that field of research.

Finally, in *Chapter Four – Case Studies* – I present a series of comparative studies of recent acquisitions of non-traditional artworks that both national and regional collections have made. These case studies have two purposes. Firstly,

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<sup>43</sup> Heal, Sharon (2002), 'Mind the Gap', *Museums Journal*, 103, 11, November 2002, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Porter, Gaby (2002), *Overview of Collections Information and Advice in the Museums Domain*, London: Resource.

in each study, I integrate discussion of acquisitions made by both national and regional counterparts. Secondly, by making them comparative, I intend the case studies to reveal potential 'route-maps' for the curators and conservators that accession and care for non-traditional artworks. I also aim for them to have a practical application in the future, that they could be consulted by collections looking to make similar acquisitions, to provide them with precedents against which they might assess their own needs, potentials or negotiations. Though I group several works within one case study, I hope that, in the future, individual accounts of acquisitions could eventually be provided by those undertaking the acquisitions themselves. The comparative nature of the case studies could emerge through seminars or a range of discussion forums that a subject network might oversee. Overall, I emphasize the need to record best practice with due cognisance for the constraints of varying levels of museum infrastructure.

I have selected and organised each case study around a rationale, which is my own. The first two – **Video and Wall Works** – are largely media oriented. They refer to collections that are keen to expand their collections in respect of certain approaches or technologies, which, in the 1990s, have become established in mainstream contemporary art practice. Therefore, these are both growth areas for collections. Each contains three discussions, which look at how collections have defined (and redefined) their abilities to be equal to artists' many uses of the video medium for example, or to wall works. With the third – **Acquiring from first installation** – I take a slightly different starting point and focus on the growing practice of acquiring artworks from their first public installation. I consider the pressure that acquiring an installation, for instance, from its first

exhibition or commission can place upon both the acquired work and the acquiring institution.

Each case study is laid out schematically, and contains a section entitled **Scoping the Level of Commitment**. I use this phrase to define a self-conscious process that begins with identifying what it would take to ensure a work's uncompromised (within reason) longevity, then with assessing what the gallery can reasonably commit to, and finally deciding whether the importance of the work to the collection overrides this. The third study focuses on a specific collecting strategy and how an institution must be congruent to its application and the implications that it may bear. Throughout, I present all of the acquisitions in a 'context-sensitive' manner, paying particular attention to instances where one collection may have emulated or interpreted (either wittingly or unwittingly) the procedures or choices of another.

To draw this thesis to a close, I offer an *Update*. I respond to the recent acquisition of **Sara Walking: Sparkly Top and Jeans** (2003) by Julian Opie by one of my subject galleries, Aberdeen, and argue that it presents proof that there is a real demand for such research as I present here to be applied and further developed.

## Chapter One – An Emerging Collector-Group

## 1.1. Introduction

A key task of my thesis is to acknowledge the efforts of a community of regional or 'local authority' public collections in the UK apropos the field of contemporary non-traditional art practices. I seek to recognise levels of ambition amongst individual regional institutions to represent artworks comprising media such as video 16mm film, and, more recently, digital technologies in their collections<sup>1</sup>. Most particularly, however, I aim to suggest that, cumulatively appreciated, those institutions have begun to form an emerging and distinct 'collector-group' whose efforts require a national if not international platform.

There is, I suggest, a strong case for thinking so. Amongst that community's number, the City Art Galleries at Leeds and Southampton have within the last few years established core holdings of video artworks, and, in the case of Southampton, the best representative group of wall drawing installations held by *any* public collection in the UK. This is a significant phenomenon for regional collections on two fronts. Firstly, they are engaging in collecting behaviours that are not only 'active' but also 'authorial'. By 'authorial', I mean to suggest that their collecting behaviours display an increasing agency with regard to how certain contemporary practitioners and trends will be represented within British cultural heritage. Secondly, they have begun to substantially expand upon the types of artistic media and formats that they have previously collected and

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<sup>1</sup> When I began my research in 2000, no public collection in the UK had accessioned a 'digital artwork', though many took receipt of videos in Digital Versatile Disk [DVD] form. As such, I do not refer to the recent acquisitions of the former within the main body of my thesis until my concluding section, but do refer to the latter in my four chapters.

committed themselves to in the long-term. It is to the ethical and resource ramifications arising from the latter of those fronts that the main thrust of my thesis is directed. To provide a context to that discussion, I focus on the former -- the recent emergence of 'authorial' collecting behaviours on the part of local authority collections towards non-traditional contemporary art - in this chapter.

For a period of twenty-five years or so in Britain, the acquisition of new or recently made artworks by British or International artists working specifically in non-traditional media and formats was presumed to be largely restricted to a narrow 'corridor' comprising the national, and predominantly London-administrated, public collections. Indeed, the curatorial departments of the Tate, the Arts Council and the British Council, all operating with grant-in-aid allocations received from central Government in London, did over that period of time fight to establish, and bring considerable credibility to, the practice of acquiring into public collections 'new art as it emerges'<sup>2</sup>. The uptake of that practice by the wider museum community, which is the subject of this chapter, has been mediated by questions of 'role' and 'resource'. These have long determined the relative 'status' and inflected the remits of various 'strata' of the museum sector in the UK. The forming of 'representative' holdings, which

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'new art as it emerges' was used by the Tate in its *Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1972-74*, published in 1974. In an article entitled 'A Growing Concern' [pp. 9-12], it noted:

We have two great representative collections at the Tate: the collection of Modern Painting and Sculpture, which is unique in Britain, and the Historic British collection, which is unique in the world. Each of these constitutes the principal collection in this country whereby the development and achievements of art in its field can be appreciated through actual examples. Added to this lies the commitment to acquire works by contemporary artists, to represent new art as it emerges [p. 11].

This statement constituted one of the first instances whereby the Tate acknowledged, within an official document and as a matter for public record, a discrete responsibility to acquire for permanent retention examples of latest artistic practice. In actual fact, the passage did not so much acknowledge its commitment alongside the other two, as effectively align it with them.



document significant developments in artistic practice in terms of 'actual' exemplar artworks and are 'unique in their respective fields', has traditionally been accepted as the preserve of the national collections<sup>3</sup>. The 'resources' of the regional museum community have never matched those of their national counterparts, and have exaggerated distinctions in 'role'. In the 2001 report that it authored, *Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's Museums*, the Regional Museums Task Force<sup>4</sup> suggested that the acquisitive profile of regional collections was effectively stymied throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>5</sup>. In such a climate, contemporary artworks have been amongst the first casualties:

In many museums, collecting has stopped and there are no funds for acquisition. This particularly affects modern (post-war) and contemporary collecting. It is reflected in a certain reluctance to address modern and contemporary issues in exhibitions and other activities [RMTF, 2001, p. 11].

As I will illustrate, where they were made, acquisitions tended to be occasional and curatorially 'passive', taking the form of gifts received through organisations such as the Contemporary Art Society. Insofar as selected local authority galleries, such as Southampton, Leeds and Aberdeen were able, with

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<sup>3</sup> The attribution of this privilege to the national collections has long been contested. However, it is a dispensation that national collections, such as the Tate, have defended over the years: Some people have suggested that part or all of the works in the central collection should be distributed widely to the provinces either permanently or in the form of touring exhibitions. To the extent that these views are based simply on the feeling that the provinces should have more and the capital less, there is no answer to them. But in some cases at least this feeling is based on a simple misunderstanding of the purpose and functions of the great national collections. These are unique in their respective fields, and what makes them unique is their scope, their inclusiveness [The Tate Gallery, 1974, p. 11].

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Museums Task Force was created in December 2000 by Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Those appointed to the Task force included Stuart Davies, then Director of Planning and Strategy at Resource, Nicolas Serota, Director of Tate, and Neil McGregor, the Director of the National Gallery. For further information on the Task Force and the implementation of the recommendations that its 2001 report put forward, see <http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/regional/00renaiss.asp#4>

<sup>5</sup> Regional Museums Task Force (2001), *Renaissance in the Regions: a New Vision for England's Museums*, London: Resource, p.11.

the benefit of endowments and Friends schemes, to generate and make acquisitions, they were frequently 'reflective' rather than 'authorial', responding in some measure to curatorial trends established by the national collections. The issues of 'role' and 'resource' do still remain ineluctable determinants for regional collections, but have, I will show, been negotiated over the years from 'within' – by respective curators – and more recently revised from 'without' – by advocacy groups such as the Contemporary Art Society, and by the wider culture of revisionism and reinvestment that the present Government and museum policy organisations have instigated in the last seven years.

### 1.2. Authoring Voices

I put forward the year 1996 as pivotal to the emergence of the cluster of regional public collections that I identify as a 'collector-group'. That year, three 'new acquisition' exhibitions by the Tate Gallery, Arts Council and Contemporary Arts Society were simultaneously staged at different venues across the Tyne and Wear region in the North-East of England<sup>6</sup>. As part of the *UK Year of the Visual Arts* celebrations, the displays were intended to showcase the recent contemporary art purchases made by those three organisations, and included Cornelia Parker's installation **Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View** (1991) [Plate 5], which the Tate acquired the year previously. Collectively, it was hoped that they would demonstrate to North-East audiences the accessibility and validity of the cultural capital being amassed for their benefits 500 miles away in London, whilst simultaneously expediting the individual

responsibilities of each organisation to their wider publics and to their regional museum counterparts. Despite the 'regional setting', no regional collections were invited to contribute or author their own contemporary acquisition displays. Conceivably, the combined staging of the exhibitions cast the Tate Gallery, Arts Council Collection and Contemporary Art Society as something of an edifice, or 'triumvirate-in-residence'. Indeed, their presence enacted a familiar dynamic of patronisation insofar as it appeared to reprise an 'incentive and yardstick'<sup>7</sup> interface that had long coined the relationship between national and regional collections, and shored up perceptions of the latter as hosts rather than as the authors or primary custodians of culturally significant collections.

However, the constitution of that particular 'triumvirate', or 'authority of three', is telling, most specifically the presence of the Contemporary Art Society, whose inclusion I shall return to shortly. The bearers of just such an authorial voice have shifted over the last thirty or so years. In 1971, German journalist Martin Kunz was one of the first commentators to attempt to acknowledge, quantify and delimit public patronage of emerging new art in the UK, and to identify its main participants. In the period 1969-1971, he undertook detailed research intended for an article for the art journal *Studio International*, but which he never published<sup>8</sup>. Kunz defined his focus broadly as 'the public

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<sup>6</sup> The exhibitions were *Tate on the Tyne* at the Laing Art Gallery; *Take it from Here*, Sunderland Museum & Art Gallery, City Arts Centre & Library and the Vardy Gallery, University of Sunderland, and *ACE* at the Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle.

<sup>7</sup> In the article 'A Growing Concern', The Tate Gallery noted of its permanent holdings, 'such collections set standards. They are focal points in the cultural life of the nation. They provide an incentive and a yardstick for those who are responsible for forming regional collections' [The Tate Gallery, 1974, p. 11].

<sup>8</sup> Kunz, Martin (1971), 'Report on Public Patronage and administration of contemporary art in Britain 1969-71', 2 vols., unpublished manuscript, Tate archive, TGA 7620.1. My research indicates that no such article appeared in the issues of *Studio International* in and around the years 1971-2.

patronage and administration of contemporary art'. His notion of patronage was largely undifferentiated in that it embraced acquisition, exhibition and financial support for the development of new work given directly to the artist. This reflected in the choice of institutions that he included in his survey. Some did undertake permanent collecting: the Tate Gallery, Arts Council, British Council, the Victoria and Albert Museum. Those organisations were funded by central Government. Kunz also included others such as Greater London Council and Greater London Arts Association, funded by local authority bodies. Other venues such as the Institute for Contemporary Arts, Camden Arts Centre and Whitechapel Art Gallery were temporary exhibition spaces without permanent collections [Kunz, 1971, p. 1]. Significantly, however, all of those organisations were London-based, as, for the most part, were the artists that they patronised.

By the time Richard Calvocoressi (now the Director of Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art) wrote a short review of two acquisitions catalogues published by the Arts and British Council collections some ten years on from Kunz's report, those three strands of 'public patronage' had evolved much more independently<sup>9</sup>. The public collecting of contemporary art was considerably more established, evidenced by the publication of those catalogues, which put into the public domain information 'in some cases for the first time' and 'of considerable use' [Calvocoressi, 1981, p. 100]. Mid-point in his review, Calvocoressi moved his discussion beyond the Arts and British Council collections exclusively, to refer to 'all public bodies which consistently acquire British contemporary art' [Calvocoressi, 1981, p. 101]. In so doing, he implied

an increasingly widespread field of activity. However, those 'public bodies' that he referred in fact comprised the four central Government funded, London-administrated collections that acquire contemporary art - the Tate, the British Council, the Arts Council, the Department of Environment [now the Government Art Collection] Calvocoressi named them, making a gesture of recognition to comparable institutions in the Scottish and Welsh capitals: Edinburgh and Cardiff. Calvocoressi still characterised their activity as largely individualised but expressed the desire that it should be 'complementary rather than self-contained'. He put forward the idea that those institutions should 'combine forces and produce an inexpensive single volume catalogue'. As a further thought, he continued, collections might eventually consider consulting one another about what to buy thus avoiding *unnecessary* duplication' [Calvocoressi, 1981, p. 101].

The 'triumvirate' that showed concurrently in the North-East – the Tate Gallery [Tate], the Arts Council Collection [ACC] and the Contemporary Art Society [CAS] – did effect an important shift in *dramatise personae* by substituting the Contemporary Art Society for the British Council and Government Art Collections. Whilst the British Council (included by both Kunz and Calvocoressi) and Government Art Collection [GAC] (included by Calvocoressi) are both funded by central Government, neither has a direct requirement to make its collection available to the British public. The British Council is a touring collection like its Arts Council counterpart. However, unlike the Arts Council collection which is first and foremost a UK-wide

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<sup>9</sup> Calvocoressi, Richard (1981), 'Richard Calvocoressi on Two Public Art Collections', *Studio*

resource, the British Council's primary audiences rest abroad. The GAC's collection is displayed in Government buildings, some of which are accessible to the public. The Contemporary Art Society obviously differs from the Tate and Arts Council, in that, as Gill Hedley noted, it is not really a 'national institution'. Indeed, its two 'triumvirate' counterparts are amongst its subscribers. It is constituted as a registered charity, and, whilst it does receive public subsidy, primarily generates revenue through its subscriptions, donors and its own consultancy activities. Yet, it is with those 'national' organisations that it seeks collecting parity, most especially on behalf of its locally funded museum members<sup>10</sup>.

As I will go on to discuss, the Contemporary Art Society was in the process of developing its own dynamic with its regional members away from a benefactor/recipient relationship. As part of the *Year of the Visual Arts*, it exhibited its latest round of purchases that would be gifted to its subscriber organisations, presenting its authorial voice on behalf of other institutions. Yet, between 1993 and 1996, it received financial support from the Arts Council Lottery fund for a pilot scheme to enable a selected number of its regional members to embark on contemporary art acquisitions programmes. In 1996, the CAS was attempting to initiate a second phase. This I refer to later in the chapter. Suffice it to say, its appearance as part of a 'triumvirate' did positively identify regional collections as rightful custodians of contemporary art, though effectively still by proxy.

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*International*, 195, pp. 100-101.

<sup>10</sup> Visual Art Galleries Association and Contemporary Art Society (1996), *Collecting for the Future*, seminar hosted at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, unpublished proceedings on tape. Contemporary Art Society Archive.

### 1.3. Questioning Consensus?

The seminar entitled *Collecting for the Future*, organised at the Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle, in conjunction with the three exhibitions, provided an opportunity for representatives from each of the three prongs of the ‘triumvirate’ – The Tate, the Arts Council and the Contemporary Art Society – to briefly state their collecting policies and responsibilities. Doing so gave the contributors an opportunity to locate themselves and their responsibilities in respect of each other. In outlining the Arts Council’s remit, Isobel Johnstone did refer to a kind of collecting ‘pyramid’, suggesting that their three distinct approaches supported a complimentary vision. As a long-standing collection formed primarily to acquire work by young or emerging artists<sup>11</sup>, the Arts Council has tended to be grass-roots and wide-ranging in its purchasing. With its two-year purchasing panels, it acquires what might be considered a ‘slice of time’. Richard Morphet, former Director of Collections at the Tate, suggested, they, by comparison, acquire far more selectively, less ‘speedily’ and have a larger frame of responsibility to represent International contemporary art as well. The CAS characterised its approach as one modelled on ‘individual buying’, derived from its original constitution as a conduit for private

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<sup>11</sup> The Arts Council’s precursor CEMA, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, began collecting in 1942. On its establishment and early history, see Taylor, Brandon (1999), *Art for the Nation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; pp. 172–76. The Arts Council was created by Royal Charter, 9 August 1946 for the purpose of developing a greater knowledge, understanding, access to, and practice of the contemporary arts in Britain. In a radio address in July 1945, subsequently published in *The Listener*, John Maynard Keynes suggested that ‘state patronage of the arts has crept in [...] half-baked if you like. Keynes was a key player in the establishment of the Arts Council, which set the foundations for a ‘permanent system of artistic patronage’ for current practitioners [Taylor, 1999, p. 173].

benefaction to public collections, and as an antidote to the 'committee-buying' into which museum institutions have often been forced. Like the Arts Council, it has tended in recent years to acquire work from emerging artists, or those in the process of establishing themselves.

The discursive space opened up in the seminar remained largely oriented towards the representational adequacy of the collecting policies and trends established by that 'collecting pyramid'. Speaking at a seminar, the artist Susan Hiller expressed critical sentiments regarding what she referred to as an 'homogeneity' or 'consensus' regarding the recent acquisitions of non-traditional, new or recently made artworks on display [VAGA/CAS, 1996]. The three other speakers invited alongside Susan Hiller shared her critical stance. Lynda Morris (Curator at Norwich Castle Museum), Gilane Tawadros, (Director of INIVA) and Tim Marlow, (broadcaster and journalist) all questioned the adequacy or authority of such homogeneity, and suggested its distorting or 'erasing' potential with regard to the formation of a self-justifying 'canon'. Subject for particular criticism was the power of the Tate to shape an inevitable history of artistic practice. The panel's discussion reprised numerous claims levelled particularly at the Tate in the 1970s, mostly particularly in articles such as 'Official Art and the Tate Gallery' by Andrew Brighton, published in 1977, and in which he stated:

The present organisation of the Tate means that a powerful status-conferring institution is controlled by a small like-minded public, a coterie. This small public, whose members have either power or influence at the Tate, is predominantly made up of people who know each other, who are professionally involved in art and who will have interests in



maintaining or creating an authoritative consensus as to the value of certain artists work<sup>12</sup>.

Within the 1996 climate, Sheila McGregor, then Assistant Curator at Birmingham City Art Gallery, suggested, in an article reviewing both the displays and the seminar<sup>13</sup>, that:

The problem is that it is a consensus which marginalizes not only earlier manifestations of the very kind of practice it now promotes, but which increasingly sidelines works of a more conventional nature, and is a consensus which cannot altogether escape charges of a cliquish introspection [...] fuelled by close links between influential dealers, curators and collectors, which has turned a small number of young, London-based artists into a new internationally regarded avant-garde [McGregor, 1996, p. 27].

To the third of those charges – ‘cliquish introspection’ – the discussion did turn. Each of the invited respondents concurred that the remits of all three organisations were largely ‘homogeneous’ in terms of the ‘metropolitan’ values that they put forward, the London-oriented dealers they patronised, and the artists that they favoured<sup>14</sup>. Primarily, the discussion focused on how far the three national organisations cast their nets in terms of representing artists who worked and exhibited outside the London art scene. All of those organisations suggested that they either acquired work beyond non-London artists or utilised non-London based buyers. Gill Hedley, too, defended the CAS by alluding to

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<sup>12</sup> Brighton, Andrew (1977), ‘Official Art and The Tate Gallery,’ *Studio International Review Issue*, 193, pp. 41-4; p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> McGregor, Sheila (1996), ‘Spring Collections’, *AN: Artists Newsletter*, May, pp. 26-28.

<sup>14</sup> Quantitatively, a certain level of ‘duplication’ or consensus forming between collections in terms of which new artists and trends to represent was evident in statistics compiled by German journalist Martin Kunz as early as 1971. During the period 1969-71 period, he noted, for example, that the Arts Council acquired 144 works of art (excluding prints) from a total of 125 artists. These were purchased or commissioned for average prices of around £ 200 in 1968/69 and £400 in 1969/70. Twenty-three of those artists acquired by the Arts Council also had works purchased by the Tate Gallery in the same period. Eighteen had already had works acquired by the Tate Gallery before 1968 [Kunz, 1971, pp. 25-26].

their use of Scottish-based buyers. Johnstone took the opportunity to reiterate the Arts Council's founding remit, as she has done elsewhere:

Set up for touring when the Arts Council of Great Britain was established just after the Second World War, the Arts Council Collection was used to show contemporary British art outside London, which was then, as it still is, the main centre for innovative activity<sup>15</sup>.

The question of how far regional collections have been able to emulate, participate in, or help define any such consensus themselves did emerge.

Tellingly, Gilane Tawadros noted:

With all due respect, being bought by a regional gallery does not have the same impact as being bought by the national institutions [...] the way they are validated in terms of an art historical canon as it does if the Tate Gallery buys the work [VAGA/CAS, 1996].

The speakers did also question, if not substantially address, the matter of how far regional collections *should* emulate their national counterparts, or whether they differentiate their own distinctive contribution. Indeed, Hiller proposed that just some kind of counter-weight was required, adding:

You can't rely entirely on a national funded policy organised from the centre, that can't do anything except provide, let's say, the 'London' view, or even maybe some sort of notion of what the art magazines this year thought was important [VAGA/CAS, 1996].

Yet, significantly, none of the institutional representatives, or the invited respondents, did address in any kind of depth the relationship between the new acquisition displays and the single regional context in which they were assembled. Indeed, the seminar itself mirrored the exhibitions, and did not seek to represent the agency of any collecting activity beyond those three institutions.

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<sup>15</sup> Johnstone, Isobel (2000), 'Raising the Temperature 100°', *The Saatchi Gift to the Arts Council Collection*, London: Arts Council of England, p. 3.

Lynda Morris was the only invited speaker to be drawn from the staff of a regional collection.

On the whole, the seminar took no quantitative account of the representation of non-traditional, new or recently made artworks in regional collections, and made only oblique reference to their buying power. Ironically, the only specific reference made by any of the panellists to regional venues was to the 'out-stations' of the Tate Gallery. Tim Marlow, for instance, noted that the Tate Galleries in Liverpool and St. Ives have no collecting remit and limited influence with regard to acquisitions [VAGA/CAS, 1996]. Indeed, to this day, acquisitions remain a centralised privilege overseen by a curatorial team based at Millbank. Moreover, it was not until questions were open to the floor that a representative of Manchester City Art Gallery directly raised the issue of how to develop regional strategies for the collecting of non-traditional, contemporary artworks. In that respect, the seminar performed its own erasure as such, and effaced the issue of a regional contribution from the efficient summary of contemporary collecting that it presented [VAGA/CAS, 1996].

#### **1.4. Regional Absence**

The discussion did not engage the representation of non-traditional artworks in regional collections, nor the 'representative power' of those collections, in any depth. In her article 'Spring Collections', Sheila McGregor strongly reiterated a literal gap between the coverage of non-traditional trends in contemporary

British and International art in the national and regional collections. She pointed out, for example, that British artists such as Cornelia Parker were not represented in any of the regional collections, large or small. Furthermore, she noted the absence of virtually any accountability on the part of the nationals to their regional colleagues with regard to what they acquired. Though regional venues may play host to the national collections, she questioned: 'How many museums are aware of, let alone challenge, the way that Arts Council spends its money?' [McGregor, 1996, p. 26].

Still in 1996, McGregor implied, that regional curators were often overwhelmed by the pace and extent of curatorial practice generated by the 'triumvirate'. She characterised the regional curator's position in relation to the 'fast-changing' face of the contemporary art scene, as one of 'bemused inertia', which she suggested was compounded by there 'being absolutely no money to spend,' and an 'apparent failure of nerve in relation to installation and video-based practice' [McGregor, 1996, pp. 27-28]. She reported that although the sums of money spent on contemporary art by regional collections over the last ten years had increased, they remained often ineffectual in comparison with market prices and largely under threat from continued 'local authority retrenchment' and V&A/MGC purchase grant cuts [McGregor, 1996, pp. 27-28].

In that respect, McGregor revisited the key obstacles faced by regional museums and galleries in Britain looking to acquire good examples of contemporary non-traditional artworks, and in any significant numbers, over the

last thirty years. As Hugh Adams had summarised some seventeen years earlier in his 1979 article, 'Sad Patronage'<sup>16</sup>:

Since their inception the great civic museums have been the most sustained and probably the most prolific collectors of Fine Art. Yet whether they have ever truly succeeded in patronising contemporary art effectively is, at best, debatable [Adams, 1979, p. 8].

As I suggested previously, Martin Kunz's early research was particularly telling where his reference to 'national and local level' referred exclusively to the context of London. His decision to leave out non-London institutions reflected a belief on his part that there was no dedicated or substantial collecting activity beyond the capital, nor any non-London art context from which to acquire. There is evidence to suggest this was his attitude where he did refer to the adequacy of the Purchase Fund, provided by central Government to assist regional collections to make significant acquisitions and administered through the Victoria and Albert Museum<sup>17</sup>.

In 1965, the Standing Commission for Museums and Galleries had already noted that 'the controversial nature of some contemporary works of art appears to make it particularly difficult for a gallery to obtain a special grant towards the purchase of a modern work'<sup>18</sup>. Such reluctance was clearly exacerbated for regional galleries. As the Commission noted in their 1963 *Report on Provincial Museums and Galleries*<sup>19</sup>, often any real investment was to arrive in the form of charitable rather than public funding. They suggested, for instance, that:

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<sup>16</sup> Adams, Hugh (1979), 'Sad Patronage', *Art Monthly*, 26, pp. 8-10.

<sup>17</sup> The Purchase Grant was established in 1964, following the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries' 1963 *Report on Provincial Museums and Galleries*, London: HMSO.

<sup>18</sup> Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries (1965), *Seventh Report 1961-64*, London: HMSO, p. 17, para. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries (1963), *Report on Provincial Museums and Galleries*, London: HMSO.

the Gulbenkian Foundation [...] has done a great deal to encourage provincial museums and art galleries to buy contemporary works of art by the purchase grants it has offered in the last three years on condition that they were matched by local contributions [Standing Commission, 1963, p. 63]<sup>20</sup>.

As Kunz noted, however, 'the national purchase grant fund has still in 1968/69 distributed in a way to the regional museums, which completely failed to encourage the museums in purchasing interesting contemporary art' [Kunz, 1971, unpublished, p. 30]. For the year 1968/9, he noted that £20 000 by the Purchase Fund was spent on acquisitions of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artworks. They gave out £5 600 as grants towards the acquisitions of works by artists such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, John Bratby and Graham Sutherland. However, 'only three younger artists – Walker, Stevens, Bevan – can be discovered in the whole list. £605 was spent on them' [Kunz, 1971, vol. 1, p. 29].

Kunz himself suggested that a dedicated fund, 'independently administered' might at least 'help to build a few other interesting collections of modern art in the regions' [Kunz, 1971, vol. 1, p. 30]. However, where at the beginning of the decade, there was, perhaps, a convincing absence of regional activity, by 1979 there were clearly aspirational beginnings. That year, the Art Galleries Association organised a day conference on the subject of 'Modern Art in Public Art Galleries: Who decides What?', which was attended by representatives from public collections both national and regional<sup>21</sup>. Convened at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, the session took in a much more substantial picture than did

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<sup>20</sup> For further details of their purchase support, see Rye, Christopher (1968), 'Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Provincial Galleries Sculpture Purchase Scheme', *Museums Journal*, 68, 1, June, pp. 27-29.

the *Collecting for the Future* seminar in 1996, though its contributions came chiefly from representatives of the national institutions and the better placed regional galleries.

Deanna Petherbridge presented an overview of the financial commitment those attending regional representatives gave shortly afterwards in the journal *Art Monthly*<sup>22</sup>:

Sheffield City Art Galleries [...] out of a spending budget in 1977-78 of £17 000 made 74 purchases --- 24 by living artists. Leeds City Art Gallery spent 25% of its purchasing budget on modern art; the Whitworth Art Gallery<sup>23</sup> in Manchester acquired 11 works for its modern collection in 1977-8. Southampton City Art Gallery is the 'goody'; since 1975 it has only acquired 20<sup>th</sup> century work [Petherbridge, 1979, p. 7].

Admittedly, how far those statistics embraced new or recently made artworks and those more specifically in non-traditional art forms, was questionable.

Where an interest in 20<sup>th</sup> century art was manifest, Tony Howarth, Chairman of the Art Galleries Association, noted:

The feeling survives however that that interest is more in gap filling than in promoting living art. Few galleries seem to be pursuing positive policies of acquiring works being produced now and at the limits, frontiers even, of artistic investigation [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 1].

This view found support elsewhere. As Adams himself reiterated in *Art Monthly*, 'overwhelmingly, patronage of modern work by municipal galleries tends to be either of conservative, or dated, or strongly crafted-based, rather than idea/time based, work' [Adams, 1979, p. 8]. Indeed, aside from the Tate and Arts Council, Liz Ogben from Southampton City Art Gallery was the only

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<sup>21</sup> Howarth, Tony (1979), 'Reflection on the afternoon session "Who Buys What, Who Decides What?"', *Art Galleries Association Newsletter*, 2, April 1979, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Petherbridge, Deanna (1980), 'Patronage and Sponsorship: the PS at the Bottom of the Art Balance Sheet, Special Supplement', *Art Monthly*, 38, 1980, pp. 3-11.

<sup>23</sup> The Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester is not publicly funded, but is a University collection, and so does not strictly speaking come under the full terms of my remit.

other representative to make direct allusion to the early acquisition of non-traditional artworks.

In comparison with its 1979 precursor, the absence of representatives from even the larger regional collections such as those at Leeds or Southampton City Art Galleries at the 1996 seminar was revealing. It eclipsed any activity that those institutions had undertaken from the late 1970s through to the 1990s, and provided no way to quantify the contemporary gains of either in the seventeen year interim, or incorporate them into a notion of consensus. McGregor specifically made reference, in her article, to the equivocation over the status of contemporary art that was then frustrating the potential of Lottery funding in this respect:

The lottery which could provide manna from heaven, has yet to agree whose job it is to buy contemporary art. For the moment, the Heritage Lottery Fund won't fund acquisitions of work less than twenty years old (by which time it presumably qualifies as heritage), while the Arts Council of England won't subsidize collections because these are a heritage matter [McGregor, 1996, p. 28].

### **1.5. The Question of Interface**

Sheila McGregor concluded her 1996 article by suggesting that the Tate, Arts Council Collection and Contemporary Art Society might indeed provide 'collecting models' for their regional counterparts. However, she did not expand on what form any such interface might take, what the outcomes might be, and nor did she consider previous precedents. Nor did she specifically differentiate such 'models' (and the actively collecting regional institutions that one might



imagine using them) from the national-regional partnerships by which the nationals expedite their responsibilities to make their own collections available to their regional viewers. Indeed, for McGregor, the temporary residence of some of the Tate's key contemporary acquisitions at the Laing Art Gallery proved thought-provoking in ways other than the *UK Year of the Visual Arts* North-East organisers would likely have intended. In her article, she suggested that 'somehow, the opulent presence of 'Tate on the Tyne' [...] renders the gallery's own collecting situation all the more poignant' [McGregor, 1996, p. 27]. In a report published four years prior to McGregor's article<sup>24</sup>, David Wilson noted the necessary role that loan policies played in emphasising that the national collections do not solely 'belong to the fat-cats of the south-east or the centrally-funded museums at Cardiff, Edinburgh or Liverpool' [Wilson, 1992, p. 20]. On the occasion of the Tate's exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery in particular, McGregor felt that the impact was quite the reverse.

In 2001, the Regional Museums Task Force was to note that,

Because of the almost universal shrinkage or disappearance of funds for making acquisitions or for rigorous, active collecting programmes, some museums and galleries are *in danger of becoming static collections, unable to reflect modern and contemporary issues* (italics mine) [RMTF, 2001, p. 76].

Yet it was exactly that danger that McGregor was making extremely vivid some five years earlier. Rather than alleviate it, the three loans exhibitions that the Tate, Arts Council and Contemporary Art Society presented in the North-East in 1996 appeared to heighten it. The shows did not compliment as much as compensate for the lack of regional holdings, and threatened to cast the host

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson, David, M. (1992), *Showing the Flag: Loans from the National Museums to the*

regional centre in a subsidiary light. For McGregor, this was exacerbated by the fact that the Laing Art Gallery had to institute an entry charge, which only served to underline 'the imbalance which exists between national institutions and the regions.' She brought to bear the same lack of Government funding and investment that David Wilson had bemoaned four years previously in his report. Like Wilson, she noted the impact that lack of finance had on the development of effective and fruitful national-regional partnerships and collection-sharing schemes. As McGregor noted: 'Why should the North-East have to pay to see a collection which is, by definition, theirs in the first place?' [McGregor, 1996, p. 27]<sup>25</sup>.

Though, clearly, it exceeded the scope of McGregor's article, the key question of exactly how the national institutions might act as curatorial mentors or consultants to their regional counterparts, particularly with regard to guiding or judging the suitability of purchases, particularly of experimental art, has been long debated [Kunz, 1971]. Kunz clearly advocated a dedicated purchase fund for modern and contemporary art distinct from that administered by the Victoria and Albert Museum, and suggested that the Tate should be considered the most appropriate body to dispense it. As he noted, 'a national purchase grant should be separately administered for contemporary and modern art by a more responsible body. The Tate gallery could be suitable' [Kunz, 1971, p. 30]. No

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*Regions*, London: HMSO, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Such partnerships have undergone significant strides since 1996. For example, the Tate Partnership Scheme is a joint initiative, created in 2000 to increase public access to the Tate Collection through a series of loans and exhibitions, and to provide new opportunities for the training and development of regional museum staff. The Partnership Scheme was initially awarded a grant of £337,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Scheme built on the Tate's eight years of partnership with the Norwich Castle Museum and the East Anglia Art Foundation, the staging of Tate Liverpool's exhibition *Urban* at the Castle Museum in Nottingham and the exhibition of Rodin's sculpture *The Kiss* in Lewes Town Hall.

such role ever came to fruition for the Tate. In Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council has operated a purchase fund dedicated to modern and contemporary acquisitions, but its English counterpart, the Arts Council of England, has never done so.

Had the Tate ever succeeded to such a role as Kunz envisioned, it would have gained an unprecedented level of influence and 'quality' control with respect to what entered other (regional) collections. Of particular force is the question of how far any acquisitions might have reflected or emulated the Tate's own purchasing of non-traditional artworks, and by implication its art historical narratives. Of the three 'triumvirate' institutions, the Tate has, as I shall presently describe, been solicited for long-term official acquisitions advice and ratification by other institutions. The Arts Council Collection has not assumed this role at any point. Until 1996, The Contemporary Art Society functioned in the main as a 'gifting' body, presenting pre-selected works to its subscribing regional institutions. As such, both have provided what might be referred to 'indirect' collecting models. Since 1996, however, the latter has taken on that role as distinct from its traditional 'gifting' remit, which I shall discuss that separately further in the Chapter.

McGregor only hypothesised 'collecting models' in the briefest possible terms. Certainly, the one-on-one, national-regional relationship can be successful (for example, the Tate Gallery and Southampton, whose relationship I discuss below). Yet, there are also examples where regional collections have been able to establish excellent contemporary art holdings without direct mentorship or an

extended infrastructure (as I will outline in relation to Aberdeen City Art Gallery, and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish Arts Council), or where investment from a private charitable organisation has assisted a regional venue in sustaining and developing an international status collection (Leeds City Art Gallery and the Henry Moore Foundation). Each of these I outline in further detail in the next three sections.

## **1. 6. Tate Gallery and Southampton City Art Gallery**

In the late 1970s, Southampton City Art Gallery solicited curatorial advice from the Tate Gallery specifically in reference to new, experimental trends in recent art. It continues to stand as a key instance where a national collection has directly advised a regional counterpart in reference to its acquisitions of contemporary, non-traditional artworks. The collection at Southampton City Art Gallery holds objects that date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, although since the 1970s they have predominantly bought modern and, more expressly, recently made artworks. Speaking at the 'Modern Art in Public Galleries: Who Buys What? Who Decides What?' session in 1979, Liz Ogben noted that of the £250 000 spent on the arts in Southampton in the previous financial year, £120, 000 was spent on the Art Gallery service. She also suggested that Southampton was in a particularly fortunate position relative to its regional counterparts, insofar as it benefited from four purchase bequests. The Rates Purchase Fund could at that time yield £500 per annum, where two of the others were for £3 800 and £1000 per annum. Ogben noted that a grant from the V&A could supplement every

purchase, thus doubling Southampton's purchase power. Vitally, too, this provided the gallery with a means to 'double check' on the quality of their desired acquisitions [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 12].

That such 'quality' assurance was important to Southampton is born out by the advice and guidance that they sought from the Tate Gallery. Liz Ogben stated in her report at the Arnolfini meeting that 'provincial galleries and staff find it difficult to keep abreast of all that is going on, and it is for this reason that Southampton approached the Tate Gallery for advice' [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 13]. Indeed, the consultative role of representatives from the nationals was part of the terms by the founders of the two largest bequests made their endowments. Robert Chipperfield, a Southampton Councillor and Justice of the Peace established his Bequest in 1911. He stipulated that money should only be spent after consultation with the Director of the National Gallery. Likewise, another Southampton Councillor, Frederick William Smith, who was involved in the early discussions about the Chipperfield bequest, also bequeathed another trust fund to the city exclusively for the purchase of paintings. His trust fund followed a similar model to Chipperfield's in that it was to be administered by a Purchasing Committee composed of representatives of the Tate Gallery and Royal Academy as well as important local organisations such as the University and the Chamber of Commerce<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Personal correspondence between author and Clare Mitchell, Registrar, Southampton City Art Gallery, 05 02 2003.

However, the relationship was consolidated by the commitment of David Brown, curator with the Tate collection from 1974-1985, who was able to provide strong guidance that resulted in Southampton's ability to reflect, in a reduced capacity, the non-traditional trends in Tate purchasing from the mid-1970s onwards. As Ogben continued:

Over the last three years, purchases have been of very recent works, mostly from living artists, often through buying directly from the artist. Photography, conceptual and new forms of art and very young artists are encouraged [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 13].

Under Brown's guidance, Southampton's representation of very recent, cutting-edge artwork clearly became established. Ogben listed a sample of their acquisitions thus:

Since 1975, only a Lawrence Atkinson (1911) and three surrealist paintings (1939) have been modern, as opposed to contemporary purchases. Other artists include Mary Potter, Stephen Buckley, Stephen Willats, Hamish Fulton, Bruce McLean, John Hilliard, Roger Ackling, Nicholas Munro, Tony Cragg and Stephen McKenna [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 13].

Amongst those artists that Ogben named, the Tate had acquired pieces by Hamish Fulton and Bruce McLean in 1973 as part of their group purchase of photographic works by British Conceptualist artists. Works by Tony Cragg and Stephen Willats, however, did not enter Tate collection till 1982 or 1981 respectively<sup>27</sup>.

With the combination of their funds and guidance, Southampton was, therefore, able to follow the Tate's acquisition policy expeditiously. Interestingly, however, the guidance that the Tate offered has in recent years been pulled

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<sup>27</sup> The works acquired by the Tate were Hamish Fulton, *A Condor* (1971), a three part photographic work; Bruce McLean, *Six Sculptures* (1967-68), *150ft Seaskape*, *Largiebeg* (1969), and *Rock and Shoreskape*, *Largiebeg* (1969); Tony Cragg, *Britain Seen from the North* (1981); Stephen Willats, *Living with Practical Realities* (1978).

back, not least due to the highly enlightened leadership of curators such as Gill Hedley, Steven Snoddy and Godfrey Worsdale. Indeed, the convening committee for the Smith Bequest no longer have the aesthetic influence in the selection that they might once have, but gather together once a year to ratify the selection that the curator has made. As Godfrey Worsdale suggested in 2001, 'they gather once a year and I say: these are the paintings we want to buy, and they say: fine that's nice, go ahead [...] but aside from that, there are two or three other funds that I can buy work from, and I've got a free hand'<sup>28</sup>.

Southampton have continued to develop a reputation as a regional gallery that does make defining or ground-breaking acquisitions, setting and not merely reflecting acquisitions agendas set in London. The Gallery's passage to such a position is bound to the Tate in several ways, but clearly they have emerged through their early association with their national counterpart to be a key public collector of contemporary art. Indeed, Southampton's purchasing has even anticipated that of the national collections. For example, they promptly acquired Gillian Wearing's **Dancing in Peckham** (1996) [Plate 6] in 1996, prior to her winning the Turner Prize in 1997. In that instance, they precipitated the Tate by some years, but acquired contemporaneously to the Arts Council, who purchased two Wearing videos: her back projected video **Sixty Minutes Silence** (1996) and **Confess all on video...** (1994). What has allowed Southampton to do could be its own relative proximity to the London art scene. Indeed, Gill Hedley's successive moves from Southampton to the British Council and then to the Contemporary Art Society appear to reinforce the hierarchical

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<sup>28</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001p), *Personal Interview with Godfrey Worsdale*,

infrastructure to the UK museums sector. A question that I return to is how far Southampton itself could provide a vital intermediary role for local or regional museums and galleries of smaller infrastructure.

### **1.7. The Absence of Infrastructure: Scotland**

The Scottish public collections interested in collecting non-traditional, new or recently made artworks stand at too greater a distance to London to be able to benefit from contact with the national collections based there to the same extent as galleries such as Southampton. This has been a persistent difficulty. As Joanna Mundy noted in 1979:

Like many other people, no doubt, away from heavily populated areas, I work from month to month, developing ideas, face and attempt to solve problems in near isolation. Certainly, there is contact with museums and galleries in Scotland but beyond that it is very easy to lose track completely of what's going on. My annual holiday in the Home Counties develops into a whistlestop tour round galleries in London, collectors in the countryside and anything else en route. A week or so later I stagger back North bursting with ideas, solutions and plans. Thus, the crash course must last a twelvemonth [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 2].

Scottish museums and galleries have a more nebulous history regarding the acquisition of non-traditional artworks. Despite the committed advocacy of figures such as dealer, curator and contemporary art critic Richard Demarco, the picture is much more hesitant. Artist and critic Pavel Buchler noted on the subject of collections of contemporary art in Scotland:

how do their agendas match the aspirations of work which is determined to assert itself within a living culture? Whatever their individual interests, it is unlikely that Scotland's cultural institutions and its "art establishment", as they are, could provide more than a limited support to the uncompromising commitments of artists who know that the identity of



living culture cannot be constrained by geography, let alone by the priorities of municipal politics. Granted, these artists' work should be collected and made more readily available—not because it is Scottish, but because it is often very good. It also is, in many instances and in the most positive sense of the terms, European and international<sup>29</sup>.

In part, this has been due to a degree of ambivalence, till very recently, that marked, for instance, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art's [SNGMA] attitude towards acquiring non-traditional artworks.

As Richard Calvocoressi has noted, prior to 1960, the National Galleries of Scotland did not collect the work of living artists<sup>30</sup>. The unwritten policy that an artist had to have been dead for at least ten years to qualify for inclusion in the collection prevailed there well beyond the relinquishment of a similar policy by the Tate. In a 'personal' statement addressed to those convened at the Art Galleries Association meeting at the Arnolfini Gallery in 1979, Douglas Hall, Keeper of Modern Art with the National Galleries of Scotland from 1961-86, noted that the SNMGA's policy of

concentrating on building up the historic aspect of the collection is paralleled by a non-partisan and cautious attitude to new developments and to the general notion of the avant-garde. This can easily be thrown back at us as a charge of inactivity and sitting on the fence in regard to contemporary art. We accept it means that visitors have not regularly been able to see anything first hand of the most contemporary work [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 14].

Hall went on to mitigate the lack of representation given to contemporary and non-traditional artworks. He expressly stated that they were a 'function of exhibitions than of permanent collections.' He referred, moreover, to a 'heavy exposure of avant-garde art' available in Edinburgh. He also cited the

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<sup>29</sup> Buchler, Pavel, (1997), 'Bad News', *Variant*, 2, Spring, accessed at <http://www.variant.randomestate.org/issue2.html>, retrieved 03 04 2003.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Calvocoressi's introduction in Elliott, Patrick (1999), *A Companion Guide to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art*, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, pp. 7-13.

detrimental impact of collecting early: 'the policies of some museums have created a formidable barrier zone between the historic past and the avant-garde present.'

For Hall, clearly, 'past and present should eventually catch up with each other' [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p. 16]. SNMGA did, however, acquire by highly selective policy, the results of which are clear today. A key buy for the Gallery was Duane Hanson's photo-realist sculpture, **The Tourists** (1970) [Plate 7], which they acquired in 1979. In the Scottish Museums Council's recent audit of Scottish collections, SNGMA listed this as one of their 'star items', which along with Roy Lichtenstein's **In the Car** (1963) and Edouardo Paolozzi's studio and his sculpture **Vulcan** (1998-99) were the only post-1945 artworks to make it onto the list<sup>31</sup>.

Sheila McGregor did refer in the notes to her article that 'purchases for the collection at the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art have been enabled through the establishment by Glasgow City council in 1990 of a £3 million endowment fund' [McGregor, 1996, p. 28]. Glasgow Museums and Galleries, the largest municipal museum service in Scotland, has itself failed till very recently to engage with more conceptual-based artworks, or those that incorporate new media, despite Glasgow's pre-eminence as a contemporary art context in the 1990s. Moreover, financial responsibility for the funding of Scottish Arts Council moved from Westminster to the Scottish Executive following

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<sup>31</sup> Unpublished list of 'star items' held in Scottish collections, compiled as part of National Audit conducted by Scottish Museums Council, 2002. Information supplied by Heather Doherty, correspondence with author, 11 04 2003. SNGMA acquired Lichtenstein's painting in 1980 and the bulk of its Edouard Paolozzi collection in 1995 [Elliott, 1999].

Devolution in 1998. Fairly contemporary to that event, the Scottish Arts Council dispersed their permanent collection across the museums and galleries sector of Scotland and desisted their own direct collecting activity. The fate of the SAC permanent 'loan' collection provides a salutary contrast to the Arts Council Collection. Similarly to the Arts Council Collection, there was a purchasing panel, the profile of which varied considerably over the years, as with the budgets available for its use. Typically, the panel would include the Director of Visual Arts and the then curator, and was frequently assembled from known local curators and educators.

How far the SAC managed to engage with non-traditional formats is questionable, or to foster a collection that might represent the groundswell of Scottish contemporary practice particularly in Glasgow. The SAC collection demonstrates some of the difficulties that the question of contemporary non-traditional art can present and precipitate, particularly with regard to the 'loan' collection. For the financial year 1990/91, for instance, a review of its acquisitions reveals how the SAC laid out £28 543 on purchases for the collection. Whilst the largest amount (£3 900) was paid for four screen-prints by well-established Scottish artists John Bellany, Alan Davie, Bruce McLean and Adrian Wisniewski; £2 500 was also paid for contemporary artist Tracy Mckenna's **Map**, (1990), comprising copper and rubber<sup>32</sup> [Scottish Arts Council, 1991, p. 27]. Where, in 1991/1992, the SAC spent £29 220 on acquisitions to the collection, purchases did include some lens-based works such

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<sup>32</sup> In its capacity as a loan resource, the gross income from the rental of works that year was £13 107. 757 works were released to 85 organisations. Of the revenue generated, £5 469 was used for care and maintenance of the collection. 33 organisations applied successfully to take on long

as photographs by Maud Sulter and Wendy McMurdo. On the whole, though, the works selected were on paper and canvas [Scottish Arts Council, 1992, pp. 25-26]. Where the ACC has managed to transform itself, the SAC lost direction and became grounded.

The following year, however, the committee acquired Scottish artist Christine Borland's fragile glass installation **Nothing but the Whole Truth** (1991) [Plate 8], which comprises three sheets of laminated glass that had been shot through with a handgun and bullets by the artist, for £2 000. It also purchased Jeremy Cunningham's mixed media piece, **Air, from the Journey Series** (1992) for £1 300, **Ruchill: 22 July 1992** (1992) by Annette Heyer and Jim Hamlyn for £375, and Craig Richardson's wall painting installation, **The Unfolding**, (1992), [Plate 9] for £2 500 [Scottish Arts Council, 1993, p. 63]. These purchases marked a move towards the non-traditional new work that emerging Scottish artists such as Borland and Richardson were producing. These were also works that would in all technical senses prove 'difficult', more so because the collection was primarily assembled for travelling.

1993-94 saw the SAC's purchase fund more than halved from its previous level of £31 214. The SAC made only eleven purchases, of which one, Daniel Reeves **Obsessive Becoming**, was a video work (£470). Another that it made was Richard Wright's **Love Gasoline** (1992) [Plate 10], which it referred to in its *Annual Report* as a 'wall work', for £3 500 [Scottish Arts Council, 1994, p. 72]. The latter certainly posed difficulties for the SAC, particularly in reference

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term loans (totalling 132 works) and 53 works were released for 'mini-rental' to Pier Arts

to what in actual fact they were, or would be acquiring (as the work is impermanent in the sense that it is destroyed when deinstalled), and the purchase almost faltered. As I discuss in greater depth in *Chapter Four*, the final terms of agreement were that the SAC would pay for three installations of the work by the artist. When they made the acquisition, there was no real precedent available to SAC for this kind of purchase. It left a string of unanswered questions: What would occur after the three installations had been used up? Would the terms be re-negotiated? Would the work cease to be part of the SAC? This effectively signalled the cessation of purchasing for the collection.

There was considerable indecisiveness over another 'wall work' by Douglas Gordon, one of the **List of Names** series, which comprise columns of names produced by the artist as a memory feat and which are silk-screened directly on to the gallery wall. (The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art went on to acquire one of the **List of Names** wall works almost a decade later, which I discuss at length in *Chapter Four*). As regards the SAC and the climate of the early 1990s, a failure of nerve over acquiring one of Gordon's wall works proved instrumental in foreclosing the SAC collection. The value of the works distributed was given as £ 297 000. Its *Annual Report*, published in 1999, noted that 'galleries and museums had cause for celebration in 1997/8, when we gifted the SAC collection of work by Scottish artists to local museums and galleries throughout the country'<sup>33</sup> [Scottish Arts Council, 1999, pp. 24-5]. It reported that 1 700 works were gifted through the scheme. It has, till 2002, continued to

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Centre and Motherwell District library amongst others.

<sup>33</sup> Phase 2 took place 1998-99 where hospital trusts and medical centres were invited to apply for works: a total of 341 works were gifted to 28 institutions [SAC, *Annual Report and Accounts*, 1998-99].

support regional collections through financial support of a limited number of purchases per annum. With the assistance provided by the scheme, Aberdeen City Art Gallery have been able to make acquisitions such as Matthew Dalziel and Louise Scullion's video installation, **Another Place** (2000) [Plate 11]<sup>34</sup>.

Though it has benefited from the purchase fund made available by the SAC, Aberdeen City Art Gallery has operated largely independently of its national counterpart, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in respect of its commitment to new or recently made artworks. Indeed, it has had to look to London and the Contemporary Art Society for guidance. The gifts it has received from the CAS have given foundations and shape to the holdings that it has subsequently built up. Like Southampton, it has an historical mandate to acquire works by living artists. It was established in 1885, and owed its founding, like its fellow Scottish local authority museums and galleries in Glasgow, Dundee and Airdrie, 'mainly to the corporate decision of local politicians, not discounting individual initiative or generosity'<sup>35</sup>. Within Scotland, the importance of Aberdeen's collection has been acknowledged: 'Despite the apparent breadth of distribution of works of art, works of single merit or historical importance remain few outside Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow' [Museums and Galleries Commission, 1986, p. 8]. In 1997, it was the 10<sup>th</sup> most visited museum or gallery in Scotland, receiving 264,428 visitors. This compared well with the dedicated modern art galleries in Scotland. The

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<sup>34</sup> Scottish Arts Council (2001), *Annual Report 2000-2001*, Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, p. 31. The SAC gave £293 903 to Aberdeen City Council in support of the latter acquisition.

<sup>35</sup> Museums and Galleries Commission (1986), *Museums in Scotland: Report by a Working Party*, London: HMSO, p. 8.

Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow polled 410,332, SNGMA was in 12<sup>th</sup> position behind Aberdeen with 217,459<sup>36</sup>.

In Scotland, it is Aberdeen City Art Gallery that exemplifies long-term, active and consistent purchasing in the field of new or recently made art, and more recently non-traditional art forms. In part, this is due to the terms, and successful management, of selected bequests from which Aberdeen, like Southampton, benefits. These are privileges of which Aberdeen are proud and protective. As has been noted:

its policy of acquisition of modern work, has only been made possible and is a direct result of the Macdonald Bequest made in 1900. However, the value of such funds, many of which were established long ago, has often declined in real terms [Museums and Galleries Commission, 1986, p. 94].

The Alexander MacDonald Bequest, in particular, provides a strong precedent by which Keeper of Fine Arts, Jennifer Melville has been able to maintain a commitment to acquiring new or recently made art. The Bequest was established in 1901, seventeen years after MacDonald's death. MacDonald himself specifically stipulated that he desired 'no pictures painted more than twenty-five years before the date of purchase shall be eligible'<sup>37</sup>. Funds from the Bequest are dispensed on a round of acquisitions every four or so years, approved by a committee of twelve members, eight from the City Council and four from the University of Aberdeen. Seven purchases were made in 2001/02 with assistance from the Bequest, all of them new works<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Scottish Museums Council (1999), *A National Strategy for Scotland's Museums*, Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council, pp. 21-2 (Source: STB Visitor Attraction Survey 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Written information supplied by Olga Ferguson, Assistant Keeper, Aberdeen City Art Gallery, 20 02 2003.

Melville has used the funds perspicaciously to introduce and expand the range of media included in the collection, particularly where local authority acquisitions budgets were suspended in the 1990s. This has made the pursuit of 'active' acquisitions especially reliant on that Bequest, and on assistance from the Friends of Aberdeen City Art Gallery and from NACF and SAC assisted purchase scheme. As of 2003-04, a purchase grant will be reinstated by Aberdeen City Council, and will be shared by the museums and galleries services in Aberdeen generally<sup>39</sup>. Melville has consciously sought to build up the representation of Scottish contemporary practitioners throughout the 1990s, where the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow have only begun to do so much more strategically in the last few years.

### **1.8. Leeds City Art Gallery: A Composite Example**

Leeds City Art Gallery has had to maximize relationships with organisations such as the Henry Moore Foundation and the Contemporary Art Society to develop its collections. The Gallery was founded in 1888 and is acknowledged as one of the outstanding collections of British art based in the regions. Directors such as Philip Hendy (1934-45) and Robert Rowe (1958-83) established a positive culture for the collecting of early modern and contemporary artworks at Leeds City Art Gallery, and the gallery has acquired

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<sup>38</sup> Personal interview with Olga Ferguson, Assistant Keeper, Aberdeen City Art Gallery, 13 02 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Ferguson noted the share of the budget available to Aberdeen City Art Gallery will be small, it will assist in furnishing the 10% funding input required when seeking assistance from organisations such as NACF and National Acquisitions Fund, administered by the Scottish Museums Council.



work by living artists from the very foundation of the collection. Miranda Strickland Constable noted that, in 1979, Leeds was spending 1/20<sup>th</sup> of its budget on purchases (she gave the budget as £20 000 in 1978/79, 20% of which being £1 000). That amount would typically be doubled by subsequent applications to the V&A Purchase Fund and the Gulbenkian Foundation for grants [Art Galleries Association, 1979, pp. 13-14]. Before the intervention of the Gulbenkian, all purchases had to be put to committee:

The Gulbenkian scheme encouraged bravery and now some 25% of the purchasing budget is spent on modern art. The Gallery already has a substantial collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century works. Caution in the sixties has given way to more courage in the seventies [Art Galleries Association, 1979, p.13].

Leeds Arts Collection Fund [LACF] has also provided a vital and necessary vein of financial help. Founded in 1912, the Fund is one of the oldest supporting 'Friends' bodies for the visual arts in Great Britain.

One predominant area of concentration for the collection is British sculpture, dating from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Since 1982, the Henry Moore Institute [HMI] has overseen the development and administration of the sculpture collection at Leeds, and it was with the introduction of support from the Henry Moore Foundation, however, that Leeds really confirmed its status as an international centre. As curator Corinne Miller has noted, 'the advent of the Henry Moore Institute and the huge input of cash from the Foundation has meant that we now have an absolutely superlative collection of British sculpture'<sup>40</sup>. The collection – which includes maquettes, models and finished sculptures – has doubled in size, and the IIMI continues to devote considerable

resources to develop the collection and indeed to help describe and promote the story of sculpture in Britain.

Leeds' own financial commitment towards acquiring artists working in more non-traditional formats has, however, been clear from the early 1980s. Leeds was quick to represent British artist Richard Long (1945-): two of his installations, **Five Stones** (1974) and **Delabole Stone Circle** (1981) entered the collection in 1975 and 1981 respectively. However, as Hugh Adams noted in 1979, in reference to Southampton's purchase of Richard Long's floor piece **River Avon Driftwood**, such works constituted 'hardly, even then, a revolutionary up-to-the-minute buy.' [Adams, 1979, p. 8] And in the earlier years, acquisitions could be restricted to more manageable media like drawings or prints. Notably, Leeds purchased **Study for 'Monument'** by American born artist, Susan Hiller (1940-) in 1981 from St Pauls Gallery, London and in 1984, RCA bought the print **The Territory of Imagination is not the Property of a Privileged Group** (1983), which it subsequently presented to the Gallery. Hiller has been known since the 1970s for the heavily conceptual basis of her practice and her mixed media installations. It was not till 1988 that they acquired the installation **Monument: Colonial Version**, (1980-81) [Plate 12], with funds from the LACF as well as the V&A/MCG Purchase Grant Fund, as it was by then known.

Indeed, this purchase reiterates the case that I making for the role that regional collections can play in housing significant artworks in parity with the national

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<sup>40</sup>Fiske, Tina (2002), Personal Interview with Corinne Miller, Keeper of Fine Art, Leeds City

institutions. The Leeds installation is one of three versions of the mixed media installation developed by Hiller, all of which vary slightly. Each comprises the same elements: photographs of a series of Victorian ceramic tiles in a London park, which commemorate acts of courage by ordinary men, women and children, and for which they died; a soundtrack playing on headphone; and a park bench<sup>41</sup>. On the occasion of its first showing at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, in 1981, Tim Guest gave the constituents of **Monument (British Version)** as follows:

Physically, the installation consists of colour photographs and an audio tape, the photographs being a public registering of the work, the tape existing as a private dialogue, a stream-of-consciousness which is listened to under headphones on a park bench facing away from the photos. There are forty-one pictures of memorial plaques, each inscribed with a name and a story of a singular act of heroic self-sacrifice [...] the photos are set in a diamond-shaped cross pattern (indeed a cross-section). Subsequently, rather than allowing a straight-across or up-and-down reading, the inscriptions are read here and there--at random-- so inducing a very fragmentary reading of the whole work<sup>42</sup>.

The Tate acquired that version only as recently as 1994. Theirs is subtitled 'British version' and was the first, or original version.

The Leeds version was designed for an exhibition that travelled to Australia, Canada and other former British colonies. As Bradley has noted, it was made with 'second-generation' images [Bradley, 1996, p. 37]. The third version was referred to as the 'foreign version', made with third generation images of slightly reduced dimensions and the audio-tape was translated. The combination

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Art Gallery, 17 01 2002, Leeds.

<sup>41</sup> A full description of the work is given in Bradley, Fiona (1996), *Susan Hiller*, Liverpool: Tate Gallery Publishing, pp. 36-38.

<sup>42</sup> Guest, Tim (1981), 'Susan Hiller "Monument"', Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, in co-operation with A Space, Toronto, Canada and The Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, pp. 4-5.

of sound and image was certainly innovative, not least for the active participation that it required of the viewer. As Hiller herself has explained:

The entire piece is activated by a person who sits on a bench listening to a sound tape, a person must be prepared to be seen in public performing a private act of listening. Since this person is seen by other viewers against a backdrop of photographic images, the piece exists as a tableau with a living centre, while the person is also the audience for the work [Bradley, 1996, p. 37].

The Tate holds other significant works by Hiller too, representing the artist in depth, and so, in that respect, exceeds what Leeds is able to do<sup>43</sup>. However, what Leeds' acquisition of **Monument (Colonial Version)** in relation to the Tate's holdings does bid is the question of a more 'distributed' picture. This kind of vision has, since 1996, gained a certain force, which I shall shortly discuss. However, prior to that, I fan out from my consideration of the three collections at Southampton, Aberdeen and Leeds in order to consolidate the notion of a broader view in tentative formation from the early 1990s onwards.

### 1.9. 'Supplementing, not replacing'

A review of awards made by The National Art Collections Fund [NACF] throughout the 1990s provides a very useful barometer with regard to the broader spectrum of museums coming forward to acquire new or recently made, non-traditional artworks. The NACF's constituency of museums is larger than

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<sup>43</sup> The Tate acquired Hiller's installation (with a video element), **Belzhassar's Feast: The Writing On Your Wall**, 1983-84 in 1984. (The installation was recently recreated at Tate

that of the Contemporary Art Society, as is the funding it has available. In 2001, it allotted grants worth £5.8 million to institutions across the full scale of the museums and galleries sector<sup>44</sup>. Though it did, in its early years, establish a fund for modern art, the NACF did not begin to strategically support applications for acquisitions of non-traditional contemporary art till the 1990s.

Between 1991-1992, it pursued a focused contemporary initiative, for which it solicited regional collections to submit bids for contemporary artworks. As Penelope Curtis, now Director at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, noted:

The National Art Collection Fund launched the Contemporary Art Initiative in 1991 to encourage museums to buy recent works of art. The Fund, through its Modern Art Fund and the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts, made up seventy per cent of each work's total costs<sup>45</sup>.

In doing so, it indicated a tentative reappraisal of such works as 'heritage pieces'. With its support, regional museums have been able to exercise curatorial insight, and make excellent acquisitions in advance of their national counterparts.

In response to that initiative, Penelope Curtis noted that thirty-five applications were received from museums and galleries, eight of which were successful. Of those selected, all were applications for support in acquiring works by British artists, four by sculptors, and of those, two were less than two years old [Curtis, 1992, p. 91]. The NACF's criteria for selection depended, Curtis suggested, 'partly on the relevance of the work to a given collection.' Of the sculptures, she

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Britain). They also acquired Hiller's major installation **From the Freud Museum** (1992-96), in 1998.

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.artfund.org/9/9\\_0AboutArtFund.html](http://www.artfund.org/9/9_0AboutArtFund.html), retrieved 10 06 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Curtis, Penelope (1992), 'Four New Acquisitions: The Contemporary Collecting Initiative,' *National Art Collections Fund Annual Review 1991*, London: NACF, pp. 91-95.

added, there was the matter of whether they ‘tell anything about British sculpture at the moment.’ Importantly, two of the pieces were composed using non-traditional materials and techniques. The early sculpture by Rachel Whiteread, **Untitled (Freestanding Bed)** (1991) [Plate 4], was made with dental plaster and polystyrene and acquired for Southampton City Art Gallery for £12, 500<sup>46</sup>.

Likewise, David Mach’s **Some Like it Hot** (1991) [Plate 13], ‘a perfectly crafted mask made up of long matches’ from the mouth of which protrudes a tartan coloured thermos flask, was acquired by Manchester City Art Gallery<sup>47</sup>. Mach is best known for his temporary installations, for which he uses man-made and mass-produced materials, often in large quantities. There is frequently a performative element to Mach’s work as with this piece, where he set the head alight<sup>48</sup>. Curtis stated, however: ‘it is an interesting piece for Manchester to acquire for though it retains the essential features of Mach’s practice up to now, it marks a turning-point in terms of being small, fixed and easily displayable’ [Curtis, 1992, p. 93].

In succeeding years, the NACF supported two other applications for works by David Mach. They were **Portrait of the Artist’s Brother** (1994) made from welded metal coat hangers and acquired by Mercer Art Gallery in Harrogate, and **The King is Dead** (1992), a painted fibreglass gargoyle acquired by the

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<sup>46</sup> The sculpture was acquired from London-based dealer Karsten Schubert, for which £7 000 was covered by NACF.

<sup>47</sup> It was acquired for £ 7 500 from the William Jackson Gallery by Manchester City Council with a contribution of £5 250 from the fund.

<sup>48</sup> Another match portrait (of Scottish dealer Richard Demarco) by Mach is in Edinburgh City Art Gallery, where they have video documentation of the artist set the piece alight.

McManus Art Gallery, Dundee, in 1993. As Mary Yule noted in relation to the piece acquired by Mercer Art Gallery:

Such work is popular with the museum-going public [...] Mach's touring exhibition at the Mercer Art Gallery in 1994-5 followed the success of an installation of 30 tons of newspaper in [...] Harrogate and attracted new audiences for contemporary sculpture. This sculpture was acquired from that exhibition and also attracted great interest in 'Saved for Yorkshire', an exhibition of works acquired by Yorkshire museums and galleries through the National Art Collections Fund at the Leeds City Art Gallery<sup>49</sup>.

Where Southampton and Leeds have an on-going relationship with NACF, what about the smaller galleries? To date, the Mach sculpture remains the only piece of non-traditional contemporary work that Mercer has secured support for from the NACF. Mercer does subscribe to the Contemporary Art Society, but with assistance from the Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust<sup>50</sup>. As part of that subscription base, it does participate in a wider community of institutions, receiving as part of the CAS's distribution in 2000, four colour photographs by Tacita Dean relating to her film **Gellert** (1998) [Plate 14].

As the decade has progressed, the NACF has assisted with acquisitions of major works by international artists using new technologies or non-traditional materials and formats. Its strategy appears to be less broad and more targeted, either to secure the representation of a specific artist across several collections or to build relations with a specific collection. In view of recent large-scale purchases, there is the sense that the NACF has subsidized the 'corridor'. It has assisted the Tate in making several significant purchases in recent years, for example, German artist Rebecca Horn's kinetic piano sculpture **Concert for**

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<sup>49</sup> Yule, Mary (1995), *National Art Collections Fund 1995, incorporating the Annual Report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 1995*, London: NACF, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.contempart.org.uk/giveandtake/homepage/membermuseums.htm>, retrieved 05 06 2003.

**Anarchy** (1990) [Plate 15], Bill Viola's three screen video installation, **Nantes Triptych** (1994) [Plate 16], and Stan Douglas's installation **Win, Place or Show** (1998). Since 1991, it has helped the Arts Council Collection acquire two pieces by British sculptor Richard Deacon: **Kiss and Tell** (1989) [Plate 17], and, more recently, a ceramic work entitled **Kind of Blue (A)** (2001)<sup>51</sup>.

Interestingly, the NACF has also assisted all of the national galleries [London, Cardiff and Edinburgh] to acquire substantial pieces of work by Rachel Whiteread, a major British artist whose works might be considered too prohibitively expensive for most museums, national or regional, to be able to acquire without significant aid. **Untitled (Pair)**, (1999) [Plate 18] went to SNGMA in 2000. It comprises two bronze casts of mortuary slabs (not identical), which have been coated with white cellulose paint. They stand outside of the Gallery in its grounds. The NACF made a contribution of £50 000 towards the total purchase price of £107, 958. Likewise, in 2002, the NACF assisted The National Museum and Gallery of Wales to acquire **Untitled (History)** (2002), a four-piece wall mounted work. Made of plaster, polystyrene and steel, the work was made by casting the spaces around bookcases. Again, the Fund covered one third of the total purchase price of £120 000. Perhaps most significantly, the Tate was able to secure **Untitled (Stairs)** (2001), perhaps Whiteread's most monumental (non-exterior) work to date. It is one of three

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<sup>51</sup> See Johnstone, Isobel (1991), 'Art For Everyone,' in *National Art Collections Fund (1991), Annual Review 1991*, London: National Art Collections Fund, pp. 79-82. The NACF also assisted the Arts Council Collection to acquire Anthony Gormley's major installation **Field for the British Isles** (1993) in 1995. The installation consists of approximately 40,000 terracotta figures.



casts made from the three industrial staircase within a building Whiteread purchased in Bethnal Green<sup>52</sup>.

What kind of assistance has NACF given to regional venues in respect of acquiring major works by well-established international artists? Sheila McGregor noted in her article that the NACF were reluctant to support Southampton City Art Gallery's exceptional acquisition of Daniel Buren's **With The Arcades; Three Colours (work in situ)** (1994). **With the Arcades** was originally made as part of an exhibition called *Wall to Wall*, organised by The South Bank Centre to be shown at the Serpentine Gallery, Leeds City Art Gallery and Southampton City Art Gallery. It was purchased after the exhibition through the Chipperfield Bequest Fund and a significant donation from the Friends of Southampton's Museums and Galleries. In respect of Buren's installation, McGregor suggested that 'although the National Art Collection Fund insisted that its objection was in no way doctrinal, the suspicion lingers that it possibly was' [McGregor, 1996, p. 28].

However, the NACF has helped numerous regional collections such as Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, providing a grant towards their acquisition of Steven Pippin's suite of photographs entitled **Walking Naked (Launderomat- Locomotion series)** (1997). Where Pippin went on to be nominated for the Turner Prize in 1999, the acquisition was very much in the rich vein established by Southampton City Art Gallery. Moreover, the support it has provided to selected institutions such as Aberdeen City Art Gallery has been exemplary.

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<sup>52</sup> That work was acquired for a price of £181, 452, of which £90 000 was met by the NACF.

The acquisitions that Aberdeen has been able to make have been in some cases highly adventurous, and have included a broad range of media. Works on paper have included **Exquisite Corpses** (2000), a portfolio of 20 etchings depicting fantastic creatures – part human, part animal – by Jake and Dinos Chapman. This work was acquired in 2001 from Paragon Press, with a grant of £3,600 offered towards the total acquisition cost of £9,000<sup>53</sup>. In the same year, they also supported the purchase of **Five Set Conversation Piece** (1999) [Plate 19], a ceramic installation in five parts by Christine Borland from Sean Kelly Gallery in New York with a grant of £6 060 offered towards the total acquisition cost of £21 841<sup>54</sup>.

The NACF did also oversee the distribution of artworks from the private collection of Charles Saatchi to nine regional venues<sup>55</sup>. Those nine, the NACF's briefing notes revealed, were 'museums that we knew were eager to acquire contemporary artworks. We were also keen to help museums which had little or no purchase funds available, like the Ulster Museum in Belfast'<sup>56</sup>. This was the third act of public benefaction to be made in the 1990s by Saatchi. The first was to the Tate Gallery in 1992, followed by a bequest of 100 works to the Arts Council Collection in February 1999. In many ways, those benefactions circumscribe the kind of shift that I am claiming for in this chapter in terms of the qualitative and quantitative spread of non-traditional artworks beyond the 'triumvirate'. Charles Saatchi has said that he decided to give the works to the

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The building from which the piece was cast had had a long varied history, having once been a synagogue, it had also formerly acted as a textile warehouse and was bombed in 1941.

<sup>53</sup> Information from the NACF's online database, <http://www.artfund.org>, retrieved 02 10 2001.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.artfund.org.uk>, retrieved 15 01 2002.

Arts Council Collection as 'it will give these artists a chance to be seen more widely across the country'<sup>57</sup>.

It was, indeed, as an extension of that sentiment that Saatchi made a further gift of thirty-nine works in September 2000. The distribution process was administered by the NACF in consultation with the Saatchi Gallery. The briefing notes added that 'the selection comprises a balanced representation of work of *museum quality* by young British artists from a groundbreaking decade' (Italics mine). On that occasion, approximately two works by twenty-two artists, all of 'established reputation' were selected (although six would not be successfully placed with museums), of a market value of over £200 000<sup>58</sup>.

Saatchi's gift to the Tate Gallery comprised sculptures such as Grenville Davey's painted steel work **Rail** (1987), Richard Deacon's elaborate **This, That And The Other** (1985) and Richard Wentworth's **Yellow Eight** (1985). The gift introduced artists such as Davey, a Turner Prize winner, to the collection for the first time. Seven years later, the 100 works that he presented to the Arts Council Collection included a diverse range of work in a variety of media by many of the artists who have played an essential part in the 'Young British Artists' phenomenon. The sixty-four artists included Richard Billingham, Glenn Brown, Adam Chodzko, Keith Coventry, Martin Creed, Mark Francis, John

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<sup>55</sup> Amongst the beneficiaries were Aberdeen City Art Gallery; Swindon Museum and Art Gallery; Leeds City Art Gallery; Paisley Museum and Art Gallery; Ulster Museum; Walsall City Art Gallery and Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.

<sup>56</sup> National Art Collections Fund, 'Briefing Notes for September 6<sup>th</sup> Announcement', 4 09 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Many galleries have taken the opportunity to select their own exhibitions from the gift. These include the Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield; Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; the Art Institute, Bournemouth; and Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery. Many other works have formed parts of exhibitions.

<sup>58</sup> National Art Collections Fund, 'Briefing Notes for September 6<sup>th</sup> Announcement', 4 09 2000.

Frankland, Melanie Manchot, Mariele Neudecker, Jonathan Parson, Gary Perkins, Hadrian Pigott, Nina Saunders, Jane Simpson, Kerry Stewart and Richard Wilson. Jill Constantine, Assistant Curator for the collection has noted that the gift also introduced media that the collection had not hitherto acquired, for example, Siobhán Hapaska's **St Christopher** (wax), and also large-scale installations such as Rose Finn-Kelsey's **Steam**. Likewise, of the ten works that Aberdeen received from the regional bequest for example were three extremely fragile glass pieces by Katharine Dowson: **Drip 2** (1990) [Plate 20], **Barium Swallow** (1993) [Plate 21] and **Light Box 1** (1993). The Arts Council curators took an active participation in the selection of the works that Saatchi gifted to them, working directly with his own curatorial team. The curators of the regional venues had no such direct contact or power of curatorial selection other than to bid for works pre-selected by the NACF. Though of course, the nine galleries were involved, an intermediary was clearly needed to identify and deal with the regional collections.

#### **1.10. 'Serious regional cultural players': Recognising Qualitative and Quantitative Distribution**

Clearly, an ever-growing constituency of regional museums, seeking to acquire contemporary non-traditional artwork, is emerging. They are an extremely varied group, amongst which there is an inevitable stratification according to factors such as size or location. The larger regional collections such as those in Southampton, Leeds and Aberdeen stand as exemplars, and should, I feel, be encouraged to act as such. It is in this way, I propose, that relevant 'collecting

models' such as Sheila McGregor referred to could be identified. I focused on those three regional collections in order to suggest that they fulfil an intermediary role. They concur with the following definition offered by Stuart Davies insofar as they are amongst

those large museums which have a pre-eminent position in their region [...] They are largely self-selecting, based on size (collections, staff, and multi-disciplinary nature) historical importance (foundation date and collecting hinterland). They include the main museums and art galleries in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester etc.<sup>59</sup>

My putting those galleries forward as intermediaries does, of course, imply its own potential hierarchy, replacing a two-tier with a three-tier system. However, I accept currently a position, such as put forward in the *Renaissance Report*, that it is those museums that will be able to 'achieve a critical mass sufficient to make them serious regional cultural players' [RMTEF, 2001, p. 25]. As I go on to elaborate, however, acknowledging the contribution and status of that strata of museums is a first-step. Into that process of recognition, there must be means for regular critical review.

Critically, a context now exists in which the qualitative and quantitative achievements of regional collections, and their 'representative power', can be identified and recognised. In recent years, central Government in London has gradually accepted financial and policy liability with regard to regional collections. Reciprocally, this has illuminated, for public collections in the UK, liability in terms of performance and standards, where Government objectives

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<sup>59</sup> Davies, Stuart, 'Local Authorities: New Opportunities and Reduced Capacity,' published in Selwood, Sara (2001) *The UK Cultural Sector: Profile and Policy Issues*, London: Policy Studies Institute, p. 113.

such as Best Value have been imported into the museums sector<sup>60</sup>. Sara Selwood has suggested that, for museums, this has brought to the fore issues of access and education. In particular, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] has pursued the principle of widening access to museums and their collections, indeed introducing its own code of practice. Selwood has noted that such a change of emphasis clearly reflected within the museums sector and is 'probably best exemplified by the Museums Association's adoption of a new definition of museums' [Selwood, 2001, pp. 22-24]. The previous conception of the museum institution saw it as 'process-driven', as one 'that collects, documents, preserves, exhibits, and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.' This has, since 1998, given way to the promotion of museums as 'Centres for Social Change'<sup>61</sup>, and to an insistence on the production of access plans as a condition of future funding. The modified definition of museums, which the Museums Association now puts forward, is quoted by Selwood: 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts which they hold in trust for society' [Selwood, 2001, pp. 22-24].

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<sup>60</sup> For further discussion, see Selwood, Sara (2001), *The UK Cultural Sector: Profile and Policy Issues*, London: Policy Studies Institute. As Selwood elaborates in that text, 'the single most important feature of the DCMS's museum policy was [...] the Secretary of State's insistence that the Department and all its sponsored bodies should further Government objectives. In terms of the museum sector this involved ensuring efficiency, educational opportunities and increasing access.' Glasgow City Council did indeed carry out a Best Value review. See Glasgow City Council (2000) *Best Value review of Museums, Heritage and Visual Arts Services, 1999-2000*, Glasgow: GCC.

<sup>61</sup> DCMS (2000), *Centres for Social Change*, London: HMSO.

Most pertinently to my discussion, however, is the framework for recognition that the 'Museums Designation Scheme', set up by the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1997, has provided since its establishment<sup>62</sup>. It was set up to identify amongst the regional museums or groups of museums, collections that could be considered to be of 'pre-eminent national and international importance.' Accordingly, in its first two years, it awarded sixty-two museums 'designated' status in respect of the quality or relevance of their holdings. The *Renaissance Report* suggested that 'it formally acknowledged that not all the best or most important collections are held by the national museums and galleries [...]' [RMTF, 2001, p. 24]. Thus, the 'arm's length' policy which central Government has typically pursued in relation to the regional gallery sector has undergone significant revision. In his study, 'UK Museums: Safe & Sound?'<sup>63</sup>, Adrian Babbidge, Director of East Midlands Museums Service, acknowledged that it was in fact the Department of National Heritage [DNH], the predecessor to the DCMS, that engineered the scheme<sup>64</sup>. The Designation Scheme was followed by the Designation Challenge Fund, through which the Government provided £15 million to be dispersed over a three-year period to those 'designated' museums. In Scotland, the recent *National Strategy for Scotland's Museums*<sup>65</sup> also recognised the value of collections held out with the national institutions. It, too, is an acknowledgement on the part of the Scottish executive that it has a direct duty to secure for the future 'nationally important

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<sup>62</sup> For further information on the Scheme:

<http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/00desig.asp>

<sup>63</sup> Babbidge, Adrian (2001), 'UK Museums: Safe & Sound?', *Cultural Trends* 37 2001, London: Policy Studies, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Department of National Heritage (1996), *Treasures in Trust*, London: HMSO.

<sup>65</sup> Scottish Museums Council (2001), *National Strategy for Scotland's Museums*, Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council.

collections which are not currently the responsibility of the national Museums or National Galleries' [Scottish Museums Council, 2001, p.6].

In its review of the benefits of the Designation Scheme, Resource's report, *The Mark of Success*<sup>66</sup>, proposed that 'Designation demonstrates the value of collections to a governing body, which helps museum managers lobby for their support' [Resource 2003, p. 2]. Amongst its immediate benefits, Resource has suggested that the Designation Scheme has identified and protected 'key museum-based cultural assets', has guarded against the unwise disposal or neglect of the nation's 'treasures', and is helping to collate 'a picture of the nature of all collections described by geography, subject and quality'. Resource did, however, also recognise the potential exclusivity of the Designation scheme, and the need to open it up to other applicants: 'we will examine ways in which more groups of museums holding similar or related collections can be brought into the scheme' [Resource, 2003, p. 4].

Perhaps, most significantly, the scheme laid the foundations for the recognition of what the Regional Museums Task Force referred in its *Renaissance Report* as 'a distributed national collection.' It elaborated the concept in the following context:

The collections held by all museums and galleries are part of the distributed national collection, a hugely significant and important national asset. Government should recognise that it has responsibility for the maintenance and development of this asset, albeit in partnership with those bodies who have immediate responsibility for the care of individual collections, including local authorities who hold collections in trust for public good [RMTEF, 2001, pp. 88-89].

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<sup>66</sup> Resource (2003), *The Mark of Success: Resource reviews Designation and makes a case for Archives and Libraries*, London: Resource.



The context of revision, recognition and resource generated by the scheme has done much to revise the determinants of 'role' and 'resource' that have inscribed the development of regional museum service. It has created a positive culture, which organisations such as the Contemporary Art Society have harnessed. To conclude this chapter, I consider the Contemporary Art Society's 'Special Collections Scheme', in particular as a means by which a 'distributed national collection' of contemporary non-traditional art is becoming -- acquisition by acquisition- a reality.

### **1.11. Achieving Qualitative and Quantitative Distribution**

Of the collections to receive 'designated' status between 1997 and 1998, Southampton City Art Gallery was the only instance where the criteria for its designation were explicitly met by contemporary, non-traditional art holdings. Southampton's designation acknowledged specifically its 'policy of collecting art with two years of its creation has resulted in the acquisition of fine examples of work by many Turner prize winners'<sup>67</sup>. Leeds was also 'designated' in part for its collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture, implicitly including its more contemporary acquisitions<sup>68</sup>. Currently, however, Southampton remains the only regional collection to be acknowledged specifically for the excellence of its collecting in the area of current, non-traditional art practice. In the context of the late 1990s, it provides a counter-balance to the dominant picture as put forth by the three exhibitions staged in the North-East in 1996, and, more particularly, to

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<sup>67</sup> [http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/47\\_01\\_south.asp](http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/47_01_south.asp), retrieved 13 07 2002.

the associated seminar. This brings my discussion back to 1996 as a significant turning point, inscribed still with lingering perceptions that non-traditional contemporary artworks should still largely be confined to the national institutions (its 'consensual' nature in need of critique), but also posing a threshold to a new attitude.

The appearance of the Contemporary Art Society as the third prong of the 'triumvirate' becomes particularly salient here. To recapitulate, Gill Hedley reaffirmed the Society's desire to make available artworks comparable in 'quality' to those acquired by the nationals to a wider remit of collections through its commitment to acquiring in parity with the national institutions. As she noted at the *Collecting for the Future* seminar: 'I don't think it is the Contemporary Art Society's role to buy regional artists for regional museums and we are buying for regional museums and a tiny handful of nationals' [VAGA/CAS, 1996]. The CAS has, as a subscription organisation, always worked with a group of self-identifying institutions, and in 2000, had some forty-nine local authority museum members. Within that self-identifying constituency, it has consistently tried to be non-discriminatory. As John Russell noted in 1982, 'the principle behind the CAS benefactions seems to have been -- at least within the bounds of financial possibility --- *that no gift is too large or too small, and no gallery too large or too small to receive it*'<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> [http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/16\\_01\\_leeds.asp](http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/designation/16_01_leeds.asp), retrieved 13 07 2002. It is worth noting that where the scheme does not extend to Scotland, Aberdeen does not hold this status.

<sup>69</sup> Russell, John (1982) 'Editorial, Contemporary Art Society Special Issue,' *Art & Artists*, October, p. 34

Where, till the mid-1990s, it has acted essentially as a gifting organisation, it has not been able specifically to help develop the acquisitive power of those institutions. However, Hedley did also suggest at the seminar that the CAS only support collections that have a proven interest in collecting contemporary art, and is not keen to do 'their work for them.' [VAGA/CAS, 1996]. This constituted a vital recognition that regional collections do have 'work to do' vis-à-vis ensuring the representation of non-traditional contemporary artworks for present and future audiences. At the 1996 seminar, Hedley did indicate where this ethos might lead, and referred to the then nascent 'Special Collections Scheme', through which, for the first time, the CAS could work directly with curators to develop their specific collections. However, as I have suggested already, this thinking was not built into the selection of the 1996 seminar panellists, nor decisively reflected in the content of the discussion on that occasion. This may have reflected a sense of contingency still attached to the funding of the scheme.

Hedley noted in the discussion, which followed the speakers' presentations, that the Arts Council of England – the organisation that had funded the pilot initiative – was not able to underwrite the scheme through another phase. She noted that the CAS had been advised to turn to the Lottery, but, as she stated (and as Sheila McGregor reiterated in her article), the Lottery was not able to fund acquisitions of works younger than twenty-five years. From its creation in 1995, the Heritage Lottery Fund<sup>70</sup> [HLF] operated an age criterion that excluded

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<sup>70</sup> Between its creation in 1995 and December 1999, the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is administered through the National Heritage Memorial Fund, dispersed £530 million to museum projects, giving over £482, 335, 000 in grants to English museums and galleries and £44 594 000 to their Scottish counterparts.

applications from public museums for financial assistance to secure any item made within the last twenty years. That criterion has more generally stood as an unspoken heritage 'threshold', largely on the basis that anything less than twenty years was insufficient time for an item's 'enduring value' or 'fitness for purpose' to be recognised. Following a broad ranging consultation process in 2001, the HLF has, as of 2002, reduced their threshold to ten years. As stated in their *Strategic Plan 2002-2007*<sup>71</sup>, 'our current restriction applies to works of art and archives created within the last twenty years, but we are reducing this to ten years' [HLF, 2002, p. 24].

The 'Special Collections Scheme' in England and Wales and, its more recent Scottish counterpart, the 'National Collecting Scheme' both reflect this on-going revisionism. The CAS has lobbied for, and initiated both with, funds from the Lottery through the Arts Council of England and Scottish Arts Council respectively. They present the most significant initiatives, in recent years, to offer the possibility to invigorate gallery-generic buying, and to consolidate a culture of 'acquiring early' amongst regional galleries. Underpinning them is Hedley's aspiration, noted in 1996, that the CAS can help build 'a metropolitan collection which is homogeneous with the other national collections but whose purpose is to be housed in other museums' [VAGA/CAS, 1996].

The 'Special Collections Scheme' was established in 1998 (following a pilot phase that ran from 1993/1996), when the Arts Council Lottery awarded £2.5m to enable fifteen museums and galleries to 'develop challenging collections of

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<sup>71</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund (2002), *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage: The Heritage Lottery*

contemporary art and craft over five years'<sup>72</sup>. Vitally, the CAS aims to reinvigorate research within institutions, which, it has argued, forms a part of skills necessary to create quality public collections. Each museum has contributed 25% partnership funding of a total annual purchasing budget of £30,000 per museum. In addition, museums have to set aside funds for research and travel to develop their knowledge and expertise on contemporary art practice within the UK and abroad. As of May 2002, the Scottish Arts Council has diverted its purchase fund allocation towards the setting up of a comparable scheme to be piloted by ten collections in Scotland<sup>73</sup>. In a press release from the Scottish Arts Council, Amanda Catto, its Head of Visual Arts, suggested that:

Much of the work being produced by living Scottish artists is outstanding and recognised internationally for its quality. The Scottish Arts Council has long recognised the need for a strengthened collectors' base and an art market for contemporary art<sup>74</sup>.

In support, Gill Hedley proposed that there had been 'no better time to take on this challenge. The quality of artists working in Scotland, many with international reputations, needs to be celebrated nearer home on a permanent basis'<sup>75</sup>.

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*Fund Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, London: HLF, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Contemporary Art Society, Special Collections Scheme, general press release, undated. Contact Contemporary Art Society press officer. The fifteen museums in the scheme are: Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery; Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull; Leeds City Art Gallery; Manchester City Art Gallery; Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick; Middlesbrough Art Gallery; Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Nottingham; Southampton City Art Gallery; South London Art Gallery; The Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent; New Art Gallery Walsall; Wolverhampton Museum & Art Gallery and Worcester Museum & City Art Gallery.

<sup>73</sup> See Scottish Arts Council press release for 10 05 2002, which can be accessed at <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk> under the news archive section, retrieved 10 05 2002.

<sup>74</sup> See Scottish Arts Council press release for 18 05 2002, which can be accessed at <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk> under the news archive section, retrieved 18 05 2002.

<sup>75</sup> See SAC press release 10 05 2002.

Moreover, both schemes seek to integrate non-traditional artworks into pre-existing historical collections, getting those museums to radically examine their collections, their identities and significance. Consistent with the language of a 'distributed national collections', they have suggested that collaboration between museum curators will mean that a new national policy can be generated, leading to innovative collections, including traditional and new media, available for local and national audiences<sup>76</sup>. Phil Miller reiterated this spirit in relation to the Scottish 'National Collecting Scheme':

The scheme will let museum curators buy new, more difficult work, sometimes without the constraints of council committee-led decisions. The CAS hope it will create distinct collections across Scotland, complementing rather than competing with national collections<sup>77</sup>

The 'Special Collections Scheme' has born fruit in this vein in England and Wales already, both in its pilot and subsequent phases<sup>78</sup>. It has brought a reversal of a scenario set out by the Tate in 1974:

Arguments for uniquely representative central collections are not arguments against the development of collections elsewhere. Galleries should be enriched in other cities [...] These things should not be rivals but be complimentary situations and complimentary experiences [The Tate Gallery, 1974, p. 12].

As it currently stands, I would suggest that arguments *for* the development of collections 'elsewhere' are not arguments against 'uniquely representative central collections'. Through the first phase, for instance, collections such as the Towner Art Gallery at Eastbourne have added works by key British

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.contempart.org.uk/SCS.htm>, retrieved 15 08 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, Phil (2002), 'New scheme will let museums buy best modern Scottish art,' *The Herald*, 25 October.

<sup>78</sup> The first museums to buy work using the Scottish fund were Aberdeen Art Gallery and Paisley Museums and Arts Galleries. In summer 2003, Aberdeen acquired **Head and Shoulders (with Conditioner)** (2002) by Jim Lambie, a large wall-mounted montage of I.P covers featuring bouffant-haired singers, affixed to the wall with black tape.

contemporary practitioners such as Tacita Dean, Anya Gallaccio and Ceal Floyer. By virtue of those acquisitions, they have added to their holdings media such as 16mm film. Significantly, however, collections such as Leeds, The Potteries at Stoke-on-Trent and Southampton have represented certain artists well in advance of their national counterparts. The Towner acquired a flower installation, **preserve (chateau)** (1995) [Plate 22], by Anya Gallaccio in 1996, some seven years before the Tate began to address her representation in their collection. Southampton has been able, through its participation in the successive phases of the scheme, to build on previous acquisitions of wall drawings, and now hold a core collection that rightly can claim to be the most representative collection of its kind in a public institution in Britain.

Eight years on from the three shows staged in the Tyne and Wear region, it is pertinent for me to re-state the title of the CAS's exhibition: *Take it from Here*.

Gill Hedley aspired to a 'metropolitan collection' distributed and 'housed in other museums'. Yet, the potential is that such 'metropolitanism' is itself yielding in the face of specific aspirations set out by the *Renaissance Report*:

the desire to develop a regional voice; to think regionally; to be more integrated; to see new regional structures as presenting an opportunity to form a bridge between national policy and local delivery; to devolve more power and decision-making to the regions [RMTF, 2001, p. 27].

Indeed, the true challenge for regional museums is to forge a line between the two: to assemble holdings that are distinctive and 'competitive' with their national counterparts, but which promote their individual identities.

However, I suggest that the charge that that title implicitly posed to the regional museum sector in 1996 now has a fresh focus and force for those collections that find themselves custodians of 16mm film stock or installations comprising shattered panes of glass: how to 'take it from here' for the long term.



## Chapter Two – Accommodating the Non-Traditional: Issues and Approaches

## 2.1. Introduction

For many museum professionals and commentators, the inherent and often rapidly manifested instability, or obsolescence, of various 'new' materials that artists use are simply not congruent with the aims of collecting, displaying and conserving in perpetuity. Professor Keith S. Thomson, for example, has recently questioned acquisition as the right kind of commitment for public museums to make to 'non-traditional' art forms. In his book, *Treasures on Earth: Museums, Collecting and Paradoxes*<sup>1</sup>, Thomson queries:

No one would argue that museums should always be stuck with 'old' and 'mainstream' art, and at the very least they should exhibit the works of emerging artists, whether unknown and worth knowing or fast in the eye of the public. The question is: should museums, which are seen by everyone as the bastions (indeed the ultimate agents) of authenticity, collect in such areas? [Thomson, 2002, p. 41].

When the acquisition of non-traditional works was pioneered in the 1970s, conservators often demonstrated an air of indifference. Discussing the technical archive that he initiated in 1968 specifically to record 'non-traditional art forms', German conservator Erich Gantzert-Castrillo suggested that even by 1979 'with very few exceptions, interest amongst conservators was restrained; no doubt the reason was that, [...] a large number of restorers were not yet particularly affected by the problems posed by restoring such works'<sup>2</sup>. As I will discuss, issues relating to the maintenance and longevity of those first acquisitions were not slow in emerging. In the intervening years, the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomson, Keith S. (2002), *Treasures on Earth: Museums, Collecting and Paradoxes*, London: Faber and Faber.

<sup>2</sup> Gantzert-Castrillo, Erich (1999), 'The Frankfurt Museum für Moderne Kunst and a Privat archive: Registration Systems for Contemporary Art', in Hummelen, I., & Sille, D., (eds.), *Modern Art: Who Cares? An Interdisciplinary Research Project and an international Symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: The Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, p. 284.

ramifications of the 'restraint' or 'delay' in monitoring and documenting many of those first acquisitions, which have resulted in the near 'loss' of some, have galvanised conservators and curators alike.

Thus, I argue, there is considerable impetus now for public collections to accommodate non-traditional artworks, and to do so *earlier* rather than *later*. In 2001, for example, the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation [UKIC] endorsed that very principle, stating: '*There should be a minimum impediment to supporting the conservation of recently created objects, so that they may survive long enough for their enduring value to be assessed*'<sup>3</sup> (Italics mine). In doing so, the UKIC acknowledges that allowing time and distance to intervene before committing to acquisition can, indeed, exacerbate the ethical and material implications that non-traditional artworks bear, and even add new ones into the equation. Where contemporary materials and intentions are not stable or fixed even within their own time, delay in acquiring such artworks will only confound their instability, and their ability – should examples prove themselves to be of historical significance - to be secured for and 'inherited' by future generations. This is more acute for non-traditional artworks than for their more traditionally produced counterparts. Acquiring and documenting a video artwork or installation soon after its creation or first realisation can help mitigate the repercussions that their long-term care might bring about.

What of the ethics, practices and infrastructures that a museum will already have in place to care for those more traditionally produced counterparts? Do

they readily extend to non-traditional materials and intentions? Contemporary art practices have become ever more rapacious in their attitude to materials, and take on new levels of complexity in their assemblage or realisation. There remain few boundaries with regard to what constitutes 'legitimate' artistic media or technique, particularly as practitioners continue to respond to advances made in technology for instance. In these respects, the demands that a single artwork can place upon a collection are many. As Dutch curator D. H. van Wegen has suggested, many of those will be 'indiscernible' in comparison with the problems that traditional painting and plinth sculpture can manifest<sup>4</sup>. In an article entitled 'Planning for Impermanence'<sup>5</sup>, Martha Buskirk concurs with van Wegen. She indicates that whilst 'concern over the alteration of unstable materials is hardly unique to the contemporary moment,' what is new is the sheer range of possible problems and solutions that the aging of contemporary materials presents.

Aside from the more traditional conservation concern with the aging and deterioration of an artwork's original material constitution or appearance, continued viability also rests in factors such as the effective management of a work's possibly numerous and disparate elements, and its appropriate reinstallation. The actual constitution of any one installation can be intricate, the status and function of its potentially numerous material components apparently ambiguous. Ensuring the continued ability to realise such artworks is generally

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<sup>3</sup> United Kingdom Institute for Conservation response to Heritage Lottery Fund discussion document 'The Horizons of Heritage', posted on its website, <http://www.ukic.org.uk>, on 19 09 2001 and retrieved 06 May 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Van Wegen, D.H. (1999), 'Between Fetish and Score: The Position of the Curator of Contemporary Art,' in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 203.

no mean feat. In her article, Buskirk quotes Kees Herman Aben, conservator at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam discussing Mario Merz's installation **Dal Miele Alle Ceneri (From Honey to Ashes)** (1984):

**Dal Miele Alle Ceneri** comes unassembled with a tubular aluminium frame and supporting iron bars, forty-seven tablets or panels of beeswax on gauze, six steel sheets, two fir-cones covered in wax, machine parts and the head of an antelope...It takes at least two people a full working day to put up the igloo. There are fifteen pages of instructions, complete with drawings and instructions [Buskirk, 2002, p. 113].

Such works are storage and resource hungry. Furthermore, Aben admits that factors such as fragility of components and complexity of installation do have a bearing on the frequency and length of a work's display.

Can and must a collection re-construct its practices to accommodate the ethical, technical and resource demands posed by such artworks? Speaking broadly, Tate conservator, Rachel Barker recently suggested:

An acquired work may have already entered into an 'inimical' environment, possibly incapable of respecting every aspect of its *raison d'être* [...] Our permanent collection is subjected to museum-like conditions and all that this entails<sup>5</sup>.

Barker frames an essential question: could the acquisition of non-traditional artworks by museums be too compromising, either for the acquired work or the acquiring institution? Her colleague at the Tate, Pip Laurenson, conservator with special responsibility for new media works, has put forward the view that 'the move in contemporary art away from the material object' can be

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<sup>5</sup> Buskirk, Martha (2002), 'Planning for Impermanence', *Art in America*, 88, April, pp. 112-7 and p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> Barker, Rachel (2002), 'Modern Art: A Lifetime to Consider' in Reid, Z. (ed.), *Contemporary Art: Creation, Curation, Collection, Conservation*, Postprints of IPCRA conference September 2001, Dublin: Irish Professional conservators and Restorers' Association, p 1.

accommodated within traditional practices of collections care<sup>7</sup>. However, there are those, such as Jon Ippolito, Associate Curator at the Guggenheim, who believes that non-traditional artworks are 'likely not to survive, according to traditional methods of preservation'<sup>8</sup>. According to Ippolito, the issues of vulnerability that non-traditional artworks present clearly require that museums reappraise their existing domestic practices of care: 'The opportunity [...] is to craft a new collecting paradigm that is as radical as the art it hopes to preserve. *The choice is ours: do we jettison our paradigm? Or our art?*' (Italics mine) [Ippolito, 2001, np].

Accordingly, in this chapter, I want to differentiate these two perceptions, and suggest that one takes what I call a 'domesticating' view, and the other a 'foreignising' approach to acquiring non-traditional artworks early. The terms 'domesticating' and 'foreignising' are more familiar to Literary Translation Studies<sup>9</sup>. They refer to particular *perspectives* open to a translator who seeks to make available a 'foreign' text to their own culture (referred to in translation parlance as the 'target' culture). As tendencies within translation practice, they were first broadly defined as early as 1813 in a lecture delivered by German translator Friedrich Schleiermacher<sup>10</sup>. In that lecture he noted:

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<sup>7</sup> Laurenson, Pip (2001), 'Developing Strategies for the conservation of installations incorporating Time-based Media with reference to Gary Hill's **Between Cinema and a Hard Place**', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 40, 2, pp. 259-266.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished transcripts of conference containing introduction by Jon Ippolito and group discussions at the *Preserving the Immaterial* conference on variable media, held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 30 and 31 03 2001, accessed 20 04 2002 and downloaded from [www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var\\_pre\\_index.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_index.html).

<sup>9</sup> I derive the terms from Lawrence Venuti's discussion of recent Translation ethics in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995), London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> Lefevere, Andre (ed.) (1992), *Translation, History, Culture: A Sourcebook*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 74.

'There are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.

Few connections have been made between the histories and ethics of conservation and translation practices, though I argue that many sympathies exist between the two. I will return my discussion to this later in this Chapter. Here, I propose that those two terms can be validly applied to the viewpoints I have framed above. That represented by Laurensen involves bringing non-traditional artworks towards pre-existing museum procedures and resources. I liken it to Schleiermacher's second tendency to 'leave the reader' or recipient culture in 'peace' and to move the author and his/her product towards its values. Ippolito's involves taking those pre-existing procedures 'towards' the artworks, so leaving the artwork 'in peace' and moving the recipient culture in its direction.

## **2.2. A Reasonable or Necessary Commitment?**

The inclusion of artworks such as Mario Merz's **Dal Miele Alle Ceneri (From Honey to Ashes)** (1984) within permanent collections continues for some to pose an unacceptable risk to the museum's perpetuative role. As Frederik Leen, curator at the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten in Brussels, has argued:

Artists have used new materials the resistance of which to physical degeneration had not been sufficiently assessed throughout the century. These materials include plastics, which (still) have the reputation of being indestructible although they actually deteriorate rather quickly [...] There is of course the issue of video, Polaroid and Cibachrome. Here, the notion of the 'original object' becomes difficult to maintain, although the whole idea of conservation is based upon this idea<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Leen, Frederik (1999), 'Should Museums Collect Ephemeral Art?', in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. p. 377.

He suggests that the loss of the primacy of the 'original object' and the lack of sufficient time and distance from which to judge the performance of 'new' materials unacceptably jeopardises the museum collection's procedures and resources. To 'protect' these, he is prepared to accept the 'radical ostracism' of non-traditional art forms, most specifically those that embrace overtly ephemeral media, from those collections. Edward Lucie-Smith has supported this viewpoint, noting in 1997:

A number of answers have been offered to this kind of problem. Experimental artists say defiantly that they are working for the present day, and that posterity is no concern of theirs. One can make a simple retort to this: exhibit in museums by all means, but refuse to sell, or allow your works to be sold to them. Anything which enters a museum's permanent collection is, by implication, something which is being preserved for future generations. I don't envy the conservators of tomorrow<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, he has proposed alternative 'resting' places for non-traditional artworks, such as 'easily manageable digital archives which would keep pace with increasingly sophisticated technology':

Enter the compartment you have booked, switch on a machine, click on the appropriate button – and, hey presto! There is your complete Tracey Emin, with a list of all the former lovers whose names she embroidered on her knickers. [...] These records would make no pretence that they were the 'real thing' in artistic terms. Indeed, one of their functions would be to make plain that the actual work, its moment past, had now forever vanished [Lucie-Smith, 1997, p. 58].

Leen's and Lucie-Smith's positions can be critiqued on a number of fronts.

Their vision of the museum collection is notably static, and both paint a picture of the permanent collection as one unable or unwilling to transform itself, its

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<sup>12</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward (1997), 'Do We Need Museums of Contemporary Art?' *Art Review*, November, pp. 56-58



purpose or practices. Additionally, their mutual conceptions of artistic intention and material realisation appear to be largely fixed. Moreover, Leen's 'radical ostracism' and Lucie-Smith's 'alternative resting places' do not liberate the museum collection from threat of compromise, insofar as it endangers the representative power and breadth of museum collections. As Jon Ippolito has spelt out, the greater risk is in fact that

we decide to give up on the ephemeral art forms of the twentieth century, withdrawing into our ironclad citadel of durable Paintings and Sculpture, and watching from the ramparts as hapless masterpieces of video and online art are mowed down by the specter of technological obsolescence [Ippolito, 2001, np].

Moreover, conservation practitioners do recognise that the museum and its collection[s] are shifting entities. It is not simply in relation to non-traditional art that the notion of a stable, durable relationship between original intended meaning and material realisation comes under fire, nor our ability to access and assess that relationship over distance of time. The inability to fully reconstitute original intention or material condition is germane to conservation ethics. Art historian Ernst van de Wetering, noted in 1989 that:

Ethics in restoration have found their origin in the growing awareness that we will never understand the artist's intention to their full extent and that consequently our interpretations, which in restoration are expressed on the very object, never entirely cover the truth [...] <sup>13</sup>.

Typically, museum conservators encounter an art object that has survived across some span of time and through distinct 'life' phases. Conservators are faced with historical distance from the object's creation and first context, which may

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<sup>13</sup> Wetering, Ernst van de (1989), 'The Autonomy of Restoration: Ethical Considerations in Relation to Artistic Concepts', in Stanley Price, Nicholas, M. Kirby Talley Jr., and Alessandro Melucco Vaccaro (eds.) (1996), *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, Los Angeles, California: The Getty Conservation Institute, p. 196.

additionally be obscured by the physical accumulation of those 'lives' that the object will undoubtedly bear.

The conservator is, therefore, in a position where they must simultaneously respect and bridge temporal distance. Doing so, they must negotiate the danger of anachronism, of 'betraying' the object with judgements framed by the values of the present and therefore not consistent with the object's 'original' context and intent. Van de Wetering, for one, has questioned just how secure present day re-constructions of 'original' context or intent can hope to be [Price, Talley and Vaccaro (eds.), 1996, p. 196]. On the stability of meaning in the art object, David Phillips states,

For the post-modern commentators of recent decades [...], any intended meaning or experience imparted by the author or through historical process represents only an irretrievable moment in the life of the work. Their point of view seems to be reflected in the physical history of objects [...], which makes the choice of a moment in the past as a target to which the object might be returned through restoration arbitrary, if not fantastic<sup>14</sup>.

Likewise for the museum, art historian David Carrier has queried

In coming to understand how conservation practices are always controversial, and how they serve functions within institutions, which themselves change with time, we give up the belief that those practices are unambiguously determined by some intention of the artist<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, both thing-to-be-inherited (the object) and that which inherits (the museum) both appear increasingly contingent.

It can be argued that acquiring non-traditional artworks for perpetuity is to wilfully exacerbate the ethical and technical difficulties that conservation

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<sup>14</sup> Phillips, David (1997), 'Conservation and condition', *Exhibiting Authenticity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 165.

encounters even in relation to more traditional artworks. As David Phillips pressed:

you might think that at least in the case of contemporary work, especially where the artist is still alive and available for consultation, these issues of intention, representation and time would not arise. Not so. Neither artistic intention nor materials are stable enough even within this time-frame [Phillips, 1997, p. 160].

As with both Leen and Ippolito, I argue that factors such as the lack of material stability, or unambiguous relationship between an artist's intention and their use of materials, have actually simultaneously repelled *and* compelled conservators. This is where the appearance of a new impetus to acquire non-traditional artworks, and to acquire them early, really does take hold. Those factors do seem to contradict the foundation of the conservator's practice. Yet, what obligates the conservator first and foremost is a threat of belatedness, the fear of coming or arriving too late.

### 2.3. The Domesticating Approach in Origin: The Tate Gallery

Here, I briefly outline an early manifestation of what I refer to as a 'domesticating' perspective - that developed by the Tate conservation department in relation to non-traditional works in the 1970s. The Tate's is a large, historical collection, which comprises artworks from five centuries of artistic production. The Tate's *Biennial Report* of 1982<sup>16</sup> revealed that the growth of the modern collection

inevitably had a fundamental effect on the work and approach of the staff of the conservation department, most of whom are trained in the traditional restoration skills of consolidating the structures of easel

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<sup>15</sup> Carrier, David (1985), 'Art and Its Preservation', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43, 3, Spring, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> Tate Gallery (1982), *Biennial Report 1980-1982*, London: Tate Gallery.

paintings, removing discoloured varnish and restoring damages, but who are now faced with a flow of works through the studio many of which have little structural relation to the previously accepted norm [Tate Gallery, 1982, p. 65].

In relation to that variance from the 'previously accepted norm', the Tate did embark upon a formative approach, which I will read here as 'domesticating'. That tendency was demonstrable, I suggest, in Tate Keeper Richard Morphet's response to criticisms that *Burlington Magazine* published in April 1976, regarding the Tate's purchase of Carl Andre's **Equivalent VIII** (1966) [Plate 23]<sup>17</sup>. In the main, the Burlington's editorial took issue with the purchase as part of a broader censure of the Tate's emerging policy to acquire 'art as it emerges'<sup>18</sup>. Where the article did focus on **Equivalent VIII** specifically, its main contention rested with the status of the work's material content. In particular, it queried:

In the case of minimal and conceptual art, might it not make sense for the Tate to collect only full documentation rather than the examples themselves, so that they could be reconstructed whenever the need arose? But what of the 'purity' of the original idea, conceived in terms of particular blankets or rods or light bulbs? Well, even T1534 is not the original brick sculpture that Carl Andre made in 1966: since no one wanted to buy it, the bricks were sent back to the works, and were not available when the Tate, six years later, wished to buy a replica. Andre had to make do with firebricks [Editorial, 1976, p. 187].

In his reply, Morphet actually gave early expression to the impetus to 'acquire early', in direct relation to the material questions that **Equivalent VIII** posed:

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<sup>17</sup> The Burlington's critical editorial, 'T1535 Untitled 1966', was published in *Burlington Magazine*, 1976, 118, 877, April, pp. 187-188. Richard Morphet's response, 'Carl Andre's Bricks', appeared in the November issue of the same journal, *Burlington Magazine*, 1976, 118, 884, November, pp. 762-67.

<sup>18</sup> As I noted in the *Introduction* to this thesis, in the early and mid-1970s, there was considerable critical debate regarding the Tate's acquisitions policy vis-à-vis contemporary art. For instance, in 1972, Richard Cork convened a round-table of representatives from the Tate, which he published the following year as 'The Tate Gallery: Acquisitions, Exhibitions, Trustees, Future Developments,' *Studio International*, 185, April, pp. 181-192. See also Peter Fuller's 1978 article, 'The Tate, The State and the English Tradition,' *Studio International*, 194, pp. 4-18 or Colin Osman's interview with Alan Bowness the Director of the Tate Gallery, published in 1982 in *Creative Camera*, 205, January, pp. 374-9.

In the case not only of these works, but of 'conceptual' works also, where particular obsolescent materials such as paper or photographs of a particular tone, are employed, a museum cannot blithely 'collect only fully documentation rather than the examples themselves so that they could be reconstructed whenever the need arose', as the *Burlington* suggests. What would be thought if this were done with a Brancusi or a Bridget Riley? [Morphet, 1976, p. 764].

In that passage, Morphet anticipates the issue of material obsolescence or unavailability for instance. Yet, those concerns could only at that stage be anticipatory. His response to the *Burlington's* nudge regarding 'reconstruction' was to assert the materiality (and material specificity) of **Equivalent VIII**, and of Andre's approach in general. Referring to the artist's own declared opinion, he noted that 'the presence of 120 firebricks is very different from the idea of 120 firebricks. One might add that the presence of 120 of these particular sand lime bricks is very different from that of 120 bricks of a randomly chosen specification' [Morphet, 1976, p. 764].

Morphet did leave a key question that the *Burlington* raised hanging. Pertinently, the Editorial had asked: 'just how far a public Gallery, which must impose its own kind of order on what it acquires, can go to accommodate changing attitudes to art. At what point, if any, does it have to draw the line?' [Editorial, 1976, p. 187]. Morphet acknowledged 'limits of a physical or ethical kind to what a museum can acquire.' However, he added, somewhat obliquely, that the Tate had not reached those limits, nor did he seek to define what they might be [Morphet, 1976, p. 766]. Had he attempted to do so, he would have had numerous relevant examples to draw on. During the Biennium 1972-74, for instance, the Tate had made its first 'new media' acquisitions, which Morphet

had already referred to in a previous essay<sup>19</sup>: three videos by Gilbert & George - **In the Bush** (1972) [Plate 24], **Gordon's Making us Drunk** (1972) [Plate 25] - and **A Portrait of the Artists as Young Men** (1972) as well as two pieces by David Tremlett that comprised eighty-one audio cassette tapes and eighty-one colour 35mm slides respectively [Plate 26]<sup>20</sup>. Those works, by virtue of their media and display formats, would seem to have indicated some kind of 'limit', but Morphet did not take this up.

Tate records show that the curatorial and conservation staff there did experience some initial practical teething troubles in the early handling of works by Barry Flanagan and Richard Long for example. In 1969, Tate took possession of two works by Flanagan for consideration. One was **aaing j gui aa** (1965) [Plate 27], which it subsequently acquired. The condition of the work, only four years old when acquired, was noted in a memo following its purchase:

This plaster, cloth covered piece is generally in a scruffy condition. Five main areas of damage. Three at the points of the green piece. Points broken in one case completely missing. Cloth spent. One on multi-coloured piece--a break under the cloth. One on grey piece when cloth is pulling away. The purple 'trunk' is very faded. The 'everlasting flower' damaged and tatty<sup>21</sup>.

Museum staff were clearly troubled by the overall state of the work. The difficulties they experienced in perceiving what was damage and what was not were demonstrated in a letter to Barry Flanagan from Richard Morphet:

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<sup>19</sup> Morphet, Richard (1974), 'A Note on Conceptual Art', in *The Tate Gallery* (1974), *Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1972-74*, London: The Tate Gallery, pp. 29-33.

<sup>20</sup> The two installations by David Tremlett are **Spring Recordings** (1972) and **Green** (1972). The former comprised 81 cassette tapes displayed on glass shelving that is installed on the gallery wall, and played back on a tape recorder. The latter consists of 81 colour slides that are projected continuously in numbered sequence for seven seconds each. Catalogue entries for the two works can be found in *The Tate Gallery* (1974), *Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1972-74*, London: The Tate Gallery, pp. 244-5.

<sup>21</sup> Memo: 'Report on Damage etc. to Work of art' Undated, TATE GALLERY ARCHIVE: TG 4/2/FLANAGAN/1 1969-77.

the dried flower which sticks out of the top of one of the parts of "aaing I gui aa" has been snapped in two, presumably by a member of the public, and would be difficult to restore. It would be most kind if you could let me know the best way of replacing the dried flower on this, and any future occasion. Would you like to be approached, in the first instance, to supply a replacement? Or should we seek a replacement as close as possible in size, colour and type to the present one? Or is it simply a question of the principle of having a dried flower -- of any type-- at this point?<sup>22</sup>.

Confusion over material constitution, over the importance of material elements, and the issue of 'replacement' and 'disposability' were clearly emerging.

The indeterminacy of the work's physical constitution, and of the artist's working methods, gave Tate curators cause to pose very direct questions to him. In 1973, following the installation by Flanagan of **Pile 3** (1968/1985)<sup>23</sup>, **June 2'69** (1969) and **No 5 1971** (1971) [**Plate 28**] for approval by the Board, Morphet noted that:

he [Flanagan] left behind a bundle of sticks of the same sort as those used in T01718 [**No. 5 1971**]. Half of this bundle consists of sticks in too bad a condition to use, and the other half are to kept by us as spares in case of damage to any of the sticks in T01718. Flanagan himself will come in the next few days to sort the bundle out into these two varieties and to take away the useless ones<sup>24</sup>.

As with Flanagan, a disarming insouciance pervaded communications from Richard Long regarding the physical constitution and divisibility of his work **Circle of Sticks** (1973). **Circle of Sticks** was initially commissioned by Tate from Long in response to one of its galleries and then subsequently acquired by

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<sup>22</sup> Typed Letter 22 Oct 1969 Richard Morphet to Barry Flanagan, TATE GALLERY ARCHIVE: TG 4/2/FLANAGAN/1 1969-77.

<sup>23</sup> Tate database lists this work with the dual date (1968/1985) where it was reconstituted in 1985. For further reference to the remaking of early sculptures by Flanagan see Juan Cruz's review of 'Made New', an exhibition curated by Andrew Wilson at City Racing, London October-November 1996, *Art Monthly*, 202, pp. 30-31. Cruz refers to Flanagan's early works as 'precise material possibilities for which one could have given precise instructions.'

<sup>24</sup> Memo from Richard Morphet to Stephen Lees 25 Jan 1973, TATE GALLERY ARCHIVE: TG 4/2/FLANAGAN/1 1969-77

the gallery shortly after<sup>25</sup>. In response to a letter from Tate curator Anne Seymour to Long on the matter of acquiring spare sticks, he replied that he would 'pop some in'<sup>26</sup>.

How conservation procedures and infrastructures were adapted in response to works such as these was most effectively summarised by Alexander Dunluce, Head of Conservation, in 1978:

The central activity of the Department continues to be the conservation and restoration of paintings and drawings. Increasingly, however, the Department's activity extends beyond this familiar role. One of the principal factors which makes this so is the nature of modern works of art. Whilst many such works in the collection involve painting or drawing, there are many which do not and the tendency has long been for even those works, which do involve these skills to be in some aspects untraditional from a technical standpoint. This means that a wide range of objects may be encountered, constructed from an almost infinite variety of media and assembled in numerous ways<sup>27</sup>.

Dunluce proceeded to adumbrate new issues identified by the Tate conservation department, and the corresponding solutions that they initiated. He listed amongst the non-traditional works that the Tate had recently acquired three representative groups.

- Concept-based or new media art: for example, **Spring Recordings** by David Tremlett (1972) [**Plate 26**], which uses audiotape cassettes, or the three videos Gilbert & George: **In the Bush** (1972), **Gordon's Making**

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<sup>25</sup> The commissioning and subsequent acquisition of contemporary artworks is no longer practiced by the Tate, as curator Frances Morris spelt out during a discussion panel in 1999. See the published version of that discussion in Hiller, Susan and Sarah Martin (eds.) (2001), *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation*, Newcastle upon Tyne: BALTIC and University of Newcastle, pp.70-71. Yet, in this early instance, Anne Seymour developed **Circle of Sticks** (1978) with Long and lobbied for its acquisition. Her memo raised a number of issues that remain extremely pertinent regarding works installed or made for specific gallery spaces.

<sup>26</sup> Letter, 25 Oct 1973, Anne Seymour to Richard Long; Postcard, undated, Richard Long to Anne Seymour TATE GALLERY ARCHIVE: TG 4/2/LONG/1 1969-77.

<sup>27</sup> Dunluce, Alexander (1978), 'Some Aspects of the Changing Role of the Conservation Department', *Tate Gallery Biennial Report 1976-78*, London: Tate Gallery, pp. 82-83.



**us Drunk** (1972) and **A Portrait of the Artists as Young Men** (1972) [Plates 24 and 25].

- Polychromatic sculpture: a sculpture consisting of painted steel and acrylic sheeting as with **Bird in Arras VI** by Tim Scott (1969).
- Installations involving found (often organic) or readymade materials, such as Richard Long's **Avon Driftwood** (1976) which comprises an arrangement of pieces of driftwood, or Carl Andre's **Equivalent VIII** (1966) [Plate 23], which includes 120 firebricks.

Within eight or ten years of its first acquisitions in these areas, the Tate had intuitively felt their way towards principles of reasonable commitment that would suit those artworks. Vitally, they identified that the key to dealing with the ambiguity many of those works bore in terms of the relationship between their meaning and materials lay in documentation. As Dunluce noted, 'it is as important to preserve such information as it is to conserve the fabric of the object itself' [Dunluce, 1978, p. 82-83]. Dunluce took full cognisance of the increased profusion of materials and processes that non-traditional artworks introduced to the museum environment: 'The standard record form which was used until recently was designed exclusively for easel paintings. It was divided into appropriately headed sections. These headings, however, could not be used successfully when dealing with less traditional objects' [Dunluce, 1978, p. 82-83].

As the information to be recorded changed, and its absolute importance became clearer, Dunluce noted the inadequacy of established documentation procedures.

The questions to be asked, and the format in which it was captured and stored, were modified. What was required was a record far 'less rigid' in constitution, that would reflect 'a much more flexible approach'. Dunluce proposed a 'loose leaf configuration' that could accommodate the disparate character of the various photographs, diagrams and other documents generated around the work. However, he was concerned that standards be developed insofar as 'a shortcoming is that the system allows too much freedom and experiments are continuing with checklists for the more common types of object to ensure that all the relevant information is included' [Dunluce, 1978, p. 82-83]. Regarding non-traditional artworks, Dunluce prioritised the following information:

- Display requirements and assemblage: Many contemporary works need to be assembled each time they are shown, for example, Richard Long's **Avon Driftwood Piece**, or they have particular display requirements.
- A knowledge of the artist's attitude to ready-made parts is important-he may be happy to have them replaced as necessary or he may consider the ageing process as part of his work.
- Whether the artist has different attitudes towards vandalism and the normal process of ageing. He may also have different attitudes to different works.
- A source of supply where spare parts are essential.
- The importance of ready-made parts where they may become unavailable, and what criteria might be used to select alternatives in the future. The paint required for the repainting of some large metal sculpture is a good example of a material quickly becoming unobtainable. In this case accurate recording of the colour, finish and method of application in

consultation with either the paint manufacturer or the artist [Dunluce, 1978, p. 82-83].

A paper entitled 'The Installation File-Conserving by Documenting'<sup>28</sup>, given at the International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art in Ottawa, Canada, in 1980, by Tate representatives Sandy Nairne and Peter Wilson, demonstrated the sophistication with which the Tate had already developed the documentation and handling of non-traditional artworks. In particular, I refer to two passages published in an abstract of the paper's contents:

Complicated Art Works with Special Effects:

Recent years have seen the creation of art works where the particular directions for assembly and the issues that these pose have been explored deliberately by artists [...] It is necessary to discover from the artist what his attitude to these auxiliaries is - are they themselves a distinct part of the art work, or is it only the effect which is essential to the work. Whichever view is taken, it is necessary to keep records of artists' answers to relevant questions, *together with an accurate and complete record of the effects created in order to keep the work available over a "museum" time-scale* (Italics mine)

Installation pieces

For our purposes we may define 'installation pieces' as works of art which, in a stored or dismantled state, offer little or no clue to the would-be displayer as to the final effect. In order to function, such works require a plan or set of installation instructions. Such instructions are often but not invariably supplied by the artist. Accurate documentation of the assembled state, together with all necessary instructions on how to achieve it, is vital and an "installation" does not exist without it [Nairne and Wilson, 1980, pp. 16-17].

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<sup>28</sup> Nairne, Sandy and Peter Wilson (1980), 'The Installation File-Conserving by Documenting', *Abstracts from International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art* 7-12 July, Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, pp. 16-19.

Both explanations mapped out, in embryonic fashion, the basis of the Tate's approach to accommodating non-traditional works congruently with 'a "museum" time-scale.'

The crucial ingredient was the capacity to specify, document and assess the role and meaning of the material elements of each work, and key in this respect was the ability to consult the artist. As Dunluce stated, 'direct contact with the artist provides a unique opportunity for the conservator-who is, by experience, able to predict what changes are likely to occur and can seek the artist's opinion about what to do in the future' [Dunluce, 1978, pp. 82-83]. Morphet, too, alludes to this in respect of the *Burlington's* jibe regarding reconstruction:

Like other museums, the Tate is in no way averse to doing as the *Burlington* suggests whenever such an approach is within the specification of the work; indeed in some cases it has already done so. But only the artist can determine whether reconstruction is within the specification of the work and so far few have decided that it is [Morphet, 1976, p. 764].

As I will note elsewhere in this and other chapters, these principles remain pertinent to the Tate's approach to this day [Laurenson, 1999, 2001]. Yet, where Dunluce prioritised documentation and to the availability of the artist, there was no critical evaluation of the factor that made those two elements possible (acquiring the works early in their existence, when either new or very recently made), nor upon the priorities with which it was applied. Such critical evaluation, I argue, is becoming increasingly necessary in view of the greater endorsement amongst museum and conservation professionals for acquiring non-traditional artworks 'early'.

## 2.4. Valuing Proximity

The early experiences at the Tate reveal the efficacy, for conservation, of eliding or narrowing the conventionally desirable time gap between the creation and acquisition of an artwork in respect of those that comprise non-traditional media. It is a practice, however, that is not unproblematic for conservators. At the *Modern Art: Who Cares?*<sup>29</sup> conference held in Amsterdam in 1997, three of the contributors, Renee van de Vall, D. H. van Wegen and Ernst van de Wetering, all referred to the dilemma that 'proximity' presents to a practice such as conservation that is more used to negotiating an excess of distance from their object. Yet, as I put forward here, the conservation community has begun to value and absorb that elision.

Suffice it to say, that with works that are new or recently made, the conservator has no or little historical remove from their object. In that respect, those objects are items about which 'feasible consensus is not yet possible' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 203]. Of course, the propinquity of acquisition to creation does provide access, for the most part, to the living artist, or to those intimately involved with the artist and their creative processes and intentions. Their guidance and input in matters of conservation has been crucial. Conservator Marie Louise Sauerberg has intimated that 'the artist's intention remains an

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<sup>29</sup> Hummelen, Ijsbrand and Dionne Sillé (eds.) (1999), *Modern Art: Who Cares? An Interdisciplinary Research Project and an International Symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: The Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage.

important guiding principle. For modern art this statement carries additional weight, due to the proximity in time of the objects<sup>30</sup>.

That proximity, however, may have its own import for the artist. Curator Harald Szeemann recognised as early as 1970 that:

some of the importance formerly attached to objects has now been transferred to gestures, attitudes, events. Conservation has become less important. *This situation, in which the presence of artists is essential and less importance is placed on the work of art as a product or for its intrinsic value, should be maintained as long as possible, for it is a characteristic feature of the contemporary art scene*<sup>31</sup> (Italics mine).

What Szeemann characterises here is the increasingly extended nature of the artist's creative involvement with their work beyond initial production, an involvement that may not be fully resolved or closed. Thus, how far artist's intention should provide 'absolute' guidance for the conservator may be prone to alteration and remains subject for debate. Artists may change their position in relation to a particular view. This may place the onus back on the conservator, but for the conservators themselves, proximity can produce its own dilemmas. As Sauerberg continues, 'having known the works of art from the time of their creation, and having seen them in their so-called perfect condition, gives us a strong emotional bond to them' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 366]. Interestingly, what Sauerberg identifies as their 'perfect condition' retains a belief that the initial and first manifestation of a work is its 'purest'. It, therefore, elicits a strong reaction from the conservator.

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<sup>30</sup> Sauerberg, Marie-Louise (1999) 'Proceedings for discussion on the Conservation of Monochrome Paintings,' in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 366.

I'll return to look at those issues specifically in the next section. Prior to that, I suggest that it is by construing non-traditional, new or recently made works of art 'a historical character', that may as yet be delayed, but which will come to fruition in the imminent future, that conservators identify (or frame) their mandate. As Austrian conservator, Hiltrud Schinzel noted in her 1987 paper, 'Paint is not Painting', 'the laws of historical thinking have entered our flesh and blood'<sup>32</sup>. She iterates for the conservator what art historian Didier Maleuvre claims for the act of 'salvaging artifacts', namely that it is 'itself a historical gesture'<sup>33</sup>. Maleuvre continues, it is one that 'takes place in history; it passes a judgement on history; it grants artworks a historical character.' It is, thus, by knowing that the inevitable 'onset' of distance and historical process, will ensue as artworks recede from their moment of origin that conservation can accommodate the early acquisition of the non-traditional artwork into its temporal framework.

Writing in 1988, writer Andrew Solomon suggested that conservation practice faced a potentially violent antagonism from Post-Modernist theory. At stake was what he referred to as two (opposing) temporal visions<sup>34</sup>. The first comprises the 'non-linear temporal vision' that underpins Post-Modernist strategies such as appropriation, and in which 'fragments of the past become the present.' The second constitutes the 'pure time line' that underpins

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<sup>31</sup> Szeemann, Harald (1972), 'Problems of the Museum of Contemporary Art in the West' in *Museum*, 24, 1, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Schinzel, Hiltrud (1987), 'Paint is not Painting', *Preprints*, ICOM Committee for Conservation, 8th Triennial, Sydney, Australia 6-11 September 2 vols., pp. 553-554.

<sup>33</sup> Maleuvre, Didier (1999), *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Solomon, Andrew (1988), 'Something Borrowed, Something Bloom', *Artforum*, 26, 9, May, pp. 122-7.

conservation, in which the 'present can only compensate for the past.' What the former presented was a distinct challenge to the 'way we constantly define human and artistic time by dividing it into past, present and future domains and what this splitting generates' [Solomon, 1988, p. 122]. For Solomon, 'conservation work demands a splitting of time into past, present and future, for its is clearly as vigorously involved with the posterity to which it transmits works of art as with the past from which the art comes' [Solomon, 1988, p. 124]. It is a confrontation, he suggests, that conservation practice ultimately recoiled from. He noted:

Since conservation and Post-Modernism stand in diametric opposition and temporal coincidence to one another, by now there should have been a great collision of the two types of thought. There should have been a terrible moment when Post-Modernism and conservation collided and there was a bang. Then one of them might have "won"; or they might have cancelled one another out altogether; or they might have re-defined themselves in less oppositional terms. But none of this happened. There was no bang. The sound of explosion or collision has been absent, and the silence is not only strange, but sad, for it points to all the silences of the too silent 80s...silences not necessarily of enormous things we have prevented ourselves from saying, but rather of collisions we have failed to notice [Solomon, 1988, p.126].

In place of any such 'collision', the museum's, and hence conservation's, temporal vision has remained in place. In *Time and Narrative*<sup>35</sup>, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur gave substance to that 'linear temporal vision'. He referred to 'the mediation we are seeking between the reception of the past transmitted by tradition and the projection of a horizon of expectation' [Ricoeur, 1984, p. 234]. Within that timeline, Ricoeur significantly placed emphasis on

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<sup>35</sup> Ricoeur, Paul (1984), *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3 vols.



the present. He proposes it in active terms, as an 'initiative' rather than a passive moment, thus:

On the one hand, [...] our expectations must be determined, hence finite and relatively modest, if they are to be able to give rise to responsible commitments. We have to keep our horizon of expectation from running away from us. We have to connect it to the present by means of a series of intermediary projects that we may act upon [...] On the other hand, we must also resist any narrowing of the space of experience. To do this, we must struggle against the tendency to consider the past only from the angle of what is done, unchangeable and past[...] In short, when confronted with the adage that the future is open and contingent in every respect but that the past is unequivocally closed and necessary, we have to make our expectations more determinate and our experience less so [Ricoeur, 1984, p. 216].

This passage has, I argue, important bearing for conservators, and for conservation as a practice that has typically viewed the present as the element in that timeline that must defer to the other two: past and future.

Firstly, Ricoeur's presentation of the present as active is, I propose, very much in line with contemporary conservation ethics, which tend towards a more pre-emptive role with regard to the designation and care of heritage. The remit of museum conservation has, indeed, taken on the character of a two-step process very much in this tenor. For instance, the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation define the conservator's task:

Society calls on public guardians (the staff of museums, galleries, archives and libraries) to *mediate* the transition from possession (e.g. deliberate acquisition, failing to throw away) to active retention over the longer term (e.g. collecting, curating, preserving)<sup>36</sup>.

This chimes with Ricoeur's call for a 'projection of a horizon of expectation' that is more determinate and finite, and which is linked to the present by a 'series of intermediary projects that we may act upon.' Such an approach seeks

the kind of 'disclosure' of which philosopher Arthur Danto has spoken: 'the present does not disclose its structure until it is related to the future'<sup>37</sup>. In essence, the conservation endorsement to acquire non-traditional artworks early implements this. By linking these works to 'the future', which their 'permanent' acquisition effects, conservators do seek to reveal an intermediary structure based on their available resources by which they can 'act'.

## 2.5. Managing Subjectivity

Here, I want to return to the 'emotional bond' that, according to Marie-Louise Sauerberg, proximity to an artwork's so-called 'perfect condition' can induce. Emotional response does introduce subjectivity to the notion of responsible commitment. Pertinently, Ernst van de Wetering has differentiated that attachment according to 'different speeds of transformation.' When faced with new or recently made work of art, he suggests that the conservator is torn 'between two forces':

The existential power of the work as a statement in the present and his or her awareness that the object at some point, probably very soon, will be absorbed into the stream of time, becoming an historical object as well and deserving the utmost care as a source about its original appearance, own meaning and function for future generations [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 248].

Within a museum institution, van de Wetering notes, these speeds are generationally inflected:

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<sup>36</sup>United Kingdom Institute for Conservation response to Heritage Lottery Fund discussion document 'The Horizons of Heritage', posted on its website, <http://www.ukic.org.uk>, 19 09 2001 and retrieved 06 05 2002.

To someone [...] who has known the artist or was once an assistant on his/her studio or helped in the presentation of the object, the speed of transformation is much slower than for the young conservator-restorer of a later generation. The first category of conservators tends to prolong the present, in an effort to support the strength and actuality of the artist's statement. For the young conservator, the same artist and the same object may already be history, with all the consequences that this will entail for the care of the object as a source about the past and the sense of responsibility for its transition to the future [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 248].

Van de Wetering depicts a compacted version of what Peter Osborne has described as a 'biological model' of transmission. In this case, I apply it to the collection and care practices by which cultures and, indeed, museums ensure their own ability to 're-inherit' the material legacies they vouchsafe. It is a model premised upon the handing on from one generation to the next, and thus does conform to conservation's linear temporal structure. As Osborne denotes in *The Politics of Time*<sup>38</sup>, the act of

handing down or transmitting something from generation to generation [...] shadows the biological continuity of generations at the level of social form. Anchoring ethics and politics to nature, it connects the idea of history to the life of the species [Osborne, 1995, p. 127].

To work, the model relies on a process of identification obtaining between those handing on and those receiving. This frames a basis for continuity. In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur suggested that 'the idea of a succession of generations finds its sociological projection in the anonymous relationship between contemporaries, predecessors and successors.' He identifies them as 'historical agents', 'living people who come to take the place of the dead' [Ricoeur, 1984, p. 109]. Tellingly, Ricoeur suggests that generations operate through a

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<sup>37</sup> Danto, Arthur C. (1999), 'Looking at the Future Looking at the Present as Past,' in Corzo, Miguel Angel (ed.), *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of Twentieth Century Art*, Los Angeles, California: The Getty Conservation Institute, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Osborne, Peter (1995), *The Politics of Time*, London: Verso.

‘combination of replacement (which is successive) and stratification (which is simultaneous)’ [Ricoeur, 1984, p.112].

Hitherto, conservation approaches to non-traditional, new or recently made art have been consistent with this. Typically, ‘authority’ to act is established between artist, curator and conservator along the lines of a kinship or familial bond that extend out from the artist. D.H. Van Wegen notes:

When problems arise soon after the purchase of a new work, which is not uncommon, and the artist is immediately asked for a solution, one can assume that the artistic concept and the personality of its maker have still not separated so that the moment of creation can be somewhat extended [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 207].

Here, the carer’s (curator or conservator’s) persona is deferred and viewed within the extension from the artist. Conservator Andree Van der Kerckhove’s account of a conversation with contemporary American artist Jason Rhoades exemplifies this:

When I put the question to him of whether he thought it important that the objects in his work remained authentic in the future and what his own personal preferences were for how his work should continue to exist in the future, he said that authenticity did not necessarily directly have to do with the authenticity of the materials. As an example he gave the blue pieces of sailcloth that were lying around in our vicinity. He said that if it ever happened that this sort of plastic material for some reason could no longer be used, it should definitely be replaced because one could simply buy it in the shop. *Later on in our discussion he came up with the comparison that the person who would later be responsible for installing his works should be like a ‘son’ to him—that is it should be someone who handled the objects and structures with an attitude that was kindred to his own*<sup>39</sup> (Italics mine).

Clearly, from the nature of his approach, documenting Rhoades would be approximate and expressive rather than ‘scientific’ [Plate 29]. The continuity of

the work would be assured through 'kinship', and the designation of familial attributes, such as 'son'. Van Wegen offered a further example in the artist Suchan Kinoshita. Of her work **Hok 1** (1996) [**Plate 30**], in the collection of Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, he noted:

Suchan Kinoshita [also] leaves little room for interpretation. With a view to replacing certain elements of her *Hok 1*, including the hourglasses, which, because of the way they function in this installation have a limited life span, Kinoshita appoints 'godmothers' who take over the responsibility for re-executing the relevant parts [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 209].

For Kinoshita, the kinship expresses a care to action instructions, and to ensure the adequate replication of that role. This structuring of care is itself handed down like the works themselves. Van Wegen continued, 'there will come a day, however, when Sol LeWitt's studio assistant is no longer around and the godmothers to Kinoshita's work will themselves have to appoint godmothers' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 209].

The cases of Rhoades and Kinoshita open up the matter of decision-making, or how to action such 'familial' roles in the present and future. The act of 'handing on' is, as Peter Osborne noted, inflected with notions of betrayal or surrender [Osborne, 1995, p. 128]. He has argued that:

The future is envisaged in the image of the past, and the present appears solely in its mediating function as a link in the chain of generations. However, in so far as the continuity of this chain must be secured anew in each generation, the process of handing down is fraught with the risk of failure in the present. This is reflected in the root meaning of *tradere*: to hand over in the sense of surrender and betrayal....As a result, *the continuity of tradition requires a constant exercise of authority to combat the threat of betrayal inherent in its temporal structure* [Osborne, 1995, p. 128] (Italics mine).

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<sup>39</sup> Van de Kerckhove, Andrée (1996), 'Like a Son', *Kunst & Museumjournaal*, 7, 1/2/3, p. 29.

That 'constant exercise of authority' must, however, acknowledge inevitable compromise. Reporting at the International Council of Museums-Committee for Conservation [ICOM-CC] Triennial in Sydney in 1987, Ernst van de Wetering and Rik van Wegen summarised the activities of a working group formed to update a previous conservation decision-making model<sup>40</sup>. They developed a circle with seven vectors pointing inwards, and representing the various considerations to be taken into account when assessing an artwork's condition. Both van de Wetering and van Wegen acknowledged

the basic nature of any decision on the field of conservation and restoration as a compromise; a compromise because many of the forces involved are opposed. Any change in our conception and evaluation of the more or less conflicting categories may change the final outcome of the decision [ICOM Committee for Conservation, 1987, p. 562].

Philosopher Renee Van de Vall has elaborated their model recently in order to accommodate non-traditional, new or recently made artworks<sup>41</sup>. Consistent with the familial connections that I elaborated earlier, Van de Vall refers to the example of the tragic Greek character Agamemnon and his daughter Iphigencia as used by Martha Nussbaum in her book *The Fragility of Goodness*<sup>42</sup>. He does so to present a case of 'tragic conflict': that is an instance in which 'one is forced to choose between two morally undesirable courses of action. Both alternatives are undesirable because each of them violates a valid ethical claim.' Conservators, van de Vall states, 'have to make choices in which the sacrifice of

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<sup>40</sup> Van de Wetering, Ernst and Rik Van Wegen (1987), 'Roaming the Stairs of the Tower of Babel - Efforts to Expand Interdisciplinary Involvement in the Theory of Restoration', in ICOM Committee for Conservation, 8<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting, Sydney, Australia 6-11 September, Vol. 2, pp. 561-565.

<sup>41</sup> Vall, Renee van de (1999), 'Painful Decisions: Philosophical Considerations on a Decision-Making Model', in Hunnellen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, pp. 196-200.

some value is inevitable, for instance, whether to preserve the historical or material authenticity of a painting, or its (presumably) original visual appearance' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 197].

The chances of encountering such dilemmas seem to have increased with contemporary artistic developments. With contemporary non-traditional works, 'they are even more urgent because here the values involved may be more diverse, less clearly determinable, less established' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 197]. Van de Vall does, indeed, give real dimension and weight to Ricoeur's somewhat abstract 'intermediary projects', and to what is involved in securing that timeline of Andrew Solomon spoke of:

In the end, it is the developed sensibility of a curator or conservator that guides the balancing of the pain -- and unlike Agamemnon, he or she will not deny that the pain is there, because this is exactly what makes the decision instructive for others: to learn why, in which circumstances, this was the best thing to do; and what, in spite of all care and cautiousness, was irrevocably and painfully lost [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1997, p. 200].

## 2.6. From Material 'Perfectionism' to Material 'Detachment'

Here, I return to the practical issues at stake, and bring my discussion back to those two tendencies or approaches to accommodating non-traditional artworks that I introduced earlier: the 'domesticating' and the 'foreignising'. In this section, I consider the first of those more fully, as a tendency, which, I suggested, involves the move to bring non-traditional artworks towards pre-

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<sup>42</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. (1989), *The Fragility of Goodness - Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

existing museum procedures and resources. I liken it to the second tendency that Frederick Schleiermacher identified within translation practices: where the translator undertakes to 'leave the reader' or recipient culture in 'peace' and to 'move' the author and his/her product towards its values.

The revision of their existing care procedures and premises by museums, in order that they can accommodate the increasingly complex characteristic of non-traditional art forms, has taken on considerable momentum within the last fourteen years. As I have previously outlined, internationally, the practice of acquiring non-traditional artworks at points nearer and nearer to their creation has been widely accepted, and in some cases, has been clearly recognised institutionally, and even nationally. In the Netherlands, for instance, art historian and critic Tineke Reijnders has stated:

A [...] beneficial condition is the existence of a society that values the possession and care of art collections. The Delta Plan instigated by the Dutch Government at the beginning of the Nineties comprised generous financing for overdue restoration in various areas. The cry from a number of alert museum workers fell on receptive ears and [...] the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art could be realised in the best possible way<sup>43</sup>.

There, that recognition has inspired inter-institutional moves to develop and network systematic procedures, and to find a more unilateral approach that could be employed across institutions in relation to the accession and care of contemporary acquisitions.

In particular, the realisation of the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art in the Netherlands resulted in the interdisciplinary research pilot project at



Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, and which preceded the *Modern Art: Who Cares?* conference (Amsterdam, 1997). It is that research project that I focus my discussion on here. Both the research project and ensuing conference stand as landmark acknowledgements that a conservation impetus for the early acquisition of contemporary artworks exists, that it is pressing, and, indeed, must be embraced. The project did not aim to be, nor could it be, comprehensive in its address of the many long-term implications that non-traditional, and especially new media artworks, pose for the institutions seeking to house them in perpetuity. However, it was as much by its omissions and residual values as its inclusions and conclusions that it brings the scope of those implications and the issues of procedure that they instigate most fully to light.

In 1993, a syndicate of representatives, many selected from the six Dutch modern art institutions, inaugurated *The Conservation of Modern Art* project. The representatives taking part in the project were drawn from a broad range of disciplines. Indeed, as Sillé notes, interdisciplinary discussion was ‘necessary precisely because modern art is so complex in its use of materials and meaning.’ They initiated the project out of a concern that traditional conservation decision-making models and ethical guidelines may not provide an adequate basis for the care of modern and contemporary artworks. Their preliminary discussions noted that there were no generally accepted methods or criteria for assessing and solving the conservation problems of non-traditional art objects, that no inventory of the expertise of conservators and curators exists, and that there was little insight into the nature and use of modern materials [Hummelen and Sillé

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<sup>43</sup> Reijnders, Tineke (1999), ‘A Shining Document of our Time,’ in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.),

(eds.), 1999, p. 14]. Conservator Dionne Sillé, the project manager, put forward in her introduction that:

Over the centuries, a structural approach to conservation and restoration has been developed for old masters' art. [...] But what about modern and contemporary art? The materials used here are often far more fragile than those of traditional art; moreover, they may have a diversity of meanings<sup>44</sup>.

As part of that initiative, the participating collections collectively proposed fifty objects. The representatives selected ten works in total, which were chosen because the challenges 'not only in a material sense but also from an ethical standpoint' that they posed [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, pp. 14-15]. They presented, as Sillé continued, 'a range of as yet unsolved conservation problems': plastics, kinetics, monochromes and works consisting of mixed materials. As such, the project's aim was to find 'a methodological approach to conservation that took the complexities of modern art into account'.

The question stands as to how far the ten artworks tested the scope of traditional conservation ethics. The activity surrounding each of the ten pilot objects revealed that 'the heart of the problem' lay in the generation of models adequate to the registration of data and condition. As Sillé summarised, trying to reconstitute information about the early history of an artwork 'at a later date can be far more complicated and time consuming than collating it when the object is actually acquired' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 17]. However, the pilot case studies could only conclude this retrospectively and *compensate* for the inadequacies of early documentation through careful ethical discussion. Most of the works dated from the late 1960s and early 1970s. The most recent of the

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1999, p. 153.

pilot objects, for example, was Tony Cragg's **One Space, Four Places** (1982). Indeed, one of the works, **59-18** (1959) by Henk Peeters, was almost forty years old when the project took place. In several of the cases, the artist had died, and where the artist was still available to consult, the artwork, typically, had receded considerably from its point of creation. Most certainly, the case studies provide valuable precedents for the treatment of older, non-traditional artworks acquired when approaches were still formative, and concomitantly absences in adequate documentation can now be identified. I recount two discussions of **Gismo** (1960) by Jean Tinguely [**Plate 31**], and **Citta Irreale** (1968) by Mario Merz [**Plate 32**] in particular to demonstrate this.

**Gismo** (1960) is a kinetic sculpture that Jean Tinguely welded together from scrap metal that he collected and stockpiled over a considerable number of years. The sculpture stands more than two metres high, is nearly six metres long. It comprises a long neck and a central body made up of drive belts, wheels, pots, hammers and cans amongst other items. [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 23]. As a machine, **Gismo** is designed to function or 'live', emitting a dissonant rabble of sounds, and jerking motions. Conservator Lydia Beerkens described how along the neck:

A small hammer taps a red saucepan every now and then. The other nine instruments in this pots-and-pans orchestra follow more slowly, each with its own rhythm [...] A rusty, ribbed 5-litre tin is beaten by a plate nut. A food can spins around, rattling on a rod attached to the rear axle, while a thick tube on another axle does the same, sliding with a light grating sound<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Sillé, Dionne (1999), 'Introduction to the Project', in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Beerkens, Lydia, Isjbrand Hummelen, and Dionne Sillé, (1999) 'Reconstruction of a Moving Life,' in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 23.

Heavily rusted, not very robust and fitfully operational, the tenuous physical condition of the piece dated back to its original creation. How far it was built, or indeed treated, as an artwork capable of being inherited is, therefore, a salient point. What we can think of as **Gismo's** first 'life', when in Tinguely's ownership, did not dispose it towards heritability either. As the project conservators noted:

The machine had to travel to several exhibitions; during the periods in between it was parked in Tinguely's studio or, more probably, outside. Gismo therefore suffered a great deal, on top of the fact that it had always been somewhat rickety. To keep it in working order, Tinguely constantly had to straighten or repair different elements [...] As a result, the work's appearance, movements and sounds gradually changed [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 27].

Yet the fact that the artist sold the piece to the Stedelijk suggests that he did aspire to its being so. The work's second life 'phase' commenced with its entry into their collection in 1974. Yet any assurance regarding its fitness and care was 'rudely interrupted' by a handling accident in 1980, which initiated a third life, characterised by 'ad hoc repairs.'

In the 1993 project, in deciding which of those various 'lives' they should aim any restorative treatment at, the balance of the question rested with the original sounds and movements of the piece along with its appearance. Yet, with a lack of documentation, compounded by the artist's own modifications, this would prove impossible. Ultimately, the conservators determined its 1974 appearance as that to which Gismo should be restored.

[...] the machine's movements and sounds had to be maintained along with its appearance. But in what condition? Its authentic 1960 state? When one reduces Gismo to specific life phases, it is apparent that it was given a new look prior to 1974 and the most drastic changes were carried out by the artist himself. Conservation ethics disallow major interventions

to return a work to its original form. Besides, this would be impossible: Gismo has reached a certain age [Hummelen and Sillé, 1999, p. 27].

The Stedelijk acquired Mario Merz's **Citta Irreale** (1968) [Plate 32] in 1969 when the work was only a year old. The work consists of a triangular metal framework that stands proud of the wall. Around the frame, Merz attached plastic gauze sheeting to which he then applied an uneven layer of warm yellow wax. On the gauze, he fastened several neon components: white lettering spelling 'citta irreale', and two blue lines that fall from the lettering. At the time that the work was acquired, neon was a new material, of which very little was known in terms of its longevity and durability. All of the neon tubes have been substituted over subsequent years. The two blue tubes were 'broken, repaired and replaced by 1974,' and replacements were made for the white lettering as a precaution [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 69]. The original white neon tubes were stored, the blue neon tubes lost. In assessing its condition, the working group noted that the plastic gauze also seemed somewhat precarious in its attachment to the frame, and also in respect of the wax adhered to its surface.

Merz had made the work when in Paris, and, as Lydia Beerkens related, loaned it to the Stedelijk for an exhibition entitled *Op Losse Schroeven (Square Pegs in a Round Hole)* [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 67]. Another work, which the Stedelijk sought for the show, was refused for acquisition on the grounds that it was not in fit condition, suggesting that even very early in their creation, Merz's works raised issues about their physical endurance. Even at that point, there appeared to be some indeterminacy about the exact material nature of

**Citta Irreale.** As Beerkens continued, the dimensions that the lending gallery cited on the loan contract appeared to be at odds with the physical reality of the work as it was installed in the show [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 68]. In relation to the care and treatment of the piece, Beerkens suggested that **Citta Irreale** offered 'no ethical drawbacks.' Fortunately, in this case, **Citta Irreale** was photographed when exhibited in 1969. On the basis of those photographs, the conservators were able to discern discrepancies in the way that the piece was recently being installed. Returning the work to its original configuration was still possible despite the increased embrittlement of the wax surface. As Beerkens noted, 'it would be in line with restoration ethics to return the flap of gauze to its original position, as this intervention may be carried out without affecting the material' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 71].

Importantly, in her evaluation of the project, conservator Tineke Reijnders referred to the project's overall approach as one of 'material perfectionism'. As the two case studies above demonstrate, the original material condition and configuration of each artwork remained the primary reference point and value. Pertinently to this point, the selection of pilot studies did not incorporate video or large-scale installations, and were all fairly discrete artworks. Certainly by the early stages of the project – 1994 and 1995 – collections would have been acquiring in those very categories. Nor did the selection include really up to the minute acquisitions where the issues of documentation are unfolding. Sillé did comment upon the former of these, and implied that it was not for want of invitation: 'two significant categories of modern art were not covered in this survey – installations and video – for the simple reason that no representative

works were submitted.’ She added that that imbalance was in some measure addressed by lectures given at the much broader based conference that followed the project [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 15].

Appropriately, Reijinder could reflect with hindsight that those very categories – video and installation – might not have benefited from the project’s ‘material perfectionism’, requiring instead a ‘material detachment’ on the part of conservators. She stated:

Young artists in the nineties store their work in boxes while an artist like Christian Boltanski calls his installations ‘scores’ and allows museums the freedom to replace all the parts and adjust the size of the work according to the space [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p.153].

Reijinder’s is a key point, and brings to ahead the vital issue that informs the reluctance of parties and individuals such as Fredrick Leen, but has inspired others such as Jon Ippolito: material detachment. Existing procedures and values rooted in a notion of ‘perfectionism’ can be extended towards non-traditional artworks, but clearly only to a point. As I have previously noted in this chapter, Ippolito has argued that the issues of vulnerability that non-traditional artworks present clearly require that museums reappraise, or to use my term, ‘foreignise’, their existing domestic practices of care: ‘The opportunity [...] is to craft a new collecting paradigm that is as radical as the art it hopes to preserve. *The choice is ours: do we jettison our paradigm? Or our art?*’ [Ippolito, 2001, np] (Italics mine). I argue, with Ippolito, that such reappraisal is necessary, and that what it must entail is a kind of thinking that will involve taking those pre-existing procedures ‘towards’ the artworks.

## 2.7. Shifting Perspective

At this point, I return to the link I have established in the introduction to this chapter between conservation and translation practice, and those two characterisations that I placed upon recent and current approaches taken by museums with regard to the conservation of contemporary art: the 'domesticating' and the 'foreignising'. I elaborate that link and those characterisations further here with the reappraisal that Ippolito calls for in mind.

The analogy I draw between conservation and translation practices holds on several levels. Firstly, both constitute 'perpetuative' forms of action upon a pre-existing and primary work of an author or artist. As forms of action, they are subsequent and extra to the 'original' creative act. Like the literary text, the original artwork is *acted upon* at stages removed from its 'point of origin'. In that respect, consideration of the original's 'authority' is central to both practices. Furthermore, each can be framed within larger appropriating or assimilating gestures. Insofar as Literary translation typically assimilates a text from one culture into another (the target culture), museum conservation assimilates artworks to museum culture and languages of perpetuity. Therefore, they are both rooted in a notion of perpetuation that is bound up with 'domestication', of bringing the original (the object or text) into one's spatial, cultural or temporal frame. F. Cramer has noted: 'even the best museum can only present objects taken out of their context, in location, in time, in culture'<sup>46</sup>. In doing so the museum can be said to 'enculturate' the object to its own



‘domestic’ context, re-inscribing it according to its own hierarchies of status, location and values.

I suggest, however, that it is not simply in their nature as gestures that mutuality between conservation and translation exists, but in the concerns that each as evolving disciplines has faced, and in the ethical frameworks and values that each has subsequently developed. My reasons for bringing these mutualities to bear in the context of this chapter rests with recent trends within Literary Translation Studies, which do not yet have their corollary within conservation. As I proceed to outline, a cross-fertilisation of recent scholarship would, I feel, prove timely for museums curators, and conservators in particular, in relation to strategies regarding non-traditional artworks.

To recap: ‘foreignising’ and ‘domesticating’ tendencies within translation were first broadly defined as early as 1813 in a lecture delivered by German translator Friedrich Schleiermacher. In that lecture he noted:

There are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him [Lefevere, 1992, p. 74].

Strategies that seek to bring the care of non-traditional artworks towards pre-existing museum procedures and resources, I equated to Schleiermacher’s second, ‘domesticating’ tendency to ‘leave the reader’ or recipient culture in ‘peace’ and moving the author and his/her product towards its values. Attitudes such as Ippolito’s, I likened to the ‘foreignising’ tendency that Schleiermacher

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<sup>46</sup> Cramer, F. (1996), ‘Durability and Change: A Biochemist’s View’, in: Krumbein, W.E. (ed.), *Durability and Change: the Science, Responsibility, and Cost of Sustaining Cultural Heritage*, Chichester, New York: John Wiley, pp. 23-24.

proposed, insofar as Ippolito's involves taking those pre-existing procedures 'towards' the artworks, and so leaving the artwork 'in peace' and moving the recipient culture in its direction.

Of those two poles that Schleiermacher delineated, the latter – leaving the reader in peace and moving the author towards him – has held ascendancy in translation practice. I argue that, similarly, a 'domesticating' tendency has held sway historically in museum conservation practice too<sup>47</sup>. Early translations reveal basic cultural assumptions, for example, regarding the superiority of the 'domestic language' undermined any authority on the part of the 'foreign' original [Schulte and Biguenet (eds.), 1992, p. 2], to the effect that the 'foreign' original was not safe-guarded. It was only later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that translation as a practice began to conceive other languages as 'equals', and began to move towards the 'original' text. It is at this point, that a new respect or responsibility towards the foreign in the 'original source language text emerges', and which can be understood within a large cultural move. As with conservation practice, the 'original' gains authority. As Hugo Friedrich has suggested 'all the power is generated by the original.' The original, he continues, 'has to become visible.'

Where the original becomes increasingly visible, the translator as mediator becomes increasingly invisible. Friedrich noted that 'if we follow the premise that all power comes from the original, then we must also accept the notion that

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<sup>47</sup> For discussions regarding the early development of Conservation ethics, see Stanley Price, Nicholas, Kirby Talley Jr., M., and Melucco Vaccaro, Alessandro (eds.) (1996), *Historical and*

stylistic features of the translation should conform to those of the original.' This is most clearly spelt out by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in his *Translations* (1819), where he distinguishes between his three epochs of translation [Schulte & Biguenet, 1992, p. 63]. The first 'acquaints us with the foreign country in our own terms.' With the second, the translator 'endeavours to transport himself into the foreign situation but actually only appropriates the foreign idea and represents it as his own.' The third (and final) seeks to 'achieve perfect identity with the original, so that the one does not exist instead of the other but in the other's place.' Of this stage, he concludes:

A translation that attempts to identify itself with the original ultimately comes close to an interlinear version and greatly facilitates our understanding of the original. We are led, yes, compelled as it were, back to the source text: the circle within which the approximation of the foreign and the familiar, the known and the unknown, constantly move, is finally complete [Schulte and Biguenet, 1992, p. 63].

In dealing with this notion of the authority of the original, and its relation to the translated text, that the language of translation practice comes close to that of conservation. In particular, in his text, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*<sup>48</sup>, Lawrence Venuti has written convincingly about the desirability, historically, of the translator's 'invisibility', a requirement that transfers almost unproblematically to the conservator. Primarily, the invisibility of the translator is desirable in order to safeguard the legibility of the original. The translator or conservator must naturalise or defer their practice to the object. Venuti himself refers to theorist Eugene Nida who championed a translation of dynamic

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*Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, Los Angeles, California: The Getty Conservation Institute.

<sup>48</sup> Venuti, Lawrence (1995), *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London and New York: Routledge.

equivalence' that would aim 'at complete naturalness of expression'<sup>49</sup>. In elaborating his 'principle of equivalent effect', Nida noted that 'the relationship between the receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message' [Venuti, 2000, p. 129]. As Venuti clarifies, such an 'equivalent effect' in the target language culture depends upon accuracy. Yet, as he continues, accuracy can be no more than illusion however:

Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work "invisible", producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously makes its status as illusion: the translated text seems "natural" i.e. not translated [Venuti, 1995, p. 5].

The same can be said of conservation, which does harbour a concern to maintain for future audiences or 'receptors' as far as possible a viewing experience as close to the 'original' as it is able. In addition to accuracy, the notions of transparency and fluency are vital. Venuti quotes Norman Shapiro, who stated that:

I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that its there when there are little imperfections--scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn't be any. It should never call attention to itself [Venuti, 1995, p. 5].

Likewise, a good conservation treatment should never call attention to itself, or to its conservator.

Yet, a domesticating perspective does two things: in Venuti's words, it '*conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made*, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text' [Venuti, 1995, p. 2]

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<sup>49</sup> Nida, Eugene (1964) 'Principles of Correspondence' in Venuti, Lawrence (ed.) (2000), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 126-140.

(*Italics mine*). Similarly, for the conservator, the illusory effect of ‘fluency’ conceals the conditions (typically historical and often institutional) under which the treatment is carried out. Such concealment could, I argue, have considerably more violent effects for non-traditional artworks than the threat of compromise offered by Peter Osborne. Osborne acknowledged as much in *The Politics of Time*:

Dependent in its origins upon the physical proximity of the members of a community, and *kinship as a model of social power* its primary medium is not self-consciousness, but what [Theodore] Adorno describes as ‘the pre-given, unreflected and binding existence of social forms’ [Osborne, 1995, p. 127] (*Italics mine*).

For Venuti, the violence lies in:

The reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation and reception of texts. Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader [Venuti, 1995, p. 18]<sup>50</sup>.

In its positive light, as Venuti suggests, ‘translation can be considered the communication of a foreign text, but it is always a communication limited by its address to a specific reading audience’ [Venuti, 1995, p. 18].

The recent history of translation practice, and the attention it has turned to that ‘foreignising’ tendency that Schleiermacher first formalised, could, I put forward here, be instructive to conservation ethics vis-à-vis non-traditional artworks (significantly those comprising ‘new’ technology-base media). Venuti aspires to ‘a practice and theory of translation that resists dominant target-

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<sup>50</sup> Venuti, 1995, p. 18: ‘The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognisable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas.’

language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text' [Venuti, 1995, p. 23]. Currently, within the museum context, those 'dominant target-language cultural values' continue for the most part to be vested in a 'material perfectionism'. Venuti refers to translator Philip Lewis' notion of 'abusive fidelity', which 'acknowledges the abusive, equivocal relationship between the translation and the foreign text and eschews a fluent strategy in order to reproduce in the translation whatever features of the foreign text abuse or resist dominant cultural values in the source language' [Venuti, 1995, p. 24]. This 'abusive fidelity' has, I argue, applicability to the long-term care of non-traditional artworks and to the institutions that collect and care for them. The question is how to understand and perpetuate it as a reasonable commitment.

## 2.8. 'Abusive Fidelity': *The Variable Media Initiative*

I conclude this chapter by reviewing the *Variable Media Initiative*, organised by Jon Ippolito and John G. Hanhardt, Senior Curator of Film and Media Art at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2001 in relation to the collection there, and its resulting on-line *Variable Media Network* and publication *The Variable Media Approach: Permanence through Change*<sup>51</sup>. I read this umbrella of activities tentatively in light of Lewis' notion of 'abusive fidelity'. To reiterate, a 'foreignising' perspective in translation practice is one, as Phillip Lewis hopes, that will result in a text that 'values experimentation, tampers with usage,

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<sup>51</sup> Depocas, Alain, Jon Ippolito, and Caitlin Jones (eds.) (2003), *The Variable Media Approach: Permanence through Change*, Montreal and New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications and the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology. The address for the network is <http://www.variablemedia.net>, retrieved 05 02 2004.

seeks to match polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own'<sup>52</sup>. Venuti suggests that Lewis' strategy might best be called 'resistancy', 'not merely because it avoids fluency, but because it challenges the target-language culture even as it enacts its own ethnocentric violence on the foreign text' [Venuti, 1995, p. 24]. Moreover, what is vital is the following point as a goal: 'the notion of foreignization can alter the ways translations are *read* as well as produced' [Venuti, 1995, p. 24]. The *Variable Media Initiative* and *Network*, and the approach that they have sought to foster, do, I think, 'value experimentation' and look to *match* the pluralities of non-traditional artworks with its own. They also have a kind of 'resistancy' precisely insofar as their authoring institution – the Guggenheim – is challenging its own culture, as exemplified in its desire to seek 'permanence through change'.

The *Initiative* was developed to be 'an unconventional new preservation strategy' that would address questions of care in relation to specific works in collection, most especially 'its world-renowned collection of Conceptual, Minimalist, and video art.' Ippolito clearly puts forward the need for a 'paradigm shift', to re-envision preservation strategies away from traditional or 'default' procedures. What is required, he suggests, is a

paradigm based not on fixed objects stored in vaults, but on a fluid chain of events that can be recognised as an artwork with the help of a collecting institution like a museum. And central to that paradigm is the artist, and the artist's intent as to how their work should evolve over time [Ippolito, 2001, np].

Specifically, the Initiative was created in order to generate new strategies to accommodate a diversified constituency of artworks – such as those comprising

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<sup>52</sup> Lewis, Phillip, E. (1985), 'The Measure of Translation', in Venuti, L. (ed.) (2000) *The*

video, hardware, film, and the Internet - which, by the standards of existing procedures, would be considered too susceptible to vulnerability and loss. Specifically, it focused on artworks whose media and/or realisation were temporary, and which therefore had no permanent or fixed material substance or presence. It also incorporated Mark Napier's Internet art project **net.flag** (2002) which had only then just gone 'live' on the Guggenheim's website<sup>53</sup>.

Vitality, its 'foreignising' approach rests, I suggest, in the focus it has placed upon 'medium-independent behaviours' rather than material specificity. As Ippolito has discussed, the impetus at the Guggenheim to do so came with the realisation that

medium-specific pigeonholes were as transient as medium-specific artworks; as soon as video became obsolete, so would a video-based prescription for re-creating an artwork. Furthermore, as soon as another medium came along—which happens every ten minutes, it seems—we would have to add a new category [...] to circumvent this problem, we decided to explore medium-independent, mutually-compatible descriptions of each artwork, which we call behaviours<sup>54</sup>.

The 'behaviours' were generated from the selected case studies themselves through workshops carried out on each and then further elaborated in three sessions for the conference *Preserving the Immaterial* (March 2001). From those four workshops, three 'medium independent behaviours' were identified: 'reproducible', 'performative' and 'interactive and duplicable'. In the

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*Translation Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 270.

<sup>53</sup> Since the inception of the *Variable Media Initiative*, the Guggenheim has also commissioned and acquired another web-based artwork, **Unfolding Object** (2002) by John F. Simon Jr.

<sup>54</sup> Ippolito, Jon (2003), 'Accommodating the Unpredictable: The Variable Media Questionnaire', in Depocas, Alain, Jon Ippolito, and Caitlin Jones (eds.) (2003), *The Variable Media Approach: Permanence through Change*, Montreal and New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications and the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, p. 47.



intervening period since, another two have subsequently been added: ‘encoded’ and ‘networked’<sup>55</sup>. I briefly summarise the first three here in turn:

Artworks with ‘reproducible behaviours’ are those works:

- that are in reproducible media such as video, film, audio;
- or where reproduction results in a change to, or loss of, quality.

Artworks with ‘performative behaviours’ include those works that

- ‘need to have some aspect of their process documented if that behaviour of the work is to be preserved;’
- are ‘the kind of performance that we’re used to thinking of as performance,’ i.e. theatrical or dance;
- or prompt questions about numbers and constitution of cast; props, set and costume; instructions, score or script.

Artworks with ‘interactive and duplicable behaviours’ encompass those that

- can be interacted with’ in the form of a material or location or set of hardware;
- or ‘whose media can be duplicated, in the sense of automatically cloned with no loss of quality from one copy to another.’

Regarding the latter, participation by the viewer of course introduces possible removal, wear and tear or modification introduces the matter of replenishment, and there is the assumption that the work will change through subsequent installations.

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Encoded’ and ‘networked’ have been introduced to the list of behaviours since 2003.

In response to these behaviours, the VMI proposed four strategies, which embrace the more conventional to the less:

#### Storage

- The most conservative collecting strategy to store the work physically, whether that means mothballing dedicated equipment or archiving digital files on disk.
- The major disadvantage of storing obsolescent materials is that the artwork will expire once these ephemeral materials cease to function.

#### Emulation

- To emulate a work is to devise a way of imitating the original look of the piece by completely different means.
- Possible disadvantages of emulation include prohibitive expensive and inconsistency with the artist's intent..

#### Migration

- To migrate an artwork involves upgrading equipment and source material.
- The major disadvantage of migration is the original appearance of the artwork will probably change in its new medium.

#### Reinterpretation

- The most radical preservation strategy is to reinterpret the work each time it is re-created.
- Reinterpretation is a dangerous technique when not warranted by the artist, but it may be the only way to re-create performance, installation, or networked art designed to vary with context

The *Initiative* then operates by matching ‘behaviours’ that that it has identified in an artwork to particular ‘strategies.’ The match is produced in consultation between the artist, or representatives of the artist, and institutional representatives, and in some cases, different aspects of a single work may require several strategies, or a hybrid of two or more of them. The artist assists in mapping the strategies over the behaviours that constitute a given artwork, in order that it may endure in a form that respects the integrity of the work’s meaning.

To illustrate that interface in action, I refer in particular to **Untitled (Public Opinion)** 1991 [Plate 33] by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. In this instance, the artist is no longer alive to contribute to the discussion. The work was acquired shortly after its creation in 1991, within Gonzales-Torres’ lifetime (the artist died in 1996). Those discussing the artwork included Andrea Rosen, one of his executors, who worked closely with the artist during his lifetime, and Nancy Spector (the chief curator of contemporary art at the Guggenheim), who also had a personal acquaintance with the artist and an certain involvement with his ideas. Both present Gonzales-Torres as an artist who worked in a manner that was both ‘open ended and specific’, whose working methods undermine the possibility of fixing or pinning down meaning.

In terms of behaviour, the work is primarily characterised as ‘interactive and duplicable’. It comprises a pile (of a weight typically around 700lbs) of small sweets that the visitor is invited to take away. Originally, Spector and Rosen suggest, the work was installed as a rectangle on the floor rather than a pile. Diminishment is built into the very meaning of the piece. It would have to be

refreshed throughout the installation with fresh supplies of the sweets. The physical component is, therefore, portable and removable. Indeed, the work is not acquired as a 'physical form', but rather what is acquired is the 'right of ownership'.

The Guggenheim's is just one of several such installations that Felix-Gonzales made. With each, his choice of sweet differed, but was typically specific. In the case of the Guggenheim piece, the artist selected cellophane wrapped licorice sweets. Regarding the specificity of the sweet brand itself, Spector noted that:

The licorice specifically had to be shaped like a missile, because the piece was made during the Gulf War crisis [...] This was during the height of patriotism in the country and Felix made a number of works that responded sort of perjoratively to the kind of hype going on...<sup>56</sup>

Such specificity gives rise to certain questions: what occurs when that particular brand and flavour is not longer available in that shape or wrapper? If the work is travelling abroad, do the curators have to use American candy? Could the work be shown in more than one place at once, so that, theoretically, versions could be simultaneously exhibited in Spain and Australia, using 'Spanish' and 'Australian' sweets?

As Nancy Spector confessed, the work was acquired 'without really at that time thinking through the implications of storage and replenishment and refabrication to anywhere the extent that we're doing now.' Moreover, **Untitled (Public Opinion)** was not installed till 1995. The component of the work makes storage

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<sup>56</sup> Nancy Spector contributed to case study discussion group on Gonzales -Torres' installation as part of the *Preserving the Immaterial* conference on variable media, held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 30 and 31 03 2001, retrieved 20 04 2002 and downloaded from [www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var\\_pre\\_index.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_index.html).

as strategy difficult. Sweets decay over time and attract insects. However, storage was a strategy that Ippolito suggests the Guggenheim pursued ‘inadvertantly’:

I think we just ordered so much for a particular session. You know, you never know how much viewers are gonna take right? So you usually order a certain amount, then you realise you’re running out and you have to order another [...] so you end up with boxes and boxes left over [Ippolito, 2001, np].

A loaning institution in California where they were unable to source the sweet in the same wrapper pursued emulation, in the sense of making it look the same from different means:

They added, in a combination, some yellow candies and some blue candies to make, in effect, a yellow and blue candy spill---even though, of course the candies were totally different flavours and types. That was their solution to the problem of the obsolescence of the original yellow and blue wrapping.

What about the most radical of strategies, reinterpretation, which becomes entirely more likely given the nature of the work and, indeed, the subsequent death of the artist? Clearly, however, in the absence of the artist all that can be achieved is an approximation. This, in itself, would seem to be consistent with Gonzalez-Torres’ own approach.

The Guggenheim’s *Initiative* has attracted support from The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology. A proviso of that support has been that it require the Guggenheim to make ‘an actual emulation test case to preserve a digital work’ [Depocas et. al., 2003, p. 5]. In this vein, *Variable Media* activities have also led the Guggenheim to fulfil Venuti’s aspiration that a ‘notion of foreignisation’ could alter the way that translations are ‘read’ as well as ‘produced’. As of March 2004, the Guggenheim has opened a public

exhibition entitled *Seeing Double*<sup>57</sup>, in which original works and their 'emulations' will be shown together. In conclusion, the Guggenheim's *Variable Media Initiative* and *Network* are the first to fully accept, acknowledge and action the implications of acquiring non-traditional artworks for both artwork and institution. Vitally, it has recognised that the notion of 'reasonable commitment', and what it itself as an institution is able to do, is not fixed, that it cannot and should not be, but that it has to re-negotiate how it is able to respond and continue to respond to contemporary artistic practice. The extent to which other museum collections are able to emulate the Guggenheim, how far *Variable Media* procedures can be applied by museums, or to a defined and varied community such the UK regional museum sector, I address in the next chapter.

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<sup>57</sup> For information on the *Seeing Double* exhibition, which ran from 19 March – 16 May 2004, and the day symposium which ran on May 8, see <http://www.variablemedia.net/e/seeingdouble/home.html>, retrieved 20 06 2004.

### Chapter Three – Variable Media/Variable Museums: The Need to Network

### 3.1. Introduction

As its title suggests, in this chapter, I return my focus back to British regional collections. I put forward that they have, amongst them, their own quality of ‘variability’ – that they are a ‘variable’ sector – and I ask how far they are able to commit to the long-term care of non-traditional artworks in view of their current and future resource levels. As often as not, for those larger national and international institutions with greater experience in housing non-traditional artworks, that capacity is presumed, and may include specialist expertise, as well as general competence in view of the broad range of works they may hold. Where a regional collection introduces non-traditional artworks, the question of what is possible needs careful and specific review, often against a limited and unchanging infrastructure. For instance, in its 1998 *Collecting Policy*<sup>1</sup>, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery validated the strategic acquisition of contemporary artworks, stating that:

Contemporary collecting secures representation of material which may be unavailable or unaffordable in years to come. It also permits contemporary recording of events, tastes, influences and trends, the wider significance of which may not be apparent in the short term [Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1998, p. 7, 7.2.].

Indeed, its policy noted that the Museums and Art Gallery would dedicate 25% of its purchase funds (which constitute 25% of the gallery’s overall funding) to contemporary acquisitions [Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1998, p. 24, 3.1.2.]. Though specifically interested in contemporary painting, the policy did include for possible consideration artworks using ‘unconventional media e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1998), *Collecting Policy*, Birmingham: Birmingham City Council.



CD ROM and installation-based' [Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1998, p. 24, 3.1.9.].

Yet, in line with many regional galleries, Birmingham issued, within its 'general guidelines', the following proviso with regard to its own capacities:

Decisions on accepting material for the permanent collections will take into account the resource implications of caring for this material in perpetuity. Costs of acquisition methods, storage, conservation etc., availability of advice from consultants and storage space, prevailing exhibition policy and potential museum usage of each item will be taken into consideration in all acquisition decisions [Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1998, p. 5, 4.7.].

In my *Introduction*, I referred to Simon Knell, who has noted that many 'curators rarely seem to think of the life expectancy of objects in finite terms, few of the accountants or politicians who fund their activities have plans which extend beyond five years'<sup>2</sup>. However, I suggest that few regional curators would feel that they could responsibly ignore the determinations of those 'accountants' or 'politicians'.

Suffice it to say, a regional museum's limits of responsible care or 'resource implications' are by necessity defined with a broad brush, and they will differ from one institution to the next. Where one is able to accommodate a work, another may not feel that they can, or will be able to, provide responsible care. Indeed, what separates those sentiments is often subject to very fine distinction. Here I briefly look at three examples – a large complex installation, a work that 'exists' as a set of instructions, and 16 mm film – that highlight those distinctions.

### 3.2. Three Cases

The first example that I raise is Christine Borland's multiple part installation **L'Homme Double** (1997) [Plate 34]. I refer to it primarily because it was a potential acquisition that Edinburgh's Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art explored, but which they did not proceed with. I feel, therefore, that it sets an interesting benchmark for regional collections with regard to what a collection of national standing feels they are able and not able to commit to.

**L'Homme Double** comprises six portrait busts of the Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, who conducted eugenics research on prisoners at Auschwitz concentration camp during the Second World War. Despite eyewitness accounts, Mengele's actual appearance has always been subject to speculation, compounded by his ability to 'vanish' after the war and evade capture. Borland did not produce the busts of the reputedly handsome doctor herself, but commissioned them from six different portrait artists, all of whom were Scottish. Some were friends of the artist; others were professionals that she found through advertisements<sup>3</sup>. To each of the portrait artists, she gave two black and white photographs of Mengele, one taken in profile and one from the front, and several written descriptions. Borland's brief to the artists was quite

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<sup>2</sup> Knell, Simon J. (1994) *Care of Collections*, Leicester Reader in Museums Studies, London and New York: Routledge, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison, and Tina Fiske (2002), *Personal Interview with Christine Borland*, Artist, Glasgow, 10 01 2002. Borland began thinking about this piece whilst researching in the Anatomy department in Munster. Whilst working in that institution, she had come across busts of different ethnic types dating to the time of the Second World War, which may have served as part of Nazi eugenics experimentation. With this project, she subverts the production of those busts on numerous levels.

general. She gave each of them exactly the same information, but asked them to produce their own 'interpretative' representations of him. The busts were made from a recently available material called 'new clay.' The clay contains fibres that bind it, and which mean that it does not need to be fired. Borland has suggested that it is a material 'basically for hobbyists' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np], a connotation that is important to the work. Borland conceived that what the portraitists might produce from such low-grade or amateur materials could in fact constitute an 'ultimate portrait of evil' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np].

**L'Homme Double** is a key work in Borland's oeuvre. It draws on her long-standing interests in personal identity and anonymity, particularly in relation to the institutionalisation of the body enacted by medical disciplines such as genetics and forensics. Jonathan Jones refers to it as the artist's 'most devastating exposé of the limits of rational knowledge'<sup>4</sup>. The success of this particular installation, he suggests, lies 'in the way it mimes our historical experience of Nazi war criminals and the anti-climatic nature of tribunals on torture and genocide. The confessions are always inadequate' [Jones, 2001, p. 50].

The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art [SNGMA] expressed an interest in acquiring this work for their collection almost immediately that it was on display at Lisson Gallery, and, in looking to progress that interest, they commissioned a condition report on it from a freelance sculpture conservator<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, Jonathan (2001), 'Heroes and Villains', *Christine Borland, Progressive Disorder*, Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts Book Works, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> At the time, SNGMA did not have an in-house sculpture conservator. This is still the case at time of this writing.

The report flagged up several concerns that questioned the work as a reasonable commitment for SNGMA, and ultimately led to their withdrawing their interest in the piece as an acquisition. The chief cause for concern was the durability and condition of the clay heads. Once manipulated, new clay does not remain malleable. It hardens completely, and, of course, would require extreme care in handling and storage. Moreover, by the time the conservator examined the piece, several of the pale greyish busts appeared somewhat discoloured. The armature had started to rust within the busts, and was beginning to modify the colour of the clay. Of this, Borland noted: 'I didn't take enough notice of the instructions which said you shouldn't build any armature inside it' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np].

With the advice of the conservator, SNGMA explored criteria by which they felt they could acquire the work – by which, in effect, they could consider it 'acquirable' in view of the museum's conservation resources. Firstly, they enquired whether the busts could be cast in plaster, or materials approved by the conservators. Secondly, the conservators had recommended that the black and white xeroxes might be made into photographs at Borland's own expense. In failing to consider *why* Borland employed the clay, the conservator clearly did not recognise that its qualities may have held implications for the meaning of the work. However, Borland, presented the work as she did for very specific reasons. She selected the clay because it would involve no casting process, and would 'come straight from the hands of the sculptors' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np]. Furthermore, the low-level quality of the xeroxed documentation was equally deliberate, relating to the allusiveness of Mengele's identity. Therefore,

Borland rejected the museum's proposals. And, without a sculpture conservator on staff, SNGMA did not feel that their resources were congruent with the work's present and future conservation needs. As the freelance conservators that the SNGMA used in this instance took a specifically materials-based approach to the work, which was, perhaps, not entirely adequate, or necessary, they missed an opportunity to think about the installation and its components in terms of 'behaviours'<sup>6</sup>.

With the work's subsequent acquisition by a collection in Zurich, Borland produced a contract which stipulated that if any of the heads were damaged beyond repair, then the relevant sculptor could be commissioned to make another. Importantly, the contract also stipulated a procedure to be followed if one of the original six artists was no longer available, wherein the process could be repeated with another sculptor, so long as they fitted the characteristics of a professional portrait artist. In both scenarios, subsequent heads would, of course, be re-interpretations, distinct from the first and not replicas. This was to be tested, where the bust by Kenny Hunter was damaged when the installation was shown at a gallery in Portugal. Hunter undertook the commission again, but produced a fresh interpretation. For Borland, 'that's absolutely fine, part of the process [...] absolutely built into it' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np]. Hunter remade the second head without the use of metal armature. Although the result clearly looked 'fresher' than its first generation counterparts, the work was in

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<sup>6</sup> Unpublished transcripts of conference containing introduction by Jon Ippolito and group discussions at the *Preserving the Immaterial* conference on variable media, held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 30 and 31 March 2001, retrieved 20 04 2002 and downloaded from [www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var\\_pre\\_index.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_index.html).

fact more congruent with Borland's concept than the solutions suggested by the SNGMA.

The second case is Anya Gallaccio's **preserve (chateau)** (1995) [Plate 22], which the Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne acquired in 1995 from an exhibition at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London (through the CAS Special Collections pilot scheme). It is the only fresh flower installation by Gallaccio to be held currently by any British public collection<sup>7</sup>. It is a wall-mounted work, and is composed of 100 Gerbera daisies, which are placed under glass and left to decompose. It is a 'discrete' piece rather than a larger installation, and so its effects can be slightly more localised or contained within the exhibition space. The work is, moreover, entirely disposable, and has no permanent material constitution. It exists as a set of instructions to be realised as and when by the owner. What Towner took receipt of was a certificate of ownership, which conferred on them the 'right to construct **preserve (chateau)** according to the instructions'<sup>8</sup>. The work requires that the Towner be able to vouchsafe factors such as its re-installation in accordance with the artist's wishes, the availability of the particular flowers that Gallaccio specifies, and the management of its decay within the museum environment.

For the Towner, those considerations have been mediated by two factors germane to Anya Gallaccio's practice. Firstly, Gallaccio is known for her use of highly ephemeral materials such as flowers, ice and chocolate. She has made the

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<sup>7</sup> This was the case at the time of writing. Subsequently, the Tate have acquired **preserve (beauty)** (1991-2003). It comprises 2000 red gerbera daisies, placed under glass. It was presented to the Tate as a gift in 2004.

physical processes of decay the content of her work. Though they can be remade, each installation exists only temporarily. All her materials are generally discarded: she has strung up flowers which then wither and die, and has pasted walls with chocolate and left it to rot away. For Gallaccio, the process of decay is absolutely vital, constituting the work's 'life'. It is this 'life' that determines installation constraints. About her flower works, for instance, she has said:

every now and again, some of them make a kind of big puddle of...gloop comes out. So [...] you can't install them on carpet. But it washes off, so you can install it on concrete, you can install it on stone. Maybe not a really blond stone, but you can install it on stone<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, for Gallaccio, the process of decay opens up notions of duration, or the experience of time:

I suppose, because of things like the ice or the flowers, there is a sense of time, of real time. Whether you come at the beginning, or whether you come at the end, there is a sense of continuum. You understand that, hopefully, and I think it kind of encourages people to think beyond what they're actually physically with [Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np].

Secondly, Gallaccio has often proclaimed an aversion to the material posterity that museum institutions trade in. She has said:

Your work is a commodity. There is no way of separating yourself from the system... You can't escape it. You have to engage with it. I'm quite a demanding person, and so in a sense the work is. If you ask me to do an exhibition, or buy a piece of my work, that is not going to be a cushy option<sup>10</sup>.

However, where logistically possible, her work is generally repeatable and, therefore, 'possessable.' For Gallaccio, however, that ownership constitutes

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<sup>8</sup> Anya Gallaccio, Certificate of ownership, **preserve (chateau)** (1995), Towner Art Gallery.

<sup>9</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001n), *Personal Interview with Anya Gallaccio, Artist*, Tate Britain, Millbank, London, 14 12 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Bickers, Patricia (1996) 'Meltdown: interview with Anya Gallaccio', *Art Monthly*, 195, April, p. 7.

active engagement and transmission, not passive accommodation. She has tried to develop around her work

some kind of structure where there's some kind of interaction or engagement. But the consequence of that is that people don't have my work. The institution has not taken it on board. Things like the flower pieces, if you bought a flower work, you'd get a certificate, which has a set of instructions, which are very clear, photographs, the right to reproduce the work as many times as you wish, as long as there's only one in existence at any point. It's all quite clearly made out. You can change the flowers as often, or as little as you would like. So if you really, really can't bear to see the decay, you can clear it up if you have enough money, and have it all fresh. It's not my point, but...my idea was more about giving responsibility back to the collector, to the gallerist, to the other people. That it was a discussion, and it wasn't about this passive relationship between artist as this kind of eccentric creator that goes off, and is kind of patronised [...] it's more about a kind of communication and a conversation. And very much about trying to have a tension or this kind of visibility while I was alive, while I'm active<sup>11</sup> [Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np].

Gallaccio made her first flower piece, **Fleur**, in 1991 for a photographic project for the publication, 'Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art'<sup>12</sup>. She noted, 'I thought I could cheat and fake a whole 'room' of flowers. I painstakingly ripped up this gypsophilia – only two or three millimetres across – and arranged it all on a piece of paper. To me it was like a maquette' [Bickers, 1996, p. 7]. Gallaccio was invited to show **Fleur** at the 1991 Art Fair at Kensington. This introduced the notion of scale, of the prestige gallery space,

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<sup>11</sup> Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np. In that interview, Gallaccio also suggested:

You know, in the sense that some of my contemporaries, quite a lot of my contemporaries, who make much more conventional work, they don't have...the collector or whoever doesn't have to have any dealing with the artist or even the object. You can buy it, have it in a cupboard, and sell it straight on. They accrue value the same way that property, houses do [...] the people who supported my work had to invest in me, support me intellectually. If they wanted their investment to increase, they had to engage with my practice in the way that they had to talk positively about it to other people. And so then their investment would increase. So that the whole thing, I kind of thought, it was much more holistic and active and not so parasitic. But...

<sup>12</sup> Renton, Andrew and Gillick, Liam (eds.) (1991), *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art*, London: Thames and Hudson.



and also working in a space where other works would be placed. For Galluccio, these all necessitated considerable adjustments to her typical way of working. Importantly, she refers to **Fleur** as a 'very quiet piece' [Bickers, 1996, p. 6].

To bring some kind of 'framing device' to the work, she evolved the mode of display using glass: 'eventually, I reduced it down to some 9000 narcissi, pressed between two panes of glass. **preserve (cheerfulness)** was the first piece I made like that' [Bickers, 1996, p. 6]. Galluccio was attracted to the paradox between putting images, materials or objects under glass to 'protect' them, and the fact that the glass speeded up the decay of the flowers:

I liked the fact, especially in the sunflower piece **preserve (sunflower)**, 1991, the next piece I did, that as in the lost-wax process, the glass which was supposed to protect and preserve the flowers actually accelerated their decomposition [Bickers, 1996, p. 7]

With her Gerbera or sunflower pieces, Galluccio *aggravates* the decomposition process by soaking the flowers at length prior to their installation under glass. Though there are peculiarities specific to the different varieties of flowers that she selects, they follow a general process that can be mapped out where:

- the flowers breathe out the liquid onto the glass
- the glass steams up, goes cloudy and produces condensation
- the condensation is soaked back into the flowers
- this causes them to decompose
- activity varies between those flowers at the margins (which dry out) and those in the centre (which turn to sludge)
- the whole develops a 'coat' of white fur

Such implications, she is aware, make these works problematic for collections. As Gallaccio has noted, 'museums seem to be slightly more comfortable with the idea that they have a crate to put into storage and they don't mind that they're paying a lot of money to store this thing. Whereas my things was much more like, you can keep the piece of glass in storage if you want to but I'm perfectly happy for you to spend 100 quid on a piece of glass' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np].

Yet, she is highly attuned to the fact that collections need to form their own procedures for the re-installation of the work to her requirements, in the face of factors that can influence their ability to do so. These have increasingly begun to inform her own choice of materials for instance. As she continued, 'I chose mostly gerberas, which you can get all the year round. At certain points of the year they're more expensive than others, so if you want to install it for Valentine's Day or around Christmas, you know, it would cost you a lot more than it would two or three weeks earlier or later' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np]. Indeed, her awareness and support of a collection's needs has, over the years, resolved itself in her certification, which has evolved away from simple allocation of ownership and installation instructions<sup>13</sup>:

I'm not averse to people doing anything that they can to make it easier for them to understand how to install the work. Or even, in a way, to slightly

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<sup>13</sup> Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np. Gallaccio noted that:

initially, the certificates were a photograph with a text on the back, which was a kind of legal document so that the piece of paper confirmed ownership. So that if somebody had a bit of glass with some flowers, they couldn't sell that. It's a bit of paper and instructions. But the problem was, to fit all of that, really, on a side of A4, was quite difficult and quite clumsy [...] I started looking more at like recipe books and things like that. So I've kind of come up with a format at the moment, which is more a bit like an exercise book, which is a document, which is a series of pages that are all grouped in together, so they can't be separated. But there's space within that for the owner of the work to...there's a pocket at the back and there's blank pages to actually encourage them to write their own notes or stick photographs in or to add things...

amend my instructions, [...] I have quite specific instructions about how I lay the flowers down. But that's just how it suits me [...] it's a bit like cooking: as long as it looks the same at the end, and you don't actually add anything else - like glue the flowers in or anything - as long as conceptually it's the same, then I'm reasonably flexible [...] at least it's never been tested yet. We shall see in the future. As long as it's done in the spirit that I intended, I imagine that things will slightly be adapted. It's quite interesting watching often people in institutions, how timid they are. They don't want that responsibility; they don't want to interpret anything at all. And so I'm actually in the process at the moment of changing my certificates [Bracker and Fiske, 2001n, np].

Towner first displayed **preserve: chateau** in the summer 1997 as part of their exhibition, *A Case For A Collection: New work for the Towner Collection by Contemporary Artists*, and they have shown the work subsequently more three times<sup>14</sup>. On the first occasion, Gallaccio travelled down and invited them to make a video of her installing the work, although the Towner did not do so<sup>15</sup>. The most recent installation of **preserve: chateau** for the Towner's *Freeze....* exhibition was, as Sarah Blessington noted at the time, 'the longest we've ever had it on display for'<sup>16</sup>. For that installation, which ran from November through to April, the original 100 Gerbera remained behind glass for the entire duration. The decay of the flowers depends on the environmental conditions of the space it is displayed in, and the weather conditions. The mild weather in November initiated the process of decay quite quickly, within two or three days of installation. As Blessington remarked in January 2003, midpoint in the installation:

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<sup>14</sup> *Telling Tales* ran from 15 November 1997-18 January 1998; *60s/90s: Two Decades of Art and Culture* was on show from 28 August-31 October 1999, and *Freeze...* showed from November 2002-March 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Gallaccio noted her invitation whilst being interviewed. Sarah Blessington, art administrator at Towner Art Gallery later confirmed that they did not in fact make the video. Correspondence between Sarah Blessington art administrator, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, and author, 16 01 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Op.cit.

At the moment, despite the fact that it is decaying so quickly, there is quite a lot going on, if you know what I mean. It still has some of what we call its white fur coat, this is the mould that covers the flowers in the early stages of decay, it looks a bit like dandelion clock fluff. The petals of the flowers are 'etching' themselves to the glass and there is mildew on the wall behind. There are also dark brown drip marks on the walls below the work. The cold weather last week seems to have slowed the process down a bit<sup>17</sup>.

The third example I raise relates to a specific medium, 16mm film, and its greater or lesser acceptability to a range of British public collections. The Tate holds several works on 16mm film stock, for instance, **Disappearance at Sea** (1997) [Plate 35], an anamorphic colour film by Tacita Dean. The key difficulty for most galleries is that analogue film stock, and its associated playback equipment, is subject to depletion and obsolescence over time. Those factors have caused many collections to demur over acquisition. New digital technologies do now present a range of possibilities that both artists and galleries are exploring.

For an artist such as Tacita Dean, transferring her films to a digital format is not acceptable. Dean continues to stipulate that her films can only be shown in public on 16mm format. Only that medium gives the specific visual and production values that she finds acceptable. For many regional galleries, such considerations are enough to deter them from acquiring any works in that format. The Towner Art Gallery is an exception insofar as they acquired one of Dean's films, **Bag of Air** (1995) [Plate 36], in 1996. Yet, Leeds City Art Gallery, keen also to represent Tacita Dean in their collection, did not feel able to commit to 16mm film, more particularly where the artist herself would not

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<sup>17</sup> Op.cit.

allow the footage to be transferred to a digital format for reasons of aesthetic preference. On this point, Corinne Miller, Head Curator at Leeds City Art Gallery, is unequivocal:

We could cope with reel to reel technology, because it is basically mechanical, but would it be possible to repair that or keep it going? It's the film itself in that case that's the problem, it's storing it, playing it for 8 hours ... and the cost of duplicating it...<sup>18</sup>.

Miller's caution is, perhaps, well founded. Even where the artist is more flexible on the issue of alternative formats, questions of cost, storage and expertise can seem prohibitive.

In 2000, however, Southampton City Art Gallery acquired **Spill** (2000) [Plate 37], a 16mm black and white film by Graham Gussin, which had been exhibited in the exhibition *Intelligence*<sup>19</sup> held at Tate that year. As Godfrey Worsdale, former curator there, noted:

The Tate were able to solve the problem by throwing a lot of money at it, so they bought this machine that cost tens of thousands of pounds I think, that was able to loop a reel to reel film, it was marvellous, it sounded terrific. Someone's told me subsequently that there's a cheaper version around, but I haven't investigated that. But I said to him: first off we haven't got a projector; I told him how much I admired the work, and I really wanted to buy it, and we agreed a price. And he said that the film could be sent to Hollywood and it can be hardened, therefore it will be able to be shown<sup>20</sup>.

Like the City Art Gallery in Leeds, Southampton would ideally seek a work that they could run for eight hours a day and it be no worse off for that. The gallery had, in fact, recently acquired an excellent quality Digital Versatile Disk [DVD] projector, and broached the issue of transfer to DVD with Gussin. Though he

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<sup>18</sup> Fiske, Tina (2002), *Personal Interview with Corinne Miller, Keeper of Fine Art, Leeds City Art Gallery*, 17 01 2002, Leeds.

<sup>19</sup> Button, Virginia and Charles Esche (2000), *Intelligence*, London: Tate. The exhibition ran from June to September 2000.

voiced concerns that it might then be a 'slightly different work', he approved the quality of the projector<sup>21</sup>. As Worsdale described:

We came to an agreement that we would buy the work with his permission to show it as a DVD projection, and he would provide us with a DVD copy, and a proper hardened film copy, and when ever possible we would endeavour to show it in the proper projection. If anyone asks us to lend it to them for a temporary exhibition, we would attach the same conditions to our loan [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

I selected the examples above because they open up the numerous questions non-traditional artworks pose for the acquiring (or dissenting) institutions.

Where can they look for advice or support in order to support and sustain such works in the longer term? Currently, the sources of advice, particularly for regional collections, tend to be ad hoc according to local circumstance. For instance, Birmingham's 'Collecting Policy' additionally stated that where it sought artworks on CD-Rom or installations, it would do so 'in consultation with local professional sources of expertise e.g. the Ikon Gallery' [Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1998, p. 24, 3.1.9.]. The Ikon Gallery is a highly respected contemporary art venue in Birmingham, subsidised by the Arts Council of England, which has an exemplary record in staging large-scale and new media artworks. However, it has no permanent collecting remit of its own.

I focus specifically in inter-institutional support between permanent collections, particularly with regard to the issues involved in conceiving long-term commitment. Where Brendan Flynn, curator of Fine Art at Birmingham Art

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<sup>20</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001p), *Personal Interview with Godfrey Worsdale, Curator, Southampton City Art Gallery*, 14 12 2001, Southampton.

<sup>21</sup> *Spill* is in fact listed on Southampton's online database as 'video':

[http://sccwww1.southampton.gov.uk/art/view\\_artwork.asp?acc\\_num=CAS2](http://sccwww1.southampton.gov.uk/art/view_artwork.asp?acc_num=CAS2) (Accessed 25 June 2003).

Gallery, noted that Birmingham had not acquired any installation or new media artworks, he did indicate that Southampton were active in that area of collecting<sup>22</sup>. Inter-institutional recognition exists, but what I address in this chapter is how to build profiles and connections.

### 3.3. Enabling Institutions

As I noted in *Chapter One*, at the *Collecting for the Future* seminar in 1996, the institutional participants (the Tate Gallery, the Arts Council Collection and Contemporary Art Society) acknowledged a ‘consensus’ with regard to the artists they seek to represent in their collections<sup>23</sup>. Yet, they recognised that each of their collections was ‘arrived at differently’. It is true to say, that those institutions hold a ‘consensus’ view with regard to issues of care in the form of certain values (such as the primacy of the artist’s intention and the need to document this fully). However, equally, differences in their discrete infrastructures ensure that those values are ‘arrived at differently.’

Indeed, the means and procedures by which they are able to realise those values do vary considerably. Where collections acquire video or film works on analogue formats, for instance, there are numerous possible Archival Master formats<sup>24</sup>, and they are faced with a myriad of choices that they must navigate according to their own resources, present and projected. The choices that

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<sup>22</sup> Personal correspondence between Brendan Flynn and author, 20 08 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Contemporary Art Society and Visual Art Galleries Association (1996), *Collecting for the Future*, seminar hosted at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, unpublished proceedings on tape.

<sup>24</sup> Beta SP (broadcast quality videotape); laser disk; VHS. These effectively date the works however. Arts Council have acquired the archival masters of video artworks on Beta SP since approximately 1997, but also now acquire on DVD.

collections do and can make vary greatly from institution to institution, or even within a single institution. The Tate holds Tacita Dean's **Disappearance at Sea** (1997) [Plate 35] on film format, and have internegatives, interpositives and sound negatives as the Archival Masters. Sarah Joyce, conservator at the Tate, has stated that they have not done a telecine of either of the 16mm films by Tacita Dean in their collection (i.e. transferring any visual and sound content from film stock to video or DVD) although they are likely do so in the future for research purposes only<sup>25</sup>. Likewise, Towner Art Gallery has not had **Bag of Air** (1995) [Plate 36] transferred onto another format. It has only been shown in its 16mm format and with the colour photograph, **Palais Jacques Coeur** (1995)<sup>26</sup>. Both of those works will have been acquired in view of different priorities and possibilities. The resource implications of the limited display potential of the 16mm stock (for conservation reasons) would, for example, have greater impact on a collection of the size of the Towner Art Gallery than for the Tate.

How far is a consensus of care procedure between collections possible, or desirable? In terms of what is possible, new digital technologies certainly offer greater potential for homogeneity of format across collections holding video, for instance, a consideration that would greatly facilitate ease of management and particularly the matter of inter-institutional loan. Increasingly with editioned video or sound works, artists' representatives can make works available on a single format [DVD, CD], where previously they may supply one institution

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<sup>25</sup> Personal correspondence between author and Sarah Joyce, 01 July 2003. She suggested that for **Fernsehturm**, exhibition copies from the internegatives are limited to 25 after which Tate must have a new Archival Master internegative produced from the Master (after which another 25 display prints may be produced from). Dean has stipulated that they be displayed as film, and not on Laser Disk or any digital format.

<sup>26</sup> Personal correspondence between author and Sarah Blessington, 16 01 2003.



with a master on Beta SP and another with a master on Laser Disk. Two editions of a 'single' work such as Tacita Dean's **Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty** (1997), a digitally recorded sound work on Compact Disk, are held in two separate collections – Leeds City Art Gallery and the British Council Collection – on the same format. However, those two editions of Dean's sound work will each be subject to discrete levels of resource, institutional procedures and programmes. Moreover, with regard to what is desirable, the distinct procedures and remits those collections have developed historically, and the sovereignty of each institution is, arguably, something to preserve from standardisation.

Currently, the Contemporary Art Society's 'Special Collections Scheme' and 'National Collecting Scheme' provide key frameworks through which regional galleries acquire non-traditional artworks. With their well-established gifting scheme, the CAS director and curator acquire artworks more generically for an as-yet-unspecified museum during an extended buying round (which typically lasts three or four years). The acquisitions are then assembled in a group show, and curators from the various regional galleries subscribers are then invited to make a case for the works that they would like to receive. Those collections do not, then, engage with possible issues of care in a primary sense, from an open, unfiltered field of practice. They will, however, do so in a more secondary capacity, from a pre-selected group of candidates. With the works acquired through the 'Special Collections Scheme', however, regional collections have had a real opportunity to assess their own capacities in the primary sense, though, again, in a qualified manner. Where the participant galleries make

acquisitions, the potential to compromise their collections is mitigated insofar as the CAS retain title on all acquisitions made for fifteen years.

A collection's ability to commit to non-traditional artworks is, I suggest, determined by the history of its formation, its substance, its temporal vision, location, size, programme, care infrastructure and funding. Currently, there are two collections types that accession non-traditional artworks in the UK. Firstly, the historical, permanently located collection, typified by the Tate. Secondly, there is the dedicated, permanently itinerant collection, typified by the Arts Council Collection. Most regional collections conform to the first, yet their resources are often more in line with the latter. Their needs, therefore, can cut across the two. Here, I elaborate the Tate and Arts Council as such types in further detail. Where, for collecting, there has been (and continues to be) an authorial power of three, with care this has hitherto been the authority of one: the Tate Gallery.

The Tate does, of course, have a clear mandate as the national collection of modern and contemporary art to provide expertise and advice to its counterparts throughout the country. As I explore more fully in the next section, regional collections have emulated aspects of its procedures. The Arts Council collection's close counterpart, the British Council Collection, has published on aspects of its domestic practices in texts such as *Art Abroad: Guidelines for the Display and Care of the British Council Collection*<sup>27</sup>. However, the Arts Council collection itself has not published its own expertise or procedures with

regard to the care and management of non-traditional contemporary artworks. I argue that it could valuably do so, where the issue of care arise under different constraints, priorities and conditions.

The Tate's procedures are inscribed by the fact that it is a collecting institution with a view of perpetuity that extends for hundreds of years, and permanent home of its own that geared towards this. It requires resources, expertise and procedures that are at once generic enough to serve a comprehensive historical and material range of artworks, but which also cover areas of specificity, such as painting, paper, and with the acquisition of non-traditional artworks, media such as video. In the wide-ranging constitution and needs of its collection, if not the size, it is an appropriate model for regional collections, which themselves historically have been formed with similarly broad remits. It is a key example of how to accommodate within a single institution both non-traditional and traditional artworks.

The Arts Council, by virtue of being a 'loan' collection, does not have a centralised 'domestic' environment in the same terms<sup>28</sup>, and was granted 'national' status only in the late 1980s<sup>29</sup>. There are currently few, if any, regional collections dedicated to new or recently made artworks exclusively. However, the Arts Council collection does bear characteristics that could prove

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<sup>27</sup> Eccles, Diana, Joanna Gutteridge, and Craig Henderson (2001), *Art Abroad: Guidelines for the Display and Care of The British Council Collection*, London: The British Council.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that as of 2003, the Arts Council Collection has established a storage base for its sculpture collection in the grounds of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, near Wakefield.

<sup>29</sup> The Arts Council Collection was designated national status in 1987, and its administration shifted to the Hayward Gallery on the Southbank in London.

instructive to regional collections that have no in-house conservation staff for instance.

With both the Tate and the Arts Council, their infrastructures approximate adequate reflections of their needs. For regional collections, this will generally not be the case. For example, within their overall operating costs, the Tate Gallery and Arts Council Collection both have dedicated conservation budgets, a factor that is not necessarily available to regional collections. The Tate Gallery's budget for conservation must stretch across the full historical range of works in the collection, from Pre-Raphaelite painting to installations containing materials such as tapioca or milk. Moreover, where the Tate does acquire video works, the initial costs of transfer are met as part of the acquisition price<sup>30</sup>.

Given the collecting remit of the Arts Council, and similarly the British Council, its budget is dedicated to modern and contemporary works. It typically has £8 000-10 000 per annum to spend on maintenance and care of the collection<sup>31</sup>. Roughly, the same figure serves the conservation work on the British Council Collection. In the financial year 1999/2000, they spent £10, 254 on the conservation of their permanent collection, about 10% of the grant-in-aid allocation for the collection<sup>32</sup>. Those budgets must extend across works in the broad scope of media represented in the collections.

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<sup>30</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison, and Tina Fiske (2001c), *Personal Interview with Jeremy Lewison, Director of Collections, Tate, Tate Britain, Millbank*, 13 12 2001. As Lewison noted: 'Routine conservation comes out of the Conservation budget. But we determined, when we went into buying film and video, that archiving was essentially part of the acquisition process, because if you didn't do it, the work would disappear.'

<sup>31</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001i), *Personal Interview with Diana Eccles, Collections Manager, British Council Collection*, 28 09 2001, London.

<sup>32</sup> Personal correspondence between Diana Eccles and author, 28 March 2003. I refer to the British Council Collection in this instance due to its similarities with Arts Council. In *Chapter*

The key difference is that where both the Tate and the Arts Council Collection have teams of highly trained technicians who handle and install the artworks, only the Tate has established in-house conservation departments with dedicated staff. Its studios have slowly evolved from the 1950s onwards (paintings in 1954, paper in 1978, sculpture in 1986 and then electronic media in 1992) in response to the growth of the collection. In its *Biennial Report* for 1998-2000, the Tate Gallery listed fifty-seven staff across six conservation departments including conservation science, painting, paper, sculpture, and frames<sup>33</sup>.

The two loan collections of the Arts Council and British Council do not have trained in-house conservation personnel. Both use regular freelance conservators for conservation treatments. Again, this reflects an emphasis on their status as 'working' collections rather than as arbiters of 'perpetuity'. The British Council does, however, have a panel of conservation advisors drawn from private and museums practice. Yet, both the Arts Council and British Council refer to the conservation departments at the Tate Gallery, and also on occasion those at the Victoria & Albert Museum. As Diana Eccles, the British Council Collections Manager, has described, 'we use quite a lot of people from the Tate, particularly from the Sculpture Department' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001i, np].

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*One*, I distanced it from the 'Triumvirate' of the Tate, ACC and CAS because its remit is geared not towards the British museums sector but to an international audience.

<sup>33</sup> Tate Gallery (2000), *Biennial Report 1998-2000*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2 vols., p. 51.

For regional collections, the Arts Council Collection's composite approach, its priorities and scale of operation is, perhaps, more attainable or relevant. Unlike the Tate, the Arts Council collection does not carry out pre-acquisition condition checks of artworks as standard. That procedure is more implicit and invested in the more amalgamated responsibilities of curator Isobel Johnstone. She would normally rely on her own judgement and experience in this area [Bracker and Fiske, 2001, np.]. Where the need arises, (perhaps in relation to work that has clearly ephemeral elements) they would enlist freelance conservators to provide that service.

Similarly, the Contemporary Art Society does not commission pre-acquisition condition reports on every object acquired as part of either their distribution scheme, or the 'Special Collections Scheme'. In terms of documenting their artworks post-acquisition, the Arts Council Collection have a database, and ask artists to specify formally their cleaning, storage and hanging preferences. Indeed, their approach to the care of non-traditional artworks embraces the artist more immediately. Where a work is damaged, they refer in the first instance, and where possible, back to the artist, and, with non-traditional artworks, often enlist the artist themselves to solve any material issues<sup>34</sup>. This is consistent with the ethos of the collection in financially supporting artists. As Johnstone notes, they typically approach the artist 'often to see whether they would be willing to repair it, at least advise [...] and we would pay them [...] because we like paying them...so we would pay an equivalent of a day's teaching'<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> This is less the case with paintings or more traditional sculptures, for which the Arts Council hire London-based private conservators such as Phil Young.

<sup>35</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001), *Personal Interview with Isobel Johnstone, Curator of Arts Council Collection*, 29 05 2001, London.

Regional collections must negotiate the limits set by their own distinct circumstances. The question is where along the axis between the two points that the Tate and Arts Council Collection define, regional collections could place themselves and assess their own needs. Currently, the Contemporary Art Society does not formally dispense maintenance and conservation expertise to its subscriber institutions. Informally, however, they have taken steps in this direction. Collections curator Mary Doyle did organise a visit to the Tate Gallery to meet Pip Laurenson, conservator for Electronic Media, in May 1999. On that occasion, around ten curators from the 'Special Collections Scheme' attended and discussed issues surrounding video/film storage and display<sup>36</sup>. Prior to this, the same group had undertaken a curatorial visit to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where curator Chrissie Isles gave a talk on their approaches to new media.

Yet, such connections (national and regional, and inter-regional) are not formally elaborated with a framework of their own. I suggest that within that community of subscribers, there is already a sufficiency of experience that needs only a framework for recognition. Southampton, Aberdeen, and Leeds City Art Galleries have, for twenty-five or more years, collected and accommodated non-traditional artworks. In this next section, I outline their experience in assessing a work's resource implications in view of their own

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<sup>36</sup> Personal correspondence between Mary Doyle, Collections Curator, Contemporary Art Society, and author, 04 07 2003.

considered circumstances, and locate them along the axis, at either end of which sit the Tate and the Arts Council Collection.

### **3. 4. Regional Provision**

Southampton, Leeds, and Aberdeen City Art Galleries all conform to the historical collection model exemplified by the Tate. Their position, however, is radically qualified, where, for instance, regional collections often cannot anticipate funding levels so far into the future. As the first two examples I outline suggest, with painting or more discrete sculpture, regional collections can be led more directly by Tate practice. With others, such as video or installation, they often need to be considerably more strategic with their acquisitions and care policies. This, I show to be the case with both Southampton and Leeds. With the third example that I outline, Aberdeen City Art Gallery, I take a slightly different tack. Where a collection's resources, even with regard to a single work, come under pressure (through change in or unavailability of certain materials for example), the options open to them can appear closer to the Arts Council/loan collection model. To illustrate, I refer to a recent instance where the Arts Council might have provided a useful contact for Aberdeen.

Southampton City Art Gallery is in a relatively favourable position compared with other local authority museums and galleries. They have a conservation department and collections management team in place. Southampton suffers



from storage and display pressures that can inhibit which artists and which media a curator can take an interest in<sup>37</sup>. As things stand, the collection is housed and displayed in a section of Southampton Civic Centre. It shares the building with a variety of other municipal functions. Part of the area allotted to the gallery is dedicated to temporary exhibitions. The rest is available for displays of the permanent collection, of which, consequently, the curators are only able to show between 5% and 10% at any one time.

As Godfrey Worsdale, curator at Southampton till 2002, has noted, ‘amongst the attributes of Southampton City Art Gallery, the conservation department occupies a uniquely important position’<sup>38</sup>. Conservation has occasionally been the explicit focus of displays such as *Take a Closer Look: The Conservation of a Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> Century Masterpiece* (2000)<sup>39</sup>. The examination, treatment, display, and subsequent publication were all facilitated by sponsorship, and by support from the National Gallery in London and the Conservation Science Department at Cardiff University. As such, Southampton stands as one of the few regional collections that can attract external funding for a conservation project that focuses on a single work. It does, moreover, participate in ‘The Southern Conservation Network’, which also includes the Textile Conservation Centre at Winchester, English Heritage Southern Region, West Dean College,

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<sup>37</sup> Worsdale suggested that he would have been interested in pursuing a work by installation artist Mike Nelson, whose work, he suggested, had ‘much about it that was desirable from a museum collecting point of view.’ However, as he continued, Nelson’s work is on a large scale – particularly any that would be considered ‘museum pieces’ and such pressures at storage and display space had at the date of the interview made it impossible.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, Rebecca, Ruger, Axel and Worsdale, Godfrey (2000), *Take a closer Look. The Conservation of a Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> Century Masterpiece*, Southampton: Southampton City Art Gallery, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> The exhibition ran from 14 March - 4 June 2000, and focused on the conservation department’s examination and treatment of *An Extensive Landscape* (c.1655) by Philips Koninck (1619-88).

and Hampshire County Museums Service (but does not include the regional agency). That group was formed to share ideas, information, research and facilities and in the future may explore the potential to offer services such as advice and materials testing to other museums and organisations<sup>40</sup>.

Consistently across the larger picture at regional level, a conservator often specialised in painting or paper will have to care for a collection of diverse artworks (historical and contemporary) drawn from across all media, conventional and unconventional. Despite their coverage in painting expertise, Southampton is no exception to this, particularly where their collection now accommodates video, 16mm film, monitors, and sculptures that incorporate a range of media including dental plaster, concrete and fresh ink. Typically, the conservation staff will, at the request of the curator, undertake a pre-acquisition condition check on a work. During his curatorship at Southampton, Worsdale suggested, 'I would not contemplate buying something that my conservators told me wouldn't be here in 10 years time or 20 years time.' He continued: 'If I find a work I will ask one of the conservation staff to go and examine it [...]. I'll ask them to go and look at paintings with huge confidence, and works on paper and pretty much any traditional sculpture materials, I'm confident' [Bracker & Fiske, 2001p, np]. Southampton has, moreover, pursued strong contacts within the museum conservation community. Throughout its history, the Gallery has been pro-active in cultivating relations with the national collections based in London, and has been facilitated in this by their proximity to the capital.

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<sup>40</sup> The website for the Southern Conservation Network can be accessed at

In *Chapter One*, I outlined Southampton's relationship specifically with the Tate in terms of acquisitions direction. Yet, how far is Southampton able to emulate the Tate's ability to make itself congruent to a particular work or media? On this matter, Worsdale referred to the acquisition of **Two Doo Voodoo** (1997) [Plate 38] by Chris Ofili into the Southampton collection, contemporaneously to the acquisition of **Double Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars** (1997) [Plate 39] by Tate. The Tate had expressed concern about the availability of the dung balls that function as 'feet', upon which Ofili's unframed canvas' usually sit, propped against the wall. The dung balls can also function as pictorial elements, attached to the front of the canvas. Ofili has specified that they must come specifically from African elephants. Typically, they are coated with resin and decorated with beading. The Tate was concerned at the pressure that the weight of the canvas and stretcher would exert on the balls over time. In that instance, Worsdale was able to say, 'if the Tate were confident then we should be all right to follow suit.'

Yet, in the case of a medium such as video, the matter is somewhat different. The Tate, for example, has used Laser Disk as the display format for its video art collection<sup>41</sup>. Southampton City Art Gallery did acquire one work; Douglas Gordon's video installation **Hysterical** (1995) [Plate 1], on Laser Disk, but this remains unique in their collection. For them, it did not prove to be a feasible choice. Worsdale has stated:

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<http://www.soton.ac.uk/~conserve>, retrieved 07 04 2002.

<sup>41</sup> For full description of Tate's procedures for videos as artworks see *Chapter Four* [4.1.3].

We very proudly acquired as a laser disk, a double laser disk and we bought our laser disk players, and we'd be more than happy to sell them on to the design museum, or some museum, or the Science Museum or something, because we'll never use them! It's nice to have them I suppose as some sort of master copy, but I don't know whether we'd even use them for that purpose now. So you make your mistakes as you go along, I mean that was the first piece more or less that we'd got, and we're beginning to realise that it's probably not best to chase technological fashion, because you're not going to catch it [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

Generally, Worsdale concluded with a position typical of most regional collections, and which frames their boundaries of responsible care:

The problem with taking advice from those major institutions is, a lot of the time they say: this is the way to do it. But of course I'm operating under local government restrictions and financial limitations. And yes, usually if you hurl enough cash at a problem you can solve it, but of course I've got other problems to contemplate [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

Southampton has no conservation staff with training in new media. As

Worsdale noted:

There is a shortfall of expertise, and because I perhaps have taken as much interest as the conservators, in a new media issue it wouldn't be so much a request from me for them to tell me, it would be more: shall we talk this through as a group of people who are a little bit blind and not very confident [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

Assessing the resource implications posed by an artwork has, in such instances, been born by the curator. In the case of Worsdale, he has a background as a paper conservator, and more recently as a temporary exhibitions curator.

Occasionally, his personal acquaintance with the artist, or commitment to a work facilitated the acquisitions process:

With video art it's a bit different, if it's a straightforward ... there's a piece we bought: **Jerusalem** by Jeremy Deller, he's ultra-relaxed, it doesn't matter what format it's on, DVD, not a problem. Doesn't matter what monitor, no particular installation requirements, just the footage playing away as you like [...] in that instance I wouldn't bother asking a

conservator, because there are no issues there really, as long as I got the OK from him to copy the film stock onto a new medium as things develop – not a problem [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

Interestingly, Worsdale has talked in terms of a scale that has emerged in response to the video acquisitions that they have made. In 2000, Southampton acquired three video works by Hilary Lloyd (which I discuss in much greater detail in *Chp 4, 4.2.4*). Worsdale noted that that acquisition was definitely ‘the most complex and in a way it’s been good, because it’s formed a model now, and we’ve been collecting quite a lot of video art; to say well: where on this scale do you sit, how tolerant can you be of future flexibility’ [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np]. Jeremy Deller would constitute the other end. What this will demand of the Gallery currently and in the future will vary according to where it falls on that scale: ‘when you get artists like Graham Gussin who really, really – not fetishise – but they really desire the quality of proper film, then you’ve got to *work hard* to respect that’ (*Italics mine*) [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

At Leeds City Art Gallery, Corinne Miller admits that the infrastructure currently in place at Leeds is limited. In terms of in-house conservation provision, she has said that Leeds is ‘poorly resourced’ [Fiske, 2002, np]. In 2002, there was one paintings conservator and one furniture conservator on staff. No sculpture conservators are employed, despite the presence of the sculpture collection administered by the Henry Moore Institute on behalf of the City of Leeds. A rationale for this is Leeds’ location within North Yorkshire, which has a long history with British 20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture, and more particularly the sculptor Henry Moore. As such, there is a particularly rich vein

of sculpture conservators in the area, which the Henry Moore Institute currently uses when a particular work requires attention.

Interestingly, however, when the Henry Moore Institute commissioned a condition survey on the sculpture collection in 1996, Tessa Jackson, former sculpture conservator at the Tate, undertook the process. No major treatments were required; mostly any action required to make works exhibitable were classified as minor treatments. The 1996 condition survey did, however, prompt pertinent questions in relation to more non-traditional installations such as Tony Cragg's **Postcard Flag (Union Jack)**, (1981) [Plate 40], to which Jackson could apply her knowledge of the Tate's own holdings. Fourteen years after the Contemporary Art Society presented it to Leeds, the survey made note of the degradation of the plastic elements and difficulties experienced in displaying the work<sup>42</sup>. With regard to the former, the question of cleaning, of wear and tear and the matter of replacement elicited the need to clarify the artist's intention for the piece and his attitude towards the material components. This was equally the case with regard to display difficulties. The plastic elements did not adhere to the wall and kept falling off. Solutions such as bonding the four sections on to boards were considered. Jackson was also able to put forward the Tate's solution to similar problems experienced in respect of their installation, **Britain Seen from the North** (1981) [Plate 41]. They elected to attach velcro to some of the pieces and to the wall<sup>43</sup>. Similarly, with Edward Allington's **The Fruit of Oblivion** (1982), Jackson was able to refer to correspondence that the Tate had undertaken with the artist in relation to their piece **Oblivion Penetrated** (1982),

and suggest sources for the imitation fruit that needed to be replaced on the Leeds work.

As with Southampton, Leeds has no specialist staff conversant with media hardwares, or trained to handle the new technologies that many artists now utilise. They refer to organisations with expertise such as the Moving Image Touring and Exhibition Service [MITES] based in Liverpool for technical support<sup>44</sup>. Yet, again like Southampton, it often falls to curatorial or technical personnel to be conversant with formats, issues of storage, installation possibilities, and playback quality. With more recent acquisitions, Leeds have clearly exercised awareness of such issues, and also of their own resources, in the definition of their collecting remit, most particularly with regard to new media. Corinne Miller has explained:

'The idea of buying hardware that was integral to a piece I found too problematic for our gallery. I could foresee a time if we bought such works when two years down the line we would be unable to show them, because we simply didn't have the money to conserve them, or get them in workable order. So the remit that I have required when we've been buying these works is that the hardware should not be integral to the work, and when [...] in other works I suppose it is the projected image that is the work of art or the sound [...] in the case of the sound work [...] and when we've bought we've had the agreement of the artists to transfer to relevant medium should the technology progress [...] and we have quite clear instructions about the size of wall, the ability of us to determine size, the environment for the works in the installation and how that works out in practice is that [...] [Fiske, 2002, np].

Their acquisitions remit is, consequently, determined by longevity issues; that the works can, as far as can be anticipated, be shown in even as short a margin

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<sup>42</sup> Jackson, Tessa (1996), *Sculpture Collection Conservation Survey*, commissioned by the Centre for the Study of Sculpture, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

<sup>43</sup> Tate acquired their Cragg installation in 1982 and devised the Velcro solution in 1987.

<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation between Corinne Miller, Head Curator, Leeds City Art Gallery, and author, 08 10 2001. MITES was founded in 1992 and offers technical support and subsidized exhibition technologies to artists and the museum sector across the UK.

as two years. Such information no longer follows some fourteen years behind acquisition, but is a determinant in whether an acquisition actually proceeds.

Interestingly, the strictures that inform what can be done in terms of acquisitions at Leeds should, Miller feels, not impede the national collections:

I think the Tate requires them not to have the scruples that I have working in the regions because they are a national collection and if its part of the zeitgeist then that has to be reflected [...] I can't afford that luxury, because I know that I have to leave my successors all of it, but I don't think that's very responsible, because I know what's going to happen and that's why I don't do it [Fiske, 2002, np].

With this in mind, an illustrative instance of acquisition for Leeds would be **Shades of Time** (2000) by Annelise Strba, which they acquired in 2000<sup>45</sup>. The original format of the work was as a slide presentation, the form it took when first shown at Photographers Gallery, London. When Corinne Miller requested the work for an exhibition entitled *Idea of North* at Leeds City Art Gallery, she enquired whether the work was available on an alternative format. Strba obliged by transferring the slide tape format onto video, and clearly felt that this change of format did not compromise the piece, but in fact generated a new work. As a video work, it is a unique version that only exists in the copy at Leeds [Fiske, 2002, np]. Miller has noted:

We could have had the slide tape version and that's what they wanted us to buy originally but it was very expensive and we all know what happens to slides, cspccially when they're [old]...there were going to be three sets of slides, and after that we'd have to buy the slides off the artist every time we wanted to show it [...], so the problem for us is [...] we had the equipment to show this for quite a long time in the future, I could see that we would have the ability to show work in that format, but the logistics weren't appropriate for a gallery which is open to the public [...] we couldn't devote a whole gallery and show it once in the course of a day [...] because we have probably between 500 and 1000 visitors a day so

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<sup>45</sup> Leeds also has the following photographs by Strba: **Wuthering Heights** (1994), **Sonja as Cathy** (1996), **Linda as Isabella** (1996), **Bronte Moor** (1996), **Howarth** (1996).



you're actually allocating an unreasonable amount of space [...] In that format we couldn't buy it. We did want to include in an exhibition and she kindly reformatted it for us, and we've now subsequently bought that work, which she's really pleased about [...] [Fiske, 2002, np].

Aberdeen City Art Gallery, no less than Leeds or Southampton, presents a qualified form of the Tate's historical model. When adding non-traditional artworks to its collection, its resources must facilitate the care of artworks across a broad historical and technical spectrum. Unlike its two counterparts, however, it has no in-house conservation provision at all<sup>46</sup>, although it does have a handling and installation team who assist in particular with temporary exhibitions and works on loan. They also have a small conservation budget, which they can boost through conservation grants from the Scottish Museums Council's Stewardship Division, and through funds from the Friends of Aberdeen City Art Gallery. If a painting in the collection requires treatment, the gallery will contract private conservators, most often from the Edinburgh region<sup>47</sup>. The increasing confidence on the part of Aberdeen to handle non-traditional media is clear. Prospective acquisitions are often compromised by a lack of funding, or inability to act soon enough, rather than by inhibitions in relation to media. For instance, Jennifer Melville sought to acquire a work by Mariele Neudecker, but did not succeed as the work was sold to another interested party before Melville could secure the funding [Fiske, 2001a, np.].

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<sup>46</sup> Museums and Galleries Commission (1986), *Museums in Scotland: Report by a Working Party*, London: HMSO, p. 8:

We understand that Aberdeen Art Gallery has been considering the establishment of a fine art conservation studio for some years, and has a case for doing so, especially if considered as a service to the north east of Scotland. Yet we doubt whether in the long run it would be the appropriate basis for a service with national responsibilities which must also include the training of conservators.

<sup>47</sup>Fiske, Tina (2001a), *Personal Interview with Jennifer Melville, Keeper of Fine Art, Aberdeen City Art Gallery*, 25 09 2001, Aberdeen.

As with Leeds and Southampton, Aberdeen views the Tate as the authoritative source for advice. Jennifer Melville has said that where she may need guidance on a particular issue relating to non-traditional media, she refers for the most part to the Tate<sup>48</sup>. However, I will demonstrate that in the case of Aberdeen's acquisition of **Drip 2** (1990) [**Plate 20**] by Katharine Dowson, which it received as part of the Saatchi gift in 2000, the Arts Council Collection might have provided a more useful source of advice and precedent.

**Drip 2** is a work in two parts. It comprises a blown glass vessel, reminiscent of a stomach or lung, which sits on a small wax-coated table. Suspended above it is a long thin open-ended Pyrex spike, down which a clear viscous liquid drips into the vessel. Dowson produced the vessel by blowing glass into wire mesh moulds, a method that produced uneven surface qualities and caused 'imperfections' in the glass. When Aberdeen took delivery of **Drip 2** in August 2000<sup>49</sup>, Jennifer Melville did a condition check of the work and noted a 'large open crack down the back of the glass vessel'<sup>50</sup>. The work was exhibitable, but the crack, she believed, could potentially expose the glass to further compromise. The installation of **Drip 2** proved difficult in view of its having no guidance notes. Melville installed it against a wall, with the spike affixed by brackets. However, the fragile glass tube snapped with the pressure, and Melville contacted the artist directly. In a letter to the gallery, Dowson herself clarified that the crack in the vessel was generic, that it was a product of the

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<sup>48</sup> Personal correspondence between Jennifer Melville and the author, 23 07 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Aberdeen also received two other works by Dowson. They are **Barium Swallow** (1993) and **Light Box I** (1993), both of which are extremely light-sensitive.

blowing technique that she used, and, moreover, was a desired effect. She suggested that she would be able to melt the spike back together, and that all the pieces should be returned to her. Pyrex as a medium is, she noted, 'very forging'. Aberdeen permitted Dowson to undertake the treatment herself<sup>51</sup>. The spike parts were taken to the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, where the artist completed the repairs.

Significantly, prior to Aberdeen receiving their Dowson gifts, the Arts Council Collection had the previous year accessioned two works by Dowson as part of their Saatchi Bequest. Those two works, **Bubbling Glass** (1990) [Plate 42] and **Silicon Teats** (1992) [Plate 43], relate to **Drip 2** (1990) and **Barium Swallow** (1993) respectively. Like **Barium Swallow**, **Silicon Teats** was made using a specific pink watercolour pigment, which is not light fast and will fade in natural daylight. Though the teats are installed upon a table as opposed to **Barium Swallow**, which hangs vertically down the wall, they also must be lighted in such a way as to cast shadows (and thus relating to the medical purpose for which barium is used)<sup>52</sup>. Aberdeen received no installation

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from Jennifer Melville to Mary Yule, 14 08 2000, Katharine Dowson catalogue file, Aberdeen City Art Gallery.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Katharine Dowson to Lisa O'Connor, Assistant Keeper, (undated, received by Aberdeen on 23 10 2000), Katharine Dowson catalogue file, Aberdeen City Art Gallery.

<sup>52</sup> Op.cit., Dowson also gave specific installation instructions are required for **Barium Swallow** 1993 too: it should be shown vertically along the wall to correspond with viewer's body height (approx 3 ft from floor). It needs low light, but lighting should be specific as the piece should cast a shadow: In September 2001, that work was unexhibitable, and the colour was fading too. On this matter, Dowson noted:

'Barium Swallow is filled with the concentrated watercolour made by Dr Martin "Sunrise Pink" which is no longer made in the form I used in 1993 which has a florescence within. I must stress that it is not light fast and will fade to nothing if it is put anywhere near natural daylight. This is a problem I discovered over time with other works of this period and the only hope is to analyse the contents of the Pink to determine its make up. I have tried the USA manufacturers but they will not tell me for corporate secrecy reasons [...] the colour is just added to distilled water. The piece hangs vertically on the wall, the bottom about 3 feet from the floor so that it relates to the body of the viewer.'

instructions with either of the Dowson works, nor any clear information regarding the condition of the work, whether the cracking was inherent and desirable, or whether it constituted damage.

How useful might it have been to check the condition of their works on receipt against those in the Arts Council Collection? Dowson clarified that **Drip 2** was actually a functioning work, insofar as she intended for fluid to move through the spike and collect in the vessel. **Bubbling Glass** comprises similar vessels into which water is pumped by a motor. It, too, is a functioning piece, and might have implied that **Drip 2** could be as well. Furthermore, I believe that where Aberdeen allowed the work to be repaired off-site by the artist herself, communication with the Arts Council, as a collection that itself has no in-house conservation provision, but considerable experience in permitting artists to repair their own works in contexts beyond their immediate vicinity, could have been useful. Indeed, both institutions could have benefited from correspondence in this instance, most particularly where Dowson's works, by virtue of their physical make-up, are likely to require close monitoring into the future.

The above examples have, I propose, begun to build a picture of regional collections as institutions with resources and/or principles of care fitting to the care of non-traditional artworks, and to indicate how they are self-identifying (and consistently re-assessing) their potential and their responses to the nature of how and what they are collecting. Many regional collections are increasingly strategic in relation to their own particular infrastructures. In terms of advice

and expertise, relevancy is becoming a key issue. By raising the Aberdeen example, I hope to have made the case for increased inter-institutional awareness. Aberdeen, Southampton and Leeds stand as exemplars. The same call that I made for increased recognition of what they are acquiring also holds for their development as institutions with resources and procedures congruent to the long-term care of non-traditional artworks.

### 3.5. Context-sensitivity

In a recent article entitled 'Mind the Gap'<sup>53</sup>, Sharon Heal raised the pressing issue of 'context-sensitivity' in relation to matters of inter-institutional advice<sup>54</sup>. Heal framed the issue from the perspective of a small, rural, independent museum, posing questions regarding the provision for advice to such museums, existing channels through which they can go, who can they approach, and for what. She picked up on the disappearance of many traditional agency support routes within the context of transition that the regional museum sector is undergoing, in particular the current 'morphing' of the Area Museum Councils into Single Regional Agencies [Heal, 2003, p. 14]. Those agencies are dispensing with direct consultation services, with the exception of Scotland where the Scottish Museums Council does retain conservators on staff. As Heal concluded, 'the range of conservators, collections care and registration officers to choose from are long gone.' Gaby Porter reiterated this state of play more

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<sup>53</sup> Heal, Sharon (2002), 'Mind the Gap', *Museums Journal*, 103, 11, November 2002, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> For a fuller discussion of national and regional museums conservation infrastructure from 1970s to present day, see Fiske, Tina (2002), 'The Nation's Equipment': Funding Conservation Provision and Training for Museums and Galleries in the UK 1969-1984', in ICOM Committee for Conservation, *Preprints*, 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial conference, Rio de Janeiro, 22-27 September, 1, pp. 166-171. Also Winsor, Peter (2000), 'Conservation in the UK,' *Cultural Trends*, London: Policy Studies Institute, 33, pp. 1-33.

extensively in her report, *Overview of Collections Information and Advice in the Museums Domain*<sup>55</sup>, commissioned by Resource to provide a comprehensive overview of technical and professional advice and information on collections management issues available to the museum sector. This, along with the stasis into which the Museums and Galleries Commission's 'Conservation Unit' has fallen since its becoming Resource (and subsequently MLA), have effectively left 'a gap in the sector' [Heal, 2003, p. 14].

So, what is 'context-sensitive' advice? Essentially, it is standardised source material that is rendered specific with its context of use in mind. The Scottish Museums Council has reflected this distinction between source and interpretation structurally within their organisation. For example, whilst their Information Service locates and disseminates information already in the public domain, their Stewardship Division takes a slightly different approach that focuses on 'making information *meaningful*' (Italics mine)<sup>56</sup>. They achieve this by 'researching, tailoring or interpreting it towards a particular enquiry'. They seek to guide 'people towards making their own decision' that would enable 'the recipient to reach a conclusion which suits his or her own unique situation' [Scottish Museums Council, 2000, p. 23]. They prioritise 'observation, exploration and discussion of the issues raised by an enquirer before offering information, knowledge and opinions' [Scottish Museums Council, 2000, p.23]. As Porter has noted, 'good advice needs to take account of the particular circumstances of the building(s); levels of staff expertise; size and nature of the

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<sup>55</sup> Porter, Gaby (2002), *Overview of Collections Information and Advice in the Museums Domain*, London: Resource. [Referred to subsequently as *Overview*].

<sup>56</sup> Scottish Museums Council (2000), *Conservation and Collections Care Policy*, December 2000, Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council.

collections; budget available for investment and priority attached to collections care issues' [Porter, 2002, p. 7, 2.10.].

'Context-sensitivity' also refers to the source of advice too, not simply to its presentation. As Heal suggested, 'lots of people want local advice as well as some form of national back-up' [Heal, 2003, p. 14]. In effect, they want advice and field leadership from the national galleries, but in addition, advice that is infrastructure relevant. This point cannot be underestimated. Often information or advice can be generic, as is the case, for example, with the kind of information sheets that Museums and Galleries Commission formerly dispensed through the Conservation Unit. Whilst these provide valuable information, questions of infrastructure are not addressed. Inter-institutional advice is clearly desirable. With non-traditional works that use new materials, for instance, digital formats and new media, the greater bulk of expertise is non-sector. Industry sector advice is now pre-requisite with the collecting of artworks stored on DVD, or CD-ROM for instance. However, context-sensitivity reiterates that museums need guidance on how to store and secure these assets and collections that comes from 'someone with relevant scientific/technical knowledge *in a museum context* and the abilities and skills to translate this in order to assist them with problem-solving' [Porter, 2002, p. 7, 2.10.].

In respect of who should provide this information, Stephen Locke of Hampshire County Museum Service has stated that it should come 'from as close to home as possible.' He appealed for 'access to leading practitioners,' combined with 'advice from close neighbours' [Heal, 2003, p.14]. Gaby Porter supports this

call. She has identified that specialist subject expertise at curatorial level in national, regional, and local museums is on the decline. A crucial factor, Porter suggests, is how advice is solicited:

‘There is a tension. On the one hand, people want a one-stop shop, they need a lot of courage to ask for help and want a simple and direct route. They are unlikely to make more than one phone call, so that phone call needs to have a high quality response. On the other hand, they expect a high quality and highly focused response from a credible and authoritative source with access to leading edge research in the particular area of their enquiry [Porter, 2002, pp. 6-7, 2.9].’

Regional collections would, therefore, tend to address national counterparts.

The reverse, however, (a national collection approaching a regional counterpart) is negligible. With non-traditional artworks, what ‘close neighbours’ might know is itself largely unknown. As Porter suggests, ‘giving advice is a two-way process:’

Interviewees expressed concern that, in the absence of these reciprocal relationships, national and regional bodies will move towards top-down, prescriptive standards which are ‘set in stone’. They are concerned that these standards will be used to impose rigid solutions where these may not be relevant or useful, and where a more relaxed approach with attention to the detail and *context of projects* is required. (Italics mine) [Porter, 2002, p. 35, 5.1.].

The vital issue beyond identifying sources and delivery of information is how to ‘link’ those two factors up for the benefit of the second party – the user or consumer. As Porter further notes, ‘there are many providers of information and advice, but no route map.’ This, she concludes, is to the detriment of our knowledge of collections: ‘The use of contractors by national and regional agencies is compounding this fragmentation and eroding the cumulative knowledge which was built up through advice and ongoing relationships’ [Porter, 2002, p. 5, 2.8.]. Prior to looking at ‘route maps’, I briefly consider



exactly what information those ‘many providers’ could make available.

Interestingly, the Scottish Museums Council noted in relation to its *National Audit* that ‘we faced the challenge of marrying the essentially narrative, highly contextualised approach of individual museums to a standard non-contextualised framework’ [Scottish Museums Council, 2003, p.16]. What I suggest is that the impulse must be to work back from the ‘non-contextualised framework’ *to* the ‘narrative and highly contextualised’, and not vice-versa. Part and parcel of this procedure is getting museums to produce testimonies that take account of three inter-related factors:

- the needs of the artwork
- the resources of the enquiring institution itself
- the resources of the ‘source institution’, from which any information/advice comes.

### **3.6. Mapping and ‘Route Maps’: A Subject Network**

In this section, I consider the notion of ‘route maps’, and I identify ‘subject’ networks as the best means by which inter-institutional advice can be organised and managed. In particular, I discuss the validity of creating one specifically dedicated to the curation and care of contemporary non-traditional art, and what shape it might take. As with the Aberdeen and Arts Council example that I have previously raised, ‘route maps’ could provide a means of ‘linking up’.

Developed as a network, the potential is that such interface might assist regional collections in accessing national and international expertise and research, and in defining, even ultimately redefining, their notions of reasonable commitment.

There are two reasons why I put forward ‘subject networks’ as the best means for generating and supporting inter-institutional communication. Firstly, where route maps would need to be created, they would also need to be managed. Few individual institutions would have that capacity. Secondly, they would be a means to reinvigorate subject scholarship *by* collections as well. In her *Overview*, Gaby Porter recognises that in-house ‘subject expertise’ was of especial concern to her interviewees, in particular regarding its vital importance to collections management and care. However, those same interviewees, she states, had ‘raised concerns’ about its ‘continuing availability’. As she notes, ‘many museums, including the national museums, are reducing the number of specialist positions with a consequent effect on specialist advice to others’ [Porter, 2002, p. 5, 2.6]. Moves to alleviate such ‘gaps’, Sharon Heal has suggested, have reprised the notion of an autonomous, centralised national institute or body specifically focused on stewardship needs [Heal, 2003, p.14].

That concept has its own history reaching back into the 1960s. In 1972, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation called for just such a centralised advice and training service, suggesting that ‘the Government should accept responsibility for the establishment of a central Institute [...] and should make the necessary funds available for it as an *entirely new commitment*’<sup>57</sup>. Thinking has, however, attained a more fluid, democratising character since then in response to needs and to technologies. For example, between October 1995 and February 1996,

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<sup>57</sup> Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1972), *Training in the Conservation of Paintings*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 12.

the Museum Documentation Association held a series of four seminars under the title 'The Nation's Collections: Are We Virtually There?' They were an attempt to assess how far the documentation of collections had progressed and the viability of a *virtual* 'national database'. On that occasion, Kevin Gosling and Tony Gill suggested that the 'goalposts' had demonstrably moved forward:

instead of a single, centralised 'national database' it is possible to imagine a network of electronic resources distributed in museums around the country. To the user, such a patchwork of catalogue databases and related information would be accessible via a single gateway and could be thought of as a single resource covering the Nation's Collections<sup>58</sup>.

As Sharon Heal indicated, in 2001, Resource commissioned consultant Laura Drysdale to look at different forms that a national advice centre or resource might take [Heal, 2002, p. 14]. She came up with four: a website; a national point of provision for specialist advice which would point people to local sources; a consultancy service and a reinvigoration of the Museum Documentation Association's current standards. The 'downside' was the '£5.5 million price tag' [Heal, 2002, p. 14].

However, I propose that both the context-sensitivity, which routes maps could open up, and subject expertise could be more successfully ensured through a group of a self-identified willing museum partners than through the extra-museal commitment that a national advisory service would represent. Indeed, it presents an ideal marriage of the two, and particularly pertinently, it is directly involved with the collections themselves. On the matter of 'willingness', Resource's 2002 report, *Collections Management: Preserving the Past for the*

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<sup>58</sup> Gosling, Kevin and Tony Gill (1996), 'The Nation's Collections: are we virtually there?', *MDA Information*, 2, 2, p. 7.

*Future*<sup>59</sup>, suggested that common interest co-operation, or 'subject access', is increasingly, desirable. In terms of facilitating the creation of such entities, the notion of a distributed national collection presents a key opportunity to bring 'co-operation between institutions with common interests' to fruition [Resource, 2002, p. 23].

As part of its 'Stewardship Work Programme', Resource put forward eight areas as the focus for its key aims regarding collections management, one of which was 'mapping' [Resource, 2002, p. 17]. As the report stated, 'the starting point for strategic management of the cultural heritage is a better understanding of the nature and location of the various collections' [Resource, 2002, p. 23]. Several of the regional agencies have completed recent 'mapping' activity, such as North West Museums Libraries and Archives Council or South West Museums Council<sup>60</sup>. The North West Museums Libraries and Archives Council has, in fact, considered 'commissioning a feasibility study to assess the need for and the desired type of *subject access* to major collections in the Region and, if such a scheme is found to be necessary and feasible, commission its creation' (Italics mine) [Edmonds, 2002, p. 3].

The need, generally, for dedicated forums does arise, I suggest, with materials or objects whose care and treatment may, for instance, raise unique or distinctive ethical or procedural issues, and which may require received

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<sup>59</sup>Resource (2002), *Collections Management: Preserving the Past for the Future*, London: Resource.

<sup>60</sup>Edmonds, Diana (2002), *Collections Mapping Study for North West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council Final Report*, Manchester: Instant Libraries Limited, and South West

standards or practices to be interpreted or modified. I have, throughout the entirety of this thesis, identified non-traditional, contemporary artworks as one such group. The range of material, conceptual, and documentation issues that they raise challenge received standards and practices. Moreover, expertise, for example with digital technology, now often lies outside the museum sector itself, and is, therefore, 'foreign' to its priorities. This presents museums with new and distinct challenges.

To this end, subject-specific networks are not new. Where they have been formalised, they have hitherto been broadly curatorial in emphasis. As early as 1976, for instance, the Museum Ethnographers' Group [MEG] was established. The range of activities and interfaces that MEG provides is exemplary. Again, Gaby Porter has noted, it stands as a valuable forum for advice and information sharing amongst peers. The group provides interface through a range of means that are discursive and more object-oriented; through organising conferences and meetings; through their own newsletter and journal; as well as by maintaining an email discussion group and a website<sup>61</sup> [Porter, 2003, p. 24, 4.6.]. Perhaps most vitally, the location of that interface shifts and takes place *in-situ*. MEG organise meetings or workshops in different museums, often where there is no curator of ethnography, or where the collections lie outside the particular expertise of the curator. Members with relevant experience contribute in exchanges which, Porter notes, adds to their 'own development and knowledge' [Porter, 2003, p. 24, 4.6.].

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Museums Council [ now SWMLAC ] (2000), *Museum Mapping 2000: A Survey of museums and collections in the South West of England*, Taunton: South West Museums Council.

The group is compiling a register of the areas of special interest and expertise of its members, so that people can seek relevant guidance. Though it is not their sole focus, they can provide advice on collections management and care where they perceive that there are unique issues in relation to their area, and hold occasional meetings jointly with ethnographic conservators. They also undertook a survey of ethnographic collections in UK museums approximately fifteen years ago precisely, because they were in part concerned about the lack of specialist staff to care for them [Porter, 2003, p. 24, .4.6.]. Significantly, MEG itself has an interpretative or advocacy remit. In 1991, for instance, it published *Museum Ethnographers' Group Guidelines on Management of Human Remains*. Most recently in 2003, it produced amendments or guidance notes to the Museums Association's *Code of Ethics*<sup>62</sup>, in response to the need for more directed ethical advice for all people working with ethnography in museums<sup>63</sup>.

How relevant and how transferable would this framework, and range of activities, be to those collections acquiring new or recently made, non-traditional artworks? Where regional museums and galleries are beginning to integrate video art or installations into their permanent collections, the route maps, and both the discursive and targeted activities that just such a network could provide, could be truly beneficial. Where they are increasingly acquiring

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk>, retrieved 11 07 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Museums Association (2002), *Code of Ethics for Museums*, London: Museums Association.

<sup>63</sup> MEG's ethical guidelines can be accessed at the following address:  
<http://www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk/ethglines.htm>, retrieved 11 07 2003.

non-traditional artworks, and engaging in the frequently idiosyncratic negotiations that their accessioning and care requires, collections *are* pushing museum practices forward. I believe, however, that there is a need to be self-conscious and critically aware of that process. In terms of creating a museums group specifically for non-traditional artworks, the process of identifying participants and networking them has already largely been effected by the Contemporary Art Society's 'Special Collections Scheme'. There exists a ready constituency. A key part of the Scheme has been to bring curators together for studio visits for example. Their focus has been specifically to acquaint curators with artists and facilitate their access to them. There is a clear argument, I think, for formalising and seeking funding for a grouping of that nature, and generating a programme of activity to identify, generate and share information and experience. Issues could extend from pre-acquisition negotiations to post-acquisition issues of care, and it could also advocate for British museums across the board at national and international level.

To conclude this chapter, I consider how such a grouping might organise itself. In *Chapter Four*, I look at the question of route maps in greater detail, but here I propose research priorities that it might establish, and refer to international precedents. Of course, there is the implication that those international precedents eradicate the need for a national network. Yet, there are compelling arguments that the UK museums sector should actively engage with the international museum community, particularly where designated collections can be considered of national and international importance. The international museum community is a valid 'intellectual' market for regional as well as

national collections. However, it remains open to question how accessible those projects are, and whether the information that they provide is applicable. How might the focus and the local conditions that gave rise to the Dutch *Conservation of Modern Art* project in 1997, which I discussed in *Chapter Two*, chime with the current needs and context in Britain?

In terms of collaboration, the project indisputably presents a level of aspiration to the UK sector. Tineke Reijnders noted at the time of the project, 'now is the time in the Netherlands for museums to confer with each other. Where, until, recently the municipal museums were regarded as autonomous islands, sometimes competing with each other like football clubs, the idea of a 'Netherlands Collection' is now in play'<sup>64</sup>. She continued, 'conservation problems encountered by individual museums have become a general concern, which enabled plans for an homogeneous administration of a digital collection to be developed en passant during the working-group meetings.' An obvious point of divergence in local conditions, however, is funding. With regard to the financial underpinning of the *Conservation of Modern Art* project, Reijnders again stated:

A [...] beneficial condition is the existence of a society that values the possession and care of art collections. The Delta Plan instigated by the Dutch Government at the beginning of the Nineties comprised generous financing for overdue restoration in various areas. The cry from a number of alert museum workers fell on receptive ears and [...] the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art could be realised in the best possible way [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 153].

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<sup>64</sup> Reijnders, Tineke (1999), Reflecting on the Research, in Hummelen, Ijsbrand and Sillé, Dionne (eds.), *Modern Art: Who Cares? An Interdisciplinary Research project and an international symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: The Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, pp. 149-153.



The UK has moved closer to the notion of a 'Netherlands Collection' with its own notion of a 'distributed national collection', and central Government funding is increasingly becoming available for conservation purposes through initiatives like Resource's *Renaissance Report*<sup>65</sup>. Support for 'subject' networks has been alluded to within its development strategies for collections, and for research within regional institutions. A paper submitted by Professor Keith S. Thomson on behalf of its 'Collections and Research' Working Party noted the need for formal and informal clustering of institutions on the basis of subject<sup>66</sup>. However, the advocacy work, which organisations such as the CAS have undertaken for the collecting of contemporary artworks, could extend to their maintenance and conservation.

### **3.7. An International Web-Based Cross-Media and Contemporary-Dedicated Network**

Here, I consider whether existing international forums eradicate the need for a national subject network dedicated to non-traditional artworks. The International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art [INCCA] is an example of a resource independent of a single museum institution, or specific project. It is an international network generated by, and specifically geared towards, the needs of the conservation community, and is largely driven by

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<sup>65</sup> Resource (2001), *Renaissance in the Regions: a New Vision for England's Museums*, London: Resource.

<sup>66</sup> Collections and Research paper, submitted by Professor Keith S. Thomson, Oxford University Museum, on behalf of the Working Party, May 15, 2001, accessed at <http://www.resource.gov.uk/information/policy/collectionrsch.asp>, retrieved 23 05 2003.

museum conservators with direct responsibility for collections constituting or including non-traditional contemporary art. It has, hitherto, existed, and developed, as an invited, top-level partner network, comprising the representatives from the following international institutions:

- Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage - Holland
- The Tate - UK
- Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst - Holland
- Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf - Germany
- Solomon Guggenheim Museum - USA
- Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi/Konservatorskolen - Denmark
- Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art - Holland
- Museum Moderner Kunst - Austria
- Academy of Fine Arts/Faculty of Conservation and Restoration – Warsaw, Poland
- Fundació 'la Caixa' - Barcelona, Spain
- Galleria d'Arte Moderna - Turin, Italy

It was created following the Dutch *Conservation of Modern Art* project and the subsequent *Modern Art: Who Cares?* conference, in view of several of that project's research recommendations, and for 'the need for an international network to exchange the collated information' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 17]. With its creation, INCCA focused on the establishment of the website as its pilot project<sup>67</sup>. The website received significant financial supported from the European Commission's *Raphael Programme* in 1999<sup>68</sup>. It is intended to provide a one-stop 'gateway', or point of access, to databases, and projects contributed from across the international museum and conservation communities. It also has a role in generating primary source material from

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<sup>67</sup> The project can be accessed at <http://www.incca.org>, retrieved 01 09 2001.

<sup>68</sup> The Raphael Programme of Community Action in the Field of Cultural Heritage was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 13 October 1997 [Article 128 of the EC Treaty]. The aim of this programme, which has been allocated ECU 30 million for the period 1997-2000, is to give a fresh impetus to Community activities in the field of the cultural heritage by encouraging transnational cooperation and pooling expertise and experience as part of integrated projects and relaying them to both cultural operators and the general public. See [http://www.europarl.eu.int/factsheets/4\\_17\\_0.en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/factsheets/4_17_0.en.htm), retrieved 07 07 2003.

artists, essentially through artist interviews, and in developing procedural standards for generating and compiling such information that would transferable between collecting institutions. It is administered by representatives from its partner-institutions, who provide editorial expertise, and so far has been largely overseen by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, and co-organised by the Tate in London.

In terms of accessibility, in October 2002, the INCCA database and website were delivered with a view to democracy of access for museum collections. Hitherto, content and access to the INCCA databases has been limited to the eleven international leaders in the field. The question is whether these cover the needs of the UK sector in its breadth, and are accessible to the regional community. The recent *Stewardship Resources on the Web* report,<sup>69</sup> published by Resource and undertaken by M Squared Consulting, reviewed more than 100 English-language resources available on the World Wide Web, and rated out of five the information that they provide on the delivery of effective stewardship [Resource, 2003a, p. 3]. Whilst numerous national and international sites, such as those for UKIC, the Getty Conservation Institute in California, or Conservation On-Line (CoOL)<sup>70</sup> were included and reviewed in the survey, INCCA was not. This may indicate its less than widespread profile in the UK, and additionally may indicate the low profile given to the conservation of contemporary art.

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<sup>69</sup> Resource (2003a), *Stewardship Resources on the Web: Raising awareness of the role stewardship plays in ensuring the preservation of cultural material*, conducted by M Squared Consulting, London: Resource.

Within INCCA, the Tate represents the UK's contribution. It does not directly publicise the activities of the INCCA group to a UK-wide audience. That could be the responsibility of a subject network, to which the Tate could report. INCCA intends for the membership will grow via subscription. As a part of its second phase, the partners have agreed to broaden the network with new members and open up contributions to the INCCA 'Database for Artists' Archives'. The current INCCA partners will become 'correspondents' for their respective regions and introduce new members to the network. As of 2003, nine other institutions have shown interest in the project, and will be invited to join the network. Another factor is that INCCA is not technically permanently assured. Another aim of this second phase is to find the necessary funds for establishing INCCA as a permanent network.

In terms of its aims, INCCA's stated objectives are to

- create and maintain a website with general access for the public
- create and maintain a database for INCCA participating members to access and share their knowledge through the network
- target contemporary artists as a primary source of information
- devise common methods and vocabularies for organising the information and knowledge to allow its retrieval and use
- establish the artists' intent as a key factor in the care, display and conservation of all types of artwork
- disseminate its goals to the international conservation and contemporary art community
- promote and expand research and scholarship supporting all those professionals concerned with the conservation of modern and contemporary art

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<sup>70</sup>To be found at <http://www.palimpsest.edu>, retrieved 03 11 2000. CoOL provides an invaluable international exchange forum for conservation professionals.

Whilst all UK collections, national and regional, would subscribe to the priorities put forward by INCCA, I suggest that there are several ways in which the advice and subject expertise needs of the wider UK sector, as noted particularly by Porter, may not be fully addressed by them. INCCA is conservation specific. Many regional collections require the more integrated approach provided by 'early' acquisition. Moreover, INCCA clearly places emphasis on providing *source* material and procedures. In relation to the fourth aim, would the common methods and vocabularies be applicable across a spectrum of regional infrastructures? Though it aims to facilitate 'retrieval' and 'use', there is no reference to means of interpretation or 'making meaningful' – a key point that Porter identified in her *Overview*. Concomitantly, there is no infrastructure sensitivity or routing mapping, or any quantitative or cumulative sense of what is held where.

### **3.8. Research Priorities and Interpreting Other Research**

As I outlined in *Chapter Two*, and as I have applied specifically to regional collections in this chapter, a non-traditional artwork can place numerous challenges and demands at the door of the museum that acquires it. Larger, national collections have confronted those challenges and demands in a number of ways. The *Conservation of Modern Art* project, for instance, recommended 'adjusting guidelines relating to new purchases of works of art---guidelines affecting the registration of data and condition, photo registration, recording the artist's view on the preservation of the work etc.' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.),

1999, p. 19]. The Guggenheim Museum in New York has, I argued, 'foreignised' their own procedures and 'paradigm' of care through the creation of their *Variable Media Initiative*. Where do regional collections stand in relation to this? Insofar as they acquire any non-traditional artwork, a regional collection is ostensibly foreignising itself. How might a network mediate these questions? I suggest that focal points for research might be:

- Pre-acquisition 'checklists' for determining the resource implications (short, mid and long term) of a particular artwork
- Pre-acquisition 'checklists' for determining the available resources (short, mid, long term) of a particular collection
- A formula for determining an acquisition as a 'reasonable commitment'
- Early acquisition as a conservation strategy
- Specific checklists with which curators/conservators can assess the degree of 'determinacy' or 'fixedness' that a potential acquisition has, e.g. has the artist determined as far as may be possible the final configuration or display format of the artwork
- Specific checklists with which curators/conservators can assess the material and conceptual specificity of a work or its aspects
- Specific checklists with which curators/conservators can assess what is generic with regard to constitution, placement or functionality of a work
- Determining a list of factors that might preclude an artwork consideration for acquisition
- The need to preserve information and rights
- Documenting artist's intentions

What is clear, however, is that any assessment of scholarship, advice or procedures on the part of regional collections should be premised on interpretation rather than emulation. No infrastructure is so alike that this could take place wholesale. A network could assess, respond to, and facilitate the

applicability of national and international research to regional collections in the UK. Here, I put forward a brief assessment of Jon Ippolito's *Variable Media Initiative and Network*, with a view to considering how appropriate or approachable it might be to the wider UK sector<sup>71</sup>.

To recapitulate the thrust of the initiative from *Chapter Two*, Jon Ippolito suggested, that non-traditional artworks such as video, performance or multi-media installations are 'likely not to survive, according to traditional methods of preservation' [Ippolito, 2001, np]. For Ippolito, the danger is that museums

decide to give up on the ephemeral art forms of the twentieth century, withdrawing into our ironclad citadel of durable Paintings and Sculpture, and watching from the ramparts as hapless masterpieces of video and online art are mowed down by the spector of technological obsolescence. The opportunity, on the other hand, is to craft a new collecting paradigm that is as radical as the art it hopes to preserve. *The choice is ours: do we jettison our paradigm? Or our art?* (italics mine) [Ippolito, 2001, np].

This is profound advice for any institution engaged in collecting recently made or new non-traditional work and represents a necessary goal for all museums [from smaller regional through to larger national institutions], particularly if the collection of such works is to remain sustainable and viable.

Yet, where the programme was generated by a single institution in response to its own diverse and high profile holdings (with a unique historical formation), it has a specific application. Just how generic might the *Initiative* be, or how specific to the Guggenheim or galleries of a like infrastructure and collection? Moreover, the Guggenheim's level of infrastructure and funding available to

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<sup>71</sup> Tate Conservator Pip Laurenson did attend the conference and contribute.

field-leading museums in the US exceed any in the UK, with the exception of the Tate.

Ippolito intended for the *Initiative* to be transferable and useable by other collections. In conjunction with the Daniel Langlois Foundation, they have published the proceeding of the *Initiative*, and numerous case studies, both in hard copy and as pdfs on the Internet<sup>72</sup>. In the *Stewardship Resources on the Web* report, the Guggenheim's website only achieved a rating of one [Five being the highest value], as a 'site not useful for stewardship' [Resource, 2003a, p. 57]. How accessible these would prove to be as source documents for regional collections is debatable.

The *Variable Media Initiative* clearly demonstrates of the value and success of an approach that takes place in-situ and is case study led. Yet, those are not made explicitly 'context-sensitive'. It is implicit insofar as it is driven by a single institution. The selection of case studies that incorporated works not fully developed yet; those acquired straight from the studio; and those works that change from installation to installation does coincide with the picture of collecting across the UK sector at the moment. They reveal the wide variance of results that can be produced from a schematised basis, and stand as sources, which, presumably, another organisations would then themselves interpret from. However, the time and consideration to do so is not typically available to museum professionals in the UK. They need a framework for interpretation, or signposts, to direct them quickly and accurately to appropriate instances, and



how these might be 'down-scaled', or re-contextualised, to the needs of their own institution.

The need to think in terms of the Initiative's five 'medium-independent behaviours' - 'encoded', 'networked', 'reproducible', 'performative' and 'interactive and duplicable' - is highly relevant to UK museums, particularly where resources are limited, and access to specialist or scientific information, or in-house expertise can be severely restricted. As Ippolito continues: 'it helps to compare artworks created in entirely different mediums that present similar preservation challenges.' Those behaviours do provide useful pegs by which to identify whether a material or format is generic or specific.

As regards how those works might be accommodated in the long term, the four strategies - 'storage', 'emulation', 'migration' and 'reinterpretation' - equally do provide a vital framework. It is hard, however, to see UK museums and galleries on regional and local level being able to accommodate it wholesale, or whether in fact they would need to. The resources, human and financial, are simply not in place. Yet, the existing pressures on the resources of British museums, such as storage, make their selective use highly attractive. Certainly, the essence of the strategies is tremendously helpful, and provides a level of ambition and definition for museums collecting in this area. As I indicate in *Chapter Four*, collections such as Southampton City Art Gallery might more appropriately pick and choose between them, with reference to a single work of art, rather than with a view to a comprehensive 'paradigm shift'. UK museums

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<sup>72</sup> Depocas, Alain, Jon Ippolito, and Caitlin Jones (eds.) (2003), *The Variable Media Approach*:

and galleries are clearly exploring comparable considerations according to their remits and infrastructures.

A collection that seeks to evolve its established procedures could look towards instances such as Pip Laurenson's article, 'Developing Strategies for the Conservation of installations incorporating Time-based Media with reference to Gary Hill's *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*'<sup>73</sup>. It would be the role of a subject network to facilitate such considerations, and to give the regional collections the means by which to assess their own choices, but also to help them document their actions as case studies, to amass a database of those, and to broker discussion forums. In *Chapter Four*, I go on to elaborate three case studies, based on a selection of recent acquisitions made by both regional and national collections, which I suggest could indicate the kind of precedents for which a subject network could provide editorial guidance.

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*Permanence through Change*, Montreal and New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications and the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology.

<sup>73</sup> Laurenson, Pip (2001), 'Developing Strategies for the Conservation of installations incorporating Time-based Media with reference to Gary Hill's *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 40, 2001, pp. 259-266.

## Chapter Four – Case Studies

## **4.1. Case study One: Video**

### **4.1.1. Grouping Rationale**

Video represents one of the fast growing areas of acquisitions for national and regional collections. This reflects the ubiquity of the medium in artists' practice today. The issues I raise do apply in some measure to film formats (8mm, 16mm). However, film artworks could constitute their own discussion, and I have raised some of the issues elsewhere in this thesis. Here, I dedicate the study to works originally made or displayed using analogue video technologies<sup>1</sup>. The confidence to acquire an individual video work, let alone assemble a number of works that might represent video in breadth and range, has hitherto eluded Regional collections in Britain. That those collections have in very recent years begun to acquire important artworks incorporating or solely comprising analogue video technology is largely testament to the work of the Contemporary Art Society and its 'Special Collections Scheme'. However, issues of long-term care continue to place analogue video artworks beyond the current and future resources of many, particularly smaller, collections.

There is a need, I argue, for collections to represent video artworks across their spectrum, in order, simply, to record historically the advent of analogue video as a medium, particularly with the onset of digital technology. In any event, technology itself continues to evolve, and artists will, for their part, carrying on

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<sup>1</sup> A video work may be shot on high definition digital stock for instance, edited on a computer and then transferred to an analogue such as Betacam SP.

working with the latest developments. In order to follow artists who work in this vein into the future, galleries need to be congruent to those pursuits.

#### 4.1.2. Scoping the Level of Commitment

My aim, throughout these case studies, is to identify what it would take to ensure a non-traditional artwork's uncompromised (within reason) longevity; what the gallery can reasonably commit to; and whether the importance of the work to the collection overrides this. I focus, specifically, on what, in this case, would compromise an analogue video work, and what would compromise the collection? Analogue video artworks do require a very particular kind of commitment. In her 1997 lecture, 'The Conservation and Documentation of Video Art,' Tate conservator, Pip Laurenson suggested that the two key factors in preserving the integrity of any analogue video artworks are 'the preservation of video signals and the documentation of display details'<sup>2</sup>. The question is whether these (and most particularly the first of these) represent a 'reasonable' undertaking for a gallery in both the immediate and the long-term.

As I have suggested, many galleries do demur from acquisition in the face of the preservation issues, which video artworks on analogue stock (VHS, Betacam SP, Laser Disk) present. Laurenson's paper does provide a highly useful summation of the difficulties that video on analogue formats can present specifically to museums. At the time of her lecture, she noted that museums

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<sup>2</sup> Laurenson, Pip (1999), 'The Conservation and Documentation of Video Art', in Hummelen, I. and Sillé, D. (eds.), *Modern Art: Who Cares? An Interdisciplinary Research Project and an International Symposium on the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: The Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural

mostly acquired video artworks on analogue magnetic tape formats [Hummelen and Sillé, (eds.), 1999, p. 263]. As a medium upon which to store video signals, however, magnetic tape is subject to deterioration through use, and to an inherently limited life-span. Video signals are especially vulnerable and susceptible to loss of quality and information. In the gallery context, display for eight hours a day over a period possibly of months, or repeated copying for loan, may exacerbate that vulnerability. The potential for loss can be slowed, but not eliminated: as Laurenson suggests, by 'a regular transfer of the video signals onto new stock, to overcome the problem of material deterioration, and onto new formats to overcome the problem of obsolescence' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 264]. Moreover, the equipment required to playback the signals as sound and vision will require its own maintenance and face obsolescence [Hummelen and Sillé (ed.), 1999, p. 264]. One strategy, Laurenson proposes, 'would be to preserve the playback equipment', or to stockpile the relevant pieces. However, she rejects both of these as 'very difficult, if not impossible' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 264].

In relation to both, just how specifically or generically an artist has employed the technology will directly affect how far components need be 'preserved', or how far strategies such as replacement can be used. Galleries must regularly transfer their Master on to a new format, and ensure that this process will not involve loss. It also requires a decision regarding playback equipment, whether a gallery is able to access the necessary technology. For regional collections, the specificity of original formats or hardware can be prohibitive. As Justin Graham

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Heritage, pp. 263-271. Appended to Laurenson's lecture are 'Tate Gallery Guidelines for the

and Jill Sterett, conservators at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, have said, 'if only the challenges of preserving electronic art stopped with preserving the videotape itself'<sup>3</sup>. As they continue:

Electronic installations are not easy to categorize and store. They usually involve videotape, the equipment to play the tape, and there is almost always specific architecture that is built as part of the artwork. These works of art need to be put in a gallery according to the artist's specifications. In the end, what you have is a very detailed plan for a particular piece. So where does that go? Does that plan belong in paper storage? Does it stay in the curator's office? What is the art? Is the equipment required to run the piece considered "stock"? Is it dedicated to the piece? What happens when equipment parts break? What happens when the equipment is no longer available?

I suggest that a responsible approach for any gallery rests not only in weighing up the resource implications of a work, but formalising a 'right to reformat' *and* a 'right to install' with the artist. The latter includes apprehending what the artist takes to be specific or variable about the display requirements of a work; establishing with the artist parameters for possible forms of presentation; and documenting what they take to be appropriate or inappropriate.

#### 4.1.3 A Brief Overview

Route maps are premised on the ability to access information about what is where, and how it was acquired and documented. Is there another collection, for instance, that has a work by Hilary Lloyd, or Gillian Wearing? With regard to the latter, the response could be yes. In the case of the former, Hilary Lloyd, the response would be negative. She is not represented in any other public

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Care of Video Art Works' and a short annotated bibliography.

<sup>3</sup>Graham, Justin and Jill Sterett (1997), 'An Institutional Approach to the Collections Care of Electronic Art,' *Western Association for Art Conservation Newsletter*, 19, 3, September, accessed at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/waac/wn/wn19/wn19-3/wn19-310.html>, retrieved 02

collection. The enquirer would, then, have to think in terms of type, or of comparable artworks. The matter would be then to identify which of those other collections could offer the desired level of advice (perhaps specialist, perhaps more general). This requires identifying their level of infrastructure and expertise, but also analysing the nature of their holdings. The Tate collection has an established collection of video artworks, and accommodates video artworks across their full range of complexity. For example, it houses complex video installations such as Gary Hill's **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** (1991) [Plate 3], but also incorporates artworks that employ video technology in the most generic sense, where the artwork is the projected image or footage.

For regional collections, their holdings are significantly more recent, and often are singular. Leeds City Art Gallery and Aberdeen City Art Gallery, for example, have acquired Mark Wallinger's **Threshold to the Kingdom** (2000) [Plate 44], and Dalziel and Scullion's **Another Place** (2002), [Plate 11] respectively. Each are works that are technically more generic, where the work of art is not tied to a specific brand or format. Southampton occupy a mid point insofar as they are demonstrably building a collection of video artworks, which is fairly recent, and are attempting to develop beyond acquisitions that are 'generic'. An acquisition by Southampton, such as Hilary Lloyd's **Dawn** (1999) [Plate 45] is one such case, and indicates a clear attainable level of ambition.



#### 4.1.4. A Broad Collection and Medium Specialism: Tate Gallery

In the UK the Tate is paradigmatic in the resources and procedures it has developed to care for artworks comprising (either solely or in part) electronic media. Internationally, it is one of the few museum institutions to have a conservation department dedicated to this field. In her 1997 paper, Pip Laurenson elaborated the Tate's collection of works incorporating video according to three broad distinctions: [Hummelen & Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 263]

- A. Works where video is part of a mixed-media installation, and is not the primary medium. An example would be the mixed-media installation **OTTOshaft** (1991) [Plate 2] by Matthew Barney, which incorporates three constantly playing monitors alongside a range of materials including tapioca, Vaseline, bread and meringue<sup>4</sup>.
- B. Works where video is the primary medium, and the display equipment and specifications are essential to the impact and meaning of the work. One such installation in Tate's collection is Bill Viola's three screen projection **Nantes Triptych** (1994) [Plate 16], the 'atmospheric mood' of which Laurenson has noted, 'is created by the way it is installed'<sup>5</sup>.

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Media Arts around 1987, under the guidance of curator Bill Riley.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller discussion of this work, see Jackie Heuman's article 'OTTOshaft 1992', in Heuman, Jackie (ed.) (1999), *Material Matters: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*, London: Tate Gallery, pp. 90-99.

<sup>5</sup> In the notes to her lecture, Laurenson noted:

The two side images of the birth of a child and the death of a woman are back-projected. The central image is a front projection of a man floating. The projected image passes through a gauze material into a white rectangular space. The atmospheric mood of this work is created by the way it is installed, including the use of cathode ray tube projectors. Recognising that cathode ray tube projectors are likely to become obsolete, the artist has said that the projectors used to create the two side images could be [...] replaced by large liquid display crystal display panels. However, the artist feels it is

C. Works where video is the primary medium, and the display technology and details are loosely specified and the relationship between display and meaning is peripheral. Such videos are usually displayed on a monitor or as a simple projection. An example here would be Smith/Stewart's monitor-based video **Mouth to Mouth** (1999).

I retain Laurenson's delineation throughout the rest of this case study as an invaluable 'museological' typology of video artworks, and against which regional collections could logistically scope prospective acquisitions and the level of commitment that they require. These are works, which, in the main, raise multiple and idiosyncratic issues. However, the Tate's ability to collect *within* these categorisations, and to commit to works across these categories, far exceeds those that a regional collection could make.

The Tate stands as an example of a collection that has developed and built up medium expertise, in order to cope with the many issues that surround video as an artist's material. Must every collection that considers accessioning video artworks aspire to the same? As Derck Pullen, Head of Sculpture Conservation at the Tate, has questioned:

Does electronic media conservation require a real expertise in new technologies, or is it sufficient to have a basic understanding and be able to manage the technicians? Is understanding and preserving the artist's intentions the real difference between a conservator and a technician? What is best practice in this field of conservation?<sup>6</sup>

By virtue of their comprehensive collecting remit and their position as the national collection, the Tate has a clear priority to ensure that it is able to inherit

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essential that the central image is created using projected light [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 266].

<sup>6</sup> Pullen, Derek (1999), 'The Challenges of a Dual Role', in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, pp. 300-301.

and re-inherit the full range of works that it acquires far into the future. It, therefore, requires a broad and long view. This, it is able to achieve insofar as it can guarantee future resources and funding. Consequently, the Tate has established medium specialism over the last ten or so years, as their holdings of video artworks have grown. In response to specialist focus, Tate conservators have been able to identify and define several key procedures that are pre-requisite to a sound approach to the stock that video signals are stored on; the play back equipment; and to display documentation. Tate conservation department has published its own guidelines for the care of video artworks, and Pip Laurenson has also presented a case study. Both present valuable sources, but neither takes a 'context-sensitive' approach. I discuss both here, taking into account the Tate's context.

Laurenson outlined the steps that such a sound approach on the part of a collection to video artworks necessitates in the following way:

1. Prior to acquisition, she noted that the Tate assesses, and assures, the condition of the first generation edit Master, which is typically held by the artist, or their representative. It is from that copy that a collection should archive its own master copy.
2. Within the text of her lecture, Laurenson adumbrated the various factors that she, as a Tate conservator, looks out for when examining the master version prior to acquisition [Hummelen & Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 265].
3. Laurenson prioritises choosing an appropriate domestic archival master format. This involves a conversant knowledge of issues that both analogue and digital formats raise. Laurenson raises the issue of compression in

relation to digital formats specifically, and recommends a non-compressed format for archiving<sup>7</sup>. Since 1997, Tate conservation archives directly onto Digital a master on DVD. The format that they have used is D1. According to Laurensen, it is 'the most widely supported non-compressed component digital tape format in London [...] that was introduced in 1986 and compiles to the CCIR 601 Digital Video standard' [Laurensen, 2001, p. 262].

4. Transference takes place at a professional video facility, at which the conservator is present, and throughout which they must ensure the authenticity of the master material. The Tate hopes to transfer its archival master onto new stock every five years or so [Hummelen & Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 264; Laurensen, 2001, p. 262].
5. The Tate has selected a single analogue display format for use within their domestic galleries: Laser disk. They retain laser disk copies of all their video works. Rolling out a single format does depend on how just much homogeneity that you want, or can afford. Laurensen suggests that any choice should be based on 'reliability', 'ease of operation', its 'ability to be controlled externally', 'quality' of output and 'cost'. She notes that Laser Disk is a 'compromise between reliability and quality' [Hummelen & Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 268].
6. Tate has chosen not to preserve playback equipment, except where they are absolutely vital to the meaning of the work, as with Gary Hill's

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<sup>7</sup> Laurensen, 1999, p. 269: Laurensen noted that 'compression enables more video to be encoded onto a smaller area of tape, computer hard disc or onto a CD type disc, by eliminating redundant information. Presently there is a debate about the effect of different compression systems on video material [...] Until more is known about these systems we should be cautious about transferring video which was not made using a compression system onto a compressed format'.

complex installation **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** (1991), which I discuss below.

7. With regard to documentation, Laurenson provides a Tate Gallery checklist which focuses on three areas specifically: The video material; copyright and editions; and display. Laurenson suggests that the checklist should serve as a prompt when interviewing the artist, and not sent to them.

Within the following sections, I weave in comparative remarks regarding the seven points above. Here, I consider how that framework, couched in accrued specialist knowledge, yields to an individual work, and, moreover, what latitude it gives in approaching a particularly demanding work like Gary Hill's video installation **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** (1991) [Plate 3]. It is a work that tests even the Tate's capacity vis-à-vis preserving the integrity of a video artwork. Laurenson suggested in her article, 'Developing Strategies for the Conservation of installations incorporating Time-based Media with reference to Gary Hill's **Between Cinema and a Hard Place**'<sup>8</sup> that:

Success is the ability to continue to display these works in accordance with the artist's intent. A conservator also has a responsibility to preserve the historical quality or character of the work both in relation to the history of contemporary art and the development of an artist's work throughout his or her lifetime [Laurenson, 2001, p. 260].

However, in the interim between her 1997 lecture and the article, Laurenson has clearly refined responsible care to incorporate the recognition of 'complexity', 'identifying risk' and 'managing change'. Where in 1997, she referred primarily to the preservation of video signals and display documentation, here her

approach is brought in tune with a growing emphasis on preventive conservation ethics. Laurensen notes: 'Conservation is [...] now concerned with documentation and determining what change is acceptable and managing those changes' [Laurensen, 2001, p. 260]. This can constitute a significant commitment when directed towards a single work, let alone a group of works. With its level of resource and its ability to invest in scholarship, the Tate is able to do so.

**Between Cinema and a Hard Place** (1991) is probably the most complex video installation currently in a British collection, and is an ambitious realisation of Hill's recurring concerns with 'the relationship between the viewer and language and image' [Laurensen, 2001, p. 261]. It comprises twenty-three monitors that have been removed from their coverings to expose their 'innards' (cathode ray tubes and circuit boards). They are arranged in groupings according to size to evoke clusters of rocks that demarcate farmland. With a computer-controlled switching device, images fade in and out across the monitors in a pre-determined configuration in accordance with a soundtrack. The soundtrack has three elements. The first features a woman reading from Martin Heidegger's text *The Nature of Language*; the second plays an echo of her voice; the third comprises abstract sounds [Laurensen, 2001, p. 261]. With this installation, complexity of theme is supported by complexity of realisation. Curator Sophie Howarth has noted:

Across the screens, visual sequences unfold and fragment, moving from left to right. Initially, it seems as if the images are triggered by a voice reading [...] However, as the work continues, the precise correlation

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<sup>8</sup> Laurensen, Pip (2001), 'Developing Strategies for the Conservation of Installations Incorporating Time-Based Media with Reference to Gary Hill's *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 40, 2, pp. 259-266.

between sound and image becomes increasingly unclear. Monitors switch on and off, images flicker and blur<sup>9</sup>.

To identify the risk of compromise to the work from within (and without), Laurenson stipulated the 'need to understand the significance of the sculptural elements of the monitors, the time-based elements of the video and audio, and the nature of the space [...]' [Laurenson, 2001, p. 261]. As she continued:

The conservator can then anticipate the factors most likely to prevent each component from fulfilling its role. The value of some elements might be functional, the value of others might be aesthetic or sculptural, or perhaps a mixture of the two [Laurenson, 2001, p. 261].

Each of these, she then matched with strategies such as documentation, replacement, and transfer. **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** is a perfect example of a single work that demands *plural* levels of care. Firstly, there is the preservation of video signals. As per its standard archiving procedures, the Tate transferred the master material onto D1 digital tape format, and simultaneously produced several analogue versions, too, on Betacam SP and VHS formats, as well as laser disk, which is the installation's display format.

However, other elements, namely the cathode ray tube monitors, are much more problematic. On acquisition of the works, Tate conservation acquired schematics and manuals, and they contacted the relevant manufacturers to discuss part and spares:

The majority of the monitors was made by Panasonic. Panasonic will usually hold spares for specific components for eight years after production has ceased. Recognizing these threats to the long-term life of the cathode ray tubes, we have obtained spares and schematics to facilitate replacement and repair when necessary [Laurenson, 2001, p. 262].

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<sup>9</sup> Howarth, Sophie (2000), 'Between Cinema and a Hard Place', in Burton, Jane (ed.) *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*, London: Tate Gallery, np., no. 10.

They also, at that point, acquired a full set of spare monitors. However, even in the few years between the making of the work and its acquisition by Tate, aspects of the design of the hardware that Hill employed in the work had subtly changed.

At the time that Laurenson published her article, and after the work had been shown as part of the opening displays at Tate Modern, individual components in three circuit boards had failed. Laurenson noted that, of those, a commercial company recommended by Panasonic successfully repaired two [Laurenson, 2001, p. 263]. Of the functional elements<sup>10</sup> - the laser disc players, discs, audio equipment, and computer control system - Laurenson states: 'if the technology fails and these elements become obsolete it would be acceptable to the artist to substitute these components with an entirely new technology but only if their function were the same.' However, this is not as straightforward as it might seem, because what Laurenson refers to as 'dependency'. This qualification is important. Though Hill may have employed the components in a generic fashion where they facilitate, but do not aesthetically contribute to the work, they may still be unique or even idiosyncratic, and available only from a specific industry source that itself may not be secure into the future. This question of dependency can be lessened, however.

As with Hill's installation, the computer control system, for instance, is not mass-produced, but was specifically developed by Hill for this particular work.

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<sup>10</sup> As Laurenson noted:

The actual object, the laser disk player is not visible and its appearance is not significant to the artist's choice of the model or the technology. Rather, it is the ability of the laser



Moreover, there is the program that runs the work. ‘The software designed by Dave Jones, the program written by Gary Hill for this work, and a copy of the DOS operating system are stored on the Tate’s main server and also on CD’ [Laurenson, 2001, p. 264].

How these provisions will coalesce in the future, of course, remains to be seen. However, **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** is a work that exemplifies the benefits of early acquisition. If acquired soon enough, a collection has the ability to achieve contingencies and procedures, though, as **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** shows, with many works, this has to be subject to constant reassessment. If the Tate had sought to acquire the work any later, it might have been impossible to secure all of the aspects that will enable the Tate to manage the installation’s ambitious relationship between meaning and realisation. Laurenson’s article can be read as an invaluable document in applied care. However, she reflects little on the matter of timing, on the lapse between the creation of the work (1991), its acquisition (1995) and the subsequent faltering of elements for instance. Moreover, her article is implicitly, rather than explicitly, context-sensitive. Her account assumes a level of infrastructure to support a work of such complexity. No other gallery would be in a position to purchase a complete set of spare monitors in support of an acquisition.

#### 4.1.5. Specific Collecting Policies: Leeds and Aberdeen

For most regional collections, collecting has, hitherto, been typically focused on a range of works that correspond to Laurenson's 'Category C'. Some do hold works that correspond to 'Category A': mixed media installations that incorporate a video element. In 2002, for instance, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne did acquire Zoë Walker's **Somewhere Special** (1999), an installation which has a video component<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, some very ambitious installations, which would correspond to 'Category A', can spawn 'Category C' works. An example is Mark Wallinger's **Prometheus** (1999). As installed at the Whitechapel in 2002, **Prometheus** is a visually powerful and highly disturbing multiple part installation, which incorporates sculpture and photography as well as video. The work alludes to the purgatory of the Titan in Greek myth who gave fire to mankind and incurred the wrath of the Gods. In the video element, entitled **Blind Faith**, the artist's alter-ego, undergoes a perpetual, cyclical execution. For the Whitechapel exhibition, the video element was played on four monitors, and comprised part of the larger whole. Subsequently, it has been editioned as a discrete work, retaining the title **Prometheus**. Southampton City Art Gallery acquired one edition in 2003 through the 'Special Collections Scheme', and the artist's dealer presented another to the Tate.

Corinne Miller, Head Curator at Leeds City Art Gallery, has noted that regional collections have had to formulate their acquisition remits in strategic, rather

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the basis of their value to the installation [Laurenson, 2001, p. 264].

than comprehensive, terms. To reiterate her comments when discussing Leeds City Art Gallery's policy on new media:

I think the Tate requires them not to have the scruples that I have working in the regions, because they are a national collection. And if its part of the zeitgeist, then that has to be reflected [...] I can't afford that luxury, because I know that [...] I [have to] leave my successors all of it, but I don't think that's very responsible, because I know what's going to happen, and that's why I don't do it<sup>12</sup>.

However, on the whole, the works discussed in this section are those where video is often the sole originating element, and which are, in technical terms, generic in so far as their existence is not tied to a specified brand or format of technology. It is important to differentiate between 'generic', as I use it here, and the 'functional' elements characterised by Laurenson in relation to **Between Cinema and a Hard Place**. Those 'functional' elements were idiosyncratic and unique, and the work's meaning does retain a 'dependence' upon them. In essence, they remain specific, and the Tate has to treat them as such. A work that is technically most generic (which has no aesthetic dependency to a particular brand or format whatsoever) would be one such as **Jerusalem** (1999) by Jeremy Deller, which Southampton acquired as a DVD. As Godfrey Worsdale noted, Deller is 'ultra-relaxed, it doesn't matter what format it's on, DVD, not a problem. Doesn't matter what monitor, no particular installation requirements, just the footage playing away as you like'<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> **Somewhere Special** is an installation 'mountain' comprising denier nylon, guy ropes, tent pegs, model-maker trees, xpelair fan and a video element, and Lambda photographic print mounted on aluminium.

<sup>12</sup> Fiske, Tina (2002), *Personal Interview with Corinne Miller, Keeper of Fine Art, Leeds City Art Gallery*, 17 01 2002, Leeds.

<sup>13</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001p), *Personal Interview with Godfrey Worsdale, Curator, Southampton City Art Gallery*, 14 12 2001, Southampton.

To identify technically generic works, they are

- usually displayed on a monitor, or as a simple projection where video is the primary and frequently sole element, but where a monitor, disk player, projector or some other piece of hardware can be negotiated as part of the acquisitions package.
- Where playback equipment (monitor, video/disk player or projector) does not constitute a part of the work.
- The mode and means of display are loosely specified in terms of projected image size or monitor dimensions, preference in contrast/brightness, RGB mode, sharpness, and are transferable from space to space.

The work would not be compromised by changes to format, or to installation space, for instance. For collections, such as Aberdeen City Art Gallery and Leeds City Art Gallery, this currently represents their attainable or reasonable level of commitment.

Aberdeen acquired their first video work, **Another Place** (2002) [Plate 11] by Scottish artists Matthew Dalziel and Louise Scullion, on DVD format, taking receipt of two discs. The work celebrates a non-urban way of life, particular to the east coast of Scotland. It consists of between seven and eight filmed portraits that each last for two-three minutes, and that are looped and accompanied by a sound track. It is projected as a large-scale image, the dimensions of which vary according to the size of the exhibition space and relationship with surrounding works. The equipment used to project the work is non-specific, and bears no relation to the visual content or meaning of the piece. On this occasion, it did form part of the purchase. Aberdeen did acquire the

display equipment that included a disc player, amplifier and speakers, but did so with a view to their having a *non-exclusive function*. Jennifer Melville has indicated that other works that Aberdeen may acquire would have to be compatible with this display system, and would have to have the same adaptability as **Another Place**<sup>14</sup>. Specificity may arise in other forms, however, which may have bearing in terms of display pressures that many regional collections suffer from. It is vital to clarify these. For example, could **Another Place** be displayed on a loop or timed in relation to other video works? Aberdeen did acquire the work as a unique rather than editioned item. This could have bearing on the artists' requirements vis-à-vis the work's installation, insofar as they may be more definitive about it.

Leeds City Art Gallery have to date three video works, all acquired from editions of three: **Threshold to the Kingdom** (2000) [**Plate 44**] by Mark Wallinger; **Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 + 1)** (1997) [**Plate 46**]; and **Ascension (Nothing/Something Good)** (2000) [**Plate 47**] by Mark Dean. Corinne Miller has spelt out the process of defining Leeds' level of commitment:

the idea of buying hardware that was integral to a piece I found too problematic for our gallery. I could foresee a time if we bought such works when, two years down the line, we would be unable to show them, because we simply didn't have the money to conserve them, or get them in workable order [Fiske, 2002, np.].

For Miller, buying a video installation is currently unthinkable. Indeed, reluctance at Leeds to acquire video works where hardware is integral to the piece has hitherto extended to those works shown even on generic monitors. For

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<sup>14</sup> Fiske, Tina (2001a), *Personal Interview with Jennifer Melville, Keeper of Fine Art, Aberdeen*

the time being, their remit extends solely to works where it is unambiguously the projected image alone that is the work of art. For Miller, such works offer two clear advantages to a gallery such as Leeds:

when we've bought, we've had the agreement of the artists to transfer to relevant medium should the technology progress [...]we have quite clear instructions about the size of wall, the ability of us to determine size, the environment for the works in the installation, and how that works out in practice [Fiske, 2002, np].

Limitations of finance and space also play a determining role what Leeds feel they can responsibly and reasonably do. For Miller, this also extends to minimising potential problems for her successors.

For Miller, it is vital to consider any constraints with regard to how the video projections may be shown at Leeds. As with Wallinger's **Threshold to the Kingdom**, (2000), the artist has furnished Leeds with an unambiguous 'right to install'. This, Miller suggests 'is our best scenario' [Fiske, 2002, np]. Though they may be shown individually, neither the Wallinger, nor the two Dean video works, require a dedicated room, or modify the display context in a way vital to the experience of the work. For collections where space is at a premium or under pressure, flexibility in installing the work can be a pre-requisite, and it can involve 'doubling-up' videos for instance. Leeds City Art Gallery showed **Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 + 1)** and **Threshold to the Kingdom** in close proximity in 2001, in two neighbouring 'black boxes'. Both works have important and distinctive soundtracks: For Dean, the Byrd's 'Going Back', and for Wallinger, Allegri's 'Misere' of the 51st Psalm. ('I have mercy on me, God, in your kindness/In your compassion blot out my offence'). Rather than deal

with the question of sound bleeding, the films were edited and looped on the same tape, so that one started when the other stopped [Fiske, 2002, np]. This constitutes what might be called 'maximum flexibility' regarding the right to install and reformat. Miller discusses experiences with recent acquisitions thus:

we've chosen a very one-way of interpreting them. I shall use other ways in the future [...] we've got a black space, and a white projecting wall at the end, and we've constructed those space, we've got them running alongside one another, but in order to do that, we've re-formatted the disk, there's space put on at the end of each disk the same as the other. One stops and the other comes on, its syncopated. Its rather like going round an exhibition, you know, you move from one to the other [...] you don't get the over-lap [...] of course its all incredibly space-intensive [Fiske, 2002, np].

The specificity of Leeds' remit appears especially telling with regard to the other piece by Mark Dean that they acquired, **Ascension (Nothing/Something Good)**. **Ascension** was acquired at the same time as **Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 + 1)**. Leeds clearly thought that it was similarly generic. When Leeds communicated with the artist about looping it onto a tape alongside **Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 + 1)** and **Threshold to the kingdom**, Dean, happy for the former to be looped, demurred with regard to **Ascension (Nothing/Something Good)**. Consequently, as of April 2003, Leeds had not yet shown the work. Dean's reasons for demurring lay in the timing integral to the work. As he explained, 'it is important that **Ascension** has no fixed duration'<sup>15</sup>. There is also the matter of its installation at Laurent Delaye Gallery in London, where Dean installed the work in a space with shuttered windows that showed light coming through.

#### 4.1.6. Approaching Medium Specificity: Southampton

There are collections, such as Southampton City Art Gallery, where they have established an interest in representing video art in greater depth. Such collections are expanding the scale of what regional collections acquire to include works where video is the primary medium, and where the equipment and display specifications are essential to the impact and meaning of the work, often in a sculptural capacity. Video artworks with any degree of hardware specificity do pose certain challenges to regional collections. As **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** demonstrated, hardware specificity demands a more open-ended commitment on the part of the acquiring institution. The institutions that I discussed in the previous section, acquired generic works precisely because the level of commitment that they require now would remain consistent for future curators. Many regional collections do not have dedicated conservation staff nor studio space. To reiterate former curator at Southampton, Godfrey Worsdale:

there is a shortfall of expertise, and because I perhaps have taken as much interest as the conservators, in a new media issue, it wouldn't be so much a request from me for them to tell me, it would be more: shall we talk this through as a group of people who are a little bit blind and not very confident [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

Those regional galleries seeking to acquire works that have a degree of hardware specificity, therefore, have to find the mean between what is possible now and what will be conceivable for the future. As Worsdale again noted:

The problem with taking advice from those major national institutions is, a lot of the time they say: this is the way to do it. But of course I'm operating under local government restrictions and financial limitations.

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<sup>15</sup> Personal correspondence between Mark Dean and the author, 24 04 2003.



And yes, usually if you hurl enough cash at a problem you can solve it, but of course I've got other problems to contemplate. So where we can, we try to keep up with those things [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

The key factor, therefore, is the anticipation of manageability. Regional collections need to be able to structure the relationship between the present and the future much more definitively, particularly where members of staff take on increasingly composite roles. This places emphasis on timing and the need for the point of acquisition to be much more decisive.

In 2000, Southampton acquired three works by Hilary Lloyd; **One Minute of Water** (1999); **Nuala and Rodney** (1994) and **Dawn** (1999) [Plate 45]. The first presents a shot of a pool of rippling water, which is looped repeatedly on a minute-long cycle. The second two feature human subjects engaged in 'seemingly insignificant occupations,'<sup>16</sup> getting a haircut in the case of **Nuala and Rodney** and sitting, waiting in the case of **Dawn**. Both, again, are looped, with the affect of attenuating the action (or inaction in the case of **Dawn**.) The closely observed nature of each is typical of Lloyd's way of working, and her interest in 'the engagement between the voyeur and the performer, between watching and being watched, intimacy and distance' [Staple, 1999, p. 9]. All three works are shown on monitors, each of which are of different dimension, and seem individually selected with regard to the narrative that they display. The monitors and cassette recorders are placed on Unicol stands. Lloyd typically installs them in groups, though each stands as a work in itself. Alexandra Bradley has noted 'a relationship, albeit subliminal, between the human, physical subjects of the portraits and the technical, audio-visual body of

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<sup>16</sup> Staple, Polly (1999), 'Precious Time: Polly Staple on Hilary Lloyd,' *Untitled*, Autumn, p. 9.

equipment as a whole'<sup>17</sup>. For Lloyd, the monitor and video-cassette recorders are, uncompromisingly, part of the work, and are specified exactly. To all intent and purpose, the works do function like sculptures insofar as they occupy, and modify, the space around them.

To be able to acquire these works, Godfrey Worsdale, the curator at Southampton at the time, had to engage in protracted negotiations with Lloyd in order to gauge the role of the equipment itself, and the importance of its physical condition. As Worsdale noted:

I spent 2 years buying 3 pieces of work from her, and that time was spent having the same conversation over and over again about me saying: if you insist that we always use that monitor, then I can't buy the work, because I can't be sure that monitor will always exist, be made to work, that the technology will be around to repair it [Bracker and Fiske, 2001e, np].

Vitality, these discussions had to take place prior to an agreement to commit on the part of Worsdale. The Tate carried out a condition report on **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** prior to acquisition, to determine the scope of the commitment. However, the conservation team developed and implemented a strategy for its long-term care *once* the acquisition was made. For Southampton, the acquisition was only possible if an agreement could be reached in advance. Worsdale's strategy was to identify a minimum acceptable specificity regarding the exact brand, look, or qualities of the monitors, and Lloyd was happy and available to engage in discussion. In this respect, he noted, they had to take their dialogue to 'a slightly different conceptual level,' where Lloyd spelt out her reasons for choosing the specific monitors that she had [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

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<sup>17</sup> Bradley, Alexandra (1999), 'Hilary Lloyd', *Art Monthly*, 231, November, p. 27.

Ultimately for Lloyd, specificity came to rest not in brand. The key point was that those monitors that she had selected were not ‘household’ items, but that they were professional pieces of equipment of particular dimensions. From this, Lloyd was able to elaborate further characteristics independent of the sculptural nature of her original choice of hardware components. Furthermore, the quality of ‘newness’ emerged as an important value for the artist. She did point out to Worsdale that she was very anxious ‘that in 100 years time, her work wasn’t going to look like a Charlie Chaplin film, [...] and that she also wants the presentation equipment to remain quite fresh and up-to-date’ [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np]. Consequently, Lloyd developed certification to accompany the three acquisitions, specifically in response to Southampton’s need to establish a clearly understood set of terms. The certificates stated how each work was it when first installed; how to install it; what to do when the machinery is no longer available; and what you are actually buying (which is the certificate and the master tape). Prior to this, she did not issue certification, or specification of components that comprised the purchase. For Lloyd, the practice will now become standard. It makes work that was difficult for collections to acquire much more amenable.

When Hill’s piece was accessioned, the Tate acquired the twenty-three modified cathode ray monitors and computer hardware integral to the piece, in addition to an entire spare set of monitors [Laurenson, 2001]. Inversely to **Between Cinema and a Hard Place**, the equipment of Lloyd’s works, though an integral sculptural element to each, was not acquired from the artist, nor was it covered

by the purchase price. It constituted a cost additional to the purchase, and would continue to be so. For each 'unit' or work, the equipment required differs.

Southampton had to buy three separate and distinct monitors as well as three separate and distinct videocassette recorders. The works can be shown in *NO* other format. **One Minute of Water** (1999) is displayed on a Sony PVM-9045 9 inch colour video monitor and Panasonic AG-7350 S-VHS hi-fi video cassette recorder. **Dawn** (1999) is shown on a Sony PVM-1495E 14 inch colour video monitor and Panasonic AG-7350 S-VHS hi-fi video cassette recorder. **Nuala and Rodney**, a slightly older work when acquired, is played on a Casio EV-500 portable colour television 2.5 inch LCD screen. However, the playback equipment was non-specified, and given as 'VHS video cassette player' with the notation '(not supplied; gallery to add make and model to caption)'. Each set of equipment once acquired can only be used for the Lloyd piece, and is not available to screen other works on by other artists. There are benefits to be had under this arrangement, as the works can be shown individually or all together. Yet the cost implications in the short and long term would be significant for many other galleries.

The question of on-going costs carries through to the production of exhibition tapes, which must be renewed for each display, represent a further on-going cost, as would re-formatting for archival purposes. The making of exhibition tapes has implications for the look of the image. Lloyd is very clear that the loop (one minute in the case of **One Minute of Water**, and thirty minutes in the case of **Dawn**) must be seamless, with no frames of black in between edits. In order to fit the loop onto the tape (180 minutes), she notes that some of the

frames can be lost. With **Dawn**, she notes that the five seconds of white that commences the piece must strictly be adhered to. At least two exhibition copies will be required to maintain the pristine quality of the image. And new copies, moreover, must be made each time the work is shown. Lloyd's instructions regarding the positioning and preparation of the work are very precise. Elements such as the power point used clearly inform the look of the work, as does the slack amount of cable, and the use of silver, tightly adhered gaffer tape.

#### 4.1.7. Summary

To summarise, Tate Gallery collects analogue video art across a range of categories, in view of its position as the national collection of modern and contemporary art. This necessitates that the gallery has a medium expertise. It is able to reassess its procedures in relation to complex single works, and to a group of holdings (as well as to display and archive formats), on an on-going basis. Leeds City Art Gallery has a very specific remit in response to factors dictated by its current resources and programme. It acquires video works that are technically very generic, on which the work's meaning is not dependent. Southampton is beginning to extend the scope of analogue video works in their collection, towards those that have a degree of material specificity. In relation to the Tate, however, the terms must be set out *prior* to acquisition.

To conclude, the Tate's typology provides a tremendously useful guide on how to assess the commitment that a video artwork will require, in order that a gallery is able to analyse what they can reasonably do. Key factors seem to be

scale, timing, personnel and finance. I restate my claim of *Chapters One* and *Three*, that Southampton offers an exemplary intermediary approach to collections of more limited resource who seek to acquire video artworks across their range.

## 4.2. Case Study Two: Wall Works

### 4.2.1. Grouping Rationale

Like video, wall drawings and wall paintings are now considered to be mainstream art forms. Till very recently, even when a collection may be keen to represent an artist who predominantly produces wall works, it has not been uncommon that they will acquire works on paper as an alternative<sup>18</sup>. Wall works do, however, present a gradually developing constituency within museum collections. Regional, as well as national collections, are accessioning them. Unlike analogue video, however, which is comparatively well catered for in terms of technical literature, there is little published regarding the permanent retention of contemporary wall drawings or paintings. There is considerable printed matter on the conservation of prehistoric wall drawings for instance, which often gives primacy to the visual representation.

Wall or 'mural' painting, of course, constitutes one of the oldest forms of visual representation. Their contemporary counterparts share with them the principle of painted or graphic markings applied directly to a wall or architectural surface itself, with no intermediate support such as canvas or paper<sup>19</sup>. However,

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<sup>18</sup> One example would be Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, who acquired *Untitled* (1997), gouache and Indian ink drawing by Richard Wright in 2001. Wright is best known for his wall paintings. Of his drawings, Deputy Director of SNGMA, Keith Hartley has noted, 'They are not, strictly speaking, studies but they do allow him to work up ideas that may be used in [...] the larger paintings,' in Dewey, Alice (ed.) (2002), *New: Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary British Art*, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> I am not including 'wall paper' works that are pasted to wall, such as those by Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Richard Long or Fiona Banner as they incorporate a 'support'. For a discussion of Fiona Banner, see Barker, Rachel (2002), 'Modern Art: A Lifetime to Consider', in Reid, Zoë (ed.), *Contemporary Art: Creation, Curation, Collection and Conservation*, Post-prints, Dublin, September 2001, Dublin: Irish Professional Conservators and Restorers Association, pp. 5-6.

contemporary wall drawings or paintings, of the kind that I discuss here, are in the main temporary occurrences, existing as instructions or ideas and only realised for finite periods, often by parties other than the artist. Wall works of this kind have their roots in Installation art, and were pioneered in the late 1960s and 1970s by Conceptual artists such as Sol LeWitt. Those artists chose to forsake the use of an intermediary support, in favour of working directly on the wall, in part to shift focus from the precious and unique object (the painting) to the context in which it was displayed (attached to a wall or architectural feature). Therefore, for some, the need for conservation does not arise. Yet, though temporary occurrences, they are not necessarily intended to be impermanent. They can be repeated, even adapted from one installation to the next. Therefore, questions about long-term guardianship are vitally important.

#### **4.2.2. Scoping the Level of Commitment**

What actually constitutes a wall work can be fairly nebulous. They vary greatly in terms of their presentation as instructions, their relationship to their site, their execution, their repeatability, and their adaptability. In terms of vocabulary, they can be referred to as 'wall works', 'wall pieces', 'wall paintings', 'wall drawings', 'wall texts' etc. Such distinctions can be fairly self-evident. As curator Mildred Constantine recalled from an interview she conducted with Sol LeWitt in 1996:

He calls his works made with ink "wall drawings". When paint is used, rather than ink, he calls them "wall paintings." They all fall under the umbrella of "wall pieces". He explains, simply, that his works are colours applied to walls. He uses a water-soluble ink --only reds, yellows, and



blues, and sometimes grays (diluted blacks) --with three applications of each colour. He then covers all of this with a matte varnish<sup>20</sup>.

What one takes actual receipt of, in the event of acquisition, varies from artist to artist, and from work to work, but typically takes the form of certification, instructions, and the 'right to re-install'. To illustrate the extent of the scope that wall works take in, I give the following rough criteria. They can be:

- Site specific and not transferable to another setting
- designed for specific kind of architectural setting, transferable to a like setting acceptable to artist
- site non-specific and fully transferable to another setting
  
- one-off
- limited in the number of reinstallations
- unlimited in the number of reinstallations

They can occupy:

- A full dedicated room
- 1+ dedicated walls
- 1 dedicated wall (regardless of whether 'image' fills it completely)
- part wall, which can accommodate other works

They can:

- have fixed content
- have variable elements, which may come from a specific source
- be adaptable according to dimensions of wall (for example size of image)

They can be installed:

- with template or without
- screened on
- produced 'frechand'
- projected onto wall

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<sup>20</sup> Constantine, Mildred (1999), 'Preface', in Corzo, Miguel Angel (ed.), *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art*, Los Angeles, Calif.: The Getty Conservation Institute, xi.

- by artist only, where potentially the installation can constitute a 'performative' part of the work
- by artist appointed technicians using instructions
- by gallery appointed technicians using instructions

Some of the scenarios within these categories are more 'fixed' than others, some more 'variable'. Typically, different wall works will combine any of the above characteristics in different ways. The combinations will vary according to the artist, or to the type of commission or exhibition for which they may be made. For instance, a temporary installation can be a one-off, or can be re-installed in unlimited repetition, in the same site again, or across different sites. A wall drawing made for a specific site can likewise be a one-off that must be conserved, or may be freshly re-installed on each occasion. As with video, collections need to reflect on *how* they are collecting, as well as to what they are collecting. Broadly, the same principle applies. It may be that a collection only acquires individual works. Alternatively, they may seek to build up holdings. In the case of the latter, where a collection acquires across a range of types (or combinations of the characteristics I outline above), they will need to take account of a greater range of factors, and be able to manage these into the future. Where they acquire more specifically, for example, where they target works that have a certain combination of characteristics, they will need a more strategic approach. They must also take into account, as far as they are able, future aspirations: are they looking to be able to collect wall works across a range of combinations.

Most galleries with contemporary exhibition programmes are likely to have some experience in installing wall works. Logistically, the collecting institution

must have confidence that they will be able to install the work over and over in the absence of the artist, but to the artist's required standard and instructions. This may require the availability of in-house technical staff who are able to execute the work, or that the gallery can budget to meet the cost of hiring professionals into the future, and adequately supervise them as to the artist's specification for the piece. The gallery should ensure a sufficient supply of any materials specified by the artist (paints for instance), and, again, budget for their replenishment. Though wall drawings require no or little storage, they can be 'display hungry' insofar as they may require a dedicated wall or room. A gallery must be able to ensure that they are able to allot the requisite space to the work.

For a collection that is considering a wall work, what combinations of characteristics would be most favourable in view of their own ability to manage the work? With regard to this, there are two scenarios or combinations that I suggest have a *strong suitability* to the context of the permanent collection.

Those are wall works that:

- are site specific
  - have unlimited reinstallation
  - have fixed elements
  - can be installed by gallery appointed technicians using instructions
- OR
- are site non-specific, fully transferable
  - where the size of image adaptable
  - have unlimited reinstallation
  - can be installed by gallery appointed technicians using instructions

For a collection, wall work with the following characteristics would have a weaker suitability:

- Site specific
- one-off or limited number of installations

- installed by artist only

Works that collections do secure, where perhaps the following criteria are accepted, will require future negotiation:

- designed for specific kind of architectural setting, transferable to a like setting acceptable to artist
- limited number of installations
- by artist appointed technicians

A collection, therefore, needs to know that it will be able to continually re-install the work that it acquires in the future. Predominantly, this entails being able to reinstall the piece without the presence of the artist, and without compromising the work. If this is not sustainable, then the collection should consider whether or not to proceed with the acquisition. Again, it is important to acknowledge variables that might influence the work's continued availability, and build in a review at some stage. A strong case for this is Sol LeWitt's **A Wall Divided Vertically into Fifteen Equal Parts, Each with a Different Line Direction and Colour, and All Combinations** (1970)<sup>21</sup> [Plate 48], which the Tate acquired in 1973. It was the first wall work to enter a British public collection, and consists of lines drawn in four colours – horizontal lines in yellow, vertical lines in black, diagonal lines running from bottom left to top right in red, and diagonal lines running from bottom right to top left in blue. The

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<sup>21</sup> Alley, Ronald (1981) *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art other than Works by British Artists*, London: Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London, pp.427-9. The title give to the work in the catalogue was not the work's certified title. As Alley's catalogue entry notes:

Though the certification is entitled 'Wall drawing | four basic colors (black, yellow, red and blue) and all combinations', this work figures in the list of his wall drawings published in *Arts*, February 1972 as 'Fifteen part drawing using four colors and all variations (straight parallel lines, each color in a different direction) [Alley, 1981, p. 428].

Tate's catalogue entry for the work, published in 1981, was based, in large part, on acquisitions correspondence with the artist in 1973 [Alley, 1981, p. 247-9]. It indicates that repeatability without the presence of the artist was taken as part of the terms of the work, and, thus, was taken as part of the terms of the acquisition.

Tate Keeper, Ronald Alley noted in his catalogue entry notes that T01766 was, in fact, first executed by parties other than the artist for an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York. LeWitt was not the first to install the work<sup>22</sup> [Alley, 1981, p. 428]. The certification that the Tate obtained on acquiring the work is dated 'London, July 6, 1973'. In terms of execution, it states that it is

to be drawn using coloured graphite in lines about 1/16" to 1/8" apart consistently throughout; on a white wall, rendered by competent draughtsmen, placed in an adequate space, periodically painted out and redrawn to specification. The entire wall from floor to ceiling should be used [Alley, 1981, p. 427-429].

Other stipulations, conveyed by LeWitt in a note of 6 July 1973, and given in the catalogue entry, were that

- Only one executed version of this wall drawing may exist at any one time. subject to that restriction it may be executed as often as the owner chooses.
- The coloured graphite with which it must be drawn is hard and was chosen partly for that reason.
- The wall surface, or surfaces, on which it is drawn must be painted white.
- Each of the fifteen sections of the drawing must be of equal importance and dimensions.
- The proportion of the drawing seen in its totality must be longer than they are high.
- So long as the whole of the surface employed is in a single room, and this surface is either actually continuous (this being preferable) or a 'single

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This more explicit title has been adopted here. I refer to it by its accession number, T01766, for ease.

<sup>22</sup> The wall drawing was first executed in May 1970 by Al Williams, Chris Hansen and Nina Kayerm for the occasion of the exhibition *Using Walls (Indoors)*.

surface visually', the drawing may be executed on 1, 2, 3,4 or more actual walls [Alley, 1981, p. 249].

As Alley noted, the owner's permanent 'right to install' appeared to constitute part of the work. Executing those rights has not been unproblematic for the Tate, however. When in-house technicians began to execute the drawing according to the designated instructions for the opening of Tate Modern in May 2000, LeWitt himself expressed displeasure with the Tate for proceeding without duly consulting him. Already by 1999, Mildred Constantine recorded a proviso in LeWitt's attitude not so much to ownership and the 'right to install', but to execution. As she noted

He considers each of his works as the possession of the buyer and stipulates ownership by giving the buyer a certificate permitting the work on the wall to be obliterated at any time -- and redrawn again -- according to the owner's wishes. LeWitt's crew is made up mostly of artists who execute the original paint job and perform all repairs and restorations [Corzo (ed.), 1999; xi].

Though Constantine only refers to LeWitt's crew making the 'original' (and presumably first) installation, the artist does increasingly insist on specific technicians to reinstall his works, particularly after a period of dormancy. The matter of Tate Modern could be explained perhaps by the desire of the artist to have the work look its absolute best within such a context. Alternatively, it could be that the piece has taken on particular significance for the artist. Indeed, as Alley himself noted in 1981:

LeWitt considers T01766 to be his most important coloured drawing, since it employs all the basic colours, all their permutations, and all the directions. He describes it as being a *summa* of his work in colour, and a kind of treatise on colour [Alley, 1981, p.249].

Yet, as recently as 2001, and following the publicly discussed Tate Modern installation, Jeremy Lewison, Director of Collections from 1998-2002 reiterated the spirit of the acquisition:

by definition it's replaceable. So you're not buying work, you're buying a concept. And in the case of LeWitt it's absolutely clear what you're buying. You are buying the right to re-make the work each time you want to<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4.2.3. A Brief Overview

The wall drawings represented in British collections do span the all of the suitabilities that I outlined in the previous section. They range from

- those that can be installed by gallery appointed technicians *to* those that can only be installed by the artist.
- those where the content is entirely fixed *to* those where the content is 'produced' by the artist on each occasion

The examples that I shall discuss can be plotted along those scales. They are:

- Michael Craig-Martin's **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** (1995) [Plate 49], acquired by Southampton City Art Gallery in 1996.
- Craig Richardson's **The Unfolding** (1991) [Plate 9] and Richard Wright's **Love Gasoline**, (1991) [Plate 10], both acquired by Aberdeen City Art Gallery in 1997.
- Douglas Gordon's **List of Names (Random)** (1990-ongoing) [Plate 50], acquired by The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art [SNGMA] in 2000.

Each was acquired under differing circumstances. Southampton and SNGMA originated their purchases. Aberdeen received their two works as part of the Scottish Arts Council Collection Bequest. Additionally, Southampton acquired the Michael Craig-Martin soon after it was first created. The others were

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<sup>23</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001o), *Personal interview with Jeremy Lewison, Director of Collections, Tate*, 13 12 2001, Tate Britain.

accessioned into collection at a distance from their first installation.

Southampton is attempting to build up holdings of wall works, whereas SNGMA acquired Douglas Gordon's work as a one-off. Aberdeen falls as a mid-point. They inherited two wall works of different logistical natures, and, which, therefore, resist a shared strategy.

#### 4.2.4. Collecting in Depth: Southampton

Southampton City Art Gallery is one of few British collections that is seeking to represent wall works in depth. Following the early acquisition of **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet [Plate 49]** (made with the assistance of the NACF and the V&A/MGC Purchase Fund), they have acquired four more wall drawings, in conjunction with the Contemporary Art Society's 'Special Collections Scheme'. These include Liam Gillick's **Continuum 001** (2000), and **Hakim** (2000) by Simon Greeman and Christopher Sperandio. Southampton's desire to assemble a representative range of wall works, which reflect the genre's place in mainstream art practice is, however, in the main focused on works that

- Are architecturally specific but site non-specific and fully transferable to another like setting
- Have unlimited reinstallation
- Have fixed contents and instructions
- Installed with slide or template projected onto the wall
- Can be installed by gallery appointed technicians using instructions

Each of the works that they have acquired will have variables individual to them, but do chiefly adhere to those general principles, which the gallery feel present a reasonable commitment. As curator Godfrey Worsdale has noted, '[...] works we've got by Michael Craig-Martin, Daniel Buren, Liam Gillick,



Jeremy Deller; they're all totally recreatable in the absence of the artist. So they're all in the collection without worries' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001e, np]. In this instance, the works themselves are recreatable, and Southampton is able to recreate them. Both Liam Gillick's and Jeremy Deller's wall drawings have been exhibited in Southampton's galleries since acquisition. **Continuum 001** was installed at in autumn 2002, and the gallery had a professional signwriter to install it working to the artist's instructions. Where they are able, Southampton can also take advantage of several idiosyncratic factors, such as in-house personnel. Worsdale again noted:

I'd be very confident that certainly Tim Craven, who's the main person, who's Collections Manager in Conservation, he happens, by coincidence, to be a photo-realist artist in his spare time. He's like most paintings conservators, he's got fantastic technical skills [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

As of 2002, Tim Craven has, in fact, been Acting Art Gallery Manager, and he will in the near future assume post as curator<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, as I show, they are developing a balance in their own documentation procedures. Currently, they send out a questionnaire, but do not, as yet, engage the artist in a verbal discussion as standard. The exception to that, Worsdale has suggested, is Michael Craig-Martin's **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** (1995), which provides something of an exemplar in terms of what they seek to do with each acquisition. Indeed, it stands as a determinant to the level of commitment they feel they are able to achieve with wall works, and for the remainder of this section, I outline it as such.

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<sup>24</sup> Op.cit.

Michael Craig-Martin's **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** (1995) is the only wall painting of such scale by Craig-Martin currently in a public collection in Britain. It is a fairly early example of his working in this format<sup>25</sup>. Craig-Martin's wall paintings are an extension of his interest in the conventions that inscribe visual representation and visual apprehension. His painted installations 'make explicit and confound the activity of looking, emphasising the visual at the same time as they force an appreciation of the connection between looking and thinking, figuring things out and feeling our way into the space of the room and the work'<sup>26</sup>. When installed, **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** constitutes an entire room, for which all four wall surfaces are painted bright pink. On one wall, there is a painted representation of a filing cabinet, and on the wall facing, a pair of handcuffs. Both are painted in perspective, and are readily identifiable, yet their non-naturalistic colouring exposes them indisputably as 'images' of things: 'The task of actively looking is directed away from simple recognition towards a reading of the object (and the object as represented in the painting) as a carrier of multiple possibilities' [Button and Esche, 2000, p. 81].

Technically, **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** is not the most complex of Craig-Martin's room installations, especially when compared with **Store Room** (2000) [Plate 51], for example, which was installed at Tate Britain as part of the *Intelligence* exhibition (2000). To think about it in terms of the criteria that I set out, it has the following combination:

- Site non-specific and fully transferable to another like setting

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<sup>25</sup> Craig-Martin first produced wall works for a show at Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1991.

<sup>26</sup> Button, Virginia and Esche, Charles (2000), *Intelligence*, London: Tate Publishing, p. 79.

- Has unlimited reinstallation
- Occupies a full dedicated room
- Has fixed visual elements that are small in number and specified materials
- Installed with a template projected onto the wall
- Can be installed by gallery appointed technicians using instructions

In terms of materials, Southampton has a supply of the Pantone colours, and the particular adhesive tape that Craig-Martin uses. In both cases, Southampton's current resources are congruent to any costs that their replenishment will entail.

Worsdale intimated that one of their key anxieties was the availability of the tape supplier, insofar as their operation might be unique and could go out of business<sup>27</sup> [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np]. As regarding installation, Southampton took receipt of a slide to project, instructions regarding the focal length of the projection to obtain a precise image.

When Craig-Martin came to install the work for the first occasion, Southampton took the pro-active step to film the artist in the process. In doing so, they were able to focus on any particular areas of difficulty or specificity that they may have identified:

The black tape is, this is the skill really, because the handcuffs are obviously circular, so you have to stretch a piece of straight tape, you have to stick it and bend it in an 'O', and so it's quite a skill, so that's where the emphasis of the video is. And so we can do it [...] we have the technology and skill, and the know-how, but, because you've always got the slide projector to turn on and off, you can be fairly certain you've got it right or wrong [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

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<sup>27</sup> As Worsdale continued:

The best example of that is Daniel Buren, we've got this very important ... the only significant Daniel Buren installation in Britain, which pre-dates my time here. That was purchased and I understand that he was flexible about the colour, it was I think, three different colours of tape, each colour could be, you could move either way along the colour scale by so many degrees, and then the tape could be 5mm narrower or 5mm broader if supplies altered. So there were parameters within which you could alter, and I think now with the technology having developed in tape colours that you could probably, if they stopped manufacturing it off the roll, you could probably get someone to produce it for you [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np.]

Thus far, Southampton has not filmed the other artists installing their works. Making this commonplace would entail funding, not only for the production of such videos, but also their conservation too. However, Worsdale suggested that it is 'certainly an area that we ought to be developing as much as possible, because I don't think we have too much information' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np]. For Worsdale, the process of 'imbibing' information, and reviewing sound approach, is on-going. Where they have subsequently installed the work, they have consulted the artist worked in collaboration with one of his technicians, to the point that Southampton can now install the work 'precisely and confidently'.

#### 4.2.5. A Single Acquisition: Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

Douglas Gordon's **List of Names (Random)** (1990-ongoing) [Plate 50] is the only wall work in the collection of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art to date. Currently, they do not seek to represent a broad view of wall painting as a contemporary mainstream genre, but will buy a wall painting or drawing where they feel it is the right piece by which to represent a certain artist<sup>28</sup>. Thus far, SNGMA accommodates a single wall work, and not a group of holdings. This is all the more necessary where they might acquire quite idiosyncratic works. **List of Names (Random)** is a quite *singular* wall work. It is only one of a handful that Gordon has produced. In most of its generic technical characteristics, it is variable. For example, it

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<sup>28</sup> SNGMA did acquire **I don't usually do this** (2000) by Jonathan Owen. This piece was originally conceived to be a wall work, though the artist did produce the work on panel for his

- Is site non-specific and transferable
- Has unlimited reinstallation
- Can be installed by gallery appointed technicians

Its specific technical features are largely variable too, with one exception however,

- Uses 1+ dedicated walls
- Has fixed contents which are 'updated' with each installation by the artist
- Is screened on

What makes it peculiar is that the artist updates the list of names with each installation of the work. This is moreover, the locus of meaning for the piece, and the one to which the gallery's procedures must be congruent.

When installed, **List of Names (Random)** (1990-ongoing) consists of the names of everyone that the artist can remember meeting, in no apparent order, and compiled into columns<sup>29</sup>. The piece was first made for an exhibition entitled *Self-Conscious State*, held at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow (now the Centre for Contemporary Arts) in 1990. For that occasion, Gordon produced the original feat of memory, recounting all the names. As the artist has commented:

The work is trying to examine our system of cognition and memory...so for this work, I tried to remember everyone that I had met and simply displayed all these names in the gallery. There were 1440 names at that time, and the work is ongoing. It functioned quite honestly and as the actual mechanism of memory that most of us use all the time [Dewey (ed.), 2002, p. 33].

Each time the work is remade, the list has to be 'updated', as fresh names are added by the artist. In this respect, the content of the work is currently of an indeterminate nature, insofar as the list of names is not intended to be finished (and will only be finished when Gordon decides or is no longer available to

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MA degree show at Edinburgh College of Art. It was then installed at SNGMA and subsequently acquired in that format.

<sup>29</sup> There are versions of the work that are not random, but where the names are listed 'alphabetically' or 'chronologically'.

reconstitute it), nor is it fixed thus far. Moreover, though the list is retained and added to on each occasion, the work does retain a performative element to it. The piece is often likened to a roll of honour or a memorial. Where, after Gordon's death, the last installed list will become definitive<sup>30</sup>, it would most certainly compel its interpretation as such.

The constant contradictions between absolute classification, say, in the list of names, it is absolutely specific, what is happening. It takes the form of a memorial, it is a memorial exercise. But, you know, to think you can occupy a tiny amount of space in your head with what appears to be in a gallery quite a huge and fairly substantial formal presentation. But when you start to read it back the system completely implodes, that once you have read thirty names you probably can't even remember the first one anymore. So it is a contradiction in the same way that the list of those that I couldn't know is an absolutely formal classification of something that, as you said, is intangible anyway [Dewey (ed.), 2002, p. 33].

**List of Names (Random)** is not the only wall work into which Gordon put some kind of contingency. **Silence in the Museum** (1992), which Southampton City Art Gallery has acquired in 2001, similarly has in-built idiosyncrasy. Where it is installed in different countries, the text is 'translated' into the language of the host country. As Worsdale noted:

if I ever install it here, I'll write on the wall 'Silence in the Museum', but if I get a request from a museum in Germany, then when the piece is loaned to that museum, they will write – I don't speak German unfortunately – but they'll write 'Silence in the Museum' in German, and if it's in France, it would be in French. So there's an instance where it's tolerable, but that's kind of one of the most exciting elements of the work [...] because he built that into the piece, I think that's quite a beautiful approach to the work. So there's an example where it's fine, but I suppose because that was there to start with [...] [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np].

With **List of Names (Random)**, SNGMA opened up the idea of installing the text *semi-permanently* at the acquisition stage. For Gordon, this has been an

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<sup>30</sup> Personal correspondence between Keith Hartley, Deputy Director of SNGMA and author, 31

acceptable solution. **List of Names (Random)** has been installed on a number of occasions since Glasgow, most recently, for example, at Kunstverein, Hanover in 1998, and then, again, as part of the *Intelligence* exhibition at Tate Britain in 2000. On both occasions, the emphasis of the installation was horizontal. SNGMA do not have the display space to dedicate a gallery to the work. In consultation with Gordon, they elected to install the work from floor to ceiling, down the back wall of the gallery stairwell, so that the emphasis of the installation on this occasion is vertical. Where there is a performative aspect, however small, to the execution of a particular work, semi-permanent installation can present a viable solution, particularly if the medium used, for instance vinyl lettering, is standardised and easily replaceable.

Semi-permanent installation has often been cited in reference to the wall work of Richard Wright, a Glasgow-based artist, who I discuss in the next section. He works in a performative way, and emphasises the hand touch of the artist. However, he also often uses gouache and other highly light-sensitive media. As Godfrey Worsdale noted in respect of such works, 'if you went for a permanent installation they would be, you'd be fighting a losing battle' [Bracker and Fiske, 2001e, np]. Maintaining a semi-permanent installation where medium is ephemeral, and the hand of the artist is important, would logistically be very difficult. This incarnation of **List of Names (Random)** will be in place in Edinburgh indefinitely. Where SNGMA do possess the only 'Random' version, the question arises as to whether or not permanent installation (particularly

where it is open-ended) would inhibit the ability of the work to be loaned. Could **List of Names (Random)** be installed in two places at the same time?

#### 4.2.6. Mixed Holdings: Aberdeen City Art Gallery

In 1997, Aberdeen City Art Gallery received two wall drawings as part of the Scottish Arts Council Bequest. These were **The Unfolding** (1992) [**Plate 9**] by Craig Richardson, and **Love Gasoline** (1993) [**Plate 10**] by Richard Wright. Neither were acquisitions that Aberdeen, therefore, originated itself, and the gallery has not itself made any further acquisitions of wall works since<sup>31</sup>. However, by introducing two wall works that are very different, Aberdeen is, by default, one of the few collections in Britain to hold wall works across a range of types. It has, in origin, the basis for a more heterogeneous collection than Southampton has so far put together. Though he was keen to acquire a work by Richard Wright for the collection at Southampton, Godfrey Worsdale ultimately demurred, stating that ‘all those wall drawing artists who [...] hand touch things, I’m nervous about it really, and haven’t seen a way around it yet’ [Bracker and Fiske, 2001p, np]. For Aberdeen, within the limitations of its infrastructure and its resources, it has taken a more work-to-work approach in developing procedures to manage the realisation of its works into the future.

When Aberdeen received **The Unfolding** and **Love Gasoline**, neither had been installed for some time, and, indeed, the ability of both to be re-installed (and

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<sup>31</sup> Aberdeen City Art Gallery is one of the collections participating in the Contemporary Art Society’s National Collecting Scheme in Scotland. It is possible that through the support of that initiative, Aberdeen may consider making further acquisitions of wall works. As of April 2003, Aberdeen had not yet defined the collecting remit it would follow as part of the scheme.



for perpetuity) was ambiguous at best. Both had been acquired by the Scottish Arts Council Collection [SAC] in the early 1990s, and were pioneering acquisitions. The SAC were clearly feeling their way, and the question of 'permanent reinstallation' was not fully achieved or formalised in the acquisition process. What SAC acquired with each work was the installation of the work by the respective artist three times<sup>32</sup>. This was a slightly misleading agreement, not referring to the life of the works, or the matter of their on-going installation beyond those three installations. Such ambiguity simply reflected the lack of precedent in collecting this kind of work. What the SAC put forward was a basis for future discussions. Yet, for museums, who deal in perpetuity, they need to establish clearly a basis upon which to permanently reinstall a work, and eventually in the absence of the artist.

Aberdeen was able to achieve such a basis with **The Unfolding** fairly speedily. Craig Richardson first executed it in 1993 at the Chisenhale Gallery in East London. It was conceived whilst Richardson was working in a studio there<sup>33</sup>. The work comprises pairs of synonyms (in Futura Book font), such as 'acceptable' and 'extermination', produced in matt black vinyl and screened onto a single large yellow wall. Richardson's use of yellow expanse and black lettering refers to the standardised visual conventions by which we (and also nature) communicate danger. Discussing the work in catalogue essay, Ian Hunt also referred to Adrian Stokes' suggestion that for reading at a distance, black on a yellow background gives the best legibility [Hunt, 1993, np]. Technically,

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from Lucy Byatt, member of SAC collection purchasing committee, to Anne Barlow, curator of the collection, 11 04 1994. Richard Wright catalogue file, Aberdeen City Art Gallery.

the work corresponds to the type that Southampton has hitherto acquired. It has a variety of variable and fixed features:

- Site non-specific and transferable to other settings
- Unlimited reinstallation
- Can be installed by gallery appointed technicians
- Requires 1 dedicated wall, size adaptable according to size and features of Space
- Has fixed contents
- Is screened on

The variable here is the scale of the yellow background. Ian Hunt described it at the Chisenhale as follows: 'Parts of the words in black are visible as you come down the ramp, but the expanse of yellow is simply too vast to be seen as a coloured background for words' [Hunt, 1993, np]. Aberdeen installed the work in their galleries in June 2000, corresponding with the artist, discussing the space with him, and inviting him to come and install the work. On that occasion, Richardson modified the dimensions of the work to those of the space. In view of the area that the gallery had selected, he decided that the

yellow should only go exactly halfway up the wall. Looking at the dimensions of the overall room and the wall this would best accentuate the long, horizontal nature of the piece. Also I believe it should not be viewed at eye level and think that the combination of wooden floor, yellow and corresponding white space will look very graphic<sup>34</sup>.

He sent requirements, such as font and finish for the vinyl lettering, and wall colour, as well as a plan and preparatory directions. He also noted that 'almost every vinyl manufacturer has added to or interpreted' his instructions, and said that it was important to check that they used the correct specifications.

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<sup>33</sup> Hunt, Ian (1993), *Christine Borland Craig Richardson*, Chisenhale Gallery, London, unpaginated. The Scottish Arts Council also acquired Christine Borland's *Nothing but the Whole Truth* from that show.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Andrew Nairne to Richard Wright, 21 04 1994, Aberdeen City Art Gallery catalogue file.

Richardson himself installed only the lettering. The yellow surface and preparatory work for the placement of the lettering was prepared to his specific instructions prior to his arrival. Where the display space that can be dedicated to Aberdeen's contemporary holdings is limited, Aberdeen will install in that format now in their side galleries on future occasions.

Could they undertake to develop a similar solution for Richard Wright's **Love Gasoline** (1993)? The position of **Love Gasoline** has remained less certain. It presents a very useful case for a wall work where the artist is central to the execution of the piece. It was first executed at the Catalyst Gallery in Belfast and was purchased for £3 500 by SAC in 1994<sup>35</sup>. The work had been de-installed, and, therefore, no longer existed when the SAC committee expressed interest in acquiring it. Wright came to an arrangement with the SAC that the purchase price included three installations of the piece *within five years*, or that it could be installed at one location for 'a prolonged' period. As such, it denied the notion of 'permanent re-installation', and, indeed, set a limited time-frame upon the work.

Difficulties that Wright's work presents for collections can be summarised thus:

- Performative aspect
- Use of gouache
- Painted freehand
- Lack of documentation

Richard Wright sits at the centre of his work, and he does not like to delegate the execution of his wall works to any other party. His gallery representatives have been interested in the question of delegation, and have broached this with

Wright. Only twice, has his brother helped him to ‘in-fill’ the colours into a schema that Wright himself had prepared<sup>36</sup>. He has suggested that he might consider an arrangement where he could begin the process of installation, and others could finish it off. This suggests that it is the initial laying out of the design that is necessarily autograph. Wright made one exception for the *Pictura Britannica* exhibition held at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australia<sup>37</sup>, on which occasion he did allow a work to be ‘reinstalled’ by others than himself, and he insisted that the gallery employed a professional sign painter. He produced drawings and measurements on the basis of photos and plans of the space, which he developed using photographs of the work as it had previously been installed. He said that it was produced perfectly to his specifications. In general, he likes the appearance of his works to be ‘faultless’ [Fiske, 2002a, np]. However, Wright has said that often with his own work, his point of entry into it is the small imperfections that he picks up on. It is from such points that the work folds back to a presence and not a faceless execution.

On the whole, delegation and ‘reinstallation’ are contrary to his usual practice. A work is made once in a particular location, but if it is transferred to another context, it itself is transformed, becomes another work by virtue of having initiated another distinct process. If a collector sees ‘something’ that he likes and requests that piece, Wright would base an installation upon it, but there would be an element of re-conception, of it becoming a new piece of work.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Wright, catalogue file, Aberdeen City Art Gallery.

<sup>36</sup> Fiske, Tina (2002a), *Personal Interview with Richard Wright, Artist*, 21 03 2002, Glasgow.

<sup>37</sup> Murphy, Berenice (1997), *Pictura Britannica: Art from Britain*, Sydney, Australia; Museum of Contemporary Art.

Thus, the installation process for Wright has an intuitive aspect. He noted in an interview in 1998 that:

I put myself in a position where I have to improvise. In a similar way to a jazz musician, I am working with the attractions (themes, if you like) that I'm interested in at a particular time. I like to put myself on the edge of the work where the pre-existing situation and this range of attractions combine to make the show. I think the best work has been when the time limit, the space or my immediate feelings allow things to pop up that can't be fully assessed<sup>38</sup>.

However, Wright does use slides or overhead projectors to project and schematise a particular work for installation. He would also have a pre-determined idea of the material that he wanted to use (gold-leaf, gouache etc.), and has said that he is attracted to their vulnerabilities [Fiske, 2002a, np]. He has recently explored tempera, which is much more stable than gouache, but he does not use acrylic, its texture, finish, or colours. However, Wright will produce the work free hand. He will have a fair idea of what he wants to go with, with some idea of the space, but the drawing is not predetermined in a fixed sense. His approach is very much site-specific, responsive to the space in which he is working. He will also respond to the other works, and how they modify the space as well.

Wright does not document each piece photographically. His gallery does, but he himself does not, as it is selective in terms of viewpoint, and Wright feels that his work cannot be pinpointed in that way [Fiske, 2002a, np]. It is about the temporal experience of the viewer, but also the temporal experience of the artist, which cannot be repeated, or represented adequately in an instance. The photograph brings its own framing to the work, which is independent of the

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<sup>38</sup> Esche, Charles (1998), 'Interview with Richard Wright', AN: *Artists' Newsletter*, April, p. 12.

work, and which, Wright feels, cannot stand for the work. So there is no on-going visual or written document, all of which feeds into the provisional and transitory nature of Richard's work in this vein. Wright did supply visual documentation for **Love Gasoline** in 1995, which was accompanied by an artist's statement, as opposed to a set of instructions. The SAC were clear that any documentation would be used primarily to show to rental clients, but not necessarily to indicate to a second party how the work could be installed.

The question of a semi-permanent siting of **Love Gasoline** at Aberdeen City Art Gallery is clearly an option that the artist has indicated would be acceptable [Fiske, 2002a, np]. However, the issue for Aberdeen would be whether or not they could allot a space over to it on a prolonged basis. Jennifer Melville has indicated that, currently, this is not an option open to them, given pre-existing pressures on space<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, there is the maintenance of the work. Gouache is very light sensitive and would begin to fade. There is the possibility of varnishing the work for the duration of its installation, but this would not be acceptable to the artist. Currently, **Love Gasoline** remains dormant.

#### 4.2.7. Summary

To summarise, Southampton City Art Gallery is the only British public collection currently actively collecting wall works. Though the works that they have acquired differ significantly when installed, they each share a certain combination of technical characteristics, which Southampton feels its resources are congruent to, in the medium and long term. SNGMA is an example of a

collection that holds a single wall piece, acquired as an appropriate work by which to represent an artist whom they wish to include in their collection. They achieved an acceptable solution, made with the artist, have installed it for 'semi-permanent' display. By virtue of the SAC gift, Aberdeen City Art Gallery has two wall works that are very distinct in technical nature. Where they are able confidently to the re-installation of the one (Craig Richardson's **The Unfolding**), they have not yet been able to make terms for the re-installation of the other (Richard Wright's **Love Gasoline**).

To conclude, where Pip Laurenson's three categories provide a useful ready-made typology against which video artworks can be checked, there is no such pre-existing framework for thinking about wall works. In this study, I laid down a set of criteria, or characteristics, against which collections could identify the nature of the works they are interested in acquiring. I have also given contextualised accounts of how selected collections have formulated their remits. Key factors seem to be establishing the 'right' and 'ability' to re-install the work. The latter consideration includes issues of adequate documentation, on-going finance, space in which to install the work, and personnel to execute its installation.

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<sup>39</sup> Personal correspondence between Jennifer Melville and the author, 31 07 2003.

### 4.3. Case Study Three: Acquiring from first installation

#### 4.3.1. Grouping Rationale

Increasingly, artists produce often quite complex mixed media works under pressure of deadline for exhibitions or commissions. Often, an artist may create larger scale works for a specific temporary exhibition, or for a particular display space in a museum, where the institution may underwrite part cost of its realisation. Artists, also, put to exhibition more 'discrete' works produced with an experimental method of construction or installation, or one that is not fully resolved. These factors constitute a reality of practice for contemporary artists. In the UK, it is ever more common practice amongst both national and regional collections to acquire such artworks straight from their first installation.

Such acquisitions are increasing internationally, as well as nationally, across the UK. They constitute, in the words of Carol Stringari, senior conservator at the Guggenheim in New York, 'a burgeoning field of interest'<sup>40</sup>. For collections looking to accession such works, what kind of guidance available? Stringari has noted that there is in fact very little literature regarding the long-term care or conservation of mixed media installations. She suggests that 'no clear methodology' was yet existent with regard to issues such as documentation, material condition, or artist's intent, and that, in the main, the care of such works is still subject to 'contradictions and ambiguities' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 272]. Stringari's own paper, 'Installations and Problems of

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<sup>40</sup> Stringari, Carol (1999) 'Installations and Problems of Preservation', in Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 272.



Preservation', published in 1999, stands as a singular document on these matters. She does, however, focus primarily on large-scale installations. Though she suggests that installation is an 'umbrella term for many genres', she takes it to be 'any site-specific work which may or may not be destroyed after being exhibited' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 272]. Whilst national collections in the UK do acquire works of the scale and nature to which Stringari exclusively refers, there remains a larger picture of acquisitions. Her discussion does present an invaluable source, but needs to be made 'meaningful' to the demographics of British collections.

To begin to address the scope of acquisitions local to the UK, I have chosen to include in my discussion more 'discrete' works made with experimental methods of construction or installation, but which do not necessarily manifest the spatial concerns that Stringari focuses on<sup>41</sup>. Sandy Nairne and Peter Wilson put forward the following definition in their 1980 paper, 'The Installation File-Conserving by Documenting', and I use it in this study. They noted that 'we may define 'installation pieces' as works of art which, in a stored or dismantled state, offer little or no clue to the would-be displayer as to the final effect'<sup>42</sup>. This accommodates a broader range of works than Stringari's, and is, arguably, more suited to the works currently acquired by British collections.

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<sup>41</sup> For a broader discussion of Installation specifically, its characteristics and origins, see 'Towards Installation', in de Oliveira, Nicholas, Nicola Oxley, Michael Petry, and Michael Archer, (1994), *Installation Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, pp. 11-31.

<sup>42</sup> Nairne, Sandy and Peter Wilson (1980), 'The Installation File-Conserving by Documenting', *Abstracts from International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art* 7-12 July, Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, p. 18.

Furthermore, two factors which Stringari does recognise, but which she does not critically build into her discussion, are the terms of production and acquisition that those works undergo. I suggest that a critical engagement with 'early acquisition' must be integrated into any discussion, to introduce a more conscious attention to context-sensitivity.

The durability of artworks that are realised under such terms of production has long been questioned. As far back as 1922, Dugald Sutherland MacColl, Keeper of the Tate Gallery from 1906-11, struck a cautionary note struck by regarding the acquisition of new works made midst the demands of exhibition preparation<sup>43</sup>. On the matter of acquiring new or 'young' works of art for permanent public collections, MacColl noted that 'the shutting away, the part seclusion of working for a few patrons, not for the scrimmage of exhibition, is a wholesomer condition for the production of what will last' [MacColl, 1931, p. 365]. His hesitancy remains telling, though, perhaps, somewhat unrealistic given that today temporary exhibition programmes are a major determining force in the production of new work.

Typically, where such acquisitions are made, the museum, in conjunction with the artist, is likely to review the terms of production. Where an institution expresses interest, an artist may go on to 'close' a work, remake elements, or even produce a more robust, 'fit-for-purpose' version from its temporary prototype. My concern, however, focuses on the second and third of these. In this study, I consider scenarios where collections have begun to buy

installations straight from temporary exhibition or commission; where those works may not have been realised with material durability foremost in mind in the first instance; or where an approach to materials was still largely experimental for the artist<sup>44</sup>. I contend that the terms under which the museum review original production (and material constitution), and any subsequent action this may entail either by the artist or museum itself, must itself be subject to scrutiny.

#### 4.3.2. Scoping the Level of Commitment

Curators and conservators have long identified that mixed media artworks that need to be 'installed' are highly susceptible to compromise within the museum environment. This applies to both large-scale installations, and more 'discrete' works. Firstly, that susceptibility is due to the often unstable materials that artists select, and the increasingly pragmatic ways in which they employ them. In *Chapter Two*, I noted the lack of parity between non-traditional artworks and the primacy that museums conventionally give to the artist's intention as unambiguously embedded in the original material constitution of the artwork. Non-traditional artworks thwart this on two obvious levels, which D.H. van Wegen gave as 'the extreme fragility and unpredictable ageing' and 'the different role of materials and the creation process in the meaning of the work

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<sup>43</sup> MacColl, Dugald S. (1931), 'Shigionoth', *Confessions of a Keeper and Other Papers*, London: Alexander MacLehose and Sons, pp. 362 - 367.

<sup>44</sup> There are two related issues that have arisen recently for both national and regional public collections, which I do not deal with specifically but which I do acknowledge here. Those where collections do now inherit (from a private collector for instance) mixed media installations acquired in that manner as second generation owners and those where they may acquire installations that have been in the temporary exhibitions domain for some time and where the artist has died in the interim. These could provide the subject for independent case studies.

compared with traditional art' [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 203].

Secondly, where a work is 'de-installed', the relationship between material and meaning is disbanded, and will have to be reconstituted on the next occasion. A collection must be congruent to the realisation of the whole, *and* to the care and availability of the diverse material elements that it comprises.

The best conditions for a museum to develop sound procedures to both such works rests in a thorough material appraisal of the original installation; of the artist's attitude to the various elements; and of how they relate to create the whole. The possible pitfalls incurred by not doing so are several: parts may degrade or become obsolete; the relationship between elements may become obscured; as might the disposition of the whole to the space in which it is installed. The artist's assistance in reviewing these factors over time could be confused with a desire to 're-conceive' the work. Part and parcel with this is assessing the on-going commitment that the work will involve in term of costs for instance: Will items require frequent replacement? Are they widely available? Will they remain so? Are they inexpensive? If they are not exactly replaceable, what would constitute an acceptable substitute?

Justin Graham and Jill Sterett have spoken of 'institutional memory' or the 'accurate account of the experience of the art', which itself must be preserved, and becomes particularly pertinent here<sup>45</sup>. The full written, photographic, even video documentation, which Stringari outlines, constitute an index of that

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<sup>45</sup> Graham, Justin and Jill Sterett (1997), 'An Institutional Approach to the Collections Care of Electronic Art', in *Western Association for Art Conservation Newsletter*, 19, 3, September, accessed at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/waac/wn/wn19/wn19-3/wn19-310.html>, retrieved 02 05 2002.

memory. As she notes, it is preferable to obtain when ‘the original piece is constructed’ [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 279]. For most collections, this will, in fact, constitute its first re-installation upon acquisition. This will try to replicate the production and the ‘look’ of the original as closely as possible, a process to which it is vital to engage the artist. As Stringari adds, ‘it is ideal if the artist can be persuaded to focus on the banal aspects of documentation at some time close to the installation of the original work’ [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 279]. The documentation procedures that Stringari outlines in respect of installations are lengthy, and take place mostly post-acquisition. She herself has noted that it ‘may take many hours and personnel to organise, enter data, file data and update records’ [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 280]. For smaller works, this is less problematic. However, collections also need to take account of whether they can manage such factors, and on what scale. Where smaller collections have fewer staff, who cover a wide range of responsibilities, this is not always possible.

Moreover, the way that collections acquire such works, and the point at which they do so can have an impact here. This applies to installations, or more discrete works, that are ‘installed’; are produced for exhibition; or those where the relationship between the artist’s intention for the piece and its material realisation, how it might be re-assembled, or how it might perform, may not be fully resolved. This adds another level of indeterminacy that, I suggest, is circumstantial to works that are already difficult for collections appraise and document. Institutions are taking increased cognisance of this fact. As Carol Stringari has noted:

Many installation works are not actually conceived in their entirety in advance but rely quite heavily on circumstances during the process. Artists often work directly and spontaneously on a work at the time of installation, allowing it to develop in response to a particular space or letting it evolve during its creation [...] This can sometimes result in a work being unresolved or less than perfect for an exhibition. If the work is purchased out of an exhibition, it is then frozen in this state-defined as an historical moment [Hummelen and Sillé (eds.), 1999, p. 273].

Moreover, where the work is constructed, perhaps with some expediency, for a temporary exhibition, and then is acquired from it, any indeterminacy that it might bear is cast in yet another light: artworks that an artist might have remade better for another installation, or following exhibition, or sale, are suddenly open to questions of 'conservation'. In order to be able to reasonably commit to a work, typically, collections may need to seek for the artist to remake elements (or indeed the whole), or determine any such issues prior to, or as a condition of, acquisition.

The period that encompasses a work's creation and first installation, its de-installation, acquisition, and its first re-installation by a collection is, therefore, crucial. Collections who acquire installations, and more 'discrete' works, early must take critical cognisance of factors that will have some bearing on that period. Occasional factors such the unavailability of the artist, the pressure to secure the acquisition in the face of competition, or the completion of a set of exhibition dates can take its toll, and an installation can undergo hiatus or dormancy in the interim. Those hiatus must be viewed as spaces for compromise, which may exacerbate issues a museum has relating to a work's materials and installation. A collection must judge 'reasonable commitment' against what hiatus has the work already undergone, in order to assess what hiatus can be anticipated, and what is acceptable. For regional collections,

however, this will be more acute insofar as their collections are smaller, and a work is likely to be 'busier' in a regional than in national.

#### 4.3.3. A Brief Overview

More and more, collections across the range of the UK sector are becoming both *first* and *second* generation holders of installations and discrete works that need to be installed, which were initially made for, and acquired directly from, exhibition or commission. They are not only the originators of such acquisitions, they also increasingly receive gifts of works acquired by a first (usually private) owner under much the same terms. Here, I consider three acquisitions, each with a slightly different emphasis, but which begin to form a typology of what is being acquired and how. Firstly, I discuss the Tate's acquisition of Ernesto Neto's **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** (1999) [Plate 52], as an example where the commissioning institution itself acquires the installation. A factor with that example being that the artist's style of installation informs the attitude to material realisation. Secondly, I look at Christine Borland's installation **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** (1999) [Plate 53], where the work was 'ear-marked' by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art whilst in exhibition, and was completely remade prior to acquisition. Thirdly, I look one of Mariele Neudecker's 'tank' pieces, **The Sea of Ice** (1997) [Plate 54], which the Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne acquired from a temporary show at the ICA in London. Towner Art Gallery does have installations in its collection that correspond more closely to the kind to which Stringari refers in her paper. Towner has participated in both the pilot of the

Contemporary Art Society's 'Special Collections Scheme' [1993-1996] and its second phase. During the second phase of the Scheme, for example, they acquired works such as Ceal Floyer's projected light installation **Door** (1995), and, as mentioned earlier in this Chapter, Zoë Walker's **Somewhere Special** (1999)<sup>46</sup>. However, I refer to **The Sea of Ice**, acquired during the first phase of the 'Special Collections Scheme', for two further reasons. It is a more 'discrete' work, which has to be installed for display (and occasionally re-installed whilst on display). It was also one of the first 'tank' works that Neudecker made, whilst her methods were still largely experimental.

#### 4.3.4. The Tate and Ernesto Neto: Acquiring a 'Domestic' Commission

Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto is based in Rio de Janeiro, but often works for prolonged periods in Europe. In recent years, major international museum collections like the Tate and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh have acquired large scale works by the artist. In spring 2001, the Tate accessioned Neto's installation **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** (1999), [Plate 52] as a long-term loan from the American Fund for the Tate Gallery<sup>47</sup>. The work had, in fact, been commissioned by Tate Liverpool as a temporary installation for the *Trace* Biennial that it hosted throughout the Autumn of 1999.

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<sup>46</sup> Rather than target specific media, as their near neighbour Southampton City Art Gallery has done, they have pursued acquisitions thematically, and have selected works that relate to notions of landscape and environment. Towner is therefore an excellent example of a thematically conceived commitment to contemporary art practice, and the technical diversity that that can entail.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the Tate's acquisition in relation to international acquisitions, see Fiske, Tina (2002), 'Accessioning Ernesto Neto: Some Recent Acquisitions and Installations Considered', in Reid, Z., *Contemporary Art: Creation, Curation, Collection, Conservation*,



It is a large, room-size work, made for one of the spaces at the gallery there. The verticality of the work itself responded to the architectural columns that articulate the context in which it was installed. It consists of numerous nylon pods, attached to a stretchable structure in the same material that fixes to the ceiling, and which is made up with three parts. Larger pods hang down from the nylon support, falling to the floor. They are filled with saffron and clove, which secrete out of onto the floor around, present the viewer with a powerful experience that is tactile, visual and olfactory at once. By way of contrast, smaller, slimmer pods are suspended vertically upwards from the supporting ceiling element like portals, enabling the viewer to peer upwards and beyond.

Neto has, in the past, professed indifference to the matter of conservation for longevity. In 1999, curator Mildred Constantine noted that:

Neto's work is difficult to categorize, as it consists mostly of unclassifiable three-dimensional installations that change from site to site. He uses many different kinds of materials: nylon, styrofoam, wood, powdered lead, paper, string, and others. If a work is damaged, the artist frankly admits to making a replica. We discussed at length replicas versus originals, but this seemed to have no importance for him. As far as longevity was concerned, he expressed disinterest in this too [Corzo (ed.), 1999, xii].

In playful fashion, Neto demonstrated his ambivalence to the institutional conventions surrounding art in an interview with Adriano Pedrosa in September 1999. Referring briefly to the title for a new work, **Plasmic Nude**, which he was preparing for the forthcoming Carnegie International exhibition, Neto said:

[...] it was first *Museu Protoplasmatico*, then it became *Museu Endoplasmatico*, then *Museu Protoplasmatico*, *Musa Endoplasmatica*, *Musa Plasmatica* and then finally *Nu Plasmatico*. The museum had a very strong institutional connotation and I was more interested in the body<sup>48</sup>.

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Post-Prints, Dublin, 21-22 September, Dublin: Irish Professional Conservators and Restorers Association, pp. 21-26.

<sup>48</sup> Pedrosa, Adriano, (1999), *Ernesto Neto Naves, Ceus, Sonhos (Naves, Skies, dreams)*, Sao Paulo: Galleria Camargo Villaca, p. 54.

**We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** is an example of those difficult-to-classify works developed by Neto that involve stretching or suspending nylon pods or limbs, supported by an architectural element (ceiling, wall). Neto also creates autonomous forms, as well as 'naves' or ships (the literal English translation). The former can be little 'open' nylon, spice-filled sacks, or 'closed' nylon pouches filled with 'buckshot' (*Pesos*). The latter are chamber-like works that the viewer enters. Neto may produce 'hybrids' that cross over these formats, or combine them to form larger installations. He himself refers to his works indiscriminately as *sculptures*. Yet they seem to range between sculpture and environment, rest and movement, stability and change. Discussing an installation of Neto's *Pesos*, for example, critic Carlos Basualdo noted that one was able to 'map out the installation in a specific moment.' However, he noted that 'this cartographic exercise has only a provisional character'<sup>49</sup>.

Such factors as inter-activity and multi-sensory experience make Neto's work highly desirable to collections that seek to engage their audiences in ways not exclusively visual. Neto has sought to make the viewer's access to the artwork as unmediated as possible, often introducing extra-visual elements such as strong scents, and, occasionally, encouraging touch. As Neto suggested, the body is often his source of inspiration. Often his works are like bodies themselves, sensuous, enclosed within skin and imbued with sexual reference<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Basualdo, Carlos (1998), *Ernesto Neto eighteighnineeight*, Sao Paulo: Galeria Camargo Vilaca, p. 24-25.

<sup>50</sup> Garcia-Anton, Katya (2000) 'Ernesto Neto: Gramatica Jocosa', in Institute of Contemporary art, London and Dundee Contemporary Arts, *Ernesto Neto*, London and Dundee: Institute of Contemporary art and Dundee Contemporary Arts, p. 29.

Meaning is made between the materials and structure of the work, the space in which it is installed, and the viewer's body. Dan Cameron delineates a trajectory in Neto's recent work towards integration of work and viewer, of which the naves form the latest phase. He notes: 'By inviting us into a world in which the ramifications of our every movement on the environment seems to be magnified, Neto prompts us to consider, as if for the first time, the outcome of our actions on the world [...]'<sup>51</sup>.

Though desirable, what would have made **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** seem like a reasonable commitment? From an installation point-of-view, Neto's works do actually present fairly simple material propositions. Add to this, his informality of installation style, in which the Tate Liverpool staff would have participated in. Katrina Brown, curator at Dundee Contemporary Art Centre, noted the artist's relaxed, spontaneous manner when installing his show at that gallery<sup>52</sup>. On the whole, Neto appears to be pragmatic about delegating of the installation and re-siting of a work.<sup>53</sup> Increasingly frequent are occasions where parties other than the artist himself re-install his works, and often in radically different spaces than worked in by Neto originally.

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<sup>51</sup> Cameron, Dan (2000), 'Why we ask you not to touch', in Institute of Contemporary art, London and Dundee Contemporary Arts, *Ernesto Neto*, London and Dundee: Institute of Contemporary art and Dundee Contemporary Arts, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Katrina Brown at Dundee Contemporary Arts suggested that it was not about bringing work into a space, but rather that Neto comes into the space and does something to it.

<sup>53</sup> A recent example is *Stella Nave* (2000) initially made for Neto's exhibition at SITE Santa Fe in the USA, and re-installed at University of Essex by curator Gabriela Salgado. Working from photographs, Salgado installed the work herself. She suggested that the naves go up as tents, as they are basically material held by poles that stand on the ground. She noted, however, that she had to remove ceiling tiles in a bid to accommodate the height of the poles that supported the nylon structure into the exhibition space.

In the period between creation, installation and acquisition, **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** has undergone several hiatus. Though commissioned by Tate Liverpool, the installation was not conceived and installed with possible candidacy for acquisition by the Tate in mind. It would, therefore, have been installed as a temporary occurrence, conditions that, perhaps, may not fully convey the material specificity of the piece, for instance. Following the original installation, the splices were disposed with, and not all the nylon ceiling brace, or upward pods, were retained. Where it was decided that the Tate would like to acquire the piece, there was a certain amount of uncertainty as to whether the Tate would be acquiring a concept, or a material entity. Questions arose after acquisition regarding the status of the material component of the work, whether it would be remade entirely anew each time, and how they could obtain fresh nylon structures. These were exacerbated by the already elapsed eighteen months. As a consequence, the work continued in a dormant phase till these factors could be resolved with the artist.

This process of consultation took longer to arrange than expected, largely due to Neto's own extremely hectic schedule. **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** the work could be said to have existed somewhere *between* the artist and the Tate. In January 2002, Neto visited the Tate and inspected the material remnants of the work, and he clarified, on that occasion, that, though the splices can be freely discarded upon de-installation, the nylon structure is not remade each time. To that extent, the original material structure *is* the work, and should be preserved. Neto characteristically uses synthetic nylon fabric, which he first worked with in 1988. The fabric consists chiefly of polyamide with a percentage

of Spandex to make it elastic or stretchy. Most commonly, it is used to make stockings, and can be produced to various strengths in relation to the thickness of the thread, the amount of spandex, and the type of loom<sup>54</sup>. Using fabric prepared by pattern cutters in Rio, Neto typically uses at least two thicknesses of weave in a work. The nylon is transparent and perforated, and can, therefore, permit a level of secretion or 'breathing'. It is relatively durable and malleable, and can support a considerable degree of tension, yet may be susceptible to tearing, staining and a shortened life-span. Neto indicated that the staining of the lower parts of the pods, which resulted from the use of spices, was not problematic. The fabric cannot be washed, but if the pods were rolled down upon itself, the staining would not necessarily spread to the top sections of the pods.

The artist clarified that the structure is transferable to different locations, and can be shown in spaces without columns, though it should always be shown in a room of similar size to that at Tate Liverpool. Neto also stipulated that it should not be touched. The Tate anticipated that Neto will supply documentation, and that he will come to install the work for them on the first occasion. As of June 2004, **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** itself still has to be installed by the Tate. Its accessioning, though nominally provisional in the guise of a loan, continues to be punctuated with hiatus, not least the one in which it currently rests. It remains to be seen how the time elapsed between factors such as accession, documentation, installation, might be influential on this particular work. **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** does, however,

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<sup>54</sup> Rhonda Wozniak, Objects Conservator, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA,

open the way, certainly in Great Britain, for more nuanced works to be accessioned within a reassessment of what longer-term commitment can continue to consist in.

#### **4.3.5. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Christine Borland: Acquiring From First Exhibition**

The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art acquired Christine Borland's **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** (1999) [Plate 53] in 2001. It comprises 100 glass pods that are hung from the ceiling at different lengths, and clustered in apparently random groupings. Each glass pod contains a bleached Plane Tree leaf, suspended and preserved in a 60% alcohol solution. As such, the installation is very fragile, and subject to a high risk of 'internal' compromise. As I go on to describe, it also has a high degree of material specificity, and the fabrication of its elements is very much tied to the artist. As such, it represents a considerable commitment for any collection to undertake in and of itself. Circumstantial factors, such as the conditions under which Borland produced it, do exacerbate the question of commitment. I discuss it here as an example of an installation produced initially (and not unproblematically) for temporary exhibition, ear-marked by a collection at that stage, and then re-made by the artist for the purpose of acquisition. It presents an exemplar where any hiatus between its creation and first installation, and its acquisition and re-installation, was minimised. This was in large part due to the proximity of the artist to the

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correspondence with author, 26-27 08 2001.

collection (Borland lives and works in Glasgow), and by her willingness to re-fabricate it.

**Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** is one of several works that Borland has produced that reprise the form and aesthetic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘spirit collection’. The spirit collection is a method that was developed, and much favoured by, the Victorians, whereby scientific specimen were bleached and then preserved in sealed glass containers within an alcohol-based formula known as Kew solution<sup>55</sup>. As Katrina Brown, curator at Dundee Contemporary Arts, suggests, **Spirit Collection: (Hippocrates)**

alludes to the belief that to see is to understand – the assumption which gave rise to the process of ‘clearing’ and which continues to prevail in the development of new technologies. It exploits the aesthetics of the classificatory systems in a way which highlights their material fragility<sup>56</sup>.

Borland conceived the idea for the installation when she was informed of the origins of a Plane tree in the grounds of the Department of Medical Genetics at Yorkhill Hospital in Glasgow. The tree was grown from a seed of the tree, under which Hippocrates reputedly first taught medicine in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. As Brown recounted, the Greek Government makes gifts of such seeds to medical institutions:

With this in mind, the unremarkable tree in Glasgow seemed to symbolise an international, multi-generational family of medical practitioners, connecting current practice back to its origins [...] The discovery of the Plane tree and its origin led Borland to make the first in a number of works to use a botanical study technique called ‘clearing’, a process which

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<sup>55</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2002), *Personal Interview with Christine Borland, Artist*, 10 01 2002, Glasgow.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, Katrina M. (1999), *Christine Borland Progressive Disorder*, Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, pp. 16-17.

was used in the preparation of 'spirit collections'—study collections of specimens preserved in alcohol [Brown, 1999, p. 17].

For **Spirit Collection: Hippocrates**, Borland collected leaves from the tree in Autumn 1999. The bleaching process (for which Borland used a household bleach) took about two days to complete, ensuring that all vestige of chlorophyll had been removed from each specimen. Each leaf was then washed and placed in the Kew solution of 60% Ethanol, 35% water and 5% glycerol. The bleaching process reveals the vein structure of the leaf, allowing it to be 'studied.' It also renders the leaf extremely fragile and susceptible to disintegration. Borland experimented with the bleaching process, to the extent that she felt that she got to know the leaves, and what they could withstand, quite well. Borland has used the process for the preparation of another 'spirit collection' piece, **Ecobolic Garden, Winter** (2001). For that piece, Borland selected ten plants known to induce abortion if ingested by pregnant women. Each plant reacted or withstood the bleaching process differently, and Borland is not convinced that she got it right with all ten of the plant types [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np].

Borland first showed **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** as part of her solo exhibition at Dundee Contemporary Arts [DCA] in 1999. That installation provides an interesting precursor, and many of the issues raised on that occasion informed the terms of its accessioning into SNGMA. Even prior to the exhibition, a number of the prototype pods, Borland suggested, 'didn't work out as well as I'd hoped' and the leaves had collapsed or deteriorated in the pods to a degree that the vein structure was visibly disturbed [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np]. For the DCA exhibition, Borland did not vacuum seal the vessels at the top. She used silver foil to cover over the specimen and the solution. This, indeed,



formed part of the idea of the piece. As Borland has elaborated, when glassware is sterilised in laboratories, it is generally covered with silver foil to keep out dust and light. The silver foil is also a visual indicator that the glassware is sterile [Bracker & Fiske, 2002, np]. Consequently, and in view of DCA's Health and Safety regulations, the solution that Borland used was water, and not alcohol-based. Borland has since suggested that some flexibility on the gallery's part could have been negotiated, but she took what she has referred to as a 'temporary approach', given that it would be on display for a limited amount of time. Academics at Glasgow University assured Borland that using the water solution **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** would be fine for three months or so. They advised her on an anti-bacterial agent that could be added to the water to prevent the growth of fungus. Through the process of the exhibition, many of the pods were susceptible to evaporation and condensation, in some cases significantly disturbing the look of the piece.

When **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** was de-installed at DCA, it travelled to New York to be shown there, and SNGMA asked her to make another version that they could accession<sup>57</sup>. As Borland noted, 'I'm making something for a deadline, there's not much lea-way for something to go wrong...quite an experimental process... I'm quite happy to remake it' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002, np]. Borland did re-make the work, producing it again entirely from scratch, and she added in modifications, based on its performance at DCA. Of the version which has entered SNGMA, Borland has stated, 'I've made the piece to the best of my ability' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002,np]. The Edinburgh version varies from its predecessor in several significant ways:

- The glass vessels do contain the Kew solution, which is 60% ethol alcohol
- They have all been fully sealed with silicone, over which foil is placed

SNGMA did not contribute to the cost of the remade version. It was covered between Borland herself and Lisson, her London Gallery<sup>58</sup>. The period between creation and installation and acquisition was punctuated, in this instance, by the remaking of the work. With regard to acquisition and first reinstallation, SNGMA also have acted quickly. Borland had noted that at SNGMA it would be 'given a space that is more or less fixed as its space [...] I'll install it and subsequently handover to someone else to install it next time' [Bracker & Fiske, 2002, np]. Borland installed **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** in their galleries in the summer of 2002<sup>59</sup>.

#### 4.3.6. Towner Art Gallery: Mariele Neudecker

Mariele Neudecker is a German artist based in Bristol. She works with a wide range of media and techniques, and her oeuvre is well represented in British collections, such as the British Council and Arts Council Collections. Currently three of her glass 'tank' pieces are in British public collections, and it is upon these that I focus here<sup>60</sup>. They are **The Sea of Ice** (1997) [Plate 54] in the Towner Art Gallery collection at Eastbourne; **Morning Fog in the Mountains** (1997) [Plate 55] in the collection of the British Council; and **Stolen Sunsets**

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<sup>57</sup> Personal correspondence between Christine Borland and the author, 28-29 07 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Op. Cit., The DCA version of the work still remains (unsold) in storage in New York.

<sup>59</sup> Subsequent to its installation at SNGMA, the installation has been loaned to the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow.

(1996) [**Plate 56**] in the Arts Council Collection. All those works were acquired by those collections within a year of their creation and first installation, with the exception of **Stolen Sunsets**, which was gifted to the Arts Council Collection by Charles Saatchi in 1999 when the work was three years old. I invoke them as examples of works acquired where the method of construction and material performance were still experimental for the artist. Two of the works have required subsequent, and first-hand, intervention by the artist herself. Where I refer to all three in this section, I hope to indicate a potential route map, organised around a particular type of work produced by a single artist.

All of three of those ‘tank’ works were acquired early on in Neudecker’s development of the format. In general, her ‘tank’ works comprise models of landscapes that she herself fabricates, and which are placed at the bottom of glass tanks. The models are then submerged beneath liquid solutions that constitute the sky or atmosphere. The models, made from wax and fibre-glass, are usually derived directly from specific landscape or seascape paintings by Romantic artists such as Caspar David Friedrich and Philip de Loutheberg<sup>61</sup>. Neudecker uses water, liquid dyes, and acrylic medium to simulate the light and skies of the source image. Various commentators have discussed Neudecker’s intentions behind the creation of these pieces. Maite Lores has suggested how ‘the need to recall the Sublime in a Postmodern era’ has been a constant in Neudecker’s work, as has been the need to reclaim ‘German Romanticism from its abuse and appropriation under the Third Reich’ [Wood (ed.), 1999, p. 11].

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<sup>60</sup> The Art Council Collection acquired two pieces directly from the Whitechapel open, 1996: **Eclipse** 1994 and **Never Eat Shredded Wheat** 1996.

<sup>61</sup> McKee, Francis (1999), ‘Testing the Mind’s Eye’, in Wood, Katharine, Maite Lores and Francis McKee (1999), *Mariele Neudecker*, Colchester: Firstsite, pp. 28-53.

For Francis McKee, it is these works that best demonstrate ways in which Neudecker's practice is continually challenging preconceived or historically established ways of seeing [Wood (ed.), 1999, p. 29]. As he has elaborated:

There is an initial recognition of the remembered image and, framed by the edges of the tank, the model itself appears to be a two-dimensional painting. However, as the viewer draws closer to the work, the tank's three-dimensionality becomes inescapable and consequently the landscape acquires actual depth [Wood (ed.), 1999, p. 33].

Neudecker's thematic interest in unsettling modes of perception, therefore, have their physical analogue in the processural, durational facts of visibility quite literally enacted within the tank pieces, wherein the quality or clarity of the effects produced by the water, and the other liquid elements, are subject to change and deterioration.

Neudecker first began developing three-dimensional landscape pieces between 1993 and 1994. Initially, she produced a number of small models, working from her source images. To 'fill in' the area of sky in reference to the source, she first worked with clear resin<sup>62</sup>. Neudecker found this to be a difficult medium and ultimately rejected it for a number of reasons. Firstly, the lines would appear through the resin. Secondly, she could not satisfactorily introduce colour into the resin, and thirdly, it failed to produce the effect that she was seeking. The result 'ended up being very stagnant' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002d, np]. For Neudecker, it was an 'obvious move' to place the pieces in glass tanks and to use a salt/water solution, colouring agents such as acrylic medium and fogging agents to replicate the sky or atmospheric effects. She pipes the colouring in under the salt, water and acrylic solution and relies on the density of the fluids

to achieve the various ‘suspensions’ that she requires. **The Sea of Ice** is based upon a Caspar David Friedrich painting of the same title, which is in the collection of Kunsthalle Hamburg, Germany<sup>63</sup>. It has a wax and resin base, which replicates an iced-over sea surface, frozen at the moment when it breaks up, large jags of ice being thrust upwards in the ice flow. The blue foggy atmospheric effects are achieved through a combination of water, salt, acrylic medium, and blue food dye. They are fairly simple and even, in comparison, for example with **Stolen Sunsets**, in which a thick dark sky underscored with a luminous blue glow looms evenly over a mountain range.

The Towner and the British Council acquired their works fully cognisant that they would require installation on each occasion. To this in itself, they felt confident. The British Council collection acquired **Morning Fog in the Mountains** (1997) from Neudecker’s one-person show at Lotta Hammer Gallery in London in 1997. Diana Eccles, the Collection Manager, went to the gallery to assist in the de-installation of the work, to become acquainted with the process<sup>64</sup>. Where the British Council would undoubtedly intend to tour the piece internationally, it would clearly have to be installed without the presence of the artist. Yet, as Neudecker has suggested, her understanding of the tank pieces, once installed, progressed very much by ‘trial and error’ [Bracker and Fiske, 2002d, np]. Acquired as they were so early on, several factors would go on to make themselves apparent for both the Towner and British Council collections.

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<sup>62</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2002d), *Personal Interview with Mariele Neudecker, Artist*, Bristol, 28 02 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Neudecker, Mariele, Installation Instructions for **The Sea of Ice**, supplied to author by artist.

Firstly, there were construction issues. The tank containing **Stolen Sunsets** (1996) leaked out its water solution when on loan to the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, and had to be de-installed and the glass tank resealed. The British Council had had cause to return their tank piece to Neudecker for repair to the sculptural base of the work, where the water had damaged some of the trees. As she has stated, 'it was my mistake to use the wrong type of trees and then researched myself to get 100% waterproof trees.' As Neudecker noted:

It seems often that what happens is that I make them with whatever comes to hand in the studio but when they get to the point where they need repair, there's a much better way of doing it [...] different thinking in there [Bracker and Fiske, 2002d, np].

Further restoration work had to be done on the small cross that sits on top of the mountain feature when the work was on display in South America. In that instance, Neudecker could not undertake repairs herself, and the British Council had to improvise. She noted: 'they got a jeweller in Sao Paolo to repair [...] a little cross on the mountain piece and they got him to make three silver crosses to replace mine... to paint it and to stick it in as a long term repair as well' [Bracker and Fiske, 2002d, np].

Moreover, Neudecker did not initially add chlorine to her water solutions. Where **The Sea of Ice** (1997) was shown at ICA, London in 1997, it was installed under a spotlight [Plate], and so the consequences of the lack of chlorine were not so readily apparent. It soon became clear that where the work was exposed to some natural lighting, the water rapidly developed algae and

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<sup>64</sup> Bracker, Dr. Alison and Tina Fiske (2001i), *Personal Interview with Diana Eccles, Collections Manager, British Council Collection*, 28 09 2001, London.

biofilms, which disrupted the desired visual effects. Likewise, as Diana Eccles has noted with **Morning Fog in the Mountain** on first displaying the piece:

What happened was, obviously when it was in the gallery, it was in a space where there was no light. It just had artificial light on it. And it was only up for a certain length of time. We put it up in our office in Spring Gardens, in similar circumstances, but it was up for much, much longer, and it began to go cloudier and cloudier. And of course the impurities in the water, algae and all the rest of it started to grow on it [Bracker and Fiske, 2001i, np].

As part of the British Council Collection, an artwork must be able to withstand the rigours of international transportation and profound variations of climate.

Another difficulty is ensuring the availability of the chlorine. As Eccles continues:

getting those through Customs can be quite difficult. So trying to source them overseas can be problematic. So far, we've been okay, but you know, we're sort of constantly checking these things out [Bracker and Fiske, 2001i, np].

The question, therefore, arises as to whether the British Council could or would only send that work to a place where they knew those chemicals were available. This would clearly influence where they could send the work. For Diana Eccles, if they could not show it in the best way possible, it would be best not to show it at all.

For Neudecker, coming to understand the tank pieces, how they react, and how the water produces bacteria and biofilms, has required patient observation. She has modified some elements of her process to make the works more collections-friendly. As an alternative to water, she considered using an alcohol-based solution, but rejected this because it accelerates the problem of evaporation. Neudecker accepts the fact of change as part of the work. It is an aspect that is, she suggests, often 'forgotten'. The matter of defining the minimum level of

visibility before the work no longer functions is not easy, and varies regarding the particular effects of each piece, and also relies on factors specific to the location and time of installation (such as quality of water and time of year). Now, Neudecker suggests, that the solution will need to be completely replaced after ten or so weeks<sup>65</sup>. She states:

The 'fog' might settle after a few weeks (depending on water quality), and might need to be thickened with some extra fog-mixture. The change of colours etc. is dependent on balance of ingredients, 'kind' of tap water, room temperature, etc., and therefore always slightly unpredictable and uncontrollable<sup>66</sup>.

Between 1997 and 1999, **The Sea of Ice** was installed on five occasions, three of which have been within Towner's own galleries<sup>67</sup>. Those installations took their toll on the work, however. Where it had been exposed to daylight, the sculptural element and the tank had become covered in algae. In 2000, and in advance of the work's loan to New Zealand, Towner returned the to the artist for restoration. Neudecker had to thoroughly clean and repaint the sculptural base. On its return, Neudecker did issue a new set of formal instructions. She has gradually identified what a sound approach to her work entails. Using hindsight, she has been able to develop extensive and detailed installation instructions, which now accompany all her tank works to any venue. These list equipment provided; equipment required; unpacking the work; preparation of

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<sup>65</sup> This is discretionary. Neudecker offers between 8-12 weeks as a rough guide, though it has to be judged on a piece by piece basis.

<sup>66</sup> Neudecker, Mariele, Installation Instructions for **The Sea of Ice**, 1997, supplied to author by artist.

<sup>67</sup> Shown in 1997 (22 April-31 May) in *Belladonna* at firstsite, Colchester; then again from 7 June-3 August in *A Case For A Collection: New work for the Towner Collection by contemporary artists*, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne. Subsequently, it has been exhibited on the following occasions: 1997-98 (15 November-18 January) *Telling Tales*, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; 1999 (28 August-31 October) *60s/90s: Two Decades of Art And Culture*, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; for Launch of first publication at the Balcony Room, Globe Theatre, London in 1999.



the salt solution; lighting requirements; placement of work; preparation and installation step-by-step; maintenance of the work; dismantling and refilling; packing and transportation and disposal of all the solutions too.

#### 4.3.7. Summary

To summarise, the three scenarios that I have recounted here share a common factor: the works were acquired on the basis of their first installation. Neto's installation was commissioned and made specifically for a gallery at Tate Liverpool as part of the *Trace* Biennial. It was not 'ear-marked' formally during its installation, but was acquired on the basis of it (once de-installed). The two works by Christine Borland and Mariele Neudecker were both produced under pressure of forthcoming exhibition, and were pieces for which both artists were developing new, experimental, and complex methods of construction. In all three cases, the performance capacities of the materials, and their particular combinations under prolonged installation, were not fully known prior to their first public realisation, on the basis of which the work was acquired. Each was, therefore, subject to some sense of contingency.

Of the three, the SNGMA broached the question of re-fabrication with the artist prior to acquisition. Borland complied, and SNGMA was quick to install the work within their galleries following on from acquisition. The Tate has reassessed the status of the nylon structure of the Neto installation following discussions with the artist. However, the work still has not been re-installed since its original installation. Towner has taken cognisance of Neudecker's own

greater understanding with time of how her 'tank' pieces perform, and her subsequent refinements to installation instructions.

To conclude, I outlined all three acquisitions to make a case for a more conscious approach to matching a prospective acquisition's terms of production and early performance with the institution's terms of acquisition. Often such works can experience a period of dormancy, or 'hiatus', following acquisition, where terms of production and early performance may not have been, thus, considered. Under such circumstances, this is good for neither the artwork, nor the acquiring collection. The case of Christine Borland and SNGMA make clear the expediency of a well-considered dialogue. This could resolve into a set of pre-acquisition prompts or questions of the kind:

- What can be expected in view of terms of production and initial performance?
- What can be done, by whom and at what cost?
- Will that cost extend into the future?
- Will acquisition subject the work to any hiatus?

Update

I draw my thesis to a close in a form more akin to a postscript, or addendum, than an orthodox conclusion. I began it with the discussion of a single artwork: Daniel Buren's installation **With the Arcades: Three Colours (work in situ)** (1994) at Southampton City Art Gallery. I conclude it with reference to another individual piece: Julian Opie's 'computer film' **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** (2003) [Plate 57], which Aberdeen City Art Gallery have recently acquired. My doing so provides, I feel, a more fitting terminus to the discussion that I present in the preceding introduction and four chapters.

Over the period in which I have researched and produced this thesis, those regional collections that are its focus have continued apace to accession mixed media installations, wall drawings, artists' videos and films, representing artists or art forms in step with, and occasionally in advance of, their national counterparts. They have tentatively, but progressively, re-defined new technical and media thresholds with regard to what they feel they are responsibly able to acquire. And they have done so in view of (one could say almost in spite of) their restricted care infrastructures and their inability to anticipate funding beyond the immediate future.

Throughout the short, literal travels – and the longer intellectual journey – on which this doctoral dissertation has taken me, I have endeavoured to represent and be responsive to an unfolding situation. My aim, however, is that my thesis will feed back into it and contribute to, even facilitate, its future growth.

Aberdeen's acquisition of **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** (2003) provides an appropriate moment for its work to commence.

I excluded consideration of 'born-digital' artworks<sup>1</sup> from the body of my thesis, largely because there were no examples in British public collections to warrant its inclusion. That has recently changed. In 2003, the Tate made its first digital acquisition: Michael Craig-Martin's computer-based work, **Becoming** (2003) [Plate 58], which is displayed on a plasma screen fixed flush to the wall. Within the same timeframe, the Arts Council Collection also acquired three digital artworks: Brigid Lowe's **Nowhere** (1999-2000) and two works by Alison Craighead and Jon Thomson entitled **Triggerhappy**, (1998) and **Short Films about Flying #1**, (2002)<sup>2</sup>. I was aware of those purchases, and was tremendously supportive of them, yet decided not to incorporate them into my discussion because they were made by national collections.

However, the 'digital-question' directly entered the remit of my research, when in July 2004, Aberdeen City Art Gallery acquired **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** by Julian Opie with the assistance of the NACF, the National Fund for Acquisitions (administered by the Scottish Museums Council), and the Contemporary Art Society's National Collecting Scheme<sup>3</sup>. It comprises a looped computer-generated animation of a single female figure that plays across a

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<sup>1</sup> Born digital art employs those technologies as its very own medium, exploring their inherent properties, conventions, contents, contexts, and potentials for interaction and participation. They may take the form of an installation or digital environment; a website or web intervention; custom software; or an attachment to an email.

<sup>2</sup> The Arts Council Collection invited digital artist Susan Collins onto its purchasing panel for 2002-2004 specifically to advise on artists working with digital formats as their primary medium.

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see [http://www.nacf.org/main\\_site/news\\_detail.asp?ID=462](http://www.nacf.org/main_site/news_detail.asp?ID=462), retrieved 10 08 2004. Aberdeen City Council also placed a bulletin on their website, accessed at <http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk>, retrieved 11 08 2004. A version of the work is available online at Julian Opie's own website, <http://www.julianopie.co.uk>.

plasma screen attached directly to the gallery wall. That animation is programmed into a hard drive that is fixed directly onto the back of the display panel. Its purchase by Aberdeen has come within barely a year of those made by the Tate and Arts Council Collection, and with which, it now forms a core group.

As such, Aberdeen's acquisition of the Opie work testifies to, and culminates, claims that I have made in *Chapter One* and the convictions that underpin the entirety of my thesis. First and foremost, it endorses my founding belief – forged by that encounter with Daniel Buren's **With the Arcades: Three Colours (work in situ)** at Southampton City Art Gallery – that not all the best examples of contemporary 'non-traditional' art are to be found in the national museums and galleries. Moreover, the acquisition exemplifies my assertion that regional museums and galleries are developing collecting behaviours that are not only 'active', but also 'authorial' with regard to how certain contemporary practitioners and trends will be represented. Vital to that has been the financial support and validation provided by initiatives such as the Contemporary Art Society's two collecting schemes and by the NACF. With their collaboration, many regional collections have been able to successfully lobby their own local authority chiefs and 'Friends' organisations for matching funding, overcoming one particular barrier to their abilities to collect 'non-traditional' contemporary artworks, and bringing into fuller fruition the emerging notion of a 'distributed' British cultural heritage.

Furthermore, I questioned how far regional collections should aspire to emulate the collecting trends established by their national complements, or whether they differentiate their own distinctive contribution. Indeed, between that group of six digital acquisitions, there is a sense of the consensus that I raised at the beginning of *Chapter One*. That said, **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** sits well within Aberdeen's collection, of which portraiture and figurative painting is a particular strength. Opie himself has often focused on the human subject and the issue of rendering 'likeness', producing schematic figure drawings in a style that draws on computer language. It also accords well with another of Aberdeen's 'non-traditional' acquisitions, Matthew Dalziel and Louise Scullion's installation **Another Place** (2000) [Plate 11], which comprises video portraits of numerous inhabitants of a community of the Northeast coast of Scotland. Thus, with their most recent purchase, Aberdeen are succeeding in that challenge with which I concluded my discussion in *Chapter One*: that the aspiration for regional collections must be to assemble holdings of 'non-traditional' artworks that are distinctive and 'competitive' with their national counterparts, but which promote their individual identities

By accessioning **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans**, however, Aberdeen is 'co-authoring' first practice with regard to the permanent collecting of 'born-digital' art in Britain alongside its national counterparts. The challenges of that particular medium are many: hardware, software, operating systems, and browsers are all subject to obsolescence. There are also the difficulties of documenting such works, and of reasserting their interactivity or, in the case of those created for or using the Internet, their 'network dependency'. The Internet

itself is an unstable medium subject to constant change and its own potential vulnerabilities. Public collections in Britain have, till very lately, demurred over artworks that employ digital technologies as their medium, largely because of those long-term functionality, resource and maintenance implications that they bear. Yet, digital technologies are becoming increasingly ubiquitous within mainstream contemporary practices. Artists such as Julian Opie and Michael Craig-Martin, both known predominantly for their paintings and related installations, have integrated it into their range of media.

All of those six recent digital acquisitions – Aberdeen’s included – come within the boundaries of a growing international forum regarding how and what museum collections are able to commit to vis-à-vis digital art practices. The Guggenheim, for instance, has commissioned, and subsequently acquired, Internet artworks such as Mark Napier’s **net.flag** (2002). Napier’s work, which I referred to in *Chapter Two*, resides ‘on-line’, to be accessed through the Guggenheim’s website<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, the digital works that those three British collections have acquired are ‘stand alone’ – they do not depend upon a ‘live’ network connection in order to function, and are comparatively self-contained. Thus, they represent a far more manageable task for institutions that are traditionally primed to preserve unique original material artifacts in a state as close to the original as is possible. The resource and maintenance implications of those works, though not of the same calibre as those such as **net.flag**, are not

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<sup>4</sup> **net.flag** can be viewed at <http://www.netflag.guggenheim.org>, retrieved 08 03 2003. A discussion between the artist and Jon Ippolito, Curator at Guggenheim regarding issues raised with its acquisition and long term preservation are published in Depocas, Alain, Ippolito, Jon and Jones, Caitlin (Eds.) (2003), *The Variable Media Approach: Permanence through Change*, Montreal and New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications and the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, pp. 108-114.



inconsiderable. How those implications translate, and become 'reasonable', across variable museum infrastructures *is* a key question for that international forum to address.

The presence of **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** in Aberdeen's collection affirms my opinion that British regional museums and galleries constitute legitimate stakeholders in the international research into the documentation and conservation of 'non-traditional' art forms. It is at this point that the two key thrusts of my thesis take hold. Firstly: the need to review issues of content, presentation, access, dissemination and feedback. As their legitimacy and needs have emerged, the recourse that regional museum personnel have to the fruits of that research continues to be inhibited by its relatively dispersed and 'unrendered' presentation and distribution. As I discussed in *Chapter Three*, their needs pose several challenges to that international research community regarding the relevancy, 'usability', 'transferability', and dissemination of its findings across a range of museum infrastructures.

The Tate have been quick to initiate and rapidly progress a 'conservation plan' for **Becoming** in conjunction with Michael Craig-Martin and the programmer who worked with him to realise the piece. Moreover, they have already introduced the findings of that collaboration to an international audience<sup>5</sup>. It will take its place alongside other international scholarship, which includes that conducted and published by the Guggenheim, and other initiatives such as the

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<sup>5</sup> For an abstract of Pip Laurenson's presentation, 'Michael Craig-Martin's 'Becoming': A Conservation Case Study of a Digital Art Work,' at the 2004 annual meeting of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works [AIC], see AIC (2004), *Abstracts of Papers Presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> AIC Annual Meeting*, Portland, Oregon June 9-14, 2004, Washington D.C.: AIC, p. 22.

404: *Object Not Found* symposium, held in Dortmund, Germany, in summer 2003<sup>6</sup>. Aberdeen, of course, now stands as a *consumer* of that intellectual asset. However, as yet, the Tate's case study has not been delivered nationally within Britain, and that wider international research activity remains at a remove from the majority of the British museum sector. On the other hand, Aberdeen now also constitutes a potential *contributor*. Yet, currently there is no ready means for Aberdeen, or other of its regional complements, to respond to such research, or author their own. However, no less than the Tate, the terms by which Aberdeen has acquired and will maintain Opie's piece are of international relevance.

So, to my second thrust in this thesis: namely, that there is a tangible need to promote and support scholarship within British regional museums and galleries into the ethical maintenance and long-term care of their 'non-traditional' holdings, and to secure an appropriate means to circulate it not only nationally, but also internationally. Aberdeen's acquisition of **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** presents a clear opportunity to begin doing so. Of course, within the current constraints under which the majority of regional museum personnel work, few have the time to research and generate case studies or articles. Likewise, few have time to source, retrieve, interpret, and apply relevant research from elsewhere in order to inform their own practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Medien\_kunst\_net, Dortmund (2003), *404: Object Not Found: International Congress concerning the Production, Presentation and Preservation of Media Arts*, 19-22 June, conference proceedings accessed at [http://www.404project.net/index\\_e.html](http://www.404project.net/index_e.html), retrieved 04 05 2004.

This needs practical redress in the longer term within the curatorial and administrative culture of the regional museum sector so that the undertaking of both might be reasonably factored into the duties of curators, conservators and administrators. It is also vital that any such scholarship is not viewed as distinct from, or as a footnote to, research undertaken within the context of larger museums. This will require greater vigilance on the part of those museums to account for infrastructure and resource variance. In Britain, the founding of a 'subject network', such as I call for in *Chapter Three*, whose membership would comprise curators, conservators, administrators and technicians, could encourage cross-sector recognition. It could also forge integrated forums, and compile comparative, inter-institutional case studies such as I formulated in *Chapter Four*.

A 'subject network' that focuses on the acquisition, curation and conservation of 'non-traditional' contemporary art is the motivation and recommendation of this thesis. In these pages, I have named its likely participants; I have identified its possible ethos; I have proposed and demonstrated its potential content; I have considered its prospective form or forms. Above all, I have made a strong case for its necessity. What remains, beyond the scope and lifetime of this research undertaking, is to locate and secure the resources that will make it a reality.

## Bibliography

## Guide to bibliography

I have organised the bibliography in three sections: **Unpublished Materials**, **Published Materials**, and **Internet Addresses**.

**Unpublished Materials** and **Published Materials** have further sub-divisions. I made those divisions according to source or type of document.

### **Unpublished Materials** includes:

- Interviews\*
- Archival Material
- Materials supplied by individuals

\*I denote those interviews that were not transcribed with 'nt' at the end of their citation.

### **Published Materials** includes:

- Conferences, Research Projects and Seminars: Proceedings and Reviews
- Books, Collected Essays and Collections Catalogues
- Exhibition Catalogues and Artists' Monographs
- Reports and Policies
- Articles

The third section, **Internet Addresses**, I provide a list of the key websites that I referred to throughout the researching and writing of this thesis. They observe the following order:

- Name and Location of Institution
- URL address
- First date accessed
- Any specific pages that I made repetitive use of

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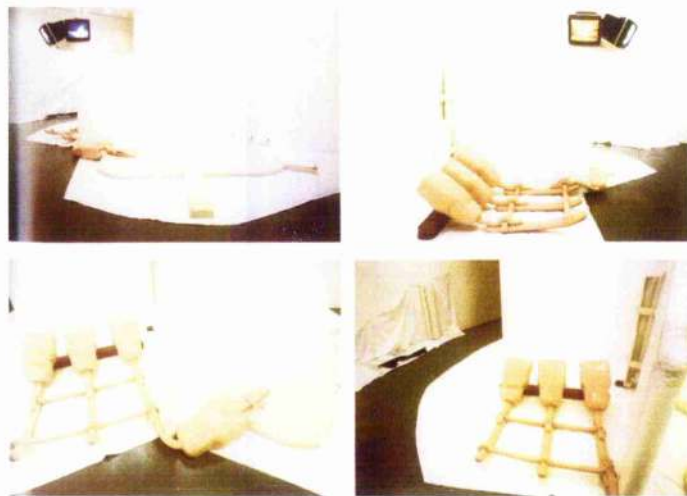
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## Plates



Installation view

**Plate 1.** Douglas Gordon (1966-), **Hysterical** (1995), video projection, display dimensions variable, Southampton City Art Gallery Collection, Southampton.



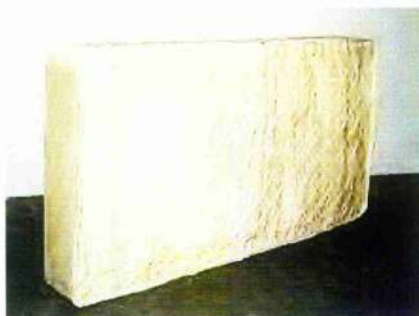
Installation views

**Plate 2.** Matthew Barney (1968-), **OTTOshaft** (1991), tapioca, vaseline, bread, meringue, video, monitors, plastics, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



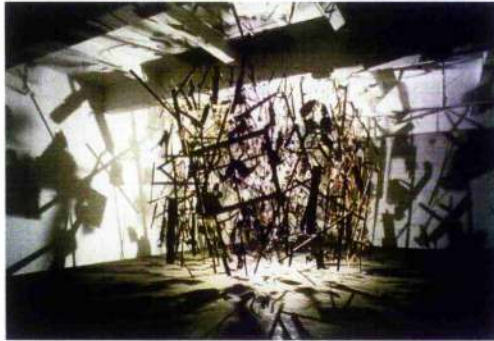
Installation view

**Plate 3.** Gary Hill (1951-), **Between Cinema and a Hard Place** (1991), video installation, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



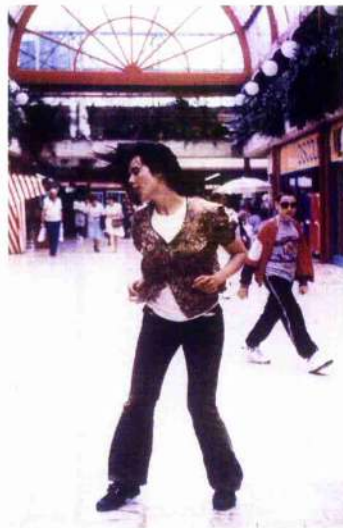
Installation view

**Plate 4.** Rachel Whiteread (1963-), **Untitled (Freestanding Bed)** (1991), dental plaster and polystyrene, 50.8 x 238.8 x 152.4, Southampton City Art Gallery Collection, Southampton.



Installation view

**Plate 5.** Cornelia Parker (1958-), **Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View** (1991), mixed media, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.

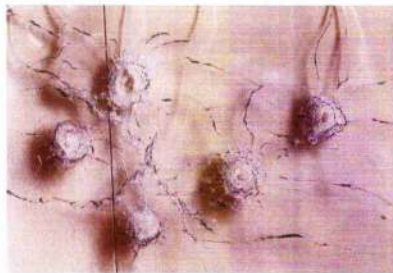


Video still

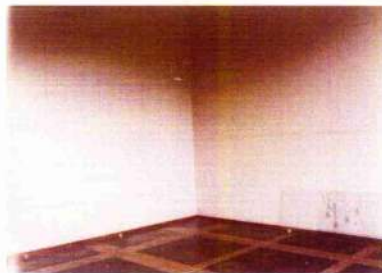
**Plate 6.** Gillian Wearing (1963-), **Dancing in Peckham** (1996), video, display dimensions variable, Southampton City Art Gallery Collection, Southampton, and Arts Council Collection, London.



**Plate 7.** Duane Hanson (1925-1996), **The Tourists** (1970), polyester resin and fibreglass painted in oil, and mixed media, man 152 high, woman 160 high, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Collection, Edinburgh.



Detail



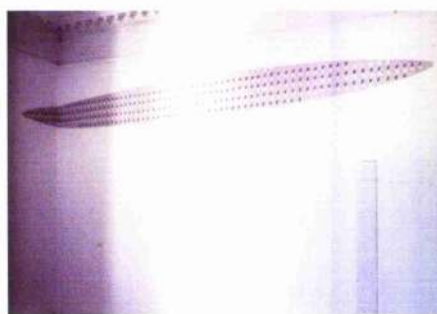
Installation view

**Plate 8.** Christine Borland (1965), **Nothing But the Whole Truth** (1991), shot glass, display dimensions variable, Dick Institute Collection, Kilmarnock.

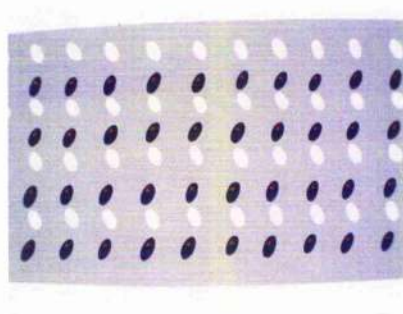


Installation view

**Plate 9.** Craig Richardson (1966-), **The Unfolding** (1992), emulsion paint and vinyl, display dimensions variable, Aberdeen City Art Gallery collection.



Installation view



Detail

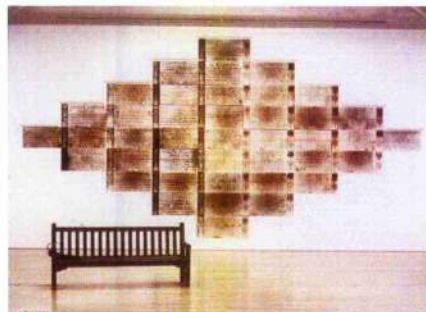
**Plate 10.** Richard Wright (1960-), **Love Gasoline** (1993), gouache, display dimensions variable, Aberdeen City Art Gallery collection.





Video Still

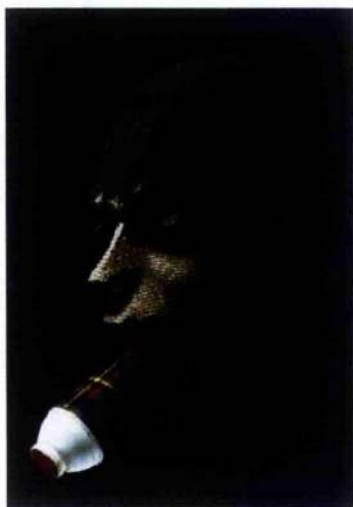
**Plate 11.** Matthew Dalziel (1957-) and Louise Scullion (1966-), **Another Place** (2000), video projection, display dimensions variable, Aberdeen City Art Gallery Collection, Aberdeen.



Installation View

**Plate 12.** Susan Hiller (1942-), **Monument (British Version)** (1980-81), photographs, audiotape and park bench, 457.2 x 685.8, Tate collection, London.





**Plate 13.** David Mach (1956-), **Some Like It Hot** (1991), burnt matches, thermos flask and mixed media, 56 x 25.5 x 33, Manchester City Art Gallery Collection, Manchester.



**Plate 14.** Tacita Dean (1965-), **Gellert** (1998), four photographs, each 38 x 59, edition of 8, Mercer Art Gallery Collection, Harrogate.



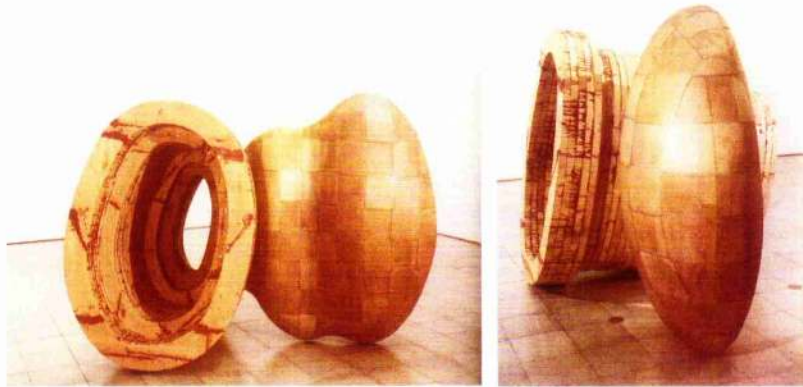
Installation view

**Plate 15.** Rebecca Horn (1944-), **Concert for Anarchy** (1990), painted wood, metal and electronic components, 150 x 106 x 155.5, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view

**Plate 16.** Bill Viola (1951-), **Nantes Triptych** (1992), video and mixed media, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



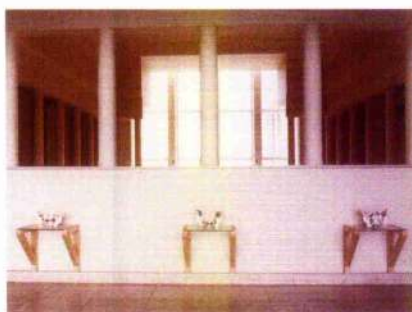
Front view

Side view

**Plate 17.** Richard Deacon (1949-), **Kiss and Tell** (1989), wood and paint in two parts, 170 x 233 x 162, Arts Council Collection, London.



**Plate 18.** Rachel Whiteread (1963-), **Untitled (Pair)** (1999), bronze, white cellulose paint in two parts, each 90 x 77 x 204, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art collection, Edinburgh.



Installation view

**Plate 19.** Christine Borland (1965-), **Five Set Conversation Piece** (1998), hand painted bone china and perspex, display dimensions variable, Aberdeen City Art Gallery Collection, Aberdeen.



Installation view

**Plate 20.** Katharine Dowson (1962-), **Drip 2** (1990), glass, water, 120 x 19 x 12, Aberdeen City Art Gallery Collection, Aberdeen.



Installation view

**Plate 21.** Katharine Dowson (1962-), **Barium Swallow** (1993) glass, water, pigment, 5 x 19 x 5, Aberdeen City Art Gallery Collection, Aberdeen.

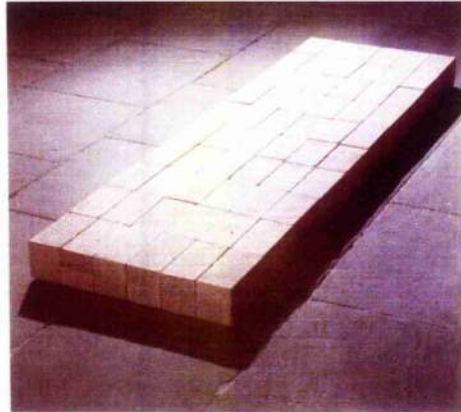


Freshly installed



Installation decayed

**Plate 22.** Anya Gallaccio (1963-), **preserve (Chateau)** (1995), 100 fresh gerberas, glass, display dimensions variable, Towner Art Gallery Collection, Eastbourne.



Installation view

**Plate 23.** Carl Andre (1935-), **Equivalent VIII** (1966), 120 firebricks, 12.7 x 68.6 x 229.2, Tate Collection, London.



Video still



Installation view

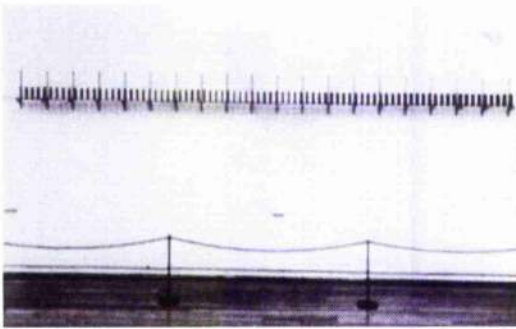
**Plate 24.** Gilbert Proesch (1943-) and George Passmore (1942-), **In the Bush** (1972), video, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



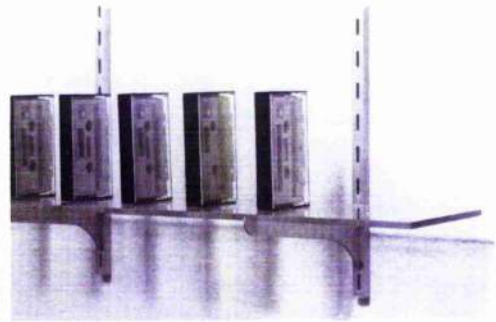


Video still

**Plate 25.** Gilbert Proesch (1943-) & George Passmore (1942-), **Gordon's Making Us Drunk** (1972), video, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view



Detail

**Plate 26.** David Tremlett (1945-), **The Spring Recordings** (1971), 81 sound cassettes, glass shelf, metal fixtures and tape recorder, 38.1 x 609.6 x 222mm, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view

**Plate 27.** Barry Flanagan (1941-), *Aaing j gui aa* (1965), mixed media, 170 x 145 x 145 cm, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view

**Plate 28.** Barry Flanagan (1941-), *No. 5 1971* (1971), sticks and fabric, 63.5 x 264.2 x 251.5, Tate Collection, London.





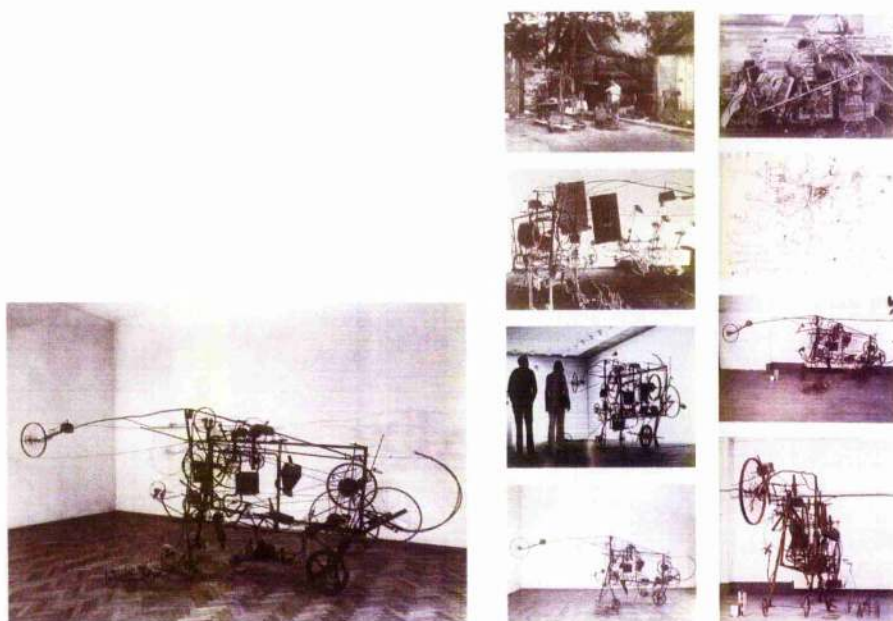
Installation view

**Plate 29.** Jason Rhoades (1965-), **The Creation Myth** (1998), mixed media, display dimensions variable, installation at Galerie Hauser & Wirth 2, Zurich, Switzerland, courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery, New York.



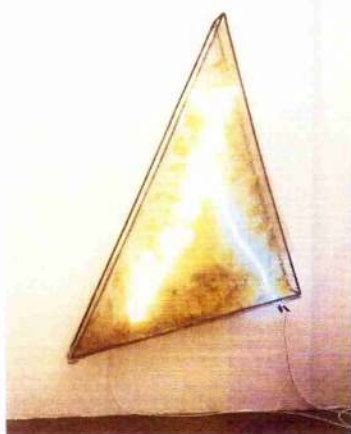
Installation view

**Plate 30.** Suchan Kinoshita (1960-), **Hok 1** (1996), mixed media, display dimensions variable, Bonnefantenmuseum Collection, Maastricht, Belgium.



Installation views 1960 -1996

**Plate 31.** Jean Tinguely (1925-1991), **Gismo** (1960), welded scrap metal, electric motor and found objects, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.



Installation view



Merz first installing work – 1968

**Plate 32.** Mario Merz (1925-2003), **Città Irreale** (1968), neon, metal, gauze, wax, 120 x 150 x 10, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

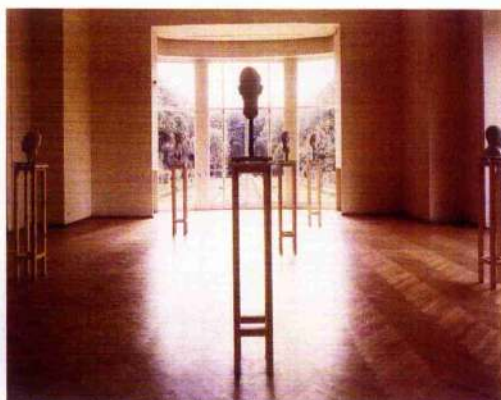


Installation view

**Plate 33.** Felix Gonzales-Torres (1957-1996), **Untitled (Portrait of Dad)** (1991), white candy, weight 79.54kg, display dimensions variable, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA.



Detail



Installation view

**Plate 34.** Christine Borland (1965-), **L'Homme Double** (1997), six clay portrait heads, wooden stands, 18 framed works on paper, display dimensions variable, Collection Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland.



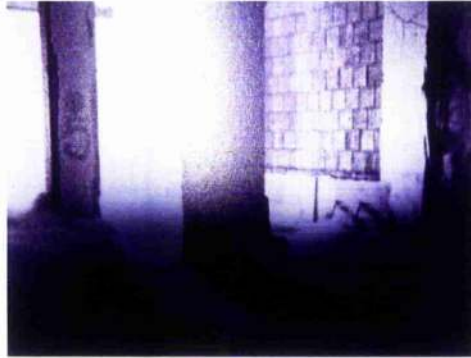
Film stills

**Plate 35.** Tacita Dean (1965-), **Disappearance at Sea** (1997), 16mm film, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



Film still

**Plate 36.** Tacita Dean (1965-), **Bag of Air** (1995), 16mm film, display dimensions variable, Towner Art Gallery Collection, Eastbourne.



Film still

**Plate 37.** Graham Gussin (1960-), **Spill** (2000), 16mm film, display dimensions variable, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.

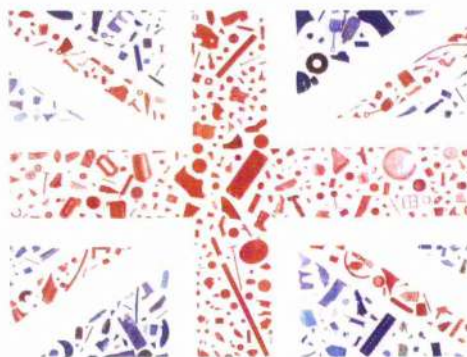


**Plate 38.** Chris Ofili (1968-), **Two Doo Voodoo** (1997), acrylic, oil, resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dug on canvas, 243.8 x 182.8cm, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.



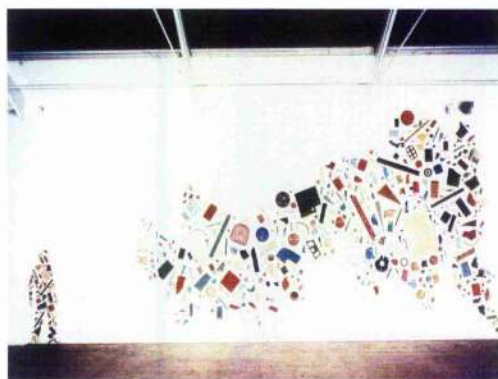


**Plate 39.** Chris Ofili (1968-), **Double Captain Shit and the Legend of the Black Stars** (1997), acrylic, oil, resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins and elephant dung on canvas, 243.8 x 182.8cm, Tate Collection, London.



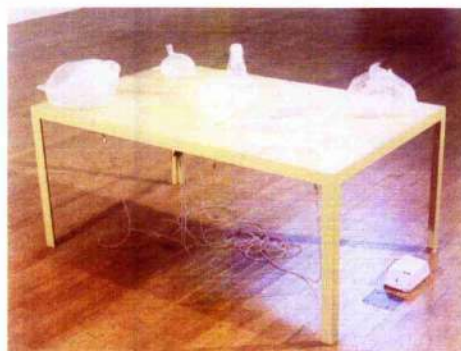
Detail

**Plate 40.** Tony Cragg (1949-), **Postcard Flag (Union Jack)** (1981), found plastic objects, display dimensions variable, Leeds City Art Gallery Collection, Leeds.



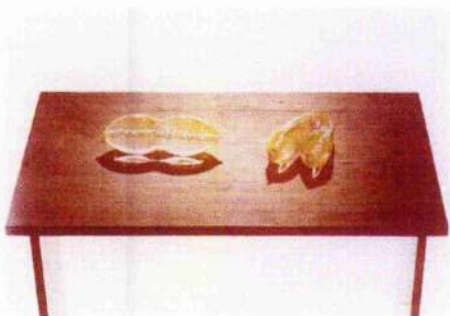
Installation view

**Plate 41.** Tony Cragg (1949-), **Britain Seen from the North** (1981), found plastic objects, 440 x 800 x 10, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view

**Plate 42.** Katharine Dowson (1962-), **Bubbling Glass** (1990), glass, water, wax, iron, air pump, plastic tubing, 94 x 152.5 x 96.5, Arts Council Collection, London.



Installation view

**Plate 43.** Katharine Dowson (1962-), **Silicon Teats** (1992), silicon, glass, water, wood, 83.5 x 98 x 54.3, Arts Council Collection, London.



Video still

**Plate 44.** Mark Wallinger (1959-), **Threshold to the Kingdom** (2000), video projection, display dimensions variable, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds.





Video still



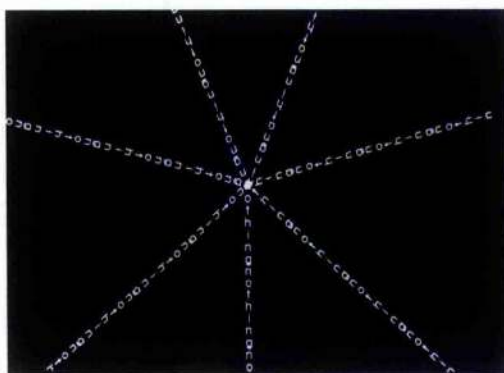
Installation view

**Plate 45.** Hilary Lloyd (1964-), **Dawn** (1999) video installation, display dimensions variable, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.



Video still

**Plate 46.** Mark Dean (1958-), **Goin' Back (The Birds/The Byrds x 32 + 1)** (1997), video projection, display dimensions variable, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds.



Installation view

**Plate 47.** Mark Dean (1958-), **Ascension (Nothing/Something Good)** (2000), video installation, display dimensions variable, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds.



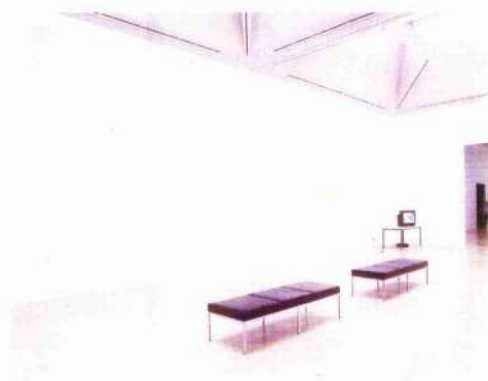
Certification shot

**Plate 48.** Sol LeWitt (1925-), **A Wall Divided Vertically into Fifteen Equal Parts, Each with a Different Line Direction and Colour, and All Combinations** (1970), wall drawing, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



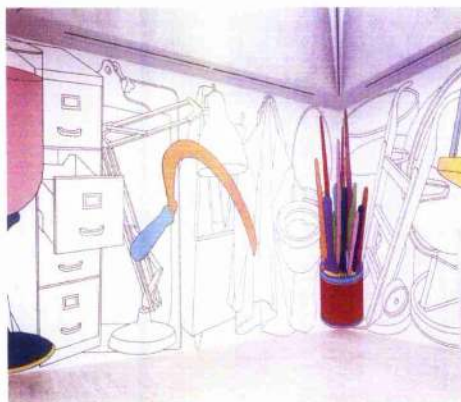
Installation view

**Plate 49.** Michael Craig-Martin (1941-), **Pink Room with Handcuffs and Filing Cabinet** (1995), paint, tape, display dimensions variable, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.



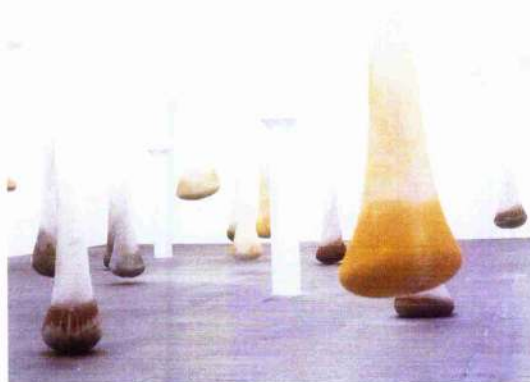
Installation view

**Plate 50.** Douglas Gordon (1966-), **List of Names (Random)** (1990-ongoing), Vinyl lettering, display dimensions variable, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.



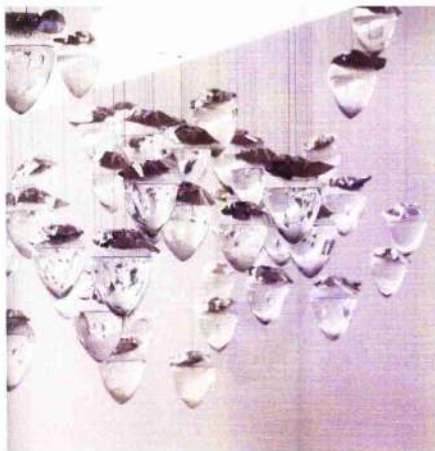
Installation view

**Plate 51.** Michael Craig-Martin (1941-), **Store Room** (2000), paint and tape, display dimensions variable, exhibited Tate Britain, London, June-September 2000.



Installation view

**Plate 52.** Ernesto Neto (1966-), **We Fishing the Time (worm's holes and densities)** (1999), nylon, spices, display dimensions variable, Tate Collection, London.



Installation view



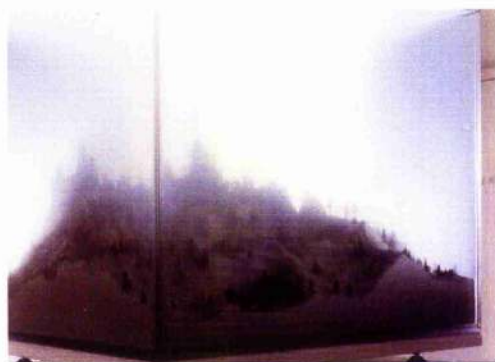
Detail

**Plate 53.** Christine Borland (1965-), **Spirit Collection (Hippocrates)** (1999), glass vessels, bleached Plane Tree leaves, 'Kew' Solution, display dimensions variable, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.



Installation view

**Plate 54.** Mariele Neudecker (1965-), **The Sea of Ice** (1997), glass, wax, salt, food dye, water, plastic, MDF plinth, 160 x 53 x 42.5, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.



Detail

**Plate 55.** Mariele Neudecker (1965-), **Morning Fog in the Mountains** (1997), glass, water, acrylic medium, fibreglass, cellulose paint, 177 x 69 x 61, British Council Collection, London.



Installation view

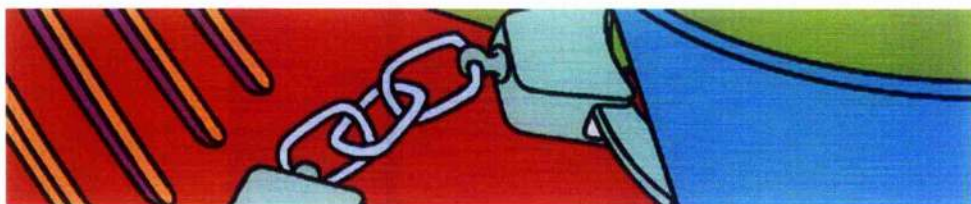
**Plate 56.** Mariele Neudecker (1965-), **Stolen Sunsets** (1996), steel, glass, fibreglass, enamel, dye, acrylic medium, water, salt, 180 x 65 x 45, Arts Council Collection, London.





Animation detail

**Plate 57.** Julian Opie (1959-), **Sara Walking, Sparkly Top and Jeans** (2003), computer film, hard drive, plasma screen, Aberdeen City Art Gallery, Aberdeen.



Detail

**Plate 58.** Michael Craig-Martin (1941-), **Becoming** (2003), computer-based LCD light-box with digital display, 38.7 x 31.8 x 11.4, Tate Collection, London.