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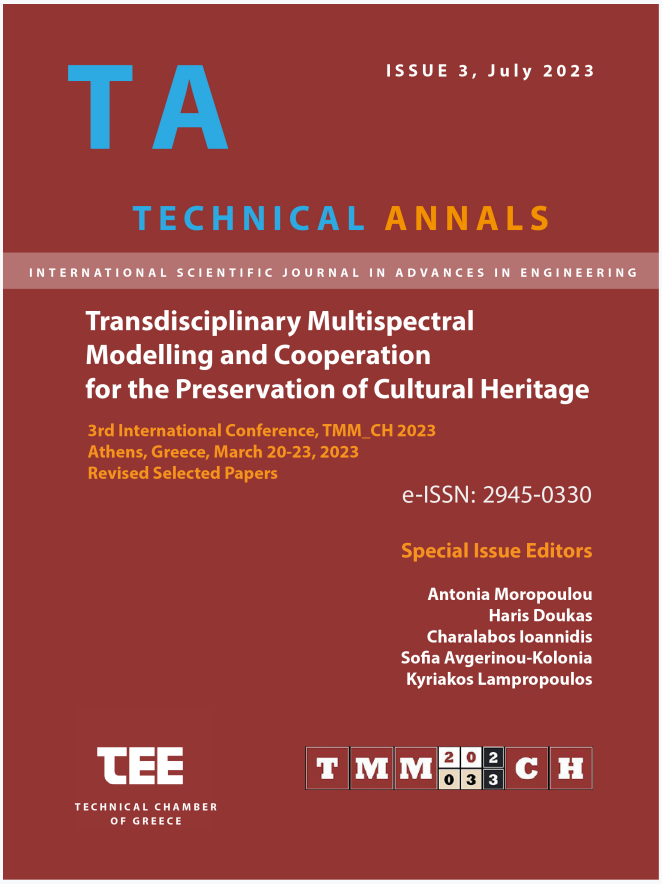

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The use of restored monuments for the exhibition of contemporary artworks: where is (preventive) conservation?

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Abstract. The key issue raised in this paper concerns the absence of an institutional framework for the operation of the buildings with the condition of preventive conservation of the modern collections. The main interest of curators focuses on the restoration of the monument in order to be "functional" and accessible rather than to the provision of facilities that will prevent the deterioration of contemporary works (two-dimensional paintings, in-situ installations, sculptures, video projections, etc.). Secondly, the monuments cannot always provide possibilities for a controlled microclimate. The fact that the exhibits are modern, made of technologically advanced or recycled materials - sometimes not original ones but replicas - should not preclude the practical application of preventive conservation measures. After all, it is proven that the establishment of an exhibition regulation is necessary regardless of the bioclimatic design of the buildings.

Keywords: bioclimatic design, preventive conservation, contemporary art.

1 The problem of funding for preventive or remedial art conservation measures

The need for low cost sustainable solutions

In recent years there has been a dominant principle for contemporary conservation practice that prevention is better than the cure of collections; According to Eastop (2011) the “Ethos” of current conservation practices is preventive conservation which seeks to reduce the effect of material and environmental changes on collections by responding to their causes rather than to their effects. In some cases, even the rationale

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for replicating or re fabrication a contemporary artwork is a strategy instead of conservation due to its degradation [1].

As Sakellariou remarks, these measures of preventive conservation relate to the development and improvement of the services of curators or collection managers [2]. As he states, in the case of preventive conservation there is always a problem of economy resources and funding proposals even at the most subsidized institutions which lack the premises, equipment and conservators so as to support preventive conservation projects (**Fig.1.)**

Fig 1. A fully digitally controlled microclimate inside the National Gallery of Athens funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (credits: K. Stoupathis, 2021).

As preventive conservation measures also require a lot of expenses, complex strategies have to be followed in the cases of historical buildings as those are not intended for museums or exhibition spaces. Thus, they host old and modern collections of historical, artistic and even religious value. The expertise of a professional in the field of preventive conservation is very important because he prepares scientific reports of the museum environment, assesses any factors that threaten the collection in relation to the building and makes decisions about any endogenous or exogenous factors that may place the art objects at risk. “Especially in cases where old buildings are not restored but left in a state of abandonment there is instability of their internal environment which provokes the artworks´ deterioration. Additionally to this, Brooks adopts a communicative approach as expresses the opinion that besides practical issues there are initiatives for museums to communicate conservation in public through exhibitions which

offer the intriguing spectacle of the possibility of slowing down natural decay to which all objects (and humans) are subject [3]. Golfomitsou also points out, that in some cases, artworks existing in material form may be replaced or reproduced instead of being conserved. Besides, the sources of a museum funding may be diverse. Reduced funding leads to a diminishing of resources such as museum jobs and a reduction of supplies and this leads museums to hire conservation managers who are authorized to make decisions in relation to what needs to be conserved and what resources are required [4].

Taking all the aforementioned into account it is clearly understood in the scientific community of museum professionals that the application of the already tested methods of preventive conservation takes precedence over any other conservation and restoration considering that preventing is better than any conservation treatment.

2 Where do contemporary art exhibitions take place?

Types of cultural spaces and monuments that host contemporary art

Historical buildings are the most important to manage due to their design peculiarities given that conservators must combine the optimal conditions for the protection of (contemporary) objects as well as the preservation of their architectural shell and the comfort of their visitors. A detailed and analytical design of their internal environment is required which is defined as "bioclimatic design". In the case of historical buildings, modifications and restoration interventions are not always easy to apply as Stamatopoulou mentions [5], the expanded concept of the museum includes every cultural space, talking about a)a general categorization of buildings that house art collections and manage human culture, b)buildings that have been built from the beginning for museum use and therefore own the required structural specifications and c)buildings that have been reused and whose original construction state did not respond to the aim of a museum or of a cultural venue **(Fig. 2)**

However, the role of the Museum building is achieved through a meticulous, detailed and analytical bioclimatic design; the goal of the design of the internal environment of the building monument is firstly to optimize the internal environment to balance the preventive conservation needs regarding the requirements of the collection. Secondly it depends on the type of objects displayed such as paintings, mixed media installations, organic collections made of fragile and ephemeral materials that are difficult to preserve. Thirdly there is always the question of knowing-how can this monument support the museological context of the curator-museologist and enhance the interpretation of the artworks by its visitors.

Stamatopoulou categorizes such buildings, according to the control of their internal environment into four categories as: a)unmodified buildings that have not undergone electromechanical construction interventions or any preservation of their internal microclimate, b)adapted monuments whose external environment has been measured in order to achieve a microclimate control of relative humidity, temperature, etc., c)old buildings as monuments with construction defects made of inappropriate paint materials, d)buildings constructed as spaces for cultural use.

We should also not forget outside open-air exhibitions in parks/gardens, urban blocks or in the metro stations, underground, etc.

Fig 2: View from a restored wooden roof, old house and studio of A. Mylona that was converted in a contemporary art museum. Besides the installation of an inverter-type air conditioner there are artificial and natural light sources (credits: K. Stoupathis, 2022).

3 Recommendations for the control of microclimate in public spaces

Authorities of a contemporary arts conservator

In the case of contemporary art that is publicly exhibited, the famous archaeological sites and monuments that host it are charged with historical memories, are reverently browsed and need to be well preserved [6]. Besides monuments, changing views on preventive conservation on artworks have occurred: As Kuhne and Kirch [7] explain, contemporary exhibitions may take place even in demolished or undamaged buildings which may have undergone renovation or past restorations (**Fig. 3)**.

Fig 3: A site specific light installation placed onto the "Old Tobacco Factory" of Athens during "Portals" exhibition: sun-light immerses from a crystal roof
(credits: K. Stoupathis, 2021).

So, new materials and material combinations of contemporary artworks are a challenge for the conservator. For example, a thorny problem is the broad spectrum of new media art which after a few years of aging require more up to date forms of conservation, or copying a visual work of art to other storage media instead of conserving it may alter the way we treat or protect collections. But in contrast to this holistic perception of art meaning and art aging, Gwynne mentions that "a contemporary artwork in its infancy...some artworks are fabricated with the understanding and the requirement that the materials must evolve or be replaced over time" [8].

Regarding preventive conservation, the climatic conditions of the (urban/rular) area where the old masonry, museum or gallery is situated need to be evaluated and the construction characteristics of the building or past restorations be examined -in order to achieve a stable climate control for the preservation state before making use of any collections displayed. For example developments and discussions are well underway in many contemporary institutions which have introduced new forms of display concerning involving art-installations, events and actions where the viewer interacts with the contemporary collection [9]. To any practical dilemmas of the conservator should someone add further, any lack of previous preservation reports of the monument. Concerning the architectural science, laboratorial or "in situ" tests must take place in order to evaluate the present condition of the walls, openings, renders and pointing mortars. As far as Restoration is concerned these experts have to make decisions about keeping any interventions of architects as they are, repair or substitute them [10]. Also, in order to improve the quality of the atmospheric conditions and to control the internal environment of a building, special attention is attributed to the existence of its thermal zones

as each monument is internally characterized by thermal zones based on the thermal data-energy resources or energy losses.

Moreover, major changes in museum practices in relation to internal conditions were made by following Thompson's recommendations which focused on limiting any environmental fluctuations in the museum environment instead of struggling to retain stable microclimate conditions; Thus, Thomson in 1978, concluded that a preventive conservation framework should be created by defining fluctuations in the range of +, -, 4-5 R.H %, achieved by air conditioning system. For it is more crucial to maintain these environmental changes rather than knowing in detail the effects of small degradation phenomena on the objects. Additionally, a well designed museum environmental control would include along with regulated R.H.% and Temperature, adequate filtration to absorb most of the harmful particulate matter (such as soot from industrial venues that host exhibitions). In urban spaces damaging pollutants penetrate through the doors, windows or contamination brought in by the public. As Stolow remarks, high density can also raise carbon dioxide levels, ammonia in galleries through the openings and floors [11].

Finally, for the proper operation of the air conditioning system, the appropriate control condition sensors must be placed: a modern solution for the control of the indoor environment is by the telemetric method where the sensors in each area of the exhibition are connected to a transmitter which is then connected directly via network to a computer and thus one can have (in real time and from a distance) all the records of the environmental conditions [12].

4 Ethical issues: Should the old monuments look like white cubes?

The “white-cube” phenomenon of a gallery or museum

Despite the microclimate control, as far as the aesthetics of the exhibition spaces are concerned there's too much talk about the white-cube phenomenon in contemporary exhibitions. For many art critics have raised concerns that the new, most outlandish Art Museum designs upstage the art inside, mentioning that this may be explained due to their futuristic appearance in contrast to the architectural characteristics of historic buildings; On my opinion, this may be disappointing as far as collection-care is concerned.

On the one hand as O´ Doherty mentions, there is the “white cube” space which instead of an old exhibiting practice provides with an opportunity to see not the artworks but the space first. As we assume this means that there may be no interest in the preventive conservation as there is a limited period of time that artworks are displayed or their deterioration timeline may be neglected. So, in order to manifest ideas and for preventive conservation rules the artworks are well mounted in galleries, hung but scattered for study. The easel picture is seen like a portable window that penetrates the walls of the building with deep space [13]. For Smithson, a vacant white room where the work of art exhibited is still a submission to the neutral, a kind of aesthetic convalescence, curable or incurable waiting to be consumed by society [14].

On the other hand, Kyung and Cerasi argue that the white-painted rooms free of all visual distractions except the contemporary artworks have become a standard so widely accepted, due to contemporary Art Museums ability to tarnish into global tourist destinations-this has often made them into a pretext for ambitious architecture and urban investments. This state of withdrawal from the world outside allowed museums to emerge as spaces apart for reflection as symbols of personal and collective transformation through a higher deal. Moreover, the monuments´ openings and windows were banished for the "time passage" disappeared -not for preventive conservation-as "the idea was to allow the viewer to focus on one work at the time and to maximize purely aesthetic contemplation" [15].

Along with these post-modern statements mentioned for the inner exhibiting areas we should further consider Riegl´s theory for the modern cult of monuments or his statement for the renewal value of a monument where interventions of restorers through stylistic additions may alter the forms or colors of it like a "newly created work" [16]. He states that, these artistic but historical monuments may be misunderstood in terms of our human conception as the artistic value of a monument is no longer commemorative but a contemporary value that should be seriously taken into account before preservation or restoration. Despite the "age value" he refers to the "historical" (that does not concern the preservation of any traces of age, disintegration or other changes caused by nature's impact on the monument) but that the present state should be maintained and stop the progression of future decay. Moreover, an old building still in use should be restored without endangering the visitors but in respect to its original stylistic unity. After all, environmental sensitivity becomes extremely important to museologists who collaborate with conservators. Many curators and designers are often loath to sacrifice Aesthetics for the sustainability of the environment: In contemporary exhibitions all designers are looking for processes and materials that are environmentally friendly and decrease energy consumption inside the monument, inner or outdoor space of area used (**Fig. 4).**

Despite the control of light -radiation in the internal part of a building which is crucial for the preventive conservation of artworks as task of a conservator, the hot or bright lights used by exhibition designers are an enormous energy drain, plus the large amount of energy involved in installations and prints that influence the quality of the air through harmful volatile compounds and difficult to dispose chemicals [17].

Fig 4. An installation of S.Antonakos at the Ampelokipoi Metro station of Athens which is partially in contact with external environment conditions, deposits and immersive sun light (credits: K. Stoupathis 2015).

5 Why not preventive conservation in contemporary art exhibitions in historical venues?

What lies beyond this rhetorical question

This paper is an extension of a recent survey as far as it fills the gap regarding the establishment of a legal code of ethics concerning the necessity of preventive conservation. A Code of Conduct has to be firmly applied in various monuments, that are being reused for contemporary art exhibitions. Due to the problem of the restoration of the architectural form of the monuments in relation to the conservation and exhibition requirements of contemporary collections; in particular the question of the re-use of historical buildings or abandoned spaces in the cloistered city seems to be a familiar practice of curators, in the context of:

a) Organizing periodical, visual exhibitions including alternative non-restored monuments such as neoclassical houses, old schools, factories, abandoned venues,
b) Following a contemporary trend/advance of postmodern times, in the service of curation due to limited expenses, art exhibitions in monuments that are free of cost and available, open-air buildings and outdoor art-happenings where preventive conservation is impossible to apply,
c) Selecting buildings with specifications that match with the museological concepts and ideas or initiatives of the curators for cultural exhibitions.

Thus, it sees that the curators of the exhibitions do not pay any attention to the factor of the preventive conservation of art. The main reason is that often the museological concept of a periodical exhibition- as well as the short period of time it lasts, play a very important role in the lack of provision of preventive conservation measures **(Fig. 5).**

Fig 5: Cement interventions and aluminum air tubes on the inner walls at the old Stock Exchange Hall of Athens in "Agora" 2013 exhibition: M. Babousis paper artworks were lit by fluorescent tubes and there was no light radiation control. (credits: K. Stoupathis, 2013).

They also choose the old building that is consistent with the idea they have in their mind or according to the thematic units that make up a museum exhibition. They clearly collaborate with artists who hang artworks, or create site-specific installations, improvisation ally and empirically. In some cases the kind of the contemporary art exhibition enhances (only) the investigation of literature and archival research of these "expanded interiors" by the curator. As Huber remarks any archaeological, archival and historical analysis of the buildings, its wall paintings, architecture and design has to be related contemporary practice and movements even at art performances [18]. The key issue raised here is sustainability which concerns the absence of an institutional framework for the operation of such buildings with the condition of preventive conservation of the modern/contemporary collections. Despite this, the urban fabric has in relation to all natural phenomena its own impact on Aesthetics [19].

It is obvious that the main interest of the curators´ focuses on the restoration of the monuments in order to be functional and accessible for the public, rather than to the provision of facilities and air conditioning units that will control the microclimate in

the exhibition space. Taken for granted that in most cases curators are not familiar with preventive conservation principles due to their educational background they display the artworks in indoor climate conditions, something which does not exclusively prevent contemporary artworks from deteriorating **(fig.6).**

Fig 6: The "NuKUmori washi Kimono" paper Art installation by M. Papatzelou, displayed near an open window at the "Red House" of Chalkida city. As mentioned on the floor, the perfume is an important material of the artwork (credits: K. Stoupathis, 2023).

Additionally, to this, these monuments cannot provide possibilities for the total control of their microclimate. The fact that the exhibits are contemporary, made of technologically advanced (sometimes recycled materials) or even replicas being displayed,

should not preclude the practical application of preventive conservation measures. In fact, professionals in the field of culture need to establish new cultural recommendations and comply with new regulations for the energy saving operation of those buildings: an updated code of conduct based on the most environmentally friendly and money-saving measures. So, one would wonder, if it is of extreme importance to institutionalize the recordings of micro-climate conditions in a monument that will host collections before they are even incorporated. As Duilio, Moyano and Gomez suggest "conservation literature and standards recommend to perform long term monitoring on a building instead of following rigid and arbitrary conditions" [20]. My opinion is that we have to redefine the interior space, the monument itself on both formal, practical and conceptual levels, besides the set-pointing of the ideal environmental conditions.

More specifically, all cultural managers and museum professionals should improve a close dialogue-even with the artists- in order to facilitate new paths for the exploration of historical monuments´ relevance for contemporary art making, towards sustainability. As Macdonald and Goncalves suggest, in cases of concrete structures an ethical issue is "to balance best practices for repair, treatment and maintenance with conservation needs through compromises that require understanding of their long term consequences" [21].

Due to these important issues mentioned research tools such as significance assessment and risk analysis, architectural reports of the preservation state of the buildings or mock ups of treatment materials should be applied prior to hosting these exhibitions. Environmental parameters such as the monuments´ energy losses, the inappropriate building materials, the lack of air conditioning units, infrastructure or anti acid supports on the art exhibits or the polluted by fumes atmosphere, do not provide protection from the threats of collections. On the contrary, they place them at risk.

6 Conclusions

The need for preventive conservation enables museum professionals and mostly conservators to struggle with obstacles of limited resources. There are also problems of funding preventive conservation projects and arguing with curators, stakeholders or architects when trying to safeguard art and retain the artists intents.

Beyond the rhetoric question "where is preventive conservation?" another problem exists: the necessity of the detailed establishment of a professional code of conduct for curators and conservators where preventive conservation measures will be strictly applied, especially written for contemporary art when displayed in old monuments. The bioclimatic design of a monument, is extremely important for the sustainability of most urban buildings, while in some cases contemporary artworks deteriorate either exposed to a non-controlled microclimate or due to human neglect.

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