

Unlikely Collaborators: How Conservators Can Support Artist's Practices

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Los Angeles County Department of Visual Arts and Culture

Visual Arts Tune-Up : Session Four

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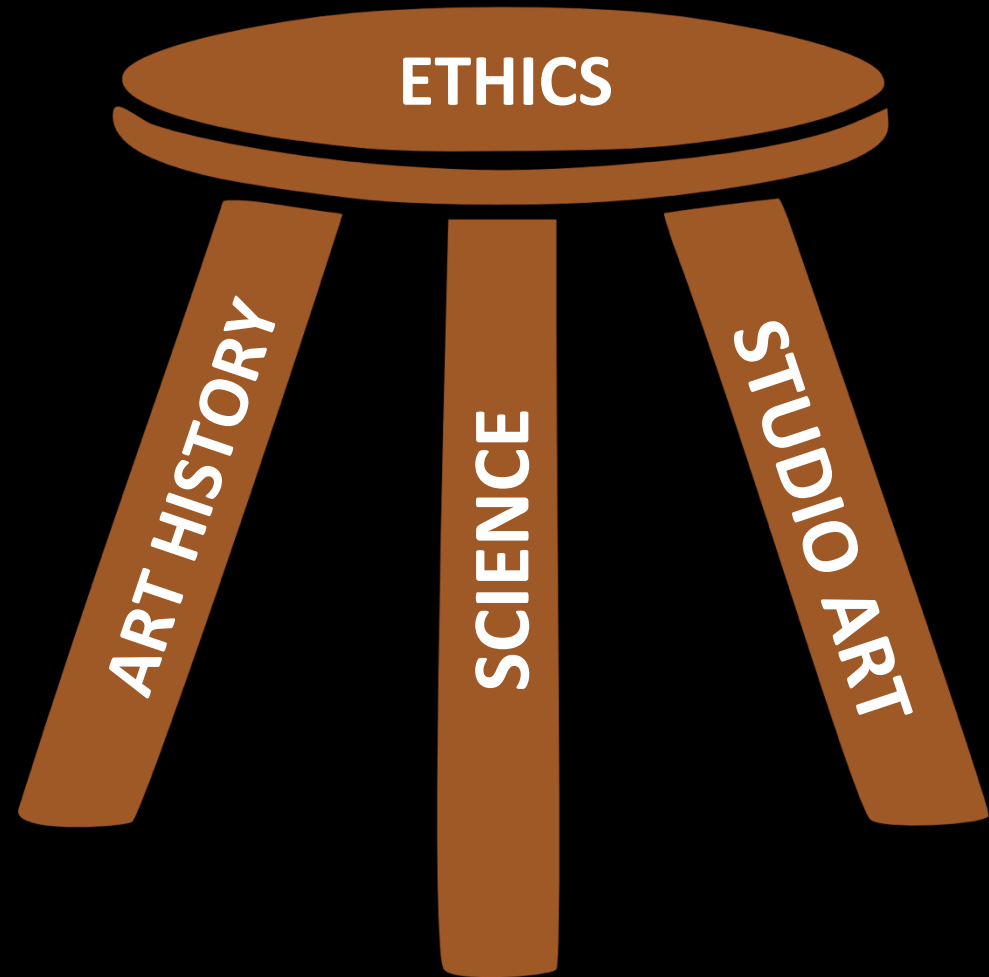
**Artist
Interviews**

**Collaborative
Research**

**Decolonizing
Art Spaces**

Art Conservators...

- ▶ Thoroughly examine and document artwork and cultural heritage.
- ▶ Have a broad knowledge on materials, techniques, and historical practice.
- ▶ Are one of the few arts professionals that actually “see” works of art/cultural heritage from the inside out.



Artist: creates art

Selects art materials based on artistic intent, working properties, aesthetic quality, et cetera.

Creates works that inherently address the colonization of art spaces.

Conservator: preserves art

Knowledgeable on the chemical composition and working properties of artist materials, aesthetic quality

Appreciates and understands “materiality”
Wants to preserve/maintain artistic integrity

Understands artist’s work and materials selection and can advocate and brings forth these inherent qualities to help decolonize art spaces.

Artist Interviews



- ▶ Captures key information about an artist's work, practice, intent, materials, et cetera.
- ▶ Information is kept confidential, though with consent from artist may be shared for a specific purpose.
- ▶ Most important: builds rapport between artist and conservator.

Daughters of Dorcas and Sons Quilting Guild visit the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum to discuss their works in the Museum's collection.

Artist Interviews: Resources and Levels of Formality

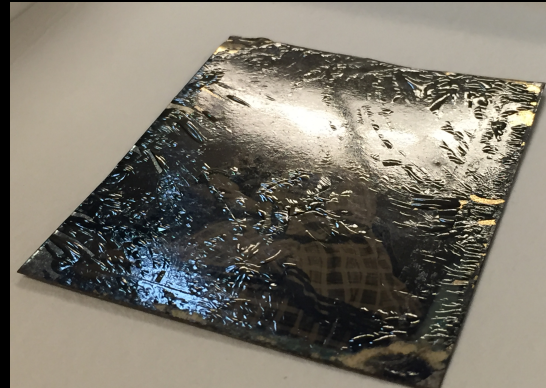
- ▶ National Museum of the American Indian
- ▶ Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
- ▶ The Artist Initiative at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)
- ▶ The International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) and Voices of Contemporary Art (VoCA)
- ▶ Artist Interview Workshops: Not all interviews are alike
 - ▶ Formal vs Informal
- ▶ Setting can vary: studio visit, gallery installation, et cetera
- ▶ Major takeaway: include all stakeholders in the discussion, allow conversation to flow
- ▶ Links:
 - <https://voca.network/voca-resources/>;
 - <https://www.sfmoma.org/stories/>;
 - <https://www.incca.org/>;



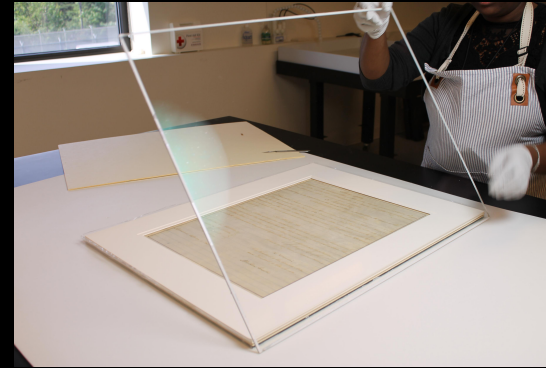
Image Credits: Bianca Garcia (UL), Anacostia Community Museum (LL), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (R)

Collaborative Research

- ▶ Material behavior
- ▶ Treatment and preservation strategies
- ▶ Options for reproduction, fabrication, et cetera



Severe flaking on a tintype



Matting and framing for historic documents



Hito Steyerl, still from *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV file*, 2013 Single Channel HD Video, 16:9, color sound, black box

Decolonizing Art Spaces

- ▶ Allowing the voice of original practitioners to be prioritized over art “experts.”
- ▶ Working with artists to incorporate traditional techniques in the preservation/conservation of a work.
- ▶ Respecting the latent qualities, lifeforce, or *ashé* contained within a work of art.

Looking at traditional tools used for making tapa.
Image: National Museum of the American Indian



Always Becoming ~ Nora Naranjo-Morse





Always Becoming in the snow.
(image credit: Gail Joice)



Smithsonian interns participating in
annual sculpture maintenance.
(image credit: Eric Long)



Robin's egg inside bird nest atop one of the
sculptures
(image credit: Kelly McHugh)



Illustration of *Always Becoming: Phase II*
by Eliza Naranjo-Morse (image credit:
www.norananjomorse.com)

A Harmonious Partnership

- ▶ Through mutual interests and a shared goal, conservators and artists can work together to ensure a work of art fulfills its artistic intent.
- ▶ Artists should feel empowered to reach out to conservators and build strong working relationships.
- ▶ The broad knowledge of the conservator can be beneficial at all stages of an artistic creation: beginning - middle - end... and beyond!

Thanks for your attention!

Special Thanks to:

- ▶ Los Angeles County Department of Art & Culture
- ▶ Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute

Feel free to contact me directly with questions:

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