

Title: "Documenting art installations with plastic components in the collection of the Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center"

In contemporary art conservation, the knowledge of the object is crucial; the gathering and registration of information on the materials, production methods and artist intent, forms the basis for responsible decision-making regarding conservation. Moreover, documentation is essential to guarantee the authenticity of a complex artwork during its reinstallation.

The project "Documentation of installations in the collection of the Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center" had the objective of exploring documentation models for contemporary artworks, which could contribute to the conservation of the collection hosted in this Cuban institution. The Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center was founded in 1983 with the mission of enriching the nation's cultural heritage by creating a permanent collection of artworks and systematically exchanging cultural documentation with artists working in countries of the so-called "Third World". Even without a permanent exhibition space, the collection has continued to grow for the last 35 years, with over a thousand artworks in varied media mostly produced during the Havana Biennials and the exhibitions organized as part of the center's regular program. Although the study and care of the collection is a current priority of the institution, the staff in charge does not have specialized training in conservation, and they have not been able to maintain an adequate storage space or a complete registration system. All of which has caused the loss of information and, in many cases, of the artworks' physical integrity. The characterization of this collection and in particular of twenty-two art installations allowed defining this as the most vulnerable section, due to the works' conceptual and material complexity and the difficulties for their storage and display.

This presentation will focus on three art installations documented during the project: "Pistolas" by Andrea Echeverri, "Yo no" by Dolores Cáceres and an untitled ensemble by Alex Flemming. These works by Latin American artists are representative of diverse aesthetics and conceptualist strategies. All of them, consisting of combined media, include synthetic polymers in their material composition. The presence of plastics supposes an even greater challenge for their study. Specific problems related to the conservation of these artworks, regarding their documentation, storage, and presentation, will be discussed.