
APPROACHES

CHAPTER 1

UPDATING TRADITIONAL ETHICAL APPROACHES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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Abstract

From the past to the present, experts have developed opinions and suggestions on protecting works of art sometimes prompted by negative consequences of past conservation practice. In response, ethical advice and practice was developed by practitioners and, through consensus, some of these have become de-facto ethical standards. The sector continuously returns to the need to establish common ethical standards to guide conservation practice in the protection of the works and support their transfer to the next generation. This article notes traditional ethical standards of respected institutes and theorists in Europe which were designed based on the conservation of classical works of art. The applicability of minimum intervention and recognisable practices of conservation is a debatable issue for professionals. As contemporary artists draw on a vast range of available materials, there are many transient and non-permanent materials and various conceptual approaches available for the construction of their artworks. The approaches currently adopted by many for the conservation of classical artworks might be appropriate for contemporary art, but, equally, the changing material and concept of the artwork might cause a rethink of traditional solutions. The article examines how these approaches match the challenges of contemporary art, which has revolutionized materials, techniques and even conceptions of art itself. We ask: does the artist's intent and the variety of materials and methods push the limits of current ethical approaches? In this context, we examine, with the use of case studies, whether conservators can apply ethical strategies such as minimum intervention and recognizability to the conservation of contemporary works of art.

Keywords: Conservation of contemporary artworks, ethics, artist's intent, minimum intervention, recognisable

1. Introduction

Ethical approaches to conservation were designed within the profession to provide basic frameworks to guide the conservation of classical artworks. These traditional approaches may not provide adequate guidance for the conservation of new artworks created under the influence of changing art movements. The reasons for this include: contemporary artworks can include conceptual elements that are immaterial and changing in form, that there is a different profile of materials and forms of construction in the creation of the art and there are radical new means of expression (Stigter, 2017). Contemporary artworks can be process-based and open-ended and represent more than tangible fixed objects (Stigter, 2017). The origins and applicability of ethical approaches defined in past centuries should be examined in the new context of contemporary artworks conservation.

In the later 20th century in Europe, approaches of minimum intervention and recognisable approaches gained hegemony and this is usually credited to the influence of Cesare Brandi. Brandi was an art historian and the director of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro between 1939 and 1961 (Muñoz-Viñas, 2005). According to Brandi, minimum and recognizable interventions are significant ethical elements for conservation practice. His motivation is to protect the artist's hand and the originality of artworks as much as possible. Although minimal intervention and recognisable practices were dominant thoughts in conservation in the 20th century in many national and regional traditions, their applicability to contemporary art conservation ethics has become arguable. This chapter discusses the applicability of traditional conservation ethics based on minimum intervention and recognisable approaches in contemporary artworks conservation. This discussion leads to additional questions as to how the artist's aims should be considered and how the transition of the conservator from a passive to an active role will develop our approaches and guidelines.

2. Approaches to minimal interventions and recognisability

The case for minimum intervention and recognisable interventions as an ethical practice is explained in Cesare Brandi's *Teoria del Restauro*, published in 1963. Brandi's (2005) conservation approach is informed by his perspective on the nature of art. He argued that the purpose of artwork should be a unique and special experience for each viewer and for a work to be described as 'art', aesthetic and historical values must be considered alongside an understanding of the artwork's integrity. This 'integrity' cannot be explained just as physical integrity, which describes the integrity of the materials that contribute the sum of the parts of artworks, but also the value integrity (Kaptan, 2009). To illustrate, words alone have no value,

whereas when the author brings them together to create a poem, words gain value (Brandi, 2005), and he applies this concept to the materials that make up the artwork. The materials that constitute works of art should not be considered separately from each other. They have indivisible integrity for the image that makes the artworks and therefore generate aesthetic value. Given this, the aesthetic value of artworks becomes a foremost decision-making criterion when undertaking conservation or restoration (Muñoz-Viñas, 2005). Consideration of aesthetic values led to the minimum intervention and recognisable conservation approaches suggested by Brandi (2005), where minimum intervention is the applied minimum limit of practices on the artworks where images or symbols do not change, and recognisable is where interventions to artworks can be recognisable by viewers or professionals (Brandi, 2005). Accordingly, it follows that interventions made to protect the works should be undertaken only where necessary on the material of the work and that the artist's hand should not be interfered with where possible. Brandi (2005) encouraged the conservator to ensure that interventions on artwork are recognisable to the extent that interventions can be noticed when examined closely and/or by professionals. This principle is offered as a significant approach to respecting the artwork, the artist's hand and minimising risk.

This century conservators have been challenged by changes in the perception of the value of artwork and in the nature of contemporary art creation, which has caused a fundamental shift in the paradigm of art conservation (Chyrkova & Yankovska, 2021). For example, the increasing use of deliberately ephemeral materials provides new challenges to conservators (Natali, 2008). Materials used by an artist might have conceptual properties that are formless or non-material (Stigter, 2017). What is the meaning of minimal intervention for conservation when the purpose of an artwork or a component of the artwork is to change and even disappear? Where artworks are ideas or performances, what does it mean to conserve them? Is it minimal to inhibit or enable change? Are changes built into artworks considered as deterioration and the subject of conservation, or as part of the value, in which case no intervention may be appropriate? Minimal intervention may not be an option for a material with a preservation horizon of days, weeks, or months. In a changing art movement, museum professionals must also be prepared to change and consider new approaches to managing the challenges in conserving the artworks, which often requires their active participation (Stigter, 2017; Giebeler et al., 2021; Lawson et al., 2019).

With the burgeoning of contemporary art forms that offer a personal perspective on political issues expressed through the art's form and content, the centrality of the artist's intention has become essential in art conservation. The artist's intent is important because the artwork

is a by-product and witness of a particular moment and era; it has historical relevance (Delagrange, 2021). With contemporary art, the inspiration and often the artists themselves, are available to help interpret that intent. This availability allows us to state, understand and challenge specific socio-cultural or ideological or political changes, creating awareness, stopping time and igniting the discussion (Delagrange, 2021). These social contexts were available to artists throughout history, and messages were made explicitly and embedded within classical artworks. However, for contemporary artworks, the artists or a close spokesperson is often available to articulate the intent, thus making it available specifically for conservation decision-making. Conservators can ask ‘what the artist means with the artwork’ by conducting and documenting a formal interview with them (Van Saaze, 2013, p. 54) or their representatives. These interviews will typically include information about techniques and materials used by artists and capture the meaning embodied in these artworks. Discussions about replacement and reconstruction should be undertaken to support the connection of meaning to tangible aspects. Such interviews are a chance to inform conservation decisions, but there remains a question about how much such interviews should impact the conservation process. Muñoz-Viñas a theorist and conservator, argues that artist’s intent is a weak approach to the conservation process. He argues that even if conservators conduct an interview with artists to learn the manufacturing technique of artworks, there may now be significant time passed between the interview and the making of the artwork, which may render it impossible for them to precisely remember all the materials, processes and techniques of manufacture (Reeves, 2015). Furthermore, the artist’s intent may change, either because of the artist actively changing their mind about the meaning or legacy value of the piece or through a developing consciousness about a piece that grows as it is engaged with. Therefore, although the artist’s interview is a valuable tool to inform conservation, it must be carefully managed and documented and sit within a larger decision-making framework (Giebler et al., 2021).

Early guidelines for ethical practice did not focus on, or prioritise, consultation with artists because the guidelines were created for conserving classical artworks long after the artist’s death. Therefore, with little guidance on how to consult, there is some evidence that conservators have in the past been reluctant to seek input on their work, especially on technical matters, or where advice was offered that appeared to conflict with what was felt to be professional ethics raising questions about how the conservators should negotiate that challenge (Henderson & Nakamoto, 2016). The combination of these challenges has led to a growing recognition within the sector that traditional conservation guidelines were inadequate, prompting calls for new ethical approaches (Ashley Smith, 2017). Thus, at least partially driven by the newly

revealed questions of contemporary artwork conservation, the necessity of reviewing and updating traditional conservation approaches and processes has become apparent (Opena et al., 2021). In practice, the rise of installation art has made artist consultation necessary and has prompted thorough reviews and guidelines (Lawson & Potter, 2017, Hölling, 2021). Conservators working with contemporary art have been revisiting the philosophy and ethics of conservation. For example, conservation staff in the Tate group of art galleries in the UK have worked to deliver considered and ethical conservation practices in consultation with relevant partners. In their publications, they have provided guidelines to practice which convey the conservators' skills and knowledge of materials, as well as innovative thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and ethics for a new operating climate (Lawson & Potter, 2017). This new operating climate challenges the comfort of well-accepted rules within the sector and reveals the need for more developed approaches to conserving contemporary artworks that can inform the profession well beyond contemporary art (Wain and Sherring 2021).

Moving beyond ethical approaches, which adhere strictly to rules of minimum intervention and recognisable practices, asks new questions of those conservators who have relied heavily on the Brandt model. It is necessary to expand common notions of authenticity, loss, and changing state being part of authentic art if we are to locate the recognisability of our intervention in multiple formats and integrate multiple and potentially changing or conflicting understandings of the meaning and authentic nature of the pieces on which we practice conservation.

3. Ethics and conservation

The field of philosophy known as ethics has been described as the study of behaviour (Edson, 1997). Another description is that 'ethics is a human activity' (Brown, 1990, p. 11). Ethics have an essential role in determining the limits of professional practice frameworks. Thus, determining ethics and their effect on professionals is significant for many fields. Clavir has described ethics as "*any and all sets of moral principles and values that govern individual and group behaviour*" (Clavir, 2002, p.26). In contrast, Edson (1997, p.5) describes ethics as geometric correctness, such as an $x=y$ mathematical equation. This ethical approach suggests that in the same situation (x) and should generate the same answer (y). Any behaviour that does not fit this method cannot be considered ethical. This rule-based or deontological approach to ethics may be helpful to warn that, for example, 'you shall not kill', but it offers less insight into conservation decisions. Furthermore, experiencing the limits of a rule-based approach may suggest to some practitioners that no universal code of professional ethics was possible for conservation, given the layers of nuance and variability implicit in our practice. Instead of a rule-based approach that focuses on inputs (the 'x' that leads to the 'y'), an ethical code

could consider the outcomes as critical to ethical decision-making, situating ethical principles on the consequences of our actions. Such a system is problematic for conservation where the consequences of our decisions and actions may exist in an unknown future where the values with which cultural heritage and our acts upon it cannot be known. A virtue-based approach to ethics where we act according to our present-day virtues aligns more closely to Clavir's description, seeking instead to find universal virtues (moral principles) of our profession. Although a daunting prospect, conservation ethics should be determined by interdisciplinary and international debate as to what should guide our practice. Opening our values (implicit or explicit) to scrutiny and comment would support the professional position of conservation within the communities whose opinions we seek.

Ethics can be conceived of as the study of good and bad behaviour. When a rule-driven approach supports such a binary perspective this may create considerable pressures for every individual's behaviour to be perfect. Despite the allure of perfection, which may be strong amongst the conservation community, it is not credible to find an ethical code to determine all acts, practices and behaviours of professionals and guarantee a perfect outcome and set of consequences for every set of inputs. Simply acknowledging the multiple and changing perspectives on cultural heritage where the same tangible item may have different meanings to different communities exposes the impossibility of perfection. Guides to ethical practice can, however, support professional decision-making based on principles determined by our current virtues, which are defined by the society, culture, and necessity of the era. Thus, rather than seeking universal rules, we may attempt to uncover our ethical principles, which are discussed and determined by art historians, curators, owners, conservators, stakeholders, and others whose lives are touched by their relationship with cultural heritage (Clavir, 2002). It is valuable to note here that many lives are also shaped by their exclusion from the cultural heritage, so discussions on ethics should be as shaped by those who currently have no access to the cultural heritage as those who do.

Although his contemporaries discuss Brandi's strategies for the conservation of architecture and artworks, his contributions to the field undoubtedly have an important place for today's conservation. Brandi emphasised the importance of conserving the image and integrity of the artwork, as well as the approach to the uniqueness of the work, which emerges as a result of the human spirit and the emotional and mental state of the artist (Ersen, 2010). The conclusions of his ideas were to determine the goals of conservation to be to preserve the meaningful whole, the experience of an artwork, and to maintain the sense of the thing as it is found now and capture its whole life. How these ideas manifested in his writing might have been recog-

nizability and minimum interventions, but these were the conclusions of his ideas in practice rather than the theoretical platform. In critiquing the application of Brandi's philosophy, much of the critique applies to the blanket use of solutions without reference to the original impetus. The purpose of this chapter is not to offer a full philosophical review of the origins of Brandi's ideas and this is done elsewhere (Meraz & Magar Meurs, 2019). Instead, the impetus of the paper is to discuss the practical applicability of the conservation approaches that Brandi put forward which have a powerful hold in our sector by examining the continued relevance of the practical conclusions of his work and, in particular their manifestation as they have been taught to the lead author of this chapter.

3.1. A brief history of conservation ethics

It is common to trace the development of conservation and restoration practices back to the Italian Renaissance when artists were rediscovering the methods and creations of classical sculptors (Ashley-Smith, 2009). In many cases, mirror actions were undertaken by conservators in later centuries. These historic interventions do not fully align with what we consider to be a clearly defined conservation profession which only began to take shape in the middle of the 20th century (Ashley-Smith, 2009). One could argue that Alois Rigel and Camillo Boito are the originators of traditional conservation theory in Europe and that Cesare Brandi, Umberto Baldini, and Paul Philippot are just a few of the most well-known individuals who furthered the development of these ideas in their works (Belishki & Corr, 2019). These approaches have significantly influenced conservation traditions in many parts of the world and it is possible to track their influence on various national and institutional initiatives that attempt to scope out appropriate ethical approaches and methods. In reviewing the sector, it is interesting to reflect on who can and should identify ethical approaches and what should be considered within the scope and implementation of ethical conservation standards.

The development of ethics, as core to the practice of conservation, is strongly related to the development of conservation-restoration as a scientific discipline during the 20th century. Ethical codes evolved alongside the development of the philosophical, historical, and scientific bases for conservation intervention methods and techniques (Schadler-Saub, 2019), with ethical principles providing a framework for practice, techniques, and methods for the newly emerging class of professional conservators. Ethical principles continued to be revisited and rethought, and within traditional European conservation contexts, there were significant innovations between the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century (Schadler-Saub, 2019). A bedrock of European practice and influential worldwide were theories developed

by Brandi in 1963¹. As the ethical practice became embedded in an increasingly professional workforce, more formal and agreed guidelines were agreed upon and published. The ideas of many theorists influenced the sector, such as the work of the 19th-century writer John Ruskin (Niglio, 2013).

Ruskin based his approach on the restoration of architectural monuments claiming that heritage buildings are ‘corpses’ that could only be preserved rather than restored (Yazdani Mehr 2019). Ruskin thought that a heritage building’s material contained priceless traces of the past, anything great or beautiful in architecture has never been able to be restored; it is as not possible as raising the dead (Yazdani Mehr 2019). This soul, which can only be obtained by the hands and eyes of the workman, can never be recalled (Yazdani Mehr 2019). Ruskin argued that instead of attempting a process of restoration, the original aesthetic and physical integrity of heritage buildings should be conserved as faithfully as possible. Ruskin combined his ideals of decay and the patina of time with suggestions for minimal intervention and the idea of trusteeship (Orbaşlı 2017). In this way, he argued that viewers best experience heritage buildings by seeing the original material. Thus, a Ruskin-inspired approach to the conservation of artwork should entail stabilizing it, preserving its integrity and ensuring that its ‘true’ aesthetic is retained without altering the artist’s intent or losing significant historical information (Niglio 2013).

According to Nicola Hartmann, contemporary art has different levels of existence, so not only are the materials different from those selected in the past the very nature of existence is called into question (Hartmann 1977). Art is supported by its materiality, which would be the visible stratum of the work and a component of perceptible reality yet, there is also an interior stratum to art, and because its nature is immaterial, the viewer sees the art from this internal stratum (Llamas-Pacheco 2020). A conservation focus that is restricted to the material form of objects with a goal of preserving physical and aesthetic integrity that was effective in the 18th century has become problematic for contemporary artworks. Conservators have begun to draw attention to the shift in focus from tangible objects to intangible things (like ideas) and consider the implications for ethical practice. Some conservators argue that this transition requires an update to traditional conservation ethics (Grevenstein and Scharff, 2005, p. 296).

1 These publications revealing a period of focus on ethics with the following publications in the early 1960s: Cesare Brandi’s *Teoria del Restauro* (1963), the Murray Pease Report (1961 to 1963), and the Venice Charter (1964). This article acknowledges its focus is on ethical perspectives informed by European perspectives.

3.2. Defining conservation ethics

A precursor to much that shapes Euro-American perspectives on conservation ethics was a report produced in America by a committee on professional standards and procedures established in 1961 under the leadership of Murray Pease, resulting in the publication of what is commonly known as the Murray Pease report in *Studies in Conservation* in 1964 (Pease, 1964). The publication advocated for the adoption of ethical guidelines internationally and was ‘the first group of conservators in any country to have formulated its standards of practice in an explicit document’. The document was adopted in 1967 “*to express those principles and practices which will guide the art conservator in the ethical practice of his profession*” (AIC, 1994, p. I). Between 1964 and 67 the profession progressed their thinking from specific procedures or operations to the need for ethical principles to guide practice. This distinction is important, recognising that professional ethics guide decision-making processes supported by principles rather than ethics determining a specific measure (rule-based).

There are several internally agreed definitions of conservation ethics, and a selection of these are listed here in chronological order of their production (table 1). Some of the definitions reproduced below replace earlier versions, so a gap in the chronology does not necessarily mean that this definition work was not being undertaken, perhaps only indicating that earlier work has been superseded. Some of the documents listed do not identify the concept of conservation ethics but indicate the ethical practice that underpins their definition of conservation.

Institutions	Publication date	Description of conservation ethics
Cesare Brandi 1963 (Brandi wasn’t considered an institution, but it was viewed as a point of the start).	1963	Brandi explained that conservation ethics should be based on conserving artworks’ aesthetic and physical integrity. His approaches to conservation ethics also include critical and philosophical perspectives.
The Venice Charter ²	1964	The Charter determined the limits of necessary interventions to the monuments and how conservators should be. Article 12: Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time, must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence (ICOMOS 1964).

2 The Venice Charter focused on the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites, was published in 1964.

E.C.C.O. [European Confederation of Conservator- Restorers' Organisations]	2002	Article 3: The conservator-restorer works directly on cultural heritage and is personally responsible to the owner, to the heritage and to society. The conservator-restorer is entitled to practise without hindrance to her/his liberty and independence (E.C.C.O. 2002).
ICOM [International Council of Museum]	2004	The museum should establish and apply policies to ensure that its collections (both permanent and temporary) and associated information, properly recorded, are available for current use and will be passed on to future generations in as good and safe a condition as practicable, having regard to current knowledge and resources.
ICOM-CC [International Council of Museums- committee for conservation]	2008	“All measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations ... All measures and actions should respect the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item” (ICOM-CC, 2008 p. 1)
ICOMOS	2014	The ICOMOS ethical principles specify the responsibilities of ICOMOS members and its bodies towards cultural heritage conservation and in connection with ICOMOS. Article 4-b: The ethical principles are not a doctrinal text: when necessary, the wording has been adjusted to clarify this.
ICOM [International Council of Museums]	2017	A basic requirement for museums is provided by the ICOM Code. It provides a set of standards for appropriate professional conduct, each supported by a set of guiding principles. All conservation procedures should be documented and as reversible as possible, and all alterations should be clearly distinguishable from the original object or specimen.
ICON [The Institute of Conservation]	2020	‘Conservation is an approach to items of cultural heritage, which seeks to preserve their intangible and physical manifestations as evidence of the past for present and future generations to study and enjoy (ICON 2020, P.3).

These definitions, produced over decades, vary in origin and are influenced by national laws and originating institutions. However, it is possible to see most of them have similar core elements. In most cases, they suggest that conservation is concerned with their responsibility to future generations and to adhere to moral duties. The UK professional body for conservation, ICON, recently developed ethical principles and explained that they must ‘specifically avoid dictating how those goals should be achieved’ (ICON, 2020, p.2). Icon signalling that they are identifying the avoidance of a deontological or rule-based approach, offering instead thirteen general statements outlining the ethical treatment of cultural heritage objects. This broad approach recognises that conservators are professionals and should be free to use their professional judgment in decision-making. Nonetheless, even within the ICON codes are statements that, at the very least, are inspired in parts by traditional ethics, as this extract indicates:

“Actions should remain detectable.

Actions should allow future re-treatment and remain as reversible as possible” (ICON, 2020, p.6).

ICON also signals that tangible and intangible elements must be considered without at this time commenting on how to navigate between these. The worldwide concern for future use is also matched with detectability in the ICON statements, although the concept of minimal intervention is not present, replaced instead with twin concepts of considering no action and only enacting sustainable interventions. Ethical guidelines can provide frameworks for conservation practice which support different measures in appropriate contexts. So, when considering 20th-century artwork and its challenges, ethical frameworks should offer principles to guide practice. Where specific measures are described as ethical but are no longer sufficient, it is appropriate to move past them.

4. Conservation ethics a discussion

4.1. Value in conservation ethics

Ethical principles for conservation offer frameworks to support the protection of valuable objects for society raising the question: why do people prefer to conserve some objects more than others? Where does the value of objects lie and how is this value given? People attach value to an object for many reasons, such as culture, society, geography, religion, etc (Giombini 2019, Munoz-Vinas 2005, Frasco 2009). In the second half of the 18th century, Winckelmann wrote his noteworthy text on art history, fine arts colleges proliferated across Europe, and Baumgarten formally founded the independent discipline of aesthetics (Wicklemann 2006). Artworks and their materials start to have a value that is ‘eternalized’ by being removed from their historical context and made into museum exhibits for perusal as pure forms (Giombini, 2019). Determining the value of art also depends on a “*cultural group -often including, but not limited to, political, religious and spiritual, and moral beliefs*” (ICOMOS 1998), thus developments in conservation ethics are linked to wider social philosophical developments. The status of cultural heritage and its associated value are therefore philosophical concepts that conservators must address in determining their ethical approaches (Llamas-Pacheco 2020). Consensus on conservation ethics amongst professionals is therefore related to the adoption of such ideas in wider society. Whilst the impetus for ethical guidance is often the creation of a stable framework for practice, relevant socio-cultural, political, and scientific factors of each era shape the creation of guidelines or codes. Each generation creates a code that they hope will transcend time, but to date, no code that the authors are aware of has remained

unchanged. In this respect, it is important to aim for longevity but acknowledge that ethical approaches will be affected by time and context.

In the current literature, there are multiple perspectives on the major issues in contemporary art conservation (Chiantora and Rava 2013), but for this chapter, the scope is limited to a discussion of the impact of minimal intervention and recognisable approaches on the aesthetic of art. Brandi argued that conservation³ should be guided by the value inherent in the piece being treated and that conservation should be guided by the existing value of the piece as it is or was valued by its artist. In following his guidance, a conservator must consider the work's aesthetic and historical value and use this to guide decisions about interventions on the material form. Brandi's primary observation is that only the material of artworks can be restored, he states, 'Conservators must not intervene in the image, and if it is necessary to sacrifice the materials of artwork, the aesthetic value must be considered' (Brandi 2005, p.48). This holistic approach places the aesthetic rather than the materials of composition at the centre of the decision (Kaptan, 2009), framing an ethical approach on the basis that as long as the appearance of the artwork is not changed, the artwork's materials can be restored because the material serves the image in the artwork. According to Brandi, the artist tends to express and create something within themselves; they can only make it manifest outside of themselves by using material methods (Verbeeck, 2019); therefore, the materials are subordinate to the expression. The audience absorbs and recognises the 'something' that is the work through its materiality (Verbeeck, 2019), as the material serves as its carrier. Accordingly, one piece of the mosaic does not represent the artwork, but the stones capture the expression when the artist puts them together. Brandi's second guiding approach is the historical value of artworks. Art contains traces within its material form from its entire life: from the period when the artists made their artworks to the present day, contributing to its historical value.

Muñoz-Viñas (2005, p. 6) makes the case that 'aesthetic values are of the foremost importance' things to be considered when making conservation decisions. Whilst prioritising aesthetic concerns is critical where a primary function or component of the art is its aesthetic quality, the artist, in the context of contemporary art does not always create their work led by aesthetic concerns. At this point, understanding the meaning of the materials and techniques used becomes a prominent issue for conservators as these are at least the embodiment of the

3 It is valuable to note here that the terms conservation and restoration are used interchangeably and distinctly within the conservation profession. Restoration is sometimes associated with more direct intervention and replacement of missing elements; however, this association does not hold consistently, especially once translation from different European languages is concerned. Where an author uses the term restoration, it may refer to a more interventive aspect of conservation, but that is only a possible conclusion that a reading of the context should test.

artist's intent. When there is no chance to ask the artist about their intent in creating the work, a portion of the value of the artwork is represented by what they created with their own hands as an expression of their ideas.

4.2. Minimum intervention

In the second half of the 20th century, minimum intervention became a dominant phenomenon in conservation ethics (Villers, 2004), based on Brandi's 'minimum of needed intervention' (Brandi 2005). Since any intervention to the artworks may cause undesired changes to the objects, minimum intervention may be a solution to minimise risks. The minimal intervention strategy encourages the conservator to only carry out as much stabilization or restoration as the object absolutely and necessarily needs in an effort to lessen unexpected treatment consequences (Frasco, 2009). Limiting actions to the necessary: considering conservation before restoration; preventive conservation before interventive conservation; and not adding more material to the object than necessary, (Frasco, 2009) are necessary steps to achieving minimum intervention.

The term 'minimal intervention' may not always communicate clear principles for conservators as the term minimal describes a wide variety of values. It holds no universal sense; it does not mean 'rather little', 'quite little', or any other similar descriptions (Muñoz-Viñas, 2002). In the complete concept of minimal, we may theorise or feel that when we use the term minimum intervention, we are communicating the same ideas, but Muñoz-Viñas (2002) argues this is just an illusion because the concepts of intervention and minimal are exclusive, no intervention can be both. Even when the conservator intends to protect or maintain the artworks or historical objects, this term is an arguable principle because any intervention in the objects can cause a loss of historical value. Even the most commonplace techniques of interventive conservation defy the description 'minimal'. For example, removing a tarnished varnish layer on a painting is not reversible and results in the loss of some historical information. Such approaches are also affected by socio-cultural facts, such as the desire for the artworks to seem as it is believed that they were when they were first created, resulting in the removal of varnish layers, which have been thought of by others as valuable patina, to conform to a specific desired socio-cultural reality (Conti & Glanville, 2007).

The concept of minimal intervention is also temporarily bound. What may be considered the minimum necessary intervention in one period can appear drastic in another, following scientific development, which provides an alternative solution. To consider a medical analogy, whereas amputation may have been the minimum necessary to cure an infected limb in one era, a course

of antibiotics may be the minimal intervention in another. Accordingly, the concept of an appropriate minimal intervention depends on the era in which the decision is made. Since the options available and the cultural context changes over time, this will lead to different approaches. That said, the fewer interventions made by conservators, the higher the probability that the originality of the artwork will be conserved, as every intervention will have a non-reversible element and some possible negative consequences (Muñoz- Viñas, 2002).

According to Caple, *“the problem with minimum intervention is that it is not a complete statement. The minimum intervention to achieve what?”* (2000, p. 65). He asks what determines the conditions for minimum intervention and explains the problem with this example *“minimum intervention to preserve an object for 10 years standing outside in the rain is very different to the minimum intervention to preserve an object for a few days in a controlled internal environment”* (Caple, 2000, p. 65). Given this, a minimum intervention should be determined for a particular object over a given period of time under a specific set of conditions (Caple, 2000), further extending the concept of minimum intervention. Professionals must also factor in environmental conditions (global warming, pollution, vandalism, etc.) which can cause deterioration in the artworks and measures by which this deterioration can be mediated. Attempting to impose a framework of minimum intervention may not lead to the most logical decision pathway, and the minimal intervention approach may not be optimal for many artworks. Each artwork needs different solutions and interventions and a minimum intervention approach will differ between artworks guided by the resources and perceptions at the time of conservation. On examination, it seems that although pervasive in its use within the sector, the concept of minimum intervention has an inconsistent meaning and does not act as a unifying guide to ethical practice.

4.3. Reversible

When considering the practice of retouching a concept which often appears in discussions on ethics is reversibility. It is proposed that the materials used for retouching be reversible so that, in the future, the interpretations that the current restorer has suggested for the painting can be simply removed and replaced with new ones (Conti & Glanville, 2007). Methods to achieve this reversibility could include careful selection of pigment binder and solvent so that retouch can be chemically removed without impact on the original paint. For instance, when retouching an oil painting water-based pigment can be applied (watercolour) under-varnish so it can be removed without damage to the original paint layer on the painting. The intervention must be applied with reversible materials and the retouch may create a lighter colour (sotto tono) than the original image becoming recognisable from the original painting by the intervention technique, tone and colour (Ostrovscá, 2020, p. 43). Another technique for reversibility is

using barrier layers providing a point of separation should an additional component need to be removed. The argument for these approaches is understandable given that in the past, instead of in-painting losses, some heavy-handed repair work involved over-painting where the original surface is hidden behind the additions to blend the repair. The resolution to this for professional conservators is careful in-painting where the conservator ensures that they restrict their actions to the areas of loss in the original paint layers, demonstrating a concern to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the artist's hand (Conti & Glanville, 2007).

4.4. Recognisable

The principle of recognisability was used in the conservation and restoration of artworks to preserve aesthetic integrity and help convey the value of artworks to visitors. Various approaches have been developed and implemented by conservation professionals to achieve recognisability. Brandi (2005) argued that all retouching interventions should be recognisable to counter any deterioration that negatively affects the aesthetic appearance of the artwork and disrupts its integrity. Such interventions should be sufficient to cover any deficiencies which disrupt the integrity of the artwork and to protect its historical meaning (Brandi 2005). A popular approach to creating recognisable retouching is to make an illusion for viewers whereby the intervention creates a form of integrity to unify the aesthetic, but when examined, it is apparent that it is not part of the original artwork. Visitors should be able to see differences between the original part of the artwork (artist's brush and drawing) and interventions which conservators have made.

Several suggestions exist for how 'in-painting' intervention can be applied. Conti and Glanville suggested three basic approaches; aesthetic restoration (invisible retouching and reconstruction through analogy), restoration as conservation (abstinence or an archaeological approach), and visible restoration (which complements the original while being easily recognisable) (Conti & Glanville, 2007). Based on experience, the authors believe that of these three approaches, aesthetic restoration is the more popular option for classical art in public collections in museums and galleries and potentially also with collection owners. This restoration intends to complete any gaps and accordingly, any past loss may go unrecognised by the viewer, who would be unclear as to any differences between the artwork of the original artist and the conservator's interpretation (Conti & Glanville, 2007).

Various techniques have been developed to enable restoration where a general audience can clearly distinguish between the original and in paint. One such technique is the *tratteggio* method of image reintegration (terms defined in AIC 2015) where the desired fill colour is created by adding repeated layers of delicate lines (Grenda, 2010). *Tratteggio* was created and improved in 1945-1950 at Istituto Centrale del Restauro and was inspired by Cesare

Brandi's philosophy of conservation. *Tratteggio* retouching reconstructs the image and makes it more readable while also making it obvious and recognisable to the viewer. Finding the distinguishing qualities of the desired hue and recomposing them by giving the appearance of a colour that reintegrates the image is known as a chromatic selection (Grenda, 2010). Colours from the chromatic selection are placed adjacently that when viewed from a distance provide the appearance of a unified colour. The colours are mixed in the eye rather than in a palette.

Full *tratteggio*-style retouching can be applied in two ways. The original *tratteggio* is *Riganto*: a system of vertical lines forms the colour (or pattern), which, when viewed from a distance, integrates the lacunae with the original *tratteggio* (Grenda, 2010). Another option is the *selezione cromatica* technique, where the alignment of the paint lines is not automatically vertical, but instead, the lines conform to the visual flow of the image (see figure 1). Another related technique is *astrazione cromatica* which was designed to be applied when there were more significant losses and there was not enough information about the original composition. The idea is founded on the supposition that neutral colour can be produced that harmonizes with the complete image and improves its ability to be reintegrated and understood (Grenda, 2010). The *astrazione* augments that neutral-toned fill with a limited pallet composed of primary colours and black, and combined with the toned fill, the intertwining lines create a vibrant colour screen (see figure 2).

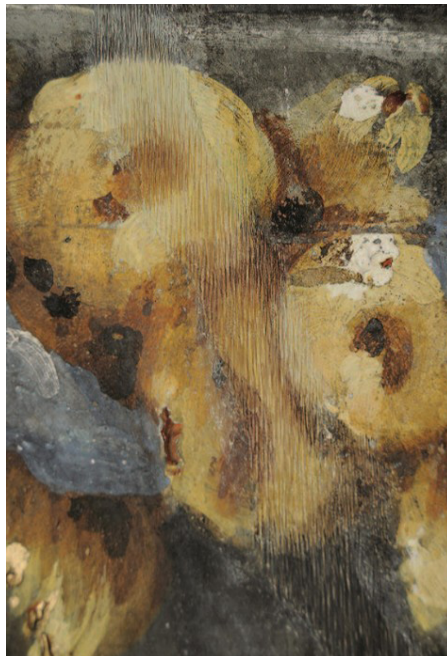


Figure 1. The example for *selezione cromatica* in the Church of San Nicolas Obispo y San Pedro Martir, Spain. (Ostrovcska, I. 2020. Aesthetic integrations in the restoration process of mural painting. *Journal of Architecture Urbanism and Heritage*, 3(2), 37-44, p. 40).



Figure 2. The example of ‘astrazione cromatica’ of Madonna’s face. (Ostrovcsca, I. 2020. Aesthetic integrations in the restoration process of mural painting. *Journal of Architecture Urbanism and Heritage*, 3(2), 37-44, p. 41).

By understanding the mode and philosophical routes of these approaches, their application to contemporary art conservation can be examined. The materials used to create contemporary works are more than just paint and canvas, so what criteria for practice should conservators use to preserve the aesthetic integrity of the work? Should new techniques for reintegration and intelligibility be developed in areas where losses are high, or can the aesthetic integrity of the contemporary artwork be achieved by re-use of materials that match the original? How is the ethical approach for traditional art conservation adapted to contemporary art conservation, can we identify a suitable approach to the aesthetic appearance that transcends variation in form?

5. The relationship between the conservator and the artist

5.1. Stakeholders

Contemporary art’ conservation has brought the necessity of collaboration to the forefront of the conservation discourse (Chiantora and Rava 2013). How can the interests of multiple stakeholders and their role in determining conservation decisions be negotiated? Miller argues that conservators should provide a balance between the artist’s intention and the obligations of institutions in terms of legal, ethical, and practical factors (Miller 2017). According to

Cotte, conservators “*aim to understand how the work is made, what the material is and the way it has been prepared, treated, manipulated, and materially transformed. Conservators tend to recreate the stages of making conceptually to gain a better understanding of the final work of art, how it conveys meaning and how it can best be conserved through time*” (Cotte et al. 2016, 108-9). In Cotte’s view, conservators are active participants in the conservation of the process of art manufacture as they take part in the experience by putting themselves in the artist’s shoes and thinking like an artist. As the conservators from the Tate describe, conservators have become ‘active caretakers of change’ (Lawson and Potter 2017), aware of the components, identity and perceptions of artworks.

5.2. Authenticity

Some conservators argue that artworks have a ‘true nature’, which is a concept that should be considered and examined alongside the term authenticity⁴. In the late 19th century the development of affordable and accessible (to some) scientific analysis enabled conservation laboratories to identify the composition of materials used by artists and to separate them from later interventions and added materials (Van Saaze, 2013). This formalized a technologically determined idea of following the artist’s aims as the basis of art conservation (Dykstra, 1996, p. 198). However, this preoccupation with material definitions of authenticity has been increasingly challenged within the profession in the early 20th century.

If a conservation ethic sits on the principle of not changing the nature of the object, and this is defined as “*the means by which the original and true nature of an object is maintained*” (Van Saaze 2013, p. 75) then evidence of an object’s origins, construction, materials, and manufacturing technology determine its essence. However, if the materials and techniques of artworks are of little concern for the artist’s intent then how should conservators respect the true nature or authentic elements of art? According to Clavir (1998), ethics should guide us to identify the conceptual integrity of cultural heritage: a concept that is not to be confused with original materials. If conceptual integrity and artist intent take precedence over ‘authentic materials and ‘original’ appearances then integrity can be seen to have moved from a material existence to an intangible one. This places artistic intent as an intangible quality with greater precedence in decision-making than material continuity. Llamas-Pacheco (2020) argues that in search of the truth of a work of art, we can distinguish between the identity and the essence of a thing, and determines that if we ask ‘what’ the art is the “*essence relates to the main and necessary qualities of the work of art*”, (2020 p.489). Whilst defining the truth of any work is

4 Authenticity is a term that includes different discussions and approaches; a full discussion of all interpretations and their implications is beyond the scope of this paper.

a huge challenge we can, as conservators, aim to try to gather interpretations of the work both from the artist and from those who interact with the work (Llamas-Pacheco, 2020).

5.3. Artists intent

Artists' intent, the use of ephemeral materials and novel techniques and the conceptual intention of the artist have all challenged traditional practices developed for conserving classical artworks. The materials used by contemporary artists, such as plastic, human and animal by-products, ephemeral, synthetic, replicas, living, etc., may cause unpredictable consequences and prove new challenges (Chiantora and Rava 2013, Soulioti and Chatzidaki 2022, Hölling, 2021, Bharti, 2023) compared to the comparatively well-researched materials of classical artworks such as tempera, oil painting, canvas or paper. The positive opportunity to interview artists helps conservators learn about the materials, techniques and intention of their artworks which may guide preservation strategies ideally as part of the process of acquisition of the artwork. Conservators can obtain information about the artist's surviving artworks that can assist in the conservation process, but this means that conservators must also recognise and respect the artist's intent and integrate this into their conservation strategy (Natali, 2008). A challenge related to the artist's intent arises when conservators do not have the opportunity to interview the artist. In this case the artist's intention could be known to exist but not to be available. Furthermore, sometimes artists want to change their artwork, which can cause a dilemma for those who regard the originality of the artwork as being located within its material construction at the point of origin. The artist's intent must also sit in the context of other perspectives including those who own or interact with the work. Given this, working with artists in the conservation process may be a nuanced process. Any simplistic default or preservation 'zeal' must be carefully managed, and a lazy default to 'ethics' as an excuse to ignore this information should be avoided.

While artists are well-positioned to describe the artwork's techniques and materials, they are not always experts in materials and conservation practices. Therefore, advice given by artists to the conservators is a platform to begin to determine conservation practice, but conservators must integrate this vital input with their specialist technical knowledge, their ethics and a concern for the pragmatism of operating in the public sphere. For example, the artist Anya Gallacio prefers work with ephemeral materials (salt, flowers and sugar), and Tate Britain asked the artist to make a site-specific sculpture in their gallery. The artist intended to use ephemeral materials to express her ideas and mentioned: "*I want to work with landscape and oak and sugar beet are both familiar elements, symbols from very different British landscapes*" (Davies & Heuman, 2004, p. 32). One of her proposed works involved pouring 1.5 tonnes of boiling sugar and glu-

cose directly on the gallery floor so that visitors could walk on the resulting sugar carpet. The gallery staff identified that these materials were hygroscopic and unstable and could cause pest attacks and dust. In collaboration with the artist they reviewed several methods and techniques to find a solution that respected the artist's vision but did not threaten the care of other parts of the collection. Eventually, the artist agreed that the nature of the sugar, the scale of the project and its interactions with decay and experience could all be adapted. Conservators reviewed and recommended the least tacky sugar substrate, selected and applied a sealant to protect the sugar surface from incoming moisture whilst keeping the glass-like surface in place and agreed that the work would be produced on pallets rather than directly on the floor (Davies & Heuman, 2004). The conservators, Davies & Heuman, noted that these quite drastic alterations were possible because the artist was very pragmatic: Gallacio stated that *"This is not about simply illustrating an idea... it is to do with having an idea about certain materials and putting them together and seeing what they do. That's what excites me. You must accept that things will change"* (Davies & Heuman, 2004, p. 33). In this case, the original materials, construction, and interactions with the visitors regarding the smell of sugar and its inevitable decay during the display were problematic for the conservators. All the adaptations described conflicted with the artist's intention, who wanted to show the physical transformation of the materials. In their paper, the conservators reflect on their practice and question whether their impetus to preserve the artwork for the future clashed with the artistic vision of the now. The artist's desire to explore physical changes was directly in conflict with conservation training to preserve materials. Most contemporary art is concerned with its effects now, no matter the repercussions, whereas conservation is about conserving art for the future. Additionally, it can be best to take a backseat and allow the artist to focus solely on their work (Davies & Heuman, 2004).

This case demonstrates how conservators changed the form and experience of a piece of art and represent a core challenge of consultation when input is sought but the stakeholder's perspective is overruled by conservators based on a perceived technical or ethical necessity (Henderson & Nakamoto, 2016). If the artistic input is subverted have the conservators become gatekeepers based on the enactment of apparent ethical principles which respect techniques of conservation even above the philosophical spirit of the creators of pieces that they aim to preserve? How do conservators navigate a pathway through an artist's intent for the now and their belief that their ethical duty is to save artworks for the future?

Is it appropriate or indeed even ethical to question artists about the philosophy that went into their creation, the tools and methods employed to make it, before interfering with their own work (Natali, 2008)? Or should ethics focus more clearly on asking questions about the

artwork to understand the artist's creative path? Protecting the aesthetic and historical value of artworks and inhibiting material deterioration are no longer sufficient guides, not least when artists want their work to decay or when they place higher importance on a notion than its material expression, which can clash with a preservation zeal (Wharton, 2005). An approach must be developed that can consider how the artist's intent can be integrated into conservation decision-making with technical considerations, the input of multiple stakeholders and ethical standards. If conservation requires a choice between protecting material or the artist's intention how can professionals unpick this dilemma?

6. A new approach to ethics?

Contemporary art movements and innovative artistic methods have led to a reevaluation of conservation, how it affects cultural objects and the responsibilities of conservators and other stakeholders (Marçal, 2019, Bharti, 2023). The 1990s saw a notable expansion in discussions on the field of conserving contemporary art (Marçal, 2019). Various interests, methodological strategies, and newly applied philosophical approaches affected the development of contemporary art's conservation (Bauerova, 2010).

Many materials and methods entered the artist's work during the second half of the 20th century. The social and historical connotations of chosen materials and the expression of the material's iconography have widened the artist's selections and integration of non-traditional painting materials (Hummelen and Scholte 2021). Changing art movements and artists' intentions have caused the need to refresh and revisit our ethical approaches to conservation. In conserving contemporary art, the improved relationship with artists has changed conservation practice. For example, if working with multiple iterations of a display of contemporary art that each consists of several frequently changeable elements, the conservator will benefit from the opportunity to develop a fuller understanding of the artists' intent and how that evolves and is applied in each specific context perhaps adapting to restrictions of space, equipment or changing components (Sterrett, 2009). In this respect, the role of the artist has been extended beyond creating artwork and in some contexts it has become engaged with museums or collectors in decisions about conservation and access.

Those who are developing the field of contemporary art conservation have looked to other disciplines for new perspectives with a resulting innovation in conservation methods (Marçal, 2019). Collaborating with professionals who have different backgrounds is as significant for understanding the meaning of material beyond the physical object to uncover issues related to value, artist intent and what the material represents (GCI CIMCA 2008). Contemporary art

conservation makes the challenges of interdisciplinarity in describing the meaning and nature of the subjects of our work and the uncertainty of future developments impossible to ignore. However, the lessons of interdisciplinarity, collaboration and the rejection of rigid frameworks can apply across the profession (Soulioti and Chatzidaki 2022). As a result, working with multidisciplinary perspectives and professionals with different backgrounds has become a common theme in making conservation decisions for contemporary artworks.

According to, Muñoz-Viñas (2005), contemporary conservation theory uses adaptable criteria and makes adjustments to meet the needs of its subjects. However, theory can be exploited or even abused when making important decisions because these criteria are subjective. So, the authority of the conservator should be implemented wisely and with caution, and all relevant variables should be evaluated as accurately and honestly as possible (Muñoz-Viñas, 2005). Additional protection lies in the process of documentation and accountability, which is vital in the process of conservation. In respect of this, contemporary conservation ethics should include informed and flexible perspectives and applications for conservators. Whilst in the early periods of conservation, decisions were made by those who considered themselves experts, such as conservators, archaeologists, and art historians, today, the conservation process respects other relevant expertise and involves different stakeholders such as artists, visitors, and originating communities, in the conservation of artworks. Of course, professionals should be listened to, and other stakeholders will undoubtedly be impacted by their views, but this should be conducted in a climate of mutual respect and carefully managed power relationships, and this can be described as ‘negotiating conservation’ (Muñoz- Viñas, 2002, p.30). Complex issues such as the artist’s intention in the work of art, the meaning attributed by the curator and the meaning that the work acquires after it is displayed to visitors can be preserved in the view of these negotiations and based on ethical standards. As Rubio and Silva claimed:

“the need to collaborate to acquire, display and maintain increasingly obsolescent and rapidly changing artworks is forcing contemporary art museums to create new interdisciplinary spaces and practices that are blurring the boundaries traditionally separating conservators, curators and artists and are fuelling new dynamics of position-taking and struggles” (Miller 2017, p.1).

Traditional conservation ethics have been focused on preserving the artworks’ original material and physical aspects. In contrast, today’s conservation ethics have noticed a shift in attention from the tangible to the intangible aspects of an artwork (Lawson & Potter, 2017). The materials and techniques used by the artist to reveal their intention have become a complex issue in contemporary art conservation. The purchase of art can mean ‘buying an idea’ rather than buying objects. An example of this is *Comedian* by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan. This artwork is a

piece of humour, criticism and ironic work of art for the contemporary art market. Emmanuel Perrotin described this artwork as a double entendre, a symbol of global trade, and a traditional technique for humour (O’Neil 2019). Cattelan bought an ordinary banana from the local market and paid \$0.30, but it sold for \$120,000 (O’Neil 2019). A simple material conceptually serves the artist’s intention and becomes art. This highlights the significance of understanding the artist’s aim as an important place in conservation approaches. Instead of preserving the original banana just because it was placed there by the artist, the artist’s idea can be preserved. The conservator should have technical knowledge that is both implicit and explicit, as well as high training in the sciences, history, and arts, as well as effective communication skills (Muñoz- Viñas, 2005), ensuring a complete understanding of the methods and materials employed (Lorusso et al., 2009).

7. Case study (bird boxes in Cardiff National Museum)

Conserving the artist’s hand in the original material is one of the priorities for conservation. However, there are many more challenges for the conservation decision-making process which can be illuminated by the case of contemporary art. We propose a thought experiment with a fictionalized case study scenario based on a real contemporary art object on display in Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales, Cardiff. The artwork that is the subject of this experiment is the ‘Unlliw’, made by Carwyn Evans and installed at the National Museum Cardiff (figure 4). The bird boxes in the piece respond to the housing policy from the local authority in Wales, to build the 6500 new houses. In response Evans made 6500 boxes to represent this decision, explaining, ‘because there were no restrictions on the new housing... is it for the local population or to entice a new population?’ Evans focuses his argument on the inevitable shift brought on by such a development and the legacy of the Welsh language, culture, and scenery. In an interview with him, he explained his intent with these words: ‘Adar i’r unlliw yr hedant i’r unlle’ [Birds of a feather flock together] (Translated by Gwern Cemig Jones). When he installed the artwork, he described this process accordingly:

“All the cardboard sections are by the factory, and I used the same factory back in 2002, and subsequently, I have to fold up all those kinds of shapes together and glue them together with hot glue. I worked flat out for about 2 weeks just to get this work ready with a few hours of sleep every night, and then half an hour to install” (YouTube, ‘Unlliw’ explained, Amgueddfa Cymru- Museum Wales, 2012).

Unlliw translates from Welsh to the English word ‘monochrome’, underlining the essential uniformity of the works. Given that both the number of boxes and their uniformity is critical to the artwork’s meaning and could be understood to transcend the individual elements how might the conservators respond in a fictitious case where one or more boxes are damaged? In

this thought experiment imagine that the artist is interviewed, he did not identify a desire for a slowly degrading housing stock but instead expressed a wish to retain the specific number and uniform nature of the bird boxes. In such a case with an appreciation of the meaning and message of this project and the uniformity of the boxes, then damage to a box is likely to prompt replacement. Such replacement might ideally be undertaken through the production of the boxes from the original factory aiming to add boxes that are perceived to be authentic in terms of their colour, shape, and size, although manufactured at a different time and context. Replacing a damaged bird box with a newly made copy in matching materials would not look like a traditional minimum intervention approach, and neither would the intervention be recognisable. A dogmatic application of minimal intervention and recognisability would lead to a rejection of the conceptual integrity or essence of the work that carried the artist's intent into the visitor experience. This presents an ethical dilemma if your ethical approach is based on instructions and habits of practice but does not if your ethics are developed through a reflexive and shared process.



Figure 3. Original artwork, 'Unlliw' by Carwyn Evans at National Museum Wales in Cardiff. (Photographed by; Ece Erman in Landscape Gallery at the National Museum of Art, 5 January 2023).

Conservators and their work frequently deliberately minimise the visible impact of conservation treatment, making it only apparent upon careful inspection (Sweetnam & Henderson, 2021). An alternative approach has been the proposal that the intervention is deliberately visible on the object and can even be thought of as a contribution to the journey of the life of the object (Sweetnam & Henderson, 2021). Is this a possible or even applicable idea for contemporary art conservation, and how does this integrate into ideas about conservation utilising minimal and recognisable approaches? Is there any scope to ask, 'Why not paint it pink?' (Sweetnam & Henderson, 2021, p. 1).

To develop the thought experiment with the Unlliw artwork. Imagine that during reinstallation in the museum, some of the boxes are lost or damaged; could different colour boxes signal their replacement? In this case, conservation would become part of this artwork's journey. How then to approach the essence of the art, the artist's intent, and a desire to reflect that process of loss and capture it in an honest and readable way? Are there any circumstances (perhaps related to how the loss occurred) where the replacements would be vivid such as bright pink (figure 5)? Might other circumstances related to the loss be responded to in more subtle ways, detectable to a careful viewer so that the replacement birdboxes are one tone darker or lighter than the colour of the boxes used in the artwork (figure 6)? Or could the boxes have the same colour and shape but different surface textures (figure 7)? Each of these ideas experiments with the recognisability of conservation interventions. A more subtle approach may create an unconscious assumption in most viewers that this was part of the artist's work, an invisible replacement would remove the loss even from the object's story and the bright pink event would call attention to it. An invisible replacement could remain detectable by a careful marking on a non-exposed surface edge or the use of fluorescent security markers, rendering it detectable to museum staff but invisible to the public. If we imagine different possible agents of change: slow decay under gallery lights; accidental wetting and mould due to poor cleaning practices; theft by young political activists seeking to extend the cause by carrying the bird box back to the housing site; a future artistic project that sought to distribute the birdboxes amongst galleries to signify alternative futures would each suggest the same response? The suitability of the conservation approach cannot be informed from an examination of conservation canon alone, it requires a culturally considered ethically informed, participatory, case-by-case discussion.



Figure 4. Representation of the recognisable intervention in the illustration program. (Photographed by; Ece Erman in Landscape Gallery at the National Museum of Art, National Museum Wales in Cardiff, 5 January 2023).



Figure 5. Designing the boxes that can be added to the work in a less conspicuous colour illustration program. (Photographed by; Ece Erman in Landscape Gallery at the National Museum of Art, National Museum Wales in Cardiff, 5 January 2023).



Figure 6. A version designed in the illustration program with a different surface texture application approach. (Photographed by; Ece Erman in Landscape Gallery at the National Museum of Art, National Museum Wales in Cardiff, 5 January 2023).

8. Conclusion

Contemporary conservation ethics and the decision-making process for contemporary artworks should involve multidisciplinary perspectives and people with different backgrounds. Instead of using strict rules and language, opening conservation decisions to the discussion is a more relevant approach to effective contemporary conservation ethics. It may be necessary for conservators to obtain information from people with new and different fields of

expertise, diversifying significantly whom we need to seek advice from to support ethical and informed practice (Garcia Celma, 2021). Traditional conservation solutions such as minimal intervention and recognisability, which have represented the dominant approach in the conservation of artworks (especially for paintings), should be recognised as strategies, not ethical principles and should be opened to discussion. A practice described as ‘minimal intervention’ does not make a case for today’s challenges and is insufficient to reflect conservation goals in the twenty-first century, particularly within the framework of an active museum purpose (Villers, 2004). Strict rule-based approaches may cause negative consequences for conservation decision-making and should be replaced by discussions held on a case-by-case basis.

A careful and bespoke approach need not be considered an abandonment of ethics but a different application of ethical practice. Principles can be developed shared and recorded that have guided conservation decisions. Ethical conservation may lead to the materials and display style of an artwork being changed in collaboration with artists, conservators, and curators and facilities managers. As seen in the example of the sugar carpet idea for ‘Now the Day is Over’, the artist’s idea may evolve into a different dimension with the participation of conservators as stakeholders. We can conceive of ethical relationships between the artist and the conservator with the conservator sometimes becoming an active participant in the creation process.

In the chronological review of ethical guidance, we noted that Icon changed their wording of an ethical approach from ‘recognisable’ to ‘detectable’ intervention. This subtle but significant shift allows for a greater range of solutions that could vary from a discrete but documented replacement of components through subtle visual cues to an approach where the intervention is a very conscious visual reminder of the life story as written in the work. In each of these options, conservation may be detectable in a distinct way whilst consistently protecting the aesthetic whole of the work.

Materials used by artists might be ephemeral or conceptual, challenging the concept of authenticity. Authenticity is understood by many to represent the continued forward protection of material elements, however, if authenticity is understood as a truthful alignment of how something is perceived and how it was intended, then other solutions become possible. Authenticity may also be understood to be consistent with the essence of the work imbued into it by the artist. Working ethically with these multiple perspectives requires a reflective conservation practitioner to identify and acknowledge their own perspectives on authenticity and open this to scrutiny and examination in the light of multiple perspectives. Successful ethical conservation practice might be defined either by the values used by the conservators

to devise their strategies or by the outcomes and consequences of their decisions, but in either situation, the conservators should acknowledge the time and context affecting those decisions.

Minimal intervention is an arguable ethical principle for the conservator. Devising an ethical approach depends on the artwork, the resources, the partners' views, the socio-political climate, and the development of technological possibilities. A contemporary artwork which used ephemeral or changing materials in its creation challenges past implementations of a minimal intervention approach. Where an artist focuses on the meaning rather than the materials, and the materials are subordinate to the artist's intent and aesthetic concern, they could be considered entirely replaceable, with the ethics satisfied through documentation. Interviewing artists and others, where available, can and should guide conservators to find the integrity of the piece and frame the possible conservation options and practices.

The ethical approach of minimal intervention and recognisable practices may vary in their form and implementation as seen by the output of the conservator's work. The application of conservation techniques can vary, but the inputs should be consistent considering the views of others and the limitations of the time and technical possibilities. Therefore, ethical rules designed for conserving classical artwork cannot be replicated simply as practical applications. Instead, the diversity of contemporary artwork encourages the conservation profession to embrace a greater diversity of inputs and approaches, to set aside the dogmatic replication of practice based on an obsession with the continuation of tangible elements and to return their ethical frameworks to issues of preserving the meaning of our cultural heritage.

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