

# THE LIFE AND DEATH OF WORKS OF ART

CHRISTOPHE  
LEMAITRE

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Kate Vanovitch

Christophe Lemaître,

Mathieu Ortalda,

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PAUL-HERVÉ PARSY

NATHALIE LÉLEU,

PETRA LANGE-BERNDT,

ALEXIS GUILIER,

AMELIA GROOM,

BUCHERT, LE BUREAU/

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THE LIFE  
AND DEATH  
OF WORKS  
OF ART  
(FOREWORD)

CHRISTOPHE  
LEMAITRE

In the beginning of the 1970s, in line with the various attempts, from within analytic philosophy and the Anglo-sphere's aesthetic canons, to give a definition of the work of art in the twentieth century (let's simply mention Nelson Goodman and Arthur Danto), George Dickie's institutional theory of art began to consider the work of art as a system of relations that would always include an artist (a person understanding and taking part in the development of the artwork), an artifact (to be presented to an artworld public), a public (namely a group of people ready to understand what is presented to them), a system in the artworld (a structure allowing for the work to be presented), and the world of art (all of the artworld systems).<sup>1</sup> George Dickie's extended definition of the work of art elegantly superimposes the artwork's nature onto the particular frame in which the artwork exists and operates for art history—since only institutionalized and exhibited artworks make up the grand narrative of art history.

Within this ecosystem, a work of art is never a closed, autonomous and intrinsic entity, but rather, it is defined extrinsically at its edges and limits by its mode of existence. A work of art begins and ceases to be as preordained by a set of determinations and conditions that exceeds it while constituting it. These determinations and conditions may be conventional (as, for instance, an exhibition is a conventional center of artistic practices and institutional

## 1

According to Roger Pouivet's words, page 47 in *Qu'est-ce qu'une oeuvre d'art?*, collection *Chemins philosophiques*, Vrin, 2007. A few references by George Dickie: *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Cornell University Press, 1974), *The Art Circle* (Haven Publications, 1984).

practices).<sup>2</sup> They can be contextual, as with Michael Asher, conceptual, as Marcel Duchamp's Readymades, legal, as in the Brancusi case against the United States,<sup>3</sup> or historical, with Jerrold Levinson's genetic definition of the artwork.<sup>4</sup> They are also obviously material. If an artwork's lifespan generally has the particularity of being longer than the artist's, the artwork itself comes and ceases to be within mate-

## 2

Within the budgetary and architectural boundaries of contemporary institutions, the exhibition—the undisputed hegemonic model of artwork presentation—is a conventional center of artistic practices and institutional practices.

## 3

For more details, see the French translation of the trial's stenographic minutes, *Brancusi contre Etats-Unis, un procès historique, 1928*, published by Adam Biro (2003).

## 4

From an external point of view, the ecosystem of artworks and of the way they are perceived is presented as a wide genetic background; art thus becomes a recursive historical development—one artwork to the next—whose evolution reflects the modes of existence and perception of artworks in human society. In the late 1970s, Jerrold Levinson stressed the historical dimension of any item considered to be a work of art: a work of art only presents itself as one because it reproduces and follows a way of perceiving other forms that came previously and that are also considered to be works of art. Every artwork is constituted upon past referents and its substance conceptually inherits from previous forms considered as works of arts. To read Jerrold Levinson, see *Defining Art Historically* (1979) and subsequent publications to this text: *Refining Art Historically*, *The Irreducible Historicity of the Concept of Art*, *Artworks as Artifacts*.

rial boundaries and physical determinations that assert it as such, and surpass it. Any artwork will fit within a material continuity of its own which will determine it, condition it and surpass it. What feeds the narrative in this text and in this book<sup>5</sup> are various material and perceptible continuities crossed by the definition of the work of art.

At the heart of this complex ecosystem where works of art take shape, live, and die, both conservator and restorer work to maintain the continuity and continuation of shape, and therefore, of meaning. At the foot of these two figures, the environment is divided into two gradients, two specific

## 5

A collection of stories and of theoretical texts, this book acts as an extension to the 2014 eponymous exhibition at Cneai (Chatou, France; curated by Christophe Lemaitre) and the panel discussion organized at Treize (Paris, France; curated by Christophe Lemaitre) in November of the same year. It is a collective theoretical effort that, from material and materialistic considerations on works of art, more generally raises a number of issues on the ontology of the work of art: how does a work of art inscribe itself in the material continuity of the object that contains it and surpasses it? How does the lifespan of a work of art within its object then surpass a human being's lifespan? Which reasons and which practices govern the conservation and preservation of an artifact? *The Life and Death of Works of Art* starts where the artworks ceases to be, to find interest in what it becomes. If *The Life and Death of Works of Art* came after other contemporary efforts were made on issues of ontology, conservation, restoration or replica, it would be neither synthetic nor exhaustive. More humbly, this book is an opening on areas of reflection for artists and the immediate community around them.



groups of factual entities: on the one hand, archetypes of material continuity coming in various degrees (artworks in the process of de-composition); on the other hand, elements in the restoration of artworks on different levels of intervention (for re-composition). The first group gradually outlines the samples, pieces, relics, artworks damaged beyond repair, physically reconfigured artworks, and chemically reconfigured artworks. Considering restoration as an act of production, the second group, synthesizes the artist's figure with the restorer's and the historian's—first through the act of retouching, then with cases of replacing a portion of the artwork (ultimately chimeras), and finally, through a number of reconstitutions in the shape of re-enactment or full replicas.

## A

FIRST ARCHETYPES:  
VARIOUS DEGREES OF MATERIAL  
CONTINUITY

## THE RELIC

*The Life and Death of Works of Art* began at a meeting<sup>6</sup> with restorer Benoit Dagron and the discovery of his col-

6

The meeting happened in 2012 at the initiative of my friend Aurélien Mole, artist, photographer and curator, with whom we prepared a publication entitled *Machine*, dedicated to the MAC VAL (Vitry-sur-Seine, France) collection as part of a children's workshop. The interview with Benoit Dagron was then published in *Machine* to accompany the iconography produced for the occasion by the children in the halls of the Museum's collection using capture and reproduction devices from the 1980s. *Machine* was co-edited by Cneai and MAC VAL; design: Hugo Anglade.

lection of items that used to be artworks, but no longer are: signed frames by De Staël, others by Picasso; a set of flags by Daniel Buren; some wire from a Calder mobile; tacks removed from a Fernand Léger painting, still bearing the marks of dried-out paint. The wire, tacks, and frames were replaced with new material on the original works, and Benoit Dagron kept them. This constellation of items collected by the restorer as he went on with his work immediately sketches a starting point and a first archetype among various degrees of material continuity that are of interest in this book: the relic—a detached fragment preserved in a holy body.

Being simultaneously a relic, an indication and an index, this very archetype is also identified in all the items gathered in the window display created by curator and gallerist Jason Hwang for *Keeping is not collecting*, inside the Los Angeles public library.<sup>7</sup> A film leader recalling the actress's hair color on shooting day; the silkscreen used on the gallery's display window; two exhibition copies; a cardboard cut-out template for a mural composition; a cane used for the making of a sculpture, then of a photograph. These forms' common element is that they were all penetrated by the process of production and/or existence of an artwork.

If these items, preserved for emotional reasons, are indeed the remaining parts of their corresponding art-

7

*Keeping is not collecting*, by Jason Hwang, with François Aubart, Valentin Bouré, Olivian Cha, Romain Chenais, David Douard, Luca Francesconi, Benoît Maire, Chris Sharp, Cally Spooner, Jennifer Teets. As part of *Works sited* at the public library of Los Angeles, United States, from December 19, 2012 to January 30, 2013.

works, the memory they convey is inevitably transmuted by the window display. Here, they are loaded with a new magical presence that perhaps moves them halfway between fetish and relic. Some years earlier, in 2006, curator and critic François Piron had already exhibited, in a tiny ephemeral architecture cell at the Centre de Création Contemporaine (Tours, France), a selection of various artworks' fragments or items entrusted to him by some of his friends.<sup>8</sup> The part refers to the whole, a sample to an incomplete and absent work of art, and the exhibition becomes a metonymy.

### THE DAMAGED WORK OF ART

As a counterpoint to the relic comes the damaged artwork—the second archetype in a work of art's various degrees of material continuity. These are items whose physical integrity is altered and no longer allows the artwork to be presented under the conditions of its creation, nor does it allow for restoration. Many such artifacts are kept, for instance, by insurers.

The market considers art to be a category of items. However volatile and absolute, art is not an eternal value. The market sets its own conservation rules, which are obviously different from museographic decisions made on cultural heritage issues. When a piece is accidentally damaged, it is no longer considered a work of art if repair costs exceed insurance value plus the object's post-restoration exchange

8

*Aakey*, by François Piron, with Wilfried Almendra and Grégory Gicquel, Erick Beltran, Claire Fontaine, Aurélien Froment, Ryan Gander, Dora Garcia, Miguel Angel Gaüeca, Pierre Joseph, Juozas Laivys, Juan Luis Moraza, Joe Scanlan, Raphaël Zarka. As part of *Home sweet home*, 2006, Centre de Création Contemporaine, Tours, France.

value.<sup>9</sup> The insurer then considers the artwork to be in a state of “total loss”. Since restoration costs exceed potential profit after a resale, the artwork’s value is nil or negative. The insurer will then compensate the owner and will become the object’s exclusive owner.<sup>10</sup> At this point it is taken off the market. Still, the object hasn’t vanished: damaged works are then stored by the insurer, perhaps in anticipation that their exchange value will once again exceed restoration costs, either thanks to a rise of the artist’s prominence, or because restoration techniques evolve and/or decrease in cost. An object’s potential value is therefore preserved and the insurer remains its only beneficiary.

The Salvage Art Institute was set up in 2009 by New York-based artist Elka Krajewska for storing, preserving and promoting artworks owned by American insurer AXA and considered to be in a state of “total loss”. When the Salvage Art Institute took part in the exhibition *The Life and Death of Works of Art* in 2014 at Cneai, one of Alberto Giacometti’s drawings picked from the pieces owned by AXA’s French branch, became the center of a paradox: on the one hand, the Giacometti Foundation benevolently allowed for the water-damaged drawing to be exhibited on the sole condition that the drawing shall not be presented

9

In the very long run, this may just as well be the case for conservation costs. Nevertheless, conservation costs are usually covered by the increase of the artwork’s exchange value.

10

During a roundtable at Columbia University on November 14, 2012, Christiane Fischer, President and CEO of AXA Art in the United States, reported the case of a collector dedicated to the sole repurchase of artworks damaged by Hurricane Katrina (Summer 2005).

as a Giacometti piece (which it technically no longer is in its current unrestored state); on the other, and despite the fact that this item is recorded as having no value, AXA only allowed for the drawing to be borrowed on the condition that it be placed behind a protective glass, and a contract establishing its insurance value (while it was supposedly nil or negative in the first place) be signed—the company went on to worry about video surveillance in the art center’s halls. Thus, rightly or wrongly, the institution somehow reactivated the damaged artwork’s exhibition value, and fittingly, according to the insurer, its exchange value.

As reported in the *Lost Art* catalogue<sup>11</sup> published by the Tate Modern in 2013, two pieces damaged in New York’s September 11 attacks in 2001 met, by necessity, a different fate: unlike works from the AXA collection, they became more than just the record and testimony of their own death. After the events, Alexander Calder’s *Bent Propeller* (1970) and Fritz Koenig’s *Sphere* (1971)—two sculptures installed at the World Trade Center—were, along with hundreds of other works on site, part of what was reported to be the largest artistic loss in human history from an economic standpoint. Calder’s stabile proved impossible to rebuild, but one of its pieces travelled to the French city of Caen in 2008 for an exhibition on September 11. This part of the sculpture continued to exist and to be preserved and exhibited, but became a commemoration object, much like the relic. This was also Fritz Koenig’s desire for *The Sphere*, a sculpture sitting between the two towers as a symbol of world peace through trade. The artist did not wish to restore his damaged work, but agreed some months later to reinstall the sculpture as is, in Battery Park, close to the site.

Thereupon destined for remembrance, *The Sphere* ceased to be a sculpture and became a monument.

PHYSICALLY RECONFIGURED  
ARTWORKS

Sometimes, artworks that have fulfilled their purpose under the neon lighting of the most respectable exhibition spaces have to leave the stage. This is the case when a production specifically designed for a particular exhibition does not find a private purchaser nor a public host. Since 2013, artist Gregory Buchert's *Domesticated Museum* has been documenting temporarily destination-less works, gathering texts, photographs and models. His collection is comprised of two monoliths-turned-to-shelves by Pierre Mercier, a Niek Van de Steeg exhibition floor that used to cover the walls of the artist's country house, a cube of plaster by Michel François used as a seat in his workshop, and the replica of a Vladimir Škoda sculpture designed as a ramp.<sup>12</sup> The project speaks to John Dewey's question of how to define the artwork in *Art as Experience*: "This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They are the earth in one of its manifest operations. It is the business of those who are concerned with the theory of the earth, geographers and geologists, to make this fact

12

Two texts written by Gregory Buchert for the *Domesticated Museum*'s performed conferences are for the first time published in this book: *L'étagère de la cuisine*, page 51 (french side), and *The Wall in the Room*, page 47.

evident in its various implications. The theorist who would deal philosophically with fine art has a like task to accomplish.”<sup>13</sup> Reoccupied by domestic daily life, their scheme and functional program dismantled and then reconfigured, the forms exhibited in the *Musée domestiqué* have ceased to be works of art. Only their memory remains, in every sense of the word: the souvenir one brings back home and places on a shelf, the memory that we keep in mind.

Any physical reconditioning may generally be associated with two words: traveling and circulation. This is how one or more Francis Bacon paintings the artist had rejected reached amateur painter Lewis Todd before they were discovered in 2006. It seems that they had passed through a fine arts supply store in Cambridge before being entrusted to Todd on the condition that they be cut into several pieces, thus respecting Bacon’s desire to destroy the paintings. On the back of a couple of Lewis Todd paintings are seemingly irrefutable elements of one or several redistributed compositions derived from Bacon’s *Popes* series.<sup>14</sup>

The same year, another kind of problem arose for British authorities about the circulation of works by Bill Viola and Dan Flavin.<sup>15</sup> Artworks made of AV equipment, such

13

*Art as Experience*, John Dewey, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1934.

14

This story’s accurate narrative can be found on page 172 of the *Lost Art* anthology, edited in 2013 by Jennifer Mundy for the Tate Modern.

15

This story was reported by Jeffrey Weiss’s article on the Salvage Art Institute entitled *Things Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art*, published in *Artforum* in March 2013.

as those by Viola and Flavin, tend to lead a discontinuous existence, constantly shape-shifting between installed art and disassembled components. This is how British Customs seized the opportunity to claim 36,000 pounds to the London gallery Haunch of Venison: as far as transport regulations go according to Customs, lights and video projectors fail to qualify as art—otherwise, they would be exempt from import duty. After various legal appeals were put forward, the European Commission finally sided with British Customs in 2009, arguing that the nature rather than the use of goods calls for taxation: a tax may legitimately apply to technical components that only become a work of art once reassembled for an exhibition.<sup>16</sup>

#### CHEMICALLY RECONFIGURED ARTWORKS

In 1997, artist Simon Starling used metal from an *Aluminum Group* chair by Charles and Ray Eames, to create a Marin Sausalito bicycle frame. Aluminum from one of these Californian mountain bikes was then used to reproduce a chair designed by the couple.<sup>17</sup> In the straightforward continua-

16

Conversely, in the 1960s, art dealer Fernand Legros used customs duties to certify as originals his fake master's paintings. During transportation of the fake paintings, an accomplice would anonymously let customs know of the goods' secret arrival. Once the artworks were intercepted, Fernand Legros had to accept the corresponding tariff and would then enter the territory with a certificate signed by Customs, who had little information on the so-called painters' prestigious identities.

17

Simon Starling, *A Charles Eames Aluminum Group chair*



tion of the selected readymade's first physical and chemical (aluminum) reality—the readymade being a chair and a bicycle, the source and destination from one identity to another—comes another reality: that of the work of art.

Artist Alexis Guillier recounts many cases of transubstantiation.<sup>18</sup> His *Reworks* project's latest development begins with the narrative of the removal of the Richard III statue by American revolutionaries in 1776, recalling how the sculpture's lead was melted to make some tens of thousands of bullets. In 1792, French revolutionaries removed the monarchy figures from their base: Henri IV, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Louis XV. Those kings of bronze were then sent to the national furnaces where they were turned into cannons and ammunition. As Alexis Guillier also recounts, during the WW2 occupation period, statues taken down by the French state were sent to the very German foundries where the Reich melted the bells they

17

*remade using the metal from a Marin Sausalito bicycle/A Marin Sausalito bicycle remade using the metal from a Charles Eames Aluminum Group chair, 1997.*

18

A progressive project initiated in 2009, *Reworks* explores the material deformation of artworks through a collection of films, installations, conferences, programs and publications. In the manner of a personal and dynamic *Musée Imaginaire* (where the deck of cards is constantly reshuffled for infinite play and various collision prospects), *Reworks* is a collection of artwork images altered or destroyed by vandalism, revolution, catastrophe, cinema and fiction: a category-confused iconographic repertoire through which Alexis Guillier freely draws and redraws small stories of art history.

had collected. Conversely, cannons were at times melted into statues, as during the nineteenth century. Thus, monuments and icons of sovereignty are potential stocks of arms and ammunition but also, in numerous cases and civilizations, are personified and valuable reserves of gold, silver and bronze. Many places of worship have been looted so as to manufacture coins, as in ancient Athens in times of economic necessity. Sometimes, cannons even appeared on the coins they had been turned into. Metal oscillated from one form to another along changes of political regime, as shown by the events of the French Revolution, before a return to monarchy and the decision to recast the once-melted effigy of Henri IV from three bronze Napoleonic statues: General Desaix, close to Bonaparte; the Napoleon atop the Vendôme column; and the Napoleon planned for the Boulogne column.<sup>19</sup>

The process of sculpture liquefaction—beyond being the explicitly symbolic repetition of political regime dissolution—represents the extreme degree to which a work of art can deteriorate. Unlike previously identified archetypes, any solid body will necessarily lose its stable shape during fusion—one characteristic of a solid—along with its absolute identity. The sculpture returns to the state of pure matter.<sup>20</sup>

19

These facts are borrowed from Alexis Guillier's research, *Reworks* (2015). The book's iconography was entrusted to Guillier who rolled out the *Reworks* project in a specific form by composing a series of photographs dedicated to various statues cast from cannon metal.

20

Another type of chemical decomposition involves living matter in works of art. The biological tissue's limited con-

## B

ELEMENTS OF RESTORATION:  
VARIOUS DEGREES OF INTERVENTION

## RETOUCHING

In *Theory of Restoration*, Cesare Brandi reminds us to what extent a poem cannot be read over time the way it should be—the sounds of language change, pass, alter—and that the evolution of musical instruments' material and fabrication keeps us from correctly listening to Bach (or any musician of the past) today—that is to say, in contrast to how an audience could listen to Bach in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Restoration must never go backwards to an original state and should always be inscribed in the present and keep the marks of an intervention. It aims to “reestablish the potential unity of the work of art, as long as this is possible without producing an artistic or historical for-

20

servation period opposes the extended lifetime of works of art. For the better, the very incapacity of natural history museums to immobilize living beings for examination and posterity, gave birth to beautiful glass replicas of plants and invertebrates by Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. On page 34 of this book, Petra Lange-Berndt, an art history teacher-researcher at the University of Hamburg in Germany, discusses the status of the corpse of a shark preserved in Damien Hirst's piece *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1993). The text takes as a starting point the 2006 replacement of the original specimen inside the piece and discusses Damien Hirst's specific conservation practices—between scientific principles of organic matter preservation, criticism and market logic.

gery and without erasing every trace of the passage of time left on the work of art.”<sup>21</sup> An act of restoration is never a return to the past, but rather a continuation and an extension of the work of art. This is why, after listing the various degrees of deterioration, it is now necessary to examine the various levels of intervention in terms of reparation and reconstitution of the work of art.

Any act of restoration is an act of production. When the restorer works on filling gaps on a fresco, he stands next to the artist. Gaps are filled but never concealed. The *tratteggio* technique, for instance, consists of retouching the fresco so that modifications may be visible when standing close to it, and indistinguishable when looking at it from a distance: the gaps are filled with a chromatic equivalent of the missing image by a weft of thin, parallel colored lines, usually in watercolor.

With the act of retouching, the figures of the artist and the restorer already mildly overlap for the first time. As an introduction to their exhibition, *Le syndrome de Bonnard*, the curatorial collective Le Bureau/ recount the legend that Pierre Bonnard, around the end of his life, would have repeatedly tried to retouch some details on exhibited paintings of his.<sup>22</sup> The anecdote mentions

21

*Theory of Restoration*, Cesare Brandi, 1963.

22

*Le syndrome de Bonnard* was a collective exhibition taking place from April 5 to May 31, 2014 at the Villa du Parc, a contemporary art center in Annemasse, France. Curated by Le Bureau/, the exhibition featured the works of artists Francis Baudevin, Jean-Luc Blanc, Nina Childress, Vincent Kohler, Renée Levi, Didier Rittener and Claude Rutault. For *The Life and Death of Works of Art*, the curatorial col-

that he was arrested by a guard at the Musée du Luxembourg as he was trying to retouch a tree leaf on one of his early paintings. Two legitimacies are thus opposed: the artist's, of course, and that of the institution on a cultural heritage mission. More recently, when Simon Hantaï was consulted by the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) for the restoration of several of his pieces, the painter asked that the canvases be tightened, thus going against the original work as it was designed, produced, and bought. The Museum refused.<sup>23</sup> There is also the case of hyper restoration, namely the art of producing a forgery based on an original work: one painting owned by the Butts family was believed it to be a portrait by Hans Holbein, but weak craftsmanship, the subject's age, the dark background, and the distinctive dating signs—the costume worn by Sir William Butts on the painting could be linked to a period in fashion history posterior to Hans Holbein's death in 1543—kept it from being accurately attributed to the man who painted *The Ambassadors*. Two X-rays had to be performed to reveal underneath this portrait, another portrait of the same Sir William Butts, younger and this time dressed in the fashion of Holbein's time. This led to a two-phase painting cleaning and the subject's rejuvenation by almost 20 years: the evi-

22

lective Le Bureau/ proposed a retrospective fictional text with their 2014 exhibition as a primary source: a prospective analysis of a Bonnardian turn in contemporary art at the turn of the 2030s, by Garance Chabert and Céline Poulin (Le Bureau/). See page 54 of this book.

23

This episode was recounted by Benoit Dagron during an interview with the author.

dence seems to be that Sir William Butts' portrait had been retouched by a second painter at the request of Sir William himself shortly before Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to the Butts family mansion in Thornage, Norfolk in 1563. With Holbein's work as a base, the portrait was brought up to date, the face redrawn and the family's emblem placed in the background.<sup>24</sup>

PARTIAL RESTORATIONS,  
FUNCTIONAL AND COSMETIC  
CONTINUITIES

In the Tuileries Garden in Paris, Fabrice Hyber's sculpture *Le cri, l'écrit*, from the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (FNAC) collection of works for public space has to be painted over about every year. In the same way the city cares for its infrastructure, the Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP) is responsible for the preservation of works for public space owned by the French state, including Fabrice Hyber's. As with, to a certain extent, the Mobilier National, the CNAP also takes care of the garden tables and benches artist Siah Armajani made for the Villa Arson in Nice. That said, when there is more significant damage linked to the particular conditions of presentation of public space artworks, preservation must be gone about differently and consciously. The case of Max Ernst's fountain is an example of restoration adapted to the specificity of public space that consists of replacing one of its parts to restore its complete physical and cosmetic integrity, therefore allowing it to fully

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*An unpublished Holbein portrait*, Paul Ganz. *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Volume 56, Issue 324, 1930, published by The Burlington Magazine Publications.

operate.<sup>25</sup> Inaugurated on November 23, 1968, the fountain was commissioned by Michel Debré, mayor of host city Amboise, and is owned by the French state. Following the theft of the *Deux assistants* sculpture and of three bronze small turtles (*Petites tortues sur socle rond*) in 1984, reproductions made of antique bronze tinted resin were installed in 1993 for a seemingly undocumented first restoration: six resin-made turtles were then installed, while the original three bronze turtles left were retrieved by the CNAP. The following year, in 1994, four of the small turtles were found beheaded and two other degraded, though they continued emitting water until 2004. Finally, in February 2009, the Center for Research and Restoration of Museums of France (C2RMF) made the decision to intervene once again on Max Ernst's fountain, where only three small turtles still stood next to the remaining three original bronze sculptures: the *Grand Génie*, the *Grande Grenouille*, the *Grande Tortue*.<sup>26</sup> In 2014, although the *Deux assistants* sculpture was recast in bronze from the plaster model kept by the first smelter, and despite the initial desire to make a bronze reproduction of the missing three turtles and to reinstall the ones stored at the CNAP, it was in reinforced resin that nine turtles were made from one of the bronze originals (three of the new turtles were then stored and

25

The author would like to thank Philippe Bettinelli, conservation supervisor of the public space artworks at the CNAP, for making time for an interview.

26

Documentation on the fountain's second restoration is available online: <http://www.cnap.fr/publication-sur-la-fontaine-«-aux-cracheurs-aux-droles-au-genie-»-de-max-ernst>, consulted on June 27, 2016.

six were installed in Amboise), consequently completing a perfect chimera of the original work of art: a hybrid and artificial production made of heterogeneous elements.

The term chimera was first proposed by Cécile Dazord to describe certain contemporary works of art whose restoration involved the non-identical replacement of a part of its technical or material components.<sup>27</sup> From the twentieth century up to the current digital revolution, with an extending field of art forms and through technological diversification, “conservation problems are now not only related to aging or altered material (whether artificial or natural) [. . .], but also to equipment obsolescence due to the industrial production of components”.<sup>28</sup> The restorer no longer operates only on the physics and chemistry of the materials comprising an original and unique artifact, but also on consumable resources (available on the market in multiple copies) that are part of a necessary chain of components for the artwork’s proper functioning. Cécile Dazord thus makes a clear distinction between consumables, the functioning of a device, and obsolescence. Renewable for some time, the consumable is an industrially mass-produced replaceable resource incorporated into a mechanism. Obsolescence is the problem that comes up when a consumable can no longer be identically replaced because industrial production of the said technological consumable has been discontinued and replaced by a new, more efficient component.

27

Cécile Dazord is a conservator for contemporary art and obsolescence phenomena at the C2RMF.

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*Techné*, issue 37, 2013. Introduction by Marie-Hélène Breuil and Cécile Dazord, *Art contemporain et obsolescence technologique*.



Because they are industrially produced over a short period of time, some consumables may serve as historical markers, as they allow dating. However, restoration by renewal may rapidly prove impossible and other solutions must be found. This was the case with Donald Judd's 1965 sculpture *Untitled*, owned by the Whitney Museum in New York since 1966.<sup>29</sup> When the piece was first restored in 1976, the industrial paint used by the initial manufacturer was no longer in production; an approximate new color, Candy Apple Maroon, was then chosen by the commissioned restorer, Ralph's Motor Repair in New York. It was not until 1990 that Judd found out about the restoration and contested the repainted piece's authenticity. A second restoration began in 2002, during which a vintage vehicle restorer, Julian Miller of Sublime Restorations in Rowley, Massachusetts, artisanally reproduced the original industrial color, Harley Davidson's Hi-Fi Purple, which had been on the market from 1963 to 1966. Running counter to obsolescence, craftsmanship replaces the industry and ensures the work of art's cosmetic continuity. With Nam June Paik's *Buddha's Catacomb* (1974), an example often cited by Cécile Dazord, the chimera preserves the artwork's material functioning at the expense of the object's historical consistency.<sup>30</sup> Acquired in 1986, the piece under-

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*The Re-restoration of Donald Judd's Untitled, 1965*, by Narayan Khandekar, Eleonora Nagy, Julian Miller, Pia Gottschaller, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro. Article available on the Whitney's conservation/restoration department's website (Last consulted in April 2016).

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Cécile Dazord, *L'art contemporain confronté aux phénomènes d'obsolescence technologique, ou l'impact des évolutions technologiques*

went three restorations from 1988 to 1992 that were more or less contradictory to the original project but seemingly always consented to by the artist or his studio. By screening in real time the captured image of a sculpted Buddha face in front of a monitor, *Buddha's Catacomb* made use of new opportunities introduced by video in the 1970s. But in 1988, following a first malfunction, the black and white JVC spherical monitor was replaced by a rectangular color monitor, transforming the piece's with the loss of one of its time markers that inscribed it in the history of technology and consequently in art history. The JVC monitor would later be repaired and reinserted into the installation in 1992, only a few months before being stolen during an exhibition at La Villette (Paris) and replaced by a facsimile. Once again, the piece had lost a technological and industrial time marker produced in multiple copies worldwide to a contradictory locally-manufactured, single-copy replica.

Another famous case was the one of László Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop for an Electric Stage* (1930), a piece that was partially restored throughout the twentieth century in an attempt to keep it functional. This luminous scenographic device, which could also be exhibited as a motionless sculpture, or used as an accessory in an experimental movie, seems to have undergone multiple transformations and restorations, piece by piece, so as to solve mechanical instability and material wear problems. In 1935, with the addition of an external frame for stability of piece when in motion; in 1938, by replacing a German motor by an American one; in the 1940s, when two pieces were replaced, in the 1950s

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*sur la préservation des œuvres d'art contemporain*, text published in the compendium *Restauration et non-restauration en art contemporain*, directed by Marie-Hélène Breuil, edited by ARSET.

by replacing some missing parts; and many times until 1970 when two first functional replicas were made.<sup>31</sup> To date, the original work, owned by the Busch-Reisinger Museum (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA), is inert and seems to remotely echo Marcel Duchamp's words: "I believe painting dies, if you would understand. A painting dies after forty or fifty years because its freshness has run off. The sculpture also dies. [. . .] I think a painting dies after some years as does the man who did it; then, it is called art history. [. . .] Art history is very different from aesthetics. For me, art history is what remains of an era inside a museum. . ." <sup>32</sup>

COMPLETE REPLICAS  
AND RECONSTITUTIONS  
IN THE TWENTIETH  
CENTURY

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The first two replicas were made by Woodie Flowers (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and are stored today by the Bauhaus Archiv (Berlin, Germany) and the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands). A third replica was produced in 2006 for the Tate Modern (London, UK), contractually stipulating that the Museum may exhibit the artifact once every four years, shall be lent to international temporary exhibitions, and cannot be considered a work of art. See *Replicas of László Moholy-Nagy's Light Prop: Busch-Reisinger Museum and Harvard University Art Museums*, Henry Lie, published in *Tate Papers*, issue 8, Fall 2007, in connection with *Inherent Vice: The Replica and its Implications in Modern Sculpture Workshop*, Tate Modern, October 18-19, 2007.

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Marcel Duchamp, *Entretiens avec Pierre Cabanne*, 1966.

For posterity and for art history, Duchamp made sure to present the whole of his work in the shape of facsimiles placed into boxes, and to gather the whole of his original pieces into a single collection, the Philadelphia collection (Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA). This did not keep the Norman artist from authorizing and participating in the design of editions and replicas bought by other museums. Four years before his death, Duchamp authorized a series of eight re-editions of his 1913-1919 readymades by Arturo Schwartz. Eight sculpted copies of the 1917 urinal were then made, based on Alfred Stieglitz's photograph, in glazed ceramic by a Milanese artist. Duchamp merely signed a copper plaque affixed below the objects.<sup>33</sup> To these eight copies, two more were added: one for Schwartz, the other for Duchamp. The latter was given to the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) in 1986. As noted by Paul-Hervé Parsy, this was indeed "an original sculpture imitating an industrial object"<sup>34</sup>, as was the JVC

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See *Y a-t-il un cas Fountain ?*, by Paul-Hervé Parsy, published in *Restauration et non-restauration en art contemporain*, a book edited by Marie-Hélène Breuil, ARSET (special issue), Tours, France, June 2008. Paul-Hervé Parsy's essay, *Y a-t-il un cas Fountain ?*, originally presented as part of a workshop on restoration at the Musée des beaux-arts de Tours in April 2007, is republished and translated into English in *The Life and Death of Works of Art*. Now director of the Villa Cavrois (Croix, France), Paul-Hervé Parsy was invited to the Tours roundtable to speak as conservator at the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France), his former position at the time.

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*Is there a case for Fountain?*, page 65 in this book.

screen facsimile mentioned above. One paradoxical situation leading to another, when Pierre Pinoncelli damaged *Fountain* with a hammer in 1993 and 2006, the National Museum of Modern Art decided to restore Schwarz's edited copy rather than to replace it with a new urinal: "But if we consider that *Fountain's* value is not based on its material technicality—which is attested for in art history—we must underline the ambiguous position of wanting to preserve at all costs the relics of the 1964 version. Indeed, that position tends to deny the very basis of the readymade concept by ultimately assigning the object's value to that of an actual creation by the artist, as the original was. If we accept that this object was made by a craftsman based on industrial drawings countersigned by Duchamp—which are kept in a private Japanese collection—and that Duchamp only signed the copper plaque affixed under the object, is it absurd to imagine that another replica would be made according to the same processes, and to which the original and unique copper plaque would be affixed? This solution would of course strengthen the legitimacy of the readymade parameter."<sup>35</sup> *Fountain* is here a rare case where, under the aegis of the institution, the restoration beautifully produced an original version of a readymade by *kinsugi*. What the Museum decided to restore is not so much Duchamp's work (the readymade principle) as it is art history, namely an artisanal copy attesting to a reproduction protocol from the 1960s. The object the Museum decided to preserve is certainly not less Schwartz's and the Milanese artist's than Duchamp's—an object which blurs the author's identity to the point of amalgamating the artist with the commissioning patron for the replica, the manufacturer and the restoring institution.

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*Ibidem*, page 65 in this book.

Complete replicas and reconstitutions of Duchamp's work that he had authorized—whether or not he may have personally made and signed them—appeared very early in the artist's lifetime. They were made and now exist for the same reasons as any reconstitution in the course of art history: they are determined by the absence of a once disappeared or destroyed object that is meant to be reconstructed, or by the absence of an existing but not geographically transportable object which is to be locally recreated. It was this imperative need to be able to make, produce and exhibit art history that allowed reconstitutions of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* to exist.<sup>36</sup> First built for the 1968 retrospective at the Stockholm Moderna Museet (the monographic exhibition only presented replicas since the Russian authorities had denied the exhibition of original works), the Swedish reconstitution made by historian Ulf Linde and artist Per Olf Ultveldt was then loaned and used as a model

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Nathalie Leleu, *Mettre le regard sous le contrôle du toucher. Répliques, copies et reconstitutions au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle : les tentations de l'historien de l'art*, published in *Les cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, issue 93, 2005, pages 95-100. Nathalie Leleu, project manager for the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France), then for the Musée Picasso (Paris, France), is the author of major research and many texts on the reconstitutions, replicas and copies of works in the art history of the twentieth century. A lot of information given here is taken from these texts. On page 78 of *The Life and Death of Works of Art*, Nathalie Leleu recounts and analyzes the reconstitutions of Kazimir Malevich's *Architectons* conducted by the Centre Pompidou in the late 1970s and 1980s.

by various international institutions. It even traveled to France, for the *Paris-Moscou 1900-1930* exhibition at Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1979), to serve as a starting point for corrections for a new local replica of the *Tower*. The French version later helped correct mistakes on its Swedish counterpart after it suffered a transportation imbroglio resulting in the loss of some of its parts on its way back to Sweden, giving the original reconstitution the opportunity to be updated, and making it both the source and destination of this study tour. Today, “the French and Swedish collections hold two pieces that—even though neither are from Tatlin’s hand nor wish—provide a formal synthesis of the research on his work at the time of their production”.<sup>37</sup> As shown by Nathalie Leleu, reconstitutions are an extension of the field of art history. They also can be a tool for the restorer when it comes to validating hypotheses on the use of conservatory techniques, as was the case with Glenn Alan Gates’ paint flow re-enactment of Morris Louis’ paintings.<sup>38</sup> By emulating the conditions and physical dimensions of Morris Louis’ studio, Gates attempted to reproduce two series: the *Stripe Paintings*, to identify the various tools used by the artist, and the *Unfurled Paintings*, to determine how paintings of this size were technically made and to master such striping in the same environment as the artist. In the sequenced reconstitution of the original production steps—experimental archeology also shares the same

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*Ibidem*, page 99.

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Glenn Alan Gates, *Reproducing Morris Louis paintings to evaluate conservation strategies*, published for The 14th Triennial Meeting The Hague Preprints, 2005.

methodology<sup>39</sup>—the figures of the artist and the restorer fully blur together. But the most important figure in the extension of art history to reproduction is probably the historian previously mentioned for his work on Tatlin, Ulf Linde.

Today, the Moderna Museet holds a collection of Duchamp's replicas, made, corrected and reworked by Ulf Linde for more than thirty years. Linde's first Duchampian replicas—some of which were later certified by Duchamp—were first made to join Robert Lebel's 1960 monograph in the Bokkonsum library in Stockholm.<sup>40</sup> Given the impossibility, one year later, to bring *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* from Philadelphia to the Moderna Museet for the *Movement in Art* exhibition, Pontus Hulten asked Marcel Duchamp if Ulf Linde could make a replica. The request was accepted and the project followed by Duchamp.<sup>41</sup> The *Large Glass* and the Swedish historian's *Readymades* then reappeared at the 1963 retrospective in Pasadena, California, and later traveled many times giving credit to the French artist's postwar notoriety through Ulf Linde, who wonderfully became, in spite of himself,

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A fact mentioned by Thierry Chancogne, essayist, teacher and editor (Tombolo Presses), during a discussion with the author.

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Jan Åman, *De ou par Marcel Duchamp par Ulf Linde*, published by Sternberg Press, 2013.

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Franck Scurti, *Certifiée pour copie conforme*, 2011. *Certifiée pour copie conforme* is a documentary movie on Ulf Linde by artist Franck Scurti. The author would like to thank Franck Scurti for his help and availability.



yet another great avatar of Duchamp's after R. Mutt and Rose Sélavy. Even more than Richard Hamilton—author of numerous replicas as well as a *Large Glass* for the Tate Modern in 1966—Ulf Linde is the chosen messenger, the artist's representative widower—he is the true onlooker of whom Duchamp speaks. He embodies the artist's posterity: he is the one that ceaselessly continues the work—the extension associated with the creator. Ulf Linde never stopped reworking his own copies after Duchamp's death.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the *Bicycle wheel*, signed by Duchamp in 1961, was corrected by Linde in 1976. *Why not sneeze*, *Rose Sélavy* and the *Three Standard Stoppages*, signed by Duchamp in 1964, were rectified in 1986. Linde even replaced the artist in the case of a replica judged incorrect by the historian: *With Hidden Noise's* first version, signed by Duchamp, was replaced by an unsigned copy Linde considered more correct.<sup>43</sup> With these numerous reconstitutions, the historian-turned-restorer ultimately became a true author of Duchampian artifacts which are now held in institutions and visible to the public. More accurately, it would perhaps be fair to say that Ulf Linde became the author of what-used-to-be-Marcel-Duchamp's-works, thus becoming his alter ego in art history. He embodies the extreme degree of a work of art's possible restoration, where it is no longer the object's formal identity that disappears, as with sculpture liquefaction, but the author's identity that fades. As restoration

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Nathalie Leleu, *Répliques et reconstitutions de/par/pour Marcel Duchamp*, published in *Restauration et non-restauration en art contemporain*, directed by Marie-Hélène Breuil, edited by ARSET.

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Jan Åman, op. cit.

revives a piece's formal identity, bringing it back into shape from its ashes, the name of the artist eventually fades away.

Required by the needs of exhibitions to write art history, all these reconstitutions now survive in commissioning museums: multiple copies of Tatlin's *Tower* and Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* are found to be scattered.<sup>44</sup> The Duchamp works whose actual author is Ulf Linde are held at the Moderna Museet. Richard Hamilton's copy of Duchamp's *Large Glass* is kept at the Tate Modern—though Duchamp is the designated author, he shares copyright ownership with Hamilton. Finally, as recounted by Nathalie Leleu, *Victory Boogie-Woogie*, a work part of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam's collection, was not Piet Mondrian's. This painting dates from two years after the artist's death. Mondrian's very last painting, left unfinished in February 1944, was borrowed in 1946 by Stedelijk director Willem Sandberg, not without difficulty, for the exhibition *PM—Piet Mondriaan Herdenkingstentoonstelling*.<sup>45</sup> Before the painting returned to the United States, Sandberg had an unauthorized copy of it made by the Museum's restorer, Willy Kock. As the piece had entered the Stedelijk collection under its own restorer's name, the painting's owner, Emily Tremaine, in turn had two new documentary iterations of

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Page 89 of this book, Amelia Groom, theorist and Critical Studies teacher at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam (Netherlands), tells of her visit to the Otsuka Museum of Art's collection in Japan, an institution dedicated to reproduce, exhibit and preserve life-size photoceramics of the history of Western art.

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Nathalie Leleu, *Les cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, op. cit.

*Victory Boogie-Woogie* made by Perle Fine in 1947 and 1948: if the first one is a faithful replica, the second one tries to continue and complete the original—now surrounded with its reproductions and co-authors.<sup>46</sup>