



Autopsy of Contemporary Art on Conservator's Table

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Object

Sculpture Light and Stuffed by Anu Pöder, 1992
Material – textile, metal, plaster
Dimensions – height 170 cm, width 50 cm, depth 69 cm
Owner – the Estonian Art Museum (EKM j 56632 S 1939)

About the artist

Sculptor Anu Pöder (17 November 1947- 17 January 2013) used various materials and means in her creative work, quite often some of these had nothing to do with traditional sculpture. Forever researching and testing, she used textiles, plastics, metal, cardboard, netting etc. for her contemporary sculptures. The 1990s witnessed a creative game with fabrics and clothes that culminated with a personal exhibition in 1996.



Fig. 1 When the museum purchased the object it was in a really bad condition.



Fig. 2 Before the conservation, 2015.



Fig. 3 After the conservation, 2016.

Conservation-restoration

The textile sculpture Light and Stuffed had to be restored to its original condition so that it could be displayed at the author's memorial exhibition Fragility is Courage in the spring of 2017 at the Estonian Art Museum. When the museum purchased the object it was in a really bad condition – the sculpture had been stored in a damp room for years and so its textile was mildewed and partly mouldered. Its metal construction had corroded.

The first examination was concluded with the decision to cleanse off the mildew on the left leg and exchange the covering layer of fabric for a new one. When conserving was already going on, it became clear that this was not enough. The shin-part of the leg was dismantled for the removal of the mildew source, the plaster that was breaking had to be repaired and the rusty metal construction needed to be passivated. When we deal with contemporary art it is possible to use the same or very similar materials as the author had used. In case of this sculpture the author had used cotton fabric, fisherman's rib included, sack-cloth, cheese-cloth and gauze, wadding, plaster and cardboard.

When the museum-pieces are taken back to safe storing-rooms after conservation, pieces belonging to private collections are sometimes 'forgotten' and left for a long time in bad conditions where they lose their original value. The scale of damages and the time the conservator needs for the work cannot be estimated at provisional observation and everything becomes clear only during the work processing.



Fig. 7 The heel of the left foot was restored, (supporting the preserved parts) with cardboard, gauze and a mixture of gypsum and glue. The metal parts were mechanically cleaned and passivated with rust converter.



Fig. 8 Building the leg. Similar textiles to those that the sculptor had used were applied for the shank and shin. Cotton fabric, sackcloth, gauze, plaster and wadding were layered one upon another. A fisherman's rib sleeve provided an even surface.

Materials used in conservation

An isolated space, means of personal protection. Ethyl alcohol, mini-ends of a vacuum cleaner (Kremer Pigmente), plaster, steel wool 0000 (Liberon), rust-converter Kurust (Hammerite), cotton fabrics, cardboard, PVA glue.

Materials and damages of the sculpture



Fig. 4 The textile of the sculpture that had been stored in a damp room was soiled, mildewed and partly mouldered.



Fig. 5 The mildewed covering fabric had mouldered and needed to be replaced. Metal parts were corroding and in the heel of the foot the plaster had broken and was crumbling.



Fig. 6 Peeling the covering fabric off layer by layer it became clear that all the materials had suffered from moisture. The metal construction of the leg was corroded and the layers of different materials – the covering fabric, the cheesecloth, cotton wool and cardboard had all mouldered. Opening the construction, it turned out that the author had neither used needle and thread or glue, all the fabrics had been tightly wound one upon the other.

Restoration of the damaged leg



Fig. 9 Modelling the leg. The leg was fixed tight with a gauze bandage to grant it the initial shape and looks



Fig. 10 Just as it had been in the original leg, its surface was covered with pieces of fabric that differed in size and shape. To imitate the soiled surface the new fabric was soaked in strong black tea. The patches were joined in blanket stitch with cotton thread.



Fig. 11 New small decorative white, light-blue and yellow patches, squares of 2-3 cm, were set with a couple of stitches at the same places where they had been before.

