

# ENGLISH SUMMARY

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## **THE UNBEARABLE VARIABILITY OF MATTER: PLASTICS IN ART**

The preservation of modern and contemporary works of art has become a real challenge for our age. Conservators have to respond to the needs of the culture and sustainable development today, when we must inevitably extend care and protection to contemporary heritage in the face of globalisation and the transformation of civilization. This requires the synergy of intellectual and scientific potential and implementation of innovative research and modern technological solutions. The multiplicity of forms, ideas, tangible and intangible aspects of contemporary artworks force us to take a different approach in taking care of such work of art. This includes detailed research to recognize the material, technique, concept, context; preventive, active conservation, and conservation through the documentation (including interviews with artists and their associates).

This is particularly important for objects created with modern materials, in particular plastics. Plastics are prevalent today, affecting the standard of living and aesthetics in the culture and art of the 19th to 21st century. They have been, they are and they obviously will continue to be used by artists of different disciplines to create various forms of visual art, as the main means of expression, and the material. From the 1930s, synthetics in various forms can be found in the collections and the public space. Plastics have been a part of our cultural heritage and of social life for over a hundred years. They are, however, customarily still treated as 'young', and therefore more durable than traditional material. In fact, the opposite is true.

The project dedicated to complex care of the plastic legacy in Poland, financed from the resources of the National Centre for Science, started in 2011 and the aim of it was to build a body of knowledge on plastics in works of art in Poland on the basis of interdisciplinary research for identification and establishing the methodology of maintenance, preservation and exhibition. The implementation through analytical tests was carried out in the form of case studies of the works of leading Polish artists using plastics in various periods. Analytical and instrumental tests allow the kind of material and its chemical composition to be determined, and therefore recognition of the techniques and technology, the stage of ageing and the cause of the damage. These determine the choice of the materials and conservation methods. At the same time, humanistic knowledge was augmented by a holistic approach, assessment and adapting to the needs: the history of plastic objects in Polish contemporary culture, their context, and the intentions of artists.

The article presents the result of the project and a short outline of the history of the use of plastics in art, including Polish art, presenting examples of specific works (Tadeusz Kantor, Jan Tarasin, Alina Szapocznikow) and problems related to their preservation, conservation and exhibition.