

ENGLISH SUMMARY

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SQUARING THE CIRCLE: THE DISPLAY OF ARTWORKS OF MARIA PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ AND JERZY BEREŚ

A work of contemporary art may be severely harmed even if its physical substance is perfectly preserved. The reason for such an apparent paradox lies in the dual nature of contemporary artworks where the matter serves as the carrier for the artist's intent. The latter might be affected while mounting an exhibition when actions like assembling an artwork's parts, designing the display space, arranging the artworks in the gallery are undertaken. In extreme cases, the wrong decisions taken concerning its exhibition may annihilate the most important intangible features of the artwork.

This subject is analysed with a focus on the works of Jerzy Bereś and Maria Pinińska-Bereś – two prominent Polish avant-garde sculptors and performers, since their works are often affected by such problems. In terms of the scale of the alteration involved, the examples described in the paper are comparable to severe overpainting of a picture. Fortunately, such errors are usually easily reversible. In this project, research conducted in the archive of the artists has been complemented by theoretical analysis of their art, examination of the structure of their artworks and interviews with relatives. Taken together these have enabled definition of the main issues involved and guidelines on avoiding them. One type of issue is linked with preparation of the artwork for an exhibition. Bereś's sculptures are composed of whole range of parts differing in type and size that have to be reassembled each time. It is not an easy task, and mistakes may lead to the wrong results. There are, however, helpful sources of information, such as approved historic photographs of the original installation and the markings of the author on the parts and descriptions of the nature of the work. The key factor is to interpret them correctly. Nevertheless, not only the arrangement of parts has to be preserved but also qualities like the physical and visual tensions in sculptures, the functional or semantic role of elements,

type of fasteners, logical order of assembly etc. It is important to note that the works of Pinińska-Bereś pose different challenges. Features like the shape of squashy elements (stuffed with polyurethane foam and cotton wool), arrangement of multi-element sculptures and the character of recreated ephemeral parts must be preserved. Also, the visual lightness and softness of shape, brightness and cleanliness of the surfaces are essential qualities to maintain.

The issues shared by both artists relate to the position of the works in an exhibition space. These were originally specified by the artists very clearly. First, the use of pedestals is unacceptable. Both artists rejected the concept of traditional sculpture and their exhibition that led them to shape and position the artworks directly on the floor. This changed the relationship between the viewer, the sculpture and the space around it. From the point of view of the artists, pedestals merged with the shape of the artwork becoming part of its substance. What is more, since their works often resemble everyday objects, putting them on pedestals results in extracting them from their natural realm. Other issues relate to viewing distance, arrangement of the artworks in the context of the layout of the room and the juxtaposition of two different sculptures.

The manner of displaying interactive artworks is another issue common to both artists. When operated, such works produce sounds, unveil inscriptions or change the arrangement of elements. When their motion is stopped at a certain point, new, unintended interpretations become possible. Usually they are false or even contrary to the artist's intent. In an ideal situation, the audience should be allowed to interact with the artworks. However, this is almost impossible to achieve in normal exhibition conditions. Providing information about the work's interactivity and reason of its limitation is therefore crucial. The viewer has to know that the artwork was not intended to be static. This should be accompanied with documentation of the work's action, demonstrations by trained staff on guided tours or the use of an exhibition replica.

In Poland, some of the issues discussed above are copyrighted. Certain articles of the legislation refer directly to the public display of an artwork: the right to "have the contents and form of the author's work inviolable and properly used" and the right to "control the manner of using the work". As a result, artworks ought to be displayed without interference with their intended meaning and the artist's remarks on this subject must be respected. This applies even if the owner of the artwork has acquired all economic rights.

This article is written from the perspective of conservators of works of art. In terms of the conservation of modern and contemporary art, the role of conservators exceeds the preservation of the matter. The artist's intent, being the core of the artwork, should be the determinant of all actions undertaken that will affect the artwork – from preventive care and display to conservation-restoration. Therefore the conservator along with curators, art historians and exhibition specialists should have significant influence on the manner of exhibition.

