

Presentation Abstracts

(in order of program)

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Painting stuffed: three case studies of conservation of Mirka Mora's soft sculptures

Full presentation

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The soft sculptures, fantastic characters made of stuffed and painted textile shapes, mark a twenty-year period (roughly 1970-1990) in the career of iconic Melbourne artist Mirka Mora, well known also for her murals, mosaics, embroideries and oil paintings. This part of Mora's artistic production now shows degradation due to age, and had not previously been studied from a material perspective. The three cases illustrate different conservation issues and involve original soft sculptures as well as reconstructions made by the conservator. The paper describes and compares the decision making process in the three cases, a practice which was informed by in depth interviews with the artist and a study of the current reflection on the topic in the conservation field. These case studies show the various options open for the conservation of Mirka Mora's soft sculptures, according to three contexts of ownership and treatment, and always taking into consideration the issues of significance and access, essential for these works of art. The treatment results have all been sanctioned by the artist, regardless of their very different outcomes. They are not intended as models but as guides for decision making processes, integrating material based knowledge gained from research and the understanding that conservation options at opposite ends of the spectrum can be possible with the involvement and approval of the artist.

Sabine Cotte has degrees in conservation of paintings from INP (France), ICCROM (Italy) and a MA from University of Melbourne (Australia). Since 1990, she has been working as a private conservator, in Paris and Melbourne. Her interests lie in questioning the relevance of conservation with contemporary artists, communities and users of living heritage. She is currently completing her PhD at the University of Melbourne, on Mirka Mora's techniques and materials.

Dr Nicole Tse is part of the research and teaching team at the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne. She has recently completed an ARC postdoctoral Fellowship investigating the 'Twentieth Century in Paint' after completing her PhD on 'The characterisation of oil paintings in tropical South East Asia'.

Associate Professor Alison Inglis is a graduate of the Art History Department of the University of Melbourne. Alison has co-ordinated the MA Art Curatorship program since 1995, and teaches subjects on Nineteenth-century Europe; Art, Markets and Materials; and museum studies (in particular issues in art museum management and art conservation).