

Let's talk to the artist... In the search for conservation and exhibition solutions for contemporary works made with textiles in the Basque Country

Vamos conversar com o artista... Em busca de soluções de conservação e exposição para obras contemporâneas feitas com têxteis no País Basco

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Abstract

In the 1980s, various factors led to the development of new artistic typologies in the Basque Country, introducing fabrics and textiles into sculptures and installations now housed in major museum collections. Institutions responsible for the maintenance and exhibition of contemporary art agree that the main problems in textile-based works are mostly related to materials, formats and execution techniques but also to their exhibition and curatorial requirements. Understanding both the technical and material aspects of artistic practices, along with their conceptual foundation and artistic intent, is decisive for determining conservation needs. This research explores the conservation of contemporary art made with textiles through case studies, emphasizing the challenges related to their unique typologies and materials. It also reviews the strategies and measures implemented by important contemporary art museums in Spain and the Basque Country, underscoring the crucial role of direct collaboration with artists in ensuring their proper preservation and display.

Resumo

Na década de 80, vários fatores levaram ao desenvolvimento de novas tipologias artísticas no País Basco, introduzindo tecidos e têxteis em esculturas e instalações agora expostas nas principais coleções de museus. As instituições responsáveis pela manutenção e exposição de arte contemporânea concordam que os principais problemas nas obras baseadas em têxteis estão relacionados principalmente com os materiais, formatos e técnicas de execução, mas também com os requisitos de exposição e curadoria. Compreender os aspetos técnicos e materiais das práticas artísticas, a base conceptual e intenção artística, é decisivo para determinar as necessidades de conservação. Esta investigação explora a conservação da arte contemporânea têxtil através de casos de estudo, enfatizando os desafios relacionados com as suas tipologias e materiais únicos. Também analisa as estratégias e medidas implementadas por museus de arte contemporânea em Espanha e no País Basco, sublinhando o papel crucial da colaboração direta com os artistas para garantir a sua preservação e exibição adequadas.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary art
Textiles
Basque Country
Conservation
Exhibition
Artistic intent

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Arte contemporânea
Têxteis
País Basco
Conservação
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Intenção artística

Introduction

Until the mid-seventies of the twentieth century, Basque artists have had a little contact with the international artistic scene due to the political situation of the region. The new social and cultural context generated after the years of dictatorship, facilitated the exchange of artistic experiences that were already being developed in other countries [1].

During the 80s different factors converged in the Basque Country that propitiated the expansion of new artistic typologies, as well as the renewal of the materials used in art creation during the posterior decades. The impact of international artistic currents and trends would be key in this transformation process [2] but also the creation of a whole cultural network constituted by art institutions and creation centres will be decisive in the development of contemporary artistic practices, giving a notable boost to new types and disciplines of art production [3].

In addition, the normalization of women artists in the artistic scene, whose presence had been very limited until that period, will be essential in the process of artistic legitimation of new experimental works. Fragile and ephemeral materials such as textiles and fabrics, feathers, resins and foams, as well as fashion accessories and clothing items will be introduced to art practice, together with those traditionally used like stone, metal or wood.

The gradual introduction of textile elements and synthetic fabrics to sculpture along with the increasing development of new artistic typologies such as installations can be already observed at the end of the 70s. Artists like Andrés Nagel (San Sebastián, 1947) or Ángel Bados (Olazagutía, 1945) will be pioneers in the introduction of textiles in their works. Progressively, these materials will gain presence and become usual in the artistic production of the following decades [4].

Nowadays, different museums and institutions conserve within their collections works of art created by the most important authors from that period along with more recent creations that show a surprising number of textile materials and related elements. Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts of Bilbao or the Basque Museum Centre of Contemporary Art-Artium in Alava are some regional examples, along with the most important Spanish institutions such as the Reina Sofía National Art Center Museum in Madrid or the Würth Museum located in La Rioja.

Institutions responsible for the maintenance and exhibition of contemporary art agree that the main problems in artworks made with textiles are mostly related to their constituting materials, the diversity of formats and execution techniques but also to their exhibition and curatorial requirements. They are often made of different elements and mixtures of natural and synthetic materials and produced with experimental and unstable techniques, so a correct characterization of these work is essential to guarantee that they are properly preserved.

Nevertheless, the conservation, display and transmission of these works also involves the understanding of conceptual aspects in addition to those purely formal or material ones and can significantly alter their meaning if disrespected.

As different authors have pointed out [5-7], the requirements for the conservation and exhibition of this type of works have evidenced the need to redefine their intervention criteria, as well as the measures directed to conserve new experimental contemporary typologies made with textiles.

Fortunately, during the last decade the field of textile conservation and restoration has developed and spread spectacularly, encompassing other disciplines such as costume or fashion and implementing new methods of intervention and preventive conservation that can be extended to contemporary works. This is well reflected in contributions like the MPhil dissertation of current textile curator at the Museum of London, Emily Austin [8], as well as in other recent publications [9-10].

This research examines textile-based contemporary art conservation through case studies, highlighting the challenges posed by their typological and material features, as well as the

measures and protocols implemented by the major Spanish and Basque contemporary art museums. To explore those issues, several Basque creators such as Naia del Castillo, Txaro Arrazola or Sahatsa Jauregui, among others, have been interviewed during this study, in order to better understand the conceptual aspects in their work that can be conflictive with their material stability.

Conservation of contemporary art: materials and artistic intend

A key criterion for preserving contemporary art objects establishes the necessary equilibrium between conserving the materials as well as the idea behind its creation. This need to balance conservation of materials and artistic or conceptual intent in contemporary art has been widely developed since the 80s, first by Heinz Althöfer [11] and later through other reference authors like Antonio Rava, Hiltrud Schinzel, Iwona Szmelzer, IJsbrand Hummelen or Glenn Wharton [12-19]. Rosario Llamas- Pachecho or Carlota Santabárbara are also some of the Spanish authors that have extendedly analysed this issue [20-25]. Nowadays, we know that this can be achieved through minimal intervention and traditional methods, or, in certain cases, by replacing elements or even reproducing the whole work to preserve the artist's intent.

In the case of contemporary textile artworks, obviously the proper identification of materials and correct characterization of the works turns out essential, since a large part of the conservation problems are usually related to the use of unstable materials and experimental techniques [26], all factors influencing their behaviour and stability.

These contemporary artistic expressions will reflect the incorporation of new materials throughout the twentieth century. Alongside traditional natural fibers like cotton, linen, wood or silk, a wide range of synthetic textiles and polymeric materials, such as nylon, polyester or PVC, began to appear, originating from industrial contexts. The coexistence of these diverse materials complicates the classification and cataloguing of such works, while also presenting significant conservation challenges due to their varied and often unstable nature.

Along with the choice of unstable materials, the artistic procedures and experimental techniques will likewise be determining factors in the behaviour of these works that, in some cases, become a source of deterioration from the very moment of their creation. In fact, the degenerative processes that affect textiles often begin during their manufacturing and continue with their subsequent aging and the influence of the environment.

The speed of these degradation processes will depend on very different reasons but it is known that textile materials are seriously affected by external factors such as light exposure (factor to which they are especially vulnerable to), relative humidity, temperature, dust or atmospheric pollution, together with the action of biological agents or damages of anthropic origin.

However, along with their characterization, study and analysis, other factors should be addressed in the decision-making regarding its interpretation and museographic exhibition. In order to ensure the preservation of this kind of contemporary artworks, the artist's intention must be considered in conjunction with formal and material aspects when making conservation and display decisions. Even if authors like Dykstra [27] or Wharton suggest [28] that "artist intention" is an ambiguous term that should be used with caution, we conservators have the professional duty to account for it, whenever it is possible.

In addition to foreseeing possible technical solutions and in order to envision integral conservation protocols, we must recognize that material selection can play a crucial role in the artwork's intention because, as stated by textile conservator Ann French [29], the choice of the textile medium may be part of its conceptual basis. Consequently, the conservation approach must treat it as a work of art, not as a functional or decorative item or applied art that might have once been intended for a practical purpose [30] as it may happen in the case of some pieces of costume or domestic and ethnographical textiles.

This craft-related terms hovering over works made of textiles are, still today, lightly used to denominate any kind of textile-based art or creation, regardless of its artistic conception and identity, conditioning its adequate conservation and interpretation.

It is known, that practices related to textiles have traditionally been classified as second-class artistic media despite the fact that the revision of concepts such as crafts, design or art was radical during the twentieth century. At an international level, the use of textiles in artistic practices was mainly promoted since the late 1960s, mostly by feminist movements, which proposed the recovery and inclusion of practices that had traditionally been relegated to a lower status, such as embroidery, weaving techniques and other applied sewing techniques [31-32].

Although these initiatives represented an enormous step in the legitimization of textile practices in the field of contemporary art, it is also true that the expansion of new artistic typologies made with textiles and related techniques has led to some confusion at the time of exhibiting them. For instance, many of this works, have been misinterpreted and assumed as vindicative of the female gender and therefore, incorrectly displayed and transmitted to the public, without taking into account that there are several artists who work with textiles just for their formal, technical or metalinguistic values [33].

This highlights the importance of involving artists, whenever possible, in the various stages of interpreting and presenting their work. As Llamas-Pacheco states [24] it is clearly beneficial to gather information about the artist's visual intention, aesthetic discourse, and intellectual universe through talking to creators themselves. Their input can enhance decision-making and problem-solving [34] by providing valuable insights into the materials used, their intended purpose, the artwork's visual discourse, and guidelines for its proper display.

Indeed, various studies have pointed out that conservation is closely related to aspects related to its exhibition, registration and storage protocols, evidencing the need for multidisciplinary collaboration between the different fields involved in order to adequately preserve and transmit contemporary artworks properly [28, 35-37].

New materials and techniques, new conservation problems

As mentioned in the introduction, the new political and cultural situation that emerged in the Basque Country at the end of the seventies gradually allowed the influx of new international artistic influences and forms of artistic expression, which would have a significant impact on the Basque art scene [3, 38].

What art historian Peio Aguirre called "the great transformation of Basque art" [2] led to the introduction of new artistic typologies, materials and elements of very diverse nature and origin (natural and synthetic fibers and fabrics, plastics, ersatz materials, foams, resins, etc.), each with their own conservation challenges and issues.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the present study has shown the presence of diverse materials in the multiple artistic typologies reviewed, observing the inclusion of traditional textiles and yarns such as cotton fabrics, linen canvas or silk tissues to non-woven fabrics like felt or suede. These last ones can be found, for example, in the cotton cleaning cloth wrapped structures characteristic of the first creations of Gema Intxausti (Guernica-Lumo, 1966) (Figure 1a-b).

It is also noteworthy that, parallel to the introduction of new fabrics, the use of other imitation materials, feathers (Figure 1c-d) or fur will begin to gain presence as well as other costume related elements and clothing accessories, such as shoes and hats [4] that will be added to the list of elements that will become part of contemporary Basque creations.

Along with these multiple materials, the expansion of artistic and creative techniques that will be incorporated into these increasingly experimental works is remarkable. New media and techniques such as crochet (Figure 1e-f), sewing or embroidery (Figure 1g-h) as well as an endless number of painting, printing or stamping techniques will be incorporated to artworks.

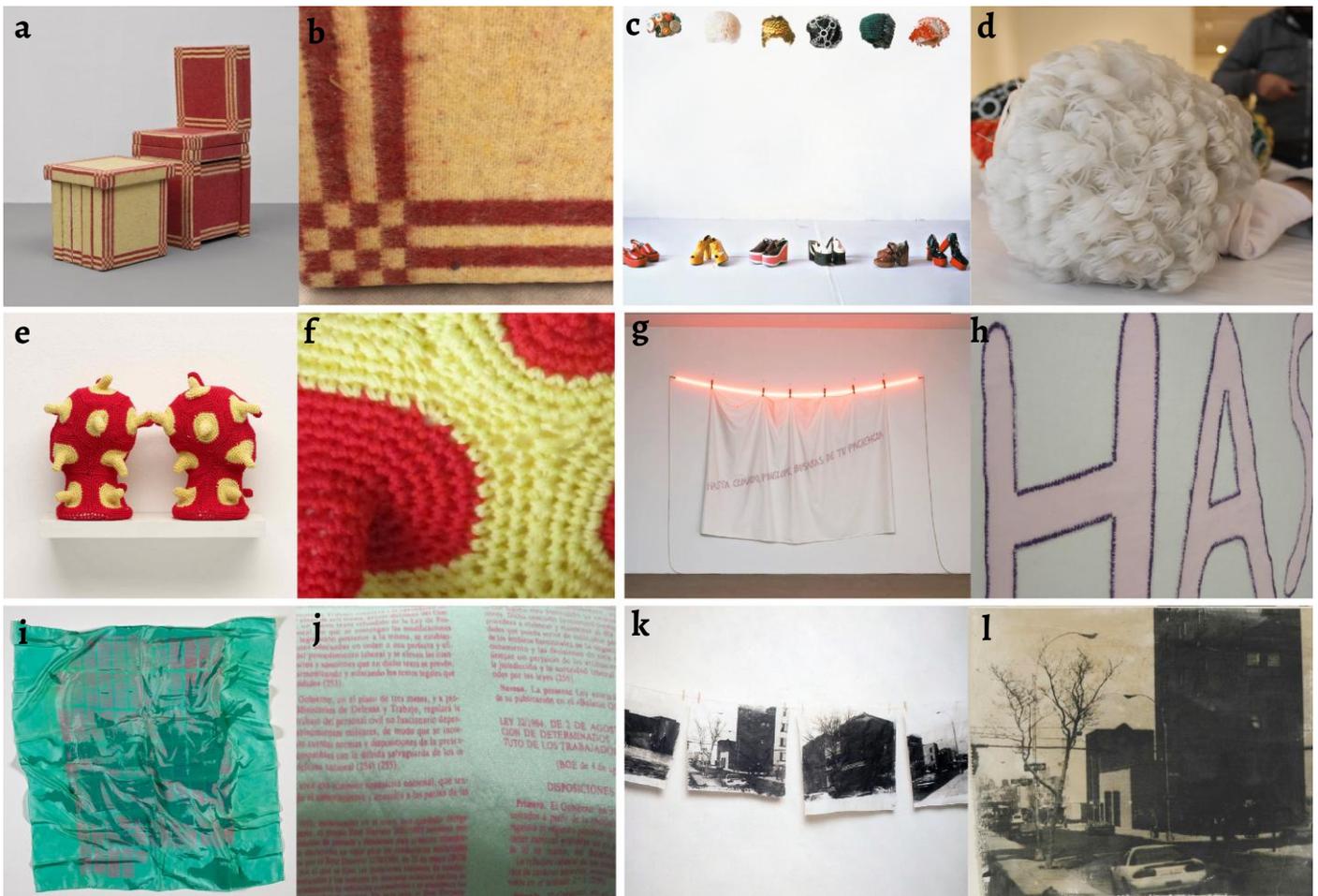


Figure 1. Materials and techniques in various contemporary works: *a-b* *Saint George and the dragon* by Gema Intxausti, 1991 and detail of the cotton suede cloth, Basque Government Collection (photos: Restoration Department of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum and Basque Government Collection – RDBFAM & BGC); *c-d* *Women on platform shoes* by Ana Laura Álaez, 1992 and a detail of a feather headdress, La Caixa Collection (photos: RDBFAM); *e-f* *Fingers* by Ana Laura Álaez, 1993 and detail of the crochet technique in acrylic wool, Artium Collection; *g-h* *Penelope* by Itziar Elejalde, 1980 and detail of the machine embroidery on cotton fabric, Artium Collection; *i-j* *Silk scarf* by J. L. Moraza 1999 and detail of the screen printing on silk, Artium Collection; *k-l* *Passing Sensations* by Txaro Arrazola, 1998-1999 and detail of a piece showing the transfer on cotton, Artium Collection (photos: Gert Voor in't Holt).

The choice of media such as solvent transfer, sublimation printing or screen printing can be found in the work of important artists like Juan Luis Moraza (Vitoria, 1960) (Figure 1i-j), Txaro Arrazola (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 1963) (Figure 1k-l) and more recently artists like Naia del Castillo (Bilbao, 1975), entailing various difficulties for its conservation. The behavior of these works will differ substantially depending on the materials and techniques used for their creation making necessary to study individually each work in order to establish conservation needs.

Many of the problems detected in those works (fading of inks and dyes, bleeding of colors, yellowing and blurring of the original images in the presence of photoemulsion based works, etc.) are sometime closer to photographic or graphic work pathologies than those traditionally related to textiles. Additionally, they often appear in combination to other emerging problems linked to their typological and formal characteristics as well as to their display systems, like deformation of fabrics, tearings or unwanted creases.

Something similar must be taken into consideration in the case of works such as *Su Tu Tumba* (2017) created by the young artist Sahatsa Jauregi (Salvador de Bahía, Brasil, 1984). This installation is composed of 27 printed images on polyester fabric cloths displayed pinned to the wall with domestic pushpins. It requires strict preventive measures when exhibited because digital print media and inks used to produce it are especially sensitive and may suffer discolorations and color modifications due to long periods of exposure to light or inadequate humidity and temperature conditions.



Figure 2. Packaging and assembly systems in large-format works: *a*) rolling system for *Project converted into installation*, by Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa, 2007, Guggenheim Bilbao Collection (photo: Department of Conservation of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao – DCGMB); *b*) installation of *Penélope*, by Itziar Elejalde, 2004, Artium Collection (photo: Artium Museum).

The use of highly fragile materials such as hair, skin or feathers (especially vulnerable to biological attack too) and even vegetal elements in conjunction with fabrics can also be found in the work of important artists Javier Pérez (Bilbao, 1968), Ana Laura Aláez (Bilbao, 1964) or Zigor Barayazarra (Bilbao, 1976). The multimateriality of these proposals raises conservation issues due to their organic nature and needs that are equally diverse and creative.

On the other hand, the formal characteristics of installations and works made with large textiles are also an important factor when preserving and exhibiting them. Handling and mounting protocols have been designed to face the conservation challenges of works like *Penélope* (1980), a huge embroidered cotton bed sheet hanging from a neon tube by clothespins made by artist Itziar Elejalde (Bilbao, 1953), Asier Mendizabal's (Ordizia, 1973) textile *Tangrams* or the painted hanging banners made by Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa (Donostia-San Sebastián, 1963).

These types of works present format features and spatial specificities that conditionate their storage and/or exhibition, requiring a great coordination when handling and mounting them (Figure 2). Their manipulation and setup protocols include steps from reception and transportation packaging to final installation, ensuring careful handling and protection to preserve the piece's integrity, always under the supervision of a conservator.

Conservation of contemporary works made with textiles

Works of art such as the ones mentioned so far, which may include fabrics and elements of both natural and synthetic origin can be considered fragile. In fact, it must be taken into account that their handling and display entails, on each and every occasion, a risk for its conservation.

When asked during the present research, museums and institutions responsible for maintaining and exhibiting contemporary art acknowledge that the primary conservation challenges in textile-based works stem not only from the materials, compositional elements and execution techniques but also from their exhibition requirements and curatorial demands. Aspects related to display systems, climatic and illumination conditions during exhibition periods or implications coming from handling during transportation and mounting processes, have a big impact in the conservation of textile-based artworks.



Figure 3. *Friends from Bilbao* by Andrés Nagel Tejada, 1980: a) with the original textile gauze behind the installation; b) detail of the fragile fabric presenting tears and a torn areas; c) sewing and consolidation of the textile during restoration process (photos: RDBFAM).

Although obviously it is sometimes necessary to restore a work following traditional criteria and methods, the effort usually focuses on preventing damage. In the case shown in [Figure 3a](#), the thin gauze hanging behind the figures moved constantly when the artwork was displayed and as a result, the fabric had torn in several places ([Figure 3b](#)). Museum restorers repaired the tears by sewing and with polyamide and a heated spatula and filled fabric losses to stabilize the textile element ([Figure 3c](#)) and a new mode of exhibition was designed to prevent further deterioration.

However, since the multimateriality of this kind of works does not always allow taking into account every specificity and need in an individualized way, they usually require a more general and comprehensive approach. The conservation strategies of the main museum institutions are mainly directed to the implementation of preventive conservation measures and risk control of collections.

Climate control

As in the case of costume collections or historical fabrics, the control and monitoring of climatic conditions that surround artworks is vital, since these materials are highly sensitive to light and relative humidity or temperature fluctuations, as well as especially vulnerable to biological attack due to their organic nature.

The alteration of the physical and chemical properties of the fabrics, in addition to the presence of additives, light-sensitive dyes or other added elements, can lead to irreversible damages in to composing materials and their characteristics. This can also have a big impact in the work's artistic intend and even bring the conceptual destruction of the work.

Currently, the standards for proper storage, conservation and display of works made with textiles recommended by the ICOM International Committee for Museums and collections of Costume, Fashion and Textiles are established at 18 °C temperature and 50-55 % Relative Humidity, with fluctuations allowed between ± 2 °C and ± 5 % respectively.

Continuous humidity and temperature oscillations or inadequate conditions can cause mechanical stress, accelerate material deterioration and promote the appearance of insects and mould, especially affecting natural textiles of cellulosic and protein origin due to their higroscopicity.

In relation to the control of lighting the general recommendation is a maximum of 50 lux for periods of no more than three months and ideally, the pieces on display should rotate. Textiles sustain irreversible damage from both visible and ultraviolet light and as the effects of light and heat are cumulative, fabrics or garments previously exposed to strong lighting, should be displayed less frequently and avoid UV radiation by using filters or protective display cases. For instance, sensitive textiles such as silk or those dyed with natural pigments should be limited to a maximum of 3 to 6 months per year, followed by a rest period in dark storage.

Correct illumination is essential, especially to appreciate the characteristic textures, hues and transparencies, and most of the interviewed artists give great importance to lighting

during their exhibition even though many of them are very aware of the light-induced deterioration of the material over time.

But although some damages are inevitable or even assumed by the artist, in other cases, the unexpected modification of plastic properties, like the fading or loss of an especially significant dye or surface color modifications in monochromatic fabrics (yellowing, darkening...), can lead to a significant alteration of the concept and the message of the work.

An example of the symbolic use of color in works of this nature and the dilemma that can arise regarding their conservation can be observed in the work *The Two Sisters* (2005) by Naia del Castillo preserved in the Würth Museum, located in La Rioja. This textile-based sculpture belonging to the *Offerings and Possessions* series represents two dressed bodies in an intense sapphire blue silk. The artist collaborated with jewellers to obtain colored fabrics inspired by precious stones like ruby red, emerald green, and sapphire blue. Over time, the saturation and luminosity of the original color has faded in some areas of the work, modifying its original aspect but also its original meaning and intent.

To prevent this kind of unwanted and irreversible situations and despite the complexity in balancing visibility with conservation, as Mateo points out [39], it is essential to find a middle ground between preserving the piece and ensuring an appropriate exhibition display conditions.

Storage systems

The multitude of formats, shapes and sizes that we find in this specific discipline is uncountable and can become a real challenge for conservators when designing packing and conservation systems. Storage systems vary greatly depending on the type of work, ranging from basic systems such as conservation boxes, adapted hanging systems on padded hangers to storage systems that simultaneously serve for exhibition avoiding unnecessary manipulations during storage and mounting.

In the preventive conservation of textiles and costume, materials are selected based on their chemical stability and compatibility with the objects. Evidently, each type of garment or textile work may require specific combinations of materials depending on its nature (structure, materials, conservation condition) and its use (storage, exhibition, or transport) although all materials should be stable and inert, avoid acidic agents, adhesives and tapes or volatile plasticizers. They must not cause abrasion and should support the textiles gently, particularly during storage periods.

Commonly used materials include archival cardboard to customize storage boxes, acid-free paper, tissue or films such as Tyvek or Cellplast to serve as protection layers and together with unbleached cotton fabrics for making covers and wraps. For accessories or three-dimensional objects, polyethylene foams (Ethafom, Plastazote) and wadding fillings or quilted molleton paddings are also frequently used for custom supports and mannequins [9, 39-40].

Other more creative alternatives and solutions are designed especially to preserve more fragile works that literally “need to rest” in horizontal position after extended exhibition periods or others that can, ideally, enable the viewing of the works inside through windows or transparent Plexiglass/Perspex surfaces (Figure 4) along with many other casuistries that may require specific designs.

Given the impossibility of systematizing packaging methods for the enormous variety of contemporary works, systems are often recovered from other conservation disciplines, as storage systems for large format paintings and even rugs and/or tapestries that are stored rolled up with the decorated side protected outwards as shown in Figure 2.

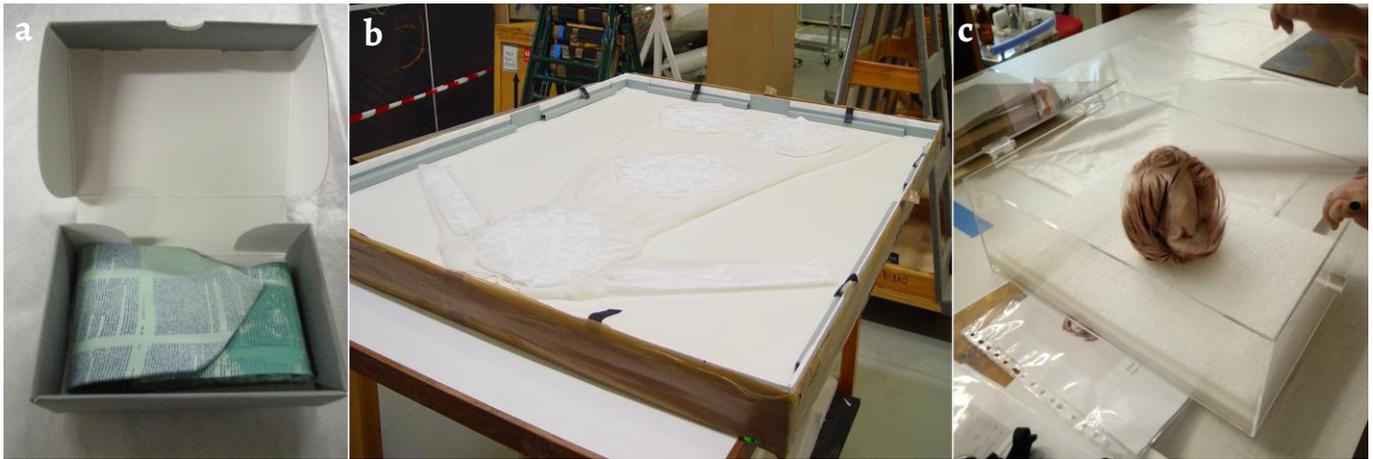


Figure 4. Packaging and storage systems: *a)* conservation box for *Tie* by J. L. Moraza, 1994, Artium Collection (photo: Artium Museum); *b)* flat storage system for the dress from *Mask of Seduction* by Javier Pérez, 1997 (photo: DCGMB); *c)* methacrylate urn for *If I were you... red* by Miren Arenzana, 1993 (photo: RDBFAM).



Figure 5. Handling and installation process of *Women on platform shoes* (1992) by Ana Laura Aláez in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum: *a)* packaging system to ensure safe transport and protection of the constituent elements; *b)* checking and condition reporting process; *c)* a tulle hat from the installation; *d)* a shoe from the installation; *e)* assembly and display of the different elements of the installation in the museum gallery; *f)* final exhibition setting of the installation (Caixa Forum Collection VEGAP, Barcelona, 2025) (photos: RDBFAM).

In the case of installations made up of various elements or parts, it is usual to keep strict registration protocols because it's crucial for the conservation of this type of works to ensure a good record of all the component elements. Risks can be minimized through accurate documentation of the works regarding materials, techniques and conservation periodical inspections and reports and by ensuring they are stored in appropriate environmental conditions [41-42].

This should be taken into account also when exhibiting the works. For the mounting practice to identify and properly register specific needs for their correct handling and care is essential, even more if we are dealing with non-replaceable elements.

The work *Women on platform shoes* (1992) by the artist Ana Laura Aláez, belonging to the contemporary art collection of the La Caixa Foundation, constitutes an excellent example of the multimateriality of this type of contemporary works, as well as a complex display of objects found and built by the artist herself (Figure 5).

In the installation, six headdresses made from materials of various textile origin, rubber objects, plastic, metal, etc. are suspended from the ceiling with their corresponding six pairs of shoes dating from the seventies, also made with a wide variety of materials, generating sets in which the female figure is absent, but at the same time represented

As we will see in the following section, display is closely linked to registration. An installation guide or map that includes precise documentation of the positioning and spatial relationships between elements is essential, particularly when the artist wishes to preserve the original configuration of the work [43], as is the case.

Display and exhibition systems

Modes of display can vary significantly from one exhibition to another depending on the resources of the hosting institution, the exhibition space, the requirements of the curatorial staff or the artist's decision. Obviously, the conservation condition of the works it's also a determining factor when it comes to design exhibitions and choose display methods. Every museographic resource is usually proposed and agreed between conservators, curators and artists taking into account the space and the exhibition discourse.

Even one same work can be exhibited in several ways. In the case of clothing, fashion exhibitions or sculpture, it is common to find works installed on mannequins, bases or plinths, inside display cases and occasionally, without any type of barrier or means of protection that isolates them from the floor, so that they can be more or less exposed to possible sources of deterioration (Figure 6).

But, meanwhile some protection measures and exhibiting conditions can be modified or replaced if necessary, some of the exhibition resources mentioned, such as pedestals or display cases, can be an integral part of the artwork. This is the case of *Archery* (2002) by Naia del Castillo. Constituting elements (the arch, the arrow, archery glove, etc.) are displayed inside a wooden and glass urn as if they were archaeological objects, a factor that must also be taken into account for their correct presentation and interpretation, as stated by the artist (Figure 7).

In the case textile works with different display systems (Figure 8), the means used to hang them, such as thumbtacks, pins, lag bolts or other suspension systems using nylon thread or steel cables, can seriously affect the mechanical properties of the fabrics and the stability of the materials.

However, it must be taken into account that these can be an essential part of the work, so the solutions proposed must involve respecting the choices of the authors and alternatives that do not interfere with their message.

This works and installations may have extremely diverse characteristics and often they can be complex to record and document so according to Huys [41] establishing clear guidelines is the basis and often the only guarantee for the correct exhibit of these artworks. Beside drawings, written guidelines, manuals and photographic documentation, instructional videos of the mounting process made by the artists are becoming usual to help conservators in these tasks.



Figure 6. The installation *Saint George and the Dragon* by Gema Intxausti, 1991, Basque Government Collection: a) packaging system to transport it; b) display resources for its exhibition at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (photos: RDBFAM).



Figure 7. Exhibition systems at the Naia del Castillo exhibition at the Artium Museum in 2004: a) various works from the series named *About Seduction* with *Luciernaga II*, 2002, at the front exhibited on a mannequin displayed on a base; b) hanging system and display case for *Seducitor*, 2002 (photos: Artium).



Figure 8. Display systems: *a-b* *Su Tu Tumba*, by Sahatsa Jauregi, 2017, Provincial Council of Bizkaia (photos: Provincial Council of Bizkaia) and a detail of the pushpins holding the printed cloths from the installation; *c-d* *Domestic Space – Labors* by Naia del Castillo, 2001 and the hanging system with nylon thread used to exhibit the work at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Cantabria (photos: Instagram @luisalonsoatelier); *e-f* Silk dress of *Mask of Seduction* by Javier Pérez, 1997, Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and a detail of the pins that hold it (photos: DCGMB).

Let's talk to the artist... The essential role of artists in the conservation of contemporary art

According to Llamas-Pacheco [44], it is not the conservator's task to decide "what is art and what is not", but proper interpretation of works is indeed a part of contemporary art conservators' responsibility [45].

During the past two decades there has been extendedly discussed how the conservator's interpretation must take into account the symbolic, aesthetic, and conceptual value, in addition to the material aspect and in order to do that artists must be listened to during the decision making process. Along with the already mentioned authors, different theories [46-47] and initiatives have reinforced that "the artist's voice is primary in developing preservation strategies and their participation is essential for future conservation and presentation of their work" [48].

Currently, the need to consult and record the opinion of creators is an assumed methodology in the conservation of contemporary art [49-54]. Gathering artists' opinion can enrich the search for solutions and decision making through the information regarding materials and the intentionality implicit in them as well as the work's plastic discourse [34] together with the guidelines and instructions on its correct display.

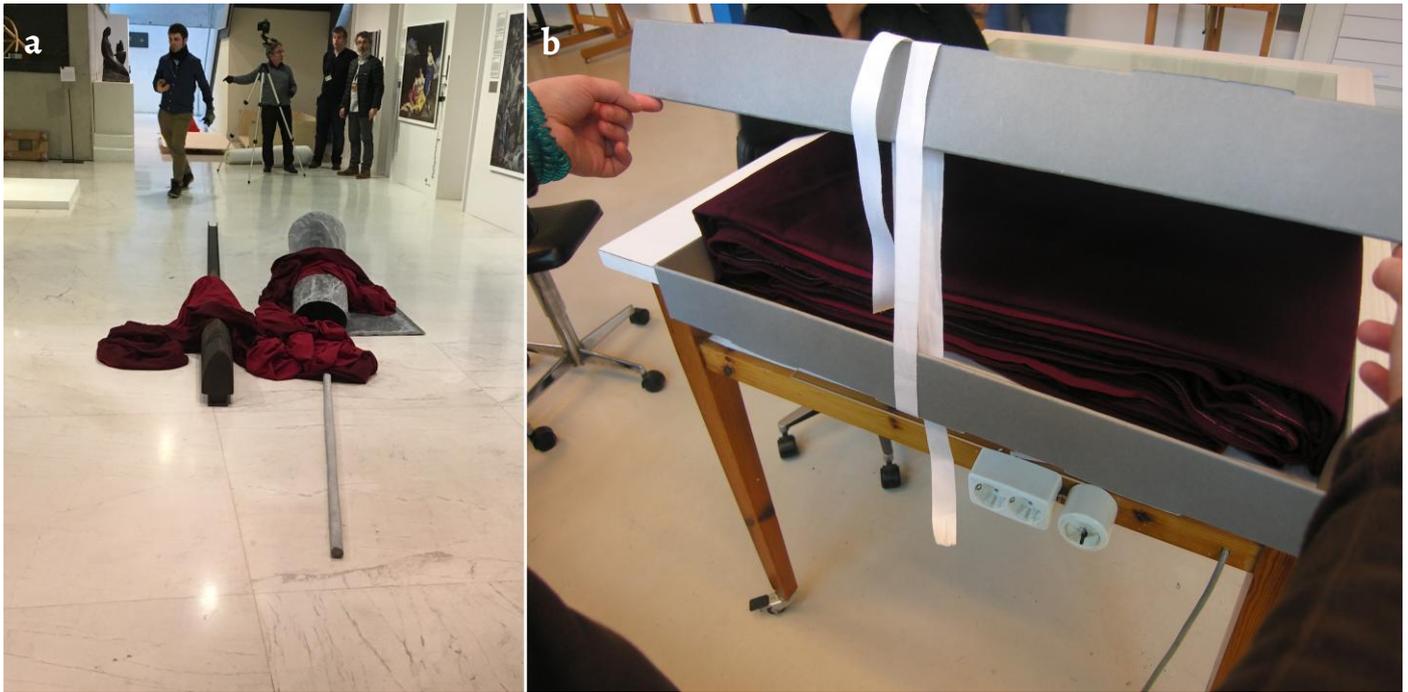


Figure 9. Artist Ángel Bados supervising the mounting of his work *Untitled*, 1985 at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum: *a*) display of the installation conducted by the artist and the conservation department; *b*) storage system for the textile element of the installation (photos: RDBFAM).

The cases studied here evidence that all the measures adopted to guarantee the conservation and correct understanding of these works, both conceptual and material, require the collaboration of the artists and other disciplines involved in the processes of study, mounting and exhibiting of works in galleries and institutions [34-36, 55]. Artist's presence and instructions are needed to install the textile element of his work thus this varies in each display due to its fluid nature (Figure 9 and Figure 10).

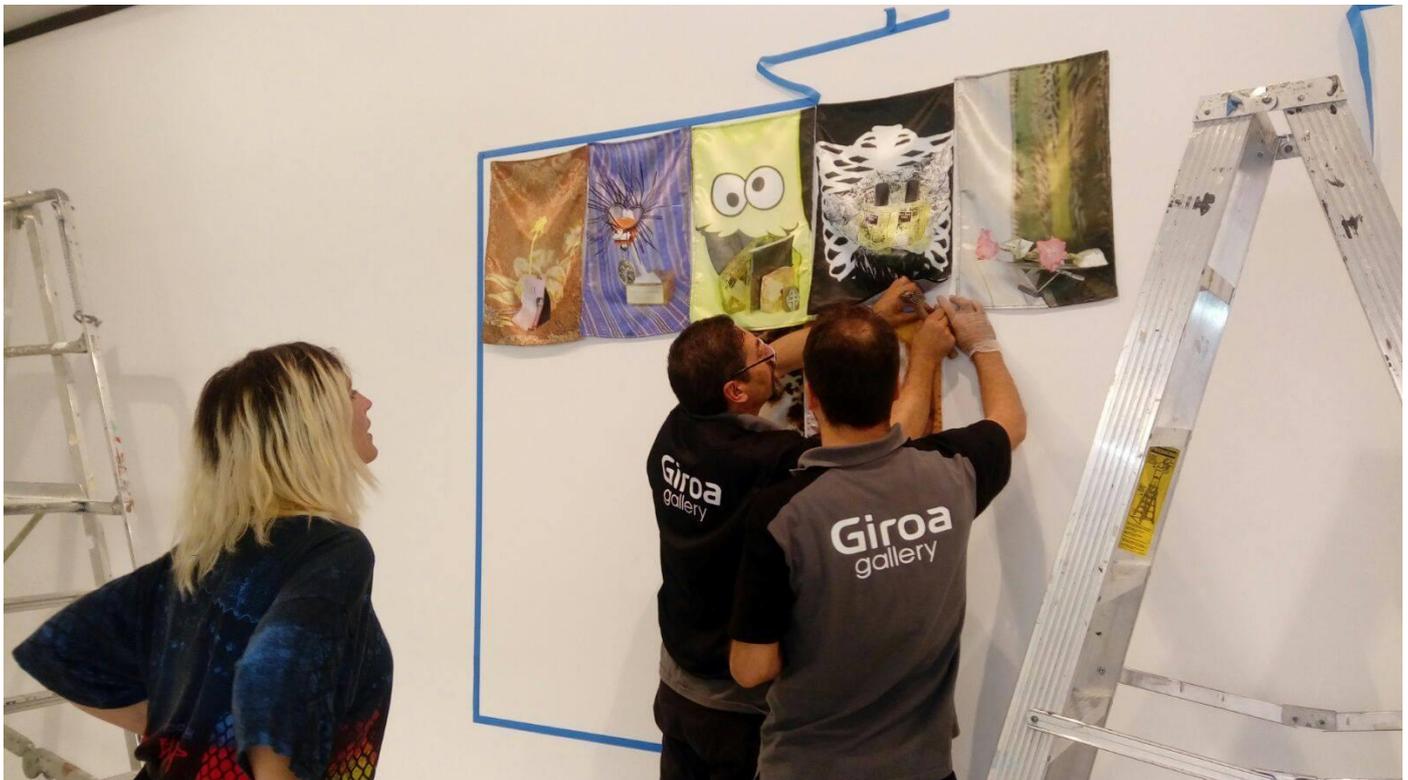


Figure 10. Artist Sahatsa Jauregi supervising the mounting and installation of her work *Su Tu Tumba*, 2017, in the Sala Rekalde. Rekalde Gallery's Facebook.

Undoubtedly, as French points out [30], this sometimes can raise complex issues of communication and interpretation [56-57] and, therefore, complicate the implementation of necessary conservation measures.

Occasionally, authentic “negotiations” can take place between the agents involved in the organization of exhibitions (owners, institutions, artists, curators, etc.), especially during the installation and mounting processes [37] but usually their presence and opinion is rather clarifying and absolutely necessary

Conclusions

The review carried out has allowed us to show the notable presence of multiple artists from the Basque artistic context who, from the 1980s to the present day, have resorted to the use of textile materials and fabrics and whose work is currently preserved in important museums and institutions of contemporary art.

By the 80s, multidisciplinary artists such as Andrés Nagel, Ángel Bados or Juan Luis Moraza began incorporating small textile objects and fabrics into their works. Later, as already noted by Porcel and Artetxe [4], it is undeniable that artists from the early 1990s generation such as Gema Intxausti, Ana Laura Aláez or Txaro Arrazola shared a common interest in exploring and reflecting on concepts of identity and gender through textile materials, a tendency that would later be continued by artists like Naia del Castillo.

The material and formal aspects of the works studied evidence the multiplicity of typologies, materials and exhibition systems that can conditionate and determine their conservation, leaving a field of work to take into consideration in museums and institutions that house and disseminate contemporary art. The conservation of works of contemporary art made with textiles represents a complex specific field that also poses a series of practical and ethical difficulties. This, as Eastop states [58], forces the contemporary art conservator to be continually making decisions that consider, in addition to material and technical factors, those of a conceptual and legal nature.

The presence of experimental works and contemporary typologies such as installations have opened the door to the inclusion of clothing, accessories and other objects related to the field in museums and galleries. This artistic reality, together with the incorporation of synthetic materials of different nature and behaviour, as well as the use of experimental techniques and procedures, necessarily pose different requirements for its conservation.

This is clearly observed in works that incorporate techniques such as screen or digital printing or heavy embroideries and applications expanding the range of possible problems due to the instability of these procedures under deterioration factors such as light or incompatibility between materials.

Likewise, the variety of contemporary artistic typologies presented here stand as a big challenge when it comes to establishing conservation measures, especially for their exhibition and display features. Not all works are shown with simple or systematizable methods and, in fact, the exhibition systems themselves (like thin needles or pushpins) can have a huge impact on the deterioration of these textile-based pieces and become potential deterioration factors themselves.

The complicated balance between the conservation needs of these materials, the artists' requirements or the curatorial and exhibition discourse itself, occasionally leads to serious conservation problems due to prolonged exhibition periods or disregarding other preventive measures during display. In many occasions these predictable accidents could have been avoided with specific preventive measures and display recommendations as the ones mentioned in the text.

After the study carried out in art centres, institutions and museums in charge of their safeguarding, the need to continue researching the materials that make up these works, as well

as the processes used for their creation, is still observed. Registration protocols and correct cataloguing can avoid problems arising from incomplete or incorrect identifications and help establish more effective conservation, restoration, storage and exhibition protocols.

The case studies have also shown how closely conservation is linked to aspects relating to its storage and exhibition protocols, while also highlighting the need for multidisciplinary collaboration between the different fields involved (creation, curatorship, conservation, history, etc.) in order to properly preserve and transmit these works of art.

The information obtained from conversations with the authors during this study has been decisive for the correct understanding of the significance of the materials and techniques used in their production, as well as to assess the importance of their exhibition requirements and conservation needs in order to be thorough and likewise preserve their artistic intention.

It's clear that conservation, exhibition and diffusion of these works involve the understanding of conceptual aspects in addition to purely formal or material ones that can significantly alter their meaning if they are not respected in an integral way. Undoubtedly, the engagement and active participation of artists throughout the various stages of interpreting and presenting their work can be regarded as essential.

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