



BioVANITAS

Reflections about the materialization of Time

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BI VANITAS

Reflections about the materialization of Time

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My mission is to kill time, and time's to kill me in its turn.

How comfortable one is among murderers.

Emil Cioran

Introduction	11
Materialization of the intangible	29
1.1. Time levels in art	35
1.2. Personified Time	41
1.3. The gaze of Time	51
1.3.1. From tradition.....	57
1.3.2. ... to the forefront	74
1.4. BioVanitas	78
1.4.1. Not everything that rots is a BioVanitas	82
1.4.2. Time, matter & (im)material	87
1.4.3. BioVanitas, a multisensory experience	94
1.4.4. Classification of BioVanitas	99
BioVanital dilemmas	111
2.1. The documentation paradox	123
2.1.1. Documentation as a tool.....	126
2.1.2. Documentation as remains	131
2.2. Ars morendi, destruction as creative process	134
2.2.1. The ruin	140

2.2.2. The materials	145
2.2.3. Deterioration factors	152
2.3. Exhibition	158
2.3.1. Sensory exhibition	159
2.3.2. The public.....	167
2.3.3. The display	170
2.4. The storage.....	177
2.4.1. Storing performative Time.....	182
2.5. Intervention criteria.....	188
2.5.1. Intervention: Why, what for, and whom for	191

Three Times 207

3.1. Present: it was not yesterday but tomorrow	215
3.1.1. Preserve 'beauty' (1991-2003).....	216
3.1.2. Now that I say goodbye but I am staying	219
3.2. Past: it is past and nothing can be done	233
3.2.1. Green Man (2010).....	234
3.2.2 Where the ephemeral lies.....	238
3.3. Future: Whatever will be, will be... ..	253
3.3.1. Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis (1975-1986) ...	254
3.3.2. Who will talk about us when we die	259
3.4. Food for thought	277

Conclusions	285
Bibliography	297
Acknowledgments	319



[F. 01] Elsie Ansareo, *Sin Título*. The Misted Glass serie (2009).
Courtesy Elsie Ansareo



Introduction

"We will always disappoint someone. Art disappoints. It is not show and it is not entertainment. It is a sidewalk. It is a focus, it is noise. It's nothing from the other world. Disappointment is conceived, something almost real and boring for the spectators of the show"

Gabriel Orozco

Acceleration. Acceleration is one of the distinctive features of the society in which we live. Everything has to be instantaneous. Everything must be accessible at any time. We have lost the time to enjoy, the *dolce far niente* that is said in Italy, and since Time is money, it is hard for us to accept that leisure time is not wasting time.

This perception of time, a consequence of the society in which we live, has made art go from being enjoyed to being consumed. Therefore, in a culture of rush and consumption, the topic of this research provides a space to breath. A parenthesis to reassess time, to look instead of seeing, to observe, to dwell on the detail and, above all, to reflect through a kind of art that, literally, is being consumed.

The choice of the topic for this doctoral thesis' origin is a personal interest in the concept of time. The perception of time, its understanding, its consequences, and above all the feeling of helplessness product of how time passes without being able to do anything to stop it.

This concern arose from personal and turned to academic through reflections that revolve around the dilemmas posed by time, ephemeral concept and destruction as a creative process. A context in which Time¹, and its materialization, have found their space in the freedom granted by ruin resulting from the creative destruction; what we have branded as *BioVanitas*.

My interest, or curiosity to put it another way, emerges when reconsidering ephemeral artworks into a Restoration context. Something that, at first and at least for me, seemed contradictory: trying to preserve something that was created to disappear. This idea, or rather this oxymoron, led me to investigate ephemeral artworks focusing, surely as a consequence of my personal concerns, on those with special interest in Time and its consequences.

Soon it was established a common thread between these artistic representations and baroque *vanitas*. However, the approach to baroque *vanitas*, showed that the extension of this genre was almost immeasurable. Not only in terms of typologies, but in the genre itself. In addition, after a deep investigation on baroque *vanitas*, the conclusion was that its exhaustive study was not essential for the main objective of

¹ The use of the word Time with a capital letter proposed as it is a specific and expanded concept, to be highlighted and differentiated in the text; understanding it as a global and total / Absolute concept from an Artistic and philosophical perspective, which links it with the inclusion of its use as artistic matter and material.

this research. For this reason, and although I have found them a very interesting genre, baroque vanitas paintings have only been considered as a starting point for this research. A link with the passage of time as a concept that they raise.

However, as the research evolved it showed that, as in baroque vanitas, there were several typologies and that the initial denomination "contemporary vanitas" was too general. This term, "contemporary vanitas", did not focus only on the specific artworks under study, as any vanitas-scented work created in the present could be considered contemporary vanitas.

Not only this historical-artistic reflection was one of the turning points that served as the basis for this research, but also to reconsider and to delimit the study to those artworks with determined specifications that constituted a subcategory within initially was called "contemporary vanitas".

As Time's perception is closely related to socio-cultural environment, and even though some contributions from other cultures such as Japanese have been made, the general approach of the topic has been made from a Western perspective². However, it is necessary to remember that Time is not understood, nor lived, in the same way for every culture.

Eduardo Galeano wrote in *Memoria del Fuego* that Western society understands the world inside boxes, and that all situations and experiences have their corresponding box; but that there are unclassifiable experiences and one of them is the passing of time itself³. These little inclusions are intended to leave the doors open for other viewpoints and future research.

This research does not intend, nor seek, to create a catalogue, neither of vanitas nor of BioVanitas, but to show some examples that may help to understand the dilemmas that these artworks pose, especially into a collection. On the other hand, the no intention to create a closed analysis is underlined too. During the research

² According to Nuria Abramowicz, social, political and cultural bases on which the Western world is based are the inheritance of the Greek civilization, which were created influenced by the Indo-European culture and by some Asia Minor's civilizations such as the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Syrians and Jews. ABRAMOWICZ, N. (2004), *Griega. Mitología*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Gradifco, p. 7.

³ IBARRONDO, J. (2014), *Convertir el tiempo en oro. Los usos del tiempo en el capitalismo*. Madrid, Spain: Catarata. p.12.

period, intentionality, interests, objectives, and even the definition of some concepts have been changed as the topic was developed.

For this reason this study, its reflections and its conclusions, are considered as the product of the current context, thought and trends. They will always be susceptible to change depending on the needs of the artwork, philosophies, studies, or contributions that can enrich it. Quoting Hiltrud Schinzel⁴: "The archenemy of modern art and the main cause of damage is ignorance, and to eliminate it, while also replacing it with respect, should be our goal".

From our point of view, to understand the use of Time as a material, it is necessary to propose certain praxis to experience it from different prisms. Not rigid approaches or doctrines, but permeable one. Continually evolving theories that consider the evolution of thought. For this reason, this study is understood as a reflection, as the first step in that direction.

At the beginning of this research, which derives from my master's thesis, Restoration dilemmas and exhibition problems posed by what was originally classified as "contemporary vanitas" were considered the main topics. The initial idea was to analyse different exhibition and performance difficulties of those artworks which use Time as matter and material. The spotlight was planned to be on artworks made with biological elements, mainly food and plants, in which Time materializes through its destruction to complete.

Under this premise, this research would refer to the materialization of Time, the intangible, focusing on the complex posture of Restorers. The preservation of a permanent changing artwork, its destruction, and the correct interpretation of the message while maintaining unalterable the artists' original ideas and concepts. The experimentation grade implied by the artistic hybridization derived from destruction carries new questions before any intervention, also originated by the inherent nature of these artworks and by the way in which they are perceived. These new conditions raise the need for a modification in conservation-restoration's competencies.

The exhibition and the proper transmission of the message also turned out to be one of the main axes of this research. An area to raise some conditions and needs that are not contemplated in other artistic manifestations, such as the sensory aspect. In

⁴ SCHINZEL, H. (2004), *Touching vision : essays on restoration theory and the perception of art*. Brussels: Belgium. University of Brussels, p. 131.

addition, the fact of respecting its temporal essence, and their inherent decay, can cause alterations in other close artworks, generating once again conflicts between exhibition and conservation criteria.

As the research progressed these issues, although important and relevant, took a back seat when considering conceptual aspects. The experience and knowledge acquired during these years of research have led to substantial changes not only in content but also in the initial objectives that we had set for ourselves. However, this transformation is understood as something natural, the result of a deep study of the matter itself, which is shaped according to all the new questions and impressions.

We considered that before facing the intervention or the exhibition criteria of the artworks, it was necessary to raise a series of reflections on concepts such as ruin and ephemerality, among others. To suggest the questions before addressing the answers. *BioVanitas* offered a space for reflection, to reconsider how some concepts are understood, an approach to these artworks' dilemmas from a new perspective. For this reason, the main axes of this research were not considered obtaining answers, but to formulate questions.

The idea of developing a protocol, or a guide, containing the appropriate guidelines for good practice was considered initially. However, after what could be considered as a deep study, and reflection it was concluded that a kind of specific questionnaire could be created, and modifiable for each work, but never a general guideline as each *BioVanitas* raised a series of particular problems, both physical and reflexive, that invalidated the possibility of this guide.

As mentioned before, this study is designed as an open reflection, where any absolute solution, nor truth that answers all the questions can not be found. However, as we considered necessary to rethink certain issues, it will be done from a perspective that, keeping the distances, is based on the Socratic method as it uses the question as a tool to get the answer. Therefore, "reflection" could be the appropriate word to define this doctoral thesis.

Objectives

The objectives set out aim to consider: why, what for and for whom of *BioVanitas*, while questioning such normalized aspects as the Apollonian criteria. A change of perspective which encourages rethinking things instead of accepting them. To this end, this is what it is proposed as the main objective of this thesis:

- The definition, development, classification, contextualization, and study of the *BioVanitas* concept.

The approach to this objective necessarily entails the achievement of the following secondary objectives:

- To study Time's materialization from a Western perspective.
- To review the concepts time and ephemeral. Analysis of their presence, and their evolution in art history, in order to understand Time's materialization in fleeting-nature artworks made with organic materials.
- Contextualize the evolution of vanitas genre from the 15th century to the present.
- Study, creation, and development of an appropriate terminology for the *BioVanitas*.
- Consult and get to know, as far as possible, the opinion of those artists who develop *BioVanitas*, as well as those institutions that have *BioVanitas* in their collection.
- To reflect on the main dilemmas suggested by *BioVanitas*: repetition, remains, originality, documentation, intervention criteria, exhibition, and storage.
- The study of representative cases, in order to delve deeper into the dilemmas posed by *BioVanitas* in collection.
- To raise questions and new perspectives in order to consider artworks as *BioVanitas*.

Methodology

In order to carry out the objectives set, a theoretical-practical investigation is proposed, based on the analysis of the materialization of Time, the concept of ruin, the ephemeral, and destruction as a creative process.

First the development of a theoretical framework which links the concept of Time with art history through a historical-artistic journey. This will serve to contextualize, but never to create a specific catalogue, focusing on baroque vanitas paintings as this genre has a special interest in the *tempus fugit* concept. This context has been elaborated through an exhaustive bibliographic review on the origin, evolution, and typology of *vanitas* genre. Due to its relevance, *vanitas* have not only been limited to Spain but to other countries where it was popular too, such as the Netherlands, France, and Italy.

This review, which serves as a nexus, will lead to ephemeral art and to the investigation of certain artistic manifestations that use Time as an active agent. Once the search parameters have been established, we will locate works (preferably into collections), with the stipulated requirements, and that form, or have formed part of exhibitions to illustrate, and explain different typologies of Bio*Vanitas*.

Besides, it was considered necessary to know the own opinion, and the experience, of those artists who create through the destruction. For this reason, we tried to contact as many as possible Bio*Vanitas* artists in order to know their perspective.



[F. 02] Interview with Pablo Mesa Capella through FaceTime (28/0/2017).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 03] Interview with Anya Gallaccio through Teams (13/07/2021).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

The first artist to contact with, and who still keeps in touch with this investigation, was Pablo Mesa Capella (1982), who explained his ephemeral artworks, especially *INNESTI* (2015) [F. 02].

Peter de Cupere (1970), was interviewed in Belgium. During this interview, he was asked not only about his artwork *Eggs* (1996), but also about his artistic vision. The aim was to get closer to his ideas and approaches, emphasizing his special interest in smell-artworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic made impossible an arranged meeting with Claire Morgan (1980). However, it was possible to interview Anya Gallaccio (1963) and talk about her artworks in depth, which helped to understand, a little more, the metalanguage of *BioVanitas* and thus bring a new vision to certain ideas [F. 03].

Unfortunately, during 2020 Lois Weinberg (1947-2020), whose artwork *Green Man* (2010) will be discussed, passed away before being interviewed.

The investigation showed that as important as the opinions and approaches was to know, or experiment, the creation process first-hand. So, in 2018 a personal experiment titled *Pilar*, image on the cover, was carried out in BilbaoArte Foundation [F. 04]. This installation, *Pilar*, made with organic materials, a *BioVanitas*, became a perfect scenario to experience the materialization of Time to the last consequences.

In 2019, a new opportunity appeared to work alongside with the floral artist Mary Lennox (1988) creating *Fieldwork*, an ephemeral installation for *Flora. International Flower Festival*, in Córdoba (Spain) [F. 05].



[F. 04] Making of the ephemeral installation *Pilar* at BilbaoArte Foundation (2018).
Photo: Pedro Muñoz Fora



[F. 05] During Mary Lennox's *Fieldwork* creation. *Flora. International Flower Festival* in Córdoba (Spain) (2019).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

This experience was very useful to learn how a professional artwork designed to transport the public on a personal journey, and where senses, specially smell, take on great importance was developed in different stages. From ideas becoming real to execution, display, and public's reaction.

This particular use of Time in artistic creation implies new needs in the field of Restoration, and despite being an incipient topic, currently there are no protocols or guides that help to manage the problems posed by creative destruction in collection.

Under this premise, and with the intention of having a more heterogeneous view of the situation, several institutions, national and international, were contacted because of the presence of *BioVanitas* in their collections. One of the first interviews, and institutional visit, was to Ainhoa Sanz, Conservation and Restoration Coordinator at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Spain), and Aitziber Velasco, also belonging to the museum's conservation area. They explained some challenges posed by Anselm Kiefer's *Das Sonnenschiff (Sun Boat)* (1984–95) and its organic matter.

In order to learn about different institutions' perspective regarding *BioVanitas* with similar characteristics, we visited the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona (Spain) and the Serralves Foundation in Porto (Portugal). Nuria Noguer, Head of Conservation-Restoration at MACBA, and Alejandro Castro, also from the same department, explained and showed the storage of *Schokoladenmeer (Chocolate Sea)* (1970) by Dieter Roth (1930-1998). Filipe Duarte, Collection Manager at the Serralves Foundation, made possible the access to two other works by Roth *P.O.T.A. A VFB* (1969) and *Über Meer (Over the sea)* (1969).



[F. 06] Internship at the S.M.A.K. (2020).
Boter en Bijenwas' research.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 07] Internship at the S.M.A.K. (2020).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

On the other hand, Sally Malenka, Senior Conservator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) in Philadelphia (United States), and Allison McLaughlin, Collection Assistant at the same museum, answered questions about Zoe Leonard's (1961) iconic *Strange fruit* (1997), and provided more information which was very useful to understand, a little more in depth, this iconic work.

In addition, it was carried out an internship at Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), in Ghent (Belgium). Iris Paschalidis, Head of Collections; Frances Berry, restorer-conservator; Thibaut Verhoeven, Researcher/Curator Collection, and Rebecca Heremans, restorer-conservator of the S.M.A.K. helped with the study of *Green Man* (2010) by the mentioned Weinberberg and *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4 / bis* (1975-1986) by Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). This doctoral internship made possible to experience first-hand BioVanitas' challenges in collection, but also to reconsider and rethink certain aspects that a merely theoretical approach would not have made possible [F. 06 - 07].

Unfortunately, COVID-19 disrupted another arranged internship at the Tate Modern in London (England). However, virtually meetings with Deborah Cane, Art Installation and Sculpture Conservation Manager at Tate Modern, Carla Flack and Carien Van Aubel, both sculpture and installation curators, made possible to inquire about Anya Gallaccio's *Preserve 'beauty'* (1991-2003).

We will conclude our reflections with the study of three works in the collection. The first artwork belongs to the Tate Modern collection, and the second and third artworks belong to the S.M.A.K.'s collection. These three artworks will be a reference to elaborate, only when it is needed, tests to be used as basis for reflecting on the



[F. 08] Elaboration of *Green Man* test 1 (2020).

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 09] Elaboration of *Preserve 'beauty'* test (2021).

Photo: Pedro Muñoz Fora

questions arise around them as they unite all the aspects developed in the previous sections, for the elaboration of a personal proposal on each [F. 08 - 09].

It is important to underline that the arranged internships would have allowed the first-hand study of these three artworks. However, the circumstances derived from COVID-19 modified the original plans, teaching, once again, that nothing is certain when it comes to Bio*Vanitas*.

State of the art

Nowadays, the challenges and casuistry that arise in relation to contemporary art in collections are topics treated with relative assiduity; however, they are almost always focused on a single aspect: conservation, even if the need goes further.

This research is focused on the peculiarities of ephemeral artworks in which Time is materialized. Time's dual nature in ephemeral art constitutes a problem that manifests itself at different levels. For years, and to date, national and international congresses have expressed their interest in the lack of protocols for these artworks.

As verified the consequences of Time's materialization, as the concern for the perishable and fleeting essence of some artworks, have been the subject of discussion in several Congresses that have become references for specialists. For instance, *From Marble to Chocolate*. These conferences organized in 1995 by the Tate Gallery Conference in London, among other topics, dealt with the conservation of modern sculpture in the 19th and 20th centuries; in 1997 the symposium entitled *Modern Art-who cares?* Discussed ten specific cases of modern sculpture; two years later, in 1999, the conferences organized by The Getty Conservation Institute, in Los Angeles, *Mortality Immortality?* Showed the different challenges that the conservation of contemporary art. More recently, in 2019, we could mention the congress held in Mexico City (Mexico) entitled *Living Matter / La materia viva*.

Some professionals and institutions, through their publications, highlight the need for new positions and studies in these issues. Among the extensive bibliography, it is highlighted Frank Matero's *Ethics and Policy in Conservation. Conservation Perspectives* (2000) published in The GCI Newsletter; or the electronic magazine CeROArt that published in 2011 the article titled *MAP as a conservation method for contemporary art with foodstuffs: three case studies*, where three artworks made with

organic materials (*Strange fruit* by Zoe Leonard; *Butter and Beeswax* by Joseph Beuys and *Eggs* by Peter De Cupere) were analysed.

Moreover, several researchers have also become aware of this topic, and this is reflected in researches based on Time and its consequences. In 2009 Lizzie Frasco published at the University of Pennsylvania *The Contingency of Conservation: Changing Methodology and Theoretical Issues in Conserving Ephemeral Contemporary Artworks with Special Reference to Installation Art*, where she spoke about the problems of conservation of ephemeral artworks. Two years later, in 2011 Carmen González García's doctoral dissertation, *Temporal Artifacts. The use of time as a material in contemporary artistic practices* developed the importance of Time in art, Artistic Times and above all what she defined as Performative Time.

In 2016 Emily Rose Vanags' Master's Thesis, *Replacement, Repair, or Obsolescence: Ephemeral Sculpture and Conservation Priorities* (2016) at the University of Newcastle (United Kingdom), dealt with the challenges presented by some artworks of these features.

At the same time, there are various publications that deal with Time and human being's concern from the philosophy and the anthropology. In 1988 José Fernández Arenas in *Arte efímero y espacio estético*, studied art from different perspectives, analysing materials, spaces, and even senses; and in 2006 the philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann's *Aesthetics of the ephemeral*, explained the evolution of the ephemeral through history. All this shows that even if Time and ephemeral, as concepts, are topics that have been treated assiduously, they still multiple different perspectives to tackle them.

As we can see, the analysis of the ephemeral and of Time is a topic that, although it has been treated on many occasions and from different perspectives, still has many aspects to address.

Besides, there are many national and international festivals, that raise the concept of the ephemeral from different perspectives, either due to the nature of their materials or because of their short duration in time. For example *The Granada Millennium Biennale (Bienal del Milenio Reino de Granada)*, organized by Dr. Ana García, from the University of Granada (Spain). García explained that for more than a month, in 2011, the city of Granada became a stage for national and international artists to show their ephemeral creations in different disciplines and formats.

A similar vision regarding the visibility of ephemeral art had *Des-Adarve* in Tudela (Navarre, Spain). In 2018, while visiting, its curators, Marta Pérez and Mikel Pau Casado, explained that since 2017 it gave visibility, in significant enclaves of the city, to ephemeral art proposals from different disciplines. 2019 was its last edition. In this sense, it is also important to mention *Flora. International Flower Festival* the ephemeral festival mentioned before and the *Floralien Festival*⁵ that takes place in Ghent (Belgium) and it is a very significant event for floral artists.

All the artworks mentioned, and the extensive research made, have showed how Time has become another working tool, and how its dual nature, as matter and material, has led to significant changes in terms of conservation-restoration approaches and interventions.

The needs raised by the use of Time, pose and will continue suggesting difficult questions to answer. From its display to possible interventions, Time as matter, demands adaptable solutions to its specific needs.

This dissertation, although seeks reflection and to combat the speedy society, it is still an accelerated essay. For its elaboration, it has been considered the creation of short chapters, with not very long, and quick-read sentences. After all, we are the result of our culture into the maelstrom. The structure is designed, or at least that is the intention, for the concatenation of ideas in a fluid, and easy-to-follow way. Each chapter tries to have an extension that provides a pleasant reading, accompanied by illustrative images to support the explained theories. As it is said, a picture is worth a thousand words, and after all we live in a visual culture.

To finish, or to start it always depends on the perspective, I would like to apologize to those who confront these pages searching for answers. I am afraid that these reflections may raise more questions than solutions. However, you are invited to venture into this reading, who knows if you will end up finding any truth...

⁵ The festival was going to take place during our stay, so we contacted the organization to find out if it would be possible to attend as an assistant. Unfortunately, the circumstances arising from the Covid-19, once again, cancelled the festival and with it our possibility to be part of it.



[F. 10] Pablo Mesa Capella, *Acqua Botanica* (2015).
Courtesy Pablo Mesa Capella



Materialization of the intangible

1

Nikolai Vsevolodovich: In the Apocalypse, the angel swears that time will no longer exist.

Kirillov: I know. What is said there is true. Accurate and intelligible. When all humanity reaches happiness, time will not exist, because it will no longer be necessary. It's a very true thought.

Stavrogin: Where will it be put?

Kirillov: It will not be put it anywhere. Time is not an object, but an idea. It will disappear from mind.

Does Time Exist? Does it have a beginning? Has it got an end? Where does it come from? There are many questions that are posed when reflecting on Time and, although answering them in their entirety seems impossible, it is likely that there is no single answer either. As Saint Augustine said⁶: “So, what is the time? I know what it is, if you don't ask me. But when I want to explain it to the questioner, I don't know ”.

Time is an ambiguous concept. It is abstract, it is exact, it is intangible, it is physical... As Juan Ibarrondo⁷ points out, it is not possible to define it like the rest of things because from its passing, we conceive and shape our understanding of the world.

Time is linked to Human being's existence. When we die, our physical time ends, our individual time ends. However, not does so our absolute time as we can live through memory.

Principia Mathematica (1687) was the first mathematical model for time and space, where Isaac Newton stated that both concepts acted independently and in which time was understood as something linear. Some years later, in 1915, Albert Einstein postulated his general theory of relativity where time and space are intertwined and in which time become the fourth dimension. Nowadays, this theory continues to be the basis for our space-time model⁸.

The way in which we understand Time has repercussions on several aspects, such as social, political, economic. We observe, like many people before us, how thought constructs the idea of Time in societies, and how these in turn establish the foundations of individual perception. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben noted⁹:

⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. 11, 14. The question of time in Augustinian thought has not been studied in Pineda, J.A., *Los mitos del Gran Tiempo and the meaning of life (philosophy of time)*, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid 2006, pp. 153-168. Quoted in VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, L. (2011), *Vanitas. retórica visual de la mirada*. Madrid, España: Encuentro, p. 72.

⁷ IBARRONDO, Op. Cit.,pp. 45-47.

⁸ HAWKING, S. (2002), *El universo en una cáscara de nuez*. Barcelona, España: Editorial Crítica. p. 31-35.

⁹ CONCHEIRO, L. (2016), *Contra el tiempo. Filosofía práctica del instante*. Barcelona, España: Anagrama. p. 108

Every culture is above all a certain experience of time, and a new culture is not possible without a modification of that experience. Therefore, the original task of an authentic revolution is no longer simply "to change the world", but also and above all "to change the time".

But how can we change something so uncertain? While for some thinkers time has its origin in the big bang¹⁰, for others it does not even exist. It is not real, it is nothing more than an illusion, a mental existence that causes changes and that constitutes one of the greatest question for humans.

Whether it is real, or an illusion, whether it has a beginning or not, the truth is that the evolution of Time as a concept, and its associated thought, has resulted in various classifications such as: absolute time, mythical time or biological time, among others. This wide range offers a broad view of the issue. Endless possibilities to address the doubts that it raises, but above all, it suggests multiple perspectives to reflect on Time in art.

We could say, without fear of being wrong, that the presence of Time in art is a fact, and it is our main question. This worry coincides with José Camón's book, *El tiempo en el arte (Time in art)*, where the author emphasizes a very interesting nuance pointing out that, mainly, time has been used to contextualize artworks, forgetting about their internal time¹¹. This kind of time which has heart and that contributes to the growth of mind and spirit.

Aforementioned clarification, about the internal and external artworks' time, proposes the existence of different temporal levels in artistic creation. Not only times related to creation and art history, but other kind of Times that define the artwork and to which we would like to dedicate special attention.

¹⁰ In 1968 Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose proved that time had a beginning with a Gravitational Collapse and Cosmology article that won second prize in a contest sponsored by the Gravity Research Foundation. HAWKING, Op. Cit., p. 41.

¹¹ CAMÓN AZNAR, J. (1972), *El tiempo en el arte*. Madrid, España: Organización Sala, p. 7

1.1. Time levels in art

One of the most famous art legends tells how in 1494, after an unexpected snowfall in Florence, Piero de Medici, who was governor of the city, ordered Michelangelo (Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564) to build a snowman.

Despite the fact that the sculpture disappeared when it melted, and only endures as an anecdote, its contemporaries described it as one of the most beautiful artworks of the artist.

Many people considered this order an abuse of power, and a waste of the artist's talent, as he was forced to work with a perishable material such as snow¹².

But would it be fair to qualify it as waste only because it was ephemeral? What does continuity in time have that contributes a higher value?

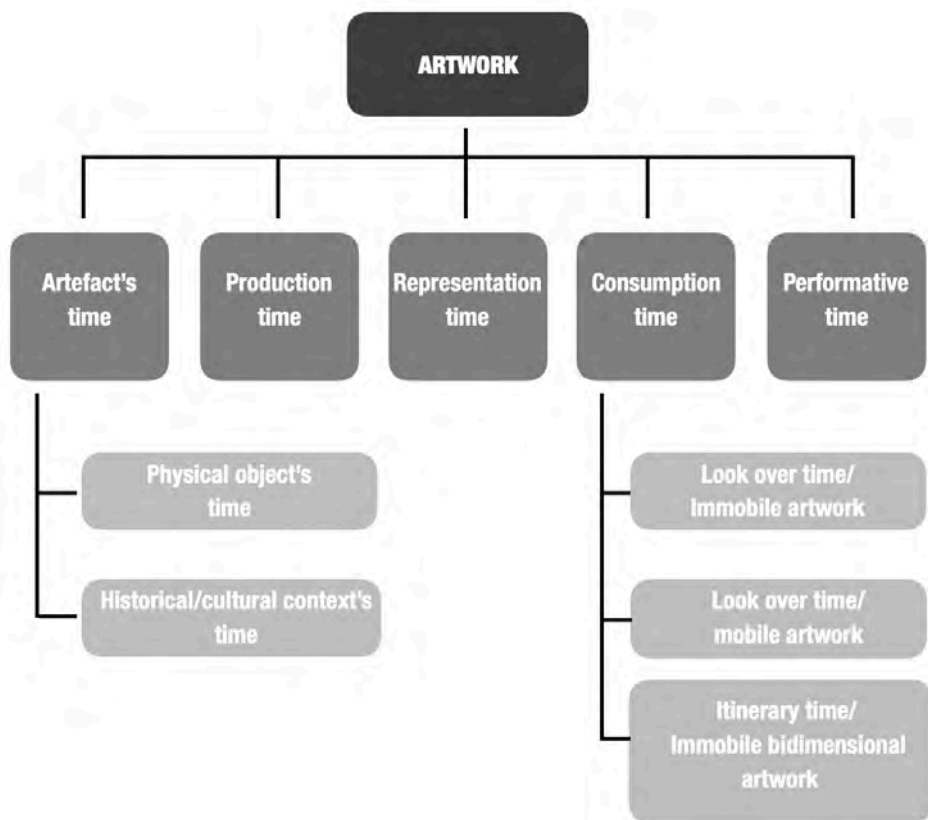
As mentioned before, Time is a concept that we find in our daily reality, but it is not something exclusive to certain aspects. Art also has its own time, and we are not referring only to what we could understand by the existence, or life span, of the artwork.

Carmen González García's¹³ scheme will be the reference to evidence Time's levels in art [F. 11]. These times, or levels, are formed by understanding the artwork as an object, and they relate the artworks' construction, and contextualization periods¹⁴.

¹² CAMPBELL JOHNSTON, R. en *El destino de toda carne* en FAIRBAIRN, Flora, & VARENNE, Olivier. (2010), *On & On*. Madrid, España: La casa encendida, p. 21.

¹³ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, C. (2011), *Artefactos temporales. El uso del tiempo como material en las prácticas artísticas contemporáneas*, Colección Vitor 279, Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, p. 112.

¹⁴ This scheme, except Performative Time, is not an unpublished classification since it starts from different catalogues made by different authors. In section 1.1. Times level in Art, as its subsections, we will start at all times from the conclusions reached by González García. *Ibid*, pp.109-209.



[F. 11] Carmen González García's Time levels in art scheme.

The mentioned diagram shows that artworks have 5 main times: artefact's time, production time, representation time, consumption time, and performative time. These times and other five secondary times arose from the principals, appear directly from the artwork.

1. Artefact's time:

Artefacts' time¹⁵ arises from the idea of the artwork's existence. Since the artwork exists physical, it has a time to which it is subject and that can influence it in different ways. But, this first differentiation is not limited only to temporal classification, as it also depends, as we can see in the diagram, on the object's and historical/cultural time.

The object's time refers to the physical time that degrades, modifies, mutates or even destroys the object. However, as González García affirms, there are theories that only contemplate the existence of this temporal sublevel when the alteration produced by time is only part of the conception.

It is this first sublevel, which generally, the conservation-restoration team, and institutions want to stop to conserve the main qualities of the object without modifications and keep it in its original conditions.

Historical/cultural context's time, locates and relates artistic creation with its time. Through this differentiation, we can add more data about the artwork that helps to understand it better.

2. Production time

Production time¹⁶ is understood as the artwork's creation period, both physical and conceptual, and as it depends on the artist one can be more important than the other. This period is usually manifested by the signature, the date, etc., but in

¹⁵ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, Op. Cit, pp.112-119.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.119-122.

addition the artwork's physical production time also leaves a trace that tells about its history.

3. Representation time

Representation time¹⁷ shows the different strategies that have been used in Art to make the presence of time palpable in a representative space. For example, the representation of sequences, the personification of time through allegorical figures, devices that reflect the passage of time, the consequences of time on inanimate or living elements, memories, etc.

4. Consumption time

Consumption time¹⁸ it is the time that the public needs to appreciate, understand, and enjoy the artwork. It is the time in which the link between public and artwork is created. In this category come into play all the resources that the artists use to create the different attention spots and highlight what they consider most relevant.

This time level is referred to consumption level, reception and contemplation, so it is easy to understand that it is itemized into three subsections that include: look over time, for mobile and immobile artworks, and itinerary time.

Look over time for immobile artwork refers to the time that people use to surround, or examine, the inert artwork from a unique view point, or from all possible angles.

Look over time for mobile artwork, it is the interval needed to appreciate dynamic artworks in a determined time; that is, those artworks that are dynamic like a projection. At this point, it is interesting to note that the way in which we appreciate the duration of the artwork is directly related to its own dynamism.

This recognition time, which exists only if someone is watching, depends exclusively on the recipients, since they are the ones who determine the

¹⁷ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, Op. Cit., p. 135-171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.122-133.

recognition time span, which does not have to be equal to the entire duration of the work.

Itinerary time¹⁹, which Umberto Eco refers to as “enjoyment time”, is that to enjoy the artistic representation, and where the details are appreciated.

5. Performative time

Performative time²⁰, it is a time dimension used only for artworks that, as González García says, “are used up in time”. At this level, time acts as an active, and creative agent, forming part of the original conception of the artwork.

Both, levels and temporal sublevels, mentioned, can justify the artwork independently and serve to understand that there is more than one useful time to appreciate artistic manifestations.

In this case, due to the research's topic, **performative time** will be emphasized, but all the other times, that also complete the vision of our study, will be considered too.

This research considers that, **performative time** refers to those artworks with a limited life span. In our case, what we will call *BioVanitas*, where immaterial time becomes, a physical and tangible, material which uses the alterations and modifications that itself generates to complete the artwork through its degradation.

This constant metamorphosis of the artwork is not only a change for itself. Due to its consistent transformation, it turns an apparent static artwork into dynamic. In this way, it does not only alter the artwork, but also changes its temporal levels.

Recognition time of the immobile work becomes mobile, subordinating its **itinerary time** to a precise moment.

¹⁹ This temporal level has many meanings, but the term is taken from Bernard Lamblin and relates the optical path to the spatial path. GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, Op. Cit., p.129.

²⁰ The name of this temporal level is directly related to the performance, due to the representative and active character that time has in artistic creations. Ibid, p. 200-209.

Performative and object's time, are two temporal levels that question the protocols, and the basic norms established by conservators, restorers, and institutions for those more "conventional" artworks, such as painting or sculpture.

As the need of time's traces and its consequences, which sometimes can carry out the absolute destruction, are needed to complete these artworks we can only say "...also what it is beautiful has to die". With these words from the thinker Friedrich Schiller²¹, let us start reflecting on materialization of Time and perishable art.

²¹ SCHILLER, F. (1965), *Sämtliche Werke*, edit. Por G. Fricke y H. G. Göpfert, vol. 1º, 4º ed., München, pp. 242 ("Nänie"). Quoted in ADORNO; T. W. (1992), *Teoría estética*. Madrid, España: Taurus, p. 46.

1.2. Personified Time

Among the different perspectives to understand art, why not do it from Time's view? Why not interpret artworks as a personal materialization of a moment? Either, it is an action or a significant act, art has been a way of reflecting events. From cave scenes to the most avant-garde proposals, art retains happenings, crystallizing them from its particular vision and showing like this the relation between Time and Art.

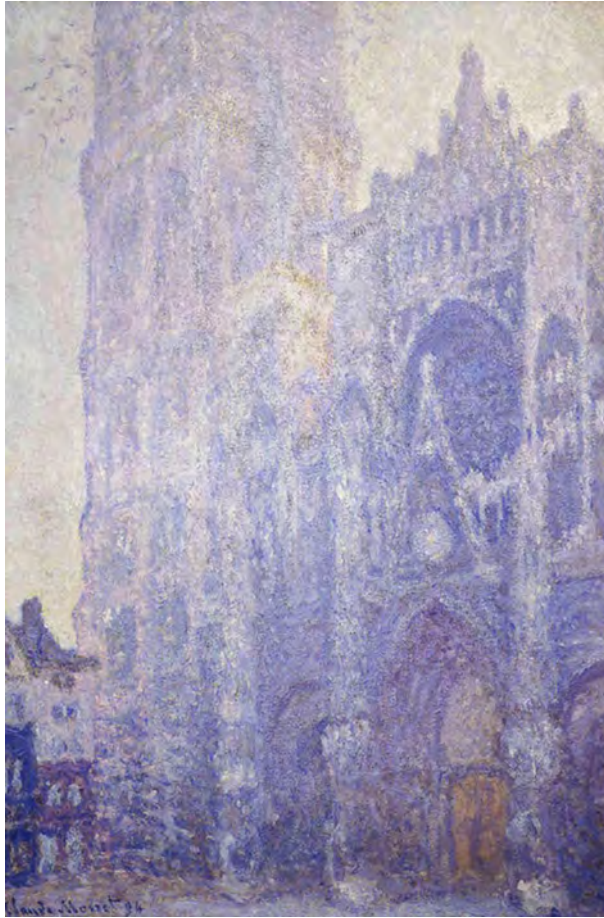
Time's representation has had a place in several artistic manifestations. Assiduously, humans have used different artistic expression to declare this inquisitiveness, and the idea of Time has materialized throughout history under different representations and iconographies.

Many artistic disciplines would be useful to analyse this materialization, such as painting, sculpture, installation, literature, music, theatre, etc. However, in this brief review, which has no greater objective than Time's presence contextualization in art, we will focus on some artworks that, we consider, personify Time in an evident, and varied way.

Since Time's presence in art dates back to prehistory, we consider it appropriate to set a starting date for this contextualization. We will take Impressionism (1872-1882) as a starting point, as considering that this movement produced a fissure about time's perception, and representation in art.

Impressionism tried to capture what the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) called "the decisive moment". Capturing the moment was the premise. To freeze something fleeting and intangible as Time and make it material through canvases. In this artistic movement, light was an indispensable factor, and artists used it to achieve their objective.

In the *Rouen Cathedral* series (1890) Claude Monet (1840-1926) represents the Rouen Cathedral from the same point but at different hours and days in a year [F. 12]. With the simple use of colour ranges and signs to the different tonal nuances related to the moment in which the artwork was made, Monet captured Time, the moment, in a subtle but effective way. Monet's use of colour makes viewers



[F. 12] Claude Monet. *Rouen Cathedral; Morning-White harmony* (1894). Detail of the series *Rouen Cathedral*.

conscience about how Time modifies the object. The way we perceive the image, the scene itself, is not the same depending on the moment of day and the season. The object does not change, but its appearance, and our perception, do. It is Time which produces this metamorphosis, and this Time is personified through colour.

When referring to personified Time, we mean the use of resources that materialize it, such as colour in Monet's work. However, the clearest example to understand this personification would be the use of clocks as, currently, we easily associate the concept of Time with this object.



[F. 13] Salvador Dalí. *The Persistence of Memory* (1931).

Image from Mike Steele. 

Maybe Salvador Dalí's (1904-1989) *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) is the most famous artwork, and the first that comes to mind, with a clock as protagonist [F. 13]. In this painting the softened clocks allude to Einstein's space-time theory and also in 1938 became the origin to the series of metaphysical-surrealist still life paintings that Dalí dedicated to his friend Federico García Lorca²².

For this composition, the artist uses different tools to materialize Time. Firstly, Dalí uses a deformed, but still perfectly legible, clock, and he also, adds sunset colours to emphasize the precise moment. With these two resources, he manages to move us to a specific moment, and stop it. Time has lost its passing to remain immobile in this eternal instant.

²² In 1930 Salvador Dalí showed his peculiar clocks in *Premature ossification of a railway station*. CASTILLA DEL PINO, C. (2000); *El bodegón: el orden, lo inmóvil, lo muerto El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 123-124.



[F. 14] Paul Cézanne. *The Black Marble clock* (1869-70).



[F. 15] Juan Gris. *The Watch (The Sherry Bottle)* (1912).

Following this literal representation of Time, clocks can be represented in different ways. There is not an only way to do it, and it does not have to be a faithful representation of the object.

They can be deformed clocks, sand clocks, sun clocks, clocks with or without hands, etc. The important thing is that the presence of Time is understood, regardless of the way in which the artist decides to represent it.

It is a very effective way to visualize Time and, to play with its concept depending on intentions, since each representation has its own meaning, as we see in the following examples by Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Juan Gris (1887-1927).

In Cézanne's *Still Life with black clock* (1869-70) [F. 14], it is quickly identifiable of the clock located on the right of the composition. Looking at this painting closely, it can be appreciated that the clock has no hands, but really they are not necessary to understand what it is.

The artist stops the Time expressing it on the canvas and eliminating the hands or, as Eco²³ defines them, "toothed wheels, so painful and lacerating that they tear the days and tear the hours".

In the other picture, *The Watch* (1912) [F. 15], Gris represents an easily identifiable pocket watch in the middle of the painting. In this case, hands have been represented, but they are not necessary to identify the object. However, in addition to Gris' painting, it is important to mention that he also introduced, for the first time, a printed literary motif, two poems by Apollinaire that made reference to lost love and the passage of time²⁴.

Stephen Kern, modern European intellectual and cultural history specialist, points out that after Cézanne's *Black Clock* [F. 13] he did not find any representation of clocks in Western majors art until Gris' *The Watch*²⁵ [F. 14].

²³ ECO, U. (2005), *Historia de la belleza a cargo de Umberto Eco*. Barcelona, España: Lumen. p. 394.

²⁴ Miriadax (2020). *El Cubismo en la cultura moderna. Un curso del Museo Reina Sofía y de la Fundación Telefónica* (3.ª edición). [Video].

²⁵ This work was shown for the first time in *Sectio d'Or* exhibition at the Boétie gallery in Paris in October 1912, where it caused a great commotion, and was the consecration of cubist collage. CASTILLA DEL PINO, Op. Cit., p. 123.



[F. 16] Joan Brossa. *Kembo*, 1986 (1988). Pic by Haizea Salazar Basañez at *Poesía Brossa* exhibition at the Artium museum, Vitoria (Spain) (2018).

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

JUNE 19, 1967

[F. 17] On Kawara. *DATE PAINTINGS* (1966-2013).  

However, this statement, as Carlos Castilla assures, could not be entirely correct when a clock face is found in Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1911)²⁶.

As we can imagine, the use of clocks in artworks has also evolved, and artists such as Robert Rauscherbeg (1925-2008) in *Third time painting* (1961), or Joan Brossa (1919-1998) in *Kembo* (1988) [F. 16] went beyond representation when incorporating them physically.

The use of real clocks adds a third dimension to creations that have gradually become free from two-dimensionality, giving Time the fourth dimension.

The truth is, that such a literal representation of Time, with the use of a clock itself, is not necessary as other resources can be used. In the following cases, we will see how the alphanumeric language can also be a valid tool for Time's personification.

An example of other kind of representation is the Japanese artist On Kawara (1932-2014). He made his personal interpretation of Time, capturing the moment while making society conscious and contextualizing a specific moment in history.

In his creations, Kawara conceptualizes and materializes Time through the basic system invented to understand it: numbers and figures to create dates²⁷.

The *Date Paintings* series [F. 17] produced between 1966 and 2013 has almost 3000 artworks. The artist, using always the same font and location, the centre of the canvas, but being able to change the size and colour of the background, reflected daily the date of its creation.

²⁶ CASTILLA DEL PINO, Op. Cit., p. 122.

²⁷ These dates have a European perspective of Time. There is not an only form for Time, since we can perceive it in different ways. There is homogeneous, heterogeneous, atomic, fluid, reversible, irreversible, personal, sacral Time, etc. In addition, it is necessary to consider that they way in which we perceive Time comes from a European and Christian perspective, which will be different to other cultures. For instance, the European year 2017 does not coincide with the Chinese or the Muslim year, among others.



[F. 18] Nicanor Parra. *Temporal Artifacts series* (1969-2002). Pic by Haizea Salazar Basañez at *Poesía Brossa* exhibition at Artium museum, Vitoria (Spain) (2018).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

As we can see in this image, [F. 18] Nicanor Parra (1914-2018) uses words to show the particular, and literal, *The passage of time* (1969-2002).

This artwork belongs to a series entitled *Temporal artefacts* created between 1969 and 2002 where the artist used everyday objects that he confronted with texts to get the public angry.

In this way, with a simple pair of glasses, Parra manages to transfer us to an old-age idea, to a unique image of the passage of time that will be formed in each observer's mind based on every own experiences.

Another way to materialize Time could be though the use of people, as we will see in the following examples.

In the video installation *Heaven and Earth* (1992) by Bill Viola (1951) [F. 19], the artist faces five centimetres apart two casing free monitors. The upper projector emits the



[F. 19] Bill Viola. *Heaven and Earth*, (1992). Video installation.

Photo: Robert Keziere.

Courtesy Bill Viola.

close-up of an old woman about to die, and the lower one the close-up of a newborn baby.

Both images are projected in a loop and in black and white, one reflecting the image of the other, conveying the idea that birth contains death and vice versa. A clear representation of the course of human life that would develop in those five centimetres, narrating human's time.

With *Self-portrait in time* (2014-2004), which is part of a photographic series titled *Self-portrait in time*, the artist Esther Ferrer (1937) shows the passage of time in her own body [F. 20]. Ferrer recreates her own face from two images ten years apart between them, equating two past times. Besides, the artist plays with the direction of time, placing first the latest date and posing a temporal development towards the past which inverts its usual sense. A double game in which the artist travels, and makes us travel, back in time.



[F. 20] Esther Ferrer. Self-portrait in time, (2014-2004)

Courtesy Esther Ferrer

It is evident that there are many forms to represent Time in art. Many ways to represent it. We would like to emphasize, once again, that the objective of this section is not to analyse art history exhaustively, but to make visible the importance of Time in art using some selected examples, which we consider enlightening to point out the different ways of representing it. These are only a few examples in which we appreciate some useful resources to personify Time and thanks to which we can assure, without fear of being wrong, that Time's presence in art is a fact.

However, and although the barrier for this review has been drawn in Impressionism, it is impossible to ignore that above all representations in which Time appears, and above all genres, there is one that stands out for its concern for Time: *vanitas*. So let us take advantage of the freedom to move in Time given by the words and let us go back a little more. Because what are a few centuries in the immensity of time?

1.3. The gaze of Time

Time flies. How many times have we heard that expression? However, the way we perceive it only depends on our own attitude; on how we see the glass, half empty or, as in Wilfredo Prieto's 2015 artwork, *Glass Half Full*.

An example of this perceptual relativity is in two well-known expressions: *carpe diem* and *tempus fugit*. Although both statements are similar, and both refer to the inevitable passage of time, the first one does so from an optimistic perspective, encouraging life, while the second highlights the concern for death²⁸.

This is the ideology of Vanitas. They invite to reflection on the passing of life, and the little value of things since, according to their philosophy, the only real thing about life is death.

Actually, we cannot clarify if Vanitas allude to *tempus fugit* or if it is *tempus fugit* that alludes to them. Whatever the case may be, the truth is that this reflection became one of the most significant artistic representations of Baroque²⁹. Vanitas are a way of seeing and understanding life. Different combinations intervene in its interpretation, but above all, the concern for time and death, which, generally, go together, stand out.

Humans' life is a concatenation of moments that unite present, past and future, which culminates in death. But is death the end, or is it the beginning? In any case, it would not hurt to follow the advice of the philosopher Juan Eusebio Nieremberg when says³⁰: "Let us always live dying, and let us understand each moment of time as if it were the last".

²⁸ NÚÑEZ FLORENCIO, R., NÚÑEZ GONZÁLEZ, E. (2014), *¡Viva la muerte! Política y cultura de lo macabro*. Madrid, España: Marcial Pons, p.135.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.135.

³⁰ NIEREMBERG, J.E. ed. Cit., p.69. Quoted in VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 110.



[F. 21] Jacopo del Sellaio. *Trionfi del Tempo/* (*Triumph of Time*) (1480-1490). Detail.



[F. 22] Peter Brueghel the elder. *El The Triumph of Death* (1562-1563). Detail.

Death is the disabused with which the humans wake up from the dream that is life. However, this attitude, so popular in Baroque culture, can be understood as a reinterpretation of Platonic principles in which the world of ideas prevails over the sensible world³¹.

Death, as a topic, was something recurrent in the paintings of the 15th century and in the portraits of that time it is common to find the *memento mori* (remember that you have to die). At the end of the Middle Ages, Petrarch's *Trionfi* (*Triumphs*), a series of illustrations, murals, and tapestries in which Time was represented as destroying human vanities, became very popular.

Time was personified through a winged man, generally bald and senile in appearance, who at times could be muscular, curved and supported on crutches or canes and who also carried a scythe, or a sickle, and a sand clock³².

Jacopo di Sellaio's (1441-1493) *The Triumph of Time* (1480-90) [F. 21] is an example of this kind of representations. In this painting it is appreciable a winged, advanced age man, referring to Time that flies (*tempus fugit*), a cane and a sand clock in his right hand. He is placed on a site framed by two angels with two dogs and in the bottom there are two fawns, a symbol of longevity.

16th century's art is shown as a reflection of life and represents, in a conscious and intentional way, humans' mortality. In the artwork of Peter Brueghel the Elder (1526-1569), *The Triumph of Death* (1562-63) [F. 22], we can see a representation of death and its devastating essence. In this scene, the Grim Reaper, represented by skeletons, annihilates all human life. It is the maximum representation of desolation that generates a daunting image of destruction³³.

³¹ The idea of death and sleep is found in Greek culture with Hypnos (god of sleep) and his brother Thanatos (genie god of death) as it is sometimes difficult to discern whether the figure depicted is dead or asleep. Hence, also the confusing idea between death and sleep. NÚÑEZ FLORENCIO, NÚÑEZ GONZÁLEZ, Op. Cit., pp. 122-123.

³² At some point in the Middle Ages, the sickle and the scythe became attributes of Petrarch, and when Time is depicted with either of these attributes, it assumes the role of a deity whose mission is to reap the lives of people, referred to as destructive Time. LIPPINCOTT, K. (2000). *El tiempo a través del tiempo*. Barcelona, España: Grijalbo Mondadori, p. 147.

³³ Ibid, pp. 186-187.



[F. 23] Lucas Furtenagel. *Portrait of the painter Hans Burgkmair and his wife Anna* (1529).



[F. 24] Lucas Furtenagel. *Portrait of the painter Hans Burgkmair and his wife Anna* (1529). Detail.

The constant memory of death is the key to the idea of disabuse, and therefore, death usually creates a temporal game in which present, past, and future converge. This idea is reflected in Lucas Furtenagel's artwork *Portrait of Hans Bugkmair and his wife Anna* (1529) [F. 23 - 24]. In this painting, the artist refers to the knowledge of how to look that reminds us that “now we see in a mirror, an enigma³⁴”.

Vanitas paintings allude continually to mortality in order to awake people from the lethargy that life is, because: “there are no things more awakening than sleeping on the death³⁵”. However, it is not just a reminder, as the continuous mention of it constitutes the first time-turn of Vanitas when transferring the future to the present. Specifically to the instant³⁶, and that's where the second twist hides.

³⁴ 1 Cor 13, 12. Quoted in VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 33.

³⁵ Inscription found at Villamiel, Extremadura (España) from 1699. VILLAMIEL. (10 August, 2020). *Wikipedia*. <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Villamiel>

³⁶ We would like to make a small distinction between instant and opportunity, as sometimes there is a tendency to make mistakes. Opportunity is understood as the precise moment to carry out, or not, an action. This distinction was also made in Greek culture, until the Hellenic period unified it, differentiating between Cronos, the abstract representation of time, and Kairos, time as a succession of suitable moments. VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 86.

According to Walter Benjamin, this awakening broke the idea of linear time imposed by history because when we remember, we transfer a past event to the present. A *jetztzeit*, or time-now. A time based on leaps that builds the truth bringing the past to the present, necessary to disabuse, and that contained time's three dimensions³⁷.

Disabuse is equivalent to the truth and reduces life with a glance by joining birth with death. Death, and the vision of the skull, suppose the truth that transfers the future to the present³⁸. A dissemination of Seneca's *quotidie morimur* thought, in which it is explained that humans do not meet death at the end of their days but from the beginning³⁹.

This fact educates humans' gaze to time, to learn how to look life's phase representations. Vanitas mould the gaze of time. The gaze to the present, to the past and to the future to recognize, in every temporal dimension, the portrait that the own skull forms and thus, to be able to identify, because it was lived before⁴⁰.

In Vanitas representations, there was a special emphasis on the virtue of prudence. This, according to Luis Vives-Ferrándiz, foresaw future consequences of the actions of the present from the experiences of the past. In this way, the present became the epicentre of action-reflection by proposing, once again, a temporal game with the three dimensions of time: present, past and future, making Time the central axis of Vanitas⁴¹.

³⁷ VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit, pp. 16-17.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 126.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴¹ This formula referring to the three modalities of time is attributed to a treatise by Seneca, where prudence is understood as: "the remembrance of the past, the ordering of the present and the contemplation of the future". Panofsky, E. El significado en las artes visuales, Alianza, Madrid, 1985. Quoted in Ibid, p. 70.



[F. 25] Evert Collier, *Vanitas* (1669).



[F. 26] David Bailly, *Vanitas* (1650).

1.3.1. From tradition...

Rivers of ink have flowed over *Vanitas*. About their composition, their elements, their intention ... it is such an extensive topic that another thesis could be done with every of these three points. The subject is immeasurable, but the intention of this chapter is not doing a thorough examination of it, but to establish, from a Western perspective, the basis that serves as link with the main subject under study of this research.

Some people contemplate painting as a *vanitas* as considering that a fool's paradise is transferred to the canvas⁴². A representation of the ambitions of those artists who dealt with deception on their canvases through the representation of objects⁴³. Quoting Vives-Ferrándiz⁴⁴: "a painting that, consequently, is also an artifice, a hoax". Therefore, although *vanitas* genre developed in different disciplines, *vanitas* paintings will be the focus of this study, considering it as a metaphor that represents life's illusory nature. But what are *vanitas*?

Vanitas is used to refer to those paintings compositions in which there are symbols referred to time and the passage of life. *Vanitas* could be classified in different ways, thus distinguishing between those that refer to eternal life, the fleetingness of life, the vanity of knowledge or the fleetingness of power, among other topics [F. 25 - 26]. But the truth is that *vanitas*, as Vives-Ferrándiz points out, are like a puzzle of different themes that capture, among others, the brevity of life, the transience of time, the certainty of death or melancholy⁴⁵.

Vanitas entail a moralizing and spiritual message about the transience existential of the human being, who will be awakened through death from the dream that life is. The ephemerality of worldly pleasures compared to the eternity of the pure soul⁴⁶.

⁴² VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 267.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 244.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 245.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.20.

⁴⁶ VALDIMESO, E. (2002), *Vanidades y desengaños en la pintura española del Siglo de Oro*. Madrid, España: Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico. p. 30.

As Enrique Valdivieso points out, it was a very useful way that the Catholic Church found to control all social classes throughout the Golden Age⁴⁷.

The inevitability of the passage of time tinges the baroque thought with melancholy. This mental state is transferred to the representations which have ancient and Christian inspiration, to represent humans before their destiny. These paintings represent the idea of the passing of time that is translated into the introspective search of the human being⁴⁸.

But which is the origin of *vanitas*? This research may not be able to answer this question categorically, and actually, it may not be its duty to do so either as it is not its topic. However, it is a fact that Baroque was the century in which *vanitas* developed with greater fullness and if something characterizes this time, in addition to its unusual beauty, it is its ability to represent itself from its antitheses. An oxymoron that shows beauty through ugliness, or truth from lies, focusing on emphasizing life from death, which was a recurring theme in the baroque mentality, where nothing was what it seemed⁴⁹.

One of the first representations of *vanitas*, dates from 1066. This image depicts a naked woman covered in a transparent outfit⁵⁰. Although, among others, there are references to *vanitas* in Homer's, Seneca's or Ovid's works, its etymological, religious, philosophical and cultural origins come from the Ecclesiastes' Psalm (Ec 1,2): from the Old Testament: "vanity of vanities, and all vanity / *vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*"... Later on, the medieval Christian mentality began to expose the transience of existence against eternal existence. The situation of wars and diseases helped to emphasize this discourse, increasing unease and anguish. The

⁴⁷ VALDIVIESO, Op. Cit, p. 34.

⁴⁸ ALBIN, M. (1990), *Les Vanites. Dans la peinture au XVIIe siècle*. Bruselas, Bélgica: Arcure, Margot et Ludion o Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen, p. 194.

⁴⁹ ECO, Op. Cit., pp. 233-234.

⁵⁰ So it appears in fol. 2v by Ms. Casanatensis, in the fol. 238r del Ms. Vat. Pal, ans in the fol. 52r by Ms. Wellcome. (from Saxl, F., "A spiritual encyclopaedia of the latter middle ages" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), pp. 82-142). Quoted in VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 363.



[F. 27] Roger van Der Weyden, *Braque's Triptych* (c.1450).
Closed triptych.

Renaissance softened the message, and the Baroque was its greatest popularity period⁵¹.

The first Western Christian culture's known *vanitas* painting is the one found in Roger van Der Weyden's (1400-1464) *Triptych Braque* around 1450 which belongs to the Louvre Museum in Paris (France). This *vanitas*, represented with a skull, is located on the left side door of the triptych⁵² [F. 27].

This representation may be conditioned by the content of the *Ars Morendi*, which indicated the guidelines for the good death and which was very popular in the European society of the 15th century.

Later on more examples such as Hans Memling's (1430-1494) around 1490 in Strasbourg, or Jan Gossaert's (1478-1532) *Carondelet* diptych (1517), that is also preserved in the Louvre, can be found. From the beginning of the 16th century, the typology of *vanitas* portraits, which consisted of placing a skull with an allusive phrase on the back of the effigy of the character, spread throughout Europe. This genre refers to the idea that death breaks everything down. However, this typology was

⁵¹ VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p.19.

⁵² VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p. 21.



[F. 28] Dirck Jacobsz, *Pompeius Occo* (c. 1531).

softened when symbols that alluded to fragility in consequence of the passage of time, such as flowers or clocks, were added to the compositions, as in Dirck Jacobsz's *Pompeo Occo*⁵³ (1531) [F. 28].

Little by little, artists emphasized the message of the *vanitas*, adding new elements that symbolized the pleasures and glories of the world⁵⁴. Those painters who developed this style followed a strict iconography based on skulls, flowers, and the hourglass with the coat of arms or signs of the represented person. The skull is the central element of these representations since it exorcizes the ravages of time and makes possible to eternalized human life's moment, as it is also a sign of redemption and eternal salvation⁵⁵.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ GÁLLEGO, J. (1984), *Visión y símbolos en la pintura española del siglo de oro*. Madrid, España: Ediciones Cátedra, p. 205.

⁵⁵ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 180.

Initially skulls appeared on the back of the painting, as a preview of the symbol *mors absconditus*, the state of decomposition that awaits mortals, and which reflects the appearance that the portrayed person on the obverse will have⁵⁶. It is important to remember that in the Middle Ages death did not instil terror, or at least the same terror as now, since comfort was offered beyond death. However, later, clergy would reflect it with more macabre tones, taking advantage of the horrors of death with "the drama of agony" imposed by the Church for its theological indoctrination⁵⁷.

During the 16th century, *vanitas*' symbolic function diminished, exceeded by its decorative desire. When art genres were confirmed, *vanitas* joined to still life, which tends to dilute their moral and religious message. When its spiritual meaning, that remains implicit in some elements such as fruits, flowers, etc., has not been understood any more, *vanitas* have been classified as still life's subgenre⁵⁸.

Even though that in the 17th century *vanitas* obtained their total independence and found their maximum expression in the Golden Age⁵⁹, the genre was still not taken too much into consideration. The low ranking of Academies was due to the fact that: "the mere reproduction of immobile objects does not correspond to the ideas of dignity and hierarchy that, according to the label of the sublime, were those of painting⁶⁰".

⁵⁶ SCHNEIDER, N. (1992), *Naturaleza muerta*. Colonia, Alemania: Taschen, p. 77.

⁵⁷ SCHNEIDER, Op. Cit., p. 78.

⁵⁸ ALBIN, Op. Cit., pp. 212-213.

⁵⁹ The Golden Age of painting coincides almost exactly with the 17th century, and corresponds in politics to the reigns of Felipe III (1598-1621), Felipe IV (1621-1665), and Carlos II (1665-1700). It is not casual to start the Golden Age around 1600, when both Toledo and Valencia were painting in a different way than Italian-Flemish Romancists, when in Seville the problems of figuration, light, and technique were already being raised of a new painting. But such questions are not, in many respects, but the successful realization of aspirations, of points of research begun in the sixteenth century, especially among the literati, whose Golden Age had begun some time ago. GÁLLEGO, Op. Cit., pp.13-21.

⁶⁰ There is a fruit language, although it is quite lost. CORAZÓN, A. (2005), *El bodegón habla de otras cosas*. Madrid, España: Machado Libros, pág. 48-49.
Fruit language dictionary. LAGORDO, A. (s.f). *El lenguaje de las flores y el de las frutas*
<http://www.geocities.ws/antoniolagordo/lengua08.html>

This minor theme consideration comes from Antiquity, where artists dedicated to this genre were called *riparographers*, which in Greek was translated as painter of low and coarse things⁶¹. Around 1650 in the Academies that followed the Royal Academy of Paris the hierarchy of painting genres established that the still life genre, and all its derivatives, were placed at the bottom of the pyramid⁶². The truth is that, although the painting genres' origin did not emerge until the 16th century, relatively late, its origin is linked to Western art's invention in Ancient Greece⁶³.

Despite *vanitas* were based on iconography, it was not possible to fit them into a specific framework. It is possible to find a *vanitas* as a specific genre. However, its transversality in the set of artistic-visual creations, meant that other genres, that could be catalogued within the specific genres of historical-artistic studies, presented certain aspects that also turned them into *vanitas*. And all this was aggravated by the fact that *vanitas* were not only developed in painting but also other disciplines such as literature⁶⁴.

Traditionally, *vanitas* genre has been studied as a still life's subgenre. This is due to Bergström's⁶⁵ and Sterling's⁶⁶ works, which were followed by more studies such as Bialostocki's, who raised the evolution of *vanitas* from Antiquity to the 19th century. However, this changed when Enrique Valdivieso's studio analysed them as an independent genre due to their complexity and nuances⁶⁷.

⁶¹ PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, A. E. (1983), *Pintura española de bodegones y floreros de 1600 a Goya*. Madrid, España: Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Archivos, D.L., p. 75.

⁶² This scheme was determined by the "Porphyria tree": reality is constituted by an order that goes from the inanimate, passing through the animate till it reaches human, owner of an immortal soul and a masterpiece of creation. SCHNEIDER, Op. Cit., p. 8.

⁶³ CALVO SERRALLER, F. (2005), *Los géneros de la pintura*. Madrid, España: Taurus., p. 9.

⁶⁴ VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 18.

⁶⁵ BERGSTRÖM, I., *Dutch still-life painting in the seventeenth century*, Faber and Faber, London 1957, pp.154-190. Quoted in *Ibid*, p.21.

⁶⁶ STERLING, Ch., *La nature morte de l'antiquité a nos jours*, Éditions Pierre Tisné, Paris 1959. Quoted in *Ibid*, p.21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 21-25.

Some currents affirm that *vanitas* are a still life's⁶⁸ variant, while others deny it. They may have different meanings, as the still life genre has fulfilled a merely decorative function far removed from *vanitas*' moral content⁶⁹ [F. 29].



[F. 29] Giovanna Garzoni, *Still life with fruits, skull and tulip* (XVII).

⁶⁸ In Spanish, there are two terms for this genre: Still life and "*bodegón*". The term "*bodegón*" was already used in Spain but with another connotation and appears collected in Sebastián de Covarrubias's dictionary published in 1611, where the word still life referred to: "The basement or low portal, within which is the winery, where he who has no one to cook his food finds it there seasoned and the drink together, in such a way that it was said of struggle". Francisco Calvo Serraller *The visual feast. An introduction to the history of still life*. Cited in BERGEN, J. (2000); et al. *El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, pág. 23-24.

⁶⁹ TRIADÓ, J. R. (2000), *Bodegones y pintura de bodegón* et al. *El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 47-48.

From the historian and art critic Victor I. Stoichita's point of view, still life⁷⁰ artworks moved between the idea of things' vanity and their metapictoric character representations.

On the contrary, the art historian Ernest Gombrich, insisted on the relation between still life and *vanitas* artworks, a decisive relation to propose the interpretation of this genre. Depending on which of the variants indicated by Stoichita in *L'Instauration du tableau* is chosen, the analysis and the emphasis on different perspectives will be different⁷¹. It may be nothing more than an all-encompassing *mixtum compositum*⁷².

The truth is that some still life artworks began to deal in the subject of vanities with the use of inanimate objects. Quoting Rafael Núñez and Elena Núñez⁷³: "A daily materialization of the warnings of thinkers and moralists about vanity".

Although generally the elements used were in good condition, it is not strange that in some still life artworks the presence of the passage of time began to be represented, as in Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's (1571-1610), *Fruit basket* (around 1597-1600) [F. 30 - 31].

Fruits, which symbolize the useful and pleasant, represent four of the five senses: sight, taste, touch, and smell. They symbolize natural beauty compared to the beauty invented by humans⁷⁴. Through small gestures such as insects, bites, spots or marks, artists expressed the inevitable consequences of time's ravages⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ The expression "*nature morte*" began to be used in France during the 18th century and due to the leadership of the French language in painting it was considered the general term to define this genre. CALVO SERRALLER, F. (2000), *Vida en suspenso. La naturaleza en la pintura francesa. El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 225; CORAZÓN, Op. Cit., p. 19.

⁷¹ JARAUTA, F. (2000), *A la sombra de la naturaleza muerta et al. El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 50.

⁷² People or things that have not yet separated. Like the genres that represent market scenes, with the still life, with *vanitas*, etc.

⁷³ NÚÑEZ FLORENCIO, NÚÑEZ GONZÁLEZ, Op. Cit., p. 140.

⁷⁴ GÁLLEGO, Op. Cit., pp. 200-201.

⁷⁵ NÚÑEZ FLORENCIO, NÚÑEZ GONZÁLEZ, Op. Cit., p. 140.



[F. 30] Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Fruit Basket* (h. 1597 - 1600).



[F. 31] Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Fruit Basket* (h. 1597 - 1600). Detail of the deterioration in fruits and leaves.

In the 16th century was stipulated the iconography that would make up the representation of the 17th century's *vanitas*, which were already easily recognizable by those fond of visual arts⁷⁶. Since their appearance as a genre, *vanitas* have used a specific iconography that has made them easily recognizable. Although these elements are sometimes diversified and intensified in the complexity of their meaning, in general, they present an easy-to-understand and accessible speech with a precise and concise meaning⁷⁷.

There were many symbolic elements in *vanitas* paintings. From this extensive list are mentionable some such as: the written words, as of an exhortation; books, as an example of the uselessness of intellectual knowledge; the emblems, because of their moralizing content; any attributes that symbolize military glory's power such as weapons or armour, symbols of royal or spiritual power (crowns, sceptres, tiaras, staves, etc.); masks as a symbol of the falsehood of the human being; seashells and nautilus, as allegories of the exotic associated with the vanity of luxury; soap bubbles, which allude to human's life beauty and inconsistency; globe that represents human losses due to power, or jewels as a symbol of what must be renounced to avoid condemnation, etc.

⁷⁶ LIPPINCOTT, Op.Cit., p. 187.

⁷⁷ VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p. 169.



[F. 32] Jacques Linard, *Vanitas* (1640-1645).



[F. 33] Harmen Steenwijck, *Vanitas Stilleben* (h. 1640).

However, there are some objects with a higher relevance as mirrors, as a reflection of the truth; candles or lamp that symbolize that live continues or that it is extinguished; clocks⁷⁸, in any of their representations, as time meters, and above them all the iconic skull [F. 32 - 33].

The skull symbolizes death, as well as resurrection in Christian terms. It is found in ancient symbolism as it is a Byzantine painting tradition which transmitted to the Occident the legend of Adam's skull of in the so-called "place of the skull" in Mount Golgotha at the foot of the cross. Thus, the skull that accompanies the saints carries the moral message⁷⁹, being the commonest element in *vanitas* paintings.

Baroque meant the independence of the genre; *vanitas* were no longer linked to portraits. Artists created new artworks in which skulls, and other high symbolic, and allegorical elements, were the focus of the compositions. Countries like the Netherlands, Germany, Flanders, France, Italy, and Spain began to create *vanitas*

⁷⁸ Although the clock was related to sight, at first it was linked to hearing, since clocks were public goods that did not show the time but made it ring. CASTILLA DEL PINO, Op. Cit., p. 117. Also, based on the etymology of the word clock, in English clock, which is related to the French *cloche* and the German *glocke* that means bell. SANCHEZ VIDAL, A. (2000), *La máquina del tiempo en El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p.107.

⁷⁹ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 82.

artworks that nowadays mainly belong to private or museum collections which are rescuing them due to the success that this genre is acquiring⁸⁰.

In the 17th century, especially in Spain and the Netherlands, the artistic community began to express its concern about the passage of Time through *vanitas* artworks; a reflection of the inconsistent, the non-durable that the baroque concept of Time linked to the occasion introduced. *Vanitas* were a warning about pleasures, everything appreciated in human's life and about the own vanity of the glories.



[F. 34] Antonio de Pereda y Salgado. *The Knight's Dream* (1650).

⁸⁰ It is also known as *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a dream*), *El sueño de la vida* (*Life's dream*), *El desengaño de la vida* (*The life's disabuse*), or *Desengaño del mundo* (*The world's disabuse*). VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p. 28.

The Knight's Dream (1650) is a *vanitas* painting attributed to Antonio de Pereda y Salgado (1611-1678)⁸¹, an artist who popularized the genre in Spain [F. 34]. This artwork can be considered a mixture of the Spanish *vanitas* typology. It shows the world's disabuse admonishing angel with the Christian knight's temptation, or the worldly vanity, and the way of salvation, which makes reference to moral conduct and salvation of the soul⁸².

On a black background, perhaps alluding to death, can be appreciated some common elements in these representations such as: the skull (not only seen in perspective but also turned over), candles, a symbol of ephemerality; an open book, weapons, a tower shape clock as symbol of justice and the clock of Temperance from the Middle Ages, coins, jewels, flowers, the globe, and the presence of the sleeping knight.

Besides, there is an angel with an inscription which says *Aeterne pungit, cito volat et occidit* (Hurts eternally, flies fast and kills). Everything is full of allusions to the passage of Time, reflections between life and death.

In this artwork, some of the most common classical objects of the iconography of baroque *vanitas* are highlighted. All the objects on which Death is mistress. The instruments allude to voluptuousness; the gold referring to earthly riches; the cards representing the chances of life; the books as the knowledge and the vanities of science; the weapons pointing to military or chivalric glory⁸³.

However, an interpretation by Julián Gállego indicates that the objects represented in this artwork can refer to the virtues; the mirror, the money, and the chest attributes of the Prudence and the sword and the clock of the Temperance. Insinuating that

⁸¹ Although currently at the San Fernando Academy of Fine Arts the authorship of the artwork is attributed to Pereda, the truth is that it was questioned for the first time in 1959 by Martín S. Soria and later by other scholars such as William Jordan and Peter Cherry. Possible authorship, which has not been proven either, was attributed to Francisco de Palacios. The doubts are based on the style and the mention that the artist makes of a painting of similar characteristics and dimensions in his will. SABÁN GODOY, M. (1997), *Los cinco sentidos y el arte*. Madrid, España: Museo del Prado, p. 308.

⁸² VALDIVESO, Op. Cit., p. 95.

⁸³ PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 90.

practising these virtues an exemplary life, that ensures the salvation of the soul, can be carried out⁸⁴.

The success and expansion of this genre throughout almost all Europe is a direct consequence of the baroque culture and the relevance that life and death had in the thought of this society⁸⁵. A genre developed under the religious influence. In the Netherlands it had an enormous development and its influence was under Protestant morality, while the Spanish *vanitas* did so under Christian morality. This meant that Spain had a greater variety than other countries⁸⁶. Specifically, Spanish Baroque captured the most horrendous images of death with its corresponding decomposition and rot, without being surpassed by other schools⁸⁷.

An example is these two paintings located on the side walls of the Hospital de la Santa Caridad's church in Seville, titled *Hieroglyphs of Death and Salvation*⁸⁸ (1672) that consecrated their author, Juan de Valdés Leal (1622-1690), as the painter of Death⁸⁹ [F. 35].

⁸⁴ VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p.48.

⁸⁵ The crucifixion, the sacrifice, and the instruments of the Passion, Christ the child and the allegory of redemption, Saint Jerome, the meditating Saints and the withdrawal / abandonment of the world, Mary Magdalene, Venus Pandora and the woman in the mirror, the portrait, the times and melancholy. ALBIN, Op. Cit. pp. 82-209.

⁸⁶ Typologies of Spanish *vanitas* painting of the Golden Age: the angel admonishing of the world's disabuse; guard because you do not know the hour when the Lord will come; Mirror of death and life; Memorare Novissima; The Child Jesus triumphant over death and sin. Hieroglyphs of redemption; Certainly my days are a breath; No one escapes from death; The vile spoils of the mighty; The futility of knowledge; Deception of the eye, disappointment of the soul; The Temptation of the Christian Knight; The ephemerality of beauty; Earthly vanity and the way of salvation; The hieroglyphs of the late; Blackberries Imperial; The good death and the salvation of the soul; Death hides behind impure love; The consciousness of the ephemeral: the portrait of Vanitas; The Child and death: *Nascendo Morimur*; Christ protects us from sin, the devil, and death; The irremediable destiny: death and judgment you will have; Cogita Mori: meditations before the skull; The bridge of life; The tree of life: Christ warns the sinner; Allegory of the two paths of life; Sin, death, and redemption. VALDMESO, Op. Cit., pp. 29-79.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.12.

⁸⁸ The name "hieroglyphic" applied to these works is not their particular name, but the common name applied to works of this genre, especially to certain works by Pereda. GÁLLEGO, Op. Cit., p. 31.

⁸⁹ VALDMESO, Op. Cit., p. 108.



[F. 35] Juan de Valdés Leal, *In ictu oculi* (1672).

The paintings in which the consequences of expiration were represented showed at the same time symbols that placed human's liberation in the uncertainty between a life chained to the material or eternity based on virtue⁹⁰.

However, although very common, the presence of the skull in *vanitas* paintings is not necessary. In Spanish *vanitas*, or disabuse⁹¹ of the Golden Age, the clock, and the skull had the same importance⁹².

The skull was only used for the more obvious *vanitas*. The consequences of the passage of time could be represented using different resources, such as the poor condition of objects, thus obtaining less apparent *vanitas* and only legible for skilled readers.

⁹⁰ SEGAL, S. (2000), *Sobre la naturaleza muerta en los Países Bajos El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 187.

⁹¹ The word "disabuse" is key for Quevedo and Gracián, conceptists of Spanish thought, so in Spanish it may be more correct to call them disabuses instead of vanitas. GÁLLEGO, Op. Cit., p. 205.

⁹² Ibid, p. 206.



[F. 36] Fede Galizia, *Still Life* (1607).



[F. 37] Jan Davidsz de Heem, *Books and pamphlets* (1628).

It can be noticed in *Still Life* (1607) by Fede Galizia (1578-1630) [F. 36] and *Books, and pamphlets* (1628) by Jan Davidsz de Heem (1606-1684) [F. 37], that the passage of time could also be represented by the oxidation of an apple or some worn-out books.

The measurement of time is translated into its own suspension; meditative stability through a mutated figure, an object balanced on the edge of a table, a half-peeled fruit or a withered bouquet of flowers⁹³.

Time is represented under these attributes that symbolize this evocation. It is responsible for emphasizing the moments and imperceptible things in the world, everything that can escape the present.

It is probable that this metalanguage lasted for years, but it seems that it has lost its meaning or, simply, that our society is not able to understand it properly and therefore not see more than a “still life” representation.

Hence, the importance of the context in order to appreciate the artworks from their original point of view and not from the projection of our interests⁹⁴.

⁹³ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 19.

⁹⁴ PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., pp. 16-17.

In a society so influenced by religious thought, it is not strange to believe that these artworks could not be “read” in any other way to reveal, only to the right public, their secrets exposed to everybody⁹⁵. All this concealed in the best way that something can be hidden, in plain sight. Not only with its elements' language, but also with the topic to be developed.

This genre may or may not contain portraits as a kind of reflection about the painter's and Time, Time and the artwork and the Time of the painter making the artwork if it appeared.

The ambiguity in the content made possible to cover one genre into another, as it is shown in these two examples: *Possible portrait of Clara Peeters* (h. 1618) [F. 38] by Clara Peeters (1594-post. 1621), and *Still Life* (1610-1625) by unknown authorship [F. 39]. Are these artworks portraits, still life paintings, kitchen scenes?

Since the Renaissance, painting became a microcosm in which artists or sponsors accumulated symbols that the public had to decipher to create the syntax; each object represents an idea⁹⁶.



[F. 38] Clara Peeters, *Presumed portrait of Clara Peeters* (h. 1618).



[F. 39] Anonymous, *Still Life* (1610-1625).

⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

⁹⁶ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 232.

According to the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, since Medieval order was destroyed, art has been immersed in a nominal process, and yet artworks do not fully respond to the canons imposed by the genres⁹⁷. The game posed by the *vanitas* paintings could be what the German historian and essayist Erwin Panofsky called "disguised symbolism." Scenes loaded with allegorical intentionality that warned against excesses⁹⁸.

In this way the genre could be treated, giving it the value of a portrait painting. Although maybe it simply has been given more mystery than it has, and it will always be a mystery, as the lack of the real context makes it impossible to interpret artworks correctly.

In baroque *vanitas* paintings, all the objects are previously placed. It is built a theatricality and an order that welcomes the person who observes them. They are artworks from the interior. Artworks related to security, although they treat the inexorable death. In these paintings, it is narrated how different objects have come together and despite their ephemeral nature, they remain together⁹⁹. They confer eternity even on the perishable, and that feature of eternity is what makes them a false reproduction of reality¹⁰⁰.

Baroque represents a complex diversity of facets that the iconography suggests. According to Gombrich, these visual paradoxes could be symbols that went beyond language towards the interpretation of the enigmatic image¹⁰¹.

Thinking about pictorial representations as a transformation is the origin, as through this representation is created a new reality to flee from time, to flee from death.

⁹⁷ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 263.

⁹⁸ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 314.

⁹⁹ BERGER, J. (2000), *¿Cómo aparecen las cosas? O carta abierta a Marisa et al. El bodegón*. Madrid, España: Galaxia Gutenberg, p. 61-62.

¹⁰⁰ CASTILLA DEL PINO, Op. Cit., p. 80.

¹⁰¹ VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., p. 15.



[F. 40] Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas* (1625).



[F. 41] Jaime Sanjuán, *Tempus Fugit* (2020).
Courtesy Jaime Sanjuán

There is a suspended time in those artworks that represent living matter, an iconic articulation that connects these representations¹⁰². A common thread that links Pieter Claesz's (1597-1661) *Vanitas* (1625) [F. 40] classical art, with the current, and digital art by Jaime Sanjuán (1981) in *Tempus Fugit* (2020) [F. 41].

1.3.2. ... to the forefront

The popularity of art genres has varied throughout history. Both in relation to the art history, and in the way of understanding and accepting them. Art thrives between the tension generated by its incomprehensibility and its desire to be understood¹⁰³. Maybe the harsh reality shows that although great artists worked on this genre, it never obtained the theoretical elite's interest.

This study considers *vanitas* as an example of evolution and a model of adaptation to new times. This adaptation of its representation, and/or language, has allowed it to preserve its particular style, its intentionality, its concept and above all, its essence.

At first sight, and taking baroque *vanitas* as a reference, the identification of contemporary *vanitas* may seem something simple. However, this research considers that it hides a much more convoluted development than what might

¹⁰² CORAZÓN, Op. Cit., pp. 21-25.

¹⁰³ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 392-393.



[F. 42] Paul Cézanne, *Still life with skull* (1898).



[F. 43] Andy Dixon, *Vanitas Painting* (2018).
Courtesy Andy Dixon

expect. Quoting Rachel Cambell Johnson¹⁰⁴: “Art opposes categorization. Their labels can no longer be attached so clearly”.

Before continuing, let us explain what this study considers contemporary *vanitas*. Contemporary *vanitas* are those artworks, with the *vanitas*' intention, made from the Impressionism to the present in which the passage of Time, its consequences, and the ephemeral essence are considered as main themes.

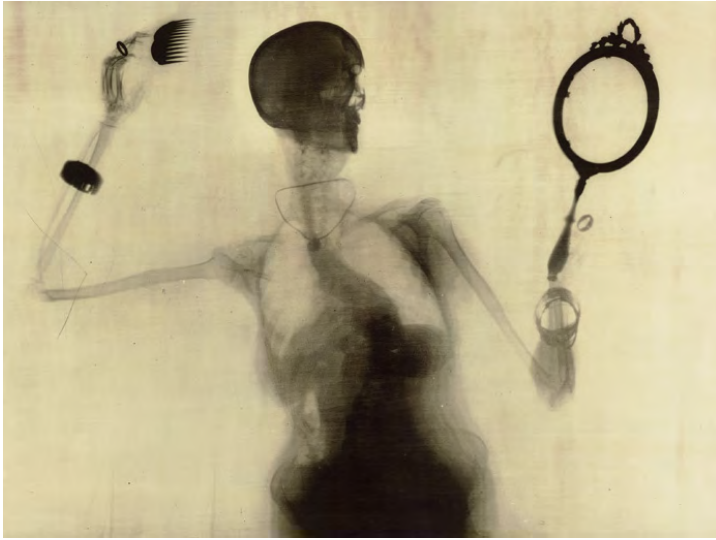
Two examples of contemporary *vanitas* are *Still Life with Skull* (1898) by Paul Cézanne [F. 42] and a more actual example *Vanitas Painting* (2018) by Andy Dixon (1979-) [F. 43].

The use of certain elements, which clearly belong to classical *vanitas*, can make us think that we are dealing with a contemporary *vanitas*. For instance, *Donna che si pettina* (1991) by Benedetta Bonichi (1968) an x-ray and mixture technique [F. 44] or *Untitled* (2019) by Jenny Holzer (1950) [F. 45] exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in the exhibition *The indescribable* (2019).

Bones, skeleton, mirrors, and even the fact of combing the hair could evoke, as we have already mentioned, to say that these artworks are contemporary *vanitas*. However, it is essential to know their intention.

While in the case of Bonichi, indeed, it is a contemporary *vanitas*, in the case of Holzer not. Petra Joss, curator of the exhibition, confirmed to us that this was never the intention of the artist, and that, despite the fact that her iconography could fit the

¹⁰⁴ CAMPBELL JOHNSTON, Op. Cit., p. 22.



[F. 44] Benedetta Bonichi, *Donna che si pettina* (1991).
X-ray mix medium.
Courtesy Benedetta Bonichi



[F. 45] Jenny Holzer, *Ram, Ram*, 2016; *Untitled*, 2017
Text: "Hell" from *Building the Barricade* by Anna Świrszczyńska, English translation by Piotr Florczyk, © 2016 by the translator. Used with permission of Ludmiła Adamska-Orłowska and the translator.
Installation: *Jenny Holzer: Thing Indescribable*, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, 2019
© 2019 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Photo: Collin LaFleche
Courtesy Jenny Holzer

parameters of the term, it makes a difference¹⁰⁵. The intention.

The retrospective gaze teaches that historical trends are changeable, but that they are also the ones that confer the concepts of art. Art will always be predetermined by what it once was, although it is only legitimate by what remains and by what it can become. It is qualitatively modified, and things that were not, are and things that were, stop being. This continuous transformation supposes the perpetual appearance of new concepts. Its specificity comes from the distance from what it came to be¹⁰⁶.

The possibilities offered by art, especially from the 20th century, mean that this topic takes different currents for its development. However, although it has points in common with many artistic currents and movements, intentionality is a decisive factor. Placing a barrier causes it to be overcome, simply by the act of placing it, and thus advances against what the barrier had been raised for¹⁰⁷. The new is the result of the historical process that eliminated the original tradition and its derivatives¹⁰⁸.

It is important to underline, once again, that it is not the intention of this research, nor these chapters, to do a review about *vanitas* paintings in art history. Rather, to create a framework to contextualize and reflect on the evolution of this genre over the centuries, and its extensive variety, to reach our research topic; Bio*Vanitas*. Because although contemporary *vanitas* would come to treat similar issues, as happened with baroque *vanitas*, not all do it in the same way.

¹⁰⁵ Información provided by Petra Joss via email (26/08/2019).

¹⁰⁶ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 11-12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 38-39.

1.4. BioVanitas

What are BioVanitas? To be honest we thought that it was an own invention term, but when we did a quick search in Google, we discovered, to our surprise, that Olivier Godat had already used it. BioVanitas, was the title of his exhibition in 2015, at the San Giovanni contemporary art gallery in Bra, Italy¹⁰⁹. However, his artworks and BioVanitas definition developed in this research only coincide in name.



[F. 46] Claire Morgan, *Sit* (2002).

Fresh fruit (apple, orange, strawberry, mango, grapefruit, plum, kiwi, etc), nylon, painted wooden chair (50 x 50 x 50 cm).

© Claire Morgan. Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz.

Photo: Claire Morgan Studio

¹⁰⁹ SAN GIOVANI. (s.f.). *Olivier Godat-Biovanitas*.
<https://galleriasangiovanni.it/?p=1278>

This study defines Bio*Vanitas* as ephemeral psycho-installations¹¹⁰, with reflective intentionality, made with organic materials, in which Time acts as matter and material.

Fleeting artworks, in constant evolution, such as Claire Morgan's *Sit* (2002). This variable dimensions artwork, which poses the consequences of their organic process as part of their creative process, is made with fresh fruit, nylon, threads and a painted wooden chair [F. 46].

Baroque *vanitas* expressed the fugacity and the longing, finding the way to evolve their concept of the ephemeral to the present days. But this evolution, at least in Bio*Vanitas*, implies some changes. The main and most obvious difference is the way in which the ephemeral concept is represented, and here we agree with Esther Ferrer when she says that¹¹¹: "the medium changes the interpretation".

An example of this evolution can be seen in the following artworks' series, where the animal head becomes the nexus. Meat in different stages, and especially the visceral representation of the animal head, links Pieter Aersten's (1508-1575) *Flight into Egypt* (1551) artwork [F. 47], with Francisco de Goya's (1746-1828) *Head and quarters of a dissected ram* (1808-1812) [F. 48].

In turn, in 1939, Picasso paid tribute to this Goya artwork with his painting *Still Life with Sheep Skull* [F. 49]. Finally, this concatenation, that lasts five centuries, is culminated with Damien Hirst's (1965-) *A Thousand years* (2012) installation [F. 50].

While initially artists used canvases and oils to represent the transience of Time through the two-dimensional image, from Avant-garde Time was untied from two-dimensional to obtain a greater amplitude. To materialize in the fourth dimension.

¹¹⁰ According to Johannes Stahl: "... the installation concept, ..., encompasses all artistic phenomena related to space that, in a very explicit way, include the space of the viewer, that is, in contrast to traditional sculpture, they erase the boundaries between the artwork and the spectator's environment". STAHL, Johannes. Instalación BUTIN, H. (2002). *Diccionario de conceptos de arte contemporáneo*. Madrid, España: Abada Editores, p. 140.

¹¹¹ *Esther Ferrer: hilos de tiempo/Threads of time* (2020). Documentary by Josu Rekalde. (2020).

[F. 47] Pieter Aersten, *Flight into Egypt* (1551).



[F. 48] Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Head and quarters of a dissected ram* (1808-1812).



[F. 49] Pablo Picasso, *Still life with sheep skull* (1939).



[F. 50] Damien Hirst, *A thousand years* (2012).
© Damien Hirst.
Photo: Joanna Pen
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>



It is an exaltation of the concept. The idea over the matter. The concept passed from static to dynamic. Baroque *vanitas* represented the ephemeral, they raised it, but Bio*Vanitas* materialize it; the artworks themselves are ephemeral.

They occupy the space, not only as a painting, but one of their own that expands beyond the tangible. The representation of objects, such as fruits or flowers, have been replaced by their real versions, by living matter.

This drastic process involves significant changes when it comes to understanding and studying the artworks. As a consequence, artwork's Time changes. The nature of the materials used means that the artwork only exists, naturally, during a certain period.

Consumption Time¹¹² stops being the two-dimensional artwork's immobile time as it is a four-dimensional composition, and it is transformed from something apparently immobile into mobile. But above all it becomes an active, living agent, adding **performative Time**¹¹³ to the artwork and converting, this way, Time into a material.

As the historian and artist Howard Hussey (1938) said¹¹⁴: "Art transforms the ephemeral into an object" but does this mean that every ephemeral artwork is an object for this study?

¹¹² Contemplation, or consumption Time is the time that needed to create the artwork-viewer link, and it is composed by Immobile artwork look over time (time that people spend in surrounding or examining the inert artwork), mobile artwork look over time, (time interval to appreciate the pieces that move) and itinerary time (in which the artistic representation is enjoyed and where the details are appreciated). This classification, except Performative Time, is not an unpublished classification since it starts from different catalogues made by different authors. GONZÁLEZ, Op. cit., pp. 112-71.

¹¹³ It is the name that Carmen González uses to refer to those artworks that, as she defines, "are exhausted in Time", we consider that the word performative is too broad. The name of this temporal level is directly related to the word *performance*, due to the representative and active character that Time has in artistic creations. Ibid, pp. 200-209.

¹¹⁴ HUSSEY, H in On & ON una forma de vida continuada en FAIRBAIN, Flora, & VARENNE, Olivier. (2010), *On & On*. Madrid, España: La casa encendida, p. 34.

1.4.1. Not everything that rots is a *BioVanitas*

Not all the ephemeral art is considered subject for this research. The fine lines that delimit art's genres can harbour to the *BioVanitas*, with no need for them to be limited to a specific genre. For instance, a sculpture, an installation, a painting, or even a visual poetry could be considered a *BioVanitas*.

Since the 1960s, some artists decided to experiment with Time in their artworks. Releasing Time from its flat, negative and two-dimensional conception, they managed to give dynamism to their artworks. And from this decade, according to many studies, time became an artistic agent, and it was consciously used as artistic material. It was common to "make life present in art"¹¹⁵. Some of these "new" manifestations, among others, are the *Happenings*, *Performances*, *Land Art* or *Earth Workers*.

Artists were attracted by the constant change provided by the creative destruction, where Time was essential to generate that concept of entropy¹¹⁶. Some Avant-garde movements had, and still have, one aspect in common, the ephemeral nature of their artworks and/or materials. Although the transience of Time was already a subject treated by medieval art, according to the critic Heinrich Wölfflin¹¹⁷, the representation of the ephemeral is a necessity of modern art.

However, the multiple influences under which *BioVanitas* are created can induce a certain error. Besides baroque *vanitas*, *BioVanitas* could be related to various art movements, such as the famous *ready-mades* by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *eat art*, or *arte povera* as in Giovanni Anselmo's (1934) *Untitled* (1968) [F. 51].

¹¹⁵ JIMENEZ, J. (2002). *Teoría del arte*. Madrid, España: Tecnos, pp.49. Quoted in GONZÁLEZ, Op. Cit., p.77.

¹¹⁶ VELAYOS, M.J. exposed in 2001 the importance that entropy had for these artists of the 60s especially for R. Smithson as mentioned by Carmen González, *Ibid*, p. 89.

¹¹⁷ SOURIAU, É. (1998). Op. cit., p. 483.



[F. 51] Giovanni Anselmo, *Untitled* (1968)
(granite, lettuce, copper wire)
Photo © Paolo Mussat Sartor
Courtesy Anselmo Archive

In this work, the artist contrasted the organic and the inorganic. A block of granite (70 x 23 x 37 cm), copper wire, and lettuce¹¹⁸, that talks about Time; about the passage of Time which causes the lettuce to rot but which at the same time could also transform the granite block into sand¹¹⁹. However, the lettuce has to be replaced periodically, maximum every two days, otherwise the small granite block that supports it would fall, breaking the sculpture¹²⁰. Nevertheless, in the precariousness of the balance of *Untitled*, it could be found a link to this variant of baroque *vanitas*.

¹¹⁸ In 1968 Anselmo exhibited this piece only once with meat instead of lettuce. Sawdust was placed on the base to absorb the liquids from the meat. The most common version, with lettuce, can also be presented with or without sawdust/sand, although nowadays, the artist prefers to present it with nothing on the base. CENTRE POMPIDOU. (s.f.). *Giovanni Anselmo. Sans titre, (granit, laitue, fil de cuivre)*. <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/es/ressources/oeuvre/kXOT92>

¹¹⁹ FERNÁNDEZ, A. (1999). *Arte Povera*. San Sebastián, España: Nerea., p. 59.

¹²⁰ Personal communication with Rocco Mussat Sartor from Archivo Anselmo. (1 November 2021).

[F. 52] Saioa Olmo Alonso, *Untitled*
(2021).
Courtesy Saioa Olmo Alonso



[F. 53] Mary Lennox, *Fieldwork* (2019).
Flora. International Flower Festival, Córdoba (Spain).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 54] [F. 55] Anselm Kiefer. *Das
Sonnenschiff (Sun-Ship)* (1984–95).
Courtesy Anselm Kiefer &
Guggenheim Bilbao museum



Due to the nature of Bio*Vanitas*' materials, they could even have a certain halo of *kinetic art* when considering its transformation as an intrinsic movement of the biological process of their materials. The influences are numerous. Nonetheless, despite the fact that they may have some similarity with many artistic movements, they may only coincide in certain aspects like the material used for the artwork. Yet, it will be the intention which makes the difference.

On the one hand, for an artwork to be considered Bio*Vanitas*, it has to achieve a series of conditions. First, it must be ephemeral and made with organic materials. Being ephemeral does not only mean that it does not last in time, but that the nature of its materials influences its existence in time. On the other hand, as pointed out before in Bio*Vanitas* definition, intentionality, and reflection are two of the main characteristics and what differentiates Bio*Vanitas*.

Although some artworks have certain elements in common with Bio*Vanitas*, such as the ephemeral essence or the use of organic materials, they cannot be considered as such if they only share this characteristic and if there is not an intentionality from the artist.

These two artworks, Saioa Olmo Alonso's (1976) *Untitled* (2021) [F. 52] and Mary Lennox's *Fieldwork* (2019) F. 53], may seem Bio*Vanitas*, but they are not. Olmo's *Untitled* was exhibited in the exhibition titled *Whispers, substrates, and substances* at the BilbaoArte Foundation in 2021, and Lennox's *Fieldwork*, in which I had the opportunity to be part of her team, was created for *Flora. International Flower Festival*, in Córdoba (Spain).

Despite the fact that in both cases organic materials are used, either living plants or bundles of dried plants, the intention of both artists did not pursue the reflection on the passage of Time that *vanitas* are assumed to be. In addition, despite the materials' organic nature, neither of the two artworks were intentionally seeking their destruction.

Olmo's artwork was made with living matter, books, and plants. However, the artwork would not disappear after the exhibition. These books continued serving as a substrate to keep alive the different plants that form the artwork beyond their exhibition time (January 15 to February 12, 2021).

Fieldwork is an ephemeral artwork, but only because it was an installation created for a specific time. It was a site specific. The design was part of the mentioned festival, *Flora*. According to this festival, the artworks had to remain as the first day during the week that it lasted, in this case from October 18th to 27th. For this reason, the deterioration of the materials was completely ruled out, and its ephemeral essence only resided in the duration of the festival.

There are other kinds of artworks, such as *Sonnenschiff (Sun-Ship)* (1984-1995) by Anselm Kiefer (1945) [F. 54], which match with *BioVanitas* in another point, the deterioration of their organic materials. However, this artwork can neither be considered as such. Mainly, once again, because it is not Kiefer's intention and because this destruction is not essential for the artwork to be completed.

This artwork by Kiefer has different organic materials such as asparagus, hair, poppies or sunflowers, and it is possible to find the organic matter's deterioration¹²¹. But once again, the intention of the artist does not fit with *BioVanitas'* fundamentals.

Sonnenschiff (Sun-Ship) has been part of the *Bilbao Guggenheim Museum's* collection since 1997. In that year, the artwork was exhibited for the first time in the museum in room number 209.

Once the exhibition time was finished, and due to *Sun-Ship's* fragility, mainly because of its organic materials, it was decided to leave the work in this room. It was agreed to build a wall in front of the artwork to hide it during non-exhibition periods. This decision intended to cancel the movement, and the vibrations that could be caused during its transport to the warehouse.

In *Das Sonnenschiff (Sun-Ship)* Kiefer did not contemplate the preservation of the artwork's organic materials¹²² (flowers and asparagus). The Restoration team of the

¹²¹ On April 16th, 2019 we had direct access to the artwork that was stored in the warehouse. The images have been provided by Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, more precisely by the Conservation-Restoration department. Ainhoa Sanz, head of the conservation-restoration department, and Aitziber Velasco, who belongs to the same department, showed the artwork and provided the pertinent information.

¹²² GUGGENHEIM BILBAO MUSEOA. (s.f.). *La conservación preventiva con Ainoa Sanz*. <https://tinyurl.com/2xpczf9u>

Bilbao Guggenheim Museum carried out this conservation task, cataloguing and relocating all the fragments that fell off, and paralyzing the evolution of its materials¹²³.

Therefore, despite initially thinking that this artwork could be classified as Bio*Vanitas*, it is not. One of the first essential requirements for an artwork to be considered as a Bio*Vanitas* is the intention. An intention that forces to reflect on the passage of time and its impacts.

Besides these two mentioned aspects, the ephemeral essence and the intentionality, Bio*Vanitas* have two main characteristics inherited from their Baroque predecessors: the first one, is the use of Time as material, and the second one the importance of senses.

1.4.2. Time, matter & (im)material

According to Buci-Glucksmann, one of the main ideas of the 20th century was the materialization of Time: capture it, make it tangible¹²⁴. In art, this materialization was possible thanks to the unprecedented freedom established in the Avant-garde.

This free will, accompanied by the figurative model's distancing, represented a revolution in all artistic aspects where matter, discovering its value, was gaining prominence until it became the end of artistic discourse¹²⁵.

This urgent experimentation, which for Adorno, responds to the need to promote a productive art far from sterility, resulted in new materials, such as Time which were unthinkable until that moment¹²⁶. Artists, institutions or critics, all artistic fields were affected by the overcoming of the two-dimensional representation of Time.

¹²³ As Sanz and Aitziber Velasco informed in the visit made on April 16th, 2019, the first intervention (consolidation and eradication of biological attack in asparagus), was carried out between 1999-2000. The last intervention, again consolidation with Paraloid, was carried out in 2015.

¹²⁴ BUCI-GLUCKSMANN, C. (2006). *Estética de lo efímero*. Madrid, España: Arena libros, p. 41.

¹²⁵ ECO, Op. Cit., p. 401.

¹²⁶ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 57-59.



[F. 55] Adrian Van der Spelt, *Still life with flowers and curtain* (1658). Detail.



[F. 56] Antoine Steenwinkel, *Vanitas portrait of the painter* (Siglo XVII). Detail.

The evolution of the use of Time, from concept to material, brought about great changes at different levels. Nowadays, Time has reached new levels in the artistic field, becoming ally of some artists who use it as the main element of their creations.

Matter's transformation, which is necessary for the artworks to be completed, and that sometimes can even reach their complete destruction, is what, in this kind of artworks, has been considered the use of Time as matter, and material.

A concept, about matter's destruction and transformation, that endures from baroque *vanitas*. This can be appreciated in the *trompe l'oeil* by Adrian Van der Spelt (1630-1673) *Still life with flowers and curtain* (1658) [F. 55], where the artist places some withered and fresh flowers together, evidencing the signs of the passage of time.

Or in Antoine Steenwinkel's (unknown-1688) *Vanitas portrait of the painter* (17th century) [F. 56] where the artist makes a self-portrait in which he represents himself in three different times. Present, past, and future, illustrating the consciousness of Time. A very similar concept to the aforementioned Ferrer's artwork [F. 20].

Bio*Vanitas* have continued the metamorphosis posed by their predecessors, but they have gone further. They have not limited themselves to mimesis, as they have used Time itself, and their materials' natural degradation process as a creation medium, making it an active part of the artwork and one of its main characteristics.

Once again, Morgan's work is a very good example to explain Time's double use, as matter and material, in Bio*Vanitas*. In her artworks, the artist considers a Time linked to the present, which makes fragility and precariousness palpable through the creative destruction.

It is not about matter's dematerialization, but about its transformation. Morgan plays with the passage of Time and its suspension, creating a space in which the captured moment is more immobile if possible due to the constant development of other close, and sensible to be rotten, elements¹²⁷.

¹²⁷ MORGAN, Op. Cit., p. 97.



[F. 57] Claire Morgan during the creation process of the artwork.

Untitled (2002).

Strawberries, nylon.

150 x 120 x 120 cm

© Claire Morgan.

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz

Photo: Claire Morgan Studio

I like the idea of tracing the passage of time, as if you are moving downstream and can still see what you have just drifted past. You can't go back, but you know what is or was there. The relationship between materials suggests a chain or cyclical process. The title is about that act of stopping things and viewing a freeze frame of a specific moment before moving on.

This mentioned materialization of Time can be appreciated in *Untitled* (2002) a (150 × 120 × 120 cm) hanging installation made entirely with approximately 2000 strawberries, and nylon thread [F. 57]. In this installation from 2002, Morgan considers materials' putrefaction and evolution as part of the work's process. Not only the destruction process implicit in its natural materials' development, but also the presence of unexpected elements, such as flies, which are not common in other kind of artworks. Quoting Morgan¹²⁸, "Flies are a species that feed with fruit and with decaying corpses cadavers, and despite this they add a certain kind of elegance to the artwork and to death's notion implicit in it".

But who could describe the consequences of the use of Time as matter and material better than the own artists? In the following paragraph, Morgan describes the evolution of another of her artworks, *Down Time* (2010) [F. 90], which will be analysed later, and which creative destruction process is very similar to *Untitled's* (2002) [F. 57-58]:

In the beginning the work will be beautiful, verging on the grotesque, spelling out its own death in the bluntest of ways. Each day it will change, both through growth and decay. In one sense the transformation will eventually make it feel more static. It will appear to be freezing, turning to stone, becoming still, through the decaying processes of the dying strawberries. The only true "life" in the work, the colour of the strawberries, will be racing away to the edges, dramatically yet imperceptibly, while simultaneously the whole thing will appear to grow and slowly creep onto and across the floor¹²⁹.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹²⁹ MORGAN, *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.



[F. 58] The shape of Time according to this study.

Untitled (2002).

Strawberries, nylon.

150 x 120 x 120 cm

© Claire Morgan.

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz

Photo: Claire Morgan Studio

Although for the theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking Time is pear-shaped¹³⁰, for this study Time's form is closer to *Untitled*, a few days after its creation [F. 58]. Artistic representations made with perishable materials are living creations shaped under an artistic prism and linked to their materials' natural processes, and this derives to Times shape. The consequences that Time has on *BioVanitas*, shows the importance of the moment in which it is visited, since its state will be conditioned by the materialization of Time which, in turn, depends on its materials' nature and environment.

Morgan's *Untitled* [F. 57-58], is an ephemeral essence artwork that uses living matter in its elaboration, which helps us to understand how Time is personified, and how it works as matter and material too. The constant evolution in which *BioVanitas* exist make it possible to observe the use of Time as an active agent through its creative destruction. The use of organic matter not only emphasizes the ephemeral nature of these artworks, but also force visitors to use other senses in addition to sight. *BioVanitas*, generally, are created with materials that emit a very intense aroma, therefore it is possible to perceive them, or rather, to smell them before even seeing them. *BioVanitas'* continuous change does not only affect to their aesthetic appearance, as their physical transformation has a direct impact on their olfactory perception too. While it is true that at first there can be perceived bright colours and pleasant aromas, as Morgan previously described, as days go by this first appearance will give rise to dull colours and decomposition odours.

Untitled [F. 57-58] is an example to illustrate one of *BioVanitas'* main characteristics, metamorphosis as the materialization of Time. The representation of what does not stay the same and which reacts to its surroundings. The use of Time as matter, and material, not only means *BioVanitas'* physical transformation but also supposes changes for professionals to approach them. Because it is necessary to know that *BioVanitas* are not artworks to be observed; they have to be experienced. And this perception, which arises from experimentation, leads to *BioVanitas'* second main characteristic: the importance of the senses.

¹³⁰ If we follow the cone of light into the past, it can be appreciated that it bends because of the attraction of matter from the early universe. The entire observed universe is contained in a region whose boundary shrinks to zero in the Big Bang. This will constitute a singularity, a point at which the density of matter would be infinite and classical general relativity would no longer be valid. HAWKING, Op. Cit., p.41.

1.4.3. Bio*Vanitas*, a multisensory experience

Can we trust the experiences, or our senses deceive us, as the philosopher René Descartes postulated¹³¹? Some people consider that the passage of time is nothing more than a sensory event¹³², therefore, it is curious to question the veracity of the senses when the *Vanitas* allude to disabuse; to deception because of not knowing how to look¹³³.

This allusion to disabuse emphasizes the importance of knowing not how to see¹³⁴ but how to look, and although Bio*Vanitas* keep this quality, their disabuse goes further. The use that Bio*Vanitas* make of Time, as matter and material, supposes experiencing them in a multisensorial way, making senses' significance their second main characteristic.

This study considers Bio*Vanitas*' multisensory experience a legacy from their baroque ancestors. The difference, as the specialist in Italian Renaissance Sylvia Ferino-Pagden points out, lies in the way that senses are treated. While baroque *vanitas* deal with senses from the scientific and philosophical perspective, Bio*Vanitas* address them from the scientific and physiological knowledge of sensory perception¹³⁵.

¹³¹ "I have learned from the senses or through the senses everything that I have had until today for truer and sure; Now, I have experienced several times that the senses are deceptive, and it is wise never to trust completely those who have ever deceived us". DESCARTE, R. (1999), *Discurso del método. Meditaciones metafísicas*. Madrid, España: Espasa, p. 126.

¹³² MENDOZA-VEGA, J. (2017, noviembre 29). Sobre La Comprensión Del Trascurso Del Tiempo. *Medicina*, 39(4), 354-358. Retrieved from <https://revistamedicina.net/ojsanm/index.php/Medicina/article/view/119-7> (14/04/2020), p. 354.

¹³³ According to the art historian Luis Sánchez the baroque culture being aware of the importance of sight, ocularcentism, became the eye in the main organ for perception using visual resources for the propagandist strategy that the baroque culture sought, to create wise individuals from disabuse got through the look. VIVES_FERRÁNDIZ SÁNCHEZ, Op. Cit., pp. 34-69.

¹³⁴ Seeing is associated with a physical process in which an image is produced while the gaze thinks that image. Ibid, p. 247.

¹³⁵ FERINO-PAGDEN, S. (1997). Prefacio. At SABÁN GODOY, Op. Ccit., p. 21.



[F. 59] David Bailly, *Vanitas* (1651).

In *vanitas* paintings every object had a specific meaning and its choice and location, in the compositions, was not accidental. Besides, each element was related to one, or more, senses. As it was thought that the soul could be corrupted through the senses, and to make allusion to this consideration, they usually were represented in *vanitas* paintings. Among other, sight was represented with any element that reflects the image or influences the gaze, such as reflective surfaces or glasses; hearing with musical instruments; taste with any fruit or edible; smell with flowers, and touch with games of chance or painting tools.

It can be appreciated in David Bailly's (1584-1657) *Vanitas* (1651) [F. 59], in addition to the genre's main themes, the five senses are also present. Although they are limited by the canvas, the five senses are referred to hastily and, perhaps, hardly discernible if its iconography is not known. Sight is represented in every reflective surfaces, in the mirror, in the soap bubbles' reflections and in the metallic surfaces; the flute refers to hearing; the coins allude to touch; the wine and the tobacco pipe evoke the taste, while the smell is evident with the flowers. Although, as Ferino-Pagden points out, *Vanitas* used the senses with a moralistic intentionality¹³⁶. Symbolically, the five senses exposed the comforts of sexual life and beauty under the discreet appearance of an imposed morality¹³⁷.

¹³⁶ FERINO-PAGDEN, Op. Cit., p. 24.

¹³⁷ ALBIN, Op. Cit., p. 286.

As senses are represented in a painting, it is possible to think that the experience that *vanitas* offer is “merely” visual. However, this fact drives to reflect on the origin of free thought and abstraction proposed by Hans Jonas. According to the German philosopher, the gaze collects the image that is blurred in the imagination, being able to completely obviate the reality of the object, and this ability to separate “form” — “matter” and “essence” — “existence”, is for Jonas the basis of free thought and abstraction¹³⁸. Hence, the baroque *vanitas*' importance of knowing how to look that Bio*Vanitas* also conserve.

And what about the Bio*Vanitas*? How do they represent the senses? The mix media, and dimension variable sculpture by Michel Blazy (1966-) *Bar à oranges (Orange Bar)* (2012) [F. 60], is a good example to illustrate the multisensory experience that Bio*Vanitas* represent. As Julia Mossé, who was press and communication manager at *art: concept* gallery in Paris, explained, in this installation everything is part of the artwork and everything is accepted¹³⁹.

In *Bar à oranges*, Blazy uses orange peels to mix different degradation phases, and their constant change makes it possible to contain multiple times in a single artwork. Unfortunately, it is not possible to experience *Bar à oranges* by ourselves, but it is possible to imagine it.

Let us imagine in the entrance of the exhibition on the opening day. Involuntarily, and even before entering, it will be appreciated the smell of orange. A mental image will automatically be formed and taste sense will be activated. The sensation will be intensified as entering the room and seeing it filled with oranges' vibrant colours and smell.

Once inside, with orange smell everywhere, it is time to take the oranges and cut them to prepare the juice. This gesture will provide information about its weight, its texture, its temperature ... and it will also impregnate hands with its aroma. It will be necessary to squeeze the two halves of the orange to make juice, witnessing how matter changes its state. As applying pressure, it will be evident how the consistency

¹³⁸ JONAS, H. (2000), *El principio vida hacia una biología filosófica*. Madrid, España: Trotta, p. 204.

¹³⁹ MOSSE, Julia. personal communication, 06/20/2017.



[F. 60] Michael Blazy. Sculpture: *Bar à oranges* (2012). Detail.
Mixed media. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy Michael Blazy & Art: Concept, Paris



[F. 61] Fresh fruit peels. Detail.
Michael Blazy. Sculpture: *Bar à oranges* (2012).
Mixed media. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy Michael Blazy & Art: Concept, Paris

of the orange gives way until there is not more than a peel. This peel, once it is empty and less rigid, will be placed on the tray next to other stacked peels [F. 61]. Still with orange-smell hands, it will be necessary to take the glass to drink the juice. While drinking, it will be revealed if it is sweet, sour, fresh, if it has pulp ... materializing, this way, the taste illusion that was generated simply by smelling the oranges. It seems that the experience is pleasant, right?

Now, let us do the same exercise, but imagining that it is a few days later. What it is perceived before entering will be a mixture of smells. A mix of fresh and rotten fruit odour, which will not evoke a freshness' image or a pleasant taste; Rather the opposite. Surely will generate an involuntary grimace of displeasure, and this is what will welcome people when entering [F. 62].



[F. 62] Evolution of the work. Detail.
Michael Blazy. Sculpture: *Bar à oranges* (2012).
Mixed media. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy Michael Blazy & Art: Concept, Paris

It is the same artwork, *Bar à oranges*, but it is not the same, is it? The smell and sight of rotting fruit will influence, probably negatively, into visitor's perception. Everything that it is perceived now will produce a completely different emotional response than to the one experienced in the first days. Its physical transformation also supposes an alteration in its expressive content¹⁴⁰.

Although the juice is made with fresh oranges, its taste will not be that tasty, as while drinking it, the particles of the decomposing fruit will reach the olfactory system and alter the taste's perception. Finally, when placing the peels, this movement will be done carefully to avoid touching while driving away the flies that emerged from the pile made with previous peels [F. 65].

Through these two examples, it is possible to appreciate the evolution of the new disabuse, what the historian Fernando Checa Cremades describes as "the distrust in

¹⁴⁰ TAYLOR, Joshua C. (1985), *Aprender a mirar. Una introducción a las artes visuales*. Madrid, España: Unigraf, p. 54.

the sensory perception that characterizes the contemporary world¹⁴¹". The exterior, involuntarily, leaves a mark in what the Greeks called *endothen* (the interior), which makes it possible to experience the artwork with the five senses¹⁴².

According to Adorno, the aesthetic experience crystallizes in the precise artwork and, after this little experiment, it can be intuited that the sensations perceived will be completely different depending on the moment in which they are experienced. However, this experience should not be isolated from the artwork, as it by itself is not sufficient for its aesthetic justification. Experience is not enough, it must be accompanied by reflection. As Adorno states: "Nothing can be understood only from itself¹⁴³."

1.4.4. Classification of Bio*Vanitas*

Ephemeral. So are Bio*Vanitas*, but each in its own way. The creative destruction posed by Bio*Vanitas* as a creative process is directly related, not only to the concept of ruin, but also to the ephemeral essence. A fleeting nature that can develop on a physical context, from the use of perishable materials that reflect the consequences of the passage of time, or a conceptual context, through works that implicitly contain the ephemeral essence in their concept.

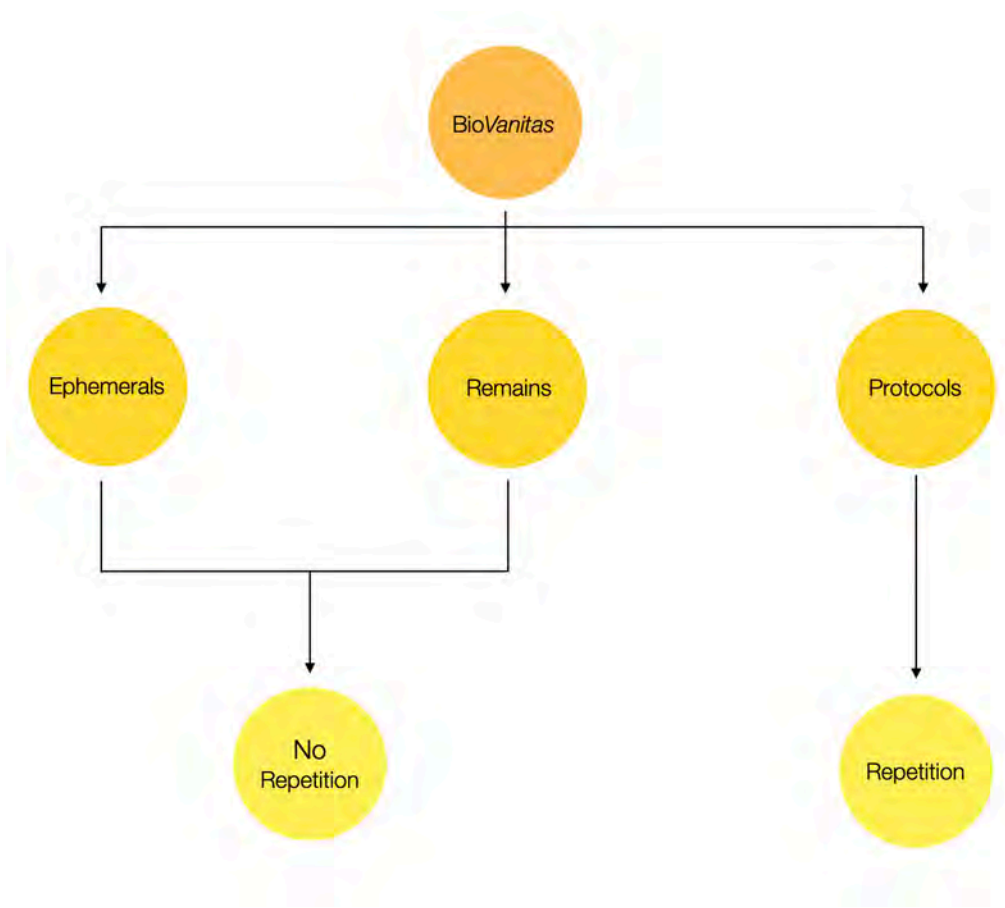
Although Bio*Vanitas* are temporary confluences that pose destruction as part of their creative process, not all do it from the same perspective. The main difference lies in their approach and intention.

At this point, as shown in the diagram [F. 63], created and developed from an own classification and denomination, this study considers that Bio*Vanitas* can be distinguished into three main groups: Ephemerals, Remains and Protocols.

¹⁴¹ CHECA CREMADES, F. (1997), Verdad y mentira de los cinco sentidos. En SABÁN GODOY, Op. Cit., p. 19.

¹⁴² LLEDÓ, Emilio. (1997), Sentir lo que sentimos en *Los cinco sentidos y el arte*. Madrid, España: Museo del Prado, p. 17.

¹⁴³ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 451-452.



[F. 63] BioVanitas' classification diagram.

This classification is made based on Bio*Vanitas*' intrinsic time, which depends on the life of their materials, and their idea or concept of the ephemeral.

The first distinction will be based on the repetition possibility, or not, as what it is significant about Bio*Vanitas* is their possibility of existing beyond destruction. Once this point has been clarified, this is the classification that this study proposes for Bio*Vanitas*.

The first group is composed of those Bio*Vanitas* that do not consider repetition. That is, those Bio*Vanitas* whose production time ends with their materials' time, or the object's time. This first group would be referred to: Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* and Remains Bio*Vanitas*.

- **Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*:** This study considers Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, those Bio*Vanitas* made with perishable materials, which make sense in their materials' time, but not beyond. Artworks that propose, whole or partial, destruction as part of their creative process. Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*' destruction could be designed to be developed in long or short period, but never contemplating the repetition. These artworks' existence will be limited by the performative time and the time of the used materials.

Eggs (1997) by Peter de Cupere (1970 -) is an Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* example. *Eggs* belongs to the collection of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent (Belgium) since 1997¹⁴⁴. This artwork consists of 23 fresh eggs (at least they were in 1997) of de Cupere's hens, wrapped with cooked and stitched chicken skin, and placed in a metal egg basket¹⁴⁵ [F. 64].

The chicken skin covers the eggs totally, and this way their smell is contained within the packages that create the chicken skins. The smell and the internal transformation of the eggs are camouflaged by the chicken skin that over the years has been cracking and detaching from the surface of the eggs.

¹⁴⁴ According to de Cupere, when he was transporting *Eggs* in his vehicle, he had an accident that broke some eggs, so he remade the broken eggs. Personal conversation with Peter de Cupere at the PXL MAD School of Arts in Hasselt (Belgium) on 02/20/2020.

¹⁴⁵ According to de Cupere, the artwork is completed by 23 eggs, although in the S.M.A.K. there are 22 quantified. The missing egg is stored separately in an artist box. Personal conversation with Peter de Cupere at the PXL MAD School of Arts in Hasselt (Belgium) on 02/20/2020.



[F. 64] Peter De Cupere. *Eggs* (1997).
Courtesy Peter de Cupere and Archive of
S.M.A.K.

Besides, the skin acts as a *trompe l'oeil* too, as it evokes the idea of the broken egg. As Cupere himself mentioned, for this artwork he used his own chickens' egg, which he feed with a specific food so that they would have a pinkish colouration. About the chicken, the artist said that he bought a roast chicken to share with some friends and that the skin that was left at the end of the meal was what he used to coat the eggs¹⁴⁶.

A variant of this first group are the **Site Specific Ephemeral BioVanitas**: These *BioVanitas* respond to the most rigorous definition of the ephemeral concept. Site Specific Ephemeral *BioVanitas* are those artworks made with perishable materials, which make sense in a precise time and space, but not beyond.

These artworks that propose, generally in a short time, total or partial destruction as part of their creative process do not contemplate the repetition. These artworks' consumption time determines the life span of the *BioVanitas*, independent of if it is completed or not.

¹⁴⁶ Personal conversation with Peter de Cupere at the PXL MAD School of Arts in Hasselt (Belgium) on 02/20/2020.



[F. 65] Pablo Mesa Capella, *INNESTI (Grafts)* (2015)
Courtesy Pablo Mesa Capella

INNESTI (Grafts) (2015) by Pablo Mesa Capella (1982) is a Site Specific Ephemeral BioVanitas [F. 65]. It is a site specific installation that the artist proposed for the project *room2* in 2015. Lori Adragna curated this exhibition at Casale dei Cedrati in Villa Pamphilj (Rome) between December 19, 2015 and January 9, 2016. Mesa explained, that this installation, which has not been repeated, lacks graphic documentation of its evolution and that is why there are only available images of the inauguration day¹⁴⁷. Besides the information provided by Mesa, it has been impossible to get more information because Casale dei Cedrati closed.

INNESTI was designed as a happening¹⁴⁸ site-specific installation. An artwork that used the senses of the public as a spatial game. For the artist, colours, lights and touch were important, but above all, the olfactory sensation.

¹⁴⁷ Video conference with Pablo Mesa Capella el 02/28/2017.

¹⁴⁸ For Mesa, it is important to differentiate between *happening* and *performance*. From his point of view *happening*, unlike *performance*, involves the public but without disturbing them, making them participant in the action and in a process. MESA, P., personal communication, 02/28/2017.

Mesa wanted to test matter's transformation from a very basic way, the consequences of performative Time practically till its decompose. The use of fresh fruit, and its organic natural process, was the way in which Mesa understood this material hybridization that gave meaning to the work.

- **Remains BioVanitas:** These BioVanitas can be understood as a consequence of Ephemeral BioVanitas, and they can be physical, documentary, or both.

Using the definition that the artist, and aesthetics expert Leonard Koren (1948) makes of the term "shell", Physical Remains BioVanitas could be understood as¹⁴⁹: "things that have the shape and that seem to be, but that they have no longer their true spirit". These artworks are qualified as remain, as they have already fulfilled their function. They do not consider repetition as a possibility, and propose total or partial destruction as part of their creative process. Physical Remains BioVanitas' performative time has ended, but its consumption time still lasts. The end of their performative time can occur naturally or by intervention.

The artworks that this study proposes as Physical Remains BioVanitas example is Dieter Roth's (1930-1998) *Schokoladenmeer (Chocolate Sea)* (1970), which belongs to the collection of the *Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona* (MACBA) [F. 66].

This installation (110 × 66 × 32 cm) was made with Lindt dark chocolate bars, placed one on top of the other, and typewritten paper from a novel that Roth never published. The artwork represents the cycle of life: birth, growth and death. The artist wanted to close the cycle, and he did it with chocolate.

This study considers *Schokoladenmeer (Chocolate Sea)* as a Physical Remains BioVanitas, because of Silvia Noger's, head of conservation-restoration at MACBA, words¹⁵⁰. She informed us that the artwork seems to have reached a stability level in which it does no shows, at least visible at first sight, any more changes.

¹⁴⁹ KOREN, L. (1997), *Wabi-Sabi para Artistas, Diseñadores, Poetas y Filósofos*. Barcelona, España: Hipòtesi-Renart, p. 86.

¹⁵⁰ Interview to Silvia Noger at MACBA (Barcelona, Spain), 09/05/2019.



[F. 66] Dieter Roth. *Schokoladenmeer (Chocolate Sea)* (1970).

MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation.

© Estate of Dieter Roth, 2021

This fact makes them suppose that the artwork's physical changes, as a result of the materialization of Time, have reached their peak, and that it could be considered stable.

The artwork, which is not loaned to prevent any risky situation and to avoid possible alterations, has been exhibited seven times at the MACBA. In every exhibition it has been used a specific show case, considered part of the sculpture. In the exhibition room there was a temperature of 20 +/- 2 °C, a relative humidity of 50 +/- 5% and lighting between 75 and 80 luxes. About the care of the installation, it is the Restoration team the responsible for maintenance, and conservation of the artwork, but never the cleaning staff¹⁵¹.

In addition to "shell"-shape, Remains BioVanitas give the possibility to represent remains in another format, the documentation.

¹⁵¹ The exhibitions in which *Schokoladenmeer* has been exhibited at the MACBA are: *Desitjos i necessitats* (2015-2016); *Episodis crítics* (2012-2013); *Volum* (2011-2012); *Col·lecció 20* (2007); *Col·lecció 14* (2003); *Col·lecció 12* (2002); *Col·lecció. Noves incorporacions* (2000). Personal email communication with Alejandro Castro, 05/11/2017.



[F. 67] Azuma Makoto, *Drop Time vol 5*. (2019). Film still.

2 de abril-8 de abril, 2019

AMFC (Azuma Makoto Flower Center)

Courtesy Azuma Makoto

An example of Documentary Remains BioVanitas is in Azuma Makoto's (1976) video series *Drop Time*¹⁵² (2019) [F. 67]. The Japanese artist creates floral sculptures in which subjects to different elements, such as fire, ice, etc. His work responds to a complex concept, but which is basic in Japanese arts, called *mono no aware* (物の哀れ). A concept based on melancholy, or empathy that is felt when facing the ephemeral¹⁵³.

In *Drop Time* Makoto records different flower bouquets' deterioration process that he later reverses to bring them back to their original state. A resurgence in its destruction.

In this case recording of the transformation not only serves to document the process, but it is what lasts from the artwork. The remain is what would be available, while there would always be a more personal aspect of the artwork that will not be accessible.

¹⁵² MAKOTO, A. (s.f.). *Azuma Makoto*
<http://azumamakoto.com/3631/>

¹⁵³ TOMÁS AVELLANA, L. (s.f.) *El concepto del mono no aware*
<https://japonismo.com/blog/el-concepto-de-mono-no-aware>

Moreover, preserving the creative destruction that this works present, not only means that the artworks live beyond their physical state, but that they are transferred to another format that perpetuates them above the time of their materials. In this way, the artworks are done only once, but they can be projected as many times as the artist wants. This fact is also linked to the ephemeral, due to the technological obsolescence. However, since the documentation becomes the artworks themselves, could the projection of this videos be considered as a repetition?

The second group, which considers repetition as a possibility, and as part of the process, is consists on what this study defines as Protocol *BioVanitas*.

- **Protocol *BioVanitas***: Quoting Adorno¹⁵⁴, Protocol *BioVanitas* could be defined, as an endless purpose. Protocol *BioVanitas* are those ephemeral artworks made with perishable materials, which contemplate materials', total or partial, destruction for the artwork to be completed, but which are designed to be repeated as many times as necessary. That is, its consumption time has an expiration, regardless of the material's time, as it can be repeated, as many times, and whenever it is considered appropriate.

Anya Gallaccio's (1963) *Red on Green* (1992 - Present) [F. 68 - 69] is the artwork selected as a Protocol *BioVanitas* example. *Red on Green* is an installation, which has been repeated since 1992 on several occasions. This artwork proposes the transformation and destruction of 10,000 red tea roses displayed like a carpet on the floor of the exhibition space.

Smell is an important feature in this installation. The fragrance of roses refers to the romance and deterioration that, little by little, makes its way, transforming their initial colour and leaving them to die.

For Protocol *BioVanitas*, consumption time is unlimited but finite, since they contemplate repetition, and in each repetition their consumption time starts from zero.

¹⁵⁴ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 186.



[F. 68] Anya Gallaccio, *Red on Green* (1992-Presente). Jupiter Artland, 2012.
© Anya Gallaccio
Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Jupiter Artland



[F. 69] Anya Gallaccio, *Red on Green* (1992-Presente). Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 2019.
© Anya Gallaccio
Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art



[F. 70] Claire Morgan, *Fluid II* (2009).

Crow (taxidermy), strawberries, fishing hooks, nylon.
200 x 150 x 150 cm.

© Claire Morgan. Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz
Photo: Claire Morgan Studio



[F. 71] Claire Morgan, *Fluid II* (2009).

Crow (taxidermy), strawberries, fishing hooks, nylon.
200 x 150 x 150 cm.

© Claire Morgan. Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz
Photo: Claire Morgan Studio

Protocol BioVanitas have a variant classified as Mixed Protocol BioVanitas. This study defines **Mixed Protocol BioVanitas** as those ephemeral artworks made with perishable materials that contemplate the total or partial destruction of the artwork, and its repetition as many times as it is necessary. However, these BioVanitas have one exception.

This variant usually have a not perishable element that is repeated in every exhibition. This non-perishable elements does not have to be the same in every display, but it is an element that does not suffer the degradation that the other organic materials of the artwork suffer.

For Mixed Protocol BioVanitas, the organic materials' performance time begins with every repetition. On the other hand, if they non-perishable material is always the same, it preserves the original performative time, because it has been part of the artwork from the beginning, or at least since its first display.

Morgan's *Fluid II* (2009) is the example selected to illustrate Mixed Protocol BioVanitas [F. 70 - 71]. The title, as the artist explains, refers to something that stops. In this artwork the artist captures the passage of time in a way that, although it flows forward, its more direct and close consequences are still visible, suggesting a concatenated process between the materials¹⁵⁵.

Fluid II (200 x 150 x 150 cm) is made of nylon, hooks, a naturalized crow, and strawberries. Due to their organic nature, and their short life, strawberries are the last thing to be placed in the installation. Strawberries get rotten in every exhibition, so they have to be replaced, but the crow is the constant in every display.

In her artworks, the Irish artist works with Time with a double meaning. She combines fruits, seeds, or leaves with naturalized animals; a juxtaposition of what is alive and what is dead. First, living materials are the ones that are most important in the installation. Furthermore, the organic process makes these objects to lose their apparent initial presence, relegating them to the background and giving prominence to inanimate animals that, as they have stopped their living Time, are the constant that emerges.

¹⁵⁵ MORGAN, Op. Cit., p. 96.

Even if the raven is an organic matter too, it has stopped its organic process due to the naturalization process that has suffered. This naturalization process makes possible to use it in every exhibition, despite its organic nature, and to preserve its broken-wing appearance the result of its death by collision with a vehicle. This fact, the use of the same raven, makes this artwork easily recognizable.

Those Bio*Vanitas* that contemplate “repetition”, such as Protocol Bio*Vanitas* and the Mixed Bio*Vanitas*, pose the following questions, how many times can these Bio*Vanitas* be repeated? Is there a finite limit of “repetitions”? Can these Bio*Vanitas* be repeated until eternity? Should they have to be not displayed again after the artist dies?

Bio*Vanitas* classification could also be done according to their activity, depending on if they are active or not active. The first group would consider those Bio*Vanitas* whose organic process is active and involves the transformation of the artworks. This will be formed by Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, Site Specific Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, Protocol Bio*Vanitas*, and Mixed Protocol Bio*Vanitas*. The second group would be formed by the non-active Bio*Vanitas*, those Bio*Vanitas* whose organic process has stopped, and therefore that they will remain stable because their transformation process has concluded. This group would only consider Remains Bio*Vanitas*.

These examples have showed that there are different kinds of Bio*Vanitas*, and diverse classification options too. Unlike baroque *vanitas* classification¹⁵⁶, that was very extensive, Bio*Vanitas*' is quite limited. However, there are certain conditions that imply changes when facing a Bio*Vanitas*.

¹⁵⁶ Only in Spanish baroque *vanitas* there are 26 different typologies in addition to the three main groups: humanists, (self) portrait and imperial, as mentioned above.



[F. 72] Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger. *Brainforest* (2004).
Courtesy Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger



Bio *Vanital*

Dilemmas

2

It can never be said that thought determines art, but neither can it be said that art determines thought; the issue is always more interdisciplinary and branching.

Javier Fuentes Feo

The BioVanitas *Strange fruit* (1997) by Zoe Leonard (1961) will be taken as reference [F. 73]. This artwork arose in response to a personal need of the artist during the mourning of a very close friend of her, David, who died because of AIDS. The artwork, which took the title of a song by Billie Holiday, was made with fruits that Leonard and her friends ate and let dry. *Strange fruit* has a peculiarity, it is the only artwork in which Leonard has used food.

Strange fruit started in 1992 with two oranges in Provincetown, Massachusetts. It continued in New York and ended in Alaska, where Leonard's friends sent the fruit to her by post-mail. In 1997 Leonard finished the work.



[F. 73] Zoe Leonard. *Strange Fruit* (1997). Detail of the installation on display, (2017).

Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

© Zoe Leonard

Courtesy Zoe Leonard & Galery Gisela Capitain, Cologne & Houser & Wirth.

Strange fruit was made with about three hundred peels of oranges, bananas, lemons, grapefruits, and avocados. Using thread, needle and wire, Leonard intervened the peels by adding zips, buttons, plastics, wires, stickers, fabrics, and wax¹⁵⁷.

The first time *Strange fruit* was exhibited was in 1995, in the artist's own studio in the Lower East Side (New York) and later, that same year, at the Jennifer Flay Gallery in Paris. In 1997, it was displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami, at the Kunsthalle in Basel, and at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York.

A year later, in 1998, and thanks to the interest shown by Ann Temkin, curator of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) at that moment, the PMA acquired the work¹⁵⁸.

The acquisition of *Strange fruit* was the result of a contribution between the Dietrich Foundation, Paula Cooper Gallery, and a partial donation from Leonard herself. Even knowing that it was a life span limited artwork, due to the nature of its materials, both parties assumed its degradation and reached an agreement.

Leonard, whose work is linked to photography and memory, allowed to photograph *Strange fruit*'s different stages to document its transformation. This documentation of the deterioration, according to Leonard herself, could be interpreted as an art diary linking *Strange fruit* with some of her other works¹⁵⁹. In this case, it would be possible to understand the documentation as remain of the work.

The PMA and the artist agreed to intervene 25 of the 300 pieces that made up the artwork, as the appearance of deterioration, and the metamorphosis, were not enough for Leonard. The choice of the best method to preserve the pieces, while respecting the artist, was a laborious process that Leonard herself carried out with the German curator Christian Scheidmann from 1995 to 1996. The fact of conserving, even if they were only a few elements of the artwork, means that *Strange*

¹⁵⁷ PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART. (s.f.). *Strange Fruit*.
<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/92277.html?mulR=523165303|1>

¹⁵⁸ GILMAN, J. (2015), The role of science in contemporary art conservation: a study into the conservation and presentation of food-based art. Ghent University, Ghent (Belgium).p. 144.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 146.

fruit suffered quite a relevant change. In the origin it was an Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, but as the result of the intervention it became a Remains Bio*Vanitas*.

As the conservator Nina Quabeck points out, Leonard wanted to preserve only the fruit peels, but ideally in different stages of decomposition¹⁶⁰: "There is a certain amount of variety in the stages of decay and I suppose the challenge here is to find a method of preservation that will work at arresting the process of decay at any stage".

Finally, in 1996 both parts found a proper solution. Every fruit peel would be shock-freeze, and immersed in vacuum in Paraloid B-72¹⁶¹. Fortunately, this solution was very effective and to date it has not been necessary the replacement of any original part. In an interview, by Beth Dungan in 2002, Leonard stated¹⁶²:

For me, preserving the object is like preserving the experience, the memory, or the set of associations. *Strange Fruit* deals with the conflict between hanging on and letting go. Which in a way is what mourning is. The conflict in that piece is that every scrap is saved, painstakingly mended, but since the peels themselves are not preserved, they continue to decay. Over time, the shrivel fade. The piece itself is slowly disintegrating.

This process of change was important for the artist. Leonard's original intention was to keep *Strange Fruit* on permanent display, as it was clearly specified in correspondence with the PMA. Unfortunately, this aim was not specified in the final contract, and different circumstances made this purpose not to be possible¹⁶³.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Zoe Leonard to Christian Scheidmann, 26th June 1996. Quoted in QUABECK, N. (2019). Intent in the making: the life of Zoe Leonard's "Strange fruit". *The Burlington Contemporary magazine*. Retrieved from <https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/journal/journal/intent-in-the-making-the-life-of-zoe-leonards-strange-fruit>

¹⁶¹ TEMKIN, A. (1999). Strange fruit. En CORZO Miguel Ángel (Coord.). *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th Century Art*. Los Angeles, Estados Unidos: Getty Publications, p. 47.

¹⁶² DUNGAN, B. (2002), An interview with Zoe Leonard. *Discourse*, 24(2), 70-85,158, p. 83. Retrieved from <https://ehu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/interview-with-zoe-leonard/docview/212434729/se-2?accountid=17248>

¹⁶³ Letter from Zoe Leonard to Ann Temkin, 22nd December 2000. Quoted in QUABECK, Op. Cit.



[F. 74] Zoe Leonard. *Strange Fruit* (1997). Detail of the work on display, (1998).

Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

© Zoe Leonard

Courtesy Zoe Leonard & Galery Gisela Capitain, Cologne & Houser & Wirth.



[F. 75] Zoe Leonard. *Strange fruit* (1992-97). Detail of the work on display, (2017).

Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

© Zoe Leonard

Courtesy Zoe Leonard & Galery Gisela Capitain, Cologne & Houser & Wirth.

Since *Strange Fruit* is part of the PMA's collection, the artwork has been exhibited twice in the museum: in 1998, and in June 2017. It has only been loaned once, in 1999 to the Israel Museum (Jerusalem, Israel). For this occasion, it was the curatorial department the responsible for the exhibition decisions¹⁶⁴.

Strange fruit has been exhibited in different ways since 1995, with some fruits hanging on a rope in front of a window, with the fruits on shelves, or with them on the floor¹⁶⁵. However, since it is part of the PMA's collection it has always been exhibited in the same way; with the fruits scattered on the ground [F. 74 - 75].

As Sally Malenka, curator of the PMA, mentioned in an interview in 2017, there are no instructions for *Strange fruit*¹⁶⁶. In 1998 the installation was exhibited independently in a room, at a RH of 50% and a temperature of 21 °C. Because of Leonard's clear preference for natural light, lighting conditions were variable. According to Malenka, the artist promised to make a dossier with instructions in her next exhibition planned for June 2017.

In this first exhibition in 1998, the conservation-restoration team was in charge of cleaning and maintenance of the artwork and only had to intervene to prevent the spread of pests (insects)¹⁶⁷.

The conservation-restoration team was also in charge of *Strange fruit*'s storage once the exhibition was over. For this process, each piece was placed in individual polyethylene bags that were placed in the original boxes stored in showcases¹⁶⁸.

In the essay published by Temkin, it is pointed out the disagreement among the acquisition team with the idea of assigning a registration number to something that was going to disappear. However, Temkin argued that giving something a number, or

¹⁶⁴ The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel. *Skin Deep: Surface and Appearance in Contemporary Art*, from 26th March to 31st July 1999. MALENKA, S., personal communication, (06/19/2017).

¹⁶⁵ QUABECK, Op. Cit.

¹⁶⁶ MALENKA, Op. Cit.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

a registration, does not guarantee its perpetual existence and that a museum must preserve other elements beyond the stable or imperishable¹⁶⁹.

The truth is, that from 2001 to 2018 *Strange fruit* remained in storage. Although the PMA agreed to use measures to delay its degradation during storage¹⁷⁰, the 17 years that it has spent in the warehouse have prevented its transformation process from being visible. This fact has been the origin of certain tension between the artist and the museum¹⁷¹.

Strange fruit was innovative because of its materials, but not because of its topic. The use of perishable materials, in this case fruits in the rotting process, evoked the transience of life and the passage of time, like in the seventeenth century. This representation of the obsolescence of Time is much more impressive than a painting, as it makes possible to witness the consequences of Time on the artwork itself. *Strange fruit* raises questions about the permanence of art and where it resides; in the ideas, in the concepts, in the objects ...

Strange fruit is also a good example to highlight some of the main problems that BioVanitas, and their fundamental idea of destruction as creative process, pose in collection. Raising questions regarding exhibition, documentation, intervention, or storage. Actually, these circumstances can be understood as challenges or dilemmas, rather than as problems. As Jonas says¹⁷²: "every problem is in essence the collision between a very broad conviction and a particular fact that does not fold before it."

¹⁶⁹ TEMKIN, Op. Cit., p. 48.

¹⁷⁰ BUSKIRK, M. (2000). Planning for Impermanence. What does the future hold for today's art works that employ ephemeral materials or rapidly obsolescent components? *Art in America*. Vol. 88, nº 4. April, 112-119. Quoted in GILMAN, Op. Cit., p. 147.

¹⁷¹ QUABECK, Op. Cit.

¹⁷² JONAS, Op. Cit., p. 23.

2.1. The documentation paradox

Maybe, Milan Kundera's phrase¹⁷³ "what happens only once is as if it never happened" may be true. This may be why documentation seems so necessary for ephemeral art, because it disappears, and generally, documentation is the only thing that remains.

Due to their ephemeral nature, Bio*Vanitas* present a complex documentation dilemma, because what is the purpose of documentation? To preserve? To keep? To report? Are these objectives compatible with those artworks whose approach is fugacity?

There are many professionals who consider the documentation essential for transitory nature artworks, as once they disappear, the documentation is what lasts. This refers only to the physical aspect, because although Bio*Vanitas* corporeality disappear, their concept remains.

The concept will endure through the memory of the people who remember the Bio*Vanitas* and will disappear with them, or with what documents them. So, we are back at the starting point.

Despite the importance of documentation, it is essential not to forget that the original artwork is the most relevant document. The original artwork will set the guidelines for observation and intervention criteria, although its evolution will depend on its active nature and the circumstances that surround it¹⁷⁴. Because what is tangible can be documented, but how can be captured what is intangible?

What about the immaterial? Who decides what to document and what not? What should be documented? Should the documentation be limited to the artistic object?

¹⁷³ KUNDERA, Mi. (2019). *La insoportable levedad del ser*. Barcelona, España: Tusquets, p. 234.

¹⁷⁴ ALTHÖFER, H. (2003), *Restauración de pintura contemporánea. Tendencias, Materiales, Técnicas*. Madrid, España: Akal, pp.11-50.

To the idea¹⁷⁵? To the production process? Or to all of it? If the BioVanitas considers repetition, should it be documented its elaboration process to make sure it could be carried out, faithfully, if the artist is not? Should BioVanitas' entire transformation process be documented? All the stages of matter? Or just the beginning and the end? But which is the end?

Humans' documentation need can be understood as another way of conserving. A way to preserve the present so that it makes sense in the future. As the Professor and Researcher Hanna B. Hölling suggests¹⁷⁶, "it is memory, it is remaining, and it is interpretation". However, this eagerness to document everything can generate a bigger problem: hyper-documentation.

The commonest documentation methods, at least nowadays, are: photography, videos, interviews, correspondence, instructions that may have been generated, conservation reports, exhibition reports, loans, people related to the artwork, remains of the artworks, and sometimes even 3D scanning, or the hologram. In an institution, normally, each department generates its own documentation, both physical and digital, which is stored and shared in common files.

The idea of documentation raises the possibility of conserving, or preserving a seen, alive, or fixed Time. At first, documentation seems a solution that borders on the eternal, but is it really an effective solution to preserve Time?

On the one hand, analogue documentation is sensitive to disappearing due to natural causes, while digital documentation is susceptible to infinite computer viruses and technological obsolescence. This supposes the continuous update and migration of systems, making possible the idea that at some point the media may not be compatible and that everything may be lost. And what would happen if it happens? What if everything gets lost? What if it is not possible to document? Or if the documentation disappears?

¹⁷⁵ Let us clarify the difference between *idea* and *concept* based on Sol Lewit's Phrases on conceptual art. For the artist, *concept* and *idea* are two different things, the *idea* is a component while the *concept* is something general. The *idea* is what sets the *concept* in motion and therefore only *ideas* can be considered artworks. LIPPARD, L. R. (2004). *Seis años: la desmaterialización del objeto artístico de 1966 a 1972*. Madrid, España: Akal, p. 124.

¹⁷⁶ HÖLLING, H. B. (2020), Archive and documentation. *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, 17, 19.

Analysing this matter from a closer perspective to the ephemeral concept than to conservation, documentation may not always be an option, or a possibility. For example, for those artworks designed from the purest ephemeral concept, in which their existence could not be understood beyond a certain time and place, not even in documentation format.

The use of the Performative Time in Bio*Vanitas* supposes their liberation of Time. The fleetingness of Time and the impossible to go back underlines the *tempus fugit* or *carpe diem* concept, depending on the perspective.

Sometimes documentation could be understood as the desire of freezing moments, like catching Time, depriving the Bio*Vanitas* of the freedom previously endowed. A way to snatch their free will provided by Performative Time to anchor them to a cyclical time. On the other hand, the possibility of reliving the experience, from a video record, or from a photograph, may diminish coherence to their original message, if this was not the artist's intention.

According to this, it should be considered the way in which artists want to document, or not, their Bio*Vanitas*. This should be a matter to discuss with special care, because eliminating the documentation is a forgets synonymous?

Some artists, like, for example, Tino Sehgal (1976), do not leave any documentary evidence of their creations. The documentation resides in the memory of the public. However, the concept of memory is closely linked to time. The memory does not live outside of time, but in turn, time modifies it.

As the film director, and theorist Andrei Tarkovski points out, they are two sides of the same coin. The memory comes from a personal experience, and it is an inner concept that is individual and impossible to experience, but in the same way, it is necessary to have lived the event, and yet each person will keep a different memory of the same event¹⁷⁷.

However, Sehgal's stance about memory's conservation, reminds to Nietzsche's, as the philosopher advocated the idea of forgetting in order to imagine. Due to the

¹⁷⁷ TARKOVSKI, A. (2019). *Esculpir en el tiempo. Reflexiones sobre el arte, la estética y la poética del cine*. Madrid, España: Rialp, p. 76.

transitory essence of Sehgal's artworks, according to the artist, there should not be any type of documentation about his artwork, neither graphic nor written. For Sehgal, the important thing is the moment. The beauty and vulnerability offered by the moment's impossibility of lasting¹⁷⁸. As the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961) questioned in the retrospective, *Tomorrow is Another Fine Day*¹⁷⁹: "Where does art reside? In the object, or in the memory of the people who experienced it?"

2.1.1. Documentation as a tool

Sehgal's position may seem quite unusual in an instant consumer society who is not very used to prolonged attention. However, there are two sides to a coin. While there are artists who deny documentation, most do not oppose it.

The truth is that although sometimes the documentation may go against the ephemeral essence of the Bio*Vanitas*, it provides a lot of essential information for understanding them. Therefore, for those Bio*Vanitas* which consider that documentation does not alter their ephemeral nature, it acquires an additional value.

The rigorous intention of the documentation is not exclusively based on the fact that it may be the only physical proof of the Bio*Vanitas*' existence, but because it will also be what preserves its idea and its concept. The documentation, in addition to being accessible and easily understandable, should be detailed, concise, and precise. However, due to Bio*Vanitas*' perishable features, it should be necessary to consult the artist before any documentation. This may ensure that the chosen documentary method does not interfere with the artwork's essence, and to check if there is any registration, or dissemination that the artist considers inappropriate.

¹⁷⁸ CAMPBELL JOHNSTON, Op. Cit., p. 22-23.

¹⁷⁹ *Tomorrow is Another Fine Day* (2004-2005 Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam and ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Couvent des Cordeliers). Quoted in GILMAN, Op. Cit., pp. 66-67.

If the artist accesses to document the *BioVanitas*, or part of it, which may also be a plausible possibility, in addition to the corresponding condition report, its documentation should contemplate both, material and immaterial aspects.

- **The tangible:** it refers to the *BioVanitas*' physical aspect, the materials, the ruin, the display, the dismantling, and the qualification of the people who will be in contact with the artwork.

Independent of the kind of *BioVanitas* to face, it is very important to know its materials, so it is more than advisable to pay special attention to this point. For those *BioVanitas* that do not consider repetition, to “foresee” their materials' possible evolution, and for those that consider repetition to ensure that all its requirements are achieved.

It would also be considered the description of the desired destruction process evolution, specifically detailing what is accepted, and what is not, as part of the *BioVanitas*' proper metamorphosis. Moreover, there should also be contemplated possible measures in case of an inappropriate transformation.

For those aspects related to the display and disassembly, it would be adequate to have specifications that help with the *BioVanitas*' correct execution. That is, diagrams, sketches, or instructions that explain the artwork's display, and disassembly process, its detailed layout, and a mention to those aspects which need special attention. This information would be useful even if the contact with the artist is possible or not.

If storage were necessary, as not all *BioVanitas* require it, it would be convenient to detail the specific needs.

In case that it is possible, photographic and written documentation of the installation's display and disassembly process, its evolution (detailed and general), and any anomaly or incident. If it is considered necessary to contextualize the artwork and what it is around, it would be recommended the use of video, in addition to the aforementioned media.

Finally, and due to BioVanitas' organic evolution, it should be registered, if necessary, the safety measures, or analysis of possible health risks that may occur due to the evolution of the work. Besides, it would have to be specified if the BioVanitas requires any indication, or staff's specific qualification, including security and cleaning staff.

- **The intangible:** This section will document BioVanitas' idea, concept, and intention. In addition to, its sensorial perceptions and the sensations designed to be transmitted. In this aspect, it would be valued the idea's conservation through the written documentation in order to define the artist's intentions in the most precise way. It would be considered any tool which enriches the conceptual understanding of the artwork.

The points mentioned above focus on the matter, form the creation context and the relation to space. But it is also important to point out that these questions must be accompanied by a humanistic investigation to define the idea and the values of the artwork, as well as a precise investigation in the exact science of the matter¹⁸⁰.

Among the different sections included in documentation, it is important to highlight the relevance of the interview. The direct contact with the artist becomes essential as sometimes, experts may adopt an overly technical attitude towards the artwork. These attitudes would generate a distance between conservators and the artwork that may imply a lack of understanding with the artwork.

In 1990, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, curator at the Menil Collection, began interviewing different artists. In the beginning, these interviews sought to collect as much information as possible about materials, techniques, processes, and anything else that would be interesting for future possible interventions. A way to know how and where to approach from the artwork¹⁸¹.

This fact marked trend among different institutions that started to develop different interview programs with artists who pursued the same objectives. Since then, the

¹⁸⁰ KOWALIK, A. (2020). The Plants As The Medium. As Issue Of The Care On Contemporary Art With The Elements Of Plants. *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, 17, p. 82.

¹⁸¹ WIELOCHA, A. (2020). The artist interview as a platform fo negotiations an artwork's possible futures. *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, 17, p. 31.

interview has become a regular exercise implemented in practice¹⁸². Today, the INCCA group (International Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art) forms an essential platform for the good preparation and documentation of interviews¹⁸³.

The dialogue with the artist generates information from a primary source, but also, makes possible to know artists' opinion about the intervention criteria in their artworks, because practising any intervention before knowing this information could lead to legal problems¹⁸⁴. Normally, the artist's intention takes precedence over other decisions. However, if it were not possible to contact the artist, it would be necessary to contact the closest person, and/or if there were, those people who participated in the execution process.

According to the collection care professional Aga Wielocha, the interview has two purposes: first, get closer to the artist in order to know the artwork in detail and to be able to create a future intervention plan, and second, negotiation. A negotiation between artistic and institutional intention. In this negotiation, the most relevant, or delicate issues can be dealt with, exposing the different views in order to reach a common solution beneficial for the artwork¹⁸⁵. An example of this negotiation is the case of Leonard previously mentioned in the begging of the second section (2. BioVanital dilemmas).

The points mentioned above may be a good guide to create a basis to encourage dialogue, and to deepen those aspects that are considered relevant. A tool for recording impressions, intentions, and instructions that may help to resolve the doubts of the professionals raised by the artwork. The interview as a way of reflecting on questions suggested by other disciplines than creation, because, as the

¹⁸² WIELOCHA, Op. Cit., p. 31.

¹⁸³ LLAMAS PACHECO, R. (2014), *Arte contemporáneo y restauración o cómo investigar entre lo material, lo esencial y lo simbólico*. Madrid, España: Tecnos, p. 71.

¹⁸⁴ Legislative Royal Decree N° 1/1996 of 12nd Abril, and modified until the Law N° 12/2017, 07/03/2017.

Retrieved from <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/es/details.jsp?id=17102>

¹⁸⁵ WIELOCHA, Op. Cit., pp. 31-45.

conservator Anna Kowalik¹⁸⁶ points out, determining the value of the artwork serves to take the appropriate strategies.

Thanks to the interview, the artwork can be faced from a more natural, and closer position. It can be helpful to understand the artwork from a broader perspective, which does not limit its vision to a concatenation of materials, but that understands it as a continuum that is represented on a physical and abstract context.

But what should be asked in the interview? It is certain that knowing the artwork's nuances and details can make a big difference when it comes to understanding its entirety. The intentionality of its materials, the limits of its destruction, if any, or even the way in which it is exhibited are factors to be widely developed¹⁸⁷. To know what is considered as damage, when it would be appropriate to intervene it ...

This influence should not be understood as something unidirectional. All the different disciplines that intervene in this conversation feed back. Unintentionally, conservators-restorers' influence for artists' future decisions is bigger than what is thought. Not only artists can modify conservators-restorers' vision, as their view can also offer new perspectives to artist to approach their creations¹⁸⁸.

The interview can also be understood as a space for dialogue, a space for the exchange of ideas from different disciplines that help to complete the joint vision of the artworks. The discussed topics, and the way in which they are treated, can influence future decisions that affect the materials, the artists' creation process, documentation, or the artwork's monitoring.

¹⁸⁶ KOWALIK, Op. Cit., p. 82.

¹⁸⁷ During my internship at the S.M.A.K. I made a questionnaire to get information about the artworks that I was studying there. Currently, and modified by Frances Berry and Rebecca Heremans to make it more practical, the S.M.A.K. uses this questionnaire and considers it very useful for this kind of artwork.

Accessible at: <https://tinyurl.com/utybdz3h>

¹⁸⁸ Ruth del Fresno, mentioned in a personal conversation that the series of interviews that she carried out to different artists helped her to consider new aspects, besides the artistic vision, but that in the same way her perspective as conservator, also influenced the artists.

However, it is also true, and on this point this study fully agrees with those professionals who postulate that the answers obtained from the interview are not absolute truths. The artists' opinion, like people's in general, tend to vary over time. The vision changes, and the original ideas may not match the final ones. In addition, many artists do not pay attention to some aspects, or do not directly consider them, as they are not interested.

So, although the interview can be considered a high-value document, it is not something to accept without assessing if the responses are completely reliable at the consultation time. On the other hand, it is known that time puts things in context, and the generated contexts can modify the values of the artwork itself, making it to not match with the initial answers. These changes may even mean that the documentation becomes part of the artwork.

2.1.2. Documentation as remains

So far this study has analysed documentation from a quite conventional, and literal approach. Documentation as a tool to compile data about artworks. However, *BioVanitas* can convert in artistic matter some documentary aspects, such as creative destruction's documentation.

Documentation can not only be used as a register, either of the way the artwork was made, or of its existence. As mentioned in Leonard's case, this register could be understood as remains, and as artwork too. Some artists use documentation to contextualize their artworks by showing them in a specific time and space.

Through remains, and documentation (photography and/or video), the organic process that Time endows *BioVanitas* is exhibited, making it possible to relive the moment over, and over again. This is one of the options that Remains *BioVanitas* offer.

The following example helps to explain two approaches to the same topic; the importance, or not importance, of the documentation. Either understanding it as an exhibition medium or with a future repetition aim, the documentation helps to know the artist's intention, besides the other common problems, among other things.

In the video work *Still Life* (2001) by Sam Taylor-Wood (1967) the artist documents on video the creative destruction of a still life, the deterioration process, and finally what remains is a video format, which is what the public will be able to consume¹⁸⁹.

As mentioned above, documentation can deprive artworks of their ephemeral essence by converting their linear time into cyclical time. Something that can loop and be consumed, or exist, as many times as it is considered.

In these cases, the video is a documentation tool, but it is also part of the artwork, or is it the artwork? Somehow, it may be that not all the sensations can be experienced through the video-record, like if there were some parts of the artworks that artists do not want to be consumed by the public. Reserved spaces and moments that can only be lived once, and that remains in a private dimension. In this way, there is a part of the artwork that is ephemeral, that is completely lost, and that does not belong to art market, while another part is registered. The video records the artwork, reveals what it is happening, it can even generate the illusion of being there, but the *BioVanitas* will never could be fully perceived through it.

While Taylor-Wood's *Still Life* was based on the artwork's ephemeral essence, capturing the moment to make it eternal can transport it into a cyclical time in which repetition, and natural cycles could be modified according to the artist's intention. In this way, documentation can change the artworks' nature.

However, documentation as remains may also raise certain problems. According to the restorer-conservator Hiltrud Schinzel, documentation is essential to maintain what she calls the "authentic idea". This requires comprehensive documentation that certifies, or in some way attests to, the original idea or "first version" against possible unauthorized reproductions that could be made, jeopardizing the authenticity and originality of the artwork¹⁹⁰.

MILLEOYANNA. (15 de octubre de 2011). *Still Life de Sam Taylor Wood de 2001*. Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXPP8eUJEtK>

¹⁹⁰ SANTABÁRBARA, C. "Hiltrud Schinzel. Una alternativa a la teoría de la restauración de Cesare Brandi". *15.a Jornada. Conservación de Arte contemporáneo*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2014, pp. 6.

There are different ways of approaching documentation. Not only in the narrower sense of the word, as it can also be expanded to an artistic context.

At all times, this decision depends on the artists, and on the artworks' design criteria. However, it is necessary to know this information in order to ensure that the artwork evolves in the most possible respectful way without interfering its essence, intention, nor message.

The different ways in which documentation can be approached make us question whether it is understood as a medium, or even if it could become an alternative instead of something imposed. So which is the real value of documentation amidst so much ruin?

2.2. *Ars morendi*, destruction as creative process

The creative process, as the art historian Henri Focillon points out, is composed of mind, matter, and technique. A trinomial that allows creation beyond the limitations imposed by the environment, and established conditioning factors. For Focillon, form does not exist, it is nothing more than an abstraction that lives in matter¹⁹¹.

Bio*Vanitas* propose their creative process from destruction. A transformation that is generally the result of their materials' organic process. Even if *a priori* it might be thought otherwise, destruction is also an art and, although not always, it must be developed properly. Within certain parameters and under certain conditions.

Just as in the 15th century there were protocols on the art of dying, the *ars morendi* books, which explained the correct way, or how to "die well", something similar happens with Bio*Vanitas*' destruction; because, as often happens, not everything goes, not even in destruction.

Not everything is valid when using destruction as a creative process. An example which contextualizes this could be *Food situation for a patriotic banquet* (1977/2010) one of Antoni Miralda's (1942) first artworks¹⁹² [F. 76].

This artwork is composed by a banquet table where the artist used rice, as it is a basic and universal food, to create eight countries' flags (France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Russia)¹⁹³.

¹⁹¹ FOCILLON, H. (1983), *La vida de las formas y elogio de la mano*. Madrid, España: Xarait, p. 41.

¹⁹² This study presents it within the exhibition context of *Miralda madeinusa*, which took place in Barcelona and Bilbao among others. The images correspond to the exhibition *MIRALDA MADEINUSA* curated by Vicente Tidorí at the Azkuna Zentroa (A.Z.) in Bilbao in collaboration with the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) from 7 June to 1 October 2017, with an extension from 3 June to 1 October at the Museum of Reproductions of Bilbao.

¹⁹³ For the exhibition at the A.Z., the trays were made in Bilbao by the collaborators of the exhibition area and the artist himself the week before the inauguration, and were stored in the refrigerators of the Jandiola cooking school at the A.Z. Interview to PALOMAR, Jon. (22 June, 2017).



[F. 76] Antoni Miralda, *Food situation for a patriotic banquet* (2017).

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

With this installation, Miralda questions people's passion for their countries colours, and plays with their meaning, because as the flag's colour changes, it still can be identifiable, but ceases in the same way stops being the flag that people venerate.

Miralda considers biological alterations as part of this artwork's evolution, but in a controlled manner. In no case the presence of mould, or condensation should impede, or make it excessively difficult, the visualization of the flags¹⁹⁴.

In 2017, during the exhibition at the A.Z., the degradation developed inadequately. Condensation occurred inside the cover-case, resulting from a bad combination of (high/low) temperature, no ventilation, and relative humidity (high).

This condensation was such that it made it very difficult to see what was inside, and contributed to a precipitous growth of microorganisms which developed in some cases, such as the French flag, within 24 hours of its production [F. 77]. This meant that it was necessary to take urgent action before the inauguration, so all the trays, except the United Kingdom, and the United States ones, had to be remade.

¹⁹⁴ PALOMAR, Op. Cit.

[F. 77] Inauguration day. Detail of the cover-case of France, (06/07/2017). High condensation inside the cover-case.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 78] France's flag tray four months later, (10/02/2017).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 79] Detail of Saudi Arabia's flag tray four months later (10/02/2017).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



However, the artwork continued its metamorphosis inadequately, and to stop this rapid biological attack, the trays were aerated and sprayed with a 70% ethanol, and 30% water solution¹⁹⁵.

On the other hand, by the end of the exhibition the deterioration was such that some flags were completely unrecognizable and therefore, although the degradation was part of the artwork, it did not develop as the artist wanted [F. 78-79].

As Adorno would say¹⁹⁶: "Artworks must be the fulfilment of their catastrophe". But is destruction a catastrophe?, or in the case of the *BioVanitas*, is it the starting point? According to the philosopher¹⁹⁷, "art has to bring chaos to order rather than the other way round". To be honest, in our society, and from a Western perspective, destruction generally has a negative meaning.

For the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the negative perception of destruction has its origins in a cultural deception. This perception goes back to Socrates, and was perpetuated by Plato, Christianity, and many intellectuals who eliminated the Dionysian canons¹⁹⁸ in order to establish, or consolidate, only the Apollonian ones¹⁹⁹.

Miralda's example shows that although degradation is proposed, it also has certain parameters, an order that conditions the evolution of the artwork. However, there are other artists, such as the aforementioned Blazy, whose works suggest free creative destruction. An idea of decadence without any kind of condition, considering absolutely everything that occurs as part of the creative process, and therefore, of the work.

¹⁹⁵ PALOMAR, Op. Cit.

¹⁹⁶ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 117.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 129.

¹⁹⁸ It is curious that the aesthetic canons valid today are Apollonian when Dionysus was educated by the nymphs in the knowledge of the fine arts, especially in dance and aesthetics. ABRAMOWICZ, Op. Cit, pp. 95-96.

¹⁹⁹ IBARRONDO, Op. Cit., p. 53.

As mentioned before, and considering that our society is based on Apollonian aesthetic canons, it is logical not to contemplate the destruction within these parameters. And yet, in this space outside the imposed limits, the Bio*Vanitas* have found the perfect enclave for their development, and for the Japanese writer Junichirō Tanizaki's words²⁰⁰: "whoever obstinate in seeing this ugliness will only succeed in destroying beauty".

This negative connotation of destruction may also be due to its usual association with the end. The nothingness and disappearance that means the end. The disappearance of being, death. This perspective associated with humans' transience makes it quite difficult to move away from time's linear dimension that allows to see beyond destruction²⁰¹. An attempt to avoid the oblivion that we will be.

However, for Bio*Vanitas* this is not the case as they need the destruction. Just like a match, which has to burn in order to fulfil its function, Bio*Vanitas* need to ruin, so they complete themselves. An idea that the philosopher Jesús Escudero puts forward as²⁰²:

...a productive appropriation of the past, a return to original sources. It is a destruction that establishes the "birth certificate", a critical destruction that proceeds genealogically, that is to say, that uncovers the different seasons of history.

So, does this ruin mean destruction, or the opposite? The truth is that the idea of loss as a beginning is not something new, either. In many cultures, such as Egyptian, or Christian, the disappearance of the physical has always given way to the beginning of a new existence on another dimension, on the spiritual. Based on the possibility of existing in different dimensions, but not referring to the multiverse, it could be thought that, although the Bio*Vanitas*' material aspect perishes, they could

²⁰⁰ TANIZAKI, J. (1994), *El elogio de la sombra*. Madrid, España: Siruela, p. 70.

²⁰¹ IBARRONDO, Op. Cit., p. 59.

²⁰² Original: "...una apropiación productiva del pasado, un regreso a fuentes originarias. Se trata de una destrucción que establece el "certificado de nacimiento", de una destrucción crítica que procede de manera genealógica, es decir, que descubre las diferentes estaciones de la historia". ESCUDERO J. A. (2016), *Guía de lectura de Ser y Tiempo de Martin Heidegger. Vol. I*. Barcelona, España: Herder Editorial. p. 120.

continue existing. Under this premise it is logical to question if Bio*Vanitas* disappear with their physical destruction or if they still prevail in conceptual.

Bio*Vanitas*' destruction acts as a reflection of humans' own mortality. And this takes place in a social context in which modern life denies the passage of time, and death. Humans resist dying, resist disappearing, whether from biology or from a traditional ideology²⁰³. An idea of death, as the end of life, inherited from the atheistic humanist tradition that dates back to Antiquity, and which was recovered by the philosophers of the Enlightenment²⁰⁴. Maybe this is why we are also opposed to destruction as a creative process.

However, destruction is innate to Bio*Vanitas*. It is an activity that belongs to them, an action that is part of their essence, and that has its end in themselves, thus opposing material transcendence. Appearance as illusion, as Adorno would say²⁰⁵.

Bio*Vanitas* mutable aspect derives from their metamorphosis as a result of their materials' organic process, and therefore of the idea of destruction as a creative process. A biological process that reminds through their destruction that they are ephemeral, or in Hussey 's words²⁰⁶:

... Ephemera is the muse Urania's gift to us, a gift for those who do SEE, a gift for those who do HEAR and FEEL, a gift for those who HONOUR art that is authentic. The spectator is made to countenance the purely ephemeral quality of a work of art.

Their destruction presupposes their construction. They are simultaneously self-destruction and self-construction. In their destruction lies the constructive power of becoming. A perpetual state of altering in which what it is observed today is not the same as was observed the day before, or what will be observed the day after, if it exists.

²⁰³ NÚÑEZ FLORENCIO, NÚÑEZ GONZÁLEZ, Op. Cit., pp. 22-25.

²⁰⁴ DE HENNEZEL, M., LELOUP J-Y. (1998). *El arte de morir. Tradiciones religiosas y espiritualidad humanista frente a la muerte*. Barcelona, España: Helios, p. 33.

²⁰⁵ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 140.

²⁰⁶ HUSSEY, Op. Cit., p. 39-40.

The fact of using matter's destruction gives the Bio*Vanitas* the freedom to create new values, and means that these artworks force people, in a way, to develop a certain degree of empathy as they may reflect human's own decadence. Empathy, as Ibarrondo points out, is one of the key concepts in revivals. A conscious symbiosis, so to speak²⁰⁷.

This reflection makes to face what Schiller would call the sublime, as it would be a representation of our physical nature, perceiving our own limits while feeling our superiority, and dependence on any limits²⁰⁸.

Under this social, and Western construction, based on the Apollonian mentality, anything that exceeds the limits, or the irrational, would have a negative meaning. While the Apollonian defends order and moderation, the Dionysian stance is justified by the deeper psychic needs of overcoming limitations or jumping over barriers²⁰⁹.

But what if this perspective were changed?, what if destruction were understood as something positive? This would entail a new vision, or understanding, not only of the materialization of Time, and destruction, but of its consequences.

2.2.1. The ruin

Nowadays, ruin refers to loss, or destruction, and there are some idiomatic that refer to this idea of decadence, such as, be in ruins, go to rack and ruin, lie in ruins, or wrack and ruin, among others. They are used to express a state that is not very encouraging, but that makes reflect on what it was, on what it is, and on the wherefores of the new situation. It seems that ruin, like destruction, is linked to negative connotations.

However, this has not always been the case. For instance, in the Romantic period, ruins were also a source of admiration, and they were considered to be of

²⁰⁷ IBARRONDO, Op. Cit., p.119.

²⁰⁸ ECO, Op. Cit., p. 296.

²⁰⁹ REVILLA, F. (2012). *Diccionario de iconografía y simbología*. Madrid, España: Cátedra. pp. 52-231.

unparalleled beauty, and even questioned whether the ruins were not really more beautiful than their original state.

Let us think for a moment about *The Torso of Belvedere* and how the archaeologist, and art historian Johann Joachim Wincklemann, taking its paradox to the extreme, considered that its incompleteness was in fact what completed it²¹⁰. This can be an example to show how perception, in this case of the concept of ruin, is nothing more than the response to a socio-cultural construction. However, does this connotation refer to the ruin or to the supposed loss that it entails?

As the philosopher Karl Rosenkranz points out, nothing positive is to be expected from destruction, at least from a Western perspective²¹¹. However, the outcome will also depend to a large extent on the destruction itself. The ruin will show traces of what once it was, and it will be each individual's mind which will have to do the work of reverse reconstruction, if necessary, to imagine the ravages of Time. The conceptual, and reflective charge of the Bio*Vanitas* increases with destruction as ruin completes them.

The true meaning of ruin lies in the ruin itself, in its entropy. In its circumstances and in its nature. Society tend to think of ruin as imperfect, but can they be considered flawed, or imperfect when it is designed to be the final state/purpose? Can ruin be thought as something to be avoided when Bio*Vanitas* are intentionally oriented to that end?

The ruinous condition of the Bio*Vanitas* evidences their ephemeral nature. A nature that can develop on both a physical and conceptual level. However, this transience refers to the idea of eternity through its disappearance. Disappearance implies that the artwork coexists between its essence and its appearance, between the material and the immaterial.

²¹⁰ RANCIÈRE, J. (2011), *Aisthesis. Escenas del régimen estético del arte*. Santander, España: Contracampo Shangrila, pp. 20-21.

²¹¹ ROSENKRANZ, K. (2015), *Estética de lo feo*. Sevilla, Spain: Athenaica Ediciones Universitarias, p.67.
Retrieved from <https://elibro-net.ehu.idm.oclc.org/es/ereader/eHu/43863?>

Not only the current state is suggested by the process of ruin, but it also evokes an earlier time in which the artwork was the same but not equal. The destruction of the material proposes the continuous renewal of the artwork, which is presented as the original but in a different way, while the idea of its disappearance evokes the presence, or existence of the artwork through its absence. As the psychologist Rudolf Arnheim said²¹²: "To see the void is to include in a perception something that belongs to it, but which is absent; it is to see the absence of that which is missing as a quality of the present". Another way of understanding what Ulrike Lehmann calls the aesthetics of absence²¹³.

Through their ephemeral essence, *BioVanitas* raise the question not only of their fleeting essence but also of whether the materiality, and the idea of durability of the artworks are necessary. *BioVanitas* as a symbol. A symbol to question the illusory, and ideal concept of eternity based on caducity. Turning the infinite, the unstable, and the real into something perceptible and tangible.

When referring to the concept of "ruin" it would be necessary to point out if this ruin is physical or conceptual, because the *BioVanitas* can become ruin on a physical level, but remain intact conceptually, and vice versa. Could this concept of ruin be an idea to simplify the *BioVanitas* until only their essence remains? For the restorer-conservator Heide Skowranek, when the artists introduce decay, what they intend is to emphasize the simultaneity of matter and concept²¹⁴.

Maybe one of the best known ruin-search artist is the aforementioned Roth. The artist looked for the ruin, and in this tireless exploration he also intervened in the destruction processes of his artworks, even introducing insects. His work was conditioned by transformation, destruction, and its consequences, such as mould,

²¹² ARNHEIM, R. (1972). *Anschauliches Denken*. Quoted in LEHMANN, U. *Estética de la ausencia en BUTIN, Hunertus*. (2002). *Diccionario de conceptos de arte contemporáneo*. Madrid, España: Abada Editores, p. 96.

²¹³ *Ibid*, p. 96.

²¹⁴ SKOWRANEK, H. (Autumn 2007). Should We Reproduce the Beauty of Decay? A *Museumsleben* in the work of Dieter Roth. *Tate Papers*, no.8, p. 2.



[F. 80] Dieter Roth, *Über Meer* (1969). Metal, plaster, soft cheese. Ed. 1/10.
Coll. Fundação de Serralves (Porto, Portugal).
© Estate of Dieter Roth, 2021.
Courtesy Fundação de Serralves

putrefaction, and physical changes, which formed an important part of his creation [F. 80]. The artwork will remain the same, but its representation will be different²¹⁵.

The Restoration theorist Cesare Brandi understood ruin as²¹⁶ “any artwork remain that cannot be restored to its potential unity without the artwork becoming a copy, or a counterfeit of itself”.

In the case of the *BioVanitas*, their ruin is fundamentally focused on the physical level, just like Brandi's definition that precedes this paragraph. A ruin that develops in the corporeality of matter while preserving the immateriality of the concept in its entirety.

BioVanitas' ruin becomes an aesthetic experience which, as Aristotle said, is a whole greater than the sum of its parts, is where the most complex mental process takes

²¹⁵ An example of the artist's research, and dedication to the destruction of matter was the *Schimmelmuseum* (mould museum) where the artist experimented freely with destruction. Unfortunately, since 2004 the *Schimmelmuseum* does no longer exists, but it is still possible to take a virtual tour.

ROTH, D. (s.f.). *Dieter Roth Museum*
<https://www.dieterrothmuseum.org/en/events/>

²¹⁶ Quoted in LLAMAS PACHECO, Op. Cit., p. 46.

place²¹⁷. An intellectual vision that takes precedence over the sensitive one. The construction of a critical gaze that demands the learning of dialectical art as opposed to contemplative art²¹⁸.

This process of ruin, which will be individual in every Bio*Vanitas*, independent of their classification, will make them unique units that will reinforce the exclusivity of the artworks.

Therefore, ruin in the Bio*Vanitas* does not mean destruction as loss, and therefore something negative, but rather the transition towards the exclusivity provided by the freedom of destruction as a creative process. A process of destruction whose ruin contains the present form but the absence of future form. However, is this evolution towards, or from the ruin?

The ruin pursued by the Bio*Vanitas* is closer to two essential concepts of Japanese culture, *saba* and *wabi sabi*, than to the Western idea of ruin. *Saba* refers to the dirt, to the crust, to the rust...

To that inimitable decay that can only be created by patina, and the states of time, and which becomes an ingredient of beauty, turning Time into material²¹⁹. For its part, *wabi sabi* refers to the beauty that resides in imperfections, in incompleteness, and in transformation²²⁰.

In this sense, the Bio*Vanitas* represent an aesthetic paradigm closer to Japanese concepts than to Western ones. However, it should be borne in mind that something considered *wabi sabi* could never be enclosed in a museum²²¹.

The ruin of the Bio*Vanitas* is the materialization of Time. Not only it is conditioned by destruction, but it is also conditioned, to a large extent, by the materials used for its

²¹⁷ SCHINZEL, H. (2019). The Boundaries of Ethics – Art without Boundaries. *CeROArt. Conservation, exposition, Restauration d'Objets d'Art*, (11), p. 6.

²¹⁸ ECO, Op. Cit., p. 50.

²¹⁹ TARKOVSKI, Op. Cit., pp. 77-78.

²²⁰ KOREN, Op. Cit., p. 7.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 67.

creation. An aesthetic reflection of the evanescence, and mutation of life, as Koren²²² would say. This is why prior reflection is necessary to direct towards the desired results.

As González García points out, the Western tradition identified guilt in the material. A guilt that extended to every expression, and creation, made by humans. Understanding guilt as responsibility, it is true that it can be said that matter is guilty. But it is in this guilt where resides the essence of the Bio*Vanitas*, making them what they are²²³.

2.2.2. The materials

What is meant by material? For Adorno, material is everything that artists start from. Anything that allows the connections, and the desired objects²²⁴. Therefore, under this definition, anything could be material, the tangible and/or the intangible²²⁵.

The use of materials, as García González points out, is neither casual nor fortuitous. Not only the materials carry a great technical and ideological weight, but they also determine the skill, and define the way of making art. The choice and use of materials is conditioned by the very nature of the material, and its cultural definition. In this way, intentionality blends with the features, and character of the materials to give the artwork the sense of a whole²²⁶.

In the case of Bio*Vanitas*, by using the transformation that organic materials undergo, the material implies action. The material is the medium that the creative process uses to complete itself. On the one hand, the material is the raw matter that makes up the

²²² Ibid, pp.54-57.

²²³ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, C. (2004), La materia y la culpa. La materia artística en la solución el proceso creativo. *Taula, quaderns de pensament*, (38), p.125.

²²⁴ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 197-198.

²²⁵ Intangible is referred to ideas, concepts, sensations, senses, and all the immaterial aspects that are part of the artwork.

²²⁶ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA (2004), Op. Cit., pp.125-128.

artwork, but it is also a language²²⁷. Materials are a key element in the metalanguage of BioVanitas. Not really because of their material value, but because the intention is expressed through them.

Although the use of organic matter, such as food or plants, in art may seem to escape the materials normally attributed to the fine arts, the truth is that this is not so. This, does not refer to their two-dimensional representation, as in *still life* or *vanitas* paintings, but to their real, and literal presence. Their use developed mostly since the 1960s, when the concept began to be valued over the object. This is not groundbreaking, since it was already a widespread practice in Europe during the Baroque.

During royal celebrations, and parades, there were placed in the streets elaborate, and majestic sculptures made of bread, cheese, and meat, representing well-known monuments. In addition, at court festivals, it was usual to build on the dessert table gigantic heraldic, and emblematic monuments made of sugar, flowers, and fruit²²⁸. Another example is the creation of a statue in the German pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. For this occasion Stollwerck, European manufacturers of luxury chocolates and cocoa, created *Temple of chocolate*, a statue over 11 m (38 ft) high, using more than 13,000 kg (30,000 lbs) of chocolate²²⁹.

However, the resemblance of these constructions and use of materials to BioVanitas lies solely in their organic nature. It is not merely aesthetic or ornamental. The fact is that the choice of materials has to be a thoughtful, and meditated decision, as it is an essential moment of production. The material is not something natural but historical. It has its meaning, and it is also defined by the way in which it is worked. A process that will be the result between the material, and the intention²³⁰.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p.131.

²²⁸ *The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals Exhibition*. From 13 October 2015 till 13 March 2016, at the Getty Research Institute (California, USA). Retrieved from http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/edible/index.html

²²⁹ WHARTON, G., BLANK, S. D., DEAN, J. C. (1995), Sweetness and Blight: conservation of chocolate works of art. At HEUMAN, J. (ed.). *From Marble to Chocolate. The Conservation of Modern Sculpture* (pp. 162-169). Londres, Reino Unido: Archetype Publications, p. 162.

²³⁰ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 197-201.

As mentioned before, the 20th century brought great changes in terms of the inclusion of new materials. Avant-garde artists began to add “other” materials to their creations, and collages, very different from the noble materials used until then. Gradually, this freedom, and the intention of non-industrialization of the artworks, meant that artists started to use even more radical materials than scraps of paper or banknotes, considering charcoal, or wax.

This movement intensified notably from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, when a real revolution in materials took place²³¹. The new currents, such as Fluxus or *Arte Povera*, sought an anti-museum art, and therefore went a step further by considering rubbish, among others, as a new material. Maybe one of the most radical examples may be Piero Manzoni's (1933-1963) *Merda d'artista* (1961).

Among the materials used during this period, food had a particular interest to some artists like Roth, who experimented with chocolate since the 1970s, or later on Janine Antoni (1964) in her artwork *Lick and Lather* (1993). This installation, in which the artist used her head as mould, is made by seven chocolate busts, and another seven in soap. Once the busts were made, she transformed them by licking the chocolate ones, and washing the ones made with soap²³².

But chocolate is not the only material. Several artists have experimented with Time's materialization, and the creative destruction involved in the organic process of other materials. For example with ham as in *Untitled* (2000) by Jan Fabre (1958), where the artist covered the columns of the Ghent University building with ham, and transparent film, or *Bed full of cooked ham* (2004) by the Italian artist Cossimo Cavallaro (1961).

The use of food began to be commonplace in the art scene of the time, being part of sculptural artworks, happenings, installations, and performances, among others. The use of food in art made it possible to carry out a type of creation that, due to its nature, escaped the art market, and institutions. A way of denying the artwork itself, as with the Japanese art movement *Mono-ha* (“school of things”). The use that art

²³¹ In 1996, under the supervision of the art historian Monika Wagner, The Archive for axis Research of Material Iconography was established at the University of Hamburg. GILMAN, Op. Cit., p. 38.

²³² ANTONI, J. (s.f.). *Janine Antoni*
<http://www.janineantoni.net/lick-and-lather>



[F. 81] Haizea Salazar Basañez, *Pilar* (2018). Detail.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 82] Haizea Salazar Basañez, *Pilar* (2018). Detail.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

made of such disparate materials as food in creation meant a redefinition of art, in which the persistent was replaced by the ephemeral.

The synergy between material, and intention makes it necessary to know how materials will transform, as not all respond in the same way, nor provoke the same reaction. As Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) mentioned in an interview for *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* in 1968²³³: "I just take any sort of fat, not just margarine... There's nothing more banal than margarine, that shocks people".

The personal experiments *Pilar* (2018), and *INNESTI* (2017), will be two examples to explain the different evolution that organic materials can suffer. *Pilar* (2018) was an installation made by myself as an experiment at Bilbao Arte Foundation, to experiment with the degradation of different materials [F. 81].

For this test I used printed paper, nylon, an empty frame, lettuce, orange peels, apple leftovers, flowers, and flower petals, in order to study the materialization of Time in different "mediums".

The aim of *Pilar* was to show varying degrees of deterioration in the materials such as rot, biological attack, or anything that would transform the appearance of the installation through Time's materialization.

However, the only results obtained were a clear dehydration of the lettuce leaves, and the almost imperceptible presence of micro-biological attack at very specific points [F. 82].

The results obtained with *Pilar*, were far from the initial objective, as the goal was to obtain something more similar to what was got with the test based on *INNESTI* in 2017. In this occasion the experiment resulted in different stages of deterioration, and biological attack [F. 83 - 84].

However, the experiment carried out with *Pilar*, was the axe to realize about the importance of the choice of materials, and their evolution in order to achieve the desired destruction.

²³³ Quoted in ABEN, K. H. (1995). *Conservation of Modern Sculpture at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*. At HEUMAN, Jackie. (ed.). *From Marble to Chocolate. The Conservation of Modern Sculpture* (pp. 104-109). London, Reino Unido: Archetype Publications, p. 107.



[F. 83] Biological attack: *Penicillium digitatum* and flies.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 84] Detail of *Penicillium digitatum*'s migration.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

The materials and the elaboration of the artworks are not exempt from a reflexive charge, and it must be distinguished between the signifier (material) and the signified (what the artwork tells). The choice of materials aims to achieve certain specific characteristics, and they are chosen for the effects that they produce, or by what they can produce²³⁴.

Matter is a message, and its dual nature of signifier and signified exalts its importance. That is why the materials used by the artists are a very relevant fact that provides a great deal of information, and gives meaning to the artworks. The *BioVanitas* use biological materials in which the passage of Time is personified, and it is essential to know their origin, shape, colour, etc., as they are the essence of the meaning.

The use of organic materials in *BioVanitas* makes reflect about their charge, or their relevance. This is why they could be understood as a kind of ready-made, as they acquire value through the context in which they are presented. Their value lies not on a physical but on a conceptual context, as it is the idea which is represented over the materials, although sometimes, they may be replaceable or renewable.

However, there is a big difference between the ready-made, and the materials used in the *BioVanitas*, as the last ones seek degradation, or transformation as a consequence of the passage of Time.

The goal is to experience the physical materialization of the passage of Time, to make this abstract, and intangible concept visible through the change of aesthetics, and sensory perception. The creative destruction is part of the artwork, the alterations complete it while destroying it, incorporating degradation as their philosophy, and message.

The historical needs of the materials determine the forms, and genres, which are no less dialectical than the individual. Despite being created, and losing their popularity, they are linked to Platonic ideas. The greater the authenticity, the greater the link with the objective requirement.

²³⁴ FOCILLON, Op. Cit., p. 38.

Each of the artworks does justice to the genres, not only because it promotes them, but also because the challenges that they entail serve as justification, as a medium for their creation, and as a motive for their destruction. The only path to art, and its success, is its impossibility²³⁵. However, *BioVanitas*' ruin does not solely depend on their materials, but on the surroundings, and the conditions enclosing them.

2.2.3. Deterioration factors

In a way, the fact of facing ruin, the consequences of creative destruction, forces to go back in time, not only to imagine another state, but to make aware of the materialization of Time. The deterioration suggested for *BioVanitas* is often only limited to their physical level, even if it can be biological, physical or chemical degradation. There is no single cause of degradation, as it is usually the result of a combination of intrinsic factors (the composition of the materials), and extrinsic factors (lighting, relative humidity, temperature).

Biological degradation, which can be micro or macro, occurs due to the disintegration of the biological system. Micro degradation is caused by bacteria, moulds and fungi, while macro degradation is caused by the attack of pests (rodents, insects, etc.) attracted by the matter²³⁶.

Attacks by microorganisms can also present a migration problem. This migration is directly related to the substances that comprise the *BioVanitas*, and it is produced by contact, or by the emission of volatile substances.

Physical degradation can occur in two ways. Induced by mechanical damage, or by a change in the bonds of the molecules that make up the matter, and that provoke physical changes²³⁷.

²³⁵ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 265-266.

²³⁶ GILMAN, Op. Cit., pp. 86-88.

²³⁷ Ibid, pp. 88-89.

Chemical degradation that BioVanitas undergoes is quite complex due to the multiple main components of their materials. The chemical interaction of their components can occur with themselves, or with environmental factors. However, the main chemical processes are usually lipid oxidation, when reacting with oxygen, and lipolysis, when reacting with water. This typically results in rancidity, which will affect the odour, taste, and texture of the materials²³⁸.

On the other hand, in addition to these degradations, it should be added the consequences of interaction with extrinsic factors:

Illumination: all organic materials are sensitive to light, independent of whether it is natural, or artificial. The radiation (visible, and invisible), heat capacity, and photochemical power of light are cumulative, and increase with intensity and exposure time. In the case of biological materials, infrared light is very harmful due to the thermal effect that favours physical and chemical reactions, while visible light can cause the degradation of some substances and the loss of initial properties such as colour²³⁹. The professionals consulted in the interviews recommend an exhibition lighting of around 100-200 lux for biological materials.

Temperature (T^a °C): based on the answers obtained from restoration-professionals interviews, the appropriate temperature for the exhibition of biological artworks would range between 18 and 20 °C, or even lower depending on the artwork. A temperature higher than 20 °C could cause softening, acceleration of chemical reactions, and stimulation of microorganisms, while a temperature not higher than 18 °C would favour the conservation of the materials.

Relative Humidity (RH): generally it is one of the most common causes of alteration due to the hygroscopic character of organic materials. The consequences of humidity can manifest themselves in changes in size, and shape, chemical reactions, and biological degradation. Although, as Isabel García points out, there are studies that show that the RH depends on each material, normally, it is recommended to

²³⁸ Ibid, pp. 89-90.

²³⁹ Ultraviolet light has not been considered as it would initiate chemical reactions that may not be provable in biological materials. CALVO, A. (2002). *Conservación y restauración de pintura sobre lienzo*. Barcelona, España: Serbal, p.129.

oscillate it between 50-55% during the exhibition period²⁴⁰. A low RH would cause a relatively early loss of volume, accelerating dehydration, while a high RH would favour the proliferation of microorganisms (bacteria, fungal spores, lichens, etc.) and insects.

However, extrinsic deterioration factors (humidity, temperature, and lighting) have a dual function. They can be a cause of deterioration, or they can also be considered as conservation factors if talking in peripheral or environmental conservation terms.

Since the 1990s, especially since 2011, the National Plan for Preventive Conservation (Plan Nacional de Conservación Preventiva, PNCP) contemplates peripheral conservation as an improvement for conservation, considering that this aspect has to be contemplated as part of the proposals and working methodology²⁴¹. The fundamental principles of peripheral conservation proposed by the PNCP are²⁴²:

- Control the deterioration risks by acting on environmental factors, and use and management patterns to prevent deterioration from occurring or accelerating.
- Use the working method recommended by peripheral conservation to define priorities according to the resources used in procedures for the conservation of objects.
- Use peripheral conservation planning in institutions as a tool for sustainable effort and applicable to sets of assets as a priority.

Peripheral or environmental conservation, what is known in Latin-speaking countries as preventive conservation, is closely linked to exhibition design. It refers only to conservation measures taken in the environment, or environmental circumstances,

²⁴⁰ GARCÍA, I.M. (1999). Op. cit., p. 68.

²⁴¹ HERRÁEZ, J.A. (Marzo de 2015). La conservación preventiva como método de trabajo integrador. En D. GAÉL DE GUICHEN (Presidencia). El conservador-restaurador del patrimonio cultural: la conservación preventiva de la obra de arte. Congreso llevado a cabo en León, España, pp. 20-21.

²⁴² Plan Nacional de Conservación Preventiva (PNCP) (marzo de 2011). Retrieved from http://ipce.mcu.es/pdfs/PN_CONSERVACION_PREVENTIVA.pdf

but never directly on the object. This type of action could be considered the "purest", since the object is free from any kind of intervention and therefore there are no characteristics that can be altered, but only delayed, or accelerated²⁴³.

BioVanitas are, by default, highly sensitive to degradation. Especially to physical, chemical, biological deterioration, and those derived from the RH and T^a combination. This means that the consequences of their creative destruction can be highly dangerous not only for themselves, who contemplate destruction, but also for other close artworks, and for people. However, even if ± 20 °C and RH $\pm 50\%$ are considered the usual exhibition conditions, these may not always be the most suitable election.

An example that explains, and illustrates the extent to which intrinsic, and extrinsic factors influence the deterioration of the BioVanitas is the previously mentioned *Food situation for a patriotic banquet* by Miralda [F. 76]. *Food situation for a patriotic banquet* was exhibited at a temperature of 22-23 °C, a RH of 55%, and zenithal illumination with halogen spotlights, between 100 and 150 lux, which generated a large amount of heat.

Display conditions, heat, and the use of the Plexiglas® cover-case, created not only optimal conditions for the proliferation of biological alterations [F. 85], but also migration problems [F. 86], and a large amount of condensation that made it difficult to see the artwork, as it has been shown before [F. 77].

As it can be seen, the biological attack migrated not only through the rice, but also colonized parts of the methacrylate and the surface, and went beyond the tray's bounding container. Direct contact of materials can transfer harmful substances from one to the other. In this example, it has been possible to observe the susceptibility of BioVanitas to deterioration factors. However, the same factors that generated these alterations could have been modified to develop the deterioration differently.

²⁴³ As every conservation involves prevention, and following the guidelines dictated by Salvador Muñoz Viñas, instead of Preventive conservation this study will refer to it as Peripheral or environmental conservation. MUÑOZ VIÑAS, S. (2003), *Teoría contemporánea de la restauración*. Madrid, España: Síntesis, p. 23.

The commonest pests in Bio*Vanitas* are the proliferation of microorganisms, such as fungi or moulds, related to RH and temperature levels. They are single or multicellular organisms that feed on the matter itself. It is not necessary to know the exact species to eradicate them when they are not part of the artwork. Even if the most effective methods are non-chemical (low RH <65% and ventilation) as opposed to chemical (fungicides), when the attack is made up of pests, mainly insects, the most used methods are hormones, inert gases (non-chemical), or insecticides (chemical)²⁴⁴.

Another problem observed in this installation was migration. If it is not considered to be part of the natural evolution of the Bio*Vanitas*, migration can be prevented by blocking (waterproofing barrier to block the transfer of harmful compounds); by dilution (modifying the physical parameters of the space); by absorbent materials (with materials that absorb or react with the volatile compounds); by temperature reduction (which slows down the chemical reactions), or by time control (limiting the exposure time). The limitation because of the use of organic materials, which is necessary for Bio*Vanitas*, is that they only exist in their consumption time. A linear time, which tells about the succession of life and death; but this time can be manipulated, as the organic material can be presented in three ways: natural, intervened or rotten²⁴⁵.

Up to now, the mentioned artworks show a reflexion about the life cycle, and the multiple materials that can be used for the creation of Bio*Vanitas*, which present the different stages in which matter can be found. Due to Bio*Vanitas*' materialization of Time, they convey not only aesthetic, but also ethical concepts, like their baroque predecessors. They are dynamic matter, in constant mutation, so, they are subjected to natural cycles: birth, development and death. Through the putrefaction of their materials, they manage to empathize with people, since in this organic process there is a reflexion of humans' mortality. Bio*Vanitas* are created while they are destroyed, and some factors of their decay influence their exhibition. Therefore, it is important not to forget that as decisive as the message, it is its correct transmission.

²⁴⁴ GARCÍA, I.M. (1999). Op. cit., pp. 267-281.

²⁴⁵ AGUILAR ICAZA, J. (1998). La cocina y la comida. En FERNÁNDEZ ARENAS. J. (Ed.), *Arte efímero y espacio estético* (pp. 81-145). Barcelona, España: Anthropos, p. 122.

2.3. Exhibition

The transmission of the message generally goes hand in hand with the exhibition of the artworks. That is to say, the way in which the idea, or the concept, it is shown, so that it makes an impression on the public. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that the selected exhibition system meets all the necessary conditions for a reliable transmission of the message.

Institutions spread art through their permanent collection, exhibitions, and parallel activities related to thought and creative action. Besides protect the artworks, exhibitions must respect them. Therefore, in order to find a way to produce an exhibition that disseminates properly the artist's idea, the staff in charge must be aware of the properties of all the components and materials that make it up²⁴⁶.

As observed in the previous section, the deterioration implicit in *BioVanitas*, whether due to their intrinsic or extrinsic characteristics, can develop different types of physical, chemical or biological degradation. The materialization of Time implies consequences derived from creative destruction, such as biological attack, and the proliferation of microorganisms which can spread beyond the exhibition space and which inhalation can be highly dangerous.

It is essential to approach the exhibition from a multidisciplinary perspective, as the consequences it entails give rise to different reflections, and relations with the public, and with the people in charge of its care.

BioVanitas' exhibition suggests more questions than it seems at first sight because, as mentioned before, *BioVanitas* are not observed, they are experienced. But how long does a sensation last²⁴⁷?

²⁴⁶ TÉTREAU, J. (1994). Exhibition and Conservation. *Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration (SSCR)*, pp.79-87.

²⁴⁷ In case of interest, a sensation lasts 90 seconds the first time it is felt. DEL RÍO LÓPEZ, M. (s.f.). *Inteligencia Emocional: La Ley de los 90 segundos*
<https://www.psicologos-malaga.com/inteligencia-emocional-90-segundos/>

2.3.1. Sensory exhibition

Ever since aesthetics has been part of the branch of philosophy, senses has been used to enjoy art. This topic has been especially developed in the Netherlands, but for some reason it has never been assigned a higher importance²⁴⁸.

The first manifestations of the five senses appear in the 9th century, but it was not until the 16th and 17th centuries that the subject became more prominent²⁴⁹. From the Middle Ages until the 18th century, there were three valid ways of representing the senses in art²⁵⁰:

1. Symbolic animals. The first representation was found in the bestiaries, where each sense was associated with an animal: the lynx, eagle, or cat with Sight; the mole, boar or deer with Hearing; the vulture or dog with Smell; the monkey with Taste and, finally, the spider or tortoise with Touch.
2. Personification. After the first Latin editions of Aristotle's works, especially after *De senso et sensatu*, the senses began to be represented by human figures. For example, people looking into a mirror, smelling flowers or playing instruments. In the 16th century, classical deities were also used: Jupiter associated with Sight; Apollo with Hearing; Diana with Smell; Ceres with Taste, and Venus with Touch. Later, in the 17th century, these were replaced by Narcissus for Sight; Homer for Hearing and Hyacinth for Smell²⁵¹.
3. Inscriptions. The last representation uses the organs themselves (eyes, ear(s), nose, mouth, hand(s)) separated from the body to refer to the senses.

²⁴⁸ The most important studies on the subject of the senses come from the Netherlands, such as the publications of Hans Kauffmann in 1943, or the psychological and physiological perspective of Marielene Putscher. FERINO-PAGDEN, Op. Cit., pp. 21-22.

²⁴⁹ La primera representación conocida se halla en del Broche Fuller y fue creada en Inglaterra a mediados del siglo IX. Breuce-Mitford. (1952 y 1956); Nordenfalk. (1976), pp. 20-21 Quoted in LUBOMÍR, K. (1997). Los cinco sentidos desde Aristóteles a Constantin Brancusi. En SABÁN GODOY, Op. Cit., pp. 21-22.

²⁵⁰ FERINO-PAGDEN, Op. Cit., pp. 21-25.

²⁵¹ LUBOMÍR, K. (1997). Los cinco sentidos desde Aristóteles a Constantin Brancusi. En SABÁN GODOY, Op. Cit., pp. 39-46.



[F. 87] Lubin Baugin, *The Five Senses* (1630).



[F. 88] Anya Gallaccio. *Stroke* (2014). Jupiter Artland, 2014.

© Anya Gallaccio

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Jupiter Artland

Even if, apparently, it is not an assiduously treated matter, the representation of the senses in art has been a constant, and has also evolved according to the demands of its time.

The Five Senses (1630) by Lubin Baugin (1610-1633) is a painting which, as its title indicates, shows the five senses represented according to the canons of its time. In this artwork, and taking the references explained in previous sections, the five senses are depicted but limited to the two-dimensionality of the painting [F. 87].

However, as Ferino-Pagden points out the old canons may not be valid for contemporary artworks, as nowadays there are some artworks that disrupt the public's senses²⁵². Based on this statement, it could be thought that the *BioVanitas*, such as *Stroke* (2015) by Gallaccio, are part of this group. So, due to the relevance that senses have in *BioVanitas*, it may be appropriate to dedicate a brief section to return to the subject [F. 88].

According to Gallaccio, *Stroke* was conceived for an exhibition in Vienna. For the artist, the artworks have their point of reference in the stereotypical response to the place, and in this case, Vienna was synonymous with chocolate and cafés.

In order to evoke the wooden walls of the characteristic Viennese cafés, the vertical surfaces of the space were covered with chocolate, up to a height of 2 metres. A room made of chocolate is a far cry from a real space, and Gallaccio was interested in this mixture of fantasy and reality, and in how smell is capable of activating expectations and memory.

Nevertheless, the figure of the neurologist, and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud is also associated with this city, and so a comparison can be made between the resemblance between chocolate and faecal matter²⁵³.

Among others, *Stroke* was exhibited in 1994 at the Blum & Poe gallery in Santa Monica (California), in 2010 at La Casa Encendida in Madrid, and in 2014 at Jupiter Artland (Edinburgh).

²⁵² FERINO-PAGDEN, Op. Cit., p. 21.

²⁵³ GALLACCIO, A., (2010), *On & On*. Madrid, España: La casa encendida, p. 78

As the artist herself states, none of the “repetitions” achieved the same result. The installation, which aim is to surround the public, is made of vertical planes covered in chocolate and vegetable oil (coconut), paper and a bench.

The conception of the space not only means that people are surrounded by chocolate in a literal and tangible way, but also that the smell it gives off activates, at the same time, the taste in their brain, evoking the intangible. Moreover, this artwork was designed to be experienced freely, and using all the senses.

According to the restorer-conservator Juan Carlos Barbero Encinas, senses have been divided into two categories: the “aesthetic senses”, which are sight and hearing, and the “non-aesthetic senses” corresponding to taste, touch and smell²⁵⁴.

This hierarchy responds to the canons established by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who considered sight and hearing the main senses because of their ability to produce sensations and provide more information.

On the other hand, taste, touch, and smell have been relegated to second place as they were considered to lead the public's attention not to objects but to their own person.

- Sight is the sense on the basis of which the other senses have been evaluated. It is directly related to knowledge and has been considered, since antiquity, as the noblest of the senses; the noble activity of the spirit. It is capable of contemplating a simultaneous multiplicity, and this offers advantages by saving time in obtaining a lot of information with a single gesture. The visual experience can be short, or long, and its duration does not influence its empirical content²⁵⁵. Humans are able to perceive the colour, shape, movement, and relief of what it is seen, and thanks to this it is possible to recognize objects, while identifying their location and distances²⁵⁶.

²⁵⁴ BARBERO ENCINAS, Juan Carlos. (2008), *Fondo y figura: el sentido de la restauración en el Arte Contemporáneo*. Madrid, España: Polifemo, p. 60.

²⁵⁵ JONAS, Op. Cit., pp. 191-199.

²⁵⁶ MORGADO, I. (2012), *Cómo percibimos el mundo. Una exploración de la Mente y Los Sentidos*. Barcelona, España: Ariel, pp. 102.

- Hearing is related to movement. There can only be dynamic reality and never static. The duration of hearing is the same as the duration of sound. The characteristic of sound is that it is not possible to choose hearing something, if a noise arises in the environment it impacts on those who can hear it, whether they want it or not²⁵⁷.
- The sense of touch allows knowing shapes. Although it is considered the least specialized of the senses, it is the one that connects people with reality. In order to touch, it is needed the object, and to exert movement, pressure or friction on it²⁵⁸.
- Smell is a non-analytical sense, that is, by smelling it is possible to know what something smells like but not what it is like, and that is why there are no specific names for smells²⁵⁹. Although humans only react to high concentrations of odourants²⁶⁰, the information perceived reaches areas of the brain that are closely linked to emotions and feelings, the amygdala and the insular cortex. This is why olfactory sensations are so powerful in producing emotional reactions²⁶¹, many of them innate, such as nausea, and the reason they influence state of mind²⁶². The curious thing about smell is that humans do not only smell through nose, but also through mouth and pharynx. Olfactory neurons die and regenerate every 60 days, so no one smells with the same neurons as two months ago²⁶³.

²⁵⁷ JONAS, *Op. Cit.*, 193-204.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 196-205.

²⁵⁹ MORGADO, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 86-87.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 81-91.

²⁶¹ Although smell cannot be remembered in the same way that images, or sounds are remember, they are capable of evoking remote emotional memories, especially those from the first ten years of life. When an odour is associated with an experience, it is very difficult to disassociate it ,and it would take an event of high emotional intensity to do so. *Ibid*, pp. 85-90.

²⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 134-135.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 131.

- The sense of taste is always linked to flavour. This sense, like smell, has the capacity to produce primary emotions and to evoke memories. When savouring, it is appreciated the qualities of what it is tasted, and not only through taste, as it also involves the sense of touch²⁶⁴.

The differences between the experiences provided by the “aesthetic” and “non-aesthetic” senses are based on the link to the body. While sight and hearing are considered to be able to interact with objects at a distance resulting in a cognitive reaction and sensation, the “non-aesthetic” senses are considered to be linked to physical pleasures, and therefore do not provide a reliable response²⁶⁵. In the case of the *BioVanitas*, the inclusion of the “non-aesthetic” senses creates a break with the classical canons that marked a certain distance from the artworks by limiting them to the “aesthetic” senses²⁶⁶.

BioVanitas do not distinguish between “aesthetic” and “non-aesthetic” senses. For example, the “non-aesthetic” sense of smell is as important, or more, than the “aesthetic” sense of sight. Sometimes it is the sense of smell which is activated first, and influences perception.

According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, aesthetic attitude theorist, the way in which things are perceived is essential to the aesthetic experience, as it results in a double reaction. On the one hand, there is the rationalized response to sensation, and on the other hand, there is sensation²⁶⁷.

And that sensation is, for the American neurologist Vernon Verjamin Mountcastle, abstraction. Mountcastle considers sensation not as a replica but as an abstraction and a product of reception from the outside and the brain²⁶⁸.

²⁶⁴ MORGADO, Op. Cit., pp. 94-99.

²⁶⁵ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., p. 62.

²⁶⁶ ECO, Op. Cit., p. 57.

²⁶⁷ MORENO, M. R. (1998). La naturaleza transformada. Los jardines. En FERNÁNDEZ ARENAS, J (Ed.), *Arte efímero y espacio estético* (pp. 311-352). Barcelona, España: Anthropos, pp. 62-63.

²⁶⁸ SCHINZEL, (2019), Op. Cit., pp. 4-5.

When the brain²⁶⁹ receives information from different channels, either eyes, skin, etc., it translates and encodes it in order to interpret and understand it. Once it is understood, the overall meaning of the stimulus is extracted to relate it to other previous information and to recognize the information.

Sensory information is not all processed in the same place, as each sensory information has an assigned area of the brain. Although much of the sensory information that is processed never becomes conscious, it remains in the brain and can be used unconsciously²⁷⁰.

Thanks to brain processes, it is possible to perceive what is happening outside the body, even if it does not necessarily coincide with reality. Colours, smells, everything perceivable with senses only exist in the individual's mind²⁷¹.

Colour, which is appreciated as one of the main aesthetic senses, is a key factor in the perception of Bio*Vanitas*. According to the social scientist Eva Heller, it depends on colour whether an artwork arouses negative or positive feelings, especially when organic matter is involved²⁷².

As it has been shown in previous examples, for instance *Untitled* by Morgan [F. 57] or *Bar à oranges* by Blazy [F. 60], it will not be perceived the same when the artwork is experimented on the first day or days later when the initial attractive colours have mutated into less appealing ones. Although, quoting Heller, and dealing with living matter "...everything ends in black, the same colour that Cronos wears²⁷³".

²⁶⁹ Throughout history the structure of the brain has evolved. The first brain, the reptilian brain, considered the brain of instincts, controlled metabolism and basic functions. Then came the emotional brain, the limbic brain, which allowed emotional responses and the storage of information related to experiences. Finally, the brain evolved into the neocortex, or reason brain, which specialises in reasoning, decision-making, organisation, movement and general behaviour. MORGADO, Op. Cit., pp. 32-40.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 117-121.

²⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 32-40.

²⁷² HELLER, E. (2005), *Psicología del color. Cómo actúan los colores sobre los sentimientos y la razón*. Barcelona, España: Eitorial Gustao Gili, pp.18-76.

²⁷³ HELLER, Op. Cit., p.129.

Something similar happens with smell. Smell can reach humans voluntarily (when consciously performing the action of smelling), or involuntarily (when the smell is perceived without the intention to be smelt). The way in which it is perceived is completely different, as when it is consciously, what it is smelt is valued emotionally. As José Luis Ruiz points out, there are certain smells in each person's olfactory memory that immediately trigger emotional reactions²⁷⁴.

Smell is one of the most important factors in Bio*Vanitas*. Although smell is considered to be the last of the senses, the least noble, it is of great importance in perception. Smell is a primitive sense and the olfactory centre is located in one of the oldest areas of the brain, close to the central nucleus, next to the areas responsible for producing emotions and instinctive functions.

Although humans' olfactory sense is less developed than other many mammals, it is sufficient to awake sensations and memories, or to activate a certain part of the brain that provokes intense emotions and feelings. That is, the evocative power of olfactory memory.

The senses of sight and smell involuntarily activate a third sense: taste. When eating, five senses are used, and this information is transmitted to the brain, which generates the judgements and values which determine whether something is liked or not through our memory and subconscious. The chemistry of food is directly related to smell, so smell and taste are intertwined, acting as a single organ.

The storage of this information ensures that although the ephemerality of the matter, its evocation is permanent through memory. Taste sensitivity is located on the tongue and, depending on the area, it is more sensitive to certain tastes; sweet tastes are appreciated on the tip of the tongue, salty tastes on the tip and lateral edges, acidic tastes on the lateral edges and bitter tastes on the base. Therefore, when seeing or smelling something, the part of the brain that stores its memory will be unconsciously activated, and it will be relived without the need to eat it again²⁷⁵.

²⁷⁴ RUIZ FELIU, J. L. (1998). La perfumería. En FERNÁNDEZ ARENAS. José (Ed.), *Arte efímero y espacio estético* (pp. 146-234). Barcelona, España: Editorial, pp. 146-153.

²⁷⁵ AGUILAR, Op. Cit., pp. 104-116.

Experiencing BioVanitas is multisensory, as they are mainly directed at sensory factors²⁷⁶. *Bar à oranges* [F. 60] showed that BioVanitas can be seen, smelt, tasted, touched, and even heard. And this means that experimentation is an essential part of shaping and defining them. Its matter does not only influence perception, which changes from static to dynamic due to the consequences of the materialization of Time, but it also affects to the particular interaction with each person.

2.3.2. The public

Nowadays, the expression “consuming art” is used. Moreover, at the section 1.1. Time levels in art, there was specifically mentioned Consumption time. It is curious that in the case of the BioVanitas, the public consumes an art that, in turn, it literally consumes itself. The ephemeral essence of the BioVanitas turns the public into a container of the instant. Their role is increasingly active and decisive.

In general, contemporary art often leaves the public bewildered. Sometimes, although there are more factors, this sensation is a consequence of the materials used for the creation. In this sense, the reaction of artists and audiences to the material is very different.

For the artists, the material is what helps them to achieve their goal, while the audience faces it as the result they are confronted with²⁷⁷. Frequently, the public is confronted with these outcomes in dedicated spaces. Usually in museums, but museums have also changed.

The first museums, from the 17th and 18th century, were spaces in which the public were allowed to manipulate the artworks. Practical spaces, so to speak. However, by the mid-19th century, this trend was changing towards what it is known today. Spaces in which interaction with the artworks is restricted, occasionally limited, and very rarely free²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁶ MORENO, Op. Cit., p. 319.

²⁷⁷ GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA (2004), Op. Cit., p.130.

²⁷⁸ Espacio Visual Europa (EVE). (9 de julio 2019). *Introducción a la museología sensorial* [Blog].

Since the 19th century, when the content of museums was limited to observation, the public has learned to position itself. To place themselves at the right distance, to walk at the right pace, and even to speak at a certain volume²⁷⁹. The public has learned to relegate touch to sight. Visitors have learned to look, but not to touch.

This attitude implied, in a way, the increasing distance between the artworks and the public. Contact with the artworks was limited to certain people, to those who, because of their knowledge, were considered to be prepared to handle them²⁸⁰.

However, some art creations, such as the *BioVanitas*, require the public to be an active part of the artwork in order to make a further reflection from what it is perceived. The public is transformed from an observer to a reflective product through the sensations experienced.

It could be supposed that this is an inherited position, maybe from *arte povera*, or from the stage director Jerzy Grotowsky, who "demanded" a fusion between the audience and the stage²⁸¹. Who knows?

Since the *BioVanitas* need to be experienced by the public for further understanding, and reflection, the design of this experience will also be decisive. A scenario in which the active stance required by the audience cannot be careless.

Let us take the mentioned *Stroke* [F. 88] as an example. In this artwork, the consequences of the passage of time also materialize through the attitude of the public, through use. This artwork, which is made entirely of chocolate, is designed to be experienced with all the senses. That is to say, it can be touched, licked, eaten...

²⁷⁹ Candlin 2010; Krmpotich y Peers 2013: 35-43. Espacio Visual Europa (EVE). (9 July 2019). *Introducción a la museología sensorial* [Entrada en un blog].

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ HESS, B. (2002). *Arte Povera* At BUTIN, H. (2002). *Diccionario de conceptos de arte contemporáneo*. Madrid, España: Abada Editores, p. 35.

whatever the public considers appropriate²⁸². Although the installation is “repeated”, the result is never the same, as Gallaccio herself explained²⁸³:

I have remade this work on many occasions and as the context changes, the response to the work shifts slightly. In Vienna, the walls became smeared with nose prints and tongue marks; in London, the corners of the work were furtively picked or marked with graffiti.

Bio*Vanitas* are a static and dynamic experience at the same time. A subjective experience linked to a collective essence. The public, based on their previous experience with the material, will make a completely subjective reading. The active stance of the audience will change them from being consumers to becoming part of the work. This can mean a modification, even if it is only perceptive, in the consumption way of the Bio*Vanitas*. They are what they were without knowing what they will be, but the way in which the public experiences them cannot be ignored.

While Bio*Vanitas* approach destruction as a creative process, they find part of their construction in the active attitude of the public, in their gaze, and in their interaction with them. An open attitude in which meaning derives from the multiplicity produced by the otherness, and difference of each Bio*Vanitas*.

Everything felt, independently of whether it is real or not, is part of each individual's mind. A subjective entity. This consciousness, the state that allows to be aware of the surroundings, can also be the subject of reflection. The world of the senses, which Bio*Vanitas* bring closer, makes to reflect on the awareness of the moment, on the idea of capturing the process, or just the result.

Does everything experience really exist? Experiences derived from the senses help to understand the relative nature, power, and limitations that the senses, consciously or unconsciously, exert on minds²⁸⁴.

²⁸² This video from the BBC shows clips ranging from the creation of *Stroke* to the public engagement with the work at the Jupiter Artland sculpture park in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2014. McLEAN, P. (19 de mayo de 2014). Chocolate room offers taste of art. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-scotland-27478755>

²⁸³ GALLACCIO, Op. Cit., p. 79.

²⁸⁴ MORGADO, Op. Cit., pp. 19-25.

However, to develop these experiences properly it is necessary to consider the contact with the *BioVanitas*, the space they are placed in, and the way in which they are to be exhibited to the public.

2.3.3. The display

Through the materialization of Time, and the multisensorial experience, the *BioVanitas* offer a new perception of art, and of its experimentation, altering the hitherto established public-work canons. A reality that suggests a question: is the public necessary to complete the *BioVanitas*?

It is essential to know the intention in order to ensure that it is respected, and that the original message reaches the public reliably. Like highlighted above, *BioVanitas* embodies the materialization of Time through the creative destruction as a result of the use of organic matter. One of its main characteristics, or consequences, is the relevance that organoleptic perception acquires; the sensations that will be experienced through the senses. This necessarily requires an in-depth analysis when deciding on the exhibition method, because a bad choice could lead to the erroneous transmission of the message, as it could interfere with the designed experience.

The first question to ask would be what type of *BioVanitas* is it going to be displayed: is it an Ephemeral, Site Specific, Protocol, Mixed or Residual *BioVanitas*? And above all, is it active? These two questions will influence the first determining factor, the space.

- **Isolated display:** Isolated display is recommended for those *BioVanitas* with very special needs or characteristics, and for those that pose a high risk to other works, and that are designed to be displayed without a cover-case and/or barrier. Although this solution is aimed more at Site Specific, Ephemeral, Protocol or Mixed *BioVanitas*, the possibility is not dismissed for Remains *BioVanitas*.

If the work is displayed individually, it would be possible to modify the environmental conditions to adapt them exclusively to the demands of each case, being able to vary the life-span of the materials without annulling their creative destruction. In this way, the performative Time would continue with its artistic hybridization while respecting its meaning. The artwork would continue its natural process without interfering with other close works, and would not represent a bigger problem than its own destruction. Furthermore, in the case of the appearance of pests, if this were not contemplated by the artist, it would be possible to apply the appropriate measures without endangering other works.

- **Joint display:** Another possibility would be to display the *BioVanitas* sharing the space with other works. This option would be acceptable for those *BioVanitas* that do not present a high risk, or that have ceased their development process, such as *Remains BioVanitas*.

Under this circumstance, the compatibility between the works should be studied beforehand, as the measures proposed may be effective for some but harmful for others, or the evolution of the ephemeral work may lead to the undesired deterioration of others. In this case checking is important, and it is advisable to regularly monitor close works for possible changes, alterations, or even biological attacks.

In the joint display option, as in the isolated display, it is also possible to carry out the necessary measures to prevent possible proliferation of pests from attacking close works, or the *BioVanitas* itself (if it were not contemplate in its design).

Once it has been established whether the *BioVanitas* will be exhibited individually or sharing the space with other works, it is necessary to raise other questions such as: the display, the use of barriers, or not, and even whether means will be used to delimit the consequences of its evolution.

The display offers a number of possibilities that will depend at all times on the *BioVanitas*' conditions, and its intention.

- **Display with vitrine:** The use of vitrine for the display could be a solution for those active, and high risky, Bio*Vanitas*. However, it can also be used with Remains Bio*Vanitas*, or with those in which it is part of the whole, such as the aforementioned *Schokoladenmeer (Chocolate Sea)* [F. 66] or *Über Meer (Over the Sea)* [F. 80] by Roth.

Biological attack, and pests, can be one of the direct consequences of the materialization of Time. In order for Bio*Vanitas* to continue their natural evolution, without interfering with other works, or disturbing the public, the use of vitrines can be a satisfactory solution. Besides, these cover-cases offer multiple choices as they can be open, semi-hermetic or hermetic.

As it can be appreciated in Hirst's installation *A Thousand Years*, mentioned previously (1.5. Bio*Vanitas*), the artist considered the hermetic vitrine as part of the installation [F. 89]. The installation (207,5 x 400 x 215 cm) is made of glass, steel, silicone rubber, painted MDF, an insectocutor, cow's head, blood, flies, maggots, metal dished, cotton wool, sugar, and water²⁸⁵.



[F. 89] Damien Hirst. *A thousand years* (1990).
© Damien Hirst.

²⁸⁵ ARTIMAGE. (s.f.). *A Thousand Years, 1990 (detail)*.
<https://www.artimage.org.uk/3395/damien-hirst/a-thousand-years--1990--detail->

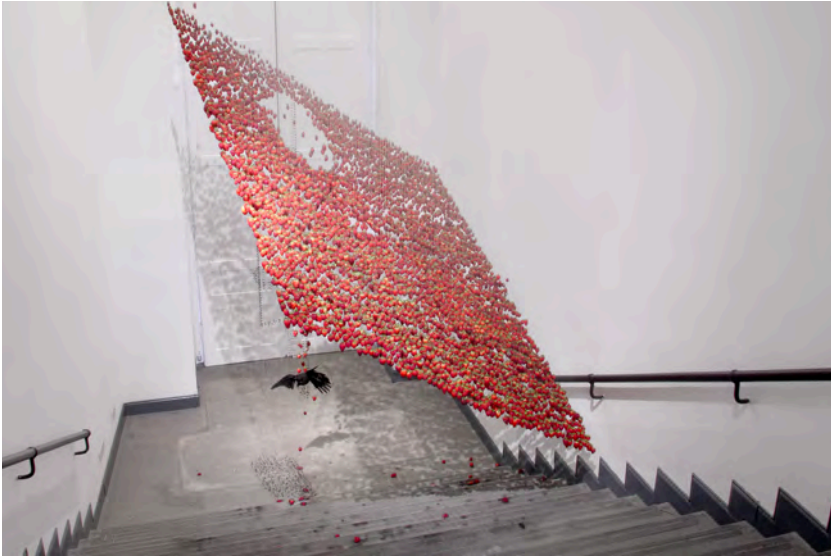
The vitrine, completely transparent, and sealed around the perimeter, made it possible to contemplate the whole process, even go around it as if it were a sculpture, but with the advantage, or disadvantage, of not having to experience the sensations that could be caused by the presence of flies, and/or other pests developed during the exhibition period. This vitrine also has a system for killing the flies, the insectocutor, so it was possible to see, in addition to the decapitated cow, and the alive flies, the dead flies on the metal tray, or on the floor.

On the other hand, those exhibitions which use vitrines present what could be considered as a problem for some installations. Indeed, the use of vitrines allows the free development of the mutable character of the Bio*Vanitas*, although they also block the sense of smell, and therefore the sense of taste. So, if the artist considers that these senses as part of the original message, this solution, the use of vitrine, would not be appropriate.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, in the section 2.2.3. Deterioration factors, if the environmental conditions are not suitable, it can be generated condensation inside the vitrine due to an RH, T, and lighting inadequate combination. This would make it difficult, and/or even impossible, to see the work as occurred in *Food situation for a patriotic banquet* by Miralda [F. 76].

- **Display without vitrine:** If the intention is for the public to act freely by experiencing the Bio*Vanitas* with all the senses while Time materializes in them, the display without vitrine would be the suitable option. *Down Time*²⁸⁶ (2010), by Morgan, could be an example of display without vitrine. This installation was designed to occupy the exhibition space in a way to allow the public to interact freely with it [F. 90].

²⁸⁶ *Down Time* was part of the *On & On* exhibition that took place in 2010 at *La Casa Encendida* in Madrid (Spain). María Nieto explained in personal communications during 2017. Temperature conditions were around 22-24 °C and RH between 50-55% due to the diversity of materials used for this exhibition, such as: live birds, naturalized birds, chemical elements that reacted by increasing their volume, candle lamps that melted or elements decomposing organics. Because of this variety, every "cares" were specific for each work and the responsible personnel followed the guidelines indicated by the artists in all times. The cleaning and maintenance team had specific orders not to intervene, and it was the assembly company itself in charge of cleaning whatever was necessary. Throughout the exhibition period, continuous controls were carried out, and the insects that appeared as a result of the works disappeared when the exhibition was finished.



[F. 90] Claire Morgan. *Down Time* (2010).

Jackdaw (taxidermy), strawberries, bluebottles, fruit flies, leas, nylon.
500 x 500 x 250 cm.

© Claire Morgan. Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Köln, Paris, St. Moritz.

Photo: Claire Morgan Studio

In this kind of installations, senses take on special importance, as their mutable nature makes the public feel different emotions depending on when they visit the Bio*Vanitas*. In this case, the intense colouring opposes the Western vision of death, and the combination of biological materials, and naturalized animals plays with the consequences of the passing of Time.

- **Display from documentation and/or remains:** the following work, *Hábito* (*Habit*)²⁸⁷ (1996) by Javier Pérez (1968-), serves as an example of an exhibition from remains, as the artist himself describes it as “work remains” [F. 91].

²⁸⁷ *Hábito* is part of Javier Pérez's personal collection and has been displayed in different exhibition such as, *Mudar*, in Sala Rekalde (Bilbao) from 24 March to 26 April 1998 and *Hábitos*, Espacio Uno, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), from 18 May to 15 June 1998. PÉREZ, J., personal communication, 18 May, 2017.



[F. 91] Javier Pérez. *Hábito (Habit)* (1996). © Javier Pérez.
Courtesy Javier Pérez

As mentioned in the classification of the Remains Bio*Vanitas*, these can be physical or documentary, and this work by Pérez perfectly reflects this symbiosis.

Pérez presents *Hábito* as a sculpture and video artwork, a record of degradation that cannot be shown independently. *Hábito* was made in 1996 from fabric, silk cocoons, butterflies, and wood. This hand made tunic was elaborated with silkworm cocoons that over time hatched, and transformed it while Pérez dressed it and documented the process.

The video projection is a Super VHS transferred to a DVD with sound, projected on a screen, or wall, in loop mode. The artist used different manifestations of Time in this work.

First, the evolution of the natural cycle, which gives rise to the hatching of the chrysalises in the form of butterflies and which is necessary for the work to be completed; second, there is the freezing of Time through the chrysalises that did not hatch and whose cycle was stopped in 1996; and finally the documentation that captures the moment. By documenting the work in photographs he freezes the instants, and by recording the process he makes Time cyclical at will.

The transformation process, as the documentation, was carried out in his atelier. The work has been exhibited on all occasions with the process finished

and stabilized, projecting the artistic hybridization and without special conditions in the exhibition space.

Even if Pérez alludes to the fact that the work is more than 20 years old, *Hábito* has been intervened on several occasions. The natural evolution of the chrysalis' evolution has been halted, which for the artist could lead to a degradation of the work, and some cocoons that did not meet the aesthetic conditions of the work have also been replaced. The artist himself made these replacements, using silk cocoons that he had kept in a box since 1996²⁸⁸.

The display of *BioVanitas* offers multiple scenarios from which to convey the message based on specific needs. And, of course, there may even be more than one option for displaying the same *BioVanitas*. Sometimes, the way of displaying makes question the real needs of what it is displayed. If the final decision responds to the real needs of the *BioVanitas*, of the space, or of the public.

What is certain is that, independent of the display solution, it will be essential to create safe exhibition spaces. Not only safe spaces for the *BioVanitas*, but for people, and for close works. The need to design and build safe perimeters makes it necessary, at least in our opinion, for the conservation-restoration team to be present in the exhibition decision-making process.

All of this reinforces the need for multidisciplinary teams while reaffirming that the functions of the conservation-restoration team go beyond the safeguarding of the works. The examples used in this section show that the display of *BioVanitas*, even if they are temporary or permanent, offers numerous possibilities. However, although some *BioVanitas*, such as *Strange fruit*, are part of a museum's collection, the truth is that they are usually exhibited only temporarily. So this leads to the following question: What happens to *BioVanitas* when nobody sees them? What happens when they are not on display?

²⁸⁸ PÉREZ, Op. Cit.

2.4. The storage

When thinking of the storage of artworks, the first thing to think about would be the space. More specifically controlled spaces. Rooms with minimum controlled lighting, constant temperature, and relative humidity to provide the works with the maximum possible stability during periods of non-exhibition. A space in which peripheral conservation is very important. Warehouses could be imagined as spaces designed for the artworks to rest.

Packaging would be another thing to think about. Safe packaging, and containers, made considering the specific needs of each work, and that protect them from external attacks during storage.

At first sight, storage does not seem to be complicated beyond the usual problems. However, the question arises when thinking about the storage of the perishable materials that make up the *BioVanitas* according to their classification or nature.

Those artworks made of organic materials can become weak, brittle or, as pointed out before, ruinous. They can become particularly susceptible to vibrations due to movement and even their manipulation, however slight, can be highly dangerous.

It cannot be overlooked that the nature of *BioVanitas* makes them unpredictable in terms of their evolution. Therefore, while they are stored they may remain stable, they may continue evolving and changing, or they even may disintegrate, and/or disappears. Unfortunately, unless the packaging has a transparent surface, either totally or partially, it will not be revealed until they are unpacked.

During the visit to the Fundação de Serralves, this reflection became true. When Mr. Duarte opened Roth's *P.O.T.A.A. VFB* (1969) packaging, it was found that it had suffered a microbiological attack over almost its entire surface²⁸⁹ [F. 92 - 93] . As Duarte pointed out, the work was not in that condition a week earlier when it was previously checked for the visit.

²⁸⁹ Visit with Felipe Duarte, collection manager, at Fundação de Serralves, Porto (Portugal). 23 July 2021.

[F. 92] Dieter Roth, *P.O.T.A.A. VFB* (1969).
Chocolate, birdseed, wood. Ed. 3/30.
Detail. Front view of the biological attack.
© Estate of Dieter Roth, 2021.
Courtesy Fundação de Serralves



[F. 93] Dieter Roth, *P.O.T.A.A. VFB* (1969).
Chocolate, birdseed, wood. Ed. 3/30.
Detail. Lateral view of the biological attack.
© Estate of Dieter Roth, 2021.
Courtesy Fundação de Serralves



[F. 94] Dieter Roth, *P.O.T.A.A. VFB* (1969).
Chocolate, birdseed, wood. Ed. 3/30.
Detail of booklice's attack after the attack
the biological attack. These insects, which
feed on the mould, made the mould
disappeared but posed a new challenge
for the conservation of the work.
© Estate of Dieter Roth, 2021.
Courtesy Fundação de Serralves



Although the work was quite appropriately stored, it was not spared from a dangerous alteration that could also endanger other works in storage²⁹⁰. However, this fact answered the question about if it was alive, or if it had reached a level of stability in its evolution²⁹¹ [F. 94].

Therefore, it is considered essential to reflect on the most appropriate storage criteria, or even if it can be considered lawful to store those works designed to make visibly their transformation.

Recalling once again the *BioVanitas*' classification, they can be divided into two large blocks, depending on whether they are intended to be repeated or not. There are Ephemeral *BioVanitas*, among them Site Specific; Remains *BioVanitas*, and Protocol *BioVanitas* with the variety of Mixed Protocol *BioVanitas*.

However, a distinction could also be made between non-active and active *BioVanitas*. This last ones, in which the deterioration process remains active, pose new dilemmas for storage.

First, those *BioVanitas* that consider repetition, that is the Protocol *BioVanitas* and the Mixed Protocol *BioVanitas*. As they are works designed for a specific time, these *BioVanitas* will not present a major problem, as it is not necessary to store their organic components.

²⁹⁰ For the storage of *P.O.T.A.A. VFB*, it was created an acid-free cardboard container, with a front box covered with Melinex® to allow observation of the work, and an opening at the top of the container to allow air flow.

²⁹¹ Quoting Duarte:

The case of Dieter Roth has been quite a challenge for us since you were here. I believe when you visited us here in Serralves it was the day when we spotted that the sculpture had a layer of mould growing. The work was then enclosed in a sealed vitrine to avoid mould contamination to other works. A couple of weeks later we saw that the work was covered by dozens of booklice (small white insects, 1mm size) that feed on mould and were attracted by the mould layer on the sculpture. In fact, a few days later, these insects had eaten all the mould layer, that gradually disappeared. We then had another issue in hands, how to get rid of the insects that could be potentially harmful for the work and for the whole collection. I was in contact with sculpture conservators at MoMA and TATE and all agreed that the best/safest solution was to eradicate them with an anoxia treatment (slow replacement of oxygen by nitrogen in a bubble). The work was in this bubble for almost two months and we have just opened it a couple of days ago. The work is in good condition with no signs of mould or insects.
Personal communication. 12/11/2021.

Let us imagine the storage of a Protocol Bio*Vanitas*, for example Gallaccio's *Red on Green* [F. 68-69], as it was used to define this type of Bio*Vanitas*. This work was composed of organic materials, specifically 10,000 roses, and was remade each time the work was exhibited. In this case, as the physical existence of the Protocol Bio*Vanitas* ends with its exhibition, once the exhibition is over, there is nothing to store, and there is no complication in this aspect.

That is to say, once the exhibition is finished the work completely disappears with it, as the roses have to be discarded after each exhibition. Therefore, the Protocol Bio*Vanitas* would not contemplate the storage of objects.

Next, will be the storage of Mixed Protocol Bio*Vanitas*. Remember their definition, these Bio*Vanitas* differ from the Protocol ones only in one detail, that they contain an element that does not degrade, and that is constant in each remake.

This typology was illustrated with *Fluid II* [F. 70-71] by Morgan. In the case of *Fluid*, the organic material, the strawberries, would have fulfilled its function and would be thrown away after each exhibition. Only the naturalized bird would remain.

When talking about Mixed Protocol Bio*Vanitas*' storage, it would have to be considered the best option for storing the non-perishable elements. These storage criteria will respond to the usual storage parameters according to the characteristics of the object. Therefore, the only thing that should be stored in the Mixed Protocol Bio*Vanitas* would be the non-degradable object.

For those Bio*Vanitas* that do not consider repetition, that is, Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, Site Specific Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, and Remains Bio*Vanitas*, the storage criteria turn a little more complicated.

Remains Bio*Vanitas*, as defined above, are those Bio*Vanitas* whose organic process has stopped, and remain stable once their creative destruction has ceased. Previously, it was used Roth's *Schokoladenmeer* (*Chocolate Sea*) as example [F. 66].

In this case, as Alejandro Castro, from the MACBA's conservation-restoration department, showed, the work is duly packed in a completely airtight wooden container which in turn contains another acid-free container.

The work is stored in a specific warehouse's area at a constant temperature of 18.5°C, and a relative humidity of 40%; optimum conditions for the conservation of the chocolate. In addition, there is a very strict protocol in place for the movement of *Schokoladenmeer*, in which it has to undergo a series of acclimatization before it can be exhibited²⁹².

When storing Site Specific Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, the variant of the Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* which is the most faithful to the definition of ephemerality as it they created for a specific time and place, their physical existence ends with their exhibition. Therefore, there would be nothing to store.

For this variant, it was used Mesa's installation *INNESTI* [F. 65] as an example. A work made with lemons, oranges, and mandarins where senses, and the organic process of the materials were essential.

In Site Specific Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, it could be questioned whether it would be possible to generate any remain, in which case it would be the only thing to store. In this case, the artist himself confirmed that he did not consider the existence of remains for *INNESTI*.

Besides, the very idea of preserving the remains would lead the work to exist beyond the time and place for which it was created, somewhat invalidating its intention. Therefore, it could be considered that the existence of remains in these Bio*Vanitas* would not be logical, and so, it is considered that there would be no physical elements to store.

Finally, it is time to analyse what happens with the Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*' storage. However, as it is considered that this point raises certain tricky questions, it would be appropriate to deal with it a little more exhaustively, because does it make sense to store performative Time?

²⁹² Information given by Alejandro Castro during the visit to MACBA, Barcelona (Spain). During the visit it was not allowed to take pictures of the work. 5 September 2019.

2.4.1. Storing performative Time

The real storage dilemma lies on the Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, works made with organic materials that maintain their active process of transformation. The doubts raised by these Bio*Vanitas* do not lie in the organic nature of their materials *per se*, but in their active decay process.

The example used to represent the Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* was *Eggs* by the Belgian artist de Cupere. In this work, and in his work in general, de Cupere experiments through smell. The aim of his works is to reach the aesthetic experience through smell, making it transport the public to other places, and to another time.

His creations are directly linked to emotions. Unexpected experiences are generated, as the artist is keen on olfactory *trompe l'oeil*, if it can be put it that way. He likes rescuing memories, especially, linked to food and childhood, and this is one of the reasons why he uses biological materials in his creations.

Eggs was last exhibited at the S.M.A.K. more than ten years ago, and since then it has been stored using a conventional system. The packaging used is what the museum calls an Artist's Box, an acid free cardboard box closed with tape, as it is shown in the image [F. 95].

The bottom of the box is reinforced with an Ethafoam® base, where the metal basket fits, and it is covered with silicone paper, which is periodically replaced, to absorb the grease from the chicken skin, and also serves to check if matter is coming off. In addition, four cotton strips in the shape of a cross, and attached with Velcro, act as a locking system, and block the movement of the basket inside the box²⁹³.

De Cupere is interested in the transformation of the material, and in its different states, in addition to the different reactions that they can produce. However, as the work is stored, it is impossible to experiment it.

²⁹³ This information has been provided by the S.M.A.K., from the *Eggs'* condition report by Sofia Gomes (2011), and from the information provided by Rebecca Heremans during a virtual conversation in which she showed the artist's box in detail. 03/03/2021



[F. 95] Peter de Cupere, *Eggs* (1997). Storage system.
Courtesy Peter de Cupere and Archive of S.M.A.K.

Storing a work of these characteristics, made with organic materials in which destruction, and organoleptic sensation are part of the process, raises the following reflection: does it make sense for the organic process to continue developing if there is no one to experience it? Or, on the contrary, should it be limited only to exhibition?

Once again, BioVanitas suggest the need of the public for their completion. If considering that the organic process is part of the work, and that it is necessary to be visible for its understanding, and experimentation, it is logical to question the compatibility of a conventional storage system for the BioVanitas.

For this reason, the most appropriate solution, or the ideal state, for the Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* would be permanent exhibition without storage, since the deterioration arising from the organic process is an essential part of the work, and it should be always visible in order to experiment it.

However, this situation of permanent exhibition is not always possible, which means that they need to be stored. In this sense, it is possible to stop the organic process during storage periods in order to respect the importance of the visibility of the destruction.

As mentioned before, *Eggs* is stored with a traditional storage system. This means that during all this time, the work has continued evolving without anyone witnessing its transformation. No one has experienced the sensations that the change in its appearance, nor its smells may have provoked, and it seems that what cannot be seen does not exist²⁹⁴. Therefore, does it make sense if it continues changing if no one can experiment this transformation?

The use of organic materials in Bio*Vanitas* leads to resort to techniques used in other disciplines, such as the food industry, to find solutions to these challenges. The food industry offers multiple options for the physical, and chemical preservation of organic material.

Within physical preservation, the most common methods are dehydration, pasteurization, thermal preservation, and irradiation. As for chemical preservation, it could be opted for preservation techniques using gases, vacuum packaging, or intelligent packaging.

There is a proposal that could be considered suitable, interesting, and feasible for the storage of Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, and so, for *Eggs*. This solution, proposed by Julie Gilman, is a preservation system called MAP (Modified Atmosphere Packing) that uses inert gases to preserve the organic matter.

The MAP method consists of a packaging system based on modified atmosphere through the introduction of inert gases. The use of this system involves placing the work in an airtight container, and introducing an inert gas, displacing the oxygen present in the atmosphere of the main container, which causes oxidation, and the

²⁹⁴ TANIZAKI, Op. Cit., p. 70.

proliferation of aerobic microorganisms. According to Gilman, this system, given its cost-effectiveness, ease of use, and safety, would be feasible in museums²⁹⁵.

These chemical preservation methods are common in the food industry to prolong the life span of foodstuffs. To explain these techniques, Gilman's study²⁹⁶ *The role of science in contemporary art conservation: a study into the conservation and preservation of food-based art* will be taken as a reference. Fortunately, Gilman also proposes this chemical conservation technique for the conservation of *Eggs*.

The principle of the MAP system is similar to that of the anoxia system, generally used to eradicate pests, except that the presence of oxygen (O₂), in the MAP system, it is not ruled out. This new atmosphere, the protective atmosphere, would be unique to each work as it would be created on the basis of its components.

The difficulty of this system lies precisely in finding the right gas combination for each material, or work. It would be necessary to carry out a specific study for each work that would be submitted to this technique, as each work requires a specific atmosphere.



[F. 96] Diagram of the installation of the new atmosphere in the container that stores the work.

²⁹⁵ GILMAN, Op. Cit., pp.109-110.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, pp.103-118.

According to the study carried out by Gilman²⁹⁷, the appropriate atmosphere for the conservation of *Eggs* in the MAP system would be composed of 50% N₂ and 50% CO₂. This protective atmosphere would preserve *Eggs* in a controlled state of rest, halting the natural organic process, and its consequences on the storage period [F. 96].

During storage, *Eggs* would be in a state of induced inactivity, in which its materials would remain stable and immune to the consequences of the organic process. At the end of this period, the modified atmosphere would be replaced by the original atmosphere, and its organic, and transformation, process would be reactivated. In this context, only one question arises: will the MAP system also retain its odour?

In the case of *BioVanitas*, specifically in *Ephemeral BioVanitas*, it would be necessary to emphasize that the MAP system should only be considered valid for storage, as their destruction process' visibility is implicit in their nature, and it is fundamental for their experimentation.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to stop it only during non-exhibition periods. If the work is designed to develop its transformation process during display, it could be considered acting against its intention if it continues its evolution under undesirable conditions.

Besides, the use that this technique makes of the container would be another reason to limit the MAP system to storage. In some cases, as it happens with *Eggs*, the use of a vitrine would block certain senses, such as smell, which are necessary for the understanding of the work.

As it has been already mentioned, the sense of smell is very present in de Cupere's work, and a sensory deprivation of this nature could invalidate the work, and transmit the message wrongly. Once again, this fact highlights the importance, and difficulty of the *BioVanitas'* exhibition, and how easy it can be to misinterpret it only by underestimating the senses.

²⁹⁷ GILMAN, Op. Cit., p.137.

From our point of view, the use of the MAP system would be a suitable solution for the storage of Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas*, as it makes possible to stop the creative destruction during specific periods, that is, while storage. This study considers that this inactivity in its creative process does not interfere in its evolution as a ruinous work, since generally this transformation, that entails its decay, has to be visible and experienced by the public.

However, the fact of considering stopping their deterioration during storage suggests that the work may still be active, and if it is still active it implies that its process of transformation is not completed yet. This makes wonder whether the Bio*Vanitas*, at least the ephemeral ones, are actually finished, or whether they will ever be considered finished, and this in turn makes reconsider the ethics of possible interventions.

2.5. Intervention criteria

It has already been mentioned that *BioVanitas* can be considered as ruinous artworks. Works that propose destruction, and deterioration as an essential part of their creative process. But this deterioration can be presented in different ways.

It would be appropriate to make an aside to specify what this study means by deterioration. When talking about deterioration, it is not referred to those aspects that considered detrimental to the work, but to alterations that may appear in the *BioVanitas* as a consequence of their organic process, independent of whether these are contemplated for their evolution.

Attention to these deteriorations will be general, as each *BioVanitas* will present unique characteristics that will produce a specific type of alteration, and it would be impossible to compile them all. Each case depends not only on the nature of its materials, but also on its time, and its circumstances.

Back again to *wabi sabi*, this concept proposes three lessons that it assumes to be obvious. First, everything is mutable. Permanence, and stability, are nothing but an illusion. Second, all things are imposed, so nothing is free from imperfection. Third, all things are incomplete.

Everything is in constant transformation, just like the *BioVanitas*. This implies to question when might they be considered ended²⁹⁸. Do they end when the last element is placed? When do they reach their maximum level of destruction? When do they disappear completely? Can they truly be considered destroyed and/or disappeared, if they still persist on a conceptual level?

For example, as Herman Aben mentions, for Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) his works were constantly changing, and they were never finished, as he considered them as autonomous processes that underwent chemical reactions, fermentation, dehydration, etc.²⁹⁹.

²⁹⁸ KOREN, Op. Cit., pp.46-50.

²⁹⁹ ABEN, Op. Cit., p. 109.

Although it is known that eternal existence is a false concept, humans refuse to disappear. We seek immortality. Not only in life but in everything around. One way to survive life is fame. Immortal fame means the permanence of certain honours. However, as Aristotle already pointed out, these honours are worth as much as those who bestow them³⁰⁰. Duchamp pointed out in a letter to Jean and Suzanne Crotti³⁰¹:

Artists who, in their own lifetime, have managed to get people to value their junk are excellent travelling salesmen, but there is no guarantee as to the immortality of their work. And even posterity is just a slut that conjures some away and brings others back to life (El Greco), retaining the right to change her mind over 50 years or so.

It is to be aware that human culture, which is charged with safeguarding this idea of immortality, is transient. This fact, as Jonas points out, deprives the concept of immortality of its meaning by limiting it to the values of society and time³⁰².

Such as it has already been repeated, humans find in the destruction posed by the Bio*Vanitas* a reflection of our mortality. This reflection generates a certain degree of empathy, and as Schinzel refers³⁰³:

... I am of the firm opinion that in a world which has become emotionally dumbstruck through visual sensory overload, a particularly important task for conservation is to enable and assist such emotional experiences in the viewer... Looking at art teaches us empathy and so, by extension, conservation has the potential to teach us how to fine-tune that empathy... However, the neuroscientific findings outlined above provide evidence that the following things are just as important as facts : sensitivity for the object's material, emotional empathy for the circumstances which accompany the creation of the artwork and for its later social history...

³⁰⁰ JONAS, Op. Cit., p. 304.

³⁰¹ NAUMANN, F. M., OBALK, H. (2000), *Affect: Marcel. The selected correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*. Gante, Bélgica: Ludion Press, p. 321, letter 216.

³⁰² JONAS, Op. Cit., p. 306.

³⁰³ SCHINZEL (2019), Op. Cit., pp. 8-9.

According to the Researcher and curator Javier Fuentes Feo, it is necessary to redefine the parameters of sensibility, as well as to revise the exchanges, and access to discourses. In other words, to change the *hows* and the *modes*³⁰⁴. To find a synergy between the sensitive form, the aesthetic form, and the scientific form of the knowledge.

Moreover, it would also be necessary to question which is the time of the Bio*Vanitas*, and which is the time of the Bio*Vanitas* in relation to its context, as it is not the same the time of the work that the time in which it lives.

Every Bio*Vanitas*, and its deterioration, will pose different intervention criteria and perspectives. If it is understood that Bio*Vanitas* are ruins artworks in transformation process, and therefore living works that have not yet been completed, would intervention make sense? Would it be ethical to interfere in their creation process before they are finished?

With these questions in mind, it is natural to wonder what the intervention is for, for whom it is carried out, for the good of the Bio*Vanitas* or for personal own good. Therefore, taking Schinzel as a reference, and before any intervention, there are three questions to answer: why, what for, and for whom³⁰⁵.

³⁰⁴ FUENTES FEO, J. (2007), *Un contexto heredado. Friedrich Nietzsche y el arte del siglo XX*. Cartagena, España: Azarbe, pp. 64-65.

³⁰⁵ SANTABÁRBARA, Op. Cit., p. 12.

2.5.1. Intervention: Why, what for, and whom for

As Matero argued, since Restoration emerged in the 20th century as a field of academic study, it has matured, and specialized to become a discipline that encompasses the theoretical synthesis, and methodology of the humanities, and sciences³⁰⁶. But **why** are artwork intervened?

Some authors, such as Salvador Muñoz Viñas, suggest that it is done in order to leave a cultural legacy for future generations, to maintain a national or group identity, for pity, for an idea of immortality, for a regression to the maternal womb, for money³⁰⁷... Whatever the motive might be, it should have been guided by Schinzel's phrase³⁰⁸: "What we cannot understand we must pass over untouched".

Humans' fear of our own transience could also be a valid explanation. The knowledge of limited existence can make people more sensitive to the fleeting, as the imminent idea of evanescence makes reflect on the different hypotheses of that inevitable end. Artworks are turned into humans' own reflection, and we try to keep them alive as long as possible as a representation of our own longing so that they continue to speak, not only of art but of humans, of our person³⁰⁹.

As Barbero Encinas indicates, conservation is concerned with the durability of the material over time, and restoration focuses on the legibility of the artwork through direct actions that modify its appearance to bring it closer to the original. An exercise in updating that encompasses both the object, and the concept³¹⁰.

Although no differentiation has been made in restoration theory between traditional and vanguard works, emphasis has been placed on the peculiarities of contemporary

³⁰⁶ MATERO, Frank. (2000). Ethics and Policy in Conservation. *Conservation Perspectives, The GCI Newsletter*, 15.1 (Spring 2000). Retrieved from <http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/15_1/feature1_2.html>

³⁰⁷ MUÑOZ VIÑAS, Op. Cit., p. 157.

³⁰⁸ SCHINZEL, (2004), Op. Cit., p. 26.

³⁰⁹ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., pp. 130-312.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 313.

art. Nowadays, the restoration of contemporary art is a subject that is regularly discussed. According to Roy A. Perry³¹¹, "if we do not preserve the art of today for tomorrow's audience, their knowledge, and experience of our culture will be, sadly, impoverished".

However, as the conservator-restorer Debra Hess Norris³¹² states, "not all contemporary art will survive, nor is it intended to". It is therefore natural to consider whether intervention, whether conservation, or restoration, is feasible for all art, and what happens to those works, such as *BioVanitas*, that are created to disappear. Is it the conservation necessary for *BioVanitas*? And if not, would intervention make sense for them?

According to the restorer-conservator Rosario Llamas Pacheco, who took the diagram of the Decision-Making Model for the Conservation of Modern Art as reference, the intervention is conditioned by: the artist's opinion, aesthetic factors, historicity, authenticity, functionality, the importance of the work, the ethics of restoration, legal aspects, technical limitation, the art market, and financial limitation³¹³.

It is essential to forget the exhibition of perfection in order to accept destruction as part of the creation. In this respect the simple application of the technique is not valid, as it requires more sensitive reflections, and not so objectual which can lead to errors, and mistakes due to an overly pragmatic vision. As the restorer and art

³¹¹ PERRY, R. A. (1999), Present and future: caring for contemporary art at the Tate Gallery. At CORZO M. Á. (Coord.). *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th Century Art* (p. 41-44). Los Angeles, Estados Unidos: Getty Publications, p. 44.

³¹² HESS NORRIS, D. (1999).The survival of contemporary art: the role of the conservation professional in this delicate ecosystem. At CORZO M. Á. (Coord.). *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th Century Art* (p. 131-134). Los Angeles, Estados Unidos: Getty Publications, p. 133.

³¹³ This model was created by the *Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art* y por el *Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage* in 1999. In turn, it is based on the traditional conservation model that describes Ernst van de Wetering in *Roaming the stairs of the power of Babel*, Efforts to expand interdisciplinary involvement in the theory of restoration en AAW, "8th ICOM-CC Triennial Meeting", Sydney, 1987, pp. 561-565. Quoted in LLAMAS PACHECO, Op. Cit., pp.53-59.

historian Heinz Althöfer puts it, these new needs suggest three areas in which to reorient the objectives of the Restoration³¹⁴:

- **Objects that can be treated as traditional artworks:** this is not a major difficulty, as known methods and tactics can be used without the need for experimentation.
- **Objects that pose new problems on technical level:** in this case, traditional actions can be modified to find a valid solution. It will be necessary to new techniques and materials.
- **Objects that require an ideological approach:** in these cases, before any action, it is necessary an initial conceptual approach, as well as providing a theory based on contemporary art, and on the foundations of current and previous thought.

There are different components that take part in the elaboration of the *BioVanitas*, and their materialization of Time through the degradation of matter, like: the conceptual dimension, the statement, the materials, the physical level, the execution, the transformation, and even the disappearance. Not only do they produce physical objects, but they also produce ideas, they generate concepts; therefore, in addition to posing new technical problems, they also require a prior ideological approach.

While the theories elaborated by Brandi sought uniqueness, the idea of preserving matter as opposed to concept, the new trends differ. According to Schinzel, this priority given to matter should be replaced by the search for perception valuing the semantic charge of the material itself³¹⁵.

BioVanitas, being artistic manifestations that consider the ruin, and that go beyond the matter, have direct consequences on the Restoration team, as it implies the need for a review of their functions, and their position referring to the work. Furthermore, they underline the need for the elaboration of guidelines regulating action, as the

³¹⁴ ALTHÖFER, Op. Cit.I, pp.10-11.

³¹⁵ SANTABÁRBARA, Op. Cit., p. 16.

standardization of protocols, and specific terminology that had long been considered for contemporary art³¹⁶.

According to Barbero Encinas there is a fundamental premise that is sometimes overlooked, that restoration does not depend on the object's needs, but rather responds to the way of apprehending objects that the society for which the restoration is carried out has³¹⁷.

When talking about the Restoration of the *BioVanitas*, it should be considered what is really part of the artwork: the matter, the concept, everything... If considering the ephemeral nature of the *BioVanitas*, and their destruction as an artistic representation that harbours the meaning, and consequence of various moments of themselves as part of their essence, it should be necessary to question if the intervention would be licit, or if on the contrary it would totally, or partially, eliminate their meaning.

Let us return again to Leonard's *Strange Fruit*, to find an example of intervention. This partial intervention considered safeguarding less than the 10% of the physical work, and let the other 90% develop freely. In this case, as already mentioned, only 25 of the 300 pieces that made up the work were intervened by freezing and applying Paraloid B-72 [F. 97].

Can it be considered that intervening less than 10% of the work contradicts its ephemeral essence?, or its idea of deterioration to its ultimate consequences? In those ephemeral, and ruinous nature works, such as the *BioVanitas*, it is necessary to check which is the advisable limit for intervening their destruction. This is because it could be intervened in different ways, modifying the speed of decay, if deemed appropriate, or even appearing to be active in a degradation that has been neutralized³¹⁸.

³¹⁶ ROLDÁN, J.C. & VEGA, L. (Febrero, 2012). De lo intangible. Arte procesual y su conservación. En G. de la DEHESA (Presidencia), Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo, 13º Jornada. Jornada dirigida por Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, p.329.

³¹⁷ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., p. 25.

³¹⁸ ALTHÖFER, Op. Cit., pp.17-18.



[F. 97] Zoe Leonard. *Strange Fruit* (1997). Detail of two intervened pieces, (2017).

Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

© Zoe Leonard

Courtesy Zoe Leonard & Galery Gisela Capitain, Cologne & Houser & Wirth

Having reached the point of the disappearance of matter, it might be asked whether the work dies with its physical form, or whether it endures with the existence of the idea, and the concept. If it is so, it should be considered the possibility of safeguarding the idea, the immaterial, as long as it does not interfere with the ephemeral nature of the work.

Degradation is part of the identity of *BioVanitas*. It is part of their natural evolution. However, as mentioned above, it may develop inappropriately, preventing “proper” degradation. In such a case the degradation would not be part of the work, and it would be considered a deterioration, something unwanted. Under these circumstances of unwanted deterioration, artists such as de Cupere with *Eggs* do not dismiss the possibility of replacing some elements [F. 98 - 99].



[F. 98] Peter De Cupere. *Eggs* (1997).
Detail (2011)
Courtesy Peter de Cupere and Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 99] Peter De Cupere. *Eggs* (1997).
Detail (2011)
Courtesy Peter de Cupere and Archive of S.M.A.K.

Bio*Vanitas* consider degradation relevant for their creative process, so its stop could be contemplated a bad intervention. In this sense, the Restoration team is at a crossroads, as deterioration had hitherto been something to be eradicated, whereas now the art of the perishable defends it as an essential part of its discourse. It is time to find a balance between intention, and professional ethics.

But **what to intervene for**? If considering the intervention as a right option, it would have to be valued, which is its purpose. Usually, interventions involve recovery. In the case of Bio*Vanitas* it is crucial to ask, what is what wants to be recovered?, its matter?, its idea/concept?

Frequently, the intention of the interventions pursues to bring back the artworks to what could be considered as a zero state. An ideal state in which the works conserve intact all the qualities that make them what they are. However, the mutable, and ruinous nature of the Bio*Vanitas* makes them zero stateless works. They have not a unique state that defines them, and that contains the epitome of their meaning. Therefore, could it be considered any ideal state to return to in the Bio*Vanitas*?

The act of restoration could be understood as an updating. Not an object's updating, but of the present moment through it, if it is considered as the set of actions carried out on the work to achieve better legibility in order to return it to its zero state³¹⁹. According to Muñoz Viñas, there are four categories of authentic, or original state³²⁰:

- **Authentic state as original state:** the state of the work at the time of its creation.
- **Authentic state as pristine state:** the ideal state that the work should have, even if it never had it.
- **Authentic state intended by the artist:** the artist's idea of the perfect state of the work.
- **Authentic state as the current state:** the present state; it would determine the real state of the work.

³¹⁹ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., p. 25.

³²⁰ MUÑOZ VIÑAS, Op. cit., pp. 85-88.



[F.100] Anya Gallaccio, *Red on Green* (1992-Presente). Jupiter Artland, 2012.
Detail of the beginning of the exhibition.

© Anya Gallaccio

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Jupiter Artland



[F. 101] Anya Gallaccio, *Red on Green* (1992-Presente). Jupiter Artland, 2012.
Detail of the roses over the passing of time.

© Anya Gallaccio

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Jupiter Artland

Besides, the authenticity of states is directly related to:

- **The materials used for the creation of the work:** considering that if the materials used for the creation of the work are changed, the work may be damaged or even destroyed.
- **The perceptible features of the objects:** those organoleptic qualities characteristic of the work, such as texture, colour, etc.
- **The idea that generated the work:** even if more than one person were involved in the development of these ideas, the artist's idea will be taken as valid, even if it involves destruction.
- **The objects' function:** this is characteristic of architectural restoration, and refers to the specific use of the object.

Under this premise, a reasonable doubt arises: what is the authentic state of a *BioVanitas*?, which is the authentic state of a work that is in continuous evolution? Let us take Gallaccio's *Red on Green* as an example. Due to its transformation, and destruction need to complete itself, it could be considered that there is no other state than the present state, and it will be assumed that it is the only true state because of the mutable character of the work [F. 100 - 101].

It is necessary to respect *BioVanitas*' natural course, and understand that they should not exist beyond the time, and space for which they were created. In the case of most *BioVanitas*, intervention would imply a modification of their materials over time. The intervention, however minimal and respectful, intervenes directly in its conceptual construction, and indirectly, and irreversibly, in the natural development of its destruction process, and thus in its natural trajectory. This, would make it impossible to know how far the intervention has modified the future of the *BioVanitas*.

This change of paradigm implies the renewal of certain methodological, and conceptual aspects of restoration, such as non-intervention. Not intervening an object, nor conserving its material, does not necessarily mean that it is not valued, but quite the opposite, it is a way to respect the evolution of the work even if knowing that this will mean its destruction. Althöfer put this principle into practice when he

refused to intervene in a work by Roth that had suffered a biological attack, considering that his intervention would be incompatible with the work³²¹.

If it is understood that every living matter tends to death, and if Bio*Vanitas* are considered as living works, it could be possible to think that they are predestined to disappear. Otherwise, they would be something inert, something devoid of soul, a shell that would last in time but only because of its inanimate characteristics. Therefore, it can be assumed that if understanding Bio*Vanitas* as something latent and alive, their true purpose may be to disappear.

According to Schinzel, ephemeral art should not be able to be repeated or restored, as these works must die, as that was their original intention³²². The idea of evanescence in the Bio*Vanitas* is a reflection of human mortality, and once again, as with the Baroque *vanitas*, they show that the destiny of all existence is the common fate of disappearance.



[F. 102] Joseph Beuys working on *Fettecke*, 1969. When Attitudes Become Form, Kunsthalle Bern, 1969.

Foto: Balthasar Burkhard © J. Paul Getty Trust. Los Ángeles, Getty Research Institute (2011.M.30).

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³²¹ WHARTON; BLANK & DEAN, Op. Cit., p. 165.

³²² SANTABÁRBARA, COp. Cit., p. 18.

However, this disappearance must be intentional, and as among others due to their appearance *BioVanitas* could be misleading, it is considered necessary to emphasize the importance of education, and information at different levels about the idea of ruin, and *BioVanitas*.

This could be a solution to avoid some incidents as the one at the Düsseldorf Academy with Beuys' *Fettecke* (1982), when in 1986, nine months after the artist's death, someone from the cleaning staff destroyed *Fettecke* with a mop, thinking that it was dirt, and not an artwork³²³ [F. 102].

In agreement with Barbero Encinas on the basis of the premise that the primordial in these artistic representations is what they suggest, or symbolize, there would not need to worry about the artistic properties, and therefore the aesthetic aspect would take second place as what matters is the idea. If the interest of the *BioVanitas* lies not in their appearance, but in their concept, it makes no sense to alter their appearance in order to actualize their message because if doing, it would suppose its destruction³²⁴.

If the *BioVanitas* are characterized by their ruin and decay, and are considered not to function under the usual parameters of an artistic representation, it should be known how to respect their fleeting essence, and not alter the traces, whatever visible or invisible, that Time leaves on them. This is a perspective of respect to those artistic manifestations that consider the doubt of reflection over the intervention.

Generally, technical problems are considered the main relevant, although these are not the only, and sometimes not the most important ones to be dealt with, at least with *BioVanitas*. It is true that if a work needs professional intervention, the techniques, and materials used with traditional works can be applied, but it is not only about the technical aspect of the intervention. As Barbero Encinas argues, other questions must be taken into consideration, such as: whether the work can be intervened or not, how far the intervention could go, whether it is the physical, or the

³²³ Unfortunately this is not the only case with this kind of artworks, as another work by Beuys suffered the same fate in 1973.
Retrieved from <https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=es&sl=de&u=https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fettecke&prev=search&pto=aue>

³²⁴ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., pp. 316-17.

immaterial which has to be preserved, etc. *BioVanitas* suggest professional dilemmas that sometimes could complicate, or question, some usual functions such as intervention³²⁵.

Another question that should be asked is, **whom for** is the intervention? Is it for the work, for the institutions, for the public... Once again, physical, and conceptual levels make a big difference, because, as Schinzel postulates, if we conserve the material the aim is to intervene for the future, whereas if what prevails is the idea, the intervention will be for contemporaries³²⁶.

The position of the conservation-restoration team opposite the *BioVanitas* is complex, as they confront the hitherto necessary preservation of the work with the reliable transmission of the discourse implied by its destruction.

The experimentation degree involved in performative Time suggests new questions about any intervention, not that much about the materials, but about the intrinsic nature of the works, and the particular way in which the public experiences them³²⁷.

The *BioVanitas* represent a certain change in the approach of the Restoration³²⁸ team, and suggest certain dilemmas that are not contemplated in other artistic creations. Although, of course, each discipline brings up its own challenges. Under these new circumstances, the Restoration team should follow a series of guidelines³²⁹:

- Keep in touch, and update constantly their knowledge of new artistic trends.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

³²⁶ SANTABÁRBARA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

³²⁷ M. MOREIRA, J.C. & LLAMAS, R. (Febrero, 2007). El artista y su papel en la conservación del arte no convencional. At P. INEBAT (Presidencia), Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo, 8ª Jornada. Jornada dirigida por Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, pp. 65-70.

³²⁸ When referring to the Restoration team, it is referred to the Restoration team that is part of a museum/institution, as it is the museum/institution which usually has restorers on its staff. On the other hand, when referring to interventions (Restoration, peripheral conservation, etc.), it will be focused on interventions carried out on the collections of museums/institutions.

³²⁹ MOREIRA, LLAMAS PACHECO, *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.

- Consider the studies carried out up to now.
- Understand the artworks' conceptual meaning and dimension.
- Elaboration of a detailed, and useful register for works requiring technical specifications, materials, and concepts.
- Knowledge dissemination.

In the case of the *BioVanitas*, it is considered necessary the presence of restorers-conservators. Maybe this presence does not have to be keeping the perspective that has been maintained until now, but rather from an evolution of their functions. From a more conceptual, and perhaps less physical position. A figure that builds safe spaces to accompany them during their process of (de)construction, while ensuring the fulfilment of their original intention.

Regarding the basis of conservators-restorers for the correct positioning that intervention in contemporary art suggest, Althöfer considers that those art research in which decadence is part of the discourse should consider philosophical aspects that go beyond the purely technical³³⁰.

BioVanitas bring lead to evident changes, not only about how the conservation-restoration team should, or should not, act on them, but also about their approach, and conception.

According to Althöfer, it is the work itself which sets the guidelines for intervention³³¹. In the case of *BioVanitas*, although some intervention criteria differ from conventional methodology, any intervention must be ruled by ethics, and take into consideration the specifications of the work.

In order to consensus decision-making, it is essentially the dialogue, and the study. It is fundamental that those who are going to intervene in the work, either directly or indirectly, are conscious of its meaning, and its conceptual value.

³³⁰ ALTHÖFER, Op. Cit., p. 7.

³³¹ Ibid, p.11.

John Brealey, who was head of the department of Conservation and Restoration of Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, considered it essential for conservators, and restorers to know the artworks in detail to act on them in the most appropriate way, and with the maximum respect for their identity.

In this way, the knowledge of professionals must be at the service of the artworks in order to, as Barbero Encinas³³² puts it, “resurrect the artist's intentions”.

BioVanitas are the result of their past, their present, and their future. In short, a product of their three times. However, the question to face is: Are we really ready to accept the destruction, and disappearance that *BioVanitas* entail?

³³² BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., p.10.



[F. 103] Pilar Soberón, *Invernadero Vegetal* (2017).
Courtesy Pilar Soberón



Three

Times

3

I am a was, and a will be, and a tired be...

Francisco de Quevedo

The number three is generally associated with perfection, with completion, but it also refers to movement, and dynamism. Three is a constant in this research: three blocks into which the study is divided, three types of *BioVanitas*... and, "coincidentally", three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future.

Three times that cohabit in the *BioVanitas* through what they were, through what they are, and through what they will be. The idea of *BioVanitas* as temporary containers, and as defenders of ruin, makes to be aware of the importance of the instant. Of that fraction of time, eternal or fleeting, that marks the difference between now and the past. Between what it is and what it was.

These peculiar characteristics, which make *BioVanitas* such interesting objects of study, also make them rare specimens in collection, because to be honest, the acquisition of the ephemeral is often accompanied by loss.

For anthropologist and historian Ruth Phillips, artworks cannot be understood as mere data. According to Phillips³³³, "Objects have dynamic cultural biographies that do not end but only change when they enter museum collections." And it is true, the value that the works acquire changes when they are part of collections. The context is different, and it modifies the meaning of the content. In this case, the meaning of the *BioVanitas*.

According to Temkin, this difference may be due to the fact that museums preserve something greater than the artworks themselves, they preserve the fiction of art as something immortal³³⁴.

The fleeting essence of the *BioVanitas* is the antithesis to this idea, as it proposes ruin as a means of creation. A ruin that not only contemplates the decay of the material, but also the disappearance, and/or destruction, either total or partial, of the work. The result of a rapid or gradual process that was, or that it is in progress. An idea of loss that suggests a restructuring of the conception and content of collections, which requires new approaches.

³³³ SCHINZEL (2019), Op. Cit., p. 4.

³³⁴ "In a museum, it often seems, we are dedicated to preserving something larger than individual works of art; we are dedicated to preserving the fiction that works of art are fixed and immortal". TEMKIN, Op. Cit., p. 50.

It cannot be overlooked the fact that none of the examples used so far had been considered, or analysed as *BioVanitas* before, mainly, perhaps, because the term was not developed yet. With the intention of reflecting on this change, this last section is dedicated to rethink three works belonging to different collections from the perspective of *BioVanitas*. A new prism to consider the materialization of Time in collection.

For this analysis there are proposed three *BioVanitas* made by three artists who have found in Time, and in the freedom proposed by performative Time, the idyllic setting for their artistic expression³³⁵. Works in which organic matter, the transformation, and materialization of Time are a constant, and which individually present a question to meditate on.

The first *BioVanitas*, which will be used to reflect on repetition, was made by Anya Gallaccio³³⁶ (1963). The work of this British artist focuses mainly on installation, where Gallaccio often uses organic materials such as ice, flowers, chocolate, or sugar.

The use of these materials, and the way she treats them, are aimed at the transformation and decomposition of the work. The way in which this evolves is therefore always an unknown, and what may be pleasant at first may have the opposite effect as the days go by.

Through the transformation of matter, Gallaccio expresses her concern for change, for the passage of time, seeking a balance between evolution and decadence. Despite the destruction, she considers that her works endure in the memory of those who have experienced them.

³³⁵ These artworks were not only selected because they can be classified as *BioVanitas*, according to our definition, but also because we were supposed to study them personally in a doctoral internship. However, due to the situation arose from COVID-19, these plans were substantially altered. Nevertheless, as far as possible, we have tried to carry out the study in accordance with the current circumstances.

³³⁶ TATE. (s.f.). Anya Gallaccio
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/anya-gallaccio-2658>

The second Bio*Vanitas*, which questions the ephemeral essence, was made by Lois Weinberger³³⁷ (1947-2020). Weinberger was an Austrian artist who defined himself as an “agricultural worker”.

With plants as the basis of his works, he created a poetic-political network that focused on marginal areas, and questioned the different hierarchies. In his artistic discourse, Weinberger favoured what he called “second-rate nature”. For this he used wild plants, specially the “weeds”, as the main representative matter to represent the free spirit in danger of extinction which goes against the tide, while symbolizing those who cherish their individuality and imagination.

From the 1970s onwards, Weinberger focused his research, based on ethnopoetics works, on natural spaces created by humans. These works were developed in different disciplines, ranging from drawing to installations and large-scale projections in public space. In addition, from the early 1990s, his work served as an example in the discussion between art and nature by blurring nature and culture in his creations.

Third, there will be considered the dilemmas posed by an active Bio*Vanitas* of the multifaceted German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). Not only known for being an active artist, pedagogue, and Fluxus theorist, he also worked in performance, painting, sculpture, and graphics, among other disciplines.

Beuys' work, which ends with his “expanded definition of art” and the idea of social sculpture as *gesamtkunstwerk*³³⁸ (total work of art), is based on concepts from humanism, social philosophy, and anthroposophy. An open range to public debate, where he spoke about political, environmental or social issues, that marked his artistic life, making him one of the most influential, and important artists of the second half of the 20th century.

³³⁷ Retrieved from: WEINBERBERG, L. (s.f.) *Lois Weinberger*
<http://www.loisweinberger.net>
STEDELIJK MUSEUM VOOR ACTUELE KUNST (S.M.A.K.). (s.f.). *History*.
<https://smak.be/en/about-s.m.a.k/history>

³³⁸ This term, which is attributed to the German composer Richard Wagner, was used by the composer to refer to a total work of art, hence its name, which referred to the 6 arts: music, painting, sculpture, dance, poetry, and architecture. Its translation into English would be something like total work of art.

Although the following Bio*Vanitas* preserve their present and their past, their future, and what it will hold for them, is uncertain. It will not depend just on them, as it will vary depending on the perspective from which they are analysed. Due to the Bio*Vanitas*' nature, and their variety, it would be impossible to establish a specific manual of praxis.

As this study considers inappropriate the systematization of Bio*Vanitas*' practice, there can only be suggested some general strategies, but not specific techniques or interventions. Quoting Guy Debord³³⁹, "the principles are clear, but their application is uncertain".

Each of the following Bio*Vanitas* contemplates its own Times and reflections, because Bio*Vanitas* are ephemeral and ruinous, of course, but each in its own way.

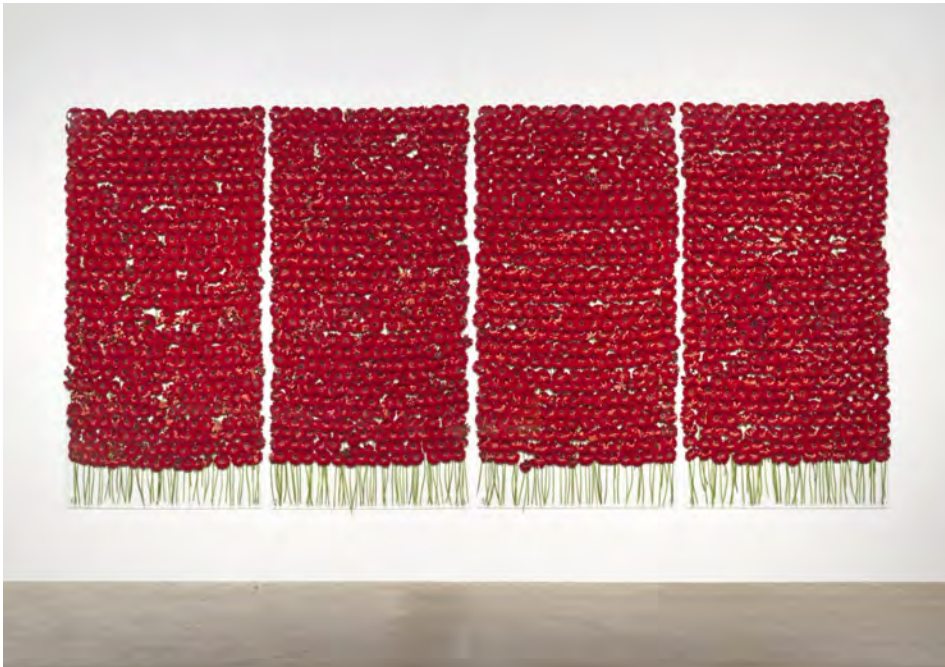
³³⁹ Guy Debord's phrase in the instructions of the famous game *Jeu de la Guerre*, that he created with his wife Alice Becker-Ho. Quoted in CONCHERO, Op. Cit., p. 130.

3.1. Present: it was not yesterday but tomorrow

There is nothing more ephemeral than the present. A blink and it is gone. What a fraction of a second ago was the present has become the past. Nevertheless, the present is what it is lived in. A time span that is able to hold the past, and future, and that makes it possible to transport ourselves through thought. The present is a concatenation of fleeting fragments that construct the idea of continuity, of life.

The first *BioVanitas* to reflect on poses a paradox between the ephemeral, and the infinite. It is a Mixed Protocol *BioVanitas* in which unlimited repetition is part of the work (1.4. 4. Classification of *BioVanitas*). A *BioVanitas* that, despite disappearing, returns and whose farewell is nothing more than a “see you later”.

3.1.1. *Preserve 'beauty'* (1991-2003)



[F. 104] Anya Gallaccio. *Preserve "Beauty"* (1991).

© Anya Gallaccio

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Kehmann Maupin Gallery, New York.

WORK DESCRIPTION

ARTIST	Anya Gallaccio (1963)
TITLE	<i>Preserve 'beauty'</i>
DATE	1991 - 2003
MEDIUM	1600/2000 gerberas, glass, metal, dental floss and rubber
DIMENSIONS	260 x 535 x 2,5 cm (displayed); 220 x 110 x 2,5 cm (per glass)
LOCATION	Warehouse
COLLECTION	Tate
ACQUISITION	Anonymous donor, 2004

DISPLAY SPECIFICATIONS

RH	50-55%
LUX	100-200 lux
TEMPERATURE °C	18-20 °C

CONDITION

CONDITION	Good (X)	Regular	Fragile	Extremely Fragile
INTERVANTIONS	No			
OBSERVATIONS				

Gallaccio first made *Preserve 'beauty'* (1991-2003) in 1991. The artist pressed 800 gerbera flowers, of the *beauty* variant, between the glass window of the Karsten Schubert Gallery, and another glass pane that occupied the surface of the window inside the gallery. The flower petals were placed facing the street and from 10th October to 2nd November 1991, everyone who walked past the London gallery could observe the evolution of the natural organic process of *Preserve 'beauty'*.

Nowadays, and thanks to an anonymous donation made in 2004, *Preserve 'beauty'*³⁴⁰ is part of the collection of the Tate Modern in London. However, although it is similar to the original, and keeps the same name, it has some modifications to the original of 1991.

The work in the Tate Modern collection consists of about 2000³⁴¹ fresh gerberas of the *beauty* variety. The flower heads, as in the original version, face the public in rows of deep red, except for the last one, which has long green stems.

The flowers are divided into four transparent glass panels (220 × 110 × 25 mm/each) which are anchored to the wall, with metal, and rubber fixings. These four panels are placed side by side, leaving a small distance between them, so finally the installation has a total dimension of 220 × 535 cm as it can be seen in the image [F. 104].

³⁴⁰ *Beauty*, or hybrid gerbera, is the result of a cross between the flower species Gerbera and Daisy. Gallaccio uses frequently this flower because for her, it perfectly symbolises the mental image that people have of a flower, but also because its massive production makes it a product instead of a flower. Personal communication with Anya Gallaccio. 13 July 2021.

³⁴¹ The Tate Modern confirmed that, the amount of flowers varies between 1600 and 2000 units, depending on the size of the flowers, and that always it is purchased a larger quantity in case of possible mishaps. Personal communication with Deborah Cane, Clara Flack, and Carien van Aubel from the Tate Modern. 08 March 2021.

3.1.2. Now that I say goodbye but I am staying

Third time's a charm! This popular phrase invites thinking that repetition, leaving aside will and effort, suggests the possibility of obtaining different results from the same event. Repetition means doing again an action that has already been carried out previously. It contains an implicit beginning, and an implicit end. A looped state whose end proposes a new beginning. But even if the new beginning is as similar as possible to the first, does it have the same value? Does repeating the "same" beginning lead to the "same" end? What value is given to the product of repetition?

Since Gallaccio presented *Preserve 'beauty'* for the first time in 1991, it has been performed many times. In different spaces, and with different results. We know that the appearance of the first installation is not exactly the same as the work that belongs to the Tate Modern's collection. So, according to this fact the first question could be, if it is not the same, can it be considered the same work?

As we thought, and as Gallaccio herself confirmed, beyond the form, the importance of this *BioVanitas* lies in its immaterial being, that is to say, in the idea, and not in its material aspect³⁴². This makes question whether Mixed Protocol *BioVanitas'* importance endures on the concept over the matter, the immaterial as the core, and the material, as long as it preserves its essence, as something "variable".

Recall that these *BioVanitas*, which contemplate their destruction, whole or partial, as their creative destruction process, can be "remake" as many times as necessary, but using an element that does not degrade, and which is used in every "remake". For *Preserve 'beauty'*, Gallaccio herself indicated that there is no finite number of repetitions, and that the work could be repeated to infinity.

Before continuing, it should be appropriate to make a pause to reflect on the idea of repetition. Although for Benjamin repetition meant the loss of aura, it should not be

³⁴² The artist has a series of works entitled *Preserve 'name of the flower'* where she plays with the idea of preservation between two crystals, and the name of the flower. Therefore, although the appearance is not exactly the same, what prevails is the containment of the flowers between two crystals, and the title of the work will depend on the floral variety that these crystals contain. GALLACCIO (2021), Op. Cit.

understood as something negative³⁴³ since, as Eco points out, seriation may be the destiny of beauty in the age of technical reproducibility³⁴⁴.

Usually, the idea of repetition goes to waste in the result. It is simple, the repetition is not the original. It is a copy, something with an inferior value. That is why the way in which the concept of copy is understood can mean that the stance towards that repetition may not be as respectful and/or objective as it should be. And so, commonly, the new beginning of repetition is associated with something unoriginal that will result in a copy.

Let us reconsider the copy from a heraclitian perspective. Even if the work is repeated, it will never be the same. It will be the same idea, but never the same work. The materials will be new, the space will not be the same, and it will be observed by other people. The result of the evolution of the *BioVanitas* is almost unpredictable and this, added to the environment, and the circumstances, means that the experience will be unique, and inimitable each time. Each repetition is a beginning, its first time. It can be considered that with each repetition it will be obtained something similar but never the same. It will never be the same experience, but the same concept. So let us reconsider again, what is it got with the Protocol *BioVanitas*' repetition? Is it a copy?, is it a repetition?, is it an original? What is it?

The first thing that it should be asked is what is it understood as copy, as repetition, as replica, as protocol, or even as original. Based on the parameters set before, can it be considered that repetition really exists? The Protocol *BioVanitas* suggest authenticity as one of its greatest paradoxes. However, if the idea is the core of the work, is it really relevant the importance attached to what happens to the matter?

For Llamas Pacheco, the copy is an exact reproduction of the work, while the replica is a copy that reproduces the original with equality, and that has been made by the artist or under his/her supervision³⁴⁵.

³⁴³ IBARRONDO, Op. Cit., p. 186.

³⁴⁴ ECO, Op. Cit., p. 377.

³⁴⁵ LLAMAS PACHECO, Op. Cit., p. 45.

According to Benjamin, even the most perfect of the reproductions lacks something. Its existence is always unrepeatable. It is there where the transformations that the work inevitably undergoes over time are found³⁴⁶.

As Rosenkranz postulates, distinction, understood as something determined, can become a duplicate. Yet, in this duplicate, there will always be an internal struggle that brings it back to the exclusivity of unity. There will always be some nuance, some detail, however small it may seem, that differentiates them from each other. Unity in this way is proposed as a resolution of the duplication, invalidating it³⁴⁷.

On the other hand, can it be used in the usual meaning of these terms in the context of Bio*Vanitas*? The concept of repetition implies doing something that has already been done. It suggests a loop. Doing the same actions over, and over again. Besides, generally, before starting any repetition it is necessary to conclude its predecessor action. The Protocol Bio*Vanitas* suppose an absolute renewal in each, and every repetition, not only in its materials, but also in the fact that all the alterations that will appear will be a direct consequence of its specific circumstances. In this way it can be considered that repetition is impossible, since the experimentation of the Bio*Vanitas* is the result of the conditions, and the sensations in a specific space, and time, and therefore it could never evolve in the same way. Its destruction makes possible a new creation, but never the same.

The repetition that *Preserve 'beauty'* poses as a Protocol Bio*Vanitas* develops at the same time the ephemeral and the eternal. Based on the idea and on the concept, it is a work that materially and physically is born and death with every exhibition, but that endures, and remains alive, despite its disappearance. The disappearance of the material and the conservation of the immaterial. A being between the presence and absence of Bio*Vanitas*, like *Preserve 'beauty'*, whose physical representation is limited by its exhibition time. But, somehow, is not this what happens with most works?

³⁴⁶ BENJAMIN, Walter. (2008) *La obra de arte en la época de su reproductividad técnica. Obras. libro II vol.2*. Madrid, España: Abada Editores. p. 13

³⁴⁷ ROSENKRANZ, Op. Cit., p. 84.

From a somewhat more abstract perspective, it can be considered that during storage, works, whether material or not, coexist in a state of non-being. That is, a state in which they are neither visible nor accessible to the public. For this reason, and due to the non-materiality of the Protocol Bio*Vanitas*, after the exhibition periods it could be questioned the importance, or not, of matter in such a common aspect as storage in collection.

On the one hand, the space and the ever-increasing volume of works is often a major problem. In this sense, non-materiality can be a positive factor, as it does not require a physical space. However, as it was mentioned in the case of *Strange fruit*, the storage of the non-tangible can also give rise to certain issues, and be a source of conflict.

In the case of *Preserve 'beauty'* this circumstance is only half true since, as it is a Mixed Protocol Bio*Vanitas*, a large part of the installation, the organic part, disappears while there is another part, the inorganic, that remains. In this case, the glass is the constant element that is reused every time *Preserve 'beauty'* is exhibited, and it is also the physical part that remains and needs to be stored. Fortunately, as it is glass, its storage is not a dilemma.

Since the installation became part of the Tate Modern's collection in 2004, it has not been loaned, and this drives to the following questions: in the case of loans, would it be necessary to transport the glass?, or would it be enough to use a similar glass³⁴⁸? Which is the importance of the glass in the context of the work?

Picking up the thread between the material and the non-material, in addition to the obvious, there is a decisive factor that marks the main difference between physical and non-physical corporeality. This difference has a very material reason, the economic cost of remaking the work for every exhibition.

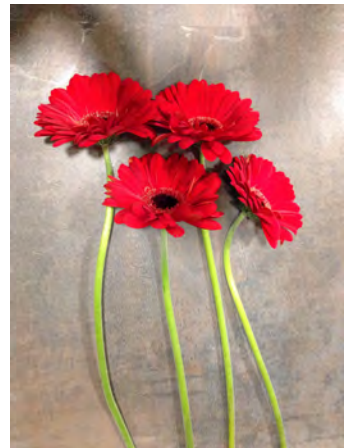
As the colleagues from the Tate Modern explained, there is no protocol that determines when, or how often, exhibit *Preserve 'beauty'*; this decision, and its

³⁴⁸ Although in the end the choice may depend on the criteria of the institution, according to Gallaccio, in the case of loan, it would not be necessary to use the original glass panels, and the institution to which the work is loaned could use new ones. However, for the artist, it is very important that the work is never exhibited simultaneously in two different places. GALLACCIO (2021), Op. Cit.

duration, always depends on the curatorial department. The installation, which is exhibited under the standard parameters³⁴⁹, can be extended as long as it is considered appropriate, having been on display up to 10 months. However, the expense of creating this installation for each exhibition can be a disadvantage in terms of the frequency of its display.

Every time *Preserve 'beauty'* is exhibited, it is need more than 2000 gerberas of the *beauty* variety, as the installation requires around 1600 to 2000 flowers, depending on the size of the flower heads. The use of the gerbera variant *beauty*, as already mentioned, is very common in Gallaccio's work, as for the artist it perfectly symbolizes the mental image of a flower.

Using a new material for every exhibition makes reconsider its importance in the work as a whole. It is not that the flowers have an artistic value, as they can be replaced in every exhibition without detracting, or altering, the meaning of the message, but the species does have an iconographic and conceptual charge.



[F. 105] Image of red gerberas with black centre and long green stems acquired for an experiment based on the installation *Preserve 'beauty'* by Anya Gallaccio. The aim of this experiment was to observe the transformation process of the flowers, and to reflect on the questions that their transformation might raise.

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

³⁴⁹ *Preserve 'beauty'* is exhibited under the following conditions: 18-20 °C; 50-55% RH, and 100-200 luxes of illumination. Personal communication with Tate Modern. 08 /03/2021.



[F. 106] Detail of the panels placed vertically while still remains dental floss on the front of the installation.

© Anya Gallaccio, *Preserve 'beauty'*

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Tate



[F. 107] Detail of the pressing of the flowers during the assembly process where it can also be appreciated one of the holes where the screws are placed to fit the panels in the lower corner.

© Anya Gallaccio, *Preserve 'beauty'*

Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Tate

With each exhibition, the flowers must be renewed as the previous died. The gerberas, and their deterioration, are the medium to transmit the message, but they are not the message.

Although the flowers have no artistic value themselves, because for Gallaccio they can be considered as a kind of *ready-made*³⁵⁰, their choice is a precise, and concrete action that responds to very specific requirements on Gallaccio. It is necessary that all the *beauty*³⁵¹ variant specimens, to be red intense coloured, with a dark centre, and a long green stem, like the ones shown in the following image [F. 105].

In addition, all the flowers have to be cut on the same day so that they all maintain the most homogeneous freshness possible. This can be a problem as the variety is not always available, and it is necessary to contact the garden centre well in advance so that they are able to supply the necessary quantity which, as mentioned, exceeds a thousand units.

The assembly of *Preserve 'beauty'* lasts four days, and during this time, the gerberas are kept in vases with water to prolong their freshness as possible, although this means that not all the flowers will be in the same, but similar, condition. The gerberas are placed one by one, and in a single layer, until the total surface of the four crystals is covered, as it is shown in the following pictures [F. 106].

The glasses (2100 × 1100 × 25 mm) are placed on easels to work horizontally. It is necessary to create a grid of rows as guides to place the flowers properly, and for this the artist, and Tate modern, use dental floss. Each gerbera is placed individually, with the head facing the glass, creating a matrix of rows and columns. In addition, once they are fixed, and before placing the second glass, in a sandwich panel, they are pressed gently with a wood panel to facilitate their placement, and to ensure their correct position [F. 107].

³⁵⁰ For Gallaccio this flower, despite being something natural, is a chain production that has somehow lost its natural cycles, and that can be considered as an industrial production. GALLACCIO (2021), Op. Cit.

³⁵¹ As the colleges of the Restoration department of the Tate mentioned, although the original variety is the *beauty*, it can be substituted by a flower with similar characteristics if it is not possible to obtain it. Personal communication. 08/03/2021.

Both panels are fitted with screws, which are inserted through the holes located on their perimeter, so that the gerberas are pressed, and into place. When the glasses are well pressed, they are lifted, and placed vertically on the wall where they will be fixed. After this process, the dental floss is cut and pulled out to leave only the *beauties*. The final result is a set of deep red flowers that cover the glass almost entirely except for the last row, which is made up of the long green stems of the last rows of gerberas [F. 104].

Repeating the installation requires the knowledge, or the correct lecture, of the assembly instructions. In other words, it is necessary to have guides, or indications, that ensure the correct display of the installation. For Protocol Bio*Vanitas*, we agree with Llamas Pacheco that the replacement of the material is necessary, and that it should not detract the authenticity of the work, not even if it is carried out by the conservation-restoration team³⁵².

Generally, it is the Tate's staff, and not Gallaccio herself, who "assembles" the installation for exhibitions, as they can be in charge of this task following the artist's indications³⁵³.

In Protocol Bio*Vanitas* it is not necessary for the artists to carry out the artwork's assembly themselves, showing, once again, that it is the idea what is important, and relevant in this type of work. This leads to consider two issues. First, the emotional, and symbolic value of the materials. That is, the importance of the material. And second the relevance, or not, of who materializes the idea. If the artist does not take part in the execution process, it devalues its authenticity?

These questions bring back to an anecdote about the Dutch collector Harry Ruhé mentioned in Gilman's research. In this account, Ruhé explains how he bought a Roth's work in which the artist had glued in a book, and one to the other, two sandwiches painted red.

³⁵² LLAMAS PACHECO, Op. Cit., p. 47.

³⁵³ Gallaccio makes instructions books that hands over with the certificate of authenticity after the purchase. In these instructions, or guides, she explains the steps to follow for the correct assembly of the installation, and even leaves a few sheets of paper in the book, so that people who have purchased the work can add annotations. As the artist mentioned, the elaboration of this manual is becoming more, and more detailed, and precise. GALLACCIO (2021), Op. Cit.

However, in Customs they opened the bag that contained the work and the sandwiches, and when it arrived to him, he only found an empty book and crumbs. Ruhé contacted Roth to discuss the situation, and the artist told him that all he had to do was buy two new sandwiches, paint them in red, and glue them to the book³⁵⁴.

This example is useful to rethink about the concepts of originality, and authenticity, mentioned before. However, if it is considered that the value of the work does not lie in the originality of its materials, or execution, but in the idea, this should be not important. Though, it makes to question, is there a way to authenticate the Protocol Bio*Vanitas*?

In this case, and as an answer to this question, the documentation may serve as a tool to authenticate the Bio*Vanitas*, fixing, or accrediting, its existence in time, and space. Therefore, documentation, in this specific case, could be understood as an act of preserving ephemerality, or verifying its existence, than as a tool to know its future evolution since it is susceptible to change, and basically unpredictable.

During the exhibition, independently of its duration, *Preserve 'beauty'* evolves between the two glass panels under the influence of chance. The installation instructions do not only indicate the way in which the installation has to be assembled, but also determine, and limit the exhibition of the work.

On the one hand this means, that the display system is appropriate, and so that the original message will not misinterpret, and on the other hand, it ensures that Gallaccio's intention is fully respected.

Preserve 'beauty', like most of the Bio*Vanitas*, poses destruction as part of its creative process. In this case, the process of metamorphosis is limited, and delimited, as, according to the artist's specifications, it takes place between the two glasses that contain, and preserve the natural organic process of the gerberas, and their consequent ruin, and decay.

At this point it is evident the irony that Gallaccio suggests with this play on words between the work's title, *Preserve 'beauty'*, its deterioration, and the fact of

³⁵⁴ GILMAN, Op. Cit., p. 77.



[F. 108] Detail of the materialisation of Time during the exhibition period.
© Anya Gallaccio, *Preserve 'beauty'*
Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Tate



[F. 109] Detail of fallen flowers during the exhibition.
© Anya Gallaccio, *Preserve 'beauty'*
Courtesy Anya Gallaccio & Tate

"preserving" it, or trying to "preserve" it, between two glass panels. Metamorphosis as a medium in an allegory of the impossibility of avoiding the passage of Time that shows, once again, the ephemeral essence through its process of ruin.

As the days go by, the gerberas lose their smoothness, their colour, and the process of deterioration begins to be clearly perceptible. Not only through decay but also through any consequence of the materialization of Time such as, biological attack, due to the conditions that occur between the two crystals as a result of humidity, temperature, and lack of air [F. 108].

All alterations, or degradation at any level, are considered part of the natural evolution of *Preserve 'beauty'*. This position assumes that intervention, in any of its meanings, would not be necessary since everything that happens is part of the work's creation process.

However, is it this non-intervention criterion, and complete destruction, so easily acceptable because the work can be repeated?, and would it be considered this option so openly accepted if the work were designed to disappear completely after its exhibition? Sometimes, the idea of repetition posed by the *BioVanitas* can influence the view of the decadence, making it more permissive, since it can be considered that its destruction is not a total destruction, as it implies a new beginning.

Therefore, although Tate Modern makes a documentation of the evolution of *Preserve 'beauty'* in each of the exhibitions, it evolves freely according to the conditions of the moment, beyond the control of the artist, or anyone, or anything else. The flowers that fall to the ground remain there till the end of the exhibition [F. 109]. Their fall is part of the process but, despite this, it cannot happen abruptly, and that is why it is necessary to adjust regularly the glass panels so that they contain, and preserve the "beauty".

The shrinkage of the gerberas, due to the loss of moisture from the flower, means a relatively rapid, and significant decrease in volume. This requires constant monitoring, and adjustment of the glass panels by the conservation-restoration team to prevent the whole installation from falling over. This is one of the few limitations that *Preserve*

'*beauty*' contemplates regarding deterioration, because, as mentioned before, everything is part of the installation.

But does this "everything is valid" refer only to the organic process, and its consequences?, or does it consider the alterations of the material part, for example, the glass? What would happen if the glasses were damaged?, would it also be considered part of the natural evolution of the installation?, and would its replacement be understood as a substitution?

The presence of the glasses is more relevant than it may seem at first sight, as the decay of the organic process in *BioVanitas* usually raises most of the doubts. However, the presence of glass is not without significance. Its transparent surface makes possible the visualization of the constant transformation of *Preserve 'beauty'*, but in an almost imperceptible, and subtle way it also acts as a barrier between the work and everything else. It allows seeing it while creates a distance.

Preserve 'beauty' is an installation designed to be experienced through sight, and smell, as the transparency of the glass, and its perimeter opening let intuit. Generally, works designed to be experienced with the senses frequently raise certain doubts, as any error in its exhibition could invalidate the sensations that the artist wishes to transmit.

However, in this case, as already mentioned, the work is exhibited following the artist's instructions, so it could be understood that the sensations that Gallaccio wants to transmit reach the public in the way she had designed.

Once again, it is questioned the importance of the public in the evolution of the *BioVanitas*. Without the work there would be no sensations, but without the audience there would be no one to experience it. This runs again to another crossroads: can the audience be considered necessary to complete the work? Can the audience be considered, as the artist does, part of the work? Or can the audience be considered as a material?

If so, it could be considered that the work does not really disappear completely in its physical representation with the end of the exhibition, because if the public is part of the work, this will be preserved through them. It seems that the factors that make up

the Bio*Vanitas* go beyond the materials and sensations, and the same happens with their fleeting essence.

Bio*Vanitas*' ephemeral essence, does not only refer to the materials that compose them. It is not limited to the physical, and material dimension that disappears, but it expands to the intangible. A concept of transience linked to the idea, to the memory or, as José Bergamín said³⁵⁵: "that which leaves no mark or linear trace that marks its rupture in order to repeat itself".

However, the idea of repetition implicit in the Protocol Bio*Vanitas* invalidates the possibility of an ephemeral essence of concept, since each repetition is a reminder and, quoting the philosopher Hannah Arendt³⁵⁶, "...each end in History necessarily contains a new beginning: this beginning is the promise, the only "message" that it is given to produce at the end". And if every end implies a new beginning, can something that is continually repeated, and seems to have no end be considered ephemeral?

If everything with a limited life span is understood as ephemeral, it would be logic that each of the exhibitions that *Preserve 'beauty'* presents were ephemeral because they involve the destruction of part of its matter. However, there are certain aspects that last, such as the glass, although it could also be understood that when the time comes, it may also disappear. In this case, would this be the definitive end of the work?, or would it continue as a concept? Could its substitution mean a new begging?

³⁵⁵ Original: "aquello que no deja huella o trazo lineal que señale su ruptura para repetirse". Quoted in CONCHEIRO, Op. Cit., p. 139.

³⁵⁶ ARENDT, H. (2002). *Los orígenes del totalitarismo*. 3. *Totalitarismo*. Madrid, España: Alianza, p. 706.

3.2. Past: it is past and nothing can be done

The following work, by Lois Weinberger, inquires where the ephemeral essence of the *BioVanitas* lies. In this case, it does not refer to a difference between the material and the conceptual dimension, but to the very corporeality of the artwork.

A question about the fleeting essence of the work. Not from a conceptual perspective, in which it is questioned the existence of eternity, and the possibility of being part of it, but from the ephemeral as a process. As the concluded time of what, it was thought, and designed to have a limited duration. A prospective which shows destruction not as the ruin of the material, but as the end of the transformation. A process that completes the *BioVanitas*, and that has been completed.

3.2.1. *Green Man* (2010)



[F. 110] Lois Weinberger. *Green Man* (2010).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K. (2017-2018)

WORK DESCRIPTION

ARTIST	Lois Weinberger (1947-2020)
TITLE	<i>Green Man</i>
DATE	2010
MEDIUM	<i>Arctium Lappa</i> , wood, glass
DIMENSIONS	152 x 102 x 52 cm (total); Puppet: 25 x 85 x 40 cm; Show case: 50 x 100 x 50 cm; Stand: 102 x 102 x 52 cm
LOCATION	Almacén
COLLECTION	S.M.A.K.
ACQUISITION	Lois Weinberger, 2015

DISPLAY SPECIFICATIONS

RH	+/- 45-50%
LUX	+/- 50 lux
TEMPERATURE °C	+/- 18 °C

CONDITION

CONDITION	Good	Regular	Fragile (X)	Extremely Fragile
INTERVANTIONS	No			
OBSERVATIONS	The <i>Arctium Lappa</i> of the puppet is very dry and tends to crumble when manipulating.			



[F. 111] Lateral view 1 *Green Man* (2020).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



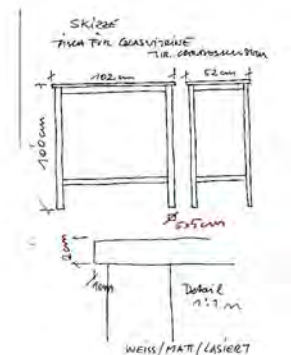
[F. 112] Lateral view 2 *Green Man* (2020).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

Weinberger's *Green Man* (2010) [F. 110] is part of the collection of the S.M.A.K. since 2015 when the artist donated it to the museum, along with other 15 works, on the occasion of a solo exhibition³⁵⁷.

Green Man consists of three elements designed, and made by Weinberger himself³⁵⁸: a human figure (25 × 85 × 40 × 40 cm) [F. 111 - 112]; a wooden stand (102 × 102 × 52 × 52 cm) [F. 113 - 114], and a glass case (50 × 100 × 50 × 50 cm).



[F. 113] Frontal view of the wooden stand (2020).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 114] Sketch of the stand by Lois Weinberger.
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

The central piece is a male body, lying relaxed with one hand on his chest and the other behind his head, his feet crossed and his penis erect, resting on a wooden table and covered with a glass case. The figure, according to Philippe Van Cauteren, the current director of the S.M.A.K. since 2006, is made entirely from bracts of the botanical species *Arctium Lappa*³⁵⁹ (popularly known as burdock).

³⁵⁷ The S.M.A.K. is currently the museum that houses the largest collection of Lois Weinberger's work, with a total of 19 works.

³⁵⁸ Total dimension on display: 152 × 102 × 52 cm.

³⁵⁹ HEREMANS, R. (2020). *Condition report Lois Weinberger, Green Man* (2010), S.M.A.K

3.2.2 Where the ephemeral lies

Generally, Bio*Vanitas* present a series of challenges, both general and common, but, in addition, each of them usually poses a specific one. In this case, the dilemma we face revolves around the concept of ephemerality. It all begins with this question: what makes *Green Man* an ephemeral work?

This uncertainty arose from the results of an experiment, which will be explained later, that made us question if it was an ephemeral work or simply a work made with biological materials. A reasonable doubt, the answer to which depended on whether *Green Man* could be considered a Bio*Vanitas* or not.

As previously explained, *Green Man* is composed entirely of organic material, namely *Arctium Lappa* or burdock. The use of this material suggests expiration, and therefore transience, since its use implies accepting the consequences of its natural organic process. This approach may lead one to think that only because it is composed of organic materials, it becomes a perishable work.

However, let us consider it this way: does the ephemeral essence of *Green Man* reside in the organic nature of its materials?, or does this transience only refer to the time in which the consequences, and transformations derived from its organic process are visible and/or active?

The answer to this question will be decisive. One option would contemplate *Green Man* as an unfinished work until its materials reach their absolute destruction, while the other would understand it as a finished work since the process of change is not perceptible and/or active. Therefore, the first step will be to answer this question, and then reflect on the possibility of considering *Green Man* as a Bio*Vanitas*.

In order to answer these questions, it has been taken as a reference not only the opinion of the S.M.A.K., and Weinberger's artistic career³⁶⁰, but also the results obtained from the experiments, since, after all, it was the origin of the doubt.

³⁶⁰ Unfortunately Lois Weinberger passed away in April 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we were unable to send him a questionnaire on *Green Man* that prepared through S.M.A.K..

There were carried out two experiments³⁶¹. These two test of *Green Man* were made with *Arctium Minus*³⁶², as it was impossible to find the original spice. The first test, which was protected by a glass case, imitating the conditions of the original work, suffered a biological attack three days after its creation [F. 115 - 116]. It was decided to leave it to evolve freely, in order to study its scope, and progression, thinking that the mould would colonize the whole test.

Due to these circumstances, it was considered to make a second test. This second one, also made with *Arctium Minus*, was placed without any kind of protection, and it was observed that it did not suffer any kind of attack [F. 117 - 118].

Over the first phase of the experiment the tests were weekly controlled, until the results obtained were quite stable, and showed no significant change, so it was decided to space out their periodicity. These control inspections, were based on: photographic documentation, weighing and measuring of the tests, and an organoleptic examination, to observe and to write down any alteration in them.

During the experiment, the specimens did not show significant physical changes beyond the tonal variation, where the initial intense green was gradually turning into browner colours. However, in both cases, the tests underwent large fluctuations in weight. In the first two weeks, the weight loss decreased dramatically, being more drastic in test No. 2, which was exposed without a glass case, losing almost 75% of its initial weight as shown in the graph *First Stage: Ratio of weight loss Test 1 and Test 2*³⁶³ [F. 119].

³⁶¹ The first test was made on 11/08/2020, and the weight of the test was 556 g. The second test was elaborated on 01/09/2020, with a weight of 556 g too. Both experiments are still active. The first test, with display case, is kept in a greenhouse outside, and the second is still in the open air without any protection.

³⁶² *Arctium Minus* is a biennial plant of the *Asteraceae* family, a smaller variant of *Arctium Lappa*. It is a wild plant with multiple medicinal properties, found along roadsides, in damp areas, poplar groves and in semi-shady places, and is not easy to find. ARCTIUM MINUS. (3 de julio de 2021). En *Wikipedia*.
https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctium_minus

³⁶³ After this first phase of the experiment, which ended on 24/11/2021, the first test weighed 256 g, and the second test 164 g. In other words, the first specimen had lost 53.95% of its initial weight, and the second specimen had lost 70.50%.



[F. 115] Detail of the biological attack. Left toe of test N° 1. (15/08/2020).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



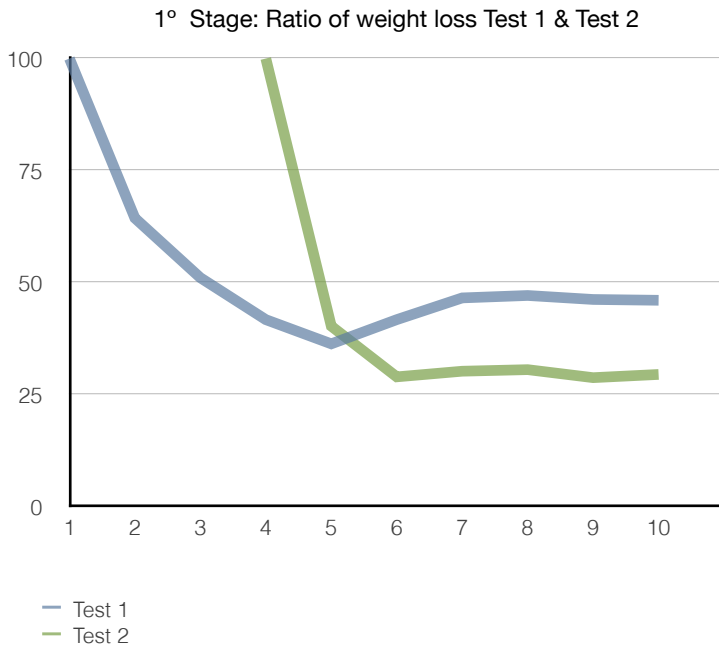
[F. 116] Detail of biological attack. Lateral view of test N° 1. (15/08/2020).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 117] Lateral view of the right side of the test N° 2. (01/09/2020).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 118] Lateral view of the right side of the test N° 2.
(24/11/2020).
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 119] Graph showing the weight variations of the two tests during the experiment. The abscissa axis shows the percentage weight variation with respect to the initial weight. The ordinate axis represents the different measurements.

After three months, it was observed that the tests showed no changes, at least not visible to the naked eye. The biological attack of the first test was stabilized, both lost their intense green colour, although it was more evident in the second test, and the characteristic smell of the bracts had also disappeared. At this point arose whether *Green Man* could be classified as an ephemeral work.

Until this moment, the ephemeral concept on which we had worked contemplated destruction as part of the organic, and creative process, as well as matter's transformation, and degradation, which could even lead to its complete destruction or disappearance. The mentioned ruin. However, the results of the tests, and *Green Man* itself, showed a different process.

This fact made us consider that the idea of ephemerality could also be referred to the natural organic process of the materials, and their transformation without the need of total or partial deterioration. That the ephemeral essence, and even decay, could be

limited to the period of change of the materials, independently of the time required, without the need for a process of ruin which involves decay or evanescence.

This stance on the ephemeral concept suggested the idea that the fleeting essence of *Green Man* lied in that lapse of time in which the burdocks had lost their natural moisture, and had changed their intense green colour to a brownish tone. That its perishable nature resided in its drying process, without the need to destroy the work, leaving its apparently concluded process as a witness of what *Green Man* had been. After this reflection, it is logical to question if we are facing *Green Man* or its remains.

From this perspective, *Green Man* can be considered to be an ephemeral work and, even more, a *BioVanitas*. Specifically, a *Remains BioVanitas*, which are those that propose destruction, total or partial, as part of their creative process and without the possibility of repetition. These works have already fulfilled their function, leaving only its remains or its shells. A kind of *BioVanitas* whose performative time is over but whose time of consumption still remains.



[F. 120] Lois Weinberger, *Green Man* (2010). Solo exhibition at S.M.A.K. (2015).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

The time of consumption, as explained before, is the time the public needs to appreciate, understand, and enjoy the work. The time in which the spectator-work bond is created. That is to say, the exhibition time. In this sense, the exhibition of *Green Man* does not seem to pose major headaches, as Weinberger's own indications specify how it has to be exhibited. In this sense, the decision is clear-cut. The work has to be exhibited with its glass case, and its stand as shown in the image [F. 120].

Since *Green Man* is part of the S.M.A.K.'s collection, it has only been exhibited twice, in 2015 and in 2020. The first exhibition entitled *Lois Weinberg Gift* was held at the S.M.A.K. from 17th January to 15th March 2015. This exhibition, followed a donation made by the artist in 2014.

The second exhibition took place in 2020 (11th September to 11th October) at the fourth edition of *Coup de Ville*³⁶⁴ entitled *Chasing Flowers* in Sint-Klaas (Belgium). So since the work has been part of the collection of the S.M.A.K., it has only been loaned out once, and has not left Belgium.

Although *Green Man* seems to be stable, free of Time's materialization challenges, the use of the glass case guarantees, and makes it possible to place it close to other work in the same exhibition space. On the other hand, the obligatory use of the glass case helps in the decision-making process as it provides a lot of information.

First, it is clear that the display case acts as a security measure, or barrier. Not only against the possible consequences of the organic process of the *Arctium Lappa*, such as biological attack or pests, but also to protect the work against the possible mechanical damage that can be caused by its adhesive power³⁶⁵.

It should be underlined that this botanical variety easily sticks to different surfaces, so it is quite possible that the work could stick to the clothes of either the public or the museum staff.

³⁶⁴ The *Coup de Ville* art tour takes place in the city of Sint-klaas (Belgium) initiated by the WARP platform. This activity has taken place in 2010, 2013, 2016 and its last edition in 2020. WARP. *Contemporary art platform*
https://www.warp-art.be/en/coup_de_ville

³⁶⁵ It is worth mentioning that Velcro relies on this plant for its adhesive power.

Besides, there are two other aspects that are significant. Understanding the glass case as part of the work makes it clear that Weinberger did not consider the smell to be part of the Bio*Vanitas* experience. This detail means that it does not have to be considered what to do about the loss of the scent of *Arctium Lappa*.

As mentioned before, the use of the glass case, in combination with the factors of humidity, temperature and lighting, can provide the perfect scenario for the proliferation of microorganisms, besides hindering the visibility of the work.

The holes present in the wooden stand, which do not have to be visible during the exhibition, and that are also covered with Tyvek®, serve to facilitate the flow of air, and lead us to think that Weinberger himself considered this scenario, and this possibility [F. 121].

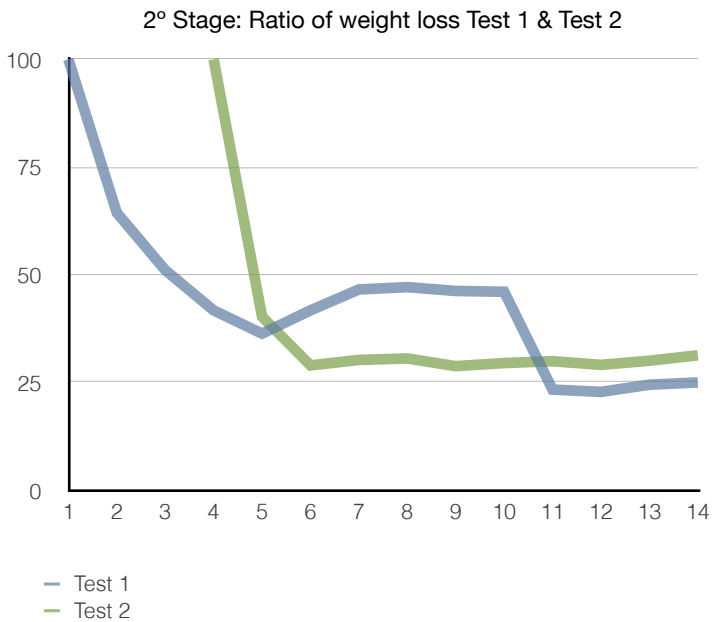


[F. 121] Detail of the two ventilation holes on the top of the wooden stand designed and made by Weinberger.

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

Although the organic process of *Green Man* seems to be inactive, we consider that this plant is highly sensitive to humidity³⁶⁶. This idea is based on the results of the experiments carried out, due to the weight increase of the tests after losing their initial weight, as shown in the graph *Second Stage: Ratio of weight loss Test 1 and Test 2* [F. 122].

One year after the last weighing, test 1, the one kept in the greenhouse, had decreased considerably in weight, while test 2, placed outside, had slightly increased in weight. After subjecting both tests to an environment with a lower RH than its usual environment (around 65.5%), both lost a similar amount of weight.



[F. 122] Graph showing the weight variations of the two tests during the experiment. The abscissa axis shows the percentage weight variation with respect to the initial weight. The ordinate axis represents the different measurements.

³⁶⁶ Another experiment carried out with a single bract of *Arctium Minus*, of those used to make the second test, attached to a cactus showed that it retained its intense green colour, unlike those used in test No. 2, which lost their colour.

Therefore, it was considered returning them to their usual location, where the RH was around 80%, and after 24 hours both specimens gained weight. For this reason, and in order to control the humidity of the work, it would be recommended weighing the work before and after every exhibition.

Due to *Green Man's* sensitivity to humidity, its ventilation is an issue that should not only be limited to its exhibition, but should also be controlled during its storage. This idea seems to agree on with Weinberger's once again, as when the artist delivered the work to S.M.A.K. it was placed in a banana box with a large opening at the top of the lid, and covered with Tyvek®.

Currently, *Green Man* is in the warehouse. For its storage, S.M.A.K. has opted for a traditional storage system, in two containers, which maintain the conditions of the work at the time of its acquisition.

A wooden structure that contains the glass case, and the organic body in two spaces, and a second container that keeps the wooden structure, or stand, as it is shown in the following images [F. 123].

The puppet is placed on top of the container, as the image shows [F. 124]. The wooden structure that contains it has two openings, one on each side, covered with Tyvek® to protect the work, and to allow the continuous circulation of air.

Therefore, it could be considered as a pseudo-closed packaging. In addition, inside the wooden structure, there is another container, also in wood, with the geometry of the puppet, and covered with foam to limit its movement, and once again to facilitate airflow.

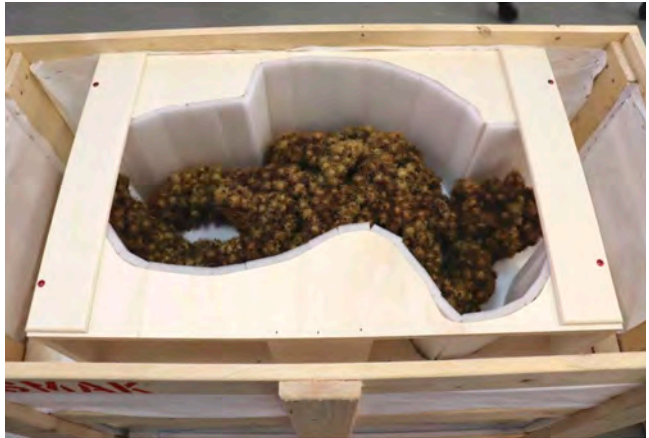
The criteria used for the packaging of *Green Man* respond to the specific needs arising from the use of *Arctium Lappa*. But does it meet the needs of a *BioVanitas*?

Considering *Green Man* as a *Remains BioVanitas* implies that it is a finished work. Although there may be a future, surely distant, in which the organic matter that composes it may decompose completely, for now, it could be understood that its organic process is finished. However, under this new perspective, and classification, it should be necessary to rethink the criteria from the context of the *BioVanitas*.

[F. 123] Storage boxes for *Green Man*.
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 124] Top view of the complete inner packaging (wood, foam, and *Artium Lappa*).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 125] Detail of *Artium Lappa* remains in the central part of the body.
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



The perception of *Green Man* as a Remains Bio*Vanitas* clears up certain doubts that arise with other Bio*Vanitas*. In this case, the storage dilemmas. If considering that its organic process, and therefore its transformation, is over, or at least that it evolves so slowly that it looks stopped, its storage decision should not be so complicated.

Its remains state answers itself to the question about what to do during the storage with the organic process, and thus with the transformation of the work, if there is nobody to see it. And so, the storage system proposed by S.M.A.K. seems completely valid for *Green Man*.

However, considering *Green Man* as a Remains Bio*Vanitas* does not make it a work free of deterioration. The current state of the *Arctium Lappa* makes it a very delicate, and weak piece. As it is shown in the following image, some fragments, and seeds are detached from the puppet [F. 125].

This is not a result of creative destruction, but a consequence of the materialization of Time. Over the years the work has dried out, and this makes it more rigid, more brittle, and therefore more fragile, causing the loss of matter with every manipulation.

The concept of ruin implied by the Bio*Vanitas* forces to reconsider the need for intervention. Not only because destruction is part of the work, but also because any intervention, however “insignificant”, could interfere with its natural evolution. The metamorphosis that decay entails makes to question which would be the aim of the intervention?, what would be recovered? Or, which previous state would be “rescued”?

Since *Green Man* is part of the collection of the S.M.A.K., it has not been intervened. However, the conservation-restoration team of the S.M.A.K. does not rule out this possibility. So Chantal Dugardin, professor of botany at the University of Ghent, was contacted to germinate some *Arctium Lappa* seeds from the original *Green Man*.

Unfortunately, as Dugardin confirmed months later, the seeds did not germinate³⁶⁷. At the same time, other seeds were also planted in the S.M.A.K. which have not yet borne fruit either, which would indicate that the work is “biologically” dead. This would reinforce the idea of *Green Man* as a Remains Bio*Vanitas*.

³⁶⁷ Replied on 23 February 2021. Almost a year after germinating them.

These seeds may not be necessary in the end, but the S.M.A.K. team does not dismiss the possibility of replacing future gaps with new *Arctium Lappa* bracts from the original work. Moreover, as this species is not easy to find, the museum would be sure to have material in case future experiments are needed.

From our point of view, if this possible intervention became true real, it should not be aimed at recovering a previous state but at recovering the correct reading of the work. *Green Man*'s erect penis is quite significant, and representative, and the idea that it could fall off, or break due to the dryness of the plants, and their lack of cohesion is one of the alterations that could cause the work to lose its significance, and therefore raise the question of a possible intervention. Would this be sufficient reason to intervene in a work that poses the consequences of the materialization of Time as part of its creative process?

If this were to happen, it would be one of the consequences of Time itself. The lack of cohesion between the bracts will mean that one by one each of the plants will become detached from each other, causing not only partial, but total losses.

The intervention of this detachment from new bracts would only mean a continuous patching, a solution that would end up replacing the original bracts with new ones. It would not only mean the inclusion of a new Time in the work, but a reconstruction. Therefore, it should have to be considered what is preferable, whether to keep *Green Man* as remains, or to evaluate replacement as an option.

At this point, if it were considered that what makes *Green Man* an ephemeral work is its materials' transformation process, that are now frozen in time, would we be faced with *Green Man*?, with its remains?, or with the reconstruction of its remains? Would this stance be better than letting the work disappear?

The state of *Green Man* is stable but fragile. It is true that the work is quite dry, and this could pose a certain risk for manipulation, as every movement entails the loss of material. It should therefore have to be assessed whether it would be necessary to consider intervention, or to avoid/limit its manipulation.

This last option may consider keeping *Green Man* on permanent display, or exhibiting it as little as possible. However, would we dare to store indefinitely a work whose life span is uncertain? It could be possible that when taking it out of its packaging all its

bracts have fallen off, and that *Green Man* has disappeared. In the eagerness to preserve, it would have been wasted the opportunity to enjoy the work. At least would not it had been better to witness the process?

Keeping the distances, the questions suggested by some Bio*Vanitas*, such as *Green Man*, could be more akin to *kōan* than to questions with solid, and definitive answers. To be honest, they may only be rhetorical questions that serve, not that much to find a unique solution, which we sincerely do not believe that exists, but to bring us closer to another perspective from which to approach the complex dilemmas that Time confronts us.

Bio*Vanitas* invite reconsidering and re-examining the meaning of some concepts, and attitudes taken for granted in other works, making very aware that the conclusions reached with these reflections will mark the course of the following steps. So, let us wonder again, what makes *Green Man* an ephemeral work?

3.3. Future: Whatever will be, will be...

Quoting Albert Einstein, "I never think about the future. It comes too soon". The future is a time to come, a temporary space in which the possible, and the impossible cohabit, something like Schrödinger's cat³⁶⁸.

The following *BioVanitas* poses the decisions for ensuring, or not, the future of a work whose ruin suggests the chronicle of a death foretold.

³⁶⁸ This is a thought experiment, referred also as a paradox, proposed by the Austrian physicist, and Nobel Prize winner Erwin Schrödinger in 1935 to illustrate his view on the problem of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. A cat is placed in a completely opaque box, an electron detector is attached to a hammer, and just below it a vial of poison that is lethal to the cat. Once all the elements are placed, an electron is fired and two things can happen. On the one hand, the sensor may detect it, the jar may break, and the cat may die, or the detector may not detect it and the cat may not die. Therefore, when the box is opened, in the physical level, the cat may be alive or dead. However, in the quantum level, the cat will be both alive and dead.

3.3.1. *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986)



[F. 126] Joseph Beuys. *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis*
(1975-1986).

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

WORK DESCRIPTION

ARTIST	Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)
TITLE	<i>Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis</i>
DATE	1975 - 1986
MEDIUM	Beeswax, cardboard boxes, wrapped butter.
DIMENSIONS	4 cardboard boxes: 20 x 30 x 20 cm/unit 7 beeswax blocks: X 6: 6 x 43 x 26 cm / X 1: 3 x 43 x 26 cm Show case: 190 x 153,5 x 73,5 cm
LOCATION	Warehouse
COLLECTION	S.M.A.K.
ACQUISITION	Donation by Isi Fizman, 1987

DISPLAY SPECIFICATIONS

RH	+/- 55 - 60%
LUX	
TEMPERATURE °C	+/- 18 °C

CONDITION

CONDITION	Bueno	Regular	Fragile (X)	Extremely Fragile
INTERVANTIONS	2008, 1999?			
OBSERVATIONS				



[F. 127] Butter packs, from box N° 2, before intervention (2008).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 128] Beeswax block N° 6, (2020).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.
Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

Butter and beeswax [F. 127 - 128]. In 1975, with these fetish materials, Beuys created *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986) or *Butter and beeswax* [F. 126] in the city of Ghent³⁶⁹.

First, a description of *Boter en Bijenwas*. This work is composed of two columns, both contained in a wooden, and glass showcase (190 × 153,5 × 73,5 cm). On the right-hand side of the work, there is a column made up of seven blocks of beeswax, stacked one on top of the other. The measure of six of the blocks is 43 × 26 × 6 cm, and their weigh is 6 kg per block [F. 129]. However, the one on the top is different. It is smaller (43 × 26 × 3 cm), and therefore also lighter (2.6 kg).

The second column, the one on the left, consists of four equal cardboard boxes³⁷⁰ (32 × 23 × 17 cm, and average weight 7.3 kg/box) stacked on top of each other [F. 130]. Each box contains, or at least originally contained, 40 individual packets of *Comelco* brand daily butter (7.5 × 4 × 10 cm, and 250 g) arranged in two levels of 4 rows, and 5 columns each [F. 127].

The history of this work began in 1975. In that year, with Jan Hoet as director, it was opened the first museum devoted entirely to contemporary art in Ghent (Belgium), where Beuys created *Boter en Bijenwas*. However, it took twelve years for this work to become part of the collection, and what happened during those years remains a mystery.

In 1987, a year after Beuys's death, the Belgian collector, and friend of the artist, Isi Fiszman, donated *Boter en Bijenwas* to the Museum of Contemporary Art³⁷¹. Thanks to this gesture, it is possible to reflect on the dilemmas that this Ephemeral Bio*Vanitas* poses in collection.

³⁶⁹ The first version of this text was published in *Encuentro Nacional sobre Registro, Documentación y Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo* (ENAC 2020), Argentina.

³⁷⁰ The original dimensions of the boxes were: 30 × 20 × 20 cm. FEFCO model 0210. FEFCO Code. FEFCO. (s.f.). *FEFCO Code*
<https://www.fefco.org/technical-information/feeco-code>

³⁷¹ In 1999 the Museum of Contemporary Art became the current S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst) in Ghent (Belgium) with Jan Hoet as director until 2003. After Hoet retired, he was replaced by Peter Doroshenko. Till 2005 this position has been held by Philippe Van Cauteren. STEDELIJK MUSEUM VOOR ACTUELE KUNST (S.M.A.K.). (s.f.). *History*.
<https://smak.be/en/about-s.m.a.k/history>



[F. 129] The 7 beeswax blocks. On the upper left corner it can be appreciated a smaller block which is the block N° 7, (2020).

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 130] Frontal view of box N° 2 (2020).

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

3.3.2. Who will talk about us when we die

It may be because of their biological, and ephemeral nature, or because of the multiple challenges they pose, but the truth is that Bio*Vanitas* are not very popular in collections. However, in the collection of the S.M.A.K. there is one of these peculiar specimens: *Boter en Bijenwas*.

In addition to all the usual doubts raised by the Bio*Vanitas*, which are not few, in this case there are also the specific questions about Beuys himself. The figure of Beuys was, and still is, full of contradictions, chiaroscuros that make it difficult to know his real intention.

This means that the starting point is the absolute uncertainty, and that is why it should be appropriate to begin from the minimal chinks of what it is known, or it is supposed to know.

The first information “known” about *Boter en Bijenwas* is Beuys's intention to make its transformation visible. For him, it was important to show the process of ruin in this particular work.

Therefore, the ideal state for this work, according to Beuys, may be its permanent exhibition. Unfortunately, this is not possible because of the current conditions at the S.M.A.K., although this situation may change with the forthcoming extension of the museum³⁷².

However, in order to fulfil Beuys' intention, and desire, to make this process of decay visible, *Boter en Bijenwas* is regularly loaned to various museums, and institutions, mainly in Belgium³⁷³. This is a solution for the artwork to be exhibited, accessible, and visible, as long as possible, even if not in the S.M.A.K. itself.

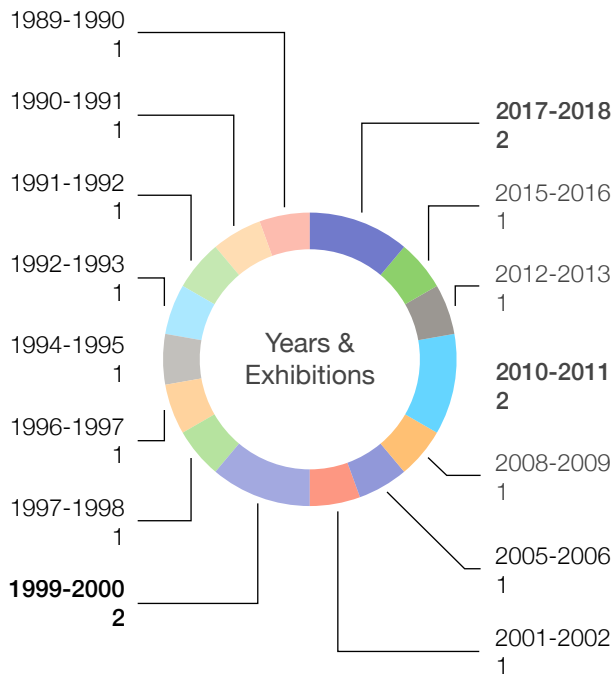
³⁷² The extension of the museum is scheduled to be finished in 7 years. Although the ideas proposed for the work will also serve to consider the conditions of its future condition we consider it appropriate to reconsider *Boter en Bijenwas* for its current conditions.

³⁷³ Since 1987, 61% of the exhibitions have taken place in Belgium, 11% in France, 11% in Germany, 6% in the Netherlands, 6% in Sweden and 6% in Japan.

The first exhibition, since *Boter en Bijenwas* is part of the collection of the S.M.A.K., dates from 1989, and its last exhibition was in 2017-2018. Even though there are some years in which it remained stored, the truth is that it has been exhibited frequently, as it is shown in the graph *Years & Exhibitions* [F. 131].

Since 1989, the work almost has been part of an annual exhibition, and occasionally it has been part of two exhibitions in the same year. On the one hand, its regular loan would keep the intention of making the process of deterioration visible.

On the other hand, its constant manipulation, not only during the display and dismantling process, but also because of the movements derived from the transport itself, could pose a high risk to the work, and accelerate its process of destruction.



[F. 131] This graphic shows the exhibition activity of *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986) in the last 33 years.

Exhibition is one of the greatest challenges for Bio*Vanitas*. One of the reason may be that environmental factors can contribute to accelerate, or retard the organic processing of their materials. In this case, it is easy to imagine that particularly butter is highly susceptible to temperature.

Due to the biological nature of Bio*Vanitas*, the senses generally play an important role. This makes it imperative to ensure that its exhibition complies with the safety measures, while respecting the needs of the work without misunderstanding the original message.

Boter en Bijenwas is exhibited with a showcase. According to S.M.A.K.'s own oral, and documentary sources, Beuys found this case during a walk through the museum's collection. The artist saw a glass and wood container, a kind of cupboard, and at that moment, he decided that it was a suitable element for the exhibition of this work³⁷⁴.

However, although it has, almost, always been exhibited in this way, the showcase has not always been the same, nor there is any documentation about it which verifies this as the original idea, or the definitive exhibition solution [F. 132].

The only time the work was exhibited without a glass case was at the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (Japan), in 1991 [F. 133]. Due to the fragile state of the butter, it was decided not to transfer it to Japan, and therefore a copy that did not require any case was shown at this exhibition³⁷⁵.

But, let us stop here for a moment, at the glass case. Looking at it, it can be appreciated that this container has a side door. A fact that may be fortuitous, or that may harbour a hidden intentionality, because when it comes to Beuys everything could be possible.

³⁷⁴ WYLDER, I. (2008). *Condition report Joseph Beuys, Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/ bis (1975-1986)*, S.M.A.K., p. 9.

³⁷⁵ According to Frances Berry, restorer-conservator at the S.M.A.K., due to the fragility of the butter the cardboard boxes "copies" where shown empty. Personal communication. (25/11/2021).

[F. 132] Joseph Beuys' *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986). Picture from 2017-2018. Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 133] Joseph Beuys' *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986) during its exhibition at The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Japan). From September 21 to December 30, 1991. Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 134] *Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis* (1975-1986) with the lateral door opened. (2017-1018) Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



In the 1980s when the artist visited the Tate Modern in London (United Kingdom), he commented that one of his works, also made in fat, smelled the way it was supposed to smell³⁷⁶.

This comment leads to think that, perhaps, smell may be an important part of *Boter en Bijenwas*. Having a glass case with a side door, not only makes it easier to place the elements inside, but also provides the opportunity to keep the door opened, or closed [F. 134].

If the door is closed, as usual, the smell emanating from *Boter en Bijenwas* is not to be perceived; it remains inside, intense, and real but at the same time non-existent for anyone outside that subspace.

On the other hand, if the door were opened, the strong smell of rancid butter would flood the room, and might even reach the adjoining rooms, expanding the presence of the work beyond its exhibition space.

This decision would significantly modify the sensations that the public would experience with the work, as seeing the work is not the same as seeing, and smelling it. The smell permeates not only people, but their memory. So, the smell of *Boter en Bijenwas* would involuntarily be associated with its image, and vice versa, and every time a similar odour would be smelt the work would be unintentionally remembered too.

However, it can not be ignored the fact that this option harbours a major problem, as it could be a potentially harmful solution for people's health. The inhalation of this materialization of Time, as a result of the decomposition of organic matter (in this case butter), could be toxic, and it would therefore be necessary to design a safe environment, both for people, and for the other works³⁷⁷. This makes the figure of the conservation-restoration team essential in the exhibition design, reinforcing the idea that their functions go far beyond safeguarding the work.

³⁷⁶ BARKER, R., BRACKER, A. (2005). *Beuys is Dead: Long Live Beuys! Characterizing Volition, Longevity, and Decision-Making in the Work of Joseph Beuys*. Tate Papers, Autumn 2005, p. 11.

³⁷⁷ The biological attack test carried out at the beginning of March 2020, using the DG-18 AGAR method, showed no evidence of biological attack, and therefore the work would not initially be dangerous, or harmful to people.



[F. 135] Packaging of the glass case for MuHKA (2017).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 136] Top view of the storage system used for cardboard boxes. (2017).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

This apparently insignificant detail, like keeping the door open or close, could make the difference. What is certain is that this decision could redefine the public-work experience. However, it could also interfere, or change, *Boter en Bijenwas*' message, because could it be considered conceptually the same keeping the door open or close?

Unfortunately, the lack of documentation about this specific topic, makes it impossible to know whether this exhibition system, either with an open or closed door, is the right one, or whether it was only a solution for that precise moment in 1975, which has last over time.

Moreover, the exhibition, or rather the impossibility of a permanent exhibition, at least for another 7 years, leads to another "real" issue: storage. At first sight, the storage does not seem to be very complicated. The main objective, usually, is to find the best way to store the works, generally using suitable packagings that protect them from external agents during the periods in which they rest from being gazed.

For *Boter en Bijenwas*, the S.M.A.K. uses a traditional storage system. The work is stored separately, that is, a first wooden container for the showcase [F. 135], and a second, and third wooden container lined inside with foam for the beeswax blocks, and butter boxes [F. 136].

In addition, the organic elements are individually wrapped in Melinex paper, and separated from each other with foams of different thicknesses as shown in the image [F. 136].

Since *Boter en Bijenwas*' materials are highly sensitive to heat, in order to avoid possible alterations, or deformations resulting from this storage system, during my internship I proposed an alternative design that would not only be suitable for storage, but also for transport.

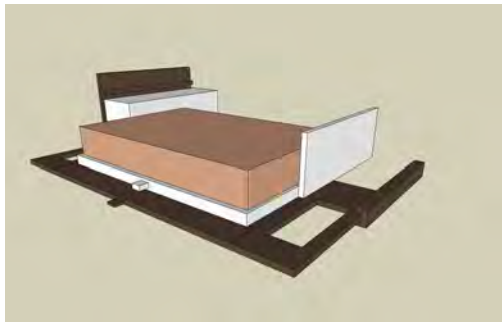
Due to the frequency of this work to be in loan, previously mentioned, it was considered to think about another packaging solution. Not only a packaging that contemplated storage, and the risk involved in transport, but that also took into consideration to make easier the manipulation of the work for its display and disassembled.

In this new proposal for the S.M.A.K. there were designed some containers, made of wood, and covered with foam too, similar to the previous containers, which limited the vibration, and movement of the work as much as possible. However, this design had a little, but significance difference: removable trays.

With this new design, each of the elements rest on a tray/support instead of on the foam which, in turn, rests directly on the material below. The trays, which are independent and mobile, allow the handling of each of the elements, either the beeswax blocks, or the cardboard boxes, minimizing the impact on the work [F. 137 - 138]. Besides, this solution facilitates the necessary manoeuvres when taking them in, and out for display or disassembly as shown in the following images [F. 139 - 140].



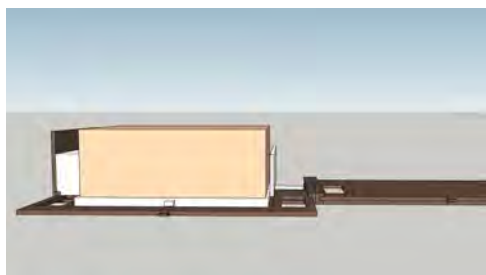
[F. 137] Front view of the proposed storage system.
Designed by Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 138] Isometric view of the new storage design showing the extraction of the trays.
Designed by Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 139] Disassembly detail for the proposed design for the storage of cardboard boxes.
Designed by Haizea Salazar Basañez



[F. 140] Interior detail of the tray system designed for the storage of cardboard boxes.
Designed by Haizea Salazar Basañez

If *Boter en Bijenwas* were analysed from a traditional perspective, this solution, or this new design, could be considered that so far so good as somewhat beneficial. However, the perspective of BioVanitas, more specifically that of Ephemeral BioVanitas in this case, forces to reconsider this storage solution.

The fact of storing a work of these characteristics, made with organic materials, in which destruction, and the visibility of its consequences, are part of the work, means that the previous solution may not be considered completely valid. This system could be useful to transport it, but not for its storage. The invalidity of this system lies in the impossibility of making the process of deterioration visible, or rather, in the impossibility of stopping it.

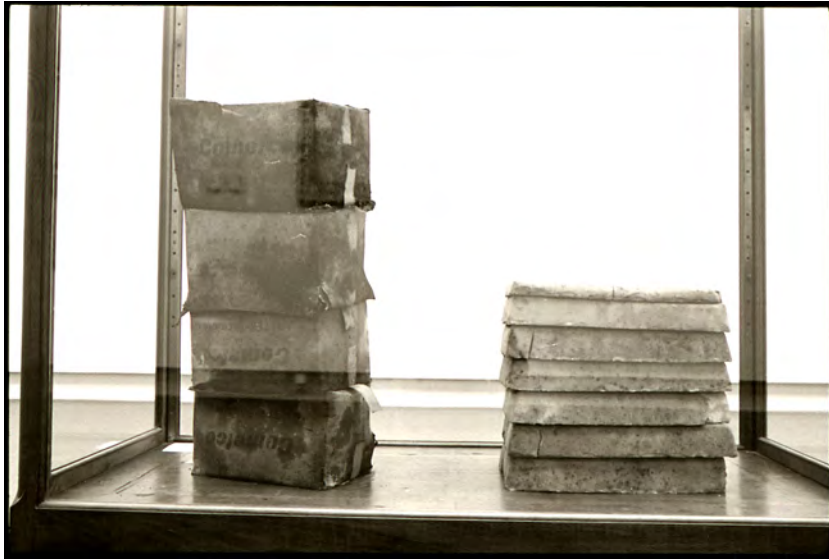
From our view, the most appropriate storage for *Boter en Bijenwas*, until it becomes part of the permanent exhibition, would be the use of the MAP system. This solution was also recommended by Gilman³⁷⁸, who determined that the ideal conservation atmosphere for this work was 100% N₂.

As explained before, the use of this system involves changing the atmosphere for a new conservation atmosphere, in this case an atmosphere composed exclusively of N₂, in order to preserve the work. This new atmosphere would keep the work in a state of rest, halting the organic process, and its consequences of the storage time.

The MAP system solution could be considered the most suitable solution for the storage of *Boter en Bijenwas*. Not only because it would slow down the deterioration process during the storage periods, when no one can see it, but also because maybe, it could be use the own glass case itself.

Thus, the use of the same container would minimize the handling of the elements, and would reduce the risk of possible mechanical deterioration. The use of the glass case itself as a container would make it possible to store all the pieces together, without having to dismantle the installation for each exhibition. This would also save space in the warehouse, because instead of three containers, it would only be necessary one. However, it would be necessary to ensure that the glass case were watertight, and if not, it would be necessary to modify it, or even change the container.

³⁷⁸ GILMAN, Op. Cit., p. 130.



[F. 141] Joseph Beuys. *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis.* (1987).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 142] Joseph Beuys. *Boter en Bijenwas, Grondstofmateriaal 4/bis.* (2017).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

When exhibiting the work again, the organic process would be reactivated by returning it to its normal atmosphere, and so reactivating its natural evolution only during the exhibition periods. The MAP system could be considered a suitable way to extend the life span of the work at the same time as it respects its ephemeral essence, and its intention of visible degradation.

However, this need to stop the organic process of *Boter en Bijenwas* suggests that it is active, and if so it could be considered that the work may not be completed as its process seems not yet finished. So, this leads to question whether the work is really finished, or not.

Another "real" data is that even though Beuys created this work in 1975, in the recently inaugurated Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, as a very common practice of him it was considered uncompleted until 1986, after his death.

Yet it is certain that in these 36 years the work has changed dramatically. Not only because of the alteration of the position of some of its elements, but also because of the physical transformation that it has undergone due to the organic natural process of its materials. [F. 141 - 142].

From 1986 to the present day, the work has continued transforming, and this matter and form metamorphosis suggests life. Today, *Boter en Bijenwas* is considered a rather fragile, and delicate work due to its evolution, and its deterioration over the years. Since its creation in 1975, the work has suffered loss of matter, infestations, scratches, deformations, and oxidation, among others.

This constant change to which it has been subjected for 47 years runs counter to the conventional idea of a finished work. This transformation, and the date that refers to its end, begs the questions: could the work be considered finished with Beuys's death? Could *Boter en Bijenwas* be understood as a finished work?

These questions make consider whether we are dealing with an unfinished work. Besides, they also force reconsidering other dilemma: intervention³⁷⁹. Would it be fair to intervene in a work if it is considered to be still under creation progress?

In agreement with Muñoz Viñas, works are intervened for different reasons, but usually the aim is to return them to their original state³⁸⁰. But what happens with those BioVanitas that, like *Boter en Bijenwas*, are constantly evolving, and have no original state to return to?

An important question that should be asked would be, what is wanted to achieve with this return to the original state. If the work was considered finished in 1986, the way it looked like in this year could be set as its original state, the state to return to, but honestly it seems very unrealistic. Besides, which would be the objective? Nowadays, would the work be recognized in that “new” state?

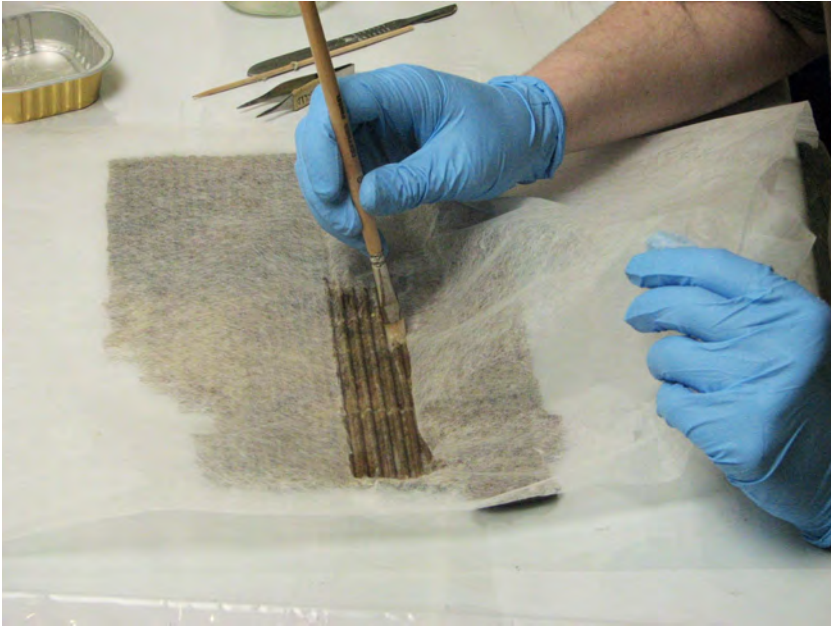
The idea of destruction implicit in the Ephemeral BioVanitas like *Boter en Bijenwas* makes question the real need for intervention. If the work contemplates its own destruction as part of its creation process, does it make sense to intervene it? And if so, whom would this intervention been done for?, for its own benefit?, for the institution that keeps it in collection?, for the public?

Actually, *Boter en Bijenwas* was treated³⁸¹ in 2008, by the conservation-restoration team of the S.M.A.K. During this intervention they repaired the broken beeswax blocks, consolidated the cardboard boxes, reorganized the boxes, and blocks, and

³⁷⁹ It was suggested to carrying out a chemical analysis of the butter, the impregnated cardboard, and the beeswax in order to find out whether these materials are still active or not, as they do not all have to be in the same state of evolution. Likewise, with a view to the future of the work, where it will be on permanent exhibition. It was also considered scanning it to be a suitable system for controlling its deterioration, and being able to monitor its process of ruin. During the internship it was considered the possibility of scanning, but the circumstances, in addition to the fact that the work is frequently assembled and disassembled, would not result in a reliable reading.

³⁸⁰ BARBERO ENCINAS, Op. Cit., p. 25.

³⁸¹ In the S.M.A.K. documentation concerning *Boter en Bijenwas*, we found some pictures from 1999 in which some butter packages were photographed outside the cardboard boxes. In addition, there are other images showing a biological attack test on cardboard box(es). However, we have not found any further related information, nor confirmation, about which boxes these photographs correspond to.



[F. 143] Intervention process in cardboard box N°2. (2008).
Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

cleaned the work by removing the characteristic patina that time has given it³⁸² [F. 143]. However, even if this intervention was considered slight, and respectful, it would never be possible to know how it really influenced the natural evolution of the work.

In this case, the difficult decision-making is compounded by the aura of mystery surrounding Beuys, whose position oscillated between the decay of the work, and the possibility of replacement. A sign of this continuing indecision, which in turn, could consider the substitution hypothesis, is that the S.M.A.K. still stores six original *Comelco* cardboard boxes³⁸³.

³⁸² WYLDER, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 13, 14.

³⁸³ It is considered relevant to point out that during the internship, the staff of the S.M.A.K. did not know about the existence of these boxes, nor did they know where they were, or whether they still had them. Thanks to our research, these boxes were located again, and placed in the artist's box for this work.



[F. 144] Detail of lower left corner of cardboard box No. 1 before intervention. (2008).

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.



[F. 145] Original *Comelco* brand cardboard which retains the S.M.A.K. in case they consider the idea of replacement. (2020)

Courtesy Archive of S.M.A.K.

Photo: Haizea Salazar Basañez

Gilman mentions in her study, that according to Hoet, it was possible to exchange the degraded cardboard boxes, as long as there were used the same materials. However, this position contradicted what Beuys statement to the curatorial, and conservation-restoration team, and the reality is that this action has not, to date, been carried out³⁸⁴.

The possibility of substitution confronts with another crossroads. On the one hand, the cardboard boxes may act as witnesses to the materialization of Time, and the evolution of its organic materials, and a substitution could erase the history of the work [F. 144 - 145]. Besides, it is necessary to mention that *Comelco* company does not exist any more.

In 1991 the Dutch company *Campina* bought this East and West Flanders cooperative, and the *Campina* brand replaced *Comelco*; but in 2008 *Campina* merged with another company to form *FrieslandCampina*³⁸⁵. Therefore, even if we were to replace the cardboard boxes, it would not be possible to find the same brand, or even the same butter that Beuys used in 1975, so would this substitution make sense?

This is a very complicated decision that puts, once again, between a rock and a hard place: should it be preserved the material or the concept?, how would we feel about a *Boter en Bijenwas* with new cardboard boxes?, would it be the same *Boter en Bijenwas* but with new materials? Perhaps these are questions for which we are not yet ready, or for which we still have not the answer.

The conservation-restoration team has to face the challenges posed by the art of the perishable in collections thanks to some institutions', such as the S.M.A.K., bet on the diversity, and freedom that the *BioVanitas* represent. Not only in terms of materials but also referring to new approaches, and stances.

The lack of specific documentation forces to continually question whether the work evolves correctly within the idea of destruction imagined by Beuys or not. The concept of ruin implicit in *BioVanitas* makes inevitably consider the functions of the

³⁸⁴ GILMAN, Op. Cit., p. 124.

³⁸⁵ COMELCO. (10 December, 2020) At *Wikipedia*.
<https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comelco>

conservation-restoration team, or whether their presence is really necessary, for works of this nature.

Those BioVanitas, such as *Boter en Bijenwas*, imply a change in the role of the restoration team. The fight against degradation, and the consequences of Time, is meaningless in this type of work. It is time to accept it. To accompany them during their deterioration process, while creating a safe environment that allows their proper evolution without putting other works, or people, at risk.

Actually, the functions of the conservation-restoration team are not very different from the usual ones; respect prevails. In addition, and, just like the work itself, these functions have to be developed on a more conceptual level that requires not only a technical approach. An absolute understanding of all the levels, and not only the physical one, that make up the work, in order to get a complete idea of their intentionality.

The respect for the intention of the work, even if it means its destruction, goes beyond the desire to preserve it. The acquisition of works destined to disappear makes to question whether we will be brave enough to let them evolve to their ultimate consequences, or whether, on the contrary, we will continue perpetuating the importance of the matter over the idea.

The purchase of works made with organic matter, living works, is a remarkable fact that reveals an important change in the idea of what a museum should house in its collection. By introducing the possibility of perishable objects into this variable, it is shown a new stance opposite to the idea of a collection.

This perspective provides new freedom to the concept of collection, but it also requires a highly reflexive attitude. Ephemerality means a constant struggle between matter and non-matter, between what persists and what disappears. It must be considered that this disappearance is only on a physical level, but not on a conceptual level, since the idea persists. But does the concept have the same value as the work? Is the concept as valuable as the material?

On the other hand, it is impossible to know the limit of *Boter en Bijenwas*' decay process, or whether it will be unrecognizable because of its evolution. Actually, as this is not a very fast process, but rather a constant and slow one, people can get

used to its transformation maybe without being aware of it. However, what would happen if the pile of cardboard boxes breaks, or falls down, because they cannot bear all that weight in their circumstances? Is that the kind of destruction Beuys was looking for? Or was he just referring to the ageing of the materials without thinking about all its total consequences? If the work reaches a point where it is no longer recognizable because of its decay, is that the end of the work?, or should it be stored in order to preserve it?

The truth is that the actions taken in 2008 may have made it possible to keep *Boter en Bijenwas* in the present, but possibly they interfered with the proper destruction of the work by misinterpreting the message that Beuys wanted to convey. Even if the S.M.A.K. did what considered the best for the work, it is impossible to know whether it was the best solution, or what the artist wanted.

For this reason, it is considered essential, when possible, to elaborate, and carry out a questionnaire that asks the artists about the correct evolution of the works. Although these ideas, or thoughts may be variable over the years, and the current opinion may not be the same as the future one.

It is obvious that these reflections are possible thanks to all the previous work done, and reflected through the perspective given by time, because the present way of thinking is a consequence of all the previous knowledge. In order to gain this knowledge, things had to change in many ways, and in the same way the solutions, and conclusions reached in this study may suffer the same fate.

This study may seem to "butter up to Beuys" if thinking that the Ephemeral *BioVanitas*, like *Boter en Bijenwas*, represent a change of mentality. A first step towards transformation. Not only referring to how collections are seen and understood, but in a way art accepts the consequences of the passing of Time. A philosophy that highlights the importance of the moment, and of the instant.

The idea of a work that disappears without being supported by evidence of its previous presence is a fact that can be hardly considered. Even if it can be imagined ephemeral works as part of collections, thanks to people like Hoet who saw a possible way forward, the need for reminiscence remains strong. In an era when

images, and data are part of our reality, the idea of leaving nothing else, but memory may be utopian.

It should not be forgotten that *Boter en Bijenwas* is a work that has a very special connection with the city of Ghent. Not only because it was created there, and because it is one of the key pieces in the collection of the S.M.A.K., but also because of the significance it had for someone as dear to the city as Hoet. It is easy to understand that to let the work run its course may mean the loss of something that goes beyond the work itself, making, even more difficult, the complex decision-making.

But as Hoet himself said³⁸⁶, “When conservation starts to look like the eternal extension of a comatose situation, then it's time to demand the right of euthanasia”. But how to know when it is time to euthanize it?

³⁸⁶ HUYS, F., HENNEMAN, I., *Beheer, conservatie en restauratie van Hedendaagse Kunstcollecties*, Brussels, 1999, p. 42. Quoted in BLANCHAERT, K. (2014), *Art in Europe after '68. Ghent / 21 st June – 31 st August 1980*. Beveren-Leie, Bélgica: S.M.A.K., p. 177.

3.4. Food for thought

After having analysed these three examples of Bio*Vanitas*, the conclusion may seem to be: let the works evolve freely, even if sometimes they disappear. Something easy to say, difficult to accept, and complicated to execute, especially for a society that avoids dealing with loss. And therefore, the idea of disappearance seems contrary to one of the most basic longings: immortality.

The Bio*Vanitas* are presented as an awakening to the false idea of eternity. They confront us with loss, with ruin, with the ravages of the passage of Time. In the case of Bio*Vanitas*, the idea is generally sought to materialize beyond its material persistence. This, forces us to accept that not everything remains, and that despite efforts, not everything will be preserved.

This harsh reality is shown through ruin, decay, and their idea of transience. However, as it was pointed out in the these three studied works (*Preserve 'beauty'*, *Green Man*, and *Boter en Bijenwas*), reflected from the perspective of the Bio*Vanitas*, the concept of ephemerality can be represented in different ways. But first it should be wondered what it is understood as ephemeral?

The word ephemeral comes from the Greek ἐφήμερος *ephēmeros*, with means 'of one day'. It is formed by the preposition ἐπὶ and by a noun ἡμέρα, ἡμέρας. Its meaning is similar in English, as the Oxford Dictionary defines ephemeral as: lasting or use for only a short period of time³⁸⁷.

According to Adorno, artworks are a contradiction since they are themselves indifferent to their reality, but this reality is indispensable to them. To quote the author himself³⁸⁸: "... An unreal in reality, the duration of the transitory as a moment of art".

³⁸⁷ Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ephemeral?q=ephemeral>

³⁸⁸ ADORNO, Op. Cit., pp. 363.

For the philosopher, the idea of enduring works has disappeared. On the grounds that many of the things intended to last have lost the interest, or live in oblivion, the idea of durability, and duration seems to him to be obsolete³⁸⁹.

Buci-Glucksmann considers ephemeral art as the art of observation, attention, and waiting. An art that would give rise to an aesthetic based on sensibility conditioned by vision, and purity; turning the ephemeral into a Time linked to the cyclical, and the linear. It is the art of Time that materializes the wisdom of existence through its fragility, where the lack makes sense, as a cultural resistance, and a human affirmation of plural worlds opposite to the disorders of existence³⁹⁰. Ephemeral art, as Buci-Glucksmann points out, explores "the other side of art", as it studies the union of the human being to the cosmos, in a way that integrates the ephemeral, and the cyclical of humans³⁹¹.

For Hussey, the ephemeral goes far beyond matter. It is neither impulse nor form; it is the collective. The ephemeral is that which comes into contact with hidden intangibles³⁹². The ephemeral is born between the inner, and the real vision, as a witness of those works that manage to confront the impossible with the real. The ephemeral is the result of the visionary and the real. Ephemeral art is any artistic representation linked to Time with a provisional, and passing character. In its original composition, this type of artistic manifestation harbours transience both in its components and in its meaning. It is a creation linked to its Time, it is absolutely contemporary. It is Time that completes the work, so it is an open creation. The artist who creates it loses its power over it, and it is Time itself that determines its duration, its evolution, and its culmination. These manifestations show a change of concept. Destructive Time changes its meaning, and now it is perceived as something positive. Something necessary for the achievement of the work.

In his Dictionary of Aesthetics, the philosopher Étienne Souriau considers the value of the ephemeral. Are art and beauty in danger of being devalued because of their

³⁸⁹ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 45.

³⁹⁰ BUCI-GLUCKSMANN, Op.Cit., pp. 51-64.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁹² HUSSEY, Op. Cit., pp. 39-40.

ephemeral nature?, or is it their ephemeral nature that gives them their richness? The answer to this question is based on a whole philosophy of Time³⁹³.

The idea of duration has been transmitted from possession. From Adorno's opinion, which cannot be externalized is what stifles art, and in his opinion: "...some artworks of supreme rank would like to lose themselves in time so as not to be their prey, falling into a clean antinomy with their need for objectification". For the philosopher, the arts in general should be like what the author Ernest Schoen called the unsurpassable *noblesse* of fireworks that do not want to last, but to shine for an instant, and explode³⁹⁴.

The three analysed Bio*Vanitas* present ephemerality as a polyhedral concept which has a much broader meaning that determines the nature, and future, of the Bio*Vanitas*. Therefore, it should be considered that one of the main questions to wonder about each Bio*Vanitas* is what makes it an ephemeral work, since the origin of its transience is essential, even if it is not the only main conditioning factor.

Preserve 'beauty' suggests the possibility of representing the eternal ephemeral. A proposal based on the expiration of the organic materials that compose it, and the counterpoint of this idea by considering eternal repetition as part of its evolution. A perspective that shows an ephemeral concept, cyclical and eternal, which contemplates repetition as part of the work. Despite considering *Preserve 'beauty'* as an ephemeral work, the possibility of remaking it whenever it is considered, and as many times as necessary, could distort its ephemeral essence for some people.

It is true, as it has been maintained throughout this study, that from a heraclitiana perspective, each display of the work is unique, and unrepeatable. However, from the abstractest position, it could be considered that the possibility of repetition invalidates somehow the sensation provided by the idea of knowing that the display is unique. Because the sensation of transience over an installation that brings the possibility of remaking it, is not as absolute as with those that only take place once. It is rather a temporary disappearance, like the aforementioned "see you later" rather than "goodbye".

³⁹³ SOURIAU, É. (1998). *Diccionario Akal de Estética*. Madrid, España: Akal, pp. 483-84.

³⁹⁴ ADORNO, Op. Cit., p. 46.

In every of the remakes the moment is decisive, and it is what will determine the evolution of the work, but the idea of knowing that it can be remade, in a certain sense, could detract from the concept of ephemerality. Indeed, it is an ephemeral work, as it will never be repeated the same again, but it will certainly be displayed again. Therefore, the sense of loss, destruction, and the idea of free evolution of its creative process seems easier to accept, as somehow it will not disappear completely.

The opposite perspective to the temporary ephemerality of *Preserve 'beauty'* is posed by *Boter en Bijenwas*. An idea of ephemerality in which the deterioration of the work is absolute, and occurs continuously, and slowly while in front of our eyes the work disappears without being aware of it. The process of ruin is gradual, and constant, and the importance, and significance of the materials reinforce the idea of non-replacement, which means that there will come a time when the work will disappear completely. And, apparently, this was the artist's intention, the disappearance, even if the mystery that surrounded Beuys did not make his final destination "crystal clear".

Boter en Bijenwas confronts the idea of loss in, hopefully, a distant future, that also forces considering detachment as part of the work, as part of its process. *Boter en Bijenwas* has a very close relation with the S.M.A.K., not only because of the close friendship between Beuys and Hoet, but also because it is one of the most representative works in the museum's collection. Therefore, although Hoet himself considered that the works have to be faithful to their destiny, even if this means disappearance, it may be that when the time comes this decision will be much more difficult to execute than Hoet himself thought. The truth is that until this moment arrives, it is very difficult to know if we will be prepared to see the work disappear.

Yet, an intermediate option between absolute, and temporary disappearance is *Green Man*, where the ephemeral is referred to a specific process. In this case the ephemeral concept does not focus on the material, and its disappearance but on a specific time of the work relating to its transition, and its transformation. *Green Man* is not considered ephemeral because of its physical disappearance, which will also happen with sufficient time, but because of the change process of its materials. A past, irreversible, and irretrievable metamorphosis that poses change until it is complete, independent of the corporeality, or not, of the matter.

Once this change, a consequence of its organics materials, has evolved, the work passes into a pseudo-inert state in which it remains stable. For this reason, it could be considered that the ephemeral essence of the works does not always have to be subject to the destruction of the material. It can also be referred to a fragment of the life span of the work, and to the idea of leaving the result of this process, its remains, as witness of their past. From this shell it would show what persists from what it was. A time and a process, that is impossible to bring back, and that invites, like the other examples, to imagine an earlier, and perhaps future, time of the work.

The multiple perspectives from which the ephemeral concept can be understood, approached, and confronted condition and/or determine the essence of the BioVanitas. The origin of their fleeting nature suggests several optics to approach them. The three aforementioned BioVanitas illustrate the three times and, they and their options, present three scenarios, similar in terms of materials and concepts, but completely different in terms of criteria and approaches.

This viewpoint of understanding the ephemeral essence of the BioVanitas has direct repercussions on their creative process, based on destruction, as well as on their concept of ruin, and the materialization of Time. As it was shown in these three examples, ruin, and creative destruction do not always imply the degradation of matter. It does not always imply a future disappearance.

González García, referring to Robert Smithson, refers to these artistic representations as "containers of Time", because they have a reflective character that invites thinking about more transcendental subjects. Reflections focused on raising awareness about Time, and how to perceive, and live in the present³⁹⁵.

Each of the scenarios suggested by the BioVanitas involves a reflection on the criteria for intervention, exhibition, and storage, among others. These three examples help to contextualize the multiple questions that should be wondered about BioVanitas in collection, based on their specific needs, and particularities, highlighting that it is necessary a critical stance that questions, and reflects on their truth.

³⁹⁵ R. Smithson uses these terms in *Entropy and the New Monuments* to refer to objects that are not meant to last, or to be remembered. Objects that are endowed with a peculiar temporality of their own in which the present continuous coexists. Quoted in GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, Op. cit., p. 84.

Although organic matter, and its process consequences, are common in every *BioVanitas*, the perspective from which they are approached, in addition to the conception of their ephemeral essence, determines the bases of these ruinous, and mutable works. Similar features with disparate criteria that not only make wonder about their nature, but also about the type of work to dealing with.

Originals, remakes, remains, protocols, ephemera...does it make sense to wonder these questions?, or does the real decisions lie beyond classification? The truth is that although the answers lie beyond their classification, or their essence, our position, and perception of them will be influenced. To be honest, it is not the same when reflecting about a remake-able, or about remains, or about works to disappear. Unconsciously, this perception conditions stance, and decisions.

Contemporary art is characterized by reclaiming the need to study works individually, and from a multidisciplinary stance, and not from standard solutions. However, the *BioVanitas* could be considered the epitome of this principle, as the problems that every of them suggest are always unique, and different.

The perspective of the ephemeral, from which each *BioVanitas* is designed, will be the guide to understand the duty towards the work. The little and subtle particularities of every *BioVanitas*, not only teach, and invite reflecting, through their process of destruction, but with their metalanguage, apparently delicate, but terribly biting, they make the difference.

From our point of view, art must have often felt defeated in its inexhaustible struggle against time. Despite all its efforts it seems to have always failed, so it is not surprising that at some point it has considered abandoning the idea of immortality embracing the fleetingness, and freedom offered by Time. But, is there anything more ephemeral and, at the same time, as eternal as Time?



[F. 146] Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. *Saturno* (1820-1823).



Conclusions

It has become evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident; neither in itself, nor in its relation to the whole, nor even in its right to existence.

Theodor W. Adorno

Time consumes us. That is a fact, however, should not be wondered if Time is consumed too? Human have been able to create the concept of Time, to idealize it, and even to turn it into a precious, and scarce commodity. One of the great dilemmas of the humanity turned into a merchandise: what will not be able to be sold, and turned into a product?

These pages have been witnessed of how Time is present in art. From its representation to its use as material. These have also shown how, among other genres, *vanitas* have dealt with the matter of Time deeply, and how they have managed to adapt themselves to the present which has provided new perspective to analyse what we have named *BioVanitas*.

This sub-genre, which this study considers to be part of contemporary *vanitas*, has turned out to have its own definition, classification, and specificities. In addition, attributing a name to it, perhaps even an identity as a sub-genre, has made possible to analyse these works from a specific perspective, the one of the *BioVanitas*, and the possibility of elaborating a theory about it. New approaches for an artistic representation that, honestly, is not so new, but that it may not have received the attention that it deserves.

The analysing of the topic during these four years has revealed, an unexpected, existence of *BioVanitas* in collections, besides the presence of many artists who have found in this discipline of destructive Time their medium of expression. It has been essential for the understanding of the materialization of Time, and the different meanings of the term ephemeral.

José Saramago said, that today's reality was yesterday's imagination, and this can also be applied to certain ideas that with the passage of time end up becoming part of the standards. However, we consider and assume that all ideas, or what can be considered as truth, can be susceptible to change depending on the society that analyses them. What it is accepted today, it is only the result of a specific thinking current influenced by its social context.

These reflections are not intended to create an absolute, or closed truth. They are conceived as a changing, and transforming truth. But despite the metamorphosis they may undergo, they may not cease to be a truth.

This study, through different examples, shows that the presence of Bio*Vanitas* in collections is not as uncommon as we may initially think. However, despite the fact that some institutions have had Bio*Vanitas* in collection for more than 20 years, it is remarkable that there is no terminology, or specific criteria for them. Thus, the creation of a name, and a terminology seemed essential to analyse them, and their dilemmas, from a stance attuned to their needs.

Although the circumstances arising from COVID-19 altered the original plans, the internship at the S.M.A.K. analysing *Boter en Bijenwas*, and *Green Man* was relevant to understand the essence of the Bio*Vanitas* from a practical, real, and not only theoretical perspective. The proximity, both to the works, and to the documentation, made this approach more precise, and has facilitated the analysis of them from the point of view of the Bio*Vanitas*.

The study of the works from the perspective of the Bio*Vanitas* suggests not only understanding the artworks from a multidisciplinary perspective, but also confronting questions that require a high level of abstraction and go beyond the technical approach. Although the study was not intended to generate a stipulated protocol, as we considered that it would not be useful because of the nature of these works, it did serve to make a standard questionnaire. This questionnaire contemplates certain specifications which are important for Bio*Vanitas*, such as the relevance of the senses, what is, or not, understood as deterioration, intervention criteria, exhibition, storage solution, or documentation methods.

Actually, the questionnaire has become a very useful tool, as it significantly contributes in the creation of a joint vision. Based on questions from what is understood as an ephemeral work, to issues related to storage, the aim is to provide a space for reflection that helps to complete the understanding of the Bio*Vanitas*. It is to highlight that both, the Bio*Vanitas* perspective, and the questionnaire are currently being used at the S.M.A.K. Specifically, in *Butter en Bijenwas* (Beuys)³⁹⁶.

The ruin implicit in Bio*Vanitas* not only has physical consequences referring to intervention criteria, but it also changes the role of the public with the work. This constant metamorphosis makes necessary the public to be par of the work

³⁹⁶ Questionnaire currently used, and available at the S.M.A.K. <https://tinyurl.com/utybdz3h>

experiencing it, but also as active recipients who contribute to its completion through the observation of its decay.

In turn, this underlines the need to create safe spaces for the appropriate exhibition of the deterioration that does not put in risk other works, nor people's health. The multiple ways in which *BioVanitas* can evolve (biological attack, pests, etc.) suggests a great challenge for its exhibition, for the proper transmission of its message, and for healthiness.

The presence of the perishable, and decadent in art circuits poses certain crossroads, and shows that the specific study of this topic is necessary in order to contribute to the resolution of the doubts about the materialization of Time. Not only an institutional change of mind, but also for art professional, and the public.

In general terms, it could be considered that the *BioVanitas* in collection should remain in permanent exhibition in order to make their transformation visible, as this usually is important for their proper creation process. If so, it seems necessary to know the artist's intention for the correct evolution of the work. However, sometimes it may not be possible to keep the work on permanent exhibition, and therefore it may also be essential to know the artist's stance about these periods in which it is not possible to exhibit it.

Those works made of biological materials, designed to deteriorate, suggest a challenge for storage. During their storage they may continue decaying, maybe till its total destruction, or even they may put in risk the rest of the collection because of their evolution, as happened with the biological attack in Serralves on Roths' work. Furthermore, storing *BioVanitas* may invalidate their original intention of showing their metamorphosis. Therefore, besides the artist's intention, it is necessary to determinate the type of *BioVanitas*, in order to study the option that best suits it, like the MAP system for the Ephemeral *BioVanitas*.

Dealing with "living" works, as is the case of some *BioVanitas*, confronts to the difficult dilemma of understanding them as works in progress, under a continuous creation process. This idea of unfinished, and permanent decay of the works may propose the possibility of non-intervention as the most respectful solution. And this, in turn, its degradation, and its possible disappearance.

Under these parameters, it is normal to question the real need for intervention, its purpose, and whom it is done for. Not only because it is an unfinished work, but also because it implies destruction as part of its creative process. That is why we consider that, although there may be exceptions, non-intervention seems the most respectful measure for the work. Any intervention, however minimal, could interfere with its natural evolution, and somehow it may misinterpret it. Understanding, and respecting, the ephemeral essence is one of the most difficult lessons when facing *BioVanitas*.

One of the most surprising aspects has been the multiple ways of understanding the ephemerality as a concept. How something that at first seemed easy to define turned out to be much more complex and decisive than expected. During this research it has been observed that the term ephemeral is a complex, and extensive concept, which gives the question a favourable scenario for its development.

The professionals, from different disciplines, who were consulted agreed in defining ephemeral art as, "any artistic manifestation that has a finite duration in time". Although this definition could be valid, in our opinion ephemeral art is, at the very least, any artistic representation linked to Time with a provisional, and transitory character that acquires meaning at the moment of its creation but not beyond.

Under this definition, many of the works considered ephemeral may be "protocol" works. That is to say, works that can be made, and remade as many times as necessary, but that will never be the same as they depend in each exhibition on the how, the where and the who.

This point needs an individual reflection on whether the works classified as ephemeral by their creators are indeed ephemeral or not, suggesting that the term ephemeral contains in its artistic definition a more complex classification than the one thought at the beginning.

The multiple meanings of the term ephemeral is reinforced with every different representations of the analysed *BioVanitas*. Through these works it has been shown that the way in which the "ephemeral" is understood conditions, and determines, the type of *BioVanitas*. So, understanding the versatility of the ephemeral is essential in *BioVanitas*.

Besides, these works also propose that the ephemeral does not only focus on matter, as it can also be referred to the physical while contemplating the “eternity” of the concept. The term ephemeral opens up doors to reflection about where lies the fleeting essence of the works, or about what is what makes them ephemeral works, among others.

The conclusions reached, in all the dilemmas suggested by the *BioVanitas*, need an abstraction effort, and the understanding of the work beyond the usual criteria. However, maybe the most difficult may be accepting non-intervention, ruin, or disappearance as part of the work.

Regarding *BioVanitas* in collection, it is to mention that the lack of the artists' specifications leaves a legal vacuum in which the actions, whether permitted or not, are not well-defined, like for example the peripheral conservation. Thus, even if these actions do not go against the artists' wishes, evidence that for every law there is a loophole. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate more detailed specifications to specify all permitted, and non-permitted, actions, in addition to what is understood as intervention, and what is understood as deterioration.

This gap may be due to a lack of terminology. The lack of specific questions referring to this particular genre may be the cause of certain actions that, when analysed from the perspective of the *BioVanitas*, could be questionable. The development of a theory about *BioVanitas*, besides the elaboration of the questionnaires, may be the base to eliminate those gaps that could be considered for *BioVanitas* and also suggests the need for specific documentation.

This study reveals that the documentation is not only limited to technical aspects. Documentation constitutes a major dilemma for *BioVanitas*, since in any of its interpretation, the existence of documentation could invalidate their ephemeral essence.

Documentation, and not only referred to the capture of the image, and the moment that this entails, could deprive the *BioVanitas* of the freedom that their performative Time gives them, anchoring them in a state of cyclical Time that would largely invalidate the conceptual aspect, and the meaning of the work. Therefore, it is

essential to consult, and assess this matter, as something as commonplace as documentation, could interfere, or invalidate, the sense and meaning of the Bio*Vanitas*.

However, there are some artists, as Anya Gallaccio, who are aware of the need for documentation to ensure the correct interpretation of their works, and who do not consider that it interferes with the ephemeral essence of the Bio*Vanitas*.

In addition, Bio*Vanitas* also include a typology in their classification that considers the documentation as part of the work. The Remains Bio*Vanitas* do not only consider that documentation does not go against its essence, but that it forms part of the Bio*Vanitas* itself, or that at least it becomes part of the work.

This comes to demonstrate, once again, the complexity of Bio*Vanitas*, and reminds that there is no a unique standard approach as each Bio*Vanitas* needs to be studied separately.

The selected cases for study, *Preserve 'beauty'*, *Green Man* and *Boter en Bijenwas*, represent the three main typologies, and have been the scenario for those questions that should be asked to different Bio*Vanitas*, while trying to find where their truth lies. The factor that makes the difference.

Although generally it is the artist's decision that takes precedence, the figure of the conservation-restoration team is essential to find the joint solution that best suits each case. The Restoration team has to rethink its functions in relation to Time, since the art of the perishable claims it as a fundamental part of its discourse. It is necessary to change the negative perception of Time, learning to accept it as something positive. This is, updating and renewing the figure of the Restoration team, not only at an institutional but also at an educational level.

In most of these works, the role of the Restoration team referring to Time is passive. This does not mean that they are relegated to the background, on the contrary, as it happens with these works, it shifts towards a more conceptual approach. The conservation team has to accompany the work, becoming the figure responsible for ensuring that it continues its evolution correctly, while making sure that the message reaches the public "intact".

The problem, in terms of the possible damage caused by the artistic hybridization implicit in the *BioVanitas*, raises the need to incorporate a new figure alongside the curatorial team in charge of the exhibition. The presence of restorers seems essential during the design of the exhibitions, as it is necessary to create a safe exhibition space that preserves the concept of the *BioVanitas*, but which is not dangerous for it, nor for other works, nor people.

These new circumstances mean that restorers are becoming increasingly multidisciplinary, and their scope of action is expanding, broadening its competencies beyond the safeguarding of the work. Under this new perspective, the Restoration team becomes an active part of the exhibition decision-making process. The exhibition has to contemplate the concept and find the way to do it respecting all the experiences that the artist wants to transmit, considering that a bad choice would totally change the message, invalidating the work. The way in which the work is displayed not only conditions the reading of the work, but many other decisions depend on it, such as the peripheral conservation measures, or environmental conditions.

This research advocates for the right of the passage of Time, its respect, its acceptance, and its personification as something natural. Although we are still far from accepting the destruction that it entails, it is a big step that brings us closer to a more open, conceptual and multidisciplinary vision of collections. The physical representation of Time, and also the *BioVanitas*, make to be aware of transience, as its degradation forces to accept the victory of Time by transferring humans' mortal essence to art.

Finally, we would like to apologize, once again, if this study has not provided the answers that were expected. However, we hope to have raised questions and, or at least, to have contributed to make be aware about the importance of the moment, and the instant. The reflections discussed throughout this research are the result of the study that the passage of Time has provided us with the distance with respect to the origin, and our socio-cultural environment. In addition, it is important to underline, once again, that this study contemplates an open perspective of change, and to dialogue.

Getting answers, or asking questions is relatively easy having seen what happens, as the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said: "life can only be understood from behind, but it has to be lived forwards".

We hope that this analysis serve as a basis for the construction of a perspective on the *BioVanitas* that helps to understand their polyhedral essence, and their metalanguage beyond matter and ruin, but, after all, it is only a matter of Time.



[F. 147] David Hornback, *Rotten Serie* (2017).
Courtesy David Hornback



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For society, old age seems to be a kind of shameful secret that it is indecent to talk about [...] That is precisely why I am writing this book: to break the conspiracy of silence.

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Jean Paul Sartre

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emeri te zabalduzu



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