

Authenticity – a matter of time?

Restoring the Installation „Glauben Sie nicht, dass ich eine Amazone bin“, 1975, by Ulrike Rosenbach

(Figure 1)

The basic concern of modern restoration is to preserve cultural heritage without doing harm to its authenticity. Therefore anyone who restores has to know what the authenticity of the individual work consists in. That is not difficult if works have been handed down largely intact. For damaged works of a traditional type the most varied restoration methods have been developed which enable them to be presented authentically despite the losses. By contrast, the authentic preservation of works of a more recent date which have been created in accordance with rules other than the classical ones is more difficult.

This was also the experience of the team from the restoration centre when, as part of the "Inside Installation" project¹, it was working on Ulrike Rosenbach's installation "Glauben Sie nicht, dass ich eine Amazone bin", "Don't think I am an Amazon" (Figure 2). The concern to maintain this work in full, which is regarded as one of the artist's masterpieces, and its art-historical examination raised questions about its authenticity and led to restoration solutions which I should like to report on here.

Ulrike Rosenbach, "Don't think I am an Amazon" (1975/76)

"Don't think I am an Amazon" dates back to a performance which took place at the 1975 Paris Biennale des Jeunes (Figure 3). Ulrike Rosenbach describes the event as follows:

"I shoot 15 arrows at the reproduction of a Mediaeval image of the Madonna (Stefan Lochner, Madonna im Rosenhag, 1451). On the video screen the arrows can be

¹ Inside Installations: preservation and Presentation of Installation Art, a three-year research project (2004-2007), managed by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) and co-organised by Tate, London; Restaurierungszentrum, Düsseldorf; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Sofia (MNCARS), Madrid, and the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art (SBMK), The Netherlands. To access all research results visit www.inside-installations.org.

seen hitting the Madonna's head and my face. Both faces are gently faded one into the other.

The video recording is my psychic feedback.

The Madonna image, representative, unapproachable, beautiful, tender, shy and, as a cliché, fairly insipid finds itself again in me. In hitting the picture the arrows also hit me."²

The performance is documented in a series of black-and-white photos by the artist, Klaus vom Bruch, Ulrike Rosenbach's partner (Figure 4). During the video recording attempted at the same time, says the artist, technical problems occurred and consequently no moving picture has survived³. After the performance the target with the photo of the Madonna and the arrows were left behind in order to represent the action in the exhibition (Figure 5). Later productions in Innsbruck, at the artist's studio in Düsseldorf and at the Oppenheim Studio, Cologne (Figure 6), are successfully documented on video tape, with varying camera angles and durations⁴. The actions took place partly with a smaller or even a rectangular target. The video that Ulrike Rosenbach recorded at her studio in Düsseldorf, b/w tape, sound, PAL, duration 15 minutes, is famous (Figure 7). The tape was issued under the same title as the installation⁵ and today forms part of a number of public collections.

Just a few months after the first performance, at the end of 1976, the relics of the performance were made into an installation. At the invitation of the Kunsthalle Saarbrücken Ulrike Rosenbach exhibited the elements already shown in Paris, with the addition of a monitor, on which the video of the Düsseldorf performance could be seen, a selection of black-and-white photos of the action, black-and-white stills from the video and stills, most of them coloured, that the artist had taken from an American Amazon film⁶. A second exhibition was mounted in 1986, again in

² Ulrike Rosenbach, in: Documenta V [exhibition catalogue], 1972, p. 353

³ Ulrike Rosenbach in an interview with the team of the restoration centre (Gunnar Heydenreich, Heike Koenitz, Martina Pfenninger, Franziska Stoldt und Cornelia Weyer) and Stephan von Wiese, Curator of museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf, 11.12.06. The interview has been documented on DVD.

⁴ See on this: Martina Pfenninger, The Videotape – Master or Copy, in: www.inside-installations.org/artworks/"Don't think I' an Amazon"/exhibition history and case research

⁵ Edition of 20 single-channel tapes, distribution Oppenheim Studio, Cologne(without copy rights)

⁶ Ulrike Rosenbach, Foto, Video, Aktion [exhibition catalogue], City of Aachen, Neue Galerie-Sammlung Ludwig, 4. December 1976 to 16. January 1977. The technicolor film with the title "The Amazons are coming" could not be more precisely identified.

Saarbrücken⁷. The arrangement of the two exhibitions has not been documented and could not be reconstructed, even with the help of the then curator, Wolfgang Becker, and the artist.

In 1986/87 the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, now museum kunst palast, acquired the work.(Figure 8) It was shown continuously as part of the museum's permanent exhibition until 1993.

The surviving photos from the Paris Biennale (Figure 9) show that the target from the installation purchased by the museum is not identical with the one originally used. In the catalogues of the Saarbrücken exhibitions the Paris target is shown reversed left-to-right. However, which target was actually shown there could not be ascertained.

Establishing the condition

Since 1993, when noticeable changes occurred to some of its parts, restoration of the Amazon installation has been under discussion. Between 2004 and 2007 the restoration could finally be systematically prepared and undertaken. The team worked closely with the curator responsible, Stephan von Wiese, and Ulrike Rosenbach.

At the start of the decision making process, when establishing the condition, interest centred on the material composition of the work.

The black-and-white photographs and the target show signs of ageing typical of the material: slight, inconspicuous greying of the surface (Figure 10) and distortion (Figure 11) caused by weight load or handling. The photo of the target (Figure 12) has been damaged by visitors and shows tears at some of the fixing points. The video film is extant on a number of tapes, a master and three exhibition copies. The condition of the master tape, exhibiting occasional drop-outs, is typical of tapes from the 1970's. The monitor acquired with the work, a black-and-white machine by Braun,

⁷ "Spuren des Heiligen in der Kunst" ["Traces of the Holy in Art"] II [exhibition catalogue], City of Aachen, Neue Galerie-Sammlung Ludwig, April/May 1986

got lost as time passed. Especially severe changes have occurred to the colour photographs and the arrow flights. As is typical for their age, the colour photographs (Figure 13) have to a considerable extent discoloured: the cool colour tones faded completely, so that the colouring as a whole shifted to reddish-brown. The polyester urethane arrow flights (Figure 14) have likewise lost their original hue, a luminous greenish-yellow typical of Day Glo colours⁸, which were then newly obtainable on the market. Moreover, its material has decomposed so badly that very little is left on the arrow shafts and otherwise only a few broken off brown crumbs remain.

Problems of restoration

The analysis of the material condition clearly shows that the most interesting and difficult questions of restoration start with the arrow flights and the colour photographs. While most parts of the work are still far from being at risk from deterioration and are to be exclusively preserved by conservation treatment, care and preventive measures, further intervention, which requires convincing justification, must be considered for the arrow flights and the colour photographs.

Of the arrow flights, as has already been said, only crumbs remain. From them their original form and colour can no longer be deduced. It is impossible to restore the flights used in the historical context. Ulrike Rosenbach made us look for new arrow flights which should match as far as possible those used by herself in the 1970's⁹ (Figure 15). Might we use them for reinstallation and by this replace material which harks back to the time of origin and was also exhibited in all the installation phases?

The colour photos are so badly discoloured (Figure 16) that the image has become obscured and the appearance has lost its impact. Ulrike Rosenbach had donated a set of slides to the museum back in 1999, probably duplicates of the pictures which

⁸ See on this: Heinrich Wulf, *Grosse Farbwarenkunde*, Cologne, 1967, p. 145-148

⁹ See on this: Gunnar Heydenreich and Franziska Stoldt, *The arrows*, in: : www.inside-installations.de/artworks/, /"Don't think I'm an Amazon"/case research: "A further search for appropriate flights revealed that a manufacturer in the USA (Mullan Archery, Oakwood) still manufactures polyester urethane flights in virtually the same form and similar colour today. Probably Ulrike Rosenbach was then already using flights by this manufacturer, because according to the specialist trade it has been delivering flights of this kind to Germany for several decades."

she had taken in the cinema herself.¹⁰ From these slides the artist wanted new stills made – although they would be on new photographic material which differs from the original positive material, not only because of its newness but also because production today differs from that of the 1970's. What is particularly noticeable about the new material is the use of a "whiter" white in the image carrier layer which, of course, also affects the colouring of the image. Furthermore, as a result of natural ageing, the slides too no longer look exactly as they did immediately after their production: the colour contrasts have presumably a little intensified. However, according to the artist's and the curator's recollection a somewhat strident colouring can also be assumed for the time of origin. Should the discoloured photos therefore be replaced for the re-installation by reproductions based on the slides?

And how authentic would the Amazon installation be, if the arrow flights and colour photographs were actually replaced?

We found answers by considering more intensively the question of what the authenticity of this work precisely consisted in. In addition to the material analysis we first examined the work as a whole and its individual parts with regard to the significance of content and composition. We then looked at the context in which the elements originated and the history of the installation. We paid particular attention to the visual appearance of the work, how it looks today and visual changes over time. Finally, we examined the way in which the various restoration concepts would affect the work.

The significance of the parts and their relation to the whole

During the interview with Ulrike Rosenbach (Figure 17) it became clear that the individual parts of the installation are evaluated by the artist differently. The central features for her are the target with photo and arrows and the monitor with the video

¹⁰ See on this: Gunnar Heydenreich, Notes on a discussion with Ms. Rosenbach and Dr. von Wiese on 14.04.1999, documentation on the installation "Don't think I'm an Amazon" at the Düsseldorf Restoration Centre, and Heike Koenitz, The Colour Photographs, in: : [www.inside-installations.org/artworks/"Don't think I'm an Amazon"/ case research](http://www.inside-installations.org/artworks/)

(Figure 18). The black-and-white photos by Klaus vom Bruch (Figure 19) document the various phases of the arrow shots; together with the black-and-white video stills (Figure 20) they reflect in an objective style details from the performance. With their help the viewer can see the events that are artistically presented in the video at an historical distance and, in context with the target, trace the origin of the video image. The colour stills from an American Amazon film (Figure 21) reinforce the theme of the combative woman, which Ulrike Rosenbach sets in contrast to the tender Madonna type. In the addition of material from the popular, stereotypical picture stock there appears a conceptual trait of this work to which the artist attaches great importance¹¹ but which has often been overlooked by its critics.

In answer to the question whether parts of the work could be dispensed with for a re-installation Ulrike Rosenbach did not rule out showing the work, if necessary, without the coloured Amazon stills. During presentation of the work in Bilbao in summer 2007, however, (Figure 22) because of the restricted spatial environment she only reduced the number of photographic works exhibited by two stills.

The significance of the parts and their interrelations are also reflected in the setting up of the work. Thus, according to the artist, the target and monitor should stand next to each other so that the eyes of the Lochner Madonna and the superimposed eyes on the monitor are positioned at the same height and thus at the same time at eye-level with the viewer.¹² However, in this respect the re-installation of Bilbao set up by Ulrike Rosenbach herself deviates from the earlier presentations (Figure 23): the monitor can be seen here placed on the floor in front of and obliquely to the left of the target. In all exhibition situations so far the photo series are attached to the walls in the background clearly separately from one another. Visitors are permitted to move between the elements so that their viewing angle changes at their own discretion.

Relations between the individual parts are built up not only by arrangement in space but also through their colour or black-and-white design. Overall the work looks discrete in its colouring (Figure 24). The large surfaces are black and white, silver or anthracite. (In reality the video image looks black and white too, not bluish as on the

¹¹ Ulrike Rosenbach, as note 3

¹² Ulrike Rosenbach, as note 3

images.) Excluded from this discrete colour canon are the film stills and the arrow flights. (Figure 25) Both stand out by their strident colouring, just like the „shock colours“ fashionable in the 1970's. Ulrike Rosenbach says of the performance that the movement of the arrows through the darkened room was visible only because of the gleaming flights with their plastic strings attached to the end of the arrow shafts.¹³ Also linked to their original function of stabilising the flight of the projectiles towards the target is their symbolic value: indicating direction and implying speed. In the installation, where the arrows are firmly lodged in the target, particularly the flights are a reminder of the shot and thus the performance at the origin of this installation. In the connection created optically between the arrows and the Amazon photos through the colouring the shot intensifies into a motif of war between the sexes.

Other sub-groups of installation elements can be derived from the context of its origin. On the one hand there are parts that have been individually created: the video and the performance photos by Klaus vom Bruch; on the other hand there is a group of prefabricated parts: monitor, picture frame, target and arrows with flights. The film stills and the photo of the "Madonna im Rosenhag" can be described as a hybrid of the two groups in so far as they represent alien, ready-made art products that have been artistically transformed. Thus, the Gothic panel (Figure 26) is reproduced without colour as a detail in tondo format. The colour stills again (Figure 27) are put into the picture slightly distorted because of the oblique camera angle relative to the screen. They partly show the frame of the projection surface in the bottom or top area of the image.

The video (Figure 28) and the target form the bipolar centre of the work, the performance on which the installation is based being envisioned in two different modes: while the target embodies the result of the action, the video shows the action as it occurs. As a time-based, procedural work in the work the video represents a link between the time of the action, on the one hand, and the presence of the objects and its viewer on the other.

In the condition before restoration the relationship between the individual parts originally established through colouring are considerably disturbed. Moreover, in the

¹³ Ulrike Rosenbach, as note 3

case of the arrow flights because of the material degradation their functional context and symbolism can no longer be read.

Restoration options

We considered three options to deal with the parts that were disturbing and had to a great extent lost their meaning (Figure 29): firstly, to leave the parts in the work as they are, secondly, to remove them or, thirdly, to replace them.

Leave them as they are

If the colour photographs and the remains of the arrow flights are left in the installation, the idea of integral material preservation¹⁴ will be satisfied, but the work will suffer considerably in its aesthetic appearance and its accessibility will also be restricted. There is furthermore a risk that with the artistic media the image of women dialectically created by Ulrike Rosenbach will be disturbed and with that the balance between servile devotion and bellicose aggression.

Remove them

If the colour photographs and the remains of the arrow flights are removed from the work without replacing them, for one thing the level of discursive comment will be lost with the kitschily overdone images of the combative woman and, for another, the shooting motif of the performance would be weakened by the missing flights. Both are clear arguments *against* this option. An argument *for* it is that the artist has expressly allowed the colour stills to be dispensed with, and that, as she sees it, the significance of the work would not be substantially impaired by the absence of this element

¹⁴ See on this: Katrin Janis, *Restaurierungsethik im Kontext von Wissenschaft und Praxis* [Restoration ethics in the context of science and practice], München 2002, p. 133: "[...] wird in Mitteleuropa traditionell nur das Originalmaterial des Kulturgutes als authentisch betrachtet. Man spricht auch von 'Substanzfetischismus' (Michael Petzet)" – "[...] in Central Europe traditionally only the original material of the cultural material is regarded as authentic. One also speaks of "substance fetishism" (Michael Petzet)."

Replace them

It was the option of replacing the problematic parts that we thought longest about, as there are several kinds of new parts which might take over the role of those used hitherto. As regards the arrow flights, Ulrike Rosenbach had already supplied replacements when restoration first began to be considered: flights made of a harder, greener plastic material.¹⁵ After a long search mass-produced flights of material identical with the original one were suggested, although, unaged and powerfully coloured, these would stand out from the whole in an opposite way to their degraded predecessors. For some time the idea of coating the replacement flights with colour dye or paint was considered. However, we eventually decided not to do so, for three reasons: firstly the artificial coating would not have presented an aged appearance which was typical of the material but would merely make colourful reference to the surface appearance of the other parts; secondly, strident colours had originally been intended, if not the same, then at least very similar, and, thirdly dialectical contrasts are a basic feature of the work and the juxtaposition of shockingly coloured and black-and-white parts further underlines this. The third option discussed by the team was to make casts of the arrow flight shape in more durable material. We set aside this option for the time being because of the high manufacturing cost and various uncertainties about the achievable aesthetic result. Nevertheless (figure 30), a casting mould was made for later use in anticipation that the degradation process would recur.

After long discussion a decision was reached in favour of using new arrow flights of identical material (Figure 31). Together with the currently required set of 15 flights a large supply was purchased and stored under adequate conditions. In this way replacements will be available in future, whatever the market development. The new arrow flights were fitted to the arrow shafts by means of a fletching tool.

To reconstruct the colour photos (Figure 32), we were able to make new digital prints on contemporary photographic material, a slightly yellowish undertone being applied by means of Photoshop in order to achieve an appearance close to that of the PE paper originally used.

¹⁵ The flights supplied by Ulrike Rosenbach were analysed by Thea van Osten, ICN, Amsterdam, and identified as of polyether urethane. The original flights, on the other hand, were of polyester urethane.

Authenticity

But what concept of authenticity did we find for this work, when we decided to replace the degraded parts? How dared we replace material which dated from the time of origin of the work?

(Figure 33) We did not find authenticity in the material alone, nor exclusively in the idea, nor with reference to a single point in time, be it the moment of origin or a moment in the history of the presentation. Nor were the artist's expressions of opinion ultimately decisive, even if we were pleased that Ulrike Rosenbach said she was satisfied with nearly all our suggestions and particularly with the results achieved in the work. We consider the condition of the work to be authentic after treatment, because thanks to the restoration intervention it once more functions aesthetically. In other words, thanks to the renewed arrow flights and colour stills the installation presents itself as a work, which is effective today, whereas in the previous condition the work's message was obscured and it could not be experienced to a full extent. The viewer who engages with "Don't think that I am an Amazon" is not only addressed directly by the title, thanks to the restored relations between the parts, he or she can once again also gain access to its message more easily. The fact that the degraded parts were in one case mass products and in the other reproductions for which patterns were available made our decision easier: the freedom of interpretation for the addition was under these conditions not really great.¹⁶ An ethical legitimization

¹⁶ See on this Wulf, as note 8, p. 147: „Tagesleuchtfarben dunkeln im Licht zunächst nach und bleichen später aus; dabei lässt die Leuchtwirkung nach.“ [“Day Glo colours first gradually dim and later bleach out; the glow effect diminishes”.] In the case of the flights the degradation is also determined by the ageing of the synthetic resin.

¹⁷Kodak paper was chosen for its better picture resolution. The material originally used was an Agfa product which is no longer manufactured.

¹⁸See on this: Charter of Venice, 1964, Article 9: "Die Restaurierung ist eine Maßnahme die Ausnahmecharakter haben sollte. Ihr Ziel ist es, die ästhetischen und historischen Werte des Denkmals zu bewahren und zu erschließen. Sie gründet sich auf die Respektierung des überlieferten

for this decision is given in the E.C.C.O. Code of Ethics¹⁷: "The conservator-restorer shall not remove material from cultural heritage unless this is indispensable for its preservation or it substantially interferes with the historic and aesthetic value of the cultural heritage."

If in the title of this lecture I asked whether authenticity is a matter of time, now in conclusion I answer, "Yes." Authenticity in the case of the installation "Don't think I am an Amazon" is truly a matter of time, not in the sense that a point in time in the object's history would have been decisive but because the strength of the current impact has proved to be the crucial criterion for restoration. Time in this case means the present and authenticity means effectiveness.

(Figure 34)

Cornelia Weyer

Bestandes und auf authentische Dokumente. Sie findet dort ihre Grenze, wo die Hypothese beginnt." [...] – "The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, [...]" – See also on this: Cornelia Weyer, Die Authentizität in der Restaurierung moderner Kunst [Authenticity in the restoration of modern art], in: Kunsthistoriker, Mitteilungen des österreichischen Kunsthistorikerverbandes, 8th Austrian Art Historians' Congress, 26th-29th October, 1995, Krems/Stein Donau University 1995, Vienna 1995, p. 48-56, particularly p. 52

¹⁹ E.C.C.O. Professional Guidelines(II): Code of Ethics, in: www.ecco-eu.info/