What is Art Conservation?

One of the primary tasks of a museum is to collect, conserve and care for objects in perpetuity. A museum gives special care to objects and their collections, allowing future generations to enjoy. The objects are restored to their original beauty, with monitoring, cleaning, preventive measures and occasional repair. This process is known as conservation and people who specialize in this are called conservators.

Conservators carefully analyze the object to determine what materials were used and to understand how the object was made. From there, conservators can address the needs of the object.

For a painting, the conservation treatment may include removing old discoloured varnish, mending a tear in the canvas, securing flaking paint or re-framing and mounting. New technologies such as x-ray equipment can also help the conservators to examine beneath the surface to study what is hidden from the naked eye.

Paintings, drawings, photographs and textiles are sensitive to light, temperature and also the humidity level. Light is often kept low to prevent the discolouration. Hygrothermographs are installed to monitor the environment and detect changes in the temperature or humidity.

There are various treatment options for objects which have active insect infestations that may damage the object. Isolation and oxygen scavenger treatment involves placing the object in a sealed area, and depleting oxygen supply to kill the insects.
Other objects such as sculpture, pottery, furniture and glassware have to be regularly cleaned, and some are cleaned with special chemicals and others with water. Different tools such as cotton swabs, brushes, scalpels and even special vacuum cleaners are used to clean the object without doing any damage.

The salvaging and conservation of the *Asian Symphony* was challenging as it involved many unknown variables due to the little documentation on how the mural was made and installed. As such, conservators used many techniques and new technologies to help in this process.

Images courtesy of The Conservation Studio.
NG ENG TENG - BIOGRAPHY OF A PUBLIC SCULPTURE: SALVAGING AND CONSERVING

1. The mural *Asian Symphony* was Ng Eng Teng’s largest known public mural. Before dismantling the mural from Garden Hotel to a new location, what techniques were used for conservation and preservation? Why?

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<th>Techniques:</th>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image A" /></td>
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<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image B" /></td>
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2. Ng Eng Teng made a maquette to present to his client the theme and stylistic approach of his commissioned mural, *Asian Symphony*. Referring to the window on the far left, identify any differences in the design of the maquette (Item 1) and the finished mural, using the polymer scale model (Item 2) as a reference.

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b. What do you think the synthetic polymer scale model of *Asian Symphony* is used for?
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3. Read the article and discuss with a partner or in groups how is *Asian Symphony* reflective of Singapore in the 1970s and her ambitions at the time?

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Local artist Ng works on a ‘giant’ mural

It’s his most ambitious project yet

ART

CINEMA/THEATRE


Local artist Ng works on a ‘giant’ mural

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ART

ABBY TAN

The Asian way of life is harmonious, cardiosome and rhythmical. This oneness of life has been captured and frozen in cement condon in a giant mural by artist Ng Ng Keng Teng.

There are the crowded spaces in mundane and Asian cultural dances gracefully skilfully called "Asian Symphony", it reflects the rhythm of life in this nation. The message drawn out of this mural is the slow movements of Malay, Chinese and Indian dances.

The motifs and designs are inspired by the movements of various dances in Singapore. "Asian Symphony" by Mr. Ng Ng Keng Teng, a sculptor in Singapore, is now his biggest piece of art and the first mural he has worked on, and even the headest.

Each panel is 300 pounds of cement condon which is different from ordinary cement.

Mr. Ng said: "This material has been proved by European sculptors to be durable for a very long time. It is strong and easy to work with cement condons."

Cement condon gets "dried" in 24 hours whereas it takes seven days for the ordinary cement.

Cement condon which is a mixture of cement and sand and ordinary cement. The first layer is 1.5 inches of cement and the second layer is one part sand and two part aggregate. The third layer is one part cement and three part aggregate.

These are sandwiched between two more layers of cement and sand and three part aggregate.

Mr. Ng said, "The artist is the only one who can sculpt such a big mural, it takes a lot of time for the work to be completed."

Mr. Ng is probably the first local artist to use this medium if his own knowledge is correct.

There are still a lot to be worked on with the use of this medium. It’s new and not really exploited yet. It can be used for decorative and monumental sculpture.”

- END -