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The living process of conserving the Live: theory and practice in the conservation of performance-based artworks at Tate

Conserving the Live was believed to be an oxymoron for many years. Research from Performance Studies have been particularly useful for the field of conservation, which has dealt with performance artworks as they started to be acquired into museum collections. Reflections around the practice of conserving performance – how conservation practices influence the artwork, or how those practices might be challenged with a change of context. This paper will explore how the practice of conserving performance art at Tate has changed through the bridging between theory and practice.

This paper will reflect upon the changing conservation practice since Tate acquired its first performance artwork thirteen years ago, exploring how moments of how theory translates into practice leading to the development of the practices within the Time-Based Media Conservation team. Grounded on the knowledge developed through inter-institutional research projects such as “Collecting the Performative” (2012-2014) and “Performance at Tate” (2014-2016), the team has since been testing the Strategy for the Conservation of Performance, building on its successes and on the cross-disciplinary perspectives, while allowing it to change and be revised through a systematic and ongoing collaborative effort.