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A public art collection buys performance art – a field test

Since 1931 Lucerne collects art from the region of Central Switzerland. Each year, the committee for Fine Arts, consisting of representatives of the city and external experts, disposes a sum of 80'000 Swiss Francs in order to acquire art works. The committee is increasingly confronted with the manifestation of art works in diverse medias that are not easy to include in the collection, such as performances and other ephemeral practices. One of the challenges is the lack of knowledge in handling ephemeral art und the fear of political debates that call for justification when buying something that is not a clearly defined object.

2015, the committee bought within the scope of a pilot experiment three works from local performance artist. As this was the first time the committee had to develop modes of handling these commissions and thereby suggested a model not yet established: the artists were not only invited to produce a new work, but also to think about forms in which their performance could be integrated in the collection.

The commissions were discussed in a controversial manner, as mainly the delegates from the city feared all kind of problems including questions of conservation, mediation and political legitimation.

The talk will analyse the different arguments and discuss the consequences for future commissions.