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Caring for Artistic Legacies – The Increasing Role of Artist Estates in Contemporary Art Preservation

Today's challenges in dealing with the legacy of contemporary artists require new structural models for conservation and preservation. Equally, they have engendered a tectonic shift in Western cultures of memory. The growing importance of artist estates in recent years is a case through which to observe and reevaluate this shift. My presentation will probe the historical and sociopolitical framework of this shift and it will provide an insight into my own experience of collaborating with an artist estate managed by a commercial gallery. I will argue that (1) artist estates have become important sites of knowledge for the preservation and contextualization of contemporary art; and that (2) this development is best understood as the decentralizing of memory, a process in which both private actors and civil society become significant stakeholders in the networks of care for contemporary art. Finally, I will critically reflect on the further implications and latent potential of this translocation of knowledge production.