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New modes of conserving: integrating front-of-house with backstage practice

The 'biographical approach to contemporary art conservation' (Van de Vall, et al., 2011) has prompted a greater focus in conservation research on the efforts required by collections care professionals to maintain the identity of complex artworks, and drawn attention to the unstable nature of such works when in storage. The notion of a work moving between biographical life stages further implies that *every* phase can be a crucial locus of observation and action for conservators.

Despite this, the behind-the-scenes nature of conservation and collections care has meant that the majority of activity takes place in the transitional phases before and after exhibitions – not during – as the skills and energy of conservators turn to preparations for upcoming exhibitions soon after the previous installation is complete. The exhibition period is thus an underrepresented life phase in conservation practice for all kinds of artworks; but its absence is an especially urgent deficiency for works that are *only* fully 'activated' when on display, such as Relational Art, Time-Based Media, or performance.

This paper suggests that artworks created through new modes of production require the integration of front-of-house with backstage conservation activities to understand and assess risks, generate mitigation tactics, and forge new documentation methods.