

Exploring Sculpture Conservation in Seattle

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**Abstract**

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Contemporary public sculptures in Seattle, at a glance, look everlasting, but they are difficult to maintain given material, environmental, social, and funding challenges. To make matters more complicated, they are also managed by different organizations—government, private, and public museums. At some point, these organizations will need to make maintenance and conservation decisions which will affect the future of sculpture in the area. This case study examines the conservation practices and philosophies of six Seattle art organizations representing government, private, and public museum collections. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven museum professionals. Results suggest that each type of art organization faces different circumstances that affect how they maintain their sculptures and they are starting to implement new conservation practices to maximize fixed resources. This study addresses a need to start examining organizational sculpture conservation practices and create a foundation to examine other aspects of public art conservation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Definitions:

**Art organizations:** A public or private entity that manages a collection of art that is displayed in public places.

**Public places:** Spaces outside a museum or gallery setting where the general public can view artwork. This includes, parks, inside office buildings, street corners, building facades etc...

**Public Sculpture:** The term “public sculpture” can take on many different meanings and it is widely defined within the literature. For the purpose of this study “public sculpture” is defined as any sculpture displayed outside a museum or gallery space that fits into at least one of the following categories: in public, public interest, public place, or publicly funded (Cartiere 2008). This study refers to public sculptures with intended permanence when talking about maintenance and conservation needs and excludes temporary exhibitions and performance art.

The Seattle area is home to thousands of sculptures displayed in public places. Seemingly effortless sculptures stand on the streets, in parks, office buildings, and bus tunnels. Examining the origin of these works, you realize they are managed by different people within a number of organizations. Government-funded art programs, private art collections, and public museums all manage sculpture collections displayed in public places which are very different than museum art collection environments. Museum collection managers are public stewards for the collection, striving to preserve the artwork indefinitely while providing public access in climate controlled gallery spaces. Following this example, institutions such as the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) set sculpture conservation best practices with the assumption of preserving and caring for outdoor sculpture in similar ways to the fine arts collections inside the museum.

People managing these sculptures find it increasingly complicated and costly to maintain the works, especially outdoor sculpture that often face intense preservation challenges. Outdoor sculpture is particularly difficult to care for and maintain with environmental factors such as moisture, UV radiation, pollutants, vandalism, and accidental damage. Public sculptures require

frequent maintenance and conservation to keep them safe and aesthetically pleasing for the people around them (Beerkins; Learner, 2014).

In response to potential environmental degradation, sculptures are either maintained and conserved, or left to deteriorate. Caretakers must make a series of choices about the level of conservation and damage. GCI notes, “the guiding principal to date has been to preserve the original appearance of the sculpture (i.e. artist’s intent) rather than the original coating/material” (Learner; Rivenc, 2012). In order to preserve the original appearance, art organizations frequently conserve and sometimes refabricate sculptures. Soon, re-fabrications of the sculptures too will need conservation, leading to questions of artist intent and the lifespan of contemporary public sculpture. Conservation critics note heavy conservation comes with a “high risk of loss of any evidence relating to the artist’s methodology, tools, and techniques” (Ryan, 2014).

Routine maintenance, or cyclic maintenance of sculptures can prolong periods between conservation treatments however, maintenance plans for public sculpture are also rarely built into organizations’ budget. Without cyclic maintenance plans, art organizations find sculptures with advanced deterioration, which requires more extensive conservation. Before commissioning a work, art organizations often hold conservation reviews with the artist. This gives the organization a chance to consult with artists about conservation and maintenance strategies but “stringent requirements from an artist can be time-consuming, expensive, and often impossible to follow” (Learner; Rivenc, 2012). With the complexity of sculpture materials, artist intent, location, community involvement, and environmental factors, public art managers, from different types of public art organizations, must often tackle maintenance and conservation on a case-by-case basis; thus making it a challenge to establish standard best practices and policies dealing with preservation.

The purpose of this study was investigate the practices and philosophies around modern and contemporary public sculpture conservation across three types of art organizations in the Seattle area. This study will take a broad look at public sculpture conservation, focusing less on individual conservation projects and looking more into the strategic conservation plans of the art organizations. The study will be framed by the following research questions.

Research Questions:

1. How is public sculpture conservation different or similar across three types of art organizations (government, private, and public)?
2. What are some of the broad conservation challenges Seattle organizations face and how does each organization approach them?
3. To what extent do current practices meet the needs of different art organizations and are these practices sustainable?
4. How do conservation philosophies affect other aspects of managing public art?

Literature surrounding conservation of public art assumes the need to preserve sculpture, however, there is little discussion of the lifetime or future of contemporary public sculpture as a whole. This research will help collection managers at public art organizations compare conservation practices across many organizations and start a conversation around the long-term effects of public sculpture management.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research is to investigate the practices and philosophies around contemporary public sculpture conservation across three types of art organizations in the Seattle area. This research is primarily situated within literature on the structure of public art organizations, social value of public art, and public art conservation case studies.

### Who Manages Public Art?

The term “public art” has varying definitions depending on the context. Researchers in public art usually define their parameters for use of the term acknowledging that there is not a universal definition. Ruri Yampolsky, former director of the Public Art Program for the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs for the City of Seattle (now Seattle Arts Commission), specifies the difference between *art in public places* and *public art*. He states, “*art in public places* is all art in the public realm, regardless of who has provided it--be it a museum, a corporate entity, or government agency. I define *public art* as art funded by the government” (GCI, 2012).

Contrarily, Cameron Cartiere (2016) recognizes a broad view of public art in her research tracing the contributions of social practice to public art history. She notes that in terms of social practice, there is a need to expand the definition “beyond publicly owned streets, buildings, parks, rights of way, and civic spaces to include privately owned spaces that allowed public access (such as shopping malls, banks, housing developments, etc.) and even private works that were in public view” (p. 14). Whereas Tom Finkelpearl (2000) purposely does not define the term public art. He explains, “When I use the term ‘public art,’ I am relying on an understanding of common usage. Public art is often sponsored by public agencies, usually outside museums and galleries, and addresses audiences outside the confine of the art world” (p. x).

Only recently have scholars tried to tackle crafting a common definition. Cartiere and Willis (2008) state, “public art is outside of museums and galleries and must fit within one of the following categories:

- 1) in a place freely accessible or visible to the public: *in public*
- 2) concerned with, or affecting the community or individuals: *public interest*
- 3) maintained for or used by the community of individuals: *public place*
- 4) paid for by the public: *publicly funded* (p. II )

For the purpose of this study, “public sculpture” is any three-dimensional artwork that fits into the public art definition above. This definition of public art and public sculpture was chosen because it encompasses the broadest range of sculpture found in public places. It includes both of Ruri Yampolsky’s (2012) definitions of *art in public spaces* and *public art* to avoid confusion. This study refers to public sculptures with intended permanence when talking about maintenance and conservation and does not include performance or temporary installations.

The idea of public art is relatively new, starting in the 1960s with interest peaking around 1989 at the end of the Reagan era. Since then, government, private, and museum public sculpture collections have grown and new types of public art have emerged. Especially in metropolitan areas, art is all around us--in bus tunnels, city streets, parks, office buildings, and even power stations (Cartiere, 2016). Public sculpture is commissioned and bought by many organizations within one city space and therefore managed differently.

With such a broad definition and wide variety of art in the public realm, public art organizations often face an identity crisis. In her survey of public art organizations, Barbara Goldstein (2005) spoke with Sean Elwood at the Seattle Arts Commission Portable Works Collection. When asked to describe the organization he said,

“we are not a museum, although we do sometimes use the methods of museums. We are not an art center, although we do have a collection (if no ‘gallery’), nor are we a private collection or a commercial gallery. What we most resemble is a corporate collection that shows art in work spaces, although our responsibilities and processes are very different from those of such a collection” (p. 77).

Unlike private corporate and public museum collections who are funded primarily through operational budgets and endowments, many government public art organizations receive funding from a One Percent for Art program. These programs take one percent of a government-funded construction budget and use it to commission or buy artwork for the entity in the construction space such as a public building, park, or infrastructure project. Barbara Goldstein examines the structure of these programs and notes that organizations receiving funding from government construction may “spell out how much money can be spent for what purposes, such as allowable administrative expenses and expenses for maintenance of artworks”. However, other arts organizations may not have budget requirements and do not detail their intended expenses (Goldstein, 2005 p. 17). Although many government art organizations receive the same type of one percent construction budget funding, they vary widely in size and management.

### **Why Does it Matter?**

Seattle has one of the nation’s first public art collections with the Seattle Arts Commission (Goldstein, 2005). The rise of public art started with government collections after the 1960s with One Percent for Art programs. Back then, the main drive for placing art around public spaces was economic, “it was part of a larger package that the city and the country were undertaking to fix their image and fix their economy” (Finkelpearl, 2000 p. 26). Goldstein notes public art programs and plans usually come about because someone wants to accomplish something for example commemorating an event, enhancing a transportation system, or improving a neighborhood, etc (Goldstein, 2005). Commissioning and buying works of art were

based on the notion of creating a type of outdoor museum or a space to aid in branding a city.

Since then, public art has evolved and taken on different roles within urban spaces; the purpose and uses of public art have become increasingly complicated and situational. Artists start conveying new ideas, communities become more involved, and the art is more incorporated into a space (Fleming, 2007).

When the Seattle Central Public Library opened in 2004, the reasons for commissioning and purchasing public artwork became more than an economic drive for the city. The inclusion of public art aimed to capture the intention of the individual artists and address the visitors using the space. The Seattle Central Library features works by internationally recognized artists such as Ann Hamilton, Gary Hill, Tony Oursler, and George Tsutakawa, all of whom have permanent installation works within the library. Ann Hamilton's *LEW Floor* consists of 7,200 square feet of hardwood floor with relief wooden typeface. The work is located in the world languages section of the library and each wooden plank has lines of text in different languages. Hamilton wanted to create an environment where "the entire body experiences the sensation of reading" (Melkisethian, 2004). Examples like this illustrate public artwork commissioning in Seattle has started moving away from entirely economic motivations and instead is centered around a sense of place and contextual experience.

Public opinion and experience is an increasingly important factor in public art projects. In his book *Dialogues in Public Art*, Tom Finkerpearl (2000) interviews twenty-five artists, architects, public officials, and stakeholders about a range of public art projects. He chooses five public works to illustrate four controversies in public art. The first controversy about *Tilted Arc* addresses public reaction and historical precedents for public outrage. The second controversy about three bronze sculptures addresses public interpretation and symbolism. The third addresses

Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* and the dichotomy of bringing artist creativity and originality and public perception. Last, Finkerpearl interviews the designers of *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, a series of posters temporarily on city buses. This controversy shows how media and public policy can affect public art projects. All of these cases address community involvement and show how art affects the public and vice versa. By highlighting social controversies in public art, researchers show "there is anecdotal evidence: letters of reactionary debate that indicate at least some of the general public take notice" (Cartiere, 2016 p. 19). Public art is not static, and researchers are beginning to measure how it can affect people's lives within a space.

Using sculpture in urban design and placemaking has also become increasingly popular. Ronald Lee Fleming collected a series of case-studies around the U.S. highlighting the ability of artworks to create a sense of place. "Place is not merely what was there, but also the interaction of what was there and what happened there. . . certainly those who have a design sensibility instantly grasp the tactile components that create the physical image of a place" (Fleming, 2007 p. 14). One of the sculpture cases studies how artist David Tureau connected a civic square with New Orleans' musical heritage. He pays homage to the blues musician, Henry Roeland Byrd. Tureau claims the site of the square is alive with the sound of train horns, engines, and conversation and wanted to use these aspects of the space to pull the artwork together. He notes, "the hero bronze on a pedestal in the park rarely conveys much more than the physical features and costume of the hero. The exceptions always require some combination of setting, abstraction in ideas and shared space" (Fleming, 2007 p. 202). In this way, the art is site-specific and one cannot exist without the other.

Since the boom of public art programs in the 1980s, there has been an ever-increasing creativity and complexity within public art. Managers of public art need to consider economic reasons, public experience, social reflection, and creating a sense of place when maintaining the works. They also need to consider the artist's intent, environmental factors, how to care for new materials, and the audience the art was made for. Almost four decades after the majority of public sculptures were commissioned, we are starting to see that these community projects and placemakers have begun to look shabby, people are losing interest, and there is a growing concern that art organizations lack the resources to revive this type of art.

### **What are the Problems? How do they Manage it?**

Since the start of major public art programs in the 1960s through the 1990s, art collections have grown and integrated themselves in urban areas. Philanthropic private collectors display their art publicly and museums have created outdoor sculpture parks and gardens outside their walls. However, decades after the commission of these sculptures, we are starting to see how these works stand the test of time. The mass amount of sculpture commissioned in the last four decades is starting to age and the number of sculptures deteriorating are exponentially increasing (Yampolsky in Goldstein, 2005).

Public art faces environmental conditions not present in museums and gallery spaces such as extreme temperatures, moisture, UV light exposure, vandalism, accidental damage, and inherent vices in the materials. Sculpture is particularly difficult to maintain and conserve because they can contain multiple materials and components, they often are site-specific relying also on the condition of their surroundings for a viewing experience, and they are usually placed in more precarious locations than a painting on a wall for example (Learner, 2012).

With so many physical and philosophical components to sculpture, “there is often uncertainty about the exact role a conservator plays in the decision-making process with the range of professionals involved in such undertaking” (Learner, 2013 p. V). The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) held a focus meeting in 2012 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to address the needs of conservators in the conservation process. A group of conservators, artist’s estates, studio representatives from the paint industry, collection managers, and curators met to discuss main issues in conservation of twentieth-century outdoor painted sculpture and possible responses to these issues. They identified five categories of conservation issues: ethical/philosophical, material/technical, legal, management, and communication/information change (Learner, 2012). These categories are examined within the literature through a series of case studies.

#### *Ethical/philosophical*

Participants in the GCI focus meeting expressed the need to educate audiences beyond the field of conservation about the profession, “specifically, that stripping earlier paint systems and repainting is often necessary and expected for objects intended for an outdoor setting.” Oscar Chiantore (2012) explored the philosophical and ethical considerations in conserving contemporary art. He highlighted the difficulty of working with contemporary materials and conserving works while the artist is still alive and involved with the process. Chiantore used a series of conservation case studies to illustrate a fine line between refabricating and creating an entirely new work. He urged caretakers of contemporary art to “consider to what length one is willing to go to salvage the contemporary heritage even at a cost of distorting it, not only in its original meaning, but above all in its relationship with its surroundings, altering the work’s

visual, tactile, and emotional effects--all the elements important to the experience of contemporary art” (Chiantore, 2012).

### *Material/technical*

Participants in the GCI focus meeting mainly discussed paint materials for outdoor sculpture. They noted the term “life expectancy” is used within the paint industry but the durability standards are not necessarily relevant to coating artworks. For example, changes in the gloss or color of the paint may come before the “life expectancy” failure (Learner, 2012). In terms of art, when paint or other materials change appearance, the life expectancy is over even if a protective coating is still intact. “There is no universal method for measuring gloss, texture, color, and composition of coatings” and therefore conservators and arts professionals find it difficult to determine the point where conservation is necessary to keep the integrity of the artwork (Learner, 2012). Chiantore also highlighted the question facing caretakers of art: at what point is an object so unrecognizable from the original that it be considered an object of “historical testimony” and no longer the work of art (Chiantore, 2012)?

Linda Beerkins called for the need to differentiate sculptures within a museum and gallery setting and public sculpture when it comes to conservation. She noted, “traditional standards in conservation are too limiting for outdoor sculptures and that new standards have to be agreed upon by conservation professionals--standards that give precedence to preserving an artwork’s identity over saving original material” (Beerkins, 2012 p. 15).

Conservators are often called in late into the deterioration process of a sculpture. The GCI panelists noted that in these cases, their only options in these situations are to do nothing, or entirely strip paint and repaint a sculpture--there is rarely an in-between (Learner, 2012). Oscar Chiantore, cited in Brandi (1952), was skeptical of a total repainting or re fabrication process.

“If, however, the degradation becomes pronounced, the work’s original aesthetic characteristics are lost and eventually the work is reduced to ‘ruin’, that is, an ‘artifact of human manufacture that presents an appearance that is unrecognizable with respect to the original’”. Sometimes the artist is consulted or brought in to repaint or re fabricate a sculpture with advanced deterioration. Chiantore (2012) noted, “the artist intervention has sometimes been sought out as a precautionary measure to avoid the danger of creating a ‘fake’: if the work is in danger of becoming something other than its original self, at least it does not lose its originality” (Chiantore, 2012). Chiantore highlighted the importance of staying true to the original intent of the artist, but also raises other questions: When does a work become “something other than its original self” even if the artist repairs it?

### *Legal*

Conservators and art professionals were generally unclear how legally binding artist’s instructions are. They asked, “who ultimately has the legal and moral ‘right’ to make the decision on a treatment” especially when “very stringent requirements from an artist can be time-consuming, expensive, and often even impossible to follow” (Learner, 2012 p. 17)?

### *Management*

Management issues include “how to deal with public interaction with sculptures and how to best implement preventative conservation strategies” such as landscaping, artwork placement, art cleaning, condition monitoring, and information displayed to the public (Learner, 2012 p. 18). This type of preventative maintenance can prolong periods between conservation and prevent advanced deterioration leading to costly and time consuming refabrication. Participants in the GCI focus meeting felt there is a “lack of established maintenance programs in the public arena compared to that of many museum collections” (Learner, 2012 p. 18).

The literature examines many individual sculpture conservation cases but rarely examines the general practices of an organization or area. Ruri Yampolsky writes about founding public art programs and addresses the need for maintenance, noting that most public art collections do not come fully formed, but rather they are developed over a long period of time with many acquisition methods. As public art collections grow, “the realization dawns that one of the historic bronzes bequeathed to the city is developing a bad case of corrosion and is in dire need of a conservator’s attentions. Indeed, it is with just this sort of realization that planning for maintenance often begins” (Yampolsky in Goldstein, 2005 p. 210). Maintenance is necessary for the sculpture to continue to look aesthetically pleasing and prolongs periods between conservation treatments. However, maintenance for public sculptures is difficult to manage with shrinking budgets and an increasing number of works. Yampolsky calls for newer arts programs to develop maintenance plans and strategize on the long-term conservation budget before commissioning works. When developing these plans, organizations must choose who will perform maintenance and conservation work--are they the gardener, facilities manager, conservator, or other staff member?

The American Institute for Conservation (AIC) (2016) realizes that without a standardized professional licensing system for conservators, anyone can call themselves a conservator. The AIC aims to professionalize and unify the conservation field by developing a code of ethics and centralizing resources for conservators. However, the field still lacks an accreditation process and it is difficult to identify the level of training necessary to work on large, complex public sculpture.

*Communication*

The lack of communication among conservators can inhibit development in the field. There is not a centralized information hub to share knowledge and the field lacks accreditation standards for conservation. GCI focus meeting participants also noted, “specifics on treatments are difficult to obtain from conservators, due to liability fears as well as a general unwillingness to talk about failures” (Learner, 2012 p. 19).

Yngvason (2012) also held a panel with artists, conservators, and museum professionals with the purpose of discussing major questions in maintaining sculpture. He challenged caretakers of sculpture to consider: “What counts as permanence in ever changing public spaces? How long should a place-specific artwork be maintained if everything changes around it? Are museum standards of preservation applicable to public art, or does public art somehow have less lasting value because of its place?” (p. 36). The purpose of the panel discussion was not to come to a consensus but to bring forth much needed opinions and more dialog around the care and ethics of caring for public sculpture.

### *Summary*

While the existing literature provides insight on the history of public art, social value of public art, and conservation challenges, it lacks sources on how arts organizations structure their maintenance and conservation programs. Barbara Goldstein (2005) calls out the need for organizations to start talking about their programs: “As the line between the ephemeral and the enduring becomes increasingly imprecise...it is crucial for artists and arts organizations to develop and articulate theoretical positions and conceptual clarity with respect to the forms, dispersal, and duration of the work” (p. 96). Goldstein (2005) examined the “philosophies and methods that have been adopted for placing art in the public realm” (p. x) but the literature lacks a study of philosophies and methods for maintaining this art in the public realm. To address this

gap, this study will investigate the practices and philosophies around contemporary public sculpture conservation across three types of art organizations in the Seattle area.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Approach

This descriptive qualitative study uses a stratified purposive sampling method to investigate the practices and philosophies around contemporary public sculpture conservation across three types of art organizations in the Seattle area. Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted to attain greater understanding of the following research questions:

1. How is public sculpture conservation different or similar across three types of art organizations (government, private, and public)?
2. What are some of the broad conservation challenges Seattle organizations face and how does each organization approach them?
3. To what extent do current practices meet the needs of different art organizations and are these practices sustainable?
4. How do conservation philosophies affect other aspects of managing public art?

### Research Sites

Six sites were chosen to represent the three categories of public art collections described by Barbara Goldstein (2005) in her survey of public art organizations: government, private, and a public museum sculpture collection. Seattle is home to all three types of organizations and at least one site from each category is examined in this study to give a broad representation to organizations in Seattle. The largest amount of public sculpture in Seattle is managed by government organizations, therefore, three sites were chosen for this group. Two sites were selected for smaller private art organizations and one site for the only public museum sculpture park in the city represented that category. All sites are located in King County, Washington and

site choice was contingent upon the site managing an art collection containing sculpture displayed in public or semi-public spaces. Art collection managers and conservation professionals at each organization were invited to participate in this study. All persons interviewed aid in managing the art collection at their organization and play a role in making conservation decisions about the artwork. Almost all participants were recommended by their peers and co-workers as the person to talk with about conservation in their organization. A list of interview participants, as well as their organizations, can be found in Table 1.

Table 1, Research Study Interview Participants

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Participant Name</i>	<i>Participant Job Title</i>
Sound Transit	Tim Marsden	Art Collection Specialist
Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA)	Janae Huber	Collection Manager
Seattle Arts Commission	Tiffany Hendrick	Conservation Technician
The Lumiere Group	Jessica Bellingham	Assistant Registrar
Perkins Coie	Allison South	Consulting Curator
Seattle Art Museum, Olympic Sculpture Park	Nick Dorman Lauren Mellon	Chief Conservator Director of Museum Services and Chief Registrar

*Note: The range of job titles in the above table suggests differences in the way each organization approaches conservation.*

*Government*

STart, Sound Transit's public art program founded in the late 1990s and funded by government construction dollars, features over 300 works placed in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties. Most of STart's artworks are classified as sculpture and are located outdoors or in transit tunnels. Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) was established in the 1970s, it is the oldest and largest collection of the six sites selected for this research. They have over 4,000 portable works including small-scale sculpture and 444 large-scale outdoor public sculptures in their collection. Similar to ArtsWA, Seattle Arts Commission was also one of the first government city art collections in the country.

*Private*

The Perkins Coie art collection and The Lumiere Group represent the private art collections in this study. Perkins Coie has 299 artworks in their Seattle office location and thousands of works spread across their offices around the world. Perkins Coie primarily collects two-dimensional artwork but has a small, portable sculpture collection that amounts to less than 10% of their total artwork. The Seattle office currently displays most of their artwork and has a vitrine for rotating three-dimensional loaned exhibits. The Seattle office art collection is managed by one, part-time contractor, Allison South. The Lumiere Group is a Seattle-based arts consulting company specializing in museum-standard art collection management for private collections. The Lumiere Group primarily contracts with private collections and corporations in the Seattle area.

*Public Museum*

The Olympic Sculpture Park (OSP) is part of the Seattle Art Museum's (SAM) three sites: The Seattle Art Museum, The Seattle Asian Art Museum, and Olympic Sculpture Park.

The OSP opened in 2007 after repurposing an underdeveloped Seattle property as a public space for art. The sculpture park has 24 large-scale sculptures managed primarily by Conservator Elizabeth Brown. Chief Conservator Nick Dorman and Director of Museum Services and Chief Registrar, Lauren Mellon were employees of SAM when the OSP opened and aided in the planning process.

### **Interview Process**

Interviews took place in person and by telephone between March 2, 2017 and April 13 2017. They were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. While the majority of interviews followed a standard guide (see Appendix I), slight modification to the instrument were made to adapt specific site circumstances. For example, to ensure client confidentiality, the interview with Jessica Bellingham from The Lumiere Group addressed the company's general practices and comments were not affiliated with any one private art collection in particular. The questions on the interview instrument were therefore, generally about The Lumiere Group, their background, ideal conservation views, and services rather than focusing on their practices with one specific collection. The interview with Jessica Bellingham was performed over the phone. Lauren Mellon's interview instrument was abbreviated and slightly altered from the original to capture her involvement at OSP as registrar and to avoid conversation overlap with Nick Dorman's interview. Although there are variations in the interview guide, the fundamental premise of the questions was similar throughout all interviews and therefore incorporated into the broader case descriptions.

**Data analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed and emergent coding was used to identify themes among responses. Answers to questions were first coded into categories based on the four research questions, then coded into sub-categories within each research question to examine maintenance, conservation, funding, sustainability, and preservation approach of each organization. Coding the interviews produced themes around conservation reviews and conservation review documents were analyzed.

**Limitations**

The four sites chosen are not generalizable to all art organizations in the greater Seattle area however, together, they represent a major portion of the public artwork within the city. Additionally, the government, private, and public museum sites in this study cannot wholly represent each type of organization on a national level, but can represent major patterns and themes on a city scale. All interview participants were chosen based on their role in making conservation decisions. However, this study does not acknowledge other factors within the organization that may affect conservation strategies and philosophies. For example, this study did not interview directors of this organization about their vision or strategic plan overall.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

### Results: Case Study Descriptions

This chapter summarizes the results of this research. It is organized by first describing interview results for the government, private, and public museum collections respectively; and concludes with a cross-comparison of the results from each organization and discusses key themes. Table 2 below provides a brief overview of each case included in this study.

Table 2, Case Profiles

Organization	Participant/ interviewee	Collection Size	Collection Location
<i>Government</i>			
Sound Transit	Tim Marsden, Art Collection Specialist	300 artworks primarily sculpture	Transit stations in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, Washington
Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA)	Janae Huber, Collection Manager	444 outdoor permanent sculptures, 3,700 portable works which includes sculpture	70% in K-12 schools, also colleges, universities, and state agencies in 36 of the 39 counties in Washington
Seattle Arts Commission	Tiffany Hendrick, Conservation Technician	400 permanent sculptures, 3,000 portable works which includes sculpture	In public buildings and outdoors around Seattle
<i>Private</i>			
The Lumiere Group	Jessica Bellingham, Assistant Registrar	Many clients in the Seattle area with varying collection sizes	Various clients with public or semi-public collection in office buildings
Perkins Coie	Allison South, Consulting Curator	299 artworks, about 10% portable sculpture	Inside Perkins Coie headquarters office in Seattle
<i>Public Museum</i>			
Seattle Art Museum, Olympic Sculpture Park (OSP)	Nick Dorman, Chief Conservator Lauren Mellon, Director of Museum Services and Chief Registrar	24 large-scale outdoor sculptures	Mostly outdoors in the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle

## **Government**

Government art organizations manage a federal, state, or municipal public art collections. Seattle was one of the first cities in the country to pass a One Percent for Art ordinance that uses one percent of capital improvement construction project budgets to purchase and install artwork in Seattle. Seattle Arts Commission and Sound Transit are funded through this system.

Washington State Arts Commission receives similar funding from a state ordinance that gives one half of one percent of capital improvement construction budgets to art.

### *Maintenance/Condition/Inventory*

Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA), Sound Transit, and the Seattle Arts Commission all started maintenance programs after the collections were founded. They outsource and centralize aspects of sculpture maintenance depending on geographical location of their collection. The location of sculptures plays a role in how well these organizations can inventory their collections and how much they know about their sculpture condition. With artwork distributed over a large geographical area, ArtsWA and Sound Transit both outsource maintenance work to other partners and vendors. ArtsWA, with the largest and most expansive collection, relies on condition report and inventory information from non-arts professionals who work in the buildings or schools where the art is located. For example, the facilities manager at an elementary school will send a brief condition report and inventory of the three artworks in their school annually to Washington State Arts Commission. This results in varying styles and degrees of condition reports but relieves the Arts Commission staff in Olympia, Washington from having to travel to each site all around the state. ArtsWA also relies on partner sites for sculpture maintenance because they do not have the staff to travel and maintain works. The Collection Manager noted, “The issue for us is...we have never been able to get to the place

where we can take over maintenance...most of our pieces suffer from benign neglect because no maintenance happens at all and they are just sitting there.” This sculpture neglect and creates a disconnect between needing to advocate for major conservation treatments while having no system to sustain the expensive treatment with maintenance. To get a better understanding of the condition of their collection, ArtsWA is performing their first, staff-lead inventory of their collection in 2017. Adam Fah, their first part-time conservation technician is traveling to each site and noting the condition of each artwork and its location.

Sound Transit has one full-time employee, Tim Marsden who is responsible for keeping track of the condition of the collection while they distribute their maintenance work to a variety of vendors. Internally, Sound Transit employees play more of a project management role, figuring out insurance and contracts for vendors who help with cleaning and maintenance rather than performing maintenance themselves. Sound Transit’s biggest challenge with maintaining the sculpture collection is “keeping eyeballs on things”. Tim Marsden noted, “we are just starting to take care of the collection...there is a backlog of projects that need maintenance and you need to triage everything.” Sound Transit is also starting a new maintenance program in 2017 and Tim Marsden will be selecting 50 objects from the collection that need varying degrees of maintenance and cleaning work. This will serve as an inventory that will be used by Sound Transit when they hire an outside vendor to travel around and systematically clean the work. Outsourcing the maintenance work will leave more time for Tim Marsden to project manage other conservation projects while still giving him the opportunity to centralize “keeping eyes on” the condition of the collection.

Seattle Arts Commission centralizes their maintenance work with a full-time Conservation Technician, Tiffany Hendrick. She is responsible for all inventory, maintenance,

and conservation of the collection, thus ensuring consistency and quality of information about the sculptures and any conservation work being carried out. She noted, “I manage the conservation and maintenance from all aspects. I determine the treatment schedules and will execute the treatments as well”.

Geography plays a major role in the systems used for maintaining artworks as well as the quality of condition reporting and general knowledge of the collections. Sound Transit and the Seattle Arts Commission have an advantage of centralizing their maintenance around one staff member, making it easier to have a full understanding of the needs of the collection. ArtsWA has a larger collection reaching across the entire state which makes it difficult to centrally manage maintenance and conservation needs, however, they still try and to conduct condition reports, maintenance, and conservation.

### *Conservation*

Just as maintenance needs vary, conservation treatments are both outsourced and centralized within these three government organizations for different reasons. Each organization, though having similar types of public sculpture, find different types of conservators. While they rely on partner agencies to maintain the artwork, ArtsWA is responsible for major conservation projects. In the 1970s when a lot of the sculptures were commissioned, there was not a maintenance or conservation program in place. Now, they have a backlog of conservation projects and find it challenging to prioritize with very few staff. With only one part-time conservation technician, Adam Fah, they need to be creative when prioritizing which works need to be conserved. They started to partner with the schools and universities for both maintenance and conservation projects. For example, ArtsWA hired a conservator to evaluate and write up a scope of work for a sculpture at a community college and then the college hired a construction

company and carpenters to execute the work. Collection Manager Janae Huber explained her reasoning for distributing conservation work: “When you are trying to take care of a collection of 4,500 objects, which is a better choice, hiring a conservation tech or a carpenter and being able to do 10 projects in a year or hiring a conservator and only being able to conserve one project per year?”

Sound Transit outsources conservation projects but has one full-time employee who spends the majority of time in a project management role when it comes to coordinating with artists, fabricators, and other vendors to do work on the art. Sound Transit focuses on being “proactive rather than reactive” when it comes to sculpture conservation. They do not have a conservator on staff but has set aside a budget “to have a couple conservators at the end of a phone so [they] can call them up with a question and they answer it and bill [them] for it”. In this way, Sound Transit has fewer large-scale conservation projects and more cleaning and maintenance projects that the Collection Specialist can manage.

Seattle Arts Commission centralizes conservation by having a full-time Conservation Technician, Tiffany Hendrick to perform most conservation work on the collection. Hendrick finds access to the sculpture a major challenge. The biggest challenge for Seattle Arts Commission is getting access to sculpture that needs conservation. Seattle Arts Commission did not consider maintenance and conservation work until recently when they were planning and installing sculptures. Sculptures commissioned in the past did not have a conservation technician to review the location and materials of the sculpture. Now, they find it logistically challenging to maneuver around and thoroughly clean sculptures in some locations. A simple conservation procedure can end up being technically challenging.

*Budget/Timing/Prioritizing*

All three government art organizations operate on a type of One Percent for Art budget that comes from capital improvement construction projects, but some of them are more restricted on how they spend these dollars. This affects their conservation prioritization strategies.

Washington State Arts Commission is funded with a state one half of one percent for art law-- one half of one percent of a state construction budget needs to be used for acquiring art.

However, this budget does not consider maintenance and conservation costs. The legislature has made conservation an allowable expense from the construction budget, but it restricts how much can be allotted to annual conservation. In order to keep sculptures in good condition on a low budget, ArtsWA partners with the sites where sculptures are located to take care of the art.

Sound Transit and Seattle Arts Commission are at an advantage by having fewer restrictions on how they spend their annual budgets. Sound Transit has spent the past three years prioritizing a backlog of maintenance and conservation projects and finding a simple treatment schedule that can work into the annual budget. The annual budget and timing plays a huge factor in treating sculptures. The Collection Specialist in charge of conservation noted, "If there's a bit of rust on there, do you freak out or do you just monitor it for a bit until you have the time to deal with it?" Contracting a vendor takes a lot of time because of Sound Transit's rigid insurance requirements. Tim Marsden explained, "I have had to negotiate with risk management the level of insurance that they require. We are very very strict on our insurance requirements at Sound Transit and for good reason--trains are involved." This forces Sound Transit to carefully assess what needs conservation and what can wait until a later time.

The Seattle Art Commission is not as constrained as Sound Transit, their budget is more of "a moving target" as they often adjust for expenses and emergencies not anticipated such as vandalism or severe sculpture damages resulting from managing artwork in public places.

However, working in one of the city's government buildings with diverse professions has unique advantages. Seattle Arts Commission relies on partnerships to be able to maintain their unpredictable collection on a tight budget. The Conservation Technician relied heavily on interdepartmental collaboration: "It's the way that we stretch our budget, we are able to tackle a lot of things and keep a lot of things in good condition that we may not otherwise have the budget for...If we are able to work interdepartmentally for example with an engineer or electrician that already works at a facility, it saves a lot in terms of us being able to get more done for what we've got to work with our budget. I think that is unique."

### *Sustainability*

Hendrick from Seattle Arts Commission explains a concerning trend in public art organizations, "Works are increasingly added but conservation funding is not. Funding for innovative conservation methods is fairly uncommon". ArtsWA finds this phenomenon particularly challenging with the oldest collection of the three organizations. In the 1970s when works were being commissioned, they did not discuss how these sculptures were to be maintained. Now, they are faced with a backlog of conservation projects while continuing to add new works into the collection. The collection manager at ArtsWA noted, "If I could redesign our program from scratch we would be in charge of maintenance and conservation and we would have the appropriate resources to do that. Had we done that from the outset in the 1970s, our collection would not be the size that it is". The current staff and budget cannot maintain much more than their current number of sculptures so they have established new ways to control the condition of the collection, defining a lifespan for the artworks, and performing conservation material reviews with artists before commissioning.

All three organizations recently started defining the lifespan of their sculptures before commissioning and have incorporated a conservation materials review in the design process, though they do not all have formalized policies. Defining the lifespan of a sculpture helps the collection manager at ArtsWA make decisions about deaccessioning a work. The lifespan of the artwork is now defined by the life of the building or site where ArtsWA commissioned it--when the site or building is damaged or demolished, so is the artwork. For example, K-12 schools in Washington are designed to last about 30 years, so when commissioning new artwork, artists agree to make a work that will last at least 30 years. To enforce this, ArtsWA came up with a materials handbook for artists. The handbook describes potential sculpture materials, wood, stone, steel, etc., and explains the maintenance and conservation needs of each material. The artist meets with the conservation technician, proposes their artwork, and adjusts to reduce potential maintenance and conservation costs in the future. The Collection Manager noted this handbook helps them “do some preventive work up-front on their acquisitions to try and build more durable pieces”. However, this practice also reduces the use of experimental materials in the sculpture collection and ArtsWA tends to shy away from commissioning works with delicate or technology components that could potentially malfunction or become obsolete within 30 years.

Sound Transit has not implemented formal policies around commissioning artwork as ArtsWA but they also expect sculptures to last 30 years or more. They do not have a formal conservation review, but the artwork “goes through a lot of scrutiny during the design phase”. Sound Transit tries to discuss conservation and maintenance needs with the Art Collection Specialist before installation to avoid premature degradation. Similar to ArtsWA, Sound Transit avoids commissioning works with experimental materials or with technology components.

Seattle Arts Commission expects the contemporary sculpture commissioned in their collection to last 30-50 years. Just as the other two government organizations, Seattle Arts Commission holds a conservation review before commissioning new works. However, they are more lenient when it comes to experimental materials and technology based works and find it is important to redefine lifespan to be able to include a variety of sculpture in the collection. The Conservation Technician noted, “I think that Seattle (Arts Commission) has been somewhat progressive in accessioning technology-based works...We understand going in that the works are subject to deaccession after about 10 years...With technology-based works in particular or experimental or new materials that have not had time for testing, it does become a challenge to predict lifespan.” Redefining lifespan is a relatively new idea for Seattle Arts Commission and it helps them determine a time to deaccession after work has severely degraded.

### *Approach*

Geography plays a major role in how government organizations structure their maintenance programs and conservation work. Sound Transit and Seattle Arts Commission have art collections within a smaller geographical range and therefore employ one person within their organization to inventory and keep track of conditions. Sound Transit prioritizes maintenance and is implementing a new program, moving funds to contract a cleaning vendor that will hopefully inhibit deterioration on sculptures. Seattle Arts Commission has been successful managing both maintenance and conservation with one employee. Their conservation technician has a good idea of the state of the entire collection but needs to reach out to other people for expertise. ArtsWA’s collection however, spans throughout the state and they must reach out to partners and vendors to keep track of the collection. The Collection Manager noted, “We just have some fundamental things that we are more behind on than our peers and they are

challenging for us because of geography. Those things have forced our hand.” ArtsWA finds it difficult to justify major conservation treatments for neglected sculptures because they know they will not be able to maintain them after treatment. Instead, they partner with their sites and find someone who is not a conservator who can repair the sculpture for a lower cost.

The government organizations realize it is difficult to keep track of the conditions of their collections and are just recently creating new systems to inventory and condition report sculptures. After their inventory when they have a complete view of the conditions, ArtsWA will need to triage maintenance decisions. Seattle Arts Commission relies on the same one person to inventory, maintain, and conserve the sculpture collection. When sculptures are “placemaking” and share the lifespan of a particular site, it is more important for these government organizations to be proactive, continually keep the sculpture looking clean and neat, rather than wait to get the budget a few years down the line.

Ultimately, defining a lifespan for sculptures aids government organizations in justifying a time to deaccession. Deaccessioning severely degraded works helps ease the backlog of maintenance and conservation projects within their collections. It also aids in making commissioning works more sustainable by keeping the collection a manageable size with a small staff and limited budget.

### **Private**

There are many private art collectors who display their collections publicly or semi-publicly. Some of the largest corporate art collections in the United States such as Progressive Insurance, Bank of America, and JPMorgan Chase art collections display their art publicly to connect with their employees and clients. These collections are usually displayed within semi-public corporate campuses. Seattle is home to many corporate art collections, however, unlike

museum and government collections, they are more private about how they manage their collections and the financials behind them. Both private collection interview participants noted it is common for a once casual corporate art collection to become too large for a board member or facilities person working within the corporation to manage. At some point, it is “natural for a corporate collection to professionalize” and look to a contractor to maintain the collection. As a result, many private collections outsource management to private contractors or consultants such as The Lumiere Group in Seattle.

#### *Maintenance/Condition/Inventory*

Jessica Bellingham explains The Lumiere Group’s relationship with their clients,

“a lot of times a corporation or private individual will realize that they need a more professional group to manage an art collection. It either gets too large or out of hand for a single person to manage, or they just want to professionalize...I think it is kind of a natural progression to move towards museum professionals who have experience with those type of high standards that museums set and implement those museum-based practices in a non-museum setting.”

When collections become too large to handle, private art collectors often hire art consulting companies such as The Lumiere Group or private contractors such as Allison South to manage their collections when they become too large to handle themselves. When Allison South was hired at Perkins Coie in 2008, she was given a list of artwork that needed cataloging, updated locations, and a database system. Now, she inventories the collection and its condition a couple times per year. The Lumiere Group also applies museum registration best practices and performs routine condition inspections and inventory.

Because private sculptures on constant display in a public environment will degrade more quickly than those rotated on and off exhibit in a traditional museum or gallery space, they require even more maintenance. Jessica Bellingham explained,

“Private collectors use their collections differently than museums do because usually it’s on public display and doesn’t get rotated off and if it does it just goes

somewhere else...When something is on constant display it is going to degrade more quickly and require more conservation. Also the nature of it being in a private home or an environment where lots of people are interacting with it on a more regular basis where there may not be a behind-museum-glass-thing that happens in a more public collection.”

Most of Allison South’s maintenance work at Perkins Coie involves routine dusting and cleaning of the sculptures and she is the only one permitted to clean or move the works. The Perkins Coie collection has few sculptures and South noted that there has yet to be a large conservation project. She tries to prevent the need for future conservation by putting the sculptures in protected locations such as the end of a hallway to prevent damage of someone bumping into them as most are in functional office spaces. So far, this strategy has worked however, Allison notes that safety may hinder aesthetic value, “ It is not always ideal for sculptors, artists like people to be able to see all around it but that is hard to do in our space”. The safe locations for the sculptures do not always allow for that type of movement around the piece.

Both corporate art collection contractors communicate with a corporate staff member or department who used to manage a corporation’s art collection. This could be one person at the company who was interested in art, the furniture department, or a cultural sub-committee. Jessica Bellingham explained, “it all depends on how it grew out of the company and where the art collection started but usually whoever has been managing it at least someone from that department will hand off information to us and we go from there.” Allison South works with a committee of attorneys and staff at Perkins Coie who have an interest in art and they come together to discuss potential acquisitions and the scope of the collection multiple times per year.

*Conservation*

Both corporate art contractors noted that their clients readily approve a conservator to come fix a damaged artwork. The Lumiere Group also consults with their curatorial staff if a sculpture ever needs conservation. Jessica Bellingham explained,

“We will do a condition report and take a look at what the damage is and talk to the curator about what she knows about the artist’s work and then we would go to the client and usually if it has severe damage or needs a conservator we would ask the client if we could take it to a conservator and send it to someone who has a specialty with that kind of material.”

The Lumiere Group also facilitates conversations with artists about either fixing an artwork themselves or purchasing a replacement piece for a work. A lot of the conservation work at Perkins Coie is in response to minor damage such as pen marks on the surface. In those cases, Allison South has a few conservators she can contact. South noted that because corporate collections are usually private about their collection, it is difficult to find conservators. She stated, it is hard to find them [conservators] on a web search. I call [The Lumiere Group] team a lot if something comes up and I do not have a vendor or idea of how to proceed. They have been so helpful”. Jessica Bellingham’s perspective on finding conservators is similar. She noted, “no one talks about their private collections so every client is a word of mouth and there is no national organization for independent consulting groups”.

#### *Budget/Timing/Prioritizing*

The Lumiere Group’s clients and Perkins Coie acknowledge that art collections have financial value, especially within corporations that need to disclose the monetary value and show they are taking care of the collection. Bellingham explained,

“I think also if you are a publically traded corporation you have a financial duty to your shareholders because anything that you own that has financial value, and art has financial value, you have to disclose that value and you have to share that you are taking care of that money if that makes sense.”

This financial attentiveness helps with maintaining a reliable yearly budget for conservation. Each year, Allison South requests a budget from Perkins Coie for purchasing art and conservation. The request starts with a review of the collection and what should be conserved. She noted, “the firm recognizes that this [art collection] is an asset for them. It is a physical asset that needs to be maintained”. When an artwork needs conservation she noted Perkins Coie supports the work, “they say, ‘yes, do it right now and do whatever needs to happen’”. Given the average budget allotment, she can conserve about 1-2 artworks that she needs each year.

Although The Lumiere Group’s clients and Perkins Coie recognize the value of conserving sculpture, their consultants see challenges with this in the broader field of private collection management. Allison South noted, “It’s always pretty easy to convince people to come up with funding in a corporate situation even in a non-profit situation for acquiring work and storing it but you have to make sure that there is always that budget for maintenance and repairs.” Jessica Bellingham agreed saying, “I think a lot of private and corporate collectors think you pay the purchase price and you have the artwork and that’s it” so advocating for a maintenance and conservation budget from the beginning is important.

### *Sustainability*

Unlike the expansive government collections such as ArtsWA and Sound Transit, corporate collections in this study are confined to an office or campus and therefore can only grow so large. They do not regularly deaccession site-specific sculptures and do not define a lifespan for their artworks. Allison South mused that they they might refine the Perkins Coie collection in the future in order to keep collecting. She explained, “We might fine-tune what’s already in the collection instead of having a giant collection...We could maybe get a finer piece by a person whose work we acquired long ago at the beginning of their career but maybe trade-

up but get another piece.” The collection would stay in the scope of contemporary artists and Perkins Coie would be able to acquire new works without amassing a collection too large for their office space.

The Lumiere Group provides curatorial and acquisition services as well as collection management. The curator and collections staff at The Lumiere Group work closely together to inform the clients of the maintenance and conservation needs of potential artworks. This is not a formal conservation review panel as government organizations, but it helps the consulting group successfully balance the maintenance needs of the artwork with the expectations of their clients. The Lumiere Group acknowledges that there are many prominent artists who make interesting artwork with new materials and they try and incorporate them into corporate collections when possible. However, they dissuade some of their clients from purchasing sculptures with more advanced maintenance and conservation needs. Jessica Bellingham noted when there is a potential problematic artwork being considered, the curator at The Lumiere Group would collaborate with the collections staff and then “look for other pieces of work by the same artist and see if they work in different material that communicates the same things that is not so difficult to preserve.”

### *Approach*

By and large, the private collections interviewed outsource collection management activities to consultants who bring museum standards to their practice. This includes maintaining artwork for an indefinite amount of time and outsourcing to particular professionals for conservation work. Six out of the eight Lumiere Group employees have a master’s degree in museum studies or previous experience working in a museum or gallery. Allison South previously worked in the Tacoma Art Museum collections department and brings her expertise to

the Perkins Coie collection. The consultants advise the corporate clients on the appropriate amount of staff and resources necessary to manage the collection up front. Both private collection consultants acknowledge that artworks on constant display will degrade more quickly than in a museum or gallery setting. If there is an artwork that they cannot maintain in constant display for an indefinite period of time, they inform their clients upfront during the commissioning process and the client will choose whether to purchase it. Most of the time, the collectors will choose an artwork with longevity. This helps the consultants avoid a backlog of conservation projects and increases the sustainability of the collections. The scope of private collections is defined by space, and not by staff capacity so they will trade-out artwork or commission fewer works to keep the collection from expanding beyond their control over maintenance.

### **Public Museum**

Many public museums have large-scale sculpture in their collections and display them in a sculpture garden or city park. The National Gallery Sculpture Garden in Washington DC for example opened in 1999 and has since used the space to display prominent artists in their collection and as a site for public programming outside of their museum. Seattle's Olympic Sculpture Park (OSP) opened later in 2007 in Seattle and showcases many of the same artists; of the twenty-one artists represented at the OSP, eight of them are also featured at the National Gallery Sculpture Garden. The connection between these two public sculpture parks is reflected in the museum staff. Director of Museum Services and Chief Registrar, Lauren Mellon came to the Seattle Art Museum shortly before they created the OSP because of her experience working as Registrar for the National Gallery Sculpture Garden. Unlike government and private public sculpture collections, the sculptures in a public museum garden or park are treated equally as part

of the museum's collection as a whole. They are either held in public trust by the museum or on extended loan by private collectors with the possibility of future donation.

#### *Maintenance/Condition/Inventory*

Unlike the government and private collections in this study who outsource, all of the maintenance and conservation work in the Olympic Sculpture Park (OSP) is either undertaken or overseen internally by their conservation department. Conservation Technician, Monica Cavagnaro monitors and performs light cleanings at the OSP weekly. The work is monitored and the cleaning methods are devised by conservator Elizabeth Brown. Cavagnaro typically designates one or one half day a week. When the OSP opened in 2007, the Seattle Art Museum conservation department had detailed initial documentation which provided a good baseline understanding of the condition of sculptures in the park.

#### *Conservation*

Timing of conservation is particularly important in the OSP because of high public visitation and Seattle's weather factors. Conservator Elizabeth Brown and a conservation technician perform most conservation treatments during warm, dry weather between May and September. Chief Conservator, Nick Dorman noted, "At this stage, she's got quite a nicely defined schedule of what she wants to achieve in the summer". For example, they repaint the sculpture *Love & Loss* by Roy McMakin every summer or perform most of their waxing treatments during that time. However, they need to consider the "pace" of the OSP conservation work. They cannot constantly have construction sites or maintenance projects interfering with the public's enjoyment of the park.

#### *Budget/Timing/Prioritizing*

With only 24 sculptures in OSP, the conservators at the Seattle Art Museum can predict the timing of their conservation projects and project a long-term budget for conservation.

Elizabeth Brown presents a conservation summary to the board every year to discuss potential conservation projects. Nick Dorman explained the conservation work flow of the OSP,

“is kind of like painting rooms in your house, you do one thing...*Stinger* the Tony Smith was painted before it came into the park but we are reaching the point now where it really needs to be repainted and we have been open for 10 years... So you can see how with 20-25 objects you kind of have years tick by and suddenly we are back at the beginning again and go through the circuit.”

Many of the sculptures in the OSP were gifted by private owners. These sculptures were in private estates with little traffic and potential for damage prior to their relocation and the OSP wants the public visitors to the park to have as close of an experience to viewing these works in a private home as possible. There are very few plinths, warning signs, or barriers within the park so the visitor can be up close to the sculptures. This also creates a high-risk environment for damages from climbing on sculptures, fingerprints, and vandalism. Nick Dorman noted, “that is our objective but we realize we can’t necessarily achieve that objective. I think one concedes that but it doesn't mean you stop trying to make things look as good as they can.”

### *Sustainability*

The sculptures at the OSP are treated as part of the collection at the Seattle Art Museum. As such, conservators have had discussions with some of the artists about the future of their works, discussing how the artists envision the works moving into the future and what aspects of the work are considered essential for the work to continue. For example, the conservators asked Mark Dion at what point he would want the nurse log from *Neukom Vivarium* replaced. Mark di Suvero’s *Bunyon’s Chess* is currently under conservation where the artist’s studio is carving and replacing the wooden logs suspended from the metal frame. Conservators at the OSP plan to continue to replace the logs as they degrade. The mentality at the OSP is that the sculptures will

be continually maintained and conserved for as long as possible though they may not stay in the same location. Some sculptures may be moved around the park or in the case of extreme degradation, moved to offsite storage.

### *Approach*

All of the maintenance and conservation work at the OSP is done or overseen internally by the conservation and registration department at the Seattle Art Museum unless specified by an artist. When the OSP opened in 2007, the conservators already had a good idea about the condition and potential issues with the sculptures. The conservators were involved in the design and planning process of the park to ensure efficiency with sculpture maintenance needs. Nick Dorman noted,

“The sculpture park project was quite good in that we had regular meetings with the whole team. We were at the table during the design process so we could work with the architects, exhibit designers, and landscapers... We could articulate our maintenance needs like access to water and power so that got incorporated into the design process. Plantings, we worked with the designers to specify plants that go around certain things to give them a little protection.”

Now, it is more streamlined for the conservators to predict an annual conservation budget and routine cleaning schedule for the sculptures, yet, they still need to juggle the needs of the sculptures with their annual budget.

### **Discussion: Cross-Case Analysis of Conservation Practices**

*How is public sculpture conservation different or similar across government, private, and public museum collections?*

All three types of organizations have different strategies for centralizing and outsourcing maintenance and conservation work. Because the government public sculpture collections are larger than the private and public museum sculpture collections, it is more difficult for them to

keep up with the demand for maintenance. The government organizations rely heavily on outsourcing to their partners to be able to fit maintenance in their budget, but that practice occurs in varying degrees. For example, ArtsWA does not perform routine maintenance on their sculptures and relies on partner sites to keep up their appearance. However, outsourcing too much as with ArtsWA can lead to a lack of understanding of the collection's condition and quality control of conservation work.

Seattle Arts Commission also relies on their interdepartmental relationships, electricians and engineers for example, to stretch their maintenance and conservation budgets but aims to centralize all the maintenance and conservation work under one conservation technician. When an organization centralizes all the maintenance and conservation responsibilities with one person, they may risk diluting the quality of the work or stretching one staff member too thin. Sound Transit, the newest government collection established in the late 1990s, seems to balance both outsourcing and centralizing maintenance and conservation work. By being able to outsource maintenance early in the sculpture's lifespan, Sound Transit will mitigate major future conservations.

Although private collections often outsource their collection management to private contractors, they have similar maintenance and conservation practices to the public museum collection that centralizes their maintenance and conservation through an internal team. Centralizing all of the work is optimal for the public museum collection at the OSP because it helps them maintain a consistent standard of preservation for the entire collection in the park and within the museum. All four employees interviewed at the private and public museum collections had previous experience working in museums and are therefore familiar with practices necessary for a high quality of care.

*What are some of the broad conservation challenges Seattle organizations face and how does each organization approach them?*

The overarching challenge for all three types of institutions in this study is environmental factors that quickly deteriorate sculpture. However, each organization has different secondary challenges that highlight their differences within the conservation challenges framework provided by Learner (2012): Ethical/philosophical, material/technical, legal, management, and communication. The government organizations have the most difficult time with management. They have the largest collections and therefore find it difficult to “keep eyeballs on things.” With a small staff and collection over a large geographical area, they need to come up with ways to maintain the collection remotely. This may include prioritizing maintenance work and hiring vendors, or partnering with local organizations who can take care of the collection. Overall, this strategy leads to inconsistency with conservation decisions but effectively cuts down on their budget.

The private art consultants find that their main challenge is the lack of education surrounding sculpture care and conservation which Learner (2012) describes as a challenge in philosophical differences. They noted the field of private art management consultants needs to advocate to private collectors to think about maintenance before purchasing the artwork. However, both private art consultants in this study found that their clients readily provide budgets for maintaining the artwork, the main goal is to get them thinking about the budget before they even acquire the art. Both art consultants noted that their clients are very private so all the contracted conservators are found through word of mouth. This is a communication issue, without communication among conservators, this can inhibit development in the field and reduce problem solving abilities.

The OSP find management and materials/technical as their main challenges. They find their conservators are spending a lot of time in a project management role. For major conservation projects, it is often difficult for the conservators to coordinate with the artist, studio, registrar, and equipment vendors to carry out a conservation project on schedule. The scale of each project and research behind it to determine the appropriate treatment and costs, makes it difficult to keep up with the demand for each conservation treatment. The Chief Conservator also noted that materials such as paint technology are constantly changing and updating, therefore it is necessary for them to conserve a sculpture and then come back to it a few years later to update it with the new technology of paint or coating.

*To what extent do the current practices meet the organization's needs and are they sustainable?*

All three types of organizations have recently designed systems to help their collections be more sustainable. The government organizations recently all created new systems to address their need of understanding the condition of their large collections. This year, ArtsWA is performing a first staff-lead inventory of their collection, which will hopefully give them a solid understanding of the collection maintenance and conservation needs. This will either help them justify a higher maintenance budget or force them to prioritize sculptures for deaccessioning in order to keep the collection at a sustainable size with current resources. Sound Transit takes inventory a step further and is inventorying and selecting 50 works per year to receive minor preventative maintenance from a cleaning vendor. This increases the sustainability of their collection by reducing the time between expensive conservation treatments. The Seattle Arts Commission collection is consolidated in a smaller geographical area and therefore they have a good sense of the collection condition already.

The private art organizations outsource collection management to private contractors who employ museum standards. In order to keep these standards of long-term preservation sustainable, consultants can trade-out artworks from the collection. This allows for private organizations to continue collecting artwork without growing their collection too large to maintain.

The public museum, OSP, is the newest organization that opened in 2007. When designing the park, they included input from the conservators at the museum making it more efficient to maintain the sculptures in good condition. Because they treat the sculptures at the OSP as part of the museum collection as a whole, they are able to move sculptures that are deteriorating at the park to off-site storage and mitigate damages that way. The museum will eventually need to prioritize refabrication projects such as *Bunyon's Chess* and the *Neukom Vivarium* and preserving the artwork elsewhere as the OSP ages.

*To what extent do current practices and philosophies affect other aspects of management?*

In all three types of organizations, conservation philosophies have most recently affected aspects of commissioning and acquiring sculpture. All organizations have implemented some sort of review process before commissioning new works in response to the backlog of rapidly deteriorating older sculptures. Other government organizations such as the Seattle Arts Commission are starting to follow ArtsWA's example of reviewing artist's materials before commissioning. ArtsWA's conservation technician created a materials review document that outlines their new stipulations for the lifespan of the new artworks. The collection manager noted, "we are taking a leadership role because we are so far behind". The materials handbook holds the artist accountable for their sculpture with a warranty of two years and does not allow them to use specific materials that are naturally difficult to maintain such as mild steel. By not

allowing artists to use materials with inherent vices or complex technological components, the works may last longer periods of time without maintenance.

Conservation reviews affect the materials artists choose to use and the design of the surrounding space. Only organizations with a staff and budget for maintenance and conservation will be able to experiment with different types of artwork. The organizations in this study would like to be able to commission sculptures with technological components and experimental materials but first they must triage the current maintenance needs of the collections.

Each organization has a different philosophy guiding the lifetime of their sculpture collections. Government organizations often integrate the sculpture's site in with the lifespan, therefore "placemaking" may become a more prominent theme in future government sculptures. ArtsWA and Sound Transit's placemaking sculpture lifespan is determined by the life of the building or site where it is installed. This makes it easier to deaccession sculpture when the site deteriorates instead of relocating or trying to save the original work. Defining lifespan of sculptures before they are commissioned is becoming the new best practice in government organizations. This aids in making commissioning works more sustainable by keeping the collection a manageable size with a small staff and limited budget.

The lifetime of sculptures in private organizations may extend outside their own collections as the artworks move around. For example, contemporary private collections may trade-up their sculpture to make room for new works by the same artists. This will keep with the scope of their contemporary collections and prevent the collection from growing too large to exhibit and manage in their facilities. The lifetime for sculptures in public museum collections is more indefinite. The OSP in Seattle continues to routinely replace parts of sculptures until they

reach unforeseen ethical dilemmas. Eventually, this is something they will have to address but they hope it will be in the distant future.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Sculptures commissioned in the last four decades are starting to age and the number of sculptures needing maintenance and conservation are increasing (Yampolsky in Goldstein, 2005). Because of this, it is important to examine how these public art organizations grapple with the needs of these sculptures as they are forced to answer questions posed by their peers: “What counts as permanence in ever changing public spaces? How long should a place-specific artwork be maintained if everything changes around it? Are museum standards of preservation applicable to public art, or does public art somehow have less lasting value because of its place?” (Yngvason, 2012, p. 36). Because the literature lacks specifics on how arts organizations structure their maintenance and conservation programs in response to these pressing preservation challenges, the purpose of this study was to investigate the practices and philosophies around contemporary public sculpture conservation across three types of art organizations in the Seattle area.

### Conclusions

While each public art organization manages contemporary public sculpture collections, they face different circumstances and challenges. Whether it is performing their first inventory, professionalizing a standard of care by hiring a private contractor, or streamlining their existing practice, results from this study suggest that many public art organizations are just starting to implement new maintenance and conservation practices to maximize resources.

The main conservation challenges these Seattle organizations face are management, communication, ethical/philosophical, and material/technical, in keeping with Learner’s (2012) framework. The government organizations face management challenges with caring for large collections spanning across a wide area. The private organizations face philosophical challenges

with juggling the expectations of their clients and the needs of their collections and communication challenges with their corporate clients wanting to keep their matters private. The public museum collection also faces management issues with centralizing most aspects of conservation and spending much of their time in project management roles. They must balance the cost and time needed to ethically maintain, research, and devise and implement conservation treatments for their large-scale sculptures in the OSP with the rest of the Seattle Art Museum's collection. They also face material challenges with ever-changing sculpture paint and coating technologies that require them to routinely update sculpture conservations.

All six organizations studied here strive to make their practices more sustainable. The government and private organizations find they need to limit the growth of their collections by either defining a sculpture's lifespan or trading out artworks instead of continually adding new pieces. The public museum aims to maintain the sculptures in the park for as long as possible and have been discussing with artists upon acquisition how they can best replace deteriorating parts of sculptures.

All six organizations perform a type of conservation review before acquiring new works. These reviews or policies can take many forms such as an explicit document, a panel, or simply discussing fabrication with the artist. Newly implemented conservation reviews and material handbooks can also limit the scope of artwork within the collections to be more durable and reduce the need for major conservation treatments. The organizations are also starting to define lifespan within their collection. The government organizations have started commissioning more site-specific artwork where the life of the sculpture depends on the life of the site or building. This makes it easier for them to deaccession works and prioritize conservation decisions. Because the three private and public museum collections have fewer site specific sculptures, they

think of the lifespan more permanently in their collections and are focused on preserving the aesthetics instead of the original materials and often will refabricate sculptures (Beerrens, 2012).

### **Implications**

Goldstein (2005), Yampolsky (2005), and Yngvason (2012) all stress the importance of discussing organizational conservation practices. Contemporary public sculpture requires a huge amount of attention and maintenance with experimental materials and environmental factors and we see these challenges in art organizations around the world (Chiantore, 2012). If organizations are going to be commissioning sculpture and spending money on maintenance and conservation, we need to be able to examine these practices, share ideas, and think critically about their implications. This study addresses this initial need to start examining organizational contemporary sculpture conservation practices in a specific region. The initial discussion this study provides about art organization conservation practices can aid in examining other aspects of public art conservation.

The organizations in this study hold conservation reviews before purchasing an artwork. These reviews, especially within government collections, can dictate which materials artists use to try and decrease the maintenance and conservation work needed for the sculpture. This brings into question whether we are losing anything by only commissioning durable materials and does this matter? It also brings into question what the future of public sculpture will look like if organizations allow maintenance needs to dictate from who and what they purchase.

This study highlights the potential threat to private conservators with government organizations outsourcing their conservation projects to other less expensive vendors. This may affect whether private conservators can find work and also may affect the conservation field as it does not have an accreditation system (AIC, 2016). Will the conservators chosen for government

conservation work be able to uphold the American Institute for Conservation's code of ethics when the organizations prioritize cost and efficiency? What do these sculptures and organizations gain and lose from hiring other types of practitioners instead of conservators for maintenance and conservation work?

For future studies, it will be important to look at how these conservation decisions affect public perceptions of the sculpture. In order to start answering Yngvason's (2012) question, "Are museum standards of preservation applicable to public art, or does public art somehow have less lasting value because of its place?" (p. 36), there needs to be research conducted on how the public views public art and if people view it differently than when it is located in museum or gallery spaces. Information on public perception could guide organizations in their conservation practices and attempt to bridge the communication gap between the public and conservators.

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## APPENDIX I

## Interview Guide

**Consent script before interview**

I am asking you to participate in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this research is to investigate the conservation practices and philosophies around modern and contemporary sculpture across three art organizations in the Seattle area. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may stop participation at any time. This interview will be recorded with identifiable information: your name, institution/organization, and job title. Quotes from this interview may be attributed to your name unless otherwise stated by you. If you have any questions or comments now or in the future, you may contact me through email at [mgreutert@gmail.com](mailto:mgreutert@gmail.com) or my advisor Angie Ong at [aong@uw.edu](mailto:aong@uw.edu).

**BACKGROUND**

What is your position at (organization)?

How long have you been at (organization)?

Have you worked in similar positions?

Can you describe the art in your collection in terms of public art/art in public places?

How many works?

Locations?

Scope of collection?

Commissions or acquisitions / year?

Looking broadly at all art organizations with sculpture, what are some of the conservation challenges you see or have experienced?

For Seattle specifically?

**MAINTENANCE**

Can you tell me about your maintenance procedures?

Do the sculptures receive or require cyclic maintenance?

If so, how many?

What do the cyclic maintenance plans look like?

Can you tell me more about your maintenance procedures?

If not, do they require maintenance? What types of maintenance do you factor in?

Are there any challenges you can describe with sculpture maintenance within your organization?

**CONSERVATION**

How do you initially find out about the condition of a sculpture?

Can you describe the general process of conserving a sculpture at your organization?

What do you like about this process?

Is there anything you would change? Why?

On average, how many sculptures receive professional conservation treatment per year?

Is this equal to the number "flagged" for treatment? / Known to need conservation?

Under your current preservation practices, where do you see the sculptures commissioned in 2016 in 5 years? 50 years?

### **DEACCESSIONING**

What is your deaccession policy?

Has \_\_\_ organization ever deaccessioned a sculpture? Tell me more about that.

During your time at organization?