

Preventive Conservation in an Outdoor Sculpture Collection

Sagita Mirjam Sunara¹, Neven Peko², Ivana Miletić Čakširan³

¹ Conservation-Restoration Department, Arts Academy, University of Split, Croatia

² Sisak Municipal Museum, Sisak, Croatia

³ Department of Monument Care in Sisak, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Croatia



Correspondence to: Sagita Mirjam Sunara
Conservation-Restoration Department, Arts Academy,
University of Split, Fausta Vrančića 17a, 21000 Split,
Croatia. Email: sagita.sunara@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

This poster describes some of the measures that can be undertaken to minimize or prevent damage to outdoor artworks. It focuses on the Sculpture Park of Sisak Steelworks, Croatia, a collection of 38 sculptures produced within the scope of the artists' colony that the factory organized between 1971 and 1990. The sculptures are made of steel. Many of them are painted, and several are galvanized. They are placed around the workshops of the former Sisak Steelworks and in the green areas of the nearby workers' housing estate. For years the sculptures were left to the ravages of time and weather (Fig. 1). In 2012 a project aimed at protecting and preserving the collection was initiated. First, the sculptures were inscribed in the Cultural Objects Register of the Republic of Croatia. Next, professional assistance had to be ensured. Collaboration was established with the conservation-restoration study programme in Split. Implementation of preventive conservation measures has been an important segment of the work of students and faculty in the Park, which is conducted during annual conservation-restoration workshops.



Figure 1 Josip Zeman's galvanized steel sculpture *Dark Visions I* of 1983 is severely corroded (photo: S. M. Sunara, May 2016)

DEALING WITH VANDALISM AND NEGLIGENCE

Initially, there were more sculptures, but some were stolen after the Colony ended and probably sold off as scrap metal (Fig. 2 and 3). In 2013 the production of 3D scans of the smaller sculptures was initiated, as they face the greatest risk of theft. The scanning of all of the sculptures is planned. Although in recent years the City of Sisak has taken over the responsibility for stewardship of the collection through its cultural institutions, the

inspections are not carried out regularly. By the time a theft is registered and reported, the



Figure 2 The upper part of Jure Žaja's *In Memory of George of Dalmatia* (1979) was stolen in 2015 (photo: N. Peko, March 2015)



Figure 3 Only a small part of Žaja's sculpture *In Memory of George of Dalmatia* has been preserved (photo: S. M. Sunara, July 2018)

sculpture has already been turned into scrap. Many of the sculptures are defaced with writing and scratching. Lighting the sculptures would help deter thieves and vandals, but that is a costly undertaking. Video surveillance would be difficult to implement because the sculptures are scattered over a large area.

Two sculptures suffered damage due to negligence of the construction workers during public works. When public works are undertaken, sculptures should be fenced off and regularly checked. The City of Sisak recently ordered the lower branches of the trees that surround the large green area where a number of sculptures are installed to be cut. This intervention has made the sculptures more visible and thus better protected from vandalism (Fig. 4 and 5).

Although the sculptures located around the former Sisak Steelworks are protected by a fence, they are not safe from harm. When a company operating on the premises of the former factory shuts down or changes ownership, the sculptures face the risk of being misplaced or discarded. Communication with the companies needs to be improved.



Figure 4 Josip Diminić's sculpture *Object II* (1979) was restored during the 2014 conservation-restoration workshop. The grounds in which the sculpture is installed are not regularly maintained (photo: S. M. Sunara, May 2016)

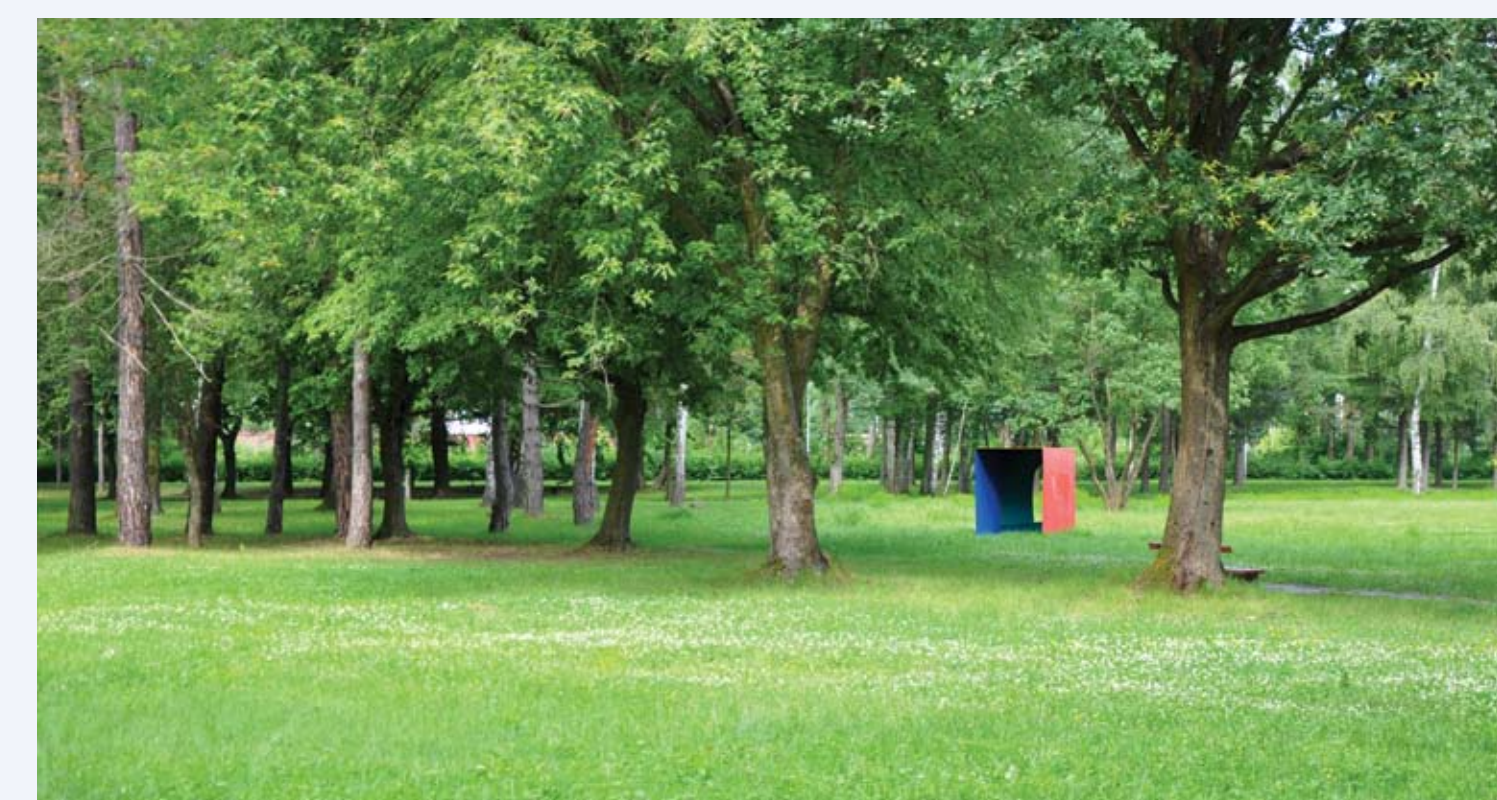


Figure 5 The lower branches on the trees surrounding Diminić's restored sculpture have recently been cut away, making the sculpture visible from afar (photo: S. M. Sunara, July 2018)



Figure 6 Wet cleaning of Peruško Bogdanić's sculpture *Riderless* of 1983 (photo: S. M. Sunara, September 2013)

MONITORING THE SCULPTURES' CONDITION. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

A condition report for each sculpture has been created. Photographic documentation is produced every year. The written and pictorial record is intended to serve as a basis for the monitoring of any changes to the sculptures and setting of treatment priorities. In 2013 systematic surface cleaning of the sculptures and their concrete plinths was carried out. Wet cleaning was performed in cooperation with the fire brigade (Fig. 6). The municipal utility services were tasked with trimming the grass around the sculptures and reducing the level of ground around the concrete plinths. The works carried out were to serve as a guide for the routine maintenance of the collection. This has yet to be implemented, however.

LABELLING PUBLIC OUTREACH

In 2015 small plates with basic information about the sculptures were installed. The aim was to inform the public that these are art works, and not pieces of scrap metal. In the future, more information should be included in the labels, as well as the "No touching and climbing" sign for some of the sculptures.

Participants of the annual conservation-restoration workshops report on their activities in the blog *Internship Among Artworks* (URL: <http://stazist.blogspot.com/>). They also give public talks and write articles. Educational activities occasionally take place in the Park. A two-day event was recently organized that included guided tours of the Park and an art workshop for children (Fig. 7 and 8). As a part of the EU-funded project *Conservation of Art in Public Spaces / CAPuS* (URL: capusproject.eu), a website dedicated to the Park is currently being created.



Figure 7 Poster of the *Encounter in the Gardens 2018* (Sisak, June 1–2, 2018)



Figure 8 Children who participated in the *Encounter in the Gardens 2018* event created artworks inspired by the sculptures from the Park (Photo: I. Miletić Čakširan, June 2018)

CONCLUSION (AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS)

The local community is gradually becoming aware of the value of the Sculpture Park of Sisak Steelworks and of the need to preserve it as a part of its own history and cultural identity. Outreach activities should be continued. The involvement of the Conservation-Restoration Department of the Arts Academy in Split has brought progress in the physical preservation of the sculptures, but this is not enough. The lack of a comprehensive, yearlong maintenance program – and the budget to support it – presents a major concern, and needs to be dealt with immediately.