

Innovation and Best Practice for International Standards on Sculpture Study and Management

CASE STUDY NO. 7

SENGA NENGUDI, WATER COMPOSITIONS, 1969-70

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STUDY CASE NO. 5

1. Description of the artwork
2. Challenge
3. Approach
4. Application of BISS Standards
5. Conclusion
6. Literature (optional)

1. Description of the artwork

ORIGINAL TITLE	
Artist	Senga Nengudi
Date	1969-70/2018
Material / Technique	Vinyl and water
Dimensions	
Edition / Numbering	
Inscriptions	
Owner	
Location	

2. Challenge

Senga Nengudi (b. Chicago 1943) has been a trailblazer in sculpture for some fifty-five years. Several of her earliest sculptures were temporary, and others have been made with materials that have since failed or become impossible to maintain or replace. An exhibition of Nengudi's work at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds (UK) in 2018 saw the reconstruction of many works not exhibited and not in existence since the late 1960s/early 1970s. The reconstructions, themselves only temporary and made to last for the duration of the exhibition and its subsequent tour to the Fruitmarket, Edinburgh (UK), have since been made again and acquired by museums internationally. The move from exhibition copy, or temporary recreation, to permanent reconstruction that itself may need recreation in time should its materials fail, can cause confusion. The objective is to apply BISS standards to ensure not only the comprehensiveness of the standards themselves but to bring clarity to sculpture that can occupy a space somewhere between temporary and permanent and is in accordance with the designation of the artist.

3. Approach

A vital figure in avant-garde scenes of Los Angeles and New York in the 1960s and 1970s, Nengudi's work is characterized by a persistently radical experimentation with material and form. Building upon a legacy of abstraction, Nengudi is a leading figure of Postminimalism and makes sculpture embedded with human, philosophical and spiritual concern. Her assimilation of traditional African forms and Japanese Gutai within Western Modernism has also been especially significant.

Among Nengudi's earliest works are her 'water composition' sculptures from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Made from heat-sealed transparent vinyl and filled with coloured water, their abstract forms rest on the floor, on plinths or are fixed to a wall. Undermining the static and industrial tendencies of Minimalist sculpture, the water compositions instead hang and flop with the weight of a body, mimicking flesh while responding to the viewer's touch. The water compositions were originally made from 1969-70, exhibited for a short time only and were not

preserved or retained. Several of the sculptures were recreated for the first time in 2018 for the artist's solo exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds where their mode of fabrication was improved extensively. These recreations lasted for the duration of the exhibition. Within the last couple of years, these sculptures and more besides have been recreated once more and entered the permanent collection of a number of museums, including that of Dia Art Foundation and the Guggenheim. *Water Composition (green/yellow)* 1969-70/2018 and *Water Composition III* 1970/2018 are two such examples.

Each of these works, and similar authorized reconstructions, is dated with the year of original creation followed by the year of the first reconstruction. Even if subsequent reconstructions are necessary (for example to allow for a move between sites where keeping the sculpture intact is not practicable, prolonged storage or when the materials eventually fail), the original creation date and original reconstruction date, are the only dates that would be listed.

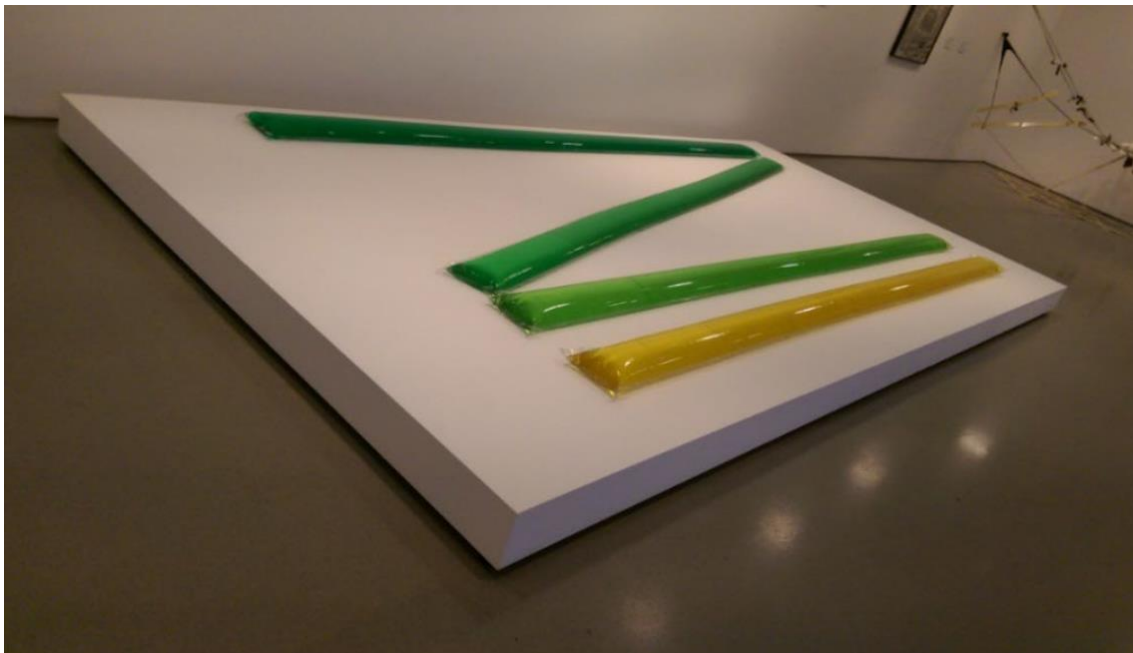


Fig. 1. *Water Composition (green/yellow)*, 1969-70/2018, Vinyl, water and rope, Dia Art Foundatio



Fig. 2. *Water Composition III*, 1970/2018, Vinyl, water and rope, Dia Art Foundation

4. Application of BISS Standards

- ✓ Authorized Unique Work
- ✓ Authorized Reconstructed Work

5. Conclusion

These sculptures should each be considered as an Authorised Unique Work and an Authorized Reconstructed work, with the simultaneous application of two BISS standard labels. The application and standardisation of dates is also notable and important: the first indicating the date of original creation (1969), followed by the date of creation of the Authorized Reconstruction (2018) separated by '/'. The case study is also significant in its confirmation that, in some cases, the date of execution and intent of the authorized original recreation may take precedent over the durability of the chosen material and any subsequent reconstruction: if an Authorized Reconstruction warrants later recreation, it is the date of the original staging that is retained. The idea, or 'act' or reconstruction in this case, takes precedent over material, and as such this example also proves useful in the consideration of much conceptual art.

6. Literature

There references correlated to the artwork in study and its main problematics.