

HUMAN HAIR IN CONTEMPORARY ART: CONSERVATION ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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Artefacts containing hair are present in numerous collections especially in natural science museums. A typical example is hair of mummies, but human hair is also present in contemporary art.

Hair of Ramses II



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Hair artefacts of the Victorian era



© KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium)

Hair on a shrunken head



©Musée du Quai Branly, Paris

Hair, museum of Auschwitz



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Artefacts in contemporary art

Daughter, 1999 by Kiki Smith, Hairy puppet



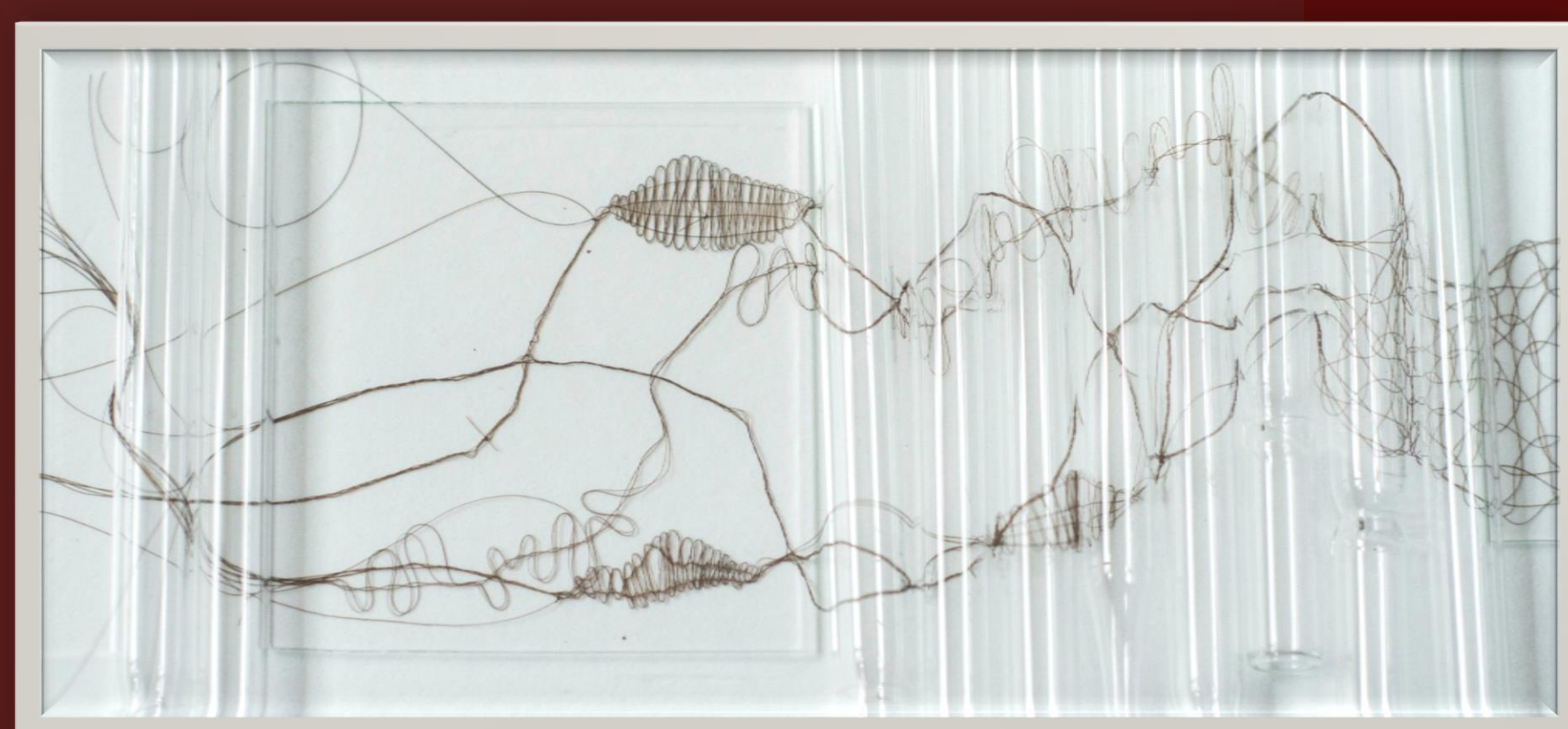
Chromogenic color print mounted to board. 41 x 59,5 cm.
©Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milano, Italy

Others artists :
Mona Hatoum,
Krystyna Piotrowska,
Isabelle Plat, ...

Case study

Artworks from the Belgian artist Hélène de Gottal :

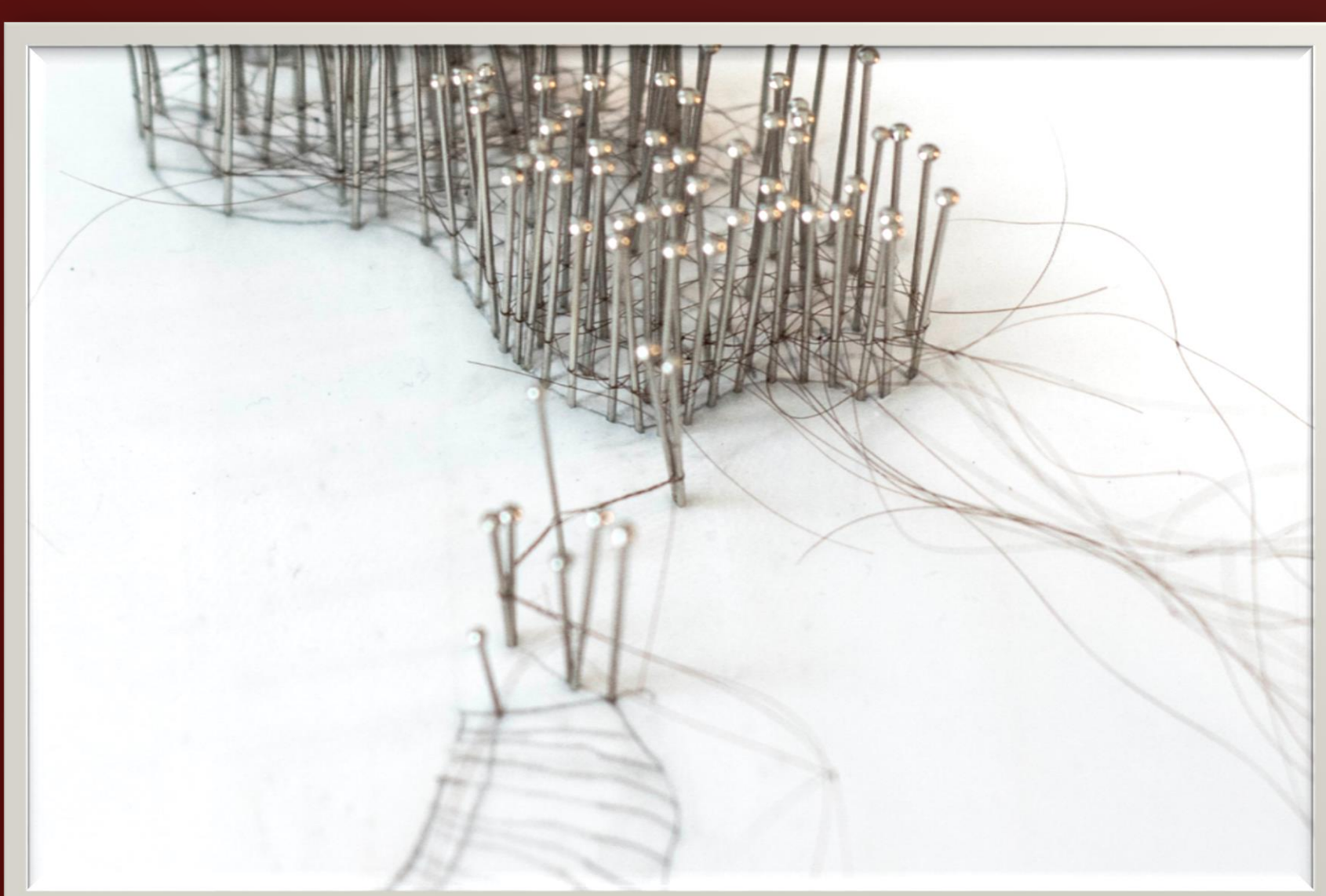
- ❖ Masks
- ❖ Lace works



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Artist's technique

- 3D forms consolidated with hairspray
- Use of traditional spindle lace techniques



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Conservation issues

Human hair is a fragile organic material, which is sensitive to light, temperature and relative humidity.

The most representative problems that occur on the studied artworks are the following :

- ❖ Lack of adhesion
- ❖ Discoloration of the fiber by UV sunlight's
- ❖ Triboelectric effect
- ❖ Sagging of the mask

Other common degradations are:

- ❖ Abrasion / breaking / undulation / infestation by Lepidoptera and dermatophytes

Research

- ❖ The use of hairspray as an adhesive by the artist could bear a solution. The study therefore aims to evaluate the adhesive properties of different hairsprays and their capacity to protect the hair against light.
- ❖ The ongoing research also aims to adapt adhesives which are commonly used in conservation and use it in the form of an aerosol
- ❖ Additives such as UV absorbers, often used to stabilize varnishes, could protect the hair from discoloration. Adding electrostatic precipitators could help to avoid the displacement of hair by triboelectrification.

Conclusion

- ❖ Modifying hairsprays and using adhesives in form of an aerosol introduces conservation directly in the artists practice.
- ❖ Hairsprays are used as an adhesive in other artistic fields such as pastel drawing. Conservation issues need to be studied.
- ❖ The aerosol technology has already been proven to be a valuable tool in conservation.

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