

On site research on 'The Beanery' by Edward Kienholz with portable Fibre Optics Raman spectroscopy

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Edward Kienholz (1927–1994) made 'The Beanery' in 1965, basing it on his local bar, The Original Beanery on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles. It took Kienholz six months to consolidate and replicate the bar's content in an artwork. Everything in the installation is life size: from the figures (inspired by Kienholz's friends and acquaintances) to the bar, bottles of beer and spirits, ash trays, cash register, telephone book, and jukebox. Even the photos on the wall duplicate those of The Original Beanery. Remarkably, Kienholz gave each person in his bar a clock for a face, a reference to his fascination with time. The hands of the clock (the eyebrows) almost all remain at ten past ten – evidently, time has come to a standstill. Only the barman, modeled after Barney, the bar-owner at that time, has a face. Smelling and sounding like an actual bar, the installation is an evocative sensory experience that visitors are allowed to enter. 'The Beanery' is also something of a time capsule, the headlines of the 1964 newspaper in a newspaper dispenser at the door indicate that the United States is on the brink of war with Vietnam.

Acquired in 1970 by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The Beanery instantly became one of the collection's most popular artworks and was, in principle, to be permanently on display at the Stedelijk Museum or on loan to another museum. Smaller composite parts of the installation have been restored over the years, but comprehensive research into materials and techniques had not been conducted until now. A systematic analysis of the condition of the work was carried out by the Stedelijk Museum.

The biggest challenge to restoring 'The Beanery' is the layer of synthetic resin that Kienholz applied to the work, which he used to visually unify all the separate components. As time passed, the resin layer has strongly yellowed and is still sticky in places, attracting considerable amounts of dust and dirt. Because of the resin and the natural aging processes of the materials, the objects in 'The Beanery' are extremely vulnerable, the work has suffered mechanical damage caused by the members of the public walking through the installation.¹

Besides questions about the composition and the condition of the synthetic resin there were questions about the composition of the adhesives used by Kienholz and about the composition of the many (sometimes vulnerable) objects present in 'The Beanery'.

Using a portable Raman system equipped with a Fibre Optic Probe many of the plastics in 'The Beanery' could be identified non-invasively. In case of the synthetic resin and the adhesives FTIR analyses using portable FTIR equipment provided complementary information.

After extended research into the materials and techniques, a condition report of the artwork, a review of the artist's intentions, and the identification of appropriate conservation materials and methods, 'The Beanery' could be restored, and has now taken its place among the artworks on permanent display in the historic building of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

REFERENCES

1. Press release: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *The Beanery* to undergo thorough restoration this summer, Amsterdam, June 21, 2012.

