



# SAVING YOUR Treasures

*A Website about what you can do to protect and preserve the things of importance in your life*



## Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center **Nebraska State Historical Society**

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## **CARING FOR OUTDOOR SCULPTURE**

Many diverse factors go into the long term preservation of outdoor sculpture. It is important to understand these factors and the roles they play in the care of cultural materials.

### **Document**

It is important to collect and maintain written records relating to the reason the sculpture was created, the materials used to produce it, the foundry or manufacturer (if the sculpture was not created solely by the artist), information about surface coatings and their intended appearance, and any other pertinent information that might be useful in the future care of the piece.

The artist's intentions for his/her work may differ from those of other artists, the owner, or from the general public. Without evidence and documentation, knowing what the artist intended can be difficult to guess. What aspect of their work does the artist value as the essence of the work? Are the sculptures location specific? What level of visual change is acceptable to the artist? Can a sculpture be repainted? When repainting a sculpture, do the color, gloss, and application method of paint need to be the same, or can an updated version or a similar paint be used? Did the artist intend for the sculpture to deteriorate over time? Did the artist know that the materials he chose could not withstand the stress of being outdoors?

Gathering this type of information from the artist directly can often provide the fullest amount of knowledge and the most accurate information. The best time to do this is when the work is first created. By gathering information on materials and manufacture specifications, on fabrication techniques, on site specificity, on artist's intent, and more, future owners will be well prepared to take care of, repair, and appreciate their artistic holdings.

### **Secure Installation**

It is always helpful, and often imperative to have an experienced engineer examine the sculpture prior to installation to recommend moving methods and base/platform/support materials, sizes, and thicknesses. A secure base provides a sturdy, solid surface upon which the sculpture may rest or to which it may be attached. The site may also include a plaza or park. Thoughtful design and attention to detail will help reduce the chances for structural problems in the future.

### **Regular Inspection**

Once a sculpture has been installed, it should be periodically inspected. It is helpful to keep a written record of the inspection, and if possible, to create photographic records so that subtle changes can be documented. Divide the inspection report into separate sections for the base/site and the sculpture and provide enough detail to fully explain the physical needs that you find. For example, note spalling concrete, overgrown plants around the base, or settlement cracks. If you observe damage to the sculpture, be sure to note its location and extent. If the damage is minor, you may want to do nothing more than keep an eye on it to see if it becomes worse.

Your inspection should provide you with the information you need to make some initial decisions about the type of care the sculpture requires. Some care activities are obvious, such as the removal of vines, overhanging branches, or overgrown plants. Other problems are not so easily overcome. Watch for unusual situations and don't hesitate to seek advice from conservators.

Use common sense – if it doesn't

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