

# The indispensability of documentation: Cabrita's "Flor Negra" case study



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PORTO

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## Introduction/Resume

This study focuses on the contemporary painting "Flor Negra" (Fig. 1), by Portuguese artist Cabrita, made in 1999, is a large format work in aluminum and industrial paint, and presents significant damage, namely losses and detachment from the chromatic layer from the aluminum support (Fig.2). It is a clear example of a work that has evolved over time in such a way that it cannot be exhibited due to damage and alterations that drastically change its aesthetic reading.

Upon first encountering the work, several questions arose regarding the specifics of the materials used, such as the type of paint and the aluminum alloy, the execution techniques, and the intention associated with the entire creative process. Given this limited information, it is important to follow specific research methods and conservation guidelines in order to correctly interpret the work and its material specificities, to create new documentation on the artwork, as well as choosing appropriate treatments while preserving the work's original character and integrity.



Fig.1: Flor Negra, 1999  
Source:Serralves Museum



Fig.2.: Example of detachment on the chromatic layer of "Flor Negra"  
Source:Author

## Objectives

1. Investigate the specifics of the materials used and the execution techniques in "Flor Negra", as well as the intentions associated, through an interview with the artist and the application of established research methods and guidelines for conserving contemporary art.

2. Utilize the Decision-Making Model to balance the need for intervention with respect for the work's formal language and creative intent, ultimately defining a concrete path for the conservation of the piece.

## Methods

### 1. Interview with the artist: research methods and international guidelines

• **INCCA: Guide to good practice: Artist's Interview**, from 2016. : This guide explains the different ways of contacting the artist, the methods and suggestions to ensure that the information is collected correctly and that the exchange between the parties is fruitful. It recommends various communication methods, such as letters, questionnaires, or interviews, and emphasizes a structured interview format with a few questions, presented beforehand.

• **Dutch Cultural Heritage: Concept Scenario** (Fig.3), a model, created in 1999, describing the general structure of the interviews, defines that the artist would first be invited to speak freely about their working methods, their choice of techniques and materials and what they mean; and then questions about ageing, conservation and restoration would be addressed. A dynamic model, with the possibility of adaptation according to the needs and issues of greatest interest to the conservator-restorer

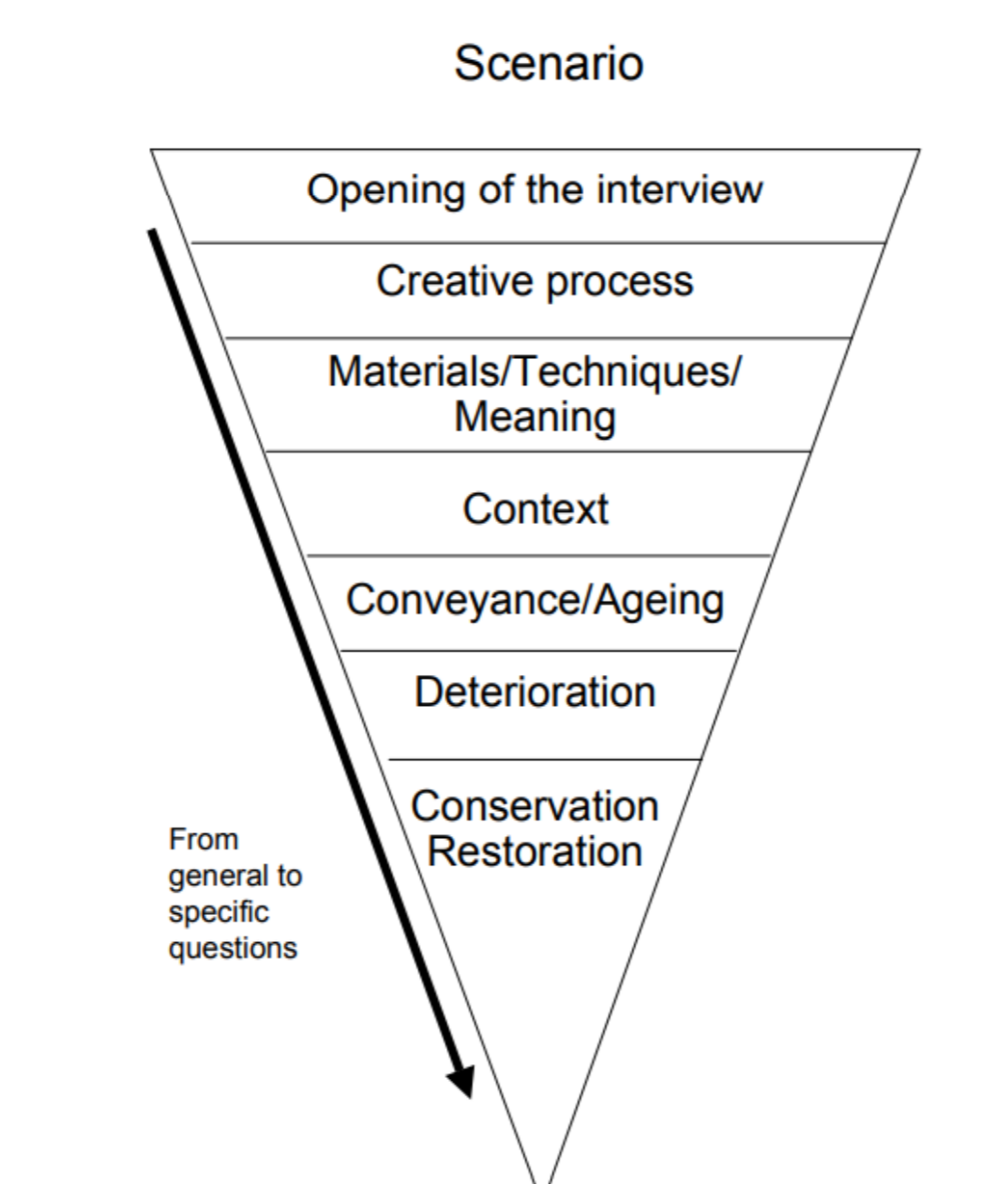


Fig.3: The Concept Scenario  
Source: Dutch Cultural Heritage, 1999, p.3

### • Applying the guidelines within the case study - Primary questions for Cabrita

1. How and in what context is the work "Flor Negra" created?
2. What materials are used?
3. Would you agree to the work undergoing a conservation and restoration intervention?
4. Do you see recreating the work as the only option? If it were to be recreated, would you be willing to collaborate with this research?
5. Is there any documentation (photographs, sketches, etc.) of the work "Flor Negra" that you could share?

### 2. Decision-Making Model:

- The Decision-Making Model (Fig.4) guides conservation interventions, respecting the work's formal language and creative intent.
- It considers all phases of conservation-restoration, emphasizing scientific research, material characteristics, and conceptual aspects in decision-making processes.
- This model addresses the complexities of conserving modern and contemporary art, prioritizing authenticity and the artist's intentions.

### • Applying the decision making model within the case study

1. Losses and detachment from the chromatic layer from the aluminum support. It cannot be exhibited due to damage and alterations that drastically change its aesthetic reading.
2. Documentation:
  - 2.1: Information that already exists (Date, material of the support, place where it was created)
  - 2.2 Interview with the artist, with the museum staff, with conservators and other stake-holders; photographic records; identification of the materials (gathered from analyses)
  - 2.3: Data Evaluation: ensure that the available information is reliable enough to support the decision
3. Conservation Options:
  - The use of magnetic systems for the attachment of the chromatic layer to the support
  - Recreation of the artwork by the artist
4. Weighing conservation options
5. Applying Conservation Strategies

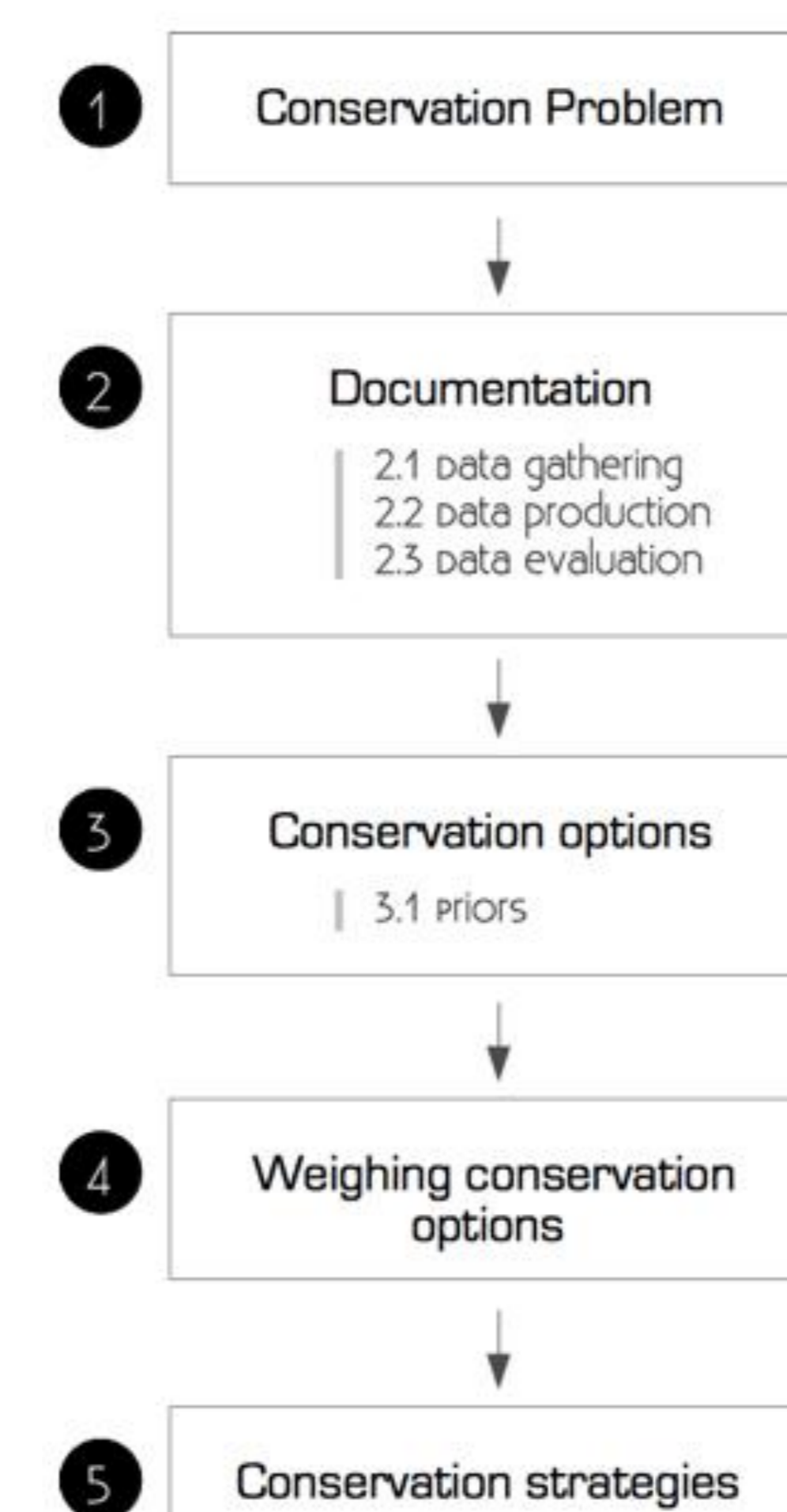


Fig.4: The decision making model  
Source: Marçal et al, 2013, p.5

## Conclusions

The path mapped out will be based on the intersection between the process of research and documentation of contemporary art, the interview with the artist, the decision-making model, the identification of materials, and the execution of the necessary treatments to restore a correct reading of the work. This approach will ensure that the work is conserved in a way that respects its original intent and artistic value.