

But without a future
Going on
Chronic collapse
But without a future

The decision to keep
But without a future

Interlude

A TRIO OF YOUNG VOICES

Singer one: This museum is named after Joseph Hirshhorn, the businessman and art collector whose private art holdings formed the basis for this permanent collection.

Singer two: Hirshhorn's daughter, Gene LePere, wrote a biography of her father called: *Little Man in a Big Hurry: The Life of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, Uranium King and Art Collector*. In it, she reports that on the night of Hirshhorn's death in 1981, he attended a performance of the hit musical *Annie* at the Kennedy Center.

Singer three: Hirshhorn apparently enjoyed the show and was heard humming "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow" to himself as he returned home, where he soon after passed away.

Together: Tomorrow, tomorrow

5. TOMORROW

ALL OF THE YOUNG SINGERS

Together: In a recent essay entitled "The Right Side of Now," the cultural critic Lauren Michele Jackson argues that moral decisions about political struggles are often made by "basing right or wrong on how a future that may or may not come to pass may or may not remember this."

Tomorrow, tomorrow

Uncertain, unpredictable
The decision to keep
What will have been important?
Custodial neglect
Physical or chemical
Sudden or slow
Fire
Water
Future damage and deterioration
Permanent impermanence
May or may not
Come to pass
May or may not

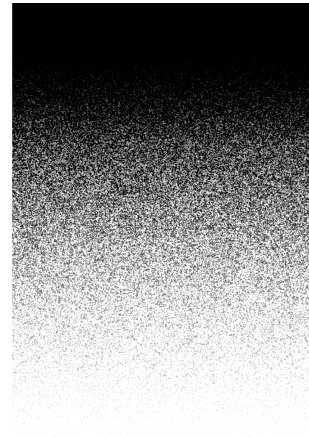
Tomorrow, tomorrow

END

AGENTS

of

DETERIORATION



LIBRETTO

*A choral performance by Maia Chao and Ethan Philbrick,
performed by the Children's Chorus of Washington.*

HIRSHHORN MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDEN

OCTOBER 5, 2024

1. PERMANENCE

A TRIO OF YOUNG VOICES

- Together:* Welcome, follow me.
- Singer one:* This is an exhibition of works from the permanent collection at the Hirshhorn Museum.
- Singer two:* The oldest work in the show is from 1864. I was negative one hundred forty eight years old.
- Singer three:* Permanent: from Middle English *permanence*, *permanens*, from Latin *permaneō*.
- Together:* Meaning enduring, unchanging, unchanged, lasting or intended to last indefinitely, remaining, holding out, continuing, staying to the end.

The art historian Claire Bishop says that permanent collections require us to think in several tenses simultaneously: the past, the present, and the future.

This was important.
This is important.
This will be important.

- Singer one:* But perhaps most interestingly, permanent collections ask us to think in the future perfect,
- Singer two:* Also known as the past future.
- Singer three:* The future perfect refers to the future from a past point of view. This will have been important.
- Together:* What will have been important?
What will have endured?
What will have lasted?
What will have remained?
What will have stayed to the end?

2. CONSERVATION

AN ENSEMBLE OF YOUNG VOICES

- Together:* Many of the works in a permanent collection such as this have been preserved by a team of art conservators.
- The term art conservation denotes the maintenance and preservation of works of art and their protection from future damage and deterioration.
- In the mid nineteen nineties, fifteen years before we were born, Stefan Michalski, a senior conservation scientist at the Canadian Conservation Institute, outlined ten different types of agents of deterioration.
- Agents of deterioration are types of forces that cause objects to deteriorate.
- Physical or chemical, sudden or slow.
Future damage and deterioration.

Interlude

A TRIO OF YOUNG VOICES

- Together:* Impermanent permanence
Permanent impermanence

3. DETERIORATION

AN ENSEMBLE OF YOUNG VOICES

- Together:* The ten agents of deterioration that pose threats to permanent collections are as follows:
- one, physical forces
two, thieves and vandals
three, fire
four, water
five, pests
six, pollutants
seven, light
eight, temperature
nine, humidity
ten, custodial neglect

1935!
1931!
1956!
1938!
1941!
1945!

This sculpture is 72 years old. I'll be 72 years old in 2084.

A: abrasion, B: buckling, C: cracking, D: delaminating, E: exfoliating, F: fading, G: gouging, H, I: infestation, J, K, L: loss, M: mold, N, O: oxidation, P: patina, Q, R: rotting, S: shattering, T: tarnishing, U, V: W: weeping—

Interlude

A TRIO OF YOUNG VOICES

- Together:* Future damage and deterioration

4. FUTURE

A DUO OF YOUNG SINGERS

- Together:* Future
- Read by an audience member:* The critical theorist Lisa Baraitser writes that in times of ecological, infrastructural, and political crisis “the future is imagined or at least routinely narrated as uncertain, unpredictable, and for some simply ‘canceled’ or foreclosed.” She writes that we are undergoing a “collapse in [the] collective capacity to invest in the future,” arguing that “we are in a chronic state of near collapse... in which ‘one goes on but without a future.’”
- Read by another audience member:* The art conservator Jane Henderson writes that “the future is inherently uncertain and yet our stewardship of [art] feels driven by a sense of moral imperative to serve it, even when that future may never arise.” Henderson argues that “the decision to keep is a political one.”
- Together:* Uncertain, unpredictable
The decision to keep
We go on
Canceled or foreclosed
The decision to keep
- Permanent
Deterioration