Philadelphia
Museum of
Art

NDSR Project: Planning for Time-Based Media Artwork Preservation

Summary

A conservation assessment of the Museum's time-based media artworks has been assigned high institutional priority. The Museum's collection includes approximately 100 time-based media objects that exist in born-digital formats, as digitized and reformatted works, and as analog media. Notable artists represented include Vito Acconci, Yael Bartana, Pierre Huyghe, Les Levine, Steve McQueen, Bruce Nauman, Fiona Tan, and Bill Viola. The Museum is currently in the process of enlisting a consultant to perform an initial conservation assessment of these materials. This process is due to conclude in the summer of 2017.

The NDSR Resident will be responsible for researching issues regarding the collecting, care, and conservation of time-based media that will come out of the assessment. The Resident will help to create a foundational roadmap to inform Museum staff of best practices, standards, tools, equipment, software, hardware, metadata and other technical needs imperative for the preservation of time-based media art in a sustainable and accessible way. This roadmap will be focused initially on digital time-based media art, however, it will also be applied to any analog time-based artworks that are migrated to a digital format in the future.

The Resident's work will be fundamental in establishing the necessary infrastructure for the care of Museum's time-based art. All processes, policies, and other documentation created by the Resident will be essential for the continued stewardship of the objects. The same processes could also be applied to audiovisual material in the Museum Archives, as well as shared with other institutions with time-based media art collections.

Specific Objectives

Goal 1. Compile institutional knowledge relevant to caring for the Museum's time-based media art collection.
Objective: Staff in various departments across the Museum (Contemporary Art, Conservation, Library & Archives, Information & Interpretive Technologies, Audiovisual, Installations, Registrar, etc.) hold valuable knowledge that will inform the care of Museum's time-based media art. The Resident will be asked to meet with various staff to compile a comprehensive overview of time-based media art as it exists within the context of the Museum. This process will help to break down silos between departments to stimulate discussion, encourage institutional cooperation, and reduce duplication of work.

Goal 2. Analyze the technical and infrastructural needs of Museum's time-based media art collection.
Objective: Using the aforementioned conservation assessment, and a compilation of institutional knowledge, the Resident will work to analyze what type of infrastructure needs exist for the Museum's time-based media art. This process will help to determine the functional requirements for any tools, network storage, software, or hardware that may need to be obtained.

Goal 3. Conduct research on the tools, software, and hardware that will be necessary to properly care for the Museum's time-based media art.
Objective: The Resident will research and recommend specific tools, equipment, software, and hardware to aid in the acquisition, description, storage, and preservation

of time-based media art. Research will include consultation with other art museums about systems and processes employed for collections of time-based media. Many museums, such as the MoMA, Guggenheim, and Whitney, already have robust media programs in place and will be ideal partners for consultation during this process, which will help inform the Museum as to what resources in terms of time, money, and staffing will be required to build the proper infrastructure for time-based media art.

Goal 4. Develop metadata recommendations.
Objective: An important part of caring for time-based media is robust metadata. The Resident will work to determine what metadata needs to be captured and what existing metadata standards may be applicable. This process will help the Museum think about what technical, structural, administrative, and descriptive information is required to ensure that the time-based media artworks remain operable, executable, discoverable, and accessible in the future.

Goal 5. Summarize all findings and create thorough documentation.
Objective: A comprehensive body of processes, policies, recommendations, and other documentation will be produced by the Resident. This process will help to ensure that the work done by the Resident can be smoothly integrated into the Museum's workflows in the future.

Timeframe & Deliverables	Project Deliverable 1. Compilation of a comprehensive overview of the environment, staff, and resources revolving around time-based media art as it exists within the context of the Museum.

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Due Date: November 2017

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Project Deliverable 2. Analysis of the technical and infrastructural needs of the Museum's time-based media art collection based on the conservation assessment and compilation of institutional knowledge.

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Due Date: January 2018

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Project Deliverable 3. Summary of research into what resources, tools, software, and hardware will be necessary to properly care for the Museum's time-based media art.

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Due Date: April 2018

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Project Deliverable 4. Develop metadata application profiles.

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Due Date: June 2018

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Project Deliverable 5. Create summary of all findings and compile documentation.

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Due Date: July 2018

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Context

In 2014, the Museum launched an internal cross-departmental project and working group named the Contemporary Caucus as a way to develop a unified vision for departments collecting contemporary art as well as to contemporize the Museum's historical collections for present day audiences. The Contemporary Caucus is comprised of 25 representatives across 16 departments and an eight person Steering Committee. In 2014 and 2015, the Contemporary Caucus organized seven workshops involving outside guest lecturers on the themes of Collection, Conservation, Development, Marketing, and Performance & Public Programs. The goal of the workshops was to facilitate discussion between staff and develop recommendations for the institution. The conservation assessment of the Museum's time-based media artworks was one of those recommendations.

Additional recommendations that have emerged from the Contemporary Caucus workshops include improving interdepartmental focus on the unique documentation requirements of contemporary art and finding new ways to capitalize on existing audiovisual materials that show artist interviews, installation footage, performances, and other public programs. The Library & Archives recently received a large transfer of audiovisual material that exists in both analog and digital formats, which includes much of the aforementioned documentation. The work of the Resident on the time-based media artworks could also be applied to these other materials. While they fall outside of the Museum's artwork collection scope, they may still require similar treatment and preservation activities.

This National Digital Stewardship Residency project comes at an important time for the Museum. Within the Library & Archives Department, we have been able to look forward and plan for the future, especially regarding digital media and materials. Processes related to administering born-digital records, transferring digital records from storage media, systematic digitization, and ingesting digital materials into a digital repository are workflows that have been under careful consideration for some time at the Museum and are finally coming to fruition. The Resident can build upon this work by focusing on the specific technical and infrastructural needs that time-based media art requires for ongoing sustainability of the collection.

Required Resources	Workstation provided by the Museum, including a laptop when necessary. Access to the Museum's computing environment, including tools and software such as a F.R.E.D. machine and our digital institutional repository system. Access to on-site library, archives, and research resources.

Required Knowledge & Skills

- Graduate degree in Library and/or Information Science, Information Technologies, Art Conservation (with a focus on time-based media), or equivalent from an accredited institution.

- Knowledge of digital preservation and digital curation principles and standards.

- Knowledge of common library, archives, and museum metadata standards such as MODS, PREMIS, CCO, CDWA, etc.

- Excellent verbal, written, and interpersonal communication skills.

Preferred Knowledge or Experience

- Experience with various time-based media formats and born-digital objects.

- Experience in a museum environment.

- Knowledge of art documentation and conservation practices.

- Knowledge of tools, equipment, software, and hardware related to time based media.