Summary Workshop Documenting *Colored Sculpture* (2016, Tate collection), 09.06.2020

Summary by Manique Hendricks

Documenting *Colored Sculpture* (2016), by Jordan Wolfson by Patricia Falcao (Time-based Media Conservator, Tate). Moderated by Gaby Wijers (Director, LIMA)

In June 2020, LIMA continued its Conversation on Preservation (planned for the symposium transformation Digital Art March 2020) programme online, recognizing the need for connections and exchanges. Documentation — a work's physical remnant or trace —is created and used in different ways, depending on its use, perspective and timing. In performance and digital art, documentation has become the focus of conservation and presentation strategies. What can be learned from other practices within and outside of the scope of the museum? This series of workshops is part of the collaborative project Documenting Digital Art, initiated and coordinated by the University of Exeter.

Case Study *Colored Sculpture* (2016) by Jordan Wolfson

Colored Sculpture is a large scale animatronic installation in which a two meter high, cartoon-like puppet is dragged across and smashed on the floor to a tightly specified 12 minute long choreography within a stage like space. The work can be conceptually described as violent and self-destructive. The polyurethane puppet is constantly being damaged by all the falls, and so constant maintenance and replacement of parts is essential, which in itself is a learning process and requires a specific set of skills in electronics and stage software. Even more alarming is the fact that *Colored Sculpture* presents a serious health and safety risk for visitors, which makes maintenance even more important. The chains that hold the puppet hang from a metal gantry and are driven by motors. Three other systems operate within the installation; 1) An automation system that moves the puppet in the space and sends in timing cues to the media playback system. 2) A head tracking system that sends in head position data. 3) A people tracking system that sends in processed people tracking data as "blobs". All three

systems are linked to the media playback system that processes this information, and plays back pre-recorded video, as well as generating video to create the illusion that the eyes of the puppet are looking at specific visitors. The overall sound is extremely important for the work and must be overwhelming for the visitor, both the loud noise of the chains being dropped or Percy Sledge's "When a Man loves a Woman" are very loud. In 2017 the work was proposed for acquisition at Tate and at that stage it was already clear that it would be displayed in the Summer of 2018. Even at the early stages of this process it was obvious that the scale and complexity of the work was beyond any work acquired up to then by Tate.

Colored Sculpture was instantiated in a collaboration between the artist, the Gallery David Zwirner, and a production company, Killstress. The installation process was the moment for Tate to fully engage with Killstress, and so the conservation teams involved, sculpture and time-based media, were able to fully document the installation process, as well as gather information about the production and maintenance of the work. This happened along with further types of documentation by the curatorial, the art handling team and the registrars, as well as documentation created by the crew maintaining the work. In the case of this specific artwork it's important to not only preserve the object, but also to reconstruct the complex installation as a whole.

After the presentation of the case study and practice of documentation of this particular case and tools used, the discussion was centered on formulating a cooperative answer towards the following questions on documenting digital art:

What should we remember about the work?
The experience of the work (the large scale, overwhelming violence and sound) is essential, as it is meant to be overwhelming.
The complex system behind it is relevant to the works history, and to understand it the work has to be installed and seen running. Beyond the systems and component parts, it is also essential to take all the stakeholders and people involved into consideration. Understanding who those people are, what they know and do and how to contact them can make the difference when displaying and preserving the work. See Patricia Falcão's presentation for different visualizations of the production phase stakeholders, display phase stakeholders and acquisition stakeholders.

What about the work should we carry into the future through documentation?
From a conservator's perspective the documentation is the base to restage or re-create that artwork. Because this work is very theatrical, and created almost as if on a stage, and the choreography of the puppet has a clear front and back, the video becomes a good template to what a visitor should see, and what a recreation should look like.

What is missing in our documentation?
Something that hasn't done so far is to describe all the functions of the software, for instance using pseudo code.

What kind of documentation do we need now and in the future to understand the work, how the work functions or functioned? How far in the future do you prepare in terms of conservation? Since the work constantly needs new parts and software is involved. How far into the future would you be able to reproduce the work?
I can't give you a date, it's more about being aware of what we have in the collection, understanding what the risks are and acting accordingly as the technological environment around you changes. When Tate considers acquiring an artwork we are immediately thinking

about what we will need to do now to be able to preserve it in the future. Attempting to recode *Colored Sculpture* for instance would be a massive task, and lots of testing would be needed to ensure that we can represent the work properly. At the moment it is still up-to-date, we don't need to do anything right now but we are planning for the future. We created disk images of all the computers, so even if the physical computers fail we know what they contained and ran. The future approach may mean updating parts of the system, namely the automation system, that is the key aspect for Health and Safety reasons and more dependent on regulations, and depending on the options at the time we might run the media system with emulation.
For other, simpler artworks the team has tried running software on different systems, or asked an artist to provide software versions to run on different Operating Systems. This means that in the future we have two options to run the system. There is a growing interest from the Digital Preservation community around emulation as a strategy for long-term preservation so we hope that there will be enough interest in the long term to ensure that emulators are maintained, or that new emulators have the ability to read older disk images.
This is by no means a certainty in the long-term, so other types of documentation must be carried out carefully.

How might the use of a collaborative inter institutional platform allow us and others to work with documentation?
Collaborating with other museums about documenting this kind of work is a good thing of course, and Tate is usually very happy to share information as long as the artist is aware, but in reality it happens a lot less than expected.
To use a permanent inter institutional platform for documentation we would want to make sure that it doesn't mean duplicating documentation or adding other complex steps to the already time-consuming process of documentation. This is even more important because if information is being shared it must also be up to date. It also involves a level of trust, knowing whether documentation is as detailed and accurate as we would expect it to be.
Colored Sculpture was a good example of informal collaboration, as while preparing for the acquisition and installation of the work we could talk to the team that had installed it a few months earlier at the Stedelijk Museum, who were extremely helpful in understanding the piece, but also the people involved in the process.

What data structure/collection management system does Tate use?
The backbone of Tate is The Museum System (TMS), our collection management system, that has been partially adapted for the Tate. Time-based media conservation has, over the last 15 years, further adapted it to be able to describe reproducible media and artworks containing this type of elements. Through that process we are able to see, for instance, that for *Colored Sculpture* we have all these components, we know we have the metal truss which is made up of 20 parts, we have 5 computers, 10 disk images. We have adapted TMS to do this, so it gives us quite a good overview. But you can't understand a work by just looking at it, TMS points you in the direction for all the information you need.
Another tool we have started using more recently, and that has been developed by Duncan Harvey is the time-based media conservation wiki, which documents processes that we use in our day to day work. Processes are broken down into steps and described on the wiki, so that we have someone new in the team, or if you are doing something that you have not done in a long time, you can refer to it and see the steps you need to take to for instance, create an archival copy of a video.

Can better documentation inspire museums to collect or acquire more digital art?
Documenting aims to support re-installing and re-making the work, allowing museums to eventually acquire more digital art. Good conservation documentation also demystifies the

conservation steps needed, and this means that curators are also less concerned with the sustainability of a work.

What can we learn from the documentation and preservation of performance?
The Tate has been researching the documentation of performance over the last 5 years, with a series of different projects that are now culminating with a case study in the Reshaping the Collectible project. That work, but also just the day to day work in the acquisition of performances, has mostly meant adapting the existing models for other types of media to fit with the live human component of artworks. This has influenced the weight put into recording the people with the expertise about a work, beyond the artist. Recent research has happened in parallel with the acquiring of *Colored Sculpture*, so there were a few conversations with colleagues focusing on performance documentation. Louise Lawson and Ana Ribeiro will go into more detail on this subject in their workshop of this series. (Link here?)

What do we need to know about different iterations this work may have had?
When preparing the acquisitions we downloaded all the photographs and videos available online. We contacted the Stedelijk , we wanted to know what we would be dealing with. The parameters that varied. For this piece we did understand that there is an evolution, when it was installed in the gallery in New York, you could only see the work from 1 side. At LUMA you could view it from 2 sides. At Tate for the first time you could go around the installation. This is helpful to understand, in that we know that the video template created by the artist, that records the work from 1 viewpoint reflects how he first saw it himself. Because of safety measures there would always be barriers around the installation keeping the audience within a safe distance, but looking at the images online it was clear to see that the barriers and truss always looked the same from iteration to iteration, and therefore that they were likely aesthetically relevant.

How does audience-generated documentation become part of the documentation of the work? Is the public a stakeholder? Do you document the reaction from the audience?
Audience-generated documentation is not part of the documentation of the work at this moment. One of the curators mentioned that the artist himself was keeping track of the work through Instagram and Twitter. Tate hasn't done a lot of audience documentation, not on a day to day basis, unless a work is interactive, which is not the case. We have created videos of visitors interacting with Subtitled Public, by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, for instance, because that is the only way you can see the work, when it is being interacted with.

Maybe you learned a lot from installing it now and documenting, maybe you know now things are missing. What would you do differently? Would you include audience documentation next time?
For a work where there is no interaction there is less of a drive to document the audience, at least from a conservation perspective, as it would not alter the display or conservation of the work. This is different for artworks where interaction is a key aspect.

The program is part of the Documenting Digital Art research project and made possible by the Arts And Humanities Research Council.

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