

Summary workshop Documenting Digital Art: Documenting Net Art, 23.06.2020

Summary by Patrícia Black

Documenting Performance: “Your face is/ is not enough” (Kevin Beasley, 2016) by Ana Ribeira (Time-based Media Conservator at [Tate](#)) & Louise Lawson (Conservation Manager at Tate). Moderated by Gabriella Giannachi (Researcher & Professor of Performance and New Media at the University of Exeter)

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.



Louise Lawson, Tate and Performance Documentation

In the last 5 years Tate made some significant changes in its performance conservation strategies. The first acquisition of a performative artwork was in 2004, "Good Feelings and Good Times", and at this time the documentation used focused on adapting existing documentation which at the time was the current method. The acquisition of performative artworks increased during the years - now the collection is around 25 artworks – with an increase of complex performance works tied to more performance works being activated. This led to a reflection on what documentation existed for each artwork and to develop new tools that would support such artworks. Seeing the performance in their own exhibition space gave the necessary insights of what they were capturing and what else they needed to do.

From this, Tate developed "the performance specification", a documentation tool to facilitate their analyses, and also to grip themes such as time, space, documentation, all together. This way they could explore the current questions but also direct to new ones for the future. They also discovered that information that once were separated could be more useful together in the same document, assisting with the ongoing care of the performance. The "performance specification", is one of the 3 main documentation tools used by the Tate, the other tools are Activation Report and Map of Interactions.

"Performance specification" is built around 7 cores themes, with prompting questions inside each of its cores. These questions are not exhaustive but flexible, which is important in cases of artworks that might not be represented by the answers. Tate also worked in a change of glossary as part of their new practise, since it represents a difference in what they are trying to articulate and capture from the artworks. The new strategy focused on collecting information on the constant elements needed for the performance over time in order to exist, instead of just analysing what the performance was. They had to find a balance between leaving an open strategy for the changeability of works but also making sure they were capturing enough, avoiding misinterpretation in future.

New glossaries were created, like "Activation", "Installed State", "Dormant State", "Constant", "Flux", "Interaction". After this, an "Activation Report" was created, which includes a map of all agents involved internally and externally to the stockholder as a way to predict areas of vulnerability and address potential risks. Since performative works are not necessarily connected to material components, this strategy looks for possible solutions to determine if a network or a link inside that network could be eroding or changing. This gives a bigger picture for a future activation, instead of just internal details.

How performance documentation influenced time based media art documentation in Tate?

The new method was built up and evolved according to their needs, but you can always bring things from the performance experiences to documenting an video installation, for example. The

biggest influences are the artworks itself, that's where a lot of the knowledge or experience is coming from. Each work is teaching them something new, the challenges are always in the present moment, therefore are built from all the previous artworks that were acquired during the Tate's history.

How the “performance” term has been changing for the last few years? Who should be responsible for this documentation?

Documentation can be captured across institutions, where the work was rehearsed or things like that, enabling you to capture more information than just when it is exhibited.

Is the “documentation map” tool of Tate being shared/collaborated with the artist or other institutions during the process?

In the case of the “performance specification” the document is sent back to the artist, to have his overview. In the case of the map of interactions this is still new and it had to gain a better shape as a tool itself in order to progress, including with the collaboration of the artist.

Ana Ribeira, “Your Face is/ is not enough” (2016) by Kevin Beasley

“Your Face is/ is not enough” is a performance based artwork consisting of 12 gas masks with megaphones sculpted by the artist. These are unique objects using several materials used by 12 performers (always local and with different backgrounds), intended to defend against and to facilitate expressions of power.

The choice for this work as a study case came from the fact that Tate participated as a full cycle, from acquisition to display, as also rehearsals (call workshops by the artist). The work was acquired with a guideline and previous video documentation provided from the artist's studio, stating main procedures for its exhibition and documentation. The main documentation was gathered during two phases. First in the preparation of the work before the first exhibition in the Liverpool Biennial in 2018, which included field observation, capturing photos and an artist's interview. Secondly during the post activation, which included data analyses collected during the exhibition and working on the current documentation tools.

This all showed how important it is to document the work beyond the exhibition itself. For example the environment brought up by the artists and the performers during the rehearsals was essential to the artwork to materialize, including instructions on how to use and care for each mask and how the institution should engage with each group of local performers. With this, Tate realized the importance of documenting the rehearsal before activating the work itself. Some of the key points discussed with the artist and considered during the documentation process were:

1. The artists see the rehearsals more than rehearsal, it functions as a workshop for the performers;
2. The masks are not replaceable which creates a huge dependency to perform the work in the future.

The use of documentation to re perform the work when the masks are no longer usable was discussed with the artist, who saw it as an option, since the performative aspect was the key, not the material one. In order to build their performance documentation Tate decided to take in consideration both the documentation they had in rehearsals and exhibitions. They also decided to create guidelines to the hired performers and/or to the facilitators that would be going to work along with the locals during the rehearsal. Not only knowing that this work would still generate a lot of archive, but possibility would be reproduced by part of its documentation in the future, a tool for visualizing all its documentation was created, as an “activation diagram”. This map organizes and tracks which activation of the works are producing its own documentation in a single diagram.

What are the workshops created by Kevin Beasley and what is their importance for the artwork?

The workshops create the relationship between the artist and the local performers, which is essential for the work, not only as simple instructions, but as an atmosphere filled with a real relationship.

What is the “required documentation” field in the “performance specification” document?

The artist expects a certain minimum of documentation everytime his work is exhibited, that's why this session stresses all the equipment, process and information that can be considered. This is a useful place in the form to actually elaborate on this topic for other artworks as well, as a way to find a better quality and level between all the video/sound/photo documentations along the way.

Did Tate use any audience documentation for this artwork?

Tate uses audience documentation in their works, but they have been thinking on how to better engage that, because it does take a lot of time and input, so they need first to understand what they want from the audience, what's the best way to do that, how to better represent that, what's the social aspects in it, which one to considerate. During the “Performance and Tate” project, the audience documentation was so extensive that the question was then turned into what to do with all the material? How to edit, interpret it? We recognize the importance of audience documentation, but there are questions on how to deal with the amount of information, what this information can tell you and how you can use it in a meaningful way.

How did all the information gathered was later synthesized into an official documentation?

This is a continuous process. They always aim for a discussion with the artists and curators after the documentation is done to see if anything changes or needs to be reflected for a new moment in the documentation. That's why it is important to capture the unexpected too.

What Tate is considering about the conservation or replacement of the material part (the masks) for this artwork?

There has to be a clear statement brought by the artist to the performances about the conception and uniqueness of the masks, of how to use and preserve them during the action. But, of course, there is also a desire for the Tate to ensure their preservation. What has become clear is how integral the masks are for the performative aspect of the work.

How Tate documented and reflected on the artist's intention for this artwork?

This was the first time they were invited to stage back in the rehearsals and could get other types of documentations such as the artist's intention during the process. But we also captured emails and incidental conversations. The main thing that could be done with this material was to reflect on them. To ask if some of this was needed to be part of the documentation by taking in consideration how the work is evolving. We wanted to capture everything around the live moment, because you never know when that piece of information can be really important. Another difference is that, in this case, the artist was not only making the documentation a condition, but constantly and collaboratively reflecting on it. Since the beginning the door was open for the documentation becoming the future work itself, so in this particular case, the documentation took a very important and complete process of reflection. It needed to show things beyond the performance, for example on how to transmit the knowledge to the instructor that will work in the future workshops. This is a key aspect, because there's no instructions for this until now.

To what extent can documentation really "replace" the work if it doesn't function as anticipated anymore?

Our motivation never was that documentation would replace the performance in itself, we do have strategies to preserve it. Is very clear that the performance needs to be performed and this is the first case scenario always. The question, however, remains on how much of the performance truly exists without the sculpture masks?

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