Transformation Digital Art 2020: Documenting Digital Art

LIMA Amsterdam
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International symposium on the preservation of software-based art

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Transformation Digital Art 2020 symposium is designed as an opportunity to share best practices concerning both artist-led and institutional strategies geared towards the future presentation of born-digital and software-based art. This year the focus of the symposium will be on Documenting Digital Art.

In performance and digital art, documentation has become the focus of conservation and presentation strategies. These artistic practices also challenge existing forms of documentation, resulting in new ways of thinking about documentation. What can be learned from other practices within and outside of the scope of the museum? Transformation Digital Art 2020 aims to show and discuss existing as well as new strategies for the documentation, transmission, and preservation of digital art for and by artists, curators and conservators.

10:10-12:15 PART I: On Documentation

Vivian van Saaze (Associate Professor Literature & Art, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University)

On the Doings of Documentation: From Live Art to Digital Art – and Back

Vivian van Saaze discusses documentation and archiving practices of live performances, by exploring existing and emerging strategies developed in museum contexts and beyond. Building on the work of the collaborative research network Collecting the Performative led by Tate (UK) and Maastricht University (The Netherlands), the aim is to explore to what extent and how past and current approaches to the documentation of live art are useful for the documentation of digital art. What are the commonalities and how can the emerging field of performance documentation inform the perpetuation of digital art and vice versa? Set within a larger framework of care practices, Van Saaze will further explore how ethnographic methods of observation and reflexivity might contribute to current documentation practices of performance-based and digital art.

Annet Dekker (Assistant Professor Media Studies: Archival and Information Studies, University of Amsterdam)

Curating Documentation

Documentation is created and used in numerous ways, and functions differently yet complementary in the various departments of museums. Annet Dekker explores these various perspectives and shows how they open new ways of thinking about what documentation means and how it moved from an inferior subjective derivative to being part of, or substituting, an artwork. At the core of these changes in documentation is the question how these expanded practices of documentation influence the value and experience of the “original” artwork; and in turn: in what way do they affect the traditional authority of the museum as creator of documentation used for future reference, historical relevance or cultural memory?

Dekker presents some of the outcomes of the research project Curating Documentation into documentation practices of art institutions, which was made possible by KIEM Creative Industry of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

Natalie Kane (Curator of Digital Design, Victoria and Albert Museum London)

#blackboxes: Collecting the Design of Instagram

How can a museum collect the design of Instagram? As museums and cultural institutions, we can somewhat rely on social accounts and oral and written histories to understand how Instagram and other social networks used photography, but what do we lose from not having the interaction or interface design to analyse alongside? What new curatorial strategies must be considered when collecting networked, user-dependant, closed-source design? Where are the barriers to access and are new relationships necessary?
Reinterpretation is a core concept in music, dance and theatre. Every re-enactment is a translation into a new, often contemporary, context. Re-enacting a work based on documentation, a script, memory or score is an essential part of artistic practice. For complex works in the field of media art and digital art this is urgent. Reinterpretation of media art can contribute to the preservation and better understanding of the work. Since 2016, LIMA has put reinterpretation on the map as an artistic and conservation strategy. In the interdisciplinary and international UNFOLD project, contextualizing, documenting, analysing, understanding, embodiment and transferring digital culture are central. Relevant questions are: What is the core of the work? And what is its method of production? Which techniques are used in which context? How do we translate this artistic legacy, practice and knowledge to the next generation? How do we reflect and learn from different interdisciplinary practices?

Marisa Olson (Artist, Writer, Media Theorist, Curator)
Performed Listening

Marisa Olson presents Performed Listening: Boomerang, a web-based video/performance installation in which she attempted to re-create the context of Boomerang (1974), an analogue video collaboration between Richard Serra and Nancy Holt. Both the original and Olson's digital rendition were premised on a form of feedback loop between a speaker and her perception of her own utterances; and both take place in studios, whether an analogue TV studio that employs a closed-system within the camera and the booth, or an artist studio in which the webcam streams a live “response video” to the internet. Performed Listening: Boomerang explores the intended inversion of tools and listening practices to problematize the boundaries between repetition, re-creation, and original performance.
findings gathered from their research interviews with distributors, artists and other stakeholders. This project seeks to put distribution on the map as an important and necessary model for the dissemination of digital art.

Wiel Seuskens (Technical Manager, LIMA), Gaby Wijers (Director, LIMA)
Acquiring Net Art, What Do You Buy?

Together with the Stedelijk Museum (Tjerk Busstra), LIMA is researching Mouchette, an online work by Martine Neddam that is in the possession of the Stedelijk - mouchette.org - incorporating shared and alternative? perspectives. What did the Stedelijk acquire? Was this acquisition meant to be a ‘freeze’, a version or an edition, of the work at the time? And how does that relate to the rest of the work? How is such a participatory online artwork documented and preserved?

Lilli Elias (Research Intern, LIMA)
State of the Arts: Documenting the Creative Process

Lilli Elias presents the preliminary results from her case studies of documenting the creative process in relation to audio visual media. This ongoing research examines time-based accounts of the methods, intentions and work processes influencing documentation practices. The research will conclude with recommendations for process-bound rather than output-bound methods of records management.

Eoin O’Donohoe (Digital Preservation Analyst, The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision)
Towards a Common Goal: Collaboration in Software Preservation

The research being conducted at The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision aims to contribute to lowering the threshold for institutions looking to make a start with software archiving. Through the examination of best practices from past and present, as well as an investigation into new and emerging software preservation projects, recommendations can be made that will benefit software collections across The Netherlands. Central to this research, so far, has been the exploration of possibilities for a joint approach and common infrastructure for software preservation and documentation. This presentation will focus on our work and discoveries to date.
Mauricio Van Der Maesen de Sombreff (Artist)  
ReCoding Joost Rekveld

Creative Coding Utrecht (CCU) is a community-based organisation with the goal to stimulate digital creativity and the artistic practice of creative coding. With the ART MACHINES project CCU brings together the history of media art with the avant-garde of digital culture. Mauricio van der Maesen de Sombreff was the selected artist of the Recoding Joost Rekveld commission. He combines his technical background with an artistic vision that is influenced by interpretations of different forms of art. He likes to experiment with different visuals and materials. Using vortex stirrer, he creates compelling visuals; combined with different colors that are gathered from Joost Rekveld’s film. The visuals will reflect the data structure gathered from the film in a chaotic way by using light and motion of the water.

Gabriella Giannachi (Professor in Performance and New Media, University of Exeter)  
Documenting Digital Art

By looking into the history of the field of media art and digital art documentation over a period of about 20 years we can trace not only a number of interesting shifts in terminology but also a series of fairly radical changes in how documentation has been used in acquisition, preservation, and exhibition practices. Art purchased by museums is increasingly immaterial and attention has moved away from understanding artworks purely as objects to looking at art as concepts, performances, media, experiences, and their reinterpretations by other artists over time. In parallel, documentation has started to acquire different meanings and very different values according to the contexts in which it originates and is utilised. This has often not only lead to the identification of documentation and art, but also brought on shifts in relation to who should be responsible for producing and preserving documentation. Analysing the shifts in practice in the fields of media art and digital art documentation can therefore not only tell us about the evolution of these particular art forms but also give us a flavour as to how these forms might be engaged with in the future.

Moderated by Marcel Ras (Program Manager, Dutch Digital Heritage Network (NDE))

12:30 – 13:00 PART II: Conversation on Conservation: Annie Abrahams (Online session)

Annie Abrahams (Artist), Monika Szűcsová (PhD researcher)

Annie Abrahams is amongst the first artists to investigate internet-based performances. Her work challenges and questions the limitations and possibilities of online communication and collaboration. Her online artwork Being Human (1997-2007) is listed in the Digital Canon?! To explore the future presentation of this artwork PhD researcher Monika Szűcsová investigates how such pieces can be acquired, presented, documented and preserved.

13:00-14:15 LUNCH

14:15-16:45 WORKSHOPS

Option A) How to Represent Digital Art on Wikipedia?

Sanneke Huisman (Programme and Writing, LIMA), Sandra Fauconnier (Art Historian / Wikimedia)

As people look up information online, one of the first websites they will turn to is the non-profit, community-driven online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. How well is digital art represented there – in terms of artists, institutions and historical context? And what can we as a sector do to improve our representation there? This workshop offers an overview of options. We will use the expertise of all attendees to map the most important areas of improvement and discuss ways to address these. This workshop follows up on a project by LIMA where students of VU University wrote artist biographies related to the online media art catalogue Mediakunst.net on Wikipedia.

Option B) Collaborative Experimental Publishing as an Art Preservation Strategy: Documenting Naked on Pluto on Monoskop wiki

Aymeric Mansoux (Artist/Researcher), Julie Boschat Thorez (Artist/Researcher) and Dušan Barok (Artist/Researcher)

In recent years, art preservation initiatives have started to experiment with online research publications to support their mission. Unlike more conventional presentations of collection databases, these new efforts are attentive to the context of works, open to multiple perspectives, and are frequently informed by conservation scholarship. In this workshop we will discuss the roles online research publications can have for artworks whose preservation heavily relies
on documentation. As a case study we will document the now defunct artistic text-based online adventure *Naked on Pluto* on the platform Monoskop which runs on MediaWiki software.

**16:45 - 17:00** BREAK

**17:00 - 17:30 PART III: Lecture Performance on Real and Fake Documentation**

**Gerald Van Der Kaap** (Artist)

This year’s closing event for Transformation Digital Art 2020 will give an inside view into the personal documentation of artist Gerald Van Der Kaap. 00Kaap will perform a set of live visuals, mixing simultaneous visuals of *Hover Hover, Brain, BlindRom, Robotnik TV*, show documentation, projects, artworks, CD-ROMS of his works and more. He will reflect on what is documented, how and by whom and how the past is interpreted by different means. Kaap will be hovering between art, infotainment and new media on the occasion of the recent publication *A Critical History of Media Art in the Netherlands* where “VJ Cultures in The Netherlands: Hovering Between Art, Entertainment and New Media Cultures” is covered in part five.

**17:30** - End of TDA Symposium 2020 - Drinks

**CASE STUDY QUESTIONS**

- What should we remember about the work?
- What about the work should we carry into the future through documentation?
- What is missing in our documentation?
- What kind of documentation do we need now and in the future to understand the work, how the work functions or functioned?
- How might the use of a collaborative inter institutional platform allow us and others to work with documentation?
- How can a collaborative inter institutional platform help us and others to have access to this documentation?
- What are the problems in documenting digital art?
- How can we improve on common practice?
- Can better documentation inspire museums to buy more digital art?
- What can we learn from the documentation and preservation of performance?

Many thanks to all participants for bringing in case studies and their contribution to the questions above.
Agent Ruby is an early exploration of an artificial intelligence web agent, shaped by and reflecting her encounters with users. The work features a custom-made code of artificial intelligence embodied by Ruby, an online bot that chats with users. This open concept of a learning environment and conversational structure mirrors an important step in participatory work. The bot Ruby was developed out of Hershman Leeson’s feature film Teknolust (2002), in which a bio-geneticist models three self-replicating automatons after herself. Ruby is one of the automatons. With Agent Ruby Hershman Leeson created a new experience in expanded cinema, one in which Ruby can engage with real people and other bots in an otherwise lonely net frontier.

Agent Ruby is among the first web-based works commissioned by SFMOMA and was originally presented by the museum in 2002 on e.space -- the museum’s then experimental online exhibition platform (2002-2008). SFMOMA subsequently acquired Agent Ruby for its collection in 2008, taking on the long-term maintenance, display, and preservation of the work. The museum’s care of the work includes the website (www.agentruby.net), custom-code (written in an artificial intelligence markup language popular in the late 1990s), design prototypes, and an ever-expanding chat log of Ruby’s conversations with users (2002-present).
Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television) is an artwork by Chris Marker produced by the Centre Pompidou for the exhibition *Passages de l’Image* in 1990. Composed of 13 video monitors, seven computer units Apple IIGS, 80 slides mounted in four light boxes, and 10 photographic prints, this major interactive installation marks the entry of digital writing forms in the art field, on the verge of the World Wide Web era. Until 2007, with the last presentation of the piece in Chris Marker’s lifetime, he never ceased to modify or complete it, building an archive of 183 floppy discs, among other data carriers.

Over a period of one year, a conservation and historical study was made of the artwork which investigated the historical documentation kept in the archives of the museum, as well as the hardware and software components and the challenges raised by their obsolescence. Based on this research, the sustainability of the various technological elements of the work (computers, CRT monitors, electronic boards and peripherals, digital and analogue content carriers such as floppy discs, memories and magnetic tapes) were evaluated. In addition, there was a critical reflection on future approaches of documenting, maintaining and migrating so-called bodyless pieces such as early computer-based artworks and audio-visual installations.

**CASE STUDY**

Alexandre Michaan (Media Art Conservator) & Marcella Lista (Chief Curator of the New Media Collection, Centre Pompidou), Chris Marker, *Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television)*, 1990-1994, installation, Centre Pompidou.
Mouchette is a collaborative net art performance created by the artist Martine Neddam, first released in 1996. Presented as an interactive website, the on-going platform evokes the online presence and rather subversive diary of Mouchette, a 13-year-old-girl living in Amsterdam, who likes to express herself on themes of death, desire and suicide triggers. Under the mouchette.org domain, users face multiple linear possibilities and paths of interaction. Hidden links and parallel side pages mainly consist of still image/text compositions, Flash animations and audio and a maze-like trail to Mouchette’s universe and its seductive identity. Interaction is constantly encouraged through several actions and web-box questionnaires, both triggering a strong dialogue and sense of intimacy with the public. From these actions, visitors can experience different kinds of content feedback, such as email responses or published answers later incorporated as part of the artwork. For Mouchette, Neddam’s authorship was maintained as a secret till 2010, creating a powerful tool for anonymity that also functioned as its own fuel. The mystery behind Mouchette’s real existence was for example allowing visitors to engage and shape her identity in their own way, later transforming the artwork at one specific stage and as an archive through the years. Much before the boom of social media, this net art performance was a pioneer in bringing to light topics such as web personas, social identity compositions and collective authorship inside art. In 2017, Mouchette was acquired by the Stedelijk Museum and it currently forms part of its main contemporary digital art collection.
My name is Mouchette.
I live in Amsterdam.
I am nearly 13 years old.
I am an animal lover.
May I help you?
Le bébé est mort en français?
My next word is... [revised]

I was walking down the path the other day in my favorite park. Meanwhile, as I walked over the bridge, I looked down and saw a dead bird. It was, instead, a fish. I ran down to the stream, it was too sad about this kind of thing. I thought there is only one remedy...
The installation *Flying City* consists of wood, digital drawings, prints, Styrofoam, copper, rope, plastic, video and a PowerPoint presentation. The recovery of an old stream in the rapidly growing city of Seoul in 2003 ruffled the feathers of many locals. Life of the 1000 vendors and their families changed dramatically because of this transformation. Artist collective Flying City used this beautification project as a starting point for their installation artwork *Drifting Producers*. Flying City interviewed many of the local vendors and workers who were soon to be displaced from their neighbourhood. This displacement was not the main issue; the problem lay with whether the local inhabitants would be able to adapt to the new urban reality. To achieve this, Flying City used the means and principles of psychogeography. For their installation artwork, Flying City used simple materials such as wood, rope and plastic to produce a number of architectural models. These models were surrounded by digital prints, photo compositions, video- and a PowerPoint presentation.

With the purchase of this artwork, several digital documents were provided by the collective. Among them was documentation of the concept, the project and activities undertaken as well as drawings and diagrams. The technical drawings of the presentation and installation descriptions were made by the technical museum staff. Furthermore, there were digital files that made it possible to reproduce the digital prints and photo compositions, as well as a video file and a PowerPoint presentation. These were all documented and preserved by the conservation department, according to their own registration method. But for the conservation department the most important question still remains: How can we bundle and make this enormous quantity of information accessible?
untitledinternet.com is a net art piece that is publicly accessible as a website and is described by the artist as a “performative collage”. The work displays a Google landing-page with a modified appearance in the form of a distinct brush stroke or sketch-like overlay. Each time the user reloads the page, a new effect appears, and retrieved information is partly obscured by the overlay. Constant Dullaart considers the screen as a contemporary landscape. Instead of looking to the passing landscape while travelling by train, passengers nowadays tend to look at the screen of their phone or tablet. The randomized filters in untitledinternet.com, created and imposed by the artist, dramatically change the visual landscape of the surf experience. The website is a comment on the way that Google structures information, by obscuring the search giant’s web page, while simultaneously turning the entire web into a painted collage that is created by the user as well as the server.

untitledinternet.com is among the first artworks to become part of LIMA’s ArtHost system, a hosting service that was developed for the preservation of “complex” artworks that consist of code, mainly focused on web-based art. The domain name, the files and the source code that together make up these works are delivered to LIMA, who takes care of the material and keeps the websites accessible for as long as possible in a system of virtual servers.

Steve Benford will also present a case study. He will draw on examples of interactive musical performances and brain-controlled films to explore the complex relationships between artwork and archive, including how consideration of the archiving may be foregrounded in designing new works, while archivists may wish to consider the possibilities for evermore experiential archives.