

THE  
MATERIALITY  
OF  
THE  
**VIEWER**

# THE MATERIALITY OF THE VIEWER

Documenting Visitor Engagement  
in Contemporary Art Installations

Jesse B. Schlabach

Museum Exhibition Planning and Design  
The University of the Arts  
May 2009

A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Fine Arts.

© Jesse B. Schlabach 2009

© 2009 Jesse B. Schlabach All Rights Reserved

No part of this document may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the author. All photographs and drawings are the property of Jesse Schlabach unless otherwise noted. Material owned by other copyright holders should not be reproduced under any circumstance. This document is not for publication and was produced in satisfaction of thesis requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Museum Exhibition Planning and Design in the Department of Museum Studies, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania under the Directorship of Polly McKenna-Cress.

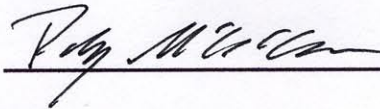
For more information contact:

Jesse Schlabach  
[jesse.schlabach@gmail.com](mailto:jesse.schlabach@gmail.com)

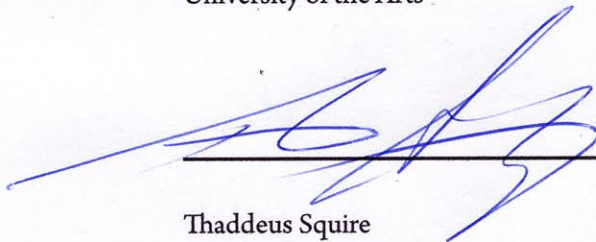
## THESIS COMMITTEE



Aaron Goldblatt  
Partner  
Metcalf Architecture & Design



Polly McKenna-Cress  
Chair, Museum Studies  
University of the Arts



Thaddeus Squire  
Artistic Executive Director  
Peregrine Arts, Inc.

## **ABSTRACT**

While there has been widespread acknowledgment of the viewer's critical role in installation art, the visitor has often remained invisible in the documentation of these artworks. Documentation has evolved into a key preservation strategy for installations; whether its purpose is to guide re-creation or serve as a memorial, the ultimate goal is to provide the future a rich portrayal of an installation and its context. If the presence of the viewer has been recognized a vital component of the artwork, should there be evidence of the viewer included in the work's remembrance? Furthermore, how might the viewer be able to contribute to the documentation of the event in which they are participating?

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to all who helped this project  
come together:

Polly McKenna-Cress, Aaron Goldblatt,  
Thaddeus Squire, Carol Moore, Helen Shannon,  
Emma Fernandez, Terry Peterson,

Helaina Blume, Mary Bordeaux, Diane  
Riley, Valerie Eppolito, Jennifer Coyne, Kate  
Antonich, Rea Zekkou,

my family,  
and my husband Jason.

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> DEFINING INSTALLATION ART
<b>12</b>	<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION
<b>16</b>	<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> METHODS OF CONSERVATION
<b>20</b>	<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> DOCUMENTATION
<b>26</b>	<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> THE INCLUSION OF THE VISITOR
<b>32</b>	<b>CHAPTER SIX</b> BENEFITS & COMPLICATIONS
<b>36</b>	<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b> THE EXPERIMENT
<b>40</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>
<b>48</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b> NOMENCLATURE INSTALLATION TEMPLATES

## INTRODUCTION

Notions of what constitutes a work of art have radically transformed in the last century; our definition has expanded to include conceptual art, performance art, land art, and installation art, among others. The role of art's viewer has undergone a similar transformation, as artists have begun to invite the public to assume a more active role in their work. This new role of the viewer is clearly evidenced in works defined as installation art, a genre of art that gained prominence in the latter part of the twentieth century. Any succinct definition of installation art is inadequate; nonetheless, in an effort to clarify my subject, in this thesis project an art installation will refer to Carol Stringari's definition: "a site-specific work which may or may not be destroyed after being exhibited. Installation art is a hybrid art form that may include architecture, various media, performance and technology."<sup>1</sup>

As the definition of art continues to widen, the methods used to document these new

artworks must also expand. In recent years, documentation has come to mean more than gathering information for visitor research, publications, loans, or library archives; it has evolved into a legitimate conservation strategy. Documentation is perhaps the only way to "preserve" contemporary art installations, which may no longer be described as discrete objects. These works are more aptly defined as events and/or performances. D.H. van Wegen notes, "A museum visitor 'experiences' rather than 'regards' these kinds of works."<sup>2</sup> In the absence of a singular object to restore, as in the case of installations, the documentation of the event becomes even more crucial, as it is "frequently the only source by which the future presentation of works can be based."<sup>3</sup> William Real reminds us, "The future will recall of an installation only what has been recorded and documented; there may be no original physical object or other evidence to act as a guide."<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to more traditional art,



contemporary installation art no longer solely invites the participation of the viewer as reader; an installation's existence may in fact depend on the viewer-participant. The increasingly important role of the public as participant (or activator) has introduced another material, the viewer, into the artist's ever-growing arsenal of media. Felix Gonzalez-Torres invites the public to dramatically shift the form of his candy spill sculptures by encouraging the visitor to take a piece of candy home with them. The diminishing piles of candy poignantly illustrate the artist's profound sense of loss when his partner, Ross Laycock, died of AIDS in 1991. In *Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)*, Rirkirt Tiravanija invites the visitor to cook, shower or lounge around in a replica of his East Village apartment constructed inside Gavin Brown's gallery in Chelsea, New York. Tiravanija, whose works are often categorized as social sculpture, frequently includes "lots of people" in his list of materials. Gonzalez-Torres and Tiravanija

exemplify the many artists who deem their artwork incomplete without its audience, yet this crucial public interaction has remained largely absent from documentation.

This collaboration of the visitor has fundamentally changed what it is about art we wish to preserve. Instead of preserving solely material, there is a growing need to preserve what Thomas Dreier refers to as "common artistic memory—the legacy of times past or about to pass— and not so much of preserving single works of art."<sup>5</sup> But how does one attempt to preserve something as vast and nebulous as common artistic memory? This project suggests that rather than applying traditional methods of preservation, we must look for ways to respond to the unique properties and needs of this ephemeral genre of art.

At a recent international conference in Copenhagen that addressed some of the problems of preserving contemporary art, Danish historian Mikkel Bogh challenged his

**Once installations began to emerge in museums, they became subject to the responsibilities of those institutions, including the preservation of the works placed in their care.**

audience to consider how a work's preservation might be informed and inspired by the qualities and properties of the artwork itself.<sup>6</sup> This provocation began to build momentum as the defining attributes of installation art started to emerge from my research. While the features of installation art can vary widely, the participation of the viewer is often termed its distinguishing characteristic. According to Claire Bishop, "This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art."<sup>7</sup> How, then, can the preservation of installation art be informed by this interaction of the visitor?

There are many inherent contradictions in the notion of documenting or conserving installation art. Chief among these is the concern that any method of preservation may be contrary to the work's ephemeral nature, a quality that contributes to a heightened experience for the viewer. But installation art is no longer required to be anti-institutional.

Once installations began to emerge in museums, they became subject to the responsibilities of those institutions, including the preservation of the works placed in their care. Furthermore, whereas many early installation artists were creating works with dramatically short lifespans (in response to the static atmosphere of museums), current installation artists, such as Bill Viola, are creating works with multiple life cycles in mind. These iterations are guided by documentation that articulates the work's essential qualities and those attributes that are more flexible.

This project does not attempt to establish a rationale for the documentation of installation art; rather, it suggests an addendum (the consideration of the viewer) to the documentation that is currently practiced.

The aim of this project is to investigate, within the context of contemporary art installations, how visitor engagement can be captured and recorded. Additionally, I am interested in

researching ways the public could become involved in providing this documentation and how it might be made accessible to a larger audience, if appropriate. Documentation, in this sense, becomes a thoughtful, active process, a process that may dramatically impact the life cycle(s) of a contemporary artwork. The final component of this project will be the documentation of an installation created by an MFA candidate at The University of the Arts. By critically examining the relationship between this installation and its viewers and experimenting with techniques that chronicle this encounter, I hope to provide valuable contextual information for artists, the institutions that show their work, and their current and future public. The “materiality” of the viewer is doubly referential; it refers to the importance of contemporary art’s audience as well as the physicality of the viewer who has become a collaborator in the making of art.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Carol Stringari, "Installations and problems of preservation." Modern Art: Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 272.

<sup>2</sup>D.H. Van Wegen, "Between Fetish and Score: The Position of the Curator of Contemporary Art," Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 205.

<sup>3</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "Conservation Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art: Recent Developments in the Netherlands," Conservatie en Restauratie 3 (2005): 24.

<sup>4</sup>William A. Real, "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art," Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 40 (2001): 213.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Drier, "Copyright Aspects of the Preservation of Nonpermanent Works of Modern Art," Mortality Immortality? The

Legacy of 20th –Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 64.

<sup>6</sup>Mikkel Bogh, Conference lecture, Preserving Perception: Ideas of Embodiment in Conceptual Art from Joseph Kosuth to Joachim Koester, Permanence in Contemporary Art: Checking Reality, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark, 3 Nov. 2008.

<sup>7</sup>Claire Bishop, "Installation Art: A Critical History" (New York: Routledge, 2005) 6.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DEFINING INSTALLATION ART

Defining installation art is problematic, as it embraces numerous forms and influences. Julie Reiss comments, “Although the term ‘installation art’ has become widely used, it is still relatively non-specific. It refers to a wide range of artistic practices, and at times overlaps with other interrelated areas including Fluxus, Earth art, Minimalism, video art, Performance art and Process art.”<sup>8</sup> The materials of installation art are boundless, but an analysis of how these myriad materials have been employed by artists uncovers a number of commonalities. Based on the research of this project, the most commonly identified attributes of installation art are the artist’s consideration of an environment, the element of time, and the presence of the viewer.

Hugh Davies identifies the “habitation of a physical site” as one of the fundamental aspects of installation artwork.<sup>9</sup> The degree to which an installation is dependent on its site differs significantly with each artwork. In the case of a traveling exhibition, such as Olafur

Eliasson’s *Take Your Time*, an installation may exist in many different spaces, accommodating each new setting and making adjustments as necessary. Installations may be wholly dependent on their environmental context, such as the installations exhibited in Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which are made in response to the site’s history and physicality. Contemporary installations exist within a broad range of venues, including museums, galleries, outdoor spaces, private residences, and a plethora of alternative spaces. For the purpose of focusing this study, there will be no concentrated discussion of how an installation’s site affects the methods used in its documentation. However, it should be duly noted that an installation’s environment is often a vital component of the work and may determine many parameters for the documentation process.

Time is another key element of installation art. “Time-based media” is a term applied

**“And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.”** Walter Benjamin

to technologically-heavy installations incorporating film, video and sound that “have duration as a dimension.”<sup>10</sup> These types of works are often described as possessing an ephemeral quality that contributes to a heightened experience for the viewer. William Real defines installations as “often less object than event, existing initially only for the duration of an exhibition.”<sup>11</sup> The lifespan of installation art is as varied as its materials and influences. Some works may exist for only a short period before they self destruct or are destroyed. Many installations, such as those by artist Nam June Paik, are re-interpreted and re-installed decades later. Still other artists have created works with no immediate end in sight.

Contemporary artists’ use of deteriorating materials further amplifies the transient nature of installation art. Glenn Wharton notes, “Ephemeral materials and unstable juxtapositions may convey symbolic meaning that expresses the artists’s intent but also

knowingly leads to self destruction.”<sup>12</sup>

Ijsbrand Hummulen similarly suggests that contemporary artists exploit unstable materials for their expressive power: “The concern is increasingly with the material itself and its ability to convey an experience in ‘real time.’”<sup>13</sup> For the viewer, a sense of immediacy is assumed by works that evidence life’s effects, perhaps even more so in settings that contain traditional works that have been ostensibly frozen in time.

The third and final characteristic of installation art, the presence of the viewer, is the focus of this project. In his 1934 seminal essay “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin prefigured a new kind of art audience. Benjamin, responding to the theater of Bertolt Brecht, declared, “And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.”<sup>14</sup> The 1960s ushered in an era of visitor participation, as “passivity was becoming regarded as a negative virtue.”<sup>15</sup> In

**If meaning is constructed from the interaction between artwork and visitor, it follows that an installation is meaningless when considered apart from its public.**

1966, installation artist Allan Kaprow proposed that the traditional concept of art's audience be abandoned: "It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely. All the elements—people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time—can in this way be integrated. And the last shred of theatrical convention disappears."<sup>16</sup> This development of the viewer/participant profoundly affected the artmaking of the next fifty years and continues to inform installations made today. In the 1980s, Kaprow's ideal of an integrated audience could be observed in the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who claimed that his work did not exist without the viewer: "Without a public, these works are nothing. I need the public to complete the work."<sup>17</sup> Julie Reiss echoes this sentiment:

The essence of Installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist. Participation can mean

offering the viewer specific activities. It can also mean demanding that the viewer walk through the space and simply confront what is there. Objects may fall directly in the viewer's path or become evident only through exploration of a space. In each of these situations, the viewer is required to complete the piece; the meaning evolves from the interaction between the two.<sup>18</sup>

If meaning is constructed from the interaction between artwork and visitor, it follows that an installation is meaningless when considered apart from its public. Perhaps this is why the presence of the viewer is frequently cited as the defining characteristic of installation art. "Installation art therefore differs from traditional media (sculpture, painting, photography, video) in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an

embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.”<sup>19</sup> Bishop claims, “By making a work large enough for us to enter, installation artists are inescapably concerned with the viewer’s presence, or as Kabakov puts it: ‘The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer.’”<sup>20</sup>

Questions for further inquiry:

How integral is the environment to the understanding of an installation’s meaning?

How does an installation’s intended lifespan affect the documentation process?

How is visitor “participation” defined in current artistic practice?



## NOTES

<sup>8</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) xiii.

<sup>9</sup>Hugh Davies, "Introducing Installation: A Legacy from Lascaux to Last Week," Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996 (Seattle: Marquand Books, 1997) 13.

<sup>10</sup>Time-based Media Conservation, 07 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/conservation/time/about.htm#what>>.

<sup>11</sup>William A. Real, "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art," Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 40 (2001): 125.

<sup>12</sup>Glenn Wharton, "The Challenges of Conserving Contemporary Art," Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art, Ed. Bruce Altshuler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 167.

<sup>13</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and

Strategies," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 171.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," Benjamin, Selected Writings 2 1931-34 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 777. Qtd in Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art, Ed. Claire Bishop (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 11.

<sup>15</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 15.

<sup>16</sup>Allan Kaprow, "Notes of the Elimination of the Audience," Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art, Ed. Claire Bishop (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 103.

<sup>17</sup>Lisa Corrin, "Self-Questioning Monuments," Felix Gonzalez-Torres (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2000)

<sup>18</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT

## NOTES

Press, 1999) xiii.

<sup>19</sup>Claire Bishop, Installation Art: A Critical History (New York: Routledge, 2005) 6.

<sup>20</sup>Claire Bishop, “But is it Installation Art?” Tate Etc. 3 (2005), 10 Mar. 2009, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue3/butisitinstallationart.htm>>.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION

“The way in which installation art insists upon the viewer’s presence in a space has necessarily led to a number of problems about how it is remembered.” Claire Bishop<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter One, installation art’s key characteristics were defined as the consideration of an environment, the element of time and, most importantly, the presence of the viewer; each of these elements poses problems of preservation that will be condensed in this chapter.

Carol Stringari identifies several unique challenges of installation art, including the potential problem of removing an installation from its original setting:

Materials may be no longer available, or technology is obsolete for creating the work. The art work itself may not exist anymore or may never have been materialized (except on paper). The artist may be alive and wish to ‘re-conceive’ the work. The conservator may be asked to replace materials or find creative

solutions for preserving ephemeral materials.

In many cases, an installation is a response to a particular space and possibly a particular moment in history; without this context, the work may become void of meaning or substance.<sup>22</sup>

Ijsbrand Hummelen lists another set of preservation issues, emphasizing the difficulty of determining an artwork’s material components and establishing the artist’s intent:

For many contemporary artists, durability is less important [than] and plays a secondary role to the power of expression in an artwork. The iconological meaning of the material itself and the working processes are very specifically and individually determined by every artist. There is a lack of information on these meanings in more artists’ works. Contemporary art is no longer represented just by autonomous objects but increasingly be temporary works such as installations, performances, and ongoing art processes.

The explosion of diversity of materials and objects used in artworks makes it virtually impossible to know the composition and aging characteristics of every material used. Moreover, it is impossible to trace information on the composition of many of the materials used (the weakest materials are mainly the plastics, and the most vulnerable objects are those involving electronic equipment).<sup>23</sup>

Stefan Michalski divides the problems of contemporary art into two main categories, material problems and knowledge problems. Material problems include the following: “they are bigger and/or more fragile than traditional art objects; they are more vulnerable to small defects; they are more vulnerable to technological obsolescence; they are novel in their use of motion and sound; and they are more likely to suffer rapid chemical decay.”<sup>24</sup> Knowledge problems of contemporary artwork make up a shorter list: “they are more vulnerable to loss of impersonal and personal narrative

knowledge.”<sup>25</sup> Impersonal narrative knowledge is also referred to as “the social, cultural and moral knowledge, all that is created and shared by the community and learned in various degrees by each individual. In ordinary parlance it is referred to as cultural context.”<sup>26</sup> The loss of personal narrative is a risk that Michalski notes is particularly shared with memorial museums:

As for viewers, it is inevitable that this generation will pass and take all their emotional and personal knowledge with them. Two types of museum face this on a much more profound and emotional level—war museums and memorial museums such as those dedicated to the Holocaust.

All these must face the transition between an audience with direct personal knowledge, their descendants who heard direct personal knowledge, and eventually an audience with only impersonal knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

In another parallel, memorial museums (such as the planned 9/11 museum in New York)

frequently incorporate installations, perhaps because their fleeting character reflects the event or life they are meant to commemorate. A memorial may even be classified as an installation should the three main features (environment, time and viewer) be deemed applicable; a good example might be Peter Eisenmann's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

The "material problems" of contemporary art (as identified by Michalski) have received much attention in the past decade; solutions and case studies for these types of problems are well represented in the bibliographic resources for this project and will be briefly summarized in the next chapter. Significantly less study has been undertaken examining Michalski's contextual "knowledge problems," issues that speak directly to the distinguishing characteristic of installations as defined here: the presence of the viewer.

Questions for further inquiry:

Should an artwork's material components be preserved at the expense of its meaning?

In what ways does the viewer contribute to an artwork's context? Must the viewer be present to "complete" the artwork?

How can/should the "knowledge problems" of contemporary art be addressed?

## NOTES

<sup>21</sup>Claire Bishop, "But is it Installation Art?" Tate Etc. 3 (2005), 10 Mar. 2009, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue3/butisitinstallationart.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup>Carol Stringari, "Installations and problems of preservation." Modern Art: Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 272.

<sup>23</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and Strategies," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 174.

<sup>24</sup>Stefan Michalski, "Conservation Lessons from Other Types of Museums And a Universal Database for Collection Preservation," Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 290–293.

<sup>25</sup>Michalski 293.

<sup>26</sup>Michalski 293.

<sup>27</sup>Michalski 294.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS OF CONSERVATION

“Obviously, we cannot coherently preserve what in its definition is unpreservable.” Arthur Danto<sup>28</sup>

Interviews are one of the most universally practiced methods of preserving installations. An interview’s purpose is to gather information about an artist’s intent, specifically regarding how a work’s materials affect its meaning. Interviews of contemporary artists have become increasingly geared toward discussion of the work’s future and what changes the artist might find acceptable. The Variable Media Network (borne of the Guggenheim Museum in New York) asks artists represented in their contemporary collection to choose their preferred method of dealing with the problems of obsolescence:

**Storage:** The most conservative collecting strategy—the default strategy for most museums—is to store a work physically, whether that means mothballing dedicated equipment or archiving digital files on disk.

The major disadvantage of storing obsolescent materials is that the artwork will expire once these ephemeral materials cease to function.

**Emulation:** To emulate a work is to devise a way of imitating the original look of the piece by completely different means.

Possible disadvantages of emulation include prohibitive expense and inconsistency with the artist’s intent.

**Migration:** To migrate an artwork involves upgrading equipment and source material.

The major disadvantage of migration is the original appearance of the artwork will probably change in its new medium.

**Reinterpretation:** The most radical preservation strategy is to reinterpret the work each time it is re-created. Reinterpretation is a dangerous technique when not warranted by the artist, but it may be the only way to re-create art designed to vary with context.<sup>29</sup>

The Variable Media Network, Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP) and the

**“It’s like a score in a performance—some things have to be done, but there’s room for improvisation.”** Nam June Paik

International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) are examples of current collaborative initiatives whose goal is sharing information among those concerned with the preservation of contemporary art. Hummelen explains, “In the peer-to-peer setting of INCCA, the partners work to create virtual artists’ archives by such means as a database which includes references to the knowledge of artists’ practices held by each museum.”<sup>30</sup> This collaborative effort has been especially helpful in preventing institutions from asking artists questions they may have already answered elsewhere. William Real remarks, “In the case of installation art preservation, which depends so thoroughly on the collective memory and record keeping of those involved with its creation, shared knowledge is essential.”<sup>31</sup> Reinterpretation, labeled by the Variable Media Network as the most radical method of preservation, has been gaining momentum in the past decade. William Real suggests that one

consider installations as events, and proposes that repeat performances of installations are the best strategy for their survival.<sup>32</sup> However, to what extent an installation should be identical to those that follow is a contentious subject. Sculptor Tony Cragg asserts, “The artist makes the art work and does that but once. You can’t make the same work again twenty years later.”<sup>33</sup> Other artists, like Bill Viola, advocate the concept of an exhibition becoming a re-creation—one that, in his absence, could be carried out by future “conductors” who were willing to interpret his “score.”<sup>34</sup> Nam June Paik, another video artist, shares his philosophy: “It’s like a score in a performance—some things have to be done, but there’s room for improvisation.”<sup>35</sup> Van Wegen continues Viola and Jun Paik’s metaphor of installation art as score: “The interpretation of the exhibition copy can also fulfill an interesting role as a commentary on the original work. The public and the art critics can then compare the way in



**“The key to survival seems to lie with an endless cycle of reproduction—copying as conservation.”** Bill Viola

which, for instance, the curator Maria de Corral reinstalls a work with the way the same piece is presented by curators like Harald Szeeman, Lynne Cooke or Rudi Fuchs—just as the conductor Bernard Haitink’s interpretation of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony can be compared with that of Christopher Hogwood.”<sup>36</sup>

Viola and June Paik work with media that is becoming obsolete at an increasingly rapid pace, so they allow for variations in the technology, provided their creative intentions are honored and the work’s essence preserved. The “essential qualities” of Viola’s work are detailed in written guidelines that accompany his installations. Viola declares, “The key to survival seems to lie with an endless cycle of reproduction—copying as conservation.”<sup>37</sup> According to Viola, though contrary to a Western mentality, there are many historical models of reproduction as a form of preservation. A poignant example recalls one of the most cherished of all qualities in Japanese art and architecture—perishability. The

Japanese Ise Shinto Shrine has been on the Ise peninsula for more than a thousand years, but it remains young; every twenty years, the shrine is reconstructed a short distance away. After the final step of transferring the “kami,” the god, to the new version, the old building is torn down and a new cycle begins.<sup>38</sup>

Whether the preservation method selected is as radical as reinterpretation, or a more conservative method, such as storage, there is one common tactic used by all conservators of contemporary art—documentation.

Questions for further inquiry:

To what extent should the artist be involved in determining conservational strategies?

How can shared knowledge be managed?

Does articulating a work’s essential qualities impose a structure that is potentially harmful to the artwork or the artistic process?

## NOTES

<sup>28</sup>Arthur Danto, "Looking at the Future Looking at the Present as Past, Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 12.

<sup>29</sup>Variable Media Network, Guggenheim Museum, 22 Feb. 2009 <[http://www.variablemedia.net /e/welcome.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html)>.

<sup>30</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "Conservation Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art: Recent Developments in the Netherlands," Conservatie en Restauratie 3 (2005): 25.

<sup>31</sup>William A. Real, "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art," Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 40 (2001): 213.

<sup>32</sup>Real 213.

<sup>33</sup>D.H. Van Wegen, "Between Fetish and Score: The Position of the Curator of Contemporary Art," Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and

Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 206.

<sup>34</sup>Bill Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 89.

<sup>35</sup>John G. Hanhardt, "Nam June Paik, TV Garden, 1974," The Variable Media Approach: Permanence Through Change (New York: Guggenheim Mus Pub, 2003) 75.

<sup>36</sup>Van Wegen 208.

<sup>37</sup>Viola 91.

<sup>38</sup>Viola 91.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DOCUMENTATION

“To ensure the long-term preservation of contemporary and Modern art accurate documentation is vital.” Debra Norris<sup>39</sup>

As art has become increasingly conceptual, the durability of materials has given way to the expression or message of the work. Sol Lewitt explains, “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”<sup>40</sup> If the artist’s work is no longer object but idea, then the materials and processes used to make it become more flexible and the artist’s instructions become more critical. But as mentioned in the previous chapter, the notion of copying as conservation is highly controversial in its suggestion that one give up deeply ingrained principles of the artist as creator of original, authentic objects. Richard Rinehart advises that in order to preserve contemporary work, we must revise our concept of authenticity: “One key point is that when preserving and re-presenting media-based works of art, we should give up the notion of a single, authentic object and view these works

as sets of instructions rather than precious originals.”<sup>41</sup>

These instructions often take the form of documentation, which has assumed a prominent role in the realm of installation art and serves many different purposes. Documentation may be all that remains of a work with a brief lifespan and thus its purpose is to preserve the memory of the event. The documentation of the work’s construction or deterioration might become part of the artwork itself; for example, artists Christo and Jean Claude routinely exhibit the documentation of their site-specific installations. For installations that are intended to be reinterpreted in the future, the documentation serves as the guide to recreation; the documentation is meant to preserve the intent of the artist and resultantly the integrity of the artwork. In all of these cases, documentation is stressed as a crucial component. Carol Stringari credits documentation as “the key to the interpretation

**“Conservation is no longer focused on intervening to repair the art object but has become concerned with documentation and determining what change is acceptable and managing those changes.” Pip Laurenson**

and decision-making process for the future.”<sup>42</sup>

Stringari warns that without it “one may encounter a subjective discourse between individuals who were not present when the work was conceived.”<sup>43</sup>

Pip Laurenson examines how the needs of contemporary art have affected conservators, who are often called upon to carry out the documentation: “Reflecting the move in contemporary art away from the material object, the conservator’s role has changed to encompass a broader notion of what constitutes the preservation and care of an artwork. Conservation is no longer focused on intervening to repair the art object but has become concerned with documentation and determining what change is acceptable and managing those changes.”<sup>44</sup> More recently, Laurenson interviewed a number of conservators about their transition from preserving objects to preserving experiential works like installation art. Chief among his

conclusions was that documentation means something different for installation art:

“Firstly, many found that documentation had a different role and status for artists’ installations. One of the primary meanings of the term ‘documentation’ used by conservators is to describe the process of recording structure and condition. Documentation for artists’ installations has a more dynamic meaning, referring to a conservation designed to mitigate the risk of not knowing how to install and display the work correctly in the future.”<sup>45</sup>

What, then, should be included in this new definition of documentation? Former methods, such as curatorial essays and photographs, should not be discarded; rather, additional techniques should be explored in order to meet some of these additional needs of installation art. Julie Reiss points out that though photographic documentation is not a perfect solution, without photography, “Installation art would likely be even more peripheral

to art history than it already is.”<sup>46</sup> However, photographic documentation can be very problematic, says Claire Bishop: “Visualisation of a work as a three-dimensional space is difficult via a two-dimensional image, and the need to be physically inside an installation renders photographic documentation even less satisfactory than when it is used to reproduce painting and sculpture.”<sup>47</sup> William Real adds, “The artist Gary Hill has commented that some documentation, such as a photograph, might sanctify and accentuate some minor detail that is actually irrelevant to the piece, underscoring the need for multiple documentation formats and techniques incorporating multiple points of view.”<sup>48</sup> Installations, in their definition, are often multidisciplinary, so the suggestion to use multiple documentation formats supports Mikkel Bogh’s proposal of allowing the properties of the artwork to inform its preservation. Ijsbrand Hummelen presents a comparable view: “The conservator must

concern themselves with the documentation and archiving of work processes and artistic practices within a huge range of different techniques and layers of significance...

Clearly, the process of documentation calls for additional techniques and research methods.”<sup>49</sup>

Returning to the question of what to include in the documentation, Real suggests the following list for possible inclusion: “floor plans; schematics; wiring diagrams; lighting diagrams and reports; artist’s preliminary notes and sketches; photographs; video; video interviews of artist, curator, and others; written records of those involved with the installation instrumental characterization of video and audio levels and quality; computer-assisted design files; and virtual reality.”<sup>50</sup> Carol Stringari gives a similar list of suggestions: “Photo-documentation of all stages of the process; complete notes and documentation of the initial development stage; coordination between the curator, registrar, conservators, technicians and lighting specialists

**If the presence of the viewer has been recognized a vital component of the artwork, should there be evidence of the viewer included in the work's remembrance?**

in order to understand the 'whole' installation; solicitation of reports from all participants in the project; central archive to file reports; interview with the artist; presentation of potential pitfalls for the future; architectural plans and blueprints; conservation treatments; and notes about reinstallations.<sup>51</sup> These suggestions are reiterated by the templates provided in the appendix, which were compiled from projects concerned with documenting installation art, such as INCAA's *Inside Installations*<sup>52</sup> and the Tate Museum's *Media Matters*.<sup>53</sup>

What is lacking in these lists and suggested templates is specific attention to installation art's distinguishing characteristic—the presence of the viewer. In the past decade, the emphasis in preservation research for contemporary art installations has been on the complex practical and ethical problems of preserving a work's material qualities and the artist's intent. While there has been widespread acknowledgment of the viewer's critical role in installation

art, the visitor has often remained invisible in the documentation of these artworks.

Documentation has evolved into a key preservation strategy for installations; whether its purpose is to guide re-creation or serve as a memorial, the ultimate goal is to provide the future a rich portrayal of an installation and its context. If the presence of the viewer has been recognized a vital component of the artwork, should there be evidence of the viewer included in the work's remembrance? Furthermore, how might the viewer be able to contribute to the documentation of the event in which they are participating? These are the questions I will investigate in the remainder of this project.

Questions for further inquiry:

What is the documentation's purpose (to serve as a memorial, a record of process, instructions for future iterations, etc.)?

For whom is the documentation intended (the institution, the public, the artist)?

## NOTES

<sup>39</sup>Debra Hess Norris, "The Survival of Contemporary Art: The Role of the Conservation Professional in this Delicate Ecosystem," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 133.

<sup>40</sup>Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," Artforum 5 (1967): 79.

<sup>41</sup>Richard Rinehart, "The Straw that Broke the Museum's Back? Collecting and Preserving Digital Media Art Works for the Next Century," Switch Journal 14 (2000), 2 April 2009, <[http://switch.sjsu.edu/nextswitch/switch\\_engine/](http://switch.sjsu.edu/nextswitch/switch_engine/)>.

<sup>42</sup>Carol Stringari, "Installations and problems of preservation," Modern Art: Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 279.

<sup>43</sup>Stringari 272.

<sup>44</sup>Pip Laurenson, "Developing Strategies for

the Conservation of Installations Incorporating Time-based Media: Gary Hill's Between Cinema and a Hard Place," Tate Papers (2004), 17 Feb. 2009 <[http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04spring/time\\_based\\_media.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04spring/time_based_media.htm)>.

<sup>45</sup>Pip Laurenson, "Research on Preservation Strategies Part 1: Risk Assessment," Inside Installations (2007), 17 Feb. 2009 <[http://insideinstallations.org/research/detail.php?r\\_id=83&ct=preservation](http://insideinstallations.org/research/detail.php?r_id=83&ct=preservation)>.

<sup>46</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) xvi.

<sup>47</sup>Claire Bishop, Installation Art: A Critical History (New York: Routledge, 2005) 11.

<sup>48</sup>William A. Real, "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art," Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 40 (2001): 216.

<sup>49</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "Conservation

## NOTES

Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art:  
Recent Developments in the Netherlands,”  
Conservatie en Restauratie 3 (2005): 24.

<sup>50</sup>Real 216.

<sup>51</sup>Stringari 280.

<sup>52</sup>Inside Installations, 15 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.inside-installations.org/home/index.php>>.

<sup>53</sup>Tate Research: Matters in Media Art, 07 Mar. 2009 <[http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/loans/resource\\_installationdoc.shtm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/loans/resource_installationdoc.shtm)>.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INCLUSION OF THE VISITOR

The preceding chapters have established the viewer as installation art's defining feature and identified documentation as the chief method of preservation for contemporary artwork. When merging these two concepts, one is confronted with the question of whether or not the viewer should be included in an installation's documentation, and if so, to what extent? This chapter provides supporting evidence for the inclusion of the viewer.

According to the bibliographic resources of this project, even with the advent of video, photography remains the predominant documentary technique. Often, in an attempt to create the best conditions for the photographer, visitors are removed from the installation; the photographer can then control lighting conditions and be privy to unobstructed views. The resulting photographs may be technically accomplished, or even artworks unto themselves, but they are far from creating a complete picture of the installation. Julie

Reiss recounts a story from her tenure at the Jewish Museum in New York, when installation artist Illya Kabakov was distressed to find that the visitors had been omitted from catalog photographs:

Illya Kabakov was perturbed that the museum staff had his installation, *Mother and Son*, photographed without spectators for an exhibition catalog. His feeling was that spectators were integral to the piece and should have been included. But this had never occurred to the museum staff. Their main concern was to find an architectural photographer who would be able to successfully photograph a whole space as opposed to a discrete object.<sup>54</sup>

The remedy for Kabakov's problem is a simple solution: in addition to photographing the installation under ideal conditions, photograph the installation as it exists with its visitors.

During a recent retrospective of Olafur Eliasson at New York's Museum of Modern

Art (MOMA) entitled *Take Your Time*, photographic documentation took on a new level of complexity. Visitors were given the option of wearing a portable camera around their neck that was set to take pictures at random intervals. The cameras were later collected and the visitors' images were promptly posted to the exhibition website. These pictures became an ever-shifting website background, offering a candid look at the experience of moving through the exhibition. MOMA visitors were also allowed to use their own cameras and video devices to document their experience at the exhibition, an opportunity that was heartily seized by visitors. Bill Viola proposes that in order for a work's conservation to be successful, the process must use a more vernacular vocabulary: "It seems to me that if conservation of artworks is to be successful and self-maintaining, and particularly if media artworks are to be successfully shown as maintained, then this process has to become

a part of people's regular activity. It has to be turned into some form of ritual, a pattern of behavior. Most important, they have to want to do it, even need to do it."<sup>55</sup> Regarding the *Take Your Time* exhibit, thousands of Flickr images suggest that taking photographs has become the sort of "ritual behavior" that may, in effect, preserve the memory of Eliasson's work.

Videotaping installations, though not as commonly practiced, can also reveal a significant amount of information about the viewer, says Vesna Krstich:

"Among the most effective ways of studying the complexity of this kind of art viewing is through qualitative video research. However, there is a dearth of qualitative video data that focuses directly on how visitors interact with installation art ... Installation art transforms passive viewers into active participants and video-based research offers numerous possibilities for studying this widespread practice in all its forms."<sup>56</sup>

In Krstich's study, video was used to capture the behavior of three participants and document how they interpreted the meaning of Janet Cardiff's multimedia installation *The Dark Pool*. Participants were first videotaped during their initial encounter with the work; participants were then invited to create (and narrate) their own videos of their experience, based on the informant-made video model developed by Richard Lachapelle.<sup>57</sup>

Krstich's study found a number of advantages to having the visitor execute their own video documentation: "Informant-made videos reduced interference from the researcher, provided visual documentation of the work, allowed for in-camera editing accompanied by verbal commentary, documented physical interaction, and provided informants with a self-reflective awareness of their own viewing experiences."<sup>58</sup> One of the major problems identified in this study was that the participants were given the opportunity to be alone with

the work; other visitors were not allowed in the installation while the participant was videotaping. Installations are often social spaces, and by removing other visitors, one dramatically affects how the viewer experiences the work. Krstich notes, "the presence of other visitors can greatly affect the manner in which people become acquainted with installations, especially its interactive components."<sup>59</sup>

A major distinction between MOMA's photographic documentation and Krstich's video documentation was that the latter was concerned not only with documenting the visual quality of the installation, but also with capturing the meaning created from the interaction between the viewer and artwork. Helen Escobedo is a proponent of preserving an artwork's meaning for posterity: "If art is a reflection of humankind's spiritual needs, then it must be recorded, just as ideas have been preserved throughout history—not only by their physical evidence, but also by virtue of

**“If art is a reflection of humankind’s spiritual needs, then it must be recorded, just as ideas have been preserved throughout history—not only by their physical evidence, but also by virtue of their meaning.” Helen Escobedo**

their meaning.”<sup>60</sup> The nature of installation art rejects the notion that there is a single vantage point to best view the work. Likewise, many installations may reject the notion that there is a single “correct” meaning or interpretation to be made by the visitor. But how is it possible to document innumerable interpretations?

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Boston has been testing ways to make the documentation of their collection accessible to their visitors and record the many diverse interpretations of their visitors in an area of the museum called the mediatheque. The mediatheque is a media lab that offers a variety of ways for visitors to engage with the collection and with each other. (Currently it is accessible only in the museum, but there are plans to make it fully available on the internet in the future.) *What Makes it Art?* is a chat/blog where visitors can leave feedback and respond to other visitors about contemporary art (both within and outside the collection).

Visitors can also interpret or describe works in the collection by “tagging” objects with descriptive words, building what the museum calls “a visitor-centered vocabulary.” *In the Galleries* provides information about artists and their work. Similar to PBS’s Art21 series, these mini-documentaries include video selections of the artists, preparators, curators, and other individuals involved in the creation and installation of artworks in ICA’s collection. In effect, the ICA has made the documentation of the installations in their museum accessible to its public as a way to create a more meaningful experience for the visitor.<sup>61</sup>

Installation art offers the public the chance to become active participants; similarly, in the case studies examined in this chapter, visitors were invited to become active participants in the documentation process. Many might argue that these case studies belong to other arenas, such as marketing (MOMA), visitor research (Krstich) or education (ICA Boston). This

project suggests that the field of contemporary art conservation may benefit from looking at how other fields have encouraged the visitor to become an active documentarian of installation art. Bill Viola reflects, “In my experience, it is people and not materials that are the greatest threat to the preservation of an artwork.”<sup>62</sup> If people are the greatest threat to the preservation of an artwork, does that also position them to become the ultimate solution to problems of preservation? Note that Viola does not mention a type of people. He does not say conservators, curators, artists etc.; he simply says ‘people.’ He does not limit the act of conservation to a specific few, but instead, opens up the possibility of extending the realm of preservation to a larger public.

Questions for further inquiry:

If an installation’s meaning (determined individually by the viewer) is to be included in documentation, how will selection be

determined?

Will “misinterpretations” (contrary to the artist’s statement) be included?

What level of accessibility is appropriate for an artwork’s documentation?

## NOTES

<sup>54</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) xvii.

<sup>55</sup>Bill Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 92.

<sup>56</sup>Vesna Krstich, "Videotaping Art Installations: A Research Tool," Curator 48 (2005): 467.

<sup>57</sup>Krstich 468

<sup>58</sup>Krstich 468–469

<sup>59</sup>Krstich 472.

<sup>60</sup>Helen Escobedo, "Work as Process or Work as Product: A Conceptual Dilemma," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 53.

<sup>61</sup>Poss Family Mediatheque, 14 April 2009 <<http://www.icaboston.org/gofurther/ica-mediatheque/>>.

<sup>62</sup>Viola 92.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BENEFITS & COMPLICATIONS

In the examples provided in the previous chapter, visitors were invited to assume an additional role (that of a documentarian) within the exhibit. Theories of environmental aesthetics suggest that one resulting benefit would be a more meaningful experience for the visitor. Arnold Berleant claims, “The greater the sensory engagement and involvement—or synaesthesia for the complete union of sensory modalities—the greater the depth of appreciation, identity, and the recognition of interconnectedness.”<sup>63</sup> David Fenner shares this point of view: “When all of my sensory modalities are engaged, and when my thoughts and feelings are likewise engaged, then I am totally immersed, I can have the deepest, richest, most highly unified experiences I am capable of.”<sup>64</sup> Installation art envelops its viewers, and frequently allows for multiple views and interpretations; including the public’s varied perspectives in the documentation would allow for a similar duplicity of views.

The argument to explore a more multifaceted documentary approach is furthered by contextualist theory, which Fenner summarizes as the idea that: “Most works of art are more valuable when considered within appropriate contexts.”<sup>65</sup> If the viewer can be defined as a collaborator, or a material, its inclusion will certainly result in a more “truthful” representation of the object, create a richer understanding for current and future generations and, according to contextualist theory, result in a more valuable artwork. Martha Buskirk suggests that treating participation as a medium may help protect the artwork’s integrity:

“Might participation or even ephemerality thus constitute a medium? Perhaps permanence might also be described as a medium? Or scale? Or newness? Or deterioration? In a sense all of these possibilities stretch the term ‘medium’ to the breaking point. Yet these are qualities central

**Curatorial essays frequently discuss the visitor's intended role in an installation; however, a visitor's actual behavior may be markedly different from the expected behavior.**

to the definition of a great many works of art, where to ignore their implications would not just alter but destroy the work.”<sup>66</sup>

Documentation of visitor engagement may also help address the genre's lack of historicization. Julie Reiss proposes that installation art is significantly less-researched than other genres of art: “Spectator participation is so integral to installation art that without having the experience of being in the piece, analysis of installation can be difficult. Perhaps as a result, few historians have seriously studied it despite its proliferation as an art form in the last forty years.”<sup>67</sup> Photographs, curatorial essays, and interviews may be all that is left as evidence of the work's existence. Curatorial essays frequently discuss the visitor's intended role in an installation; however, a visitor's actual behavior may be markedly different from the expected behavior. Including evidence of the viewer in documentation would increase the number of resources available to the historian

and could significantly contribute to further study of installation art.

Clearly, many stand to benefit from the addition of the visitor in documentation; but in making the decision to include evidence of the visitor, one must also consider the potential conflicts.

Interference with the artistic process is one potential problem, especially when there is significant involvement of the artist in determining documentation methods. Carol Stringari warns, “Documentation at all costs, whether that means harassing the artist and their studio or attempting to preserve the most ridiculous detail which has no effect on the overall concept, can be detrimental to the process... In attempting to create a scheme for understanding this genre of art, I sincerely hope that respect for the creative process and its spontaneity is not lost.”<sup>68</sup>

Another potential problem is the interruption of the visitor experience. The documentation



should not compete or distract from the experience of the installation. Ideally, the chosen technique should conceptually align with the artwork itself.

Copyright issues make up another set of concerns. For example, if visitors are allowed to take photographs or video, the artist must be willing to surrender control of how those images are used by the visitor.

Finally, one must also keep in mind that no matter what method is selected, the documentation is subject to many of the same problems of preservation as the artwork, especially documentation that involves technology, such as digital photography, sound, and video.

Questions for further inquiry:

In what ways does involving the visitor in the documentation process alter the artwork and the visitor experience?

How can the documentary techniques

conceptually align with the artwork?

How does the artist wish to handle copyright concerns? (How liberal is their notion of authenticity?)

## NOTES

<sup>63</sup>Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetics of Environment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) 28.

<sup>64</sup>David Fenner, Art in Context: Understanding Aesthetic Value (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008) 141.

<sup>65</sup>Fenner 122.

<sup>66</sup>Martha Buskirk, The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) 152.

<sup>67</sup>Julie Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) xv.

<sup>68</sup>Carol Stringari, "Installations and problems of preservation." Modern Art: Who Cares? Eds. Ijssbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans (New York: Archetype Books, 2006) 281–282.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE EXPERIMENT

In an attempt to synthesize and apply the research undertaken in this project, an experiment was conducted with an MFA student at The University of the Arts who developed a video art installation for his thesis. To focus the study, I did not attempt to document the installation in its entirety. Instead, my efforts were focused on capturing how visitors were interacting with the installation. My objective was to document this interaction in a way that respected the needs of the artist and the public:

Needs of the documentarian/myself—to capture the participation of the visitor

Needs of the artist—to preserve the artistic process and intent

Needs of the public—to fully experience/interact with the installation

Before deciding on the appropriate technique for documentation, a series of questions (posed in the preceding chapters) were considered. The questions were answered by means of informal

conversations with the artist, who was still in the process of creating his installation.

What is the main purpose of the documentation? *The documentation's primary function is to record the memory of the artwork.*

For whom is the documentation intended? *Primarily, the documentation is for the artist.*

What is the intended lifespan of the artwork? *Initially, the lifespan of the installation will be two weeks, after which the work will be dismantled. However, the artist remains open to the idea of future re-installations of the artwork.*

How is visitor "participation" defined? (What will visitors be doing?)

*In addition to video and sound components, visitors will be invited to physically handle objects in the installation.*

How integral is the environment/venue to the installation? *Originally, the artwork was conceived as large scale video projections. However, upon visiting the exhibition space, the artist decided it would be impossible to attain*

*the intimate visitor experience he intended. He subsequently altered the form of the installation to accommodate the exhibition space. He created a series of small viewing booths and isolated the sound to headphones. The artist noted that should the installation be recreated in a different venue, the form may change again in response to the new site.*

Following the Guggenheim's model of asking the artist to select the appropriate method of conservation treatment, the artist was given the following list (and reminded it was not exhaustive) of options for documentation methods: video, photography, observation, tracking and timing, visitor interviews, focus groups, a blog, and a website. The artist determined that a combination of photography and video documentation would be best suited for the installation. Video being the medium of the main installation component, the notion of using it as a means of documentation seemed to conceptually align with the artwork.

The main obstacle to overcome during the

documentation process was extraneous noise.

The opening reception was accompanied by a lively band that made sound recording difficult. However, the reception's large turnout provided ample opportunity to observe and record visitors.

Observation #1: Even with signage encouraging them to touch, visitors were hesitant to handle installation objects.



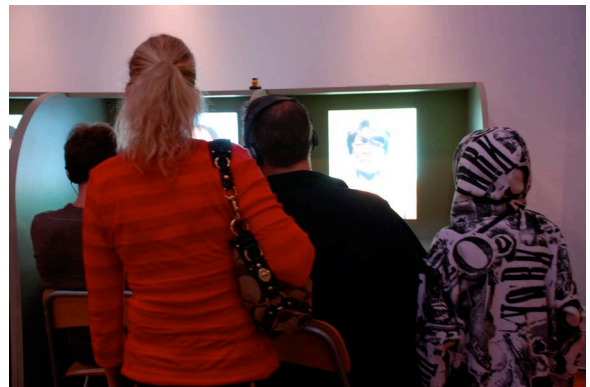
Observation #2: The presence of photography and video had a varied effect on visitor behavior. Most visitors were absorbed in the video installation and paid little attention to the photography and video documentation that was taking place. However, upon seeing the

video camera, one visitor began an impromptu performance of his own.



Observation #3: Visitors were much more likely to engage in the documentation process when they were following another's lead. After receiving assurance that photography and video were allowed, other visitors followed suit with their own devices.

Observation #4: Though the artist attempted to create an intimate one-on-one experience, many visitors experienced the installation in groups. It was common for a number of visitors to gather around one booth and share headphones or attempt to view more than one video at once.



Deviations from expected behavior (i.e. observation #4) were of particular interest, as they may potentially inform future iterations of the artist's work. The artist also expressed interest in adding an additional booth for visitors to record their responses, feedback, stories, and reflections inspired by their experience with the installation.



## PROCESS IMAGES

Load in



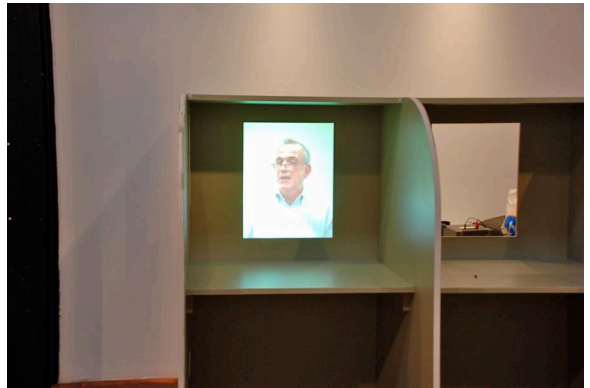
Constructed booths



Setting up the AV equipment



Adding the mylar screens



The artist Terry Peterson and Susan Viguers



Final video installation



## CONCLUSION

The word documentation conjures up certain ideas, often of a decided, objective, even clinical way of gathering information. This common view of documentation does not adequately capture the ephemeral and participatory nature of installation art. (If installation art is a genre that defies definition, how appropriate that its documentation likewise rejects a singular definition.) According to William Real, documentation of installation art should be concerned with capturing both the material *and experiential* qualities of the work.<sup>69</sup> But how is this to be carried out?

Many of those who are concerned with the problems of preserving contemporary art have acknowledged that current documentation methods are insufficient and that more research and new methods should be explored. According to Ijsbrand Hummelen, “The methods for collecting and making accessible this information should meet with high standards. For this, more research and

international and interdisciplinary collaboration in research is needed.”<sup>70</sup> Mikkel Bogh has suggested that in order to develop proper techniques for documenting contemporary artworks, we should look to the intrinsic qualities of the artwork itself.<sup>71</sup> The principles of Real, Hummelen, and Bogh formed the foundation of this thesis project.

The search for the intrinsic qualities of installation art uncovered the viewer as an element strangely absent from the majority of documentation I had analyzed. Turning then to other arenas of the museum, such as education and visitor research, I discovered compelling evidence of visitor engagement in installations. The desire to put this research into practice led to a collaboration with a graduate student/artist whose thesis work was a video installation. This experiment was intended to focus on the “experiential” qualities of the artwork and provide evidence of the viewer.

It has been argued here that installation art

is perhaps better described as a performance or event; yet current documentation is still commonly approached from the standpoint of installations as objects that are totalities unto themselves. If installations do not exist apart from their viewer, to exclude the viewer from the work's memory is to divorce the artwork from its meaning and render the documentation incomplete.



<sup>69</sup>William A. Real, "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art," Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 40 (2001): 216.

<sup>70</sup>Ijsbrand Hummelen, "The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and Strategies," Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art, Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo (Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999) 174.

<sup>71</sup>Mikkel Bogh, Conference lecture, Preserving Perception: Ideas of Embodiment in Conceptual Art from Joseph Kosuth to Joachim Koester, Permanence in Contemporary Art: Checking Reality, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark, 3 Nov. 2008.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author."  
Participation: Documents of Contemporary  
Art. Ed. Claire Bishop. Cambridge: MIT  
Press, 2006. 41–45.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer."  
Benjamin, Selected Writings 2 1931–34.  
Cambridge: Harvard University Press,  
2003. 777. Qtd in Participation: Documents  
of Contemporary Art. Ed. Claire Bishop.  
Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. 11.
- Berleant, Arnold. The Aesthetics of  
Environment. Philadelphia: Temple  
University Press, 1992.
- Bishop, Claire. "But is it Installation  
Art?" Tate Etc. 3 (2005). 10 Mar. 2009  
<[http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue3/  
butisitinstallationart.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue3/butisitinstallationart.htm)>.
- Bishop, Claire. Installation Art: A Critical  
History. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Bogh, Mikkel. Conference lecture. Preserving  
Perception: Ideas of Embodiment in  
Conceptual Art from Joseph Kosuth  
to Joachim Koester. Permanence in  
Contemporary Art: Checking Reality. Statens  
Museum for Kunst. Copenhagen, Denmark. 3  
Nov. 2008.
- Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics."  
Participation: Documents of Contemporary  
Art. Ed. Claire Bishop. Cambridge: MIT  
Press, 2006. 160–171.
- Buskirk, Martha. The Contingent Object of  
Contemporary Art. Cambridge: MIT Press,  
2003.
- Corrin, Lisa. "Self-Questioning Monuments."  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres. London: Serpentine  
Gallery, 2000.
- Davies, Hugh. "Introducing Installation: A  
Legacy from Lascaux to Last Week." Blurring  
the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969–1996.  
Seattle: Marquand Books, 1997. 8–11.
- Dreier, Thomas. "Copyright Aspects of the  
Preservation of Nonpermanent Works of  
Modern Art." Mortality Immortality? The  
Legacy of 20th-Century Art. Ed. Miguel Angel

- Corzo. Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999.
- Electronic Arts Intermix. 14 Mar. 2009 <<http://eai.org/eai/index.htm>>.
- Escobedo, Helen. "Work as Process or Work as Product: A Conceptual Dilemma." Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art. Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999. 53–56.
- Fenner, David. Art in Context: Understanding Aesthetic Value. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008.
- Fernandez, Emma. Telephone Interview. 12 May 2009.
- Groenenboom, Roland. "Installations and Interpretations." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 343–346.
- Hanhardt, John G. "Nam June Paik, TV Garden, 1974." The Variable Media Approach: Permanence Through Change. New York: Guggenheim Mus Pub, 2003. 70–77.
- Hummelen, Ijsbrand. "Conservation Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art: Recent Developments in the Netherlands." Conservatie en Restauratie 3 (2005): 22–26.
- Hummelen, Ijsbrand. "The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and Strategies." Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art. Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo. Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999. 171–174.
- Independent Media Arts Preservation. 01 Apr. 2009. <<http://www.imappreserve.org/>>.
- Inside Installations. 15 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.inside-installations.org/home/index.php>>.
- Kaprow, Allan. "Notes of the Elimination of the Audience." Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art. Ed. Claire Bishop. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. 102–104.
- Krstich, Vesna. "Videotaping Art Installations: A Research Tool." Curator 48 (2005): 467–73.
- Laurenson, Pip. "Developing Strategies for the

- Conservation of Installations Incorporating Time-based Media: Gary Hill's Between Cinema and a Hard Place." Tate Papers (2004). 17 Feb. 2009 <[http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04spring/time\\_based\\_media.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04spring/time_based_media.htm)>.
- Laurenson, Pip. "Research on Preservation Strategies Part 1: Risk Assessment." Inside Installations (2007). 17 Feb. 2009 <[http://insideinstallations.org/research/detail.php?r\\_id=83&ct=preservation](http://insideinstallations.org/research/detail.php?r_id=83&ct=preservation)>.
- Laurenson, Pip. "The Conservation and Documentation of Video Art." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 263–271.
- LeWitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." Artforum 5 (1967): 79.
- Michalski, Stefan. "Conservation Lessons from Other Types of Museums And a Universal Database for Collection Preservation." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 290–295.
- Norris, Debra Hess. "The Survival of Contemporary Art: The Role of the Conservation Professional in this Delicate Ecosystem." Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art. Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo. Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999. 131–134.
- Poss Family Mediatheque. 14 April 2009 <<http://www.icaboston.org/gofurther/ica-mediatheque/>>.
- Real, William A. "Toward Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art." Journal of the American Institute for Conservation (2001): 125–136.
- Reiss, Julie. From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.
- Rinehart, Richard. "The Straw that Broke the

- Museum's Back? Collecting and Preserving Digital Media Art Works for the Next Century." Switch Journal 14 (2000). 2 April 2009 <[http://switch.sjsu.edu/nextswitch/switch\\_engine/](http://switch.sjsu.edu/nextswitch/switch_engine/)>.
- Rosenthal, Mark. Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer. New York: Prestel Publishing, 2003.
- Stringari, Carol. "Installations and problems of preservation." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 272-281.
- Tate Research: Matters in Media Art. 07 Mar. 2009 <[http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/loans/resource\\_installationdoc.shtm](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/loans/resource_installationdoc.shtm)>.
- Time-based Media Conservation. 07 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/conservation/time/about.htm#what>>.
- Van de Wetering, Ernst. "Conservation-Restoration Ethics and the Problem of Modern Art." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 247-249.
- Van Wegen, D.H. "Between Fetish and Score: The Position of the Curator of Contemporary Art." Modern Art Who Cares? Eds. Ijsbrand Hummelen, Dionne Sille, and Marjan Zijlmans. New York: Archetype Books, 2006. 201-209.
- Variable Media Network. Guggenheim Museum. 22 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.Variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html>>.
- Viola, Bill. "Permanent Impermanence." Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art. Ed. Miguel Angel Corzo. Singapore: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999. 85-94.
- Weyer, Cornelia. "Restoration Theory Applied to Installation Art." VDR Beitrage (2006): 40-48.
- Wharton, Glenn. "The Challenges of

Conserving Contemporary Art." Collecting  
the New: Museums and Contemporary Art.  
Ed. Bruce Altshuler. Princeton: Princeton  
University Press, 2005. 163-178.

## NOMENCLATURE

Installation Art: a site-specific work which may or may not be destroyed after being exhibited.

Installation art is a hybrid art form that may include architecture, various media, performance and technology.

Time-based Media: a term applied to technologically-heavy installations incorporating film, video and sound that have duration as a dimension.

Documentation: Documentation for artists' installations has a more dynamic meaning, referring to a conservation designed to mitigate the risk of not knowing how to install and display the work correctly in the future.

## **DOCUMENTING INSTALLATION ART: A COLLABORATION BETWEEN S.M.A.K AND TATE**

---

### **Introduction**

Record of examination

### **Specifications for Display**

**Instruments for display**

Plans/manual (performance)/films

**In-house notes**

Staff with special installation knowledge

**Specifications for display**

Form

**Guidelines for packing and transport**

### **Structure and Examination**

**Condition reports**

Including what it is made of / how it is made / physical condition / photos

**Equipment particular to this work**

Anything specifically bought on acquisition and why this equipment is special

**Material information**

From the gallery, artist, artist's assistance, company/manufacturer

**Production Diagrams for media components**

**Component forms**

Record of creation, and numbering

### **Display History**

**Photographs**

Original

**Copies of images from relevant literature**

**Texts** from the museum or in an associated catalogue

**Information from other museums that have the same artwork in their collection**

**Reconstruction of the display history and experience of the museum staff**

**Display of the work prior to ownership by the museum**

**Display form** (to be designed by Tate) but it will include the following:

- Summary of what happened
- Equipment used
- A log of any minor incidents reported during display
- Display maintenance procedure
- Budget



- Installation plans (layout and wiring drawings etc.)
- Notes about any exhibition formats that were made for the particular display
- Overview of maintenance/equipment servicing
- Photographs
- Correspondence

**Loan form** (to be designed by Tate) but will include the following:

- Documentation for a particular loan
- Condition checking
- What actually happened at the loan venue (installation plans, details, incidents etc)
- Correspondence

## **Acquisition and Registration**

**Pre-Acquisition** (form)

**Board note**

**Certification**

**Legal and Copyright**

**Correspondence**

**Official views** (gallery photography)

**Inventory of Elements** (documented on arrival)

## **Conservation: Strategy/Research/Treatment/Ongoing**

**Major damage reports** (cross referenced with display history)

**Obsolescence of equipment**

**Storage guidelines**

**Disaster plan recommendations**

**Artist Box** (material archive)

**Major Treatment Reports**

**Scientific analysis**

**Migration of media components** (forms)

**Vulnerable item check list**

**House keeping procedures**

## **Artist Participation**

**Small communications** letters, fax, emails etc

**Film on the working process of reproduction and display**

**Interviews**

## **Art Historical Research/Context**

**Events related to the artwork, including editions of the work**

**Relating to the artwork**

**Relating to the artist**

## INSTALLATION TEMPLATE

### TIME-BASED MEDIA WORKS OF ART

<b>ARTIST:</b> <b>TITLE:</b> <b>OWNER:</b> <b>REF NO:</b> Accession number/ loan ref
<b>DESCRIPTION:</b> Number of channels/media type/primary mode of presentation/ media format/ sound/ colour Description of what the installation should look and sound like if operating correctly Attach installation photographs Supplementary documentation provided: photographs/plans/video included.
<b>EXHIBITION FORMAT DETAILS</b> Media format NTSC/PAL/SECAM Duration – if looped indicate duration of black on loop If more than one channel indicate whether synchronised For slide-based works indicate: if the slides are mounted/stock details For films indicate: if shown on a loop/type of stock used/presence of coating For video discs indicate: frame accurate searching enabled/authored commands/structure of disc (titles, chapters) For audio works indicate: stereo/mono/Dolby 5.1 etc Details of available backups and spares
<b>EQUIPMENT LIST</b> List items/description/make/model/suppliers details and approximate cost at date last checked if available or whether obsolete. Indicate which elements are lent with the work (if any) and which elements need to be supplied by the borrower. Provide specifications of equipment to be supplied by the borrower.
<b>DETAILS OF THE INSTALLATION SPACE</b> Attach numbered plans showing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• entrance/exit</li> <li>• public flow</li> <li>• position of equipment (speakers/projectors/players etc)</li> <li>• position of equipment cupboard and access to equipment cupboard</li> <li>• projection distances</li> <li>• screens</li> <li>• size of image</li> <li>• height of image including height from the ground</li> <li>• space between plinths and height of plinths</li> <li>• position of benches</li> <li>• corridors to limit light or sound spill</li> <li>• any other construction required</li> <li>• ceiling height</li> <li>• Flooring specifications</li> <li>• Sound insulation details and position</li> <li>• Acoustic specification – including sound levels</li> <li>• Ceiling details if false ceiling is required</li> <li>• Wall and ceiling colour</li> <li>• Lighting requirements</li> <li>• Details such as skirting etc.</li> </ul>
<b>OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED FOR THE INSTALLATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cable specifications (attach wiring diagram)</li> <li>• Brackets</li> <li>• Ceiling support of any suspended objects</li> <li>• Equipment cupboard – with shelving</li> <li>• Benches</li> <li>• Plinths</li> <li>• Special signage</li> <li>• Exit signs</li> <li>• Barriers</li> <li>• Special high reflectance paints</li> <li>• Screens</li> </ul>
<b>SPARES AND CONSUMABLES</b>

Lamps/ filters Backup equipment
<b>KEY QUALITIES &amp; INSTALLATION REQUIREMENTS</b> Flag which aspects of the work are key to a successful installation.
<b>ARTIST'S STATEMENT</b> Where possible ask the artist to sign off the installation instructions and include a statement about what is more important to pay attention to in the installation. If an interview has been conducted insert any relevant extracts.
<b>TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE NEEDED FOR THE INSTALLATION</b> Do the technicians need to have specific expert knowledge of construction, particular technologies, electrical systems, computer programming etc. Are there any specifications regarding relationship to other artworks or other environmental concerns Technical specifications and instructions.
<b>ELECTRICIANS NOTES</b> Indicate where electricians should not modify any electrical element without approval of lender  <b>POWER REQUIREMENTS</b> 240 Volt/110 volt? Number of sockets Approximate rating in amps Power conditioning required Number of constant power supplies (in equipment room/in the space) Number of supplies which will be switched off nightly from central switch (in the equipment room/in the space) Light in equipment cupboard
<b>SYNCHRONISATION DETAILS ( if applicable)</b> Time code reference Special authoring requirements System used Degree of accuracy
<b>KEY OPERATIONAL NOTES</b> Switch on and off procedures
<b>MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS</b> Nature and frequency of maintenance Number of people required Skill level Details of likely operational failures
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY DETAILS</b> Are any of the components potentially dangerous to the installation crew? Are any components potentially dangerous to the public? Consider - light levels/entrance and exit arrangements/sound levels etc Has a risk assessment been completed?
<b>GENERAL NOTES</b> What details should the installation crew pay special attention to? Has the work been shown in a similar environment before (hours of operation etc)? What is the status of the components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has any of the equipment been modified by the artist?</li> <li>• Is any of the equipment no longer easily available?</li> <li>• Are any of the components sculptural objects requiring different skills in the crew?</li> <li>• Do any components require the wearing of gloves?</li> <li>• What is most likely to go wrong?</li> </ul>
<b>SIGNED:</b> <b>DATE:</b>

# THE MATERIALITY OF THE VIEWER

Documenting Visitor Engagement  
in Contemporary Art Installations

Jesse B. Schlabach

Museum Exhibition Planning and Design  
The University of the Arts  
May 2009

A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Fine Arts.

© Jesse B. Schlabach 2009

# PROJECT ABSTRACT

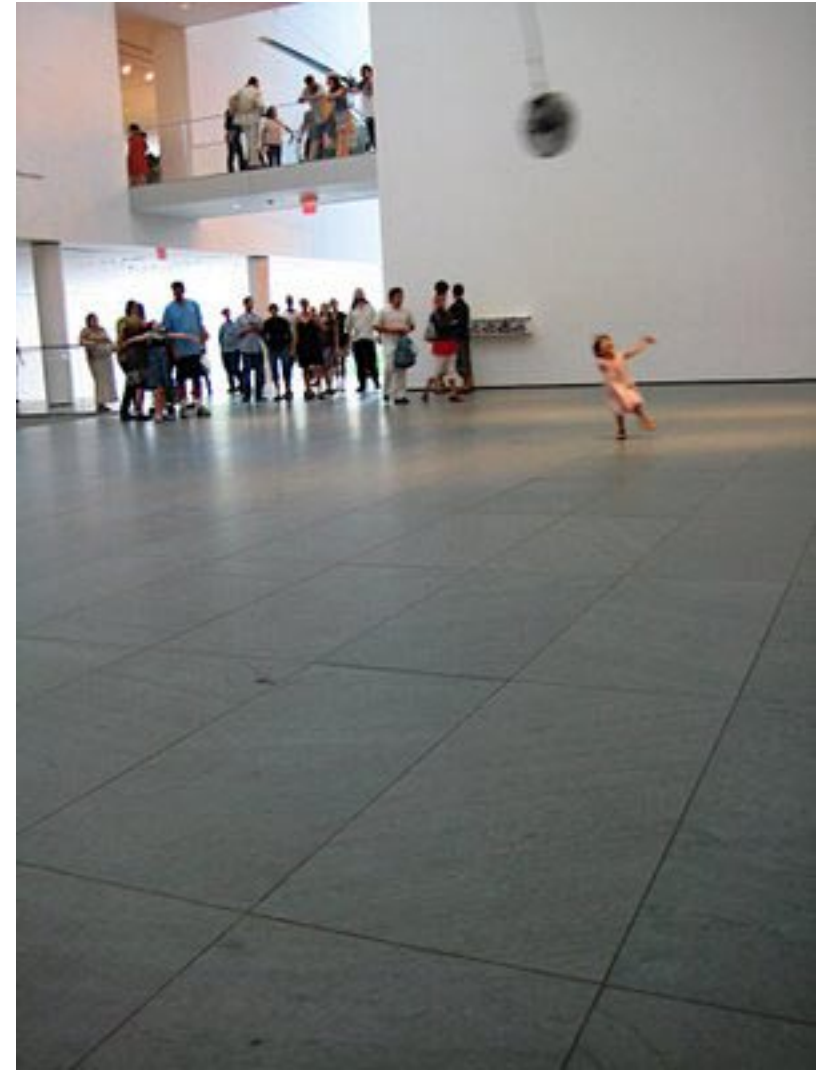
In the past decade, the emphasis in preservation research for contemporary art installations has been on the complex practical and ethical problems of preserving a work's material qualities and the artist's intent. While there has been widespread acknowledgment of the viewer's critical role in installation art, the visitor has often remained invisible in the documentation process. Documentation has evolved into a key preservation strategy for installations; whether its purpose is to guide re-creation or serve as a memorial, the ultimate goal is to provide the future a rich portrayal of an installation and its context. If the presence of the viewer has been recognized a vital component of the artwork, should there be evidence of the viewer included in the work's remembrance? Furthermore, if meaning is constructed from the interaction of viewer and artwork, how might the viewer be able to contribute to the documentation of the event in which they are participating?

## PROJECT GOALS

To consider how an artwork's documentation can and/or should be informed by the qualities of the artwork itself

To investigate, within the context of contemporary art installations, how visitor engagement can be captured and recorded

To explore ways that the public might contribute to the documentation processes and the resulting benefits and problems



Olafur Eliasson *Take Your Time*

# DEFINING INSTALLATION ART

“An installation is a site-specific work which may or may not be destroyed after being exhibited. Installation art is a hybrid art form that may include architecture, various media, performance and technology.” Carol Stringari

## ENVIRONMENT

- May exist in many different spaces
- May be in response to particular site

## TIME

- Time-based media
- Varying lifespans
- Use of deteriorating materials

## PRESENCE OF THE VIEWER

“It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely. All the elements—people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time—can in this way be integrated. And the last shred of theatrical convention disappears.” Allan Kaprow

“The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer.” Ilya Kabakov



Matthew and Jonathan Stemler *Juxtaposition*



# PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION

“The way in which installation art insists upon a viewer’s presence in a space has led to a number of problems of how it is remembered.”

Claire Bishop

## MATERIAL PROBLEMS

Often larger and/or more fragile

Explosion of diversity makes them difficult to identify

Materials may no longer be available

More likely to suffer rapid decay (often intentional)

## KNOWLEDGE PROBLEMS

Potential loss of:

Environmental Context

Cultural Context

Personal Narrative

The “material problems” of contemporary art (as identified by Michalski) have received much attention in the past decade; solutions and case studies for these types of problems are well represented in the bibliographic resources for this project. Significantly less study has been undertaken examining Michalski’s contextual “knowledge problems,” issues that speak directly to the distinguishing characteristic of installations as defined here: the presence of the viewer.



Bill Viola *The Crossing*

# METHODS OF CONSERVATION

“Obviously, we cannot coherently preserve what in its definition is unpreservable.” Arthur Danto

## INTERVIEWS

Most widely practiced way to gather information from artist

## GUGGENHEIM’S VARIABLE MEDIA NETWORK

## STORAGE

Most conservative method; store work physically; artwork will expire when materials cease to function

## EMULATION

Imitate original look; can be inconsistent with artist’s intent

## MIGRATION

Upgrading equipment and source material; appearance of work will probably change in a new medium.

## REINTERPRETATION

Most radical method; reinterpret work each time it is re-created; can be dangerous when not warranted by artist.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres



# DOCUMENTATION

“To ensure the long-term preservation of contemporary and Modern art accurate documentation is vital.” Debra Norris

## AUTHENTICITY

“One key point is that when preserving and re-presenting media-based works of art, we should give up the notion of a single, authentic object and view these works as sets of instructions rather than precious originals.” Richard Rinehart

## PURPOSE

Memorial

Artwork

Guide for future recreation/reinstallation

## A NEW DEFINITION OF DOCUMENTATION

“Documentation for artists’ installations has a more dynamic meaning, referring to a conservation designed to mitigate the risk of not knowing how to install and display the work correctly in the future.” Pip Laurenson

## WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

“Floor plans; schematics; wiring diagrams; lighting diagrams and reports; artist’s preliminary notes and sketches; photographs; video; video interviews of artist, curator, and others; computer-assisted design files; and virtual reality.” William Real



Sol le Witt

# THE INCLUSION OF THE VISITOR

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Ilya Kabakov

## MOMA/OLAFUR ELIASSON/TAKE YOUR TIME

“It seems to me that if conservation of artworks is to be successful and self-maintaining, and particularly if media artworks are to be successfully shown as maintained, then this process has to become a part of people’s regular activity. It has to be turned into some form of ritual, a pattern of behavior. Most important, they have to want to do it, even need to do it.” Bill Viola

## VESNA KRSTICH/VIDEOTAPING INSTALLATIONS

Major distinction between photography and video interviews is that it records not just visual data but also meaning.

## ICA BOSTON/MEDIATHEQUE

What Makes it Art? Chat/Blog  
Tagging Collection Objects  
In the Galleries

Many might argue that these case studies belong to other arenas, such as marketing (MOMA), visitor research (Krstich) or education (ICA Boston). This project suggests that the field of contemporary art conservation may benefit from looking at how other fields have encouraged the visitor to become an active documentarian of installation art.



Olafur Eliasson *Take Your Time*



# BENEFITS & COMPLICATIONS

## BENEFITS

Addresses a lack of historicization

“Spectator participation is so integral to installation art that without having the experience of being in the piece, analysis of installation can be difficult. Perhaps as a result, few historians have seriously studied it despite its proliferation as an art form in the last forty years.” Julie Reiss

More “truthful,” accurate representation of the artwork

More meaningful experience for the viewer

## COMPLICATIONS

Interference with artistic process

“Documentation at all costs, whether that means harassing the artist and their studio or attempting to preserve the most ridiculous detail which has no effect on the overall concept, can be detrimental to the process... In attempting to create a scheme for understanding this genre of art, I sincerely hope that respect for the creative process and its spontaneity is not lost.” Carol Stringari

Interruption of visitor experience

Logistical concerns (time, space, management/copyright)

Potential conflict with art interpreters (critics, historians, etc.)



Steve Roden *Nothing but What is Therein Contained*

Photo courtesy Joseph E.B. Elliott

# THE EXPERIMENT

MFA THESIS STUDENT TERRY PETERSON

## OBJECTIVE

To capture how the visitors are interacting with the installation in the most unobtrusive way possible

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

“In the same way, an installation that is measured and defined too narrowly risks becoming frozen, contrary to the spirit of evanescence, temporality, and change inherent in the medium.” William Real

## INITIAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as the documentation's main purpose?
2. What kind of an experience do you hope for your visitor?
3. What do you see as the essential qualities of your work that you would want to remain, and what elements would be flexible?

## POSSIBILITIES

Video  
Photography  
Observation (tracking and timing)  
Visitor interviews (video, audio, or written)  
Blog to capture visitor photography/feedback  
Plan for Website

