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## **Day 1, Part I: Artists in Need of Documentation, Scores, Support and Services**

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### **Part I: Artists in Need of Documentation, Scores, Support and Services**

Moderated by **Gaby Wijers** (LIMA)

**Geert Mul** (Artist), *Future Proof*

**Rachel Somers Miles** (LIMA), *Empowering Artists to Be in Control: The Artwork Documentation Tool*

**Julie Boschat Thorez** (LIMA), *The Future is Now!: Then What?*

### **Introduction by Gaby Wijers**

LIMA director Gaby Wijers opened the symposium by highlighting the challenges that born-digital works pose on the idea of an artwork as a fixed object, and the forthcoming consequences of that shift in perspective for preservation practice. For issues such as the constant and rapid change in technologies and the variety in manifestations or versions that these works can exist in bring a different approach for the future display and access to these works for future generations. Thereby, resisting the uncertainties that these dynamic artworks bring about would/does not lead to any fruitful approach.

Nevertheless, to prevent irreparable loss, urgent action is needed. This symposium offers professionals the opportunity to exchange current knowledge, share project practices and the development of new methods within the international network of media art preservation. What can we learn from other practices, and how to train the new generation of artists, archivists, managers and others who are responsible for future presentations of these works?

## **Geert Mul**

### ***Future Proof***

In 2016, the exhibition *Geert Mul – Match Maker 25 jaar mediakunst* took place at the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam. This exhibition displayed a history of 30 projects that Mul has been working on over the last 25 years. For the occasion, various installations and interactive artworks had to be rebuilt.

The exhibition comprised of about 11 computer-based interactive art installations of which 4 had to be rebuilt from scratch. The event offered the opportunity and need to collaborate with LIMA for the project Future Proof, in which the works were thoroughly researched and preserved which would result in a sustainable outcome based on 10 case studies.

Mul described his installations *Horizons* (2008) and *Shan Shui* (2013) which were based on the same soft- and hardware. The main questions were: Could these works be installed in 2016, using current technology? What parameters are required for the necessary migration, and can the artist, and researcher make a script for long-term installment?

LIMA held extended interviews in which technical specifications, conceptual framework and the interactivity aspect of these works were largely addressed. Protocol and scripts were developed.

After Schiedam, the works were transported to Dortmund where they were exhibited at Dortmunder-U. Afterwards Edwin Jacobs (director Dortmunder-U) commissioned *Shan Shui* for the public space of the U. This chance was used to develop a fully functioning emulated version of *Shan Shui*. (After discussing migration and emulation as preservation strategies, the outcome was to create an emulation as Mul and the team considered it as a more sustainable solution than a migration, which is still hardware-dependent.)

What were the lessons learnt from this project? For Mul, who has a background in stage art, one thing was that he was never too concerned with conservation issues. That is, until he wanted to re-show his older works. Now, he is more aware and as a result he tries to avoid very specific technological dependencies in his artistic practice. However, as Mul points out, the mindset of an artist shouldn't be mixed with that of a conservator. An artist should be an artist in the first place.

After Mul's presentation, the audience was given opportunity to reflect and ask questions. Reactions included how the documentation of interaction was done, if Mul trusts LIMA to install an exhibition without him being involved. (Mul: for some of the works, definitely, but due to the site-specificity of many of most works, involvement is often inevitable as the 'staging' is often part of the works in itself.)

In reflection, documenting interaction is an issue that can be further researched. What is the state-of-the-art, is there actual research at the moment, for instance on development of interactivity scripts?

### **Rachel Somers Miles**

#### ***Empowering Artists to Be in Control: The Artwork Documentation Tool***

Researcher Rachel Somers Miles (LIMA) presented the *Artwork Documentation Tool*, a DIY instrument for artists to document their work, developed by LIMA.

The *Artwork Documentation Package* was created during the *Future Proof* project, being further developed into the online platform *Artwork Documentation Tool* (ADT) within the *Art Host* project. The tool fits in this project as *Art Host* focuses specifically on developing tools, guidelines and services for artists.

The tool itself is available as an online platform, by use of a personal account with a login. Artists are able to work individually on the ADT by filling in the questions over time (there is a 'save' button that allows for interim use). The tool is free to use and its not resource dependent.

It is made up of a list of steps and tasks for documenting and gathering information per artwork. These different steps in turn consist of questions regarding specifications of equipment, soft- hardware, sketches, key information (concept, functioning, versions etc) storage and backups, video registration etc., to be filled in by the artist. The ADT is especially geared to complex software-based artworks that consist of various elements. Initiatives such as the *Variable Media Questionnaire* and Rafael Lozano Hemmer's text "Best Practices for Conservation of Media Art from an Artist's Perspective" (2015) formed an inspiration.

The reasoning behind the creation of the ADT is manifold: on the one hand, it serves as a tool for artists to be more in control of their work and to engage them in the preservation of their own work. The tool may also serve as a document that contains the relevant

information for institutions such as museums and galleries for acquisition, exhibition and preservation purposes. On a more general level, with this tool LIMA hopes to contribute to the preservation of complex digital art and to avoid loss of born digital art for future generations.

Two versions of the tool are available: one for artworks that are in the process of being created, and one that is specifically aimed at older artworks. During the case study-based research with Geert Mul, it became clear once again that in order to reinstall 'complex' (software-based) artworks a good documentation of these works is indispensable. Especially for artworks that were created years ago, it can be a challenge to gather and recollect information - Mul had to contact his programmer at the time, who was the only one who knew about certain technical details.

To create and further finetune the ADT, LIMA organized workshops in which artists were asked to reflect on the tool, and sent out a questionnaire. In the near future, the tool will be presented at various art academies, where students will reflect on its design and will become familiar with the tool's purposes and use.

Somers Miles described some challenges that she came across in the process of developing the ADT. These included:

- Language-wise: how to frame questions in such a way that the answers result in the information that is relevant? For instance, to get a 'short' description of the concept of artwork can be challenging, as some concepts are not as plain as others, or an artist may lack the skill of articulating his or her ideas concisely
- Different artists have different working processes and mindsets. How to overcome these differences in the tool?
- Change of artworks over time: Its possible to mention what different versions were created over time in the past. But how to deal with future versions?
- Time/ money restraints: Spending a significant amount of time on documentation leaves less time for creating new work.

Lastly, based on a reaction in the audience, it should be highlighted that no rights can be derived from the tool and collected data in the tool is not automatically stored in LIMA's database. The tool is meant for artists personal use in the first place and LIMA is not controlling and managing the data that artists insert in ADT.

## **Julie Boschat Thorez**

### ***The Future is Now!: Then What?***

Artist and researcher Julie Boschat Thorez presented her research on the preservation and distribution of the work of Ubermorgen. Her presentation was divided into two parts. As a case study, Boschat Thorez picked the work *Chinese Gold* (2006-ongoing), which she considered the most 'puzzling' work. *Chinese Gold* is both artwork, research and documentation on massively multiplied online game World of Warcraft and the economy that constitutes it. As such, the work can be considered as a collection of items, an archive, that gain meaning once they are linked or combined.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the work, researching its material qualities was a first step. Ubermorgen's practice is highly conceptual, and the working process is an important object for research. The main question was how to preserve these kinds of works that challenge the idea of an artwork as a fixed object, and whose core is instead a structure in which various items and relations arise over time.

#### *Part 1 What are we dealing with?*

Boschat Thorez first investigated the online project space of the work via the website of the artists, a series of hyperlinks that contained different info, much of which was not up-to-date and information was not always synced in various pages. Links to YouTube, to online platforms for trading Warcraft money for real money, exhibition pages of institutes that displayed the work, etc. Linkrot was one risk that she encountered here. This online context is really important for the work's meaning but highly fragile. Boschat Thorez subsequently researched the ways in which *Chinese Gold* was exhibited offline. Making an inventory of exhibitions was challenging as some exhibitions were not documented (at all). It turned out that the work had been exhibited in very different ways, up to the point it did not seem like the same work. In Beijing, for instance, the 'blue series' was displayed: prints on paper, roughly cut out and placed on a massive wall. For the exhibition *Space Invaders* (NIMk, Amsterdam) screenshots of the video on YouTube (the *Machinima*) was video-projected on a wall, surrounded by pictures of MTV series on lightboxes. In 2013 at Carroll Fletcher Gallery (London), the work was shown again differently: 6 pictures from the Belgrad series framed clean on the wall.

#### *Part 2: Where do we go now?*

*Chinese Gold* is spread over different places and has different shapes and manifestations. What can we do to preserve the work and its complexity?

- Generate production:

Artist interviews, document 'other people's documents' to understand the work (Boschat Thorez

generated lists, conversations and interviews. Thereby taking the personal relationship with the artists into account)

- Articulate collaboration:

How to collaborate and optimize collaborative preservation? The 2018 *Digital Methods Winterschool Collaborative Archiving of Digital Art* at the University of Amsterdam with Annet Dekker, Dusan Barok, Claudia Röck (and friends) covered this topic. Participants tested tools like Git and Wikimedia for defining ways in which we work on collaborative archiving. Git seems to be the better option since it keeps folder structure and has minimal interfacing, and it allows for some degree of experimentation. Also, it is possible to work with copies. Every person working on it has its own version of the archive. But it's not suitable for dealing with binaries since the tool comes from software code development. Wikimedia is not suitable for dropping entire archive inside. The advantage is that it is a really good publication tool.

A last problem encountered during this research relates to archival softwares used in organisations or institutions, which don't accommodate really well with these types of works. Due to the variability in status and constitution of these works, database software should (ideally) allow for more fluidity.

In conclusion Boschat Thorez mentioned that "it is not as much about the tools themselves as it is about the agency they create and the aspects of working together they emphasize". Would it be possible to have an archival structure that allows for reorganizing data easily, as item status change, leaving some space for unexpected navigation, and enhancing human readability? For works like *Chinese Gold*, in which an understanding of structure and relationships between items is key for future installments of the work, and this is an object for further research.