



LIMA
Arie Biemondstraat 111
1054 PD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31 (0)20 389 20 30
info@li-ma.nl | www.li-ma.nl

Day 2, Part II, option B: How to Take Control in Institutional Collections - Best Practices

By Claudia Roeck

How to Take Control in Institutional Collections – Best practices

Moderated by **Paulien 't Hoen** (SBMK)

Sylvia van Schaik (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands), *Installation Art on the Map!*

Aurora Loerakker (Van Abbemuseum), *'Ser Humano': The Challenge of Preserving a Multimedia Artwork*

Arthur van Mourik (Centraal Museum Utrecht), *Collecting and Preserving Digital Artworks in the Centraal Museum*

Mila van der Weide (LIMA), *Preservation and Management of Born-Digital Art: A Collaborative Concern*

The title of this session moderated by Paulien 't Hoen is very thoughtful. Taking control of media artworks is a challenge, not only for museums, but sometimes also for their creators. Not only do certain artworks defy the boundaries of museums, for instance through their interactive or participative character or through their complex installation, but the aging of technology also makes them unstable. Last but not least, from an administrative point of view, media artworks with their multitude of components often do not integrate well in museums that have art collections such as paintings and sculptures.

LIMA's idea to bring together art museums that collect media art, all the more if their media art collections are just marginal compared to the rest of their collection, and to share experiences, could be the start of regular meetings.

Sylvia van Schaik from the Cultural Heritage Agency of Netherlands (RCE), opened the session by presenting her institution. The RCE owns an art collection of more than 100'000 objects, whereas 150 objects are classified as installation art. The RCE does not curate exhibitions themselves, but they lend their artworks to museums and galleries to present them at their exhibitions. The RCE's mission is therefore to manage and maintain their collection. They realised, that the preparation of loan of installation artworks took them too much time. Often, such artworks are not stored at one single place, but spread over several locations. Furthermore, the competences to handle such artworks is also spread over several people such as technician, registrar, conservator. This is why they set up a project to document installation artworks systematically and to improve the internal work flow:

<https://erfgoedmodernetijd.nl/project-installatiekunst-op-de-kaart>. In collaboration with external partners (LIMA, Centraal Museum Utrecht, Frans Hals Museum and Stedelijk Museum Schiedam) they designed an intake/acquisition form for installation artworks and guidelines for the installation, registration, depot management and maintenance. This intake form is publically available:

<https://erfgoedmodernetijd.nl/artikelen/intakeformulier-installatiekunst>

Aurora Loerakker from the Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven presented a complex case study: *Ser Humano* by Nastio Mosquito. This two channel video installation included a programmed digital video player and a device to control the lights in the room. Lights and the video projection are synchronised. The artist programmed the control of the lights on site. The technicians and conservators documented the installation and its components neatly, however, they were not able to extract the light control information from the controller. The extraction of the light control information is essential in order to be able to transfer it to new future devices in case of defect or obsolescence. In the subsequent discussion, Morgane Stricot from ZKM mentioned, that ZKM intends to publish a tool they developed to extract software output from a device. Finally, Aurora Loerakker explained, how the Van Abbe Museum deals with digital media and how its collaboration with LIMA for the storage of digital and analogue video is integrated in its workflow. As a collection database the museum uses TMS which is able to represent single components of an artwork.

Arthur van Mourik from the Centraal Museum Utrecht layed out how the museum collects and preserves digital artworks. They host differing collections such as a historical collection, collections of old art, fashion, applied art, and modern and contemporary art with in total 60'000 objects. In 2016, more than 250 works were on

loan. Their digital collection encompasses about 30 pieces. The museum is working with acquisition forms and ADLIB as a collection database. As an example of a partly digital work Arthur van Mourik mentioned *As much time as space?* (2017) by Maison Nelly and Theo van Doesburg. The museum received a 16mm film positiv, a 16mm negative and a digital version of the film. The Centraal Museum Utrecht stores digital masters at LIMA's digital repository and keeps a viewing copy at the museum. *Looking back* (2016) by Sander Breure and Witte van Hulzen is another recent acquisition of the Centraal Museum Utrecht. The work eventually became much more expensive than expected, as they had to purchase a laser video projector in order to present the work. Hence, in the following discussion, the importance of the pre-acquisition process for media art came up, where cost and risk are estimated before the work is actually acquired. Besides equipment costs, the cost of conservation processes such as film or video digitization might have to be taken into account when acquiring a work. Another hot topic of discussion were the definition of the terms version and edition. Media artworks are often sold in editions similar to prints. However, each edition can comprise several digital formats. Whether they are called versions or not, depends on the conventions of an institution.

Mila van der Weide, registrar at LIMA, closed the session by presenting LIMA's acquisition process of media artworks at LIMA. Through national and international collaborations in various projects, LIMA is making sure, that its workflows and repository infrastructure stay up to date. LIMA is hosting digital artworks for external collections such as many Dutch museums. After having received the digital components of a work, LIMA checks the hash of the digital file, whether the work is complete, whether all the components are functioning properly and whether they represent the highest quality possible. In order to facilitate the registration of digital artwork components, LIMA developed an intake form, one for video and one for software-based artworks with questions regarding production history, additional equipment, display specifications, and conservation. This intake form will be supplied to LIMA's customers, to be filled in upon delivery of the digital components. It will help to improve the workflow between LIMA and its customers, as LIMA is storing, digitising and preserving media, but not the equipment. Otherwise it does not have the contextual information about the artwork and its components at its disposal, which is necessary in order to register and check the digital components correctly.

What are the lessons learned? It can be assumed that the museum with a small digital collection besides a much bigger collection of physical objects is the norm. Although its

workflow is usually optimised for works such as paintings or sculptures, it has to deal with more or less complex media artworks. If it owns other, non-digital installative works as for instance the RCE does, it can accommodate media artworks quite well. Collection databases that can handle various artwork components are also helpful. However, the preservation of digital components is still quite a different story, as this requires specific digital preservation knowledge and infrastructure. Either the museum can build up a digital repository for all its assets, or it farms the digital preservation out. The latter requires some attunement of workflows between the museum and the digital repository, such as LIMA. Is adaptation and tuning not the base of taking control? Could new collaborative tools support collaboration and even open it up to new user groups? Not to forget is the exchange of experiences between collections or museums as it just happened in this session. This is to be repeated.