NETHERLANDS MEDIA ART INSTITUTE

The installation *Albert's Ark* consists of a monitor, a computer (program), a camera and a sundial sculpture. The camera is mounted in the upper section of the pole, a mirror is attached to capture the movements and images of the spectator, while the monitor screen projects these images. The time stretcher technique deforms the images due to the fourth dimension: time. The viewer walking around the installation will, at a certain point, see the distorted image of his body on the monitor. By trying various movements, he will literally be able to wriggle into the most unlikely postures.

The work is representative of the 'state of the art' technological advancement of the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's, which is at this moment in time (2007) rapidly becoming obsolete. This was the first version in color of the Time Stretcher, hand built by the artist from existing computer components. The Artist developed the concept and technique during the last 15 years. Parts of this particular installation were missing so the research focused on the importance of documentation and emulation.

Focus for this Case Study was: To establish what was important for the preservation of the work. To explore if emulation is a good way to preserve the work. To explore if emulation based on documentation is a good way to preserve the work when a comparison with the original is not possible. To explore the importance of documentation.

In order to better understand what is important to preserve this installation and to make future presentations possible the artist was asked to work together with the preservation team to write an emulation proposal and to re-install the work to working condition. The artist gave a public presentation of his research and emulation proposal while the work was re-installed.

A major part of the experience of this installation is determined by the audience only to be achieved if the installation is in function. So functionality, only possible by emulation, in this case was given more weight than authenticity of the work and historicity of the apparatus. The results of this study were documented in text, images and video.

After the presentation of the emulated version of Albert's Ark we interviewed the audience on several emulation statements and questions.

Preserving hard-and software : Since the original camera, computer and computer program were missing documentation became extremely important. The original blueprints were not available, the artist archive contained blueprints of a slightly older (black and white) version that gave an indication of parts used and more important of the effects this had on the output of the original apparatus. Video documentation of previous presentations together with the knowledge (and memory) of the artist and technicians declared the used camera and monitor type.

time stretcher: the original time stretcher was hardware based, emulating the time stretcher the desired effects with similar look and feel can more easily be achieved with software. To avoid future obsolescence open source software was used. Given time and budget restrictions capture software and the computer platform was based on Microsoft.

camera : the typical image quality of the original Sony CCD camera (a CMOS type camera) was replaced by a similar Hitachi CMOS camera. By comparing the video documentation and the current camera images the artist was able to reconstruct near original image quality. One of the problems faced was the lack of available research and knowledge on how to describe the image quality in an objective way.

monitor : the Sony Trinitron PVM 2130Q monitor is 17 years old, rapidly becoming obsolete and being replaced nowadays by LCD/TFT flat screens. Visually and technically Albert's Ark depends on the size and type of tube monitor and it's specifications.

Preserving sculpture : The sundial has been constructed of plywood and roughed up to imitate a stone or concrete surface. All small forms of damage are documented. The upper section of the pole was damaged and restored.

What were the most interesting things which emerged from this case study?

It's now the time to preserve computer based installations from the 80ties
Monitors are still an unsolved preservation problem
What is the lifespan of computer based installations.
Verification with the original was not possible, documentation and similar source code was the source for emulation.
Weighing authenticity of the work, historicity of apparatus versus functionality of the installation.
How to describe image quality.
Is this reconstruction retro kitsch? as one of the artists suggested.
The artist suggested to include a modular instruction manual in the installation.

Were there areas of further research or questions left unresolved in this case study?

Storage and maintenance of hard- and software including monitors.
Description/notation models of image qualities.
Emulation of software and platform.