

# inside installations

Seminar 'Theory & Semantics of Installations Art'  
Thursday 11 May 2006, Bonnefanten Museum Maastricht

## Abstracts and biographies

*Locating the Intermittent Work of Art*  
**Dr. Martha Buskirk (USA)**

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For the work of art freed from an identity with a continuously present physical object, questions of interpretation are crucial to the art's ongoing definition. The most obvious form of interpretation appears in response to the need to reconfigure a work for a different physical space or to replace decaying or technologically obsolete elements, and the question of what can or cannot be altered in these circumstances is often presented as a search for what is essential to the nature of the work. Statements by the artist will be consulted, other examples considered in comparison, and a less clearly codified but still certainly present tradition of curatorial practices taken into account. Yet each of these procedures has its inherent contradictions. While the use of the artist's statement of intent as a framework for interpretation has been forcefully critiqued, such statements play a more subtle and potentially far reaching role when they function as a guide for how to realize what will be presented to the viewer. Likewise, attempts to situate a work in the context of the artist's history of production may obscure an ongoing process of definition that undermines the identification of the work with a particular point of origin. And finally, the evolving tradition of professional practices that develops in response to such questions will necessarily be prey to shifts in expectation or taste, as efforts to retrieve past works are motivated by present desires.

Martha Buskirk is associate professor of art history and criticism at Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts, where she has taught since 1994. She is author of *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (MIT Press, 2003), and she is currently pursuing work on a new book that examines intersections between museum history and contemporary artistic practices that evoke conventions associated with the collection, souvenir, relic, and archive. In addition to these projects, Buskirk has served as the former managing editor of *October* magazine and has co-edited the publication *The Duchamp Effect* with Mignon Nixon (MIT Press, 1996), as well as *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents* (MIT Press, 1990) and *Richard Serra's Tilted Arc* (Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, 1988), both with Clara Weyergraf-Serra. Buskirk earned her Ph.D. in art history from the City University of New York Graduate Center, and has held fellowships at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2000-2001, the Clark Art Institute in 2004, and the Henry Moore Institute in 2006.

(with reference to the case from the project 'Inside Installations: preservation and presentation of Installation Art': Jeffrey Shaw's and Tjebbe van Tijen's *Revolution*, 1990)

Contemporary Installation Art has a history and many predecessors in Dada, Constructivism, Arte Povera, Happenings and the art of the seventies. Everyone agrees about that. More disputable is the beginning of what we now call installation art, having the installations of the nineties in mind. Jeffrey Shaw's and Tjebbe van Tijen's *Revolution* is a work of the nineties, but should be considered as imbedded in the history of intermedia or multimedia art that goes back to the sixties and seventies. In my talk I will discuss some historical facts, considerations and definitions that form the background of our contemporary understanding of the installation, paying special attention to the role played by De Appel Foundation that has been mentioned as the first venue for installation art. I will argue that most of the installations at that time were still performance related and that this heritage is still relevant for the approach and consequently the preservation of *Revolution*. I will plead for a methodology that starts with the implied experience of the installation.

Marga van Mechelen (dr. b. 1953) is a senior lecturer at the University of Amsterdam (dep. Art and Culture). She studied art history and philosophy of language in Nijmegen and Groningen. Her dissertation, *Form and signifying process. Art History, Semiotics, Semanalyse* (Nijmegen: Sun 1993), analyses the ways art history, semiotics and Kristevan psycho-semiotics are dealing with the form/content relation. Since 1994 she is a member of the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis and of several semiotic organizations.

She publishes widely on conceptual, performance, installation and digital new media art since the late seventies and on issues concerning historiography and visual theory in general and visual semiotics and psycho-semiotics in particular. She is the co-editor and author (with Göran Sonesson) of a thematic volume on performance/ action art of *Visio, International Journal for Visual Semiotics* (2000). On the occasion of the International Sonsbeek exhibition of 2001 she published (with Jeroen Boomgaard and Miriam van Rijsingen) a book about the Sonsbeek exhibitions of 1971 (Sonsbeek buiten de perken/ Sonsbeek beyond boundaries), 1986 and 1993. A few of her articles about contemporary art are: 'Replay and Interplay. Marina Abramovic' Stage Performances as a Polysemic Device'. *Visio. The Journal of the International Association for Visual Semiotics*. 4, 1 (spring 1999), pp. 111-125, 'Ekelkunst als Diskurs über die Geschlechter', *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, an issue on transseksualism, Band 21, Heft 3-4, 1999, p. 363-385, 'Performing the Mundane Presence of Things'. *Visio; Action Art/Les arts de l'action*, 5,3, 91-105. 'Footsteps on the Screen: Net Art, its project, its orientation, its destination, *VISIO* (8, 1-2) 2004, p. 399 – 403, 'The representation of the true artificial body'. In: Winfried Nöth en Guido Ipsen (red.) *Semiotic Bodies, Aesthetic Embodiments, and Cyberbodies*. Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2006, pp. 119-132.

www.docam.ca

The DOCAM research Alliance was initiated by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for art, science and technology, following observations on the rapid state of obsolescence that threatens many of the components constituting the media and technological arts heritage comprised in the collections of a great number of museums. Furthermore, outside from the preservation and conservation issues, the DLF remarked that little work had been done, in the realm of new media, on the documentation, cataloguing and semantics strategies as well as on the history of the technologies used by artists.

Created throughout a recent time span, the artworks concerned, be they digital, mechanical or electronic, are often multimedia pieces that include apparatus that range from machines, software, electronic systems, containing analog and digital images as well as traditional materials (sculpted and pictorial elements) and non-traditional mixed media (industrial equipment and techniques). Hence, institutions are grappling with two types of challenges such as the need to create effective strategies to preserve past artworks featuring technological components and the necessity to record, conserve, name and understand the technologies used to build these works of arts, within an historical and contextual time frame.

Adding up to the previous issues and challenges at hand, is the fact that most curators, conservators, art historians and educators have not yet been adequately trained to deal with these emerging problems surrounding the documentation, preservation and semantics of artworks that include technological, electronic or digital components.

Consequently, in order to alleviate these important issues, the DOCAM research Alliance, funded for a five-year period by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada with the help of the Daniel Langlois Fondation and its partners, has undertaken a vast multidisciplinary research endeavour whose ultimate objective is to produce tangible lasting results. Some of these outcomes developed within the Alliance will be, among other things, the establishment of university core curriculum pertaining to the impending issues and the implementation of tools (Best practice guide, bilingual thesaurus, cataloguing structure, etc.) by the targeted academic and museological communities.

Sylvie Lacerte is an independent scholar, author and curator. She was granted a Ph.D. in Art Theory and Practices from Université du Québec à Montréal. Her dissertation entitled *The Mediation of Contemporary Art* will be published in the fall of 2006. She is currently Coordinator of the DOCAM (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage) Research Alliance at the Daniel Langlois Foundation for art, science and technology, in Montréal. Dr. Lacerte has just been nominated Regional Expert, for Montréal, for the Percent for Art programme (Intégration des arts à l'architecture), by the Québec Ministry of Culture and Communications. She has written many articles and essays pertaining to her fields of research and interest, for various publications, and has been a speaker – most recently at REFRESH! in Banff – , as well as moderator at several conferences and symposia in Canada and Europe.

This paper will examine the concepts of change and loss in relation to the conservation of time-based media works of art. Time-based media works of art are works that include a video, audio, film, slide or computer based component. Concepts of change and loss are central to conservation practice. In traditional conservation, the conservator's role is to minimise the effects of material deterioration on the physical object where the physical object is conceived of as the container of aesthetic value and evidence. This paper will consider the origins of this conceptual framework and its relationship to the idea of the conservation object as a unique fine art object from the western tradition and reflect on the shortcomings of this model when dealing with contemporary art in general and time-based media installations in particular.

In exploring the question "What is it that we are trying to preserve?" the author will consider whether traditional conservation's conceptual framework is dependent on an ontology of art inadequate to guide decision making in the conservation of contemporary art.

Drawing analogies to performance, the re-installation of time-based media works of art requires attention to the immaterial as well as material aspects to ensure that we are able to continue to display the work according to the artist's original design or intent and mindful of the historical integrity of the work. Whether the preservation of the immaterial can be thought of as conservation depends on how we define conservation and this goes to the heart of the role of the conservator in a contemporary art museum.

In examining our response to the preservation of these works, this paper will reflect on whether effective approaches to the stewardship of time-based media installations can rely on the blending of traditional museum practice with new modes of operating or whether these works demand a more radical break with past practice.

The ideas expressed in this paper will be illustrated with case studies drawn from the conservation of works in Tate's Collection.

Pip Laurenson completed a BA in Philosophy at Kings College London before training as an objects conservator at the City and Guilds of London Art School. She has worked at Tate since 1992 and is currently the Head of Time-based Media Conservation. In addition to her work at Tate, she is also a part time research student at the Institute of Archaeology, London examining the conservation and management of time-based media works of art and a member of the advisory committee for IMAP (Independent Media Arts Preservation). She is an accredited member of UKIC.

*Website launch, Inside Installations project*

**Tatja Scholte (NL)**

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The website 'Inside Installations' is a knowledge base for the project 'Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art'. The website includes sections for project information, lectures presented during workshops, articles, guidelines and other outcomes of research activities. A special area is dedicated to the 30 case studies and provides extensive information on the research and re-installation of these works of art. Partners jointly contribute to this website via an advanced online content management tool.

Tatja Scholte was trained as an artist and completed her studies in art history in 1989 with a dissertation on female video artists. Since 1998 she works at the Conservation Research Department of ICN on artists' interviews and the intersection between conservation research and knowledge management. She is project leader of INCCA and the project 'Inside Installations. Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art'.

In this presentation four basic rules of restoration theory are being examined on their applicability to works of installation art: durability, authenticity, minimal intervention and reversibility. It is discussed why installations as conservation objects ask for decisions that differ from those usually taken in museum context.

Dr. Cornelia Weyer was trained as a paintings conservator in Zürich (Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft) and Munich (Bayerisches Nationalmuseum and Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege) from 1973 to 1976. In addition to her formation as a conservator she studied art history at the universities of Zürich, München and Marburg. She graduated with a thesis on impainting in the early 19th century and finished her studies in 1987 with a PhD-thesis on the beginnings of painting conservation in the late 18th / early 19th century, also at Zürich University. In 1985 to 1986 she assisted Dr. Thomas Brachert at the Institut für Kunsttechnik und Konservierung, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg being in charge of the students' theoretical studies. From 1987 to 1992 she was painting conservator at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg. Cornelia Weyer lectured on art technology, restoration ethics and history of restoration at the universities of Zürich, Hildesheim, Gießen, Trier and Düsseldorf. From 1990 to 1996 she acted as coordinator of the ICOM-CC Working Group Theory and History of Restoration. From 2001 to 2005 she was vicepresident of VDR (Verband der Restauratoren). Cornelia Weyer is (since 1992) director of the Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf / Schenkung Henkel, which is the German co-organiser of the Inside Installation project.

Artist talk

**Suchan Kinoshita (NL)**

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Suchan Kinoshita (1960) was born in Japan and lives and works in Maastricht. She studied at the Musikhochschule in Keulen (1981-85) and went on to study at the Jan van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht. She uses a variety of materials in her works which are exhibited often, all over the world. Suchan Kinoshita's work has been featured in international exhibitions since 1986, including 46th Venice Biennale and 4th Istanbul Biennale (1995); Manifesta 1, Rotterdam (1996); and Truce: Echoes of Art in an Age of Endless Conclusions, SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Trade Routes: History and Geography. 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997). Her work has also been presented in such group exhibitions as Inklusion: Exklusion, Reininghaus and Künstlerhaus, Graz, Under Capricorn, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Doppelbindung. Linke Maschen, Kunstverein, Munich (1996). Kinoshita has had solo exhibitions at De Fabrick, Eindhoven (1991); White Cube, London (1996); Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1997); and Chisenhale Gallery, London (1998). She was the winner of the Prix de Rome in 1992.

In the past Suchan was very active in the theatre (Theater am Marienplatz / Krefeld) as an actor, director as well as builder of decors. This background has influenced her work and her oeuvre is clearly interdisciplinary. Kinoshita's work invites viewers to bridge art and theatre, architecture and music in participatory experiences that emphasize movement, space, and time.

Suchan will discuss her work with particular reference to the 'Untitled', 2000. This installation will be in exhibition at the Bonnefanten Museum and is one of the case studies within the Inside Installations project

The aim of the panel discussion is to place the themes and practices of the Inside Installation project within a broader discussion concerning the role of the museum for contemporary art. Is it possible to distinguish between several positions or approaches concerning the preservation and presentation of installation art and what –if thought through- are the consequences for the museum? Argued from the context of preservation and presentation of contemporary art; what should the ideal museum be like?

**MODERATOR**

- Rutger Wolfson, Director De Vleeshal

Rutger Wolfson (Monrovia, 1969) is director of De Vleeshal, a centre of contemporary art in Middelburg (NL) since 2000. Before this he was curator at Witte de With, center for contemporary art in Rotterdam. He studied Art & Cultural Sciences at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. In 2003 he edited the book *Kunst in Crisis (Art in Crisis)*. September 2005 *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland (New Symbols for The Netherlands)*, also edited by Wolfson, was published. He is currently working on a publication on the future of art and the museum, entitled: *This is the Flow, the Museum as a Space for Ideas*.

**PANEL MEMBERS**

- Martha Buskirk, associate professor of art history and criticism and author of 'The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art'.
- Alexander van Grevenstein, Director Bonnefantenmuseum
- IJsbrand Hummelen, senior researcher Netherlands Institute for Cultural heritage / ICN
- Suchan Kinoshita, artist
- Sylvie Lacerte, coordinator DOCAM, Daniel Langlois Foundation
- Pip Laurenson, senior conservator time-based media Tate

The panel discussion was prepared by IJsbrand Hummelen and Vivian van Saaze (PhD student Maastricht University / ICN) with moderator Rutger Wolfson