

Interview about video documentation

Case researcher	Sanneke Stigter, conservator
Organisation	Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands
Case study	Franz West, <i>Clamp</i> (1995)

How do you use video documentation in your daily practice as a conservator of installations? And what are the main advantages of using video documentation for this kind of art?

Video or films of installations are made on an ad hoc basis at our museum. We tend to use video to document certain aspects of installations when photography is not sufficient. Video is used to document the 'experience' of an installation; how visitors move around or past an installation or what the visitor sees as he/she moves around the work; view from the beholder.

It is also used to document how a work is installed or de-installed as this can give useful information about the materials used, how to best approach the installation and even how many staff members you may need to install a work. Such films were made by the technician before there was a sculpture conservator as permanent staff member in the museum. These days they are made together with the conservator

As mentioned, however, these films are made sporadically and only really when we come across something (particularly a complex technical issue or process) that we think can best be captured on video. Occasionally we will ask the staff member responsible for the audio visual equipment to make such videos, but as it is not standard practice and as our museum is quite small we usually make them ourselves using simple equipment, even digital cameras with a film option.

The video you have of the work *Clamp* is quite old (from 1996) and the work was installed very differently to the way you have it now in the museum. Why was this video made, for what purpose and by whom? How did you use this video within your case research?

This video was made by the Head Technician of the Kröller-Müller Museum during an exhibition of West's work in Basel. It was made because the next venue was going to be in the Kröller-Müller Museum and *Clamp* had just been bought by the museum. The curator and the technicians wanted (especially) to document the de-installation process. I was lucky to have found it as just by chance one of the technicians remembered that we had it and gave me a copy.

The first part of the video shows how the work was exhibited and is more like an exhibition view. The camera moves around the work as if it were a visitor, zooming in on details of the work and also showing how other visitors move around in the space.

However the longest, and in this case, the most important part of this video was the registration of the de-installation of the work. Here you see how the technicians (brutally) cut the wall panels using a chain saw. This information was from a conservation point of view essential as we were able to work out that the cuts made after the Basel exhibition were not made by the artist.

For my case research, the film acts both as an important document for the exhibition history of the work, but also to provide me with conservation information about the materials used, how they are put together and what was original or not.

What do you think is the most difficult aspect of this artwork to capture on film?

The hardest thing about this work to capture on video is how the visitors interact with the work. We have a lot of photographs which give a very good impression of this interaction and express the 'living room feel' of the work. In this case, video lends itself more to capturing information about the installation process.

Did you make new video documentation of the installation during your case research? If so, what did you try to capture and for what purpose are they?

We made videos for conservation and installations purposes of how the floor and the wall panels were handled and installed. The panels are large and difficult to move around. So to show future colleagues how we approached this problem we decided to make films about it.

How did you make these videos?

The videos were made in a very simple, low budget manner. Whilst handling the installation we took photographs using a digital camera on a tripod. Then for more complex processes we used the same camera and made short films. We did not plan any shots in advance, just made films as we went along.

How do you store and manage the videos you make?

The videos are stored on the museum server simply using the Windows folder system. Each artist has one folder and within this there is a folder per art work, in turn subdivided into folders containing information about different aspects. These are sorted in a chronological order.

Although everyone in the museum has access to this information, it is usually only used by myself and some colleagues in the same department. I try to store all the documentation I make in such a way that it is easy to find for someone else and adaptable for a database system.

The current museum registration system (TMS) is used more often by other colleagues, however currently I am not able to add any visual documentation to this system. Ideally we would like to adapt our system so that all documentation on one artwork from different departments in the museum can be stored in and made accessible via TMS.