

## Interview about video documentation

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Case study	Fabrizio Plessi, <i>Tempo Liquido</i> (1993)

### How do you use video documentation in your daily practice as a conservator of installations?

At the museum, some videos are made as registrations of exhibitions. These are basically a tour through the exhibition space filming the works. The videos we made of our case study were in fact the first time we used the medium in such an intensive manner for the documentation of one artwork.

### You made a variety of videos. Can you explain what you filmed and for what purpose?

The videos were made to document the installation process of our case study. We used one webcam which was placed high up to provide a 'birds-eye' view of the space. This camera recorded the whole installation process which took approximately three weeks. The webcam footage is very useful as the space the work is in is very larger, around 20 x 30 meters. It was also possible to record all of the action that took place within this space, providing a good overview of the general installation process. The result was a time-lapse video.

The second camera we had was a handy cam which we used to document some of the most complex and difficult processes of the work flow; such as detailed views of specific technical procedures of the art handlers. During the creation of the installation manual these registrations were very useful in the sense of a 'visual diary'.

After the installation was complete we also took the handy cam and made a few video sequences with a static camera to give a general impression of the installation and specifically to document the movement of the water wheel and the images on the monitors – the artwork functioning.

All of the videos were created for conservation purposes and are part of the installation manual we have made. However, because the webcam footage is so interesting we decided to make a short version (of speeded up images) to show to the general public. We used funding from the Inside Installations project to produce this film.

The video will be on show in the museum on a monitor and we will also add it to the project website. The film gives the public insight into how much and the kind of work that is involved in installing such a large and complex work. It is not the first time the museum has used conservation documentation to show to the public.

### How have the videos been stored and made accessible within the museum?

As mentioned the videos are part of the installation manual. The manual is a written text with photographs and 3D illustrations and wherever there is additional video documentation we have included information on how to find that material which is available for viewing in the museum conservation workshop. We store the videos as mini-DV tape. Of the more than five hours of handy cam material, we made a selection of the most important sequences and had these digitised. These digital films are stored on an external hard disk which is 150 GB in size and was bought especially just to store documentation about this installation.

The webcam footage is not in real time. In fact the video is made up of a long series of jpeg images; one image taken per 30 seconds. We have thousands of images which we needed to be put together as a film in order make them useful. One advantage of this method is that you can take one picture and have a closer look (as far as the reduced resolution of the webcam images allows this)

**What was the most difficult aspect of the artwork to capture? Do you think you were successful in doing this?**

The most difficult aspect to capture was the sound. This also has to do with that fact that we did not use an external microphone. The integrated microphone in the camera is not the best quality. Otherwise, video lends itself well to documenting this artwork as it is in fact a large sculpture. The camera is able to 'look' at the work just like a visitor would. It also works well in capturing the movement and overall atmosphere of the work, much better than photography.

**Can you describe things that you have learnt in making this video that you would do differently the next time you make such a video?**

It was a very spontaneous decision to make these videos and as such we did not prepare very well. We were able to borrow a semi-professional camera from our colleagues at ZKM/Institute for Visual Media. This camera creates a better result than the Mini DV camera that we have.

For the videos we made with the handy cam we did not use a tripod. This has an advantage as you are very mobile and can (literally) reach and are more flexible in moving around the artwork when filming. The resulting footage however is not very good. The composition is often not done well and for the user of the material it is sometime hard to look at without becoming sea sick!

All of this material also provided problems during the selection and editing process. Basically we had so much footage that we needed to make a selection. However in the end we sometimes had to ignore interesting sequences because of their bad quality and to choose others just because they were filmed better. In these cases we were not choosing on the basis of content but on image quality. This approach is not a good one when creating documentation that is meant to be informative.

In short we learnt that it is absolutely necessary to prepare a plan of what you want to film before you start. Using a tripod is also essential for better quality images. Realise also that the filming may take longer than you wish as you may need to stop the installation process to move the camera to a better position. Lastly, we have learnt to use an external microphone in the future, especially when we want to document the sound of the artwork itself.