

THE PETER AND IRENE LUDWIG FOUNDATION AACHEN RESEARCH GRANT - REPORT
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MAPS - MEDIA ART PRESERVATION
THE TIME-BASED MEDIA ART CONSERVATION PROGRAM AT NYU, NEW YORK
2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Research Program was to demonstrate the challenges of **media art conservation as a new field in collection care** and share experience as a young practitioner on the international scene in New York University (NYU). This report was developed on the basis of a broad range of contribution of institutes and various occasions such as 16 meetings with professionals, 12 shows in museums and galleries and 8 different types of lectures about media art conservation.

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This researching period was: 8th October – 29th October 2018.

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Media art preservation in theory and practice is currently one of my PhD areas under the supervision of Miklós Peternák at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts Doctoral School. As the Head of Conservation and Collection Care, my responsibility has been to manage, design, and implement conservation projects, with a focus on contemporary art at the Ludwig Museum Budapest since 2008. As the Chief Conservator at Ludwig Museum, my main task is to preserve contemporary arts, such as media art, which belongs to our cultural heritage, and to promote the importance of conservation tasks and collection care means, in order to preserve cultural diversity as a fundamental value.

2. REVIEW OF MEDIA ART PRESERVATION

Traditional restoration techniques focus on conserving the physical condition of the medium (e.g. the canvas). In comparison, the conservation of media art (video, film, digital art, Internet art) is a much more complex task, because the technological environment is in constant change, since it is contingent upon the developments controlled by the interests of science and trade. This also means that replacing a screen, projector, or speaker that forms integral part of the artwork might end up changing the original work or rendering it obsolete. Digital content depends on networks and the output and capacity of computers; a change in these might distort the work's appearance or, in some extreme cases, might even make the piece inaccessible.

Ephemeral media works also pose a problem for Hungarian public collections. In our understanding, the term media art encompasses more than just software-based works; earlier terminology considered everything from analogue photography through film to video as technical media. From the 1960s onwards, in the spirit of a broader understanding of art, art forms like happening, action, and performance have appeared in Hungary as well as internationally. Presence was pivotal for these works: they were often only performed once and witnessed exclusively by those present; we are thus left with only documentations of them. These relics (photographs, videos) have since transformed into artworks in their own right, which can be displayed as evidence of the original happening.

The rapid aging and changing of technology is accepted as a part of life today. In comparison to older technology, such as VHS tapes, the deterioration of digital content happens at an even faster rate, therefore their long-term preservation creates a constant challenge.

A changing environment requires different preservation strategies for long-term sustainability, as opposed to traditional painting, statue, and object prevention processes. Compared to artworks preserved in museums, the obsolescence of technical devices is considerably faster, however, **media artworks belong to our cultural heritage** as well. The methodology of collecting, presenting, conserving media art are entirely new fields for professionals working in Hungarian public collections.

2.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Documentation and research of time based art are important tasks from conservator aspects. High quality training and postgraduate education focusing on contemporary conservation are difficult to find in Eastern Europe.

According to our present understanding, an important element of conservation is the accurate documentation of the objects, which entails the assessment of their condition. However, there is no uniform system in use, and the situation is further complicated by the variety of materials used by contemporary artists.

My personal goal is to develop and spread the importance of media art preservation, with respect to **conserving for future generations**. Long-term collaboration based on people-to-people contacts is essential to fill this gap.

Organising conferences workshops and providing theoretical training. With the cooperation of Ludwig Museum I have organized several projects and conferences (**MAPS**) with lectures and workshops focusing on preservation of media art in practice. Through this, my aim is to embark on a discussion dedicated to topics in the field of digital preservation, including common terminology. Project started in 2015.

The exhibition "Save As..." – What Will Remain of New Media Art? Exhibition at Ludwig Museum, spanning the period from Hungarian media art's golden age to our present day, the prevalence of the Internet, introducing the work of artists who were responding to constantly changing technologies. (2/2017 – 3/2017)

Design and develop the strategy of preservation and digitization. The project is aimed to develop the digital preservation policy, strategy, and procedures of the museum. Raise and generate the preservation infrastructures (MuseumPlusRIA) and workflows. It is being developed with the Hungarian Ministry of Human Capacities. Project started in April 2016.

Documentary film. To spread the professional digital preservation initiative. The film, focusing on the changeable nature of media art of the last few decades, shows the unique atmosphere of the Eastern European cultural background. The selected works examine important Hungarian artists from the beginning of this genre until present such as: Andreas Fogarasi, Péter Forgács, András Lengyel, Dóra Maurer, János Sugár, Tamás St.Auby, János Szirtes, Endre Tót. Project started in August 2016.

Strive for establishing a future Institute of Collection Care Methodology with a collaboration of Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts. The Research Project is meant to be a step towards

accomplishing this initiative and research into Time-Based Media Curriculum Programs in New York University.

3. TIME BASED MEDIA CONSERVATION PROGRAM ATTENDED IN NEW YORK UNIVERSITY (NYU)

Long-term collaboration between international conservators, curators, and professionals is essential to building an effective digital preservation strategy and Time-Based Media Curriculum Programs.¹ Through digital projects, the main issue is to create awareness of the importance of preserving art, in order to support culture and to promote a dialogue between professionals at New York University (NYU).

The research project seeks to advance new strategies in the field of time-based media art preservation, and expert discussion meetings devoted to the topic of conservation in New York University (NYU):

The Mellon Time-Based Media art conservation curriculum at NYU:

New York University start to develop the first curriculum in Time-Based Media art conservation in 2015. This four-year M.A. program dual with M.S. in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and M.A. in the History of Art and Archaeology under the Time-Based Media specialization. Uses a multi-disciplinary approach to address preservation objectives and is embedded in the conceptual framework of media art conservation.

Hannelore Roemich as Chairman of the Conservation Center was dedicated to facilitate the highest level of teaching for students in NYU and to explore new areas of interest in the ever changing field of conservation. After two years of development with a working group the **NYU launched in September 2018 a new specialization in time-based media (TBM)** art conservation as part of MA/MS dual degree at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (IFA), which is the first of its kind in the United States.

Christine Frohnert is currently the TBM Program coordinator at IFA-NYU. She was the chair (2008-2012) of the Electronic Media Group at the American Institute for Conservation² and initiated the conference series to specifically provide education based on time-based media.

The launched program offering an overview course on time-based media (TBM). Draws on a collaboration of experts and specialists in the fields of computer science, engineering, and film and video preservation. Students are come from various backgrounds, including art-history, art conservation, engineering, art management, digital humanities and computer science.

At first year requirement to completion of core conservation courses in traditional object conservation, material science, principals and also Museum Studies as art history is essential. At the second year the program is expanded with preventive conservation and science/programming course. At the third year tasks are exhibition installation, acquisition and documentation process and directed research towards the M.A. Thesis. The last year is an internship placement program.

¹ <https://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/fineart/conservation/time-based-media.htm> 30/10/2018

² <http://www.conservation-us.org/specialty-topics/electronic-media-group> 30/10/2018

3.1 TECHNOLOGY AND STRUCTURE OF WORKS OF ART

This is a special course every week, which introduces a historical overview of the technology and media various categories of Time-Based media (TBM). The issues related to the acquisition, examination, documentation, exhibition, installation and the conservation. Emphasis will be put on the decision-making processes based on ethical standards. This course is follow a lecture format and supplemented optional lab and exhibition visits.

Outcomes of the course:

- to describe media and technologies of artistic production and use generally accepted terminologies
- to identify media and technologies of TBM artworks
- to identify and evaluate TBM artworks various iterations
- provenance, condition, materials, media, technologies, equipment, production history,exhibition history, migration, and risk evaluation

4. MEETINGS AND COURSES ATTENDED

During the research project there were several opportunities to get in-depth knowledge about the media art preservation program of NYU. As a result of cooperation with in a number of institutions there is an operating umbrella committee to dedicate a long-term possibility for media art preservation in collections. (New York University, NYC, USA, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NYC, USA, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), NYC, USA, The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, NYC, USA, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University (NYU), USA) Also, three concerning programmes provide background for the latest Time-Based Media art conservation curriculum at NYU:

- The **Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP)** at NYU Tisch School of the Arts is a two-year program of full-time study leading to an MA degree for students from different disciplines with the skills and conceptual understanding necessary to manipulate and creative uses of interactive multimedia technologies.³
- The **Integrated Digital Media (IDM)** master's program at NYU Tandon School of Engineering's is receive education for media production with new tools, techniques, and experimental practices. From using motion capture technology to reimagine theatrical performance, augmented reality for health, special needs education, generate user interfaces for science exploration.⁴
- The **Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP)** Master of Arts program trains future archivist professionals to manage preservation-level collections of film, video, digital and multimedia works at NYU Tisch School of the Arts Department of Cinema Studies. All students are required to complete two semester-long internship in New York based institutions and a summer internship in other parts of the US or abroad to work on collections. The program gives students the opportunity to work with archives, museums, libraries and art organizaions.⁵

³ <https://tisch.nyu.edu/itp/admissions/itp-mps> 30/10/2018

⁴ <http://idm.engineering.nyu.edu/> 30/10/2018

⁵ <http://tisch.nyu.edu/cinema-studies/miap> 30/10/2018

The MET – Overview of the TBM Conservation Strategy

The Time Based Media Working Group⁶ has launched with their work in 2001. The group became an official Met working group which has grown and includes about fifteen members. (Glenn Wharton, Museum Studies, New York University; Lia Kramer, Conservation Centre, The Institute of Fine Arts; Lorena Ramírez-López, Small Data Industries)

The project aims to assess Time-based media collection at Met, collection management practices and conceptualize a full program for time-based media conservation. The working group dedicated their work to collecting, exhibiting, preserving and conserving of Time Based Media Art. Item by time research of artworks needs, documentation and gaps in the documentations, migration and installation requirements. Review collection management policies, identify collections management and workflows. Identify staff, laboratory and equipment needs, and develop additional collection management workflows. The first Time based media artwork was acquired in 1995 and now the MET has more than 250 artworks in this field.

Acquiring process is also a part of the MET TBM Conservation Strategy when purchasing artworks. With an artist questionnaire they have developed seven individual documents for category of artworks such as animation, audio, film, video, performance, slide-based and software-based artworks.

This is help to determine the medium of the Artist's Master and inform which deliverables on the procedures will be required for the acquisition. These documents indicate the content of the works, and also cover issues of artwork production, components, technical descriptions, sculptural components and the installation process for exhibitions such as concerning environments and display equipment. Also important to know the multiple parts of the components, and number of the editions. These documents contain approximately 100 questions for the artist or vendors to find out and get appropriate information from the work prior to arranging the incoming shipment.

The document supports to receive all the information it needs for the Acquisition Agreement and Condition Reports, Iteration Reports and Identity Reports. Warranty and Indemnification by the Artist or Provider is certain prioritised area for the process. Further installation instructions condition assessment and preservations steps are to make interview with the Artist if it is possible.

NYU LIBRARIES – Barbara Goldsmith Preservation & Conservation Department, Media Preservation Unit. This division mission is to working with archivists and curators in NYU Libraries. Also strives to extend the lifetime of film, video and audio collections with preventive and direct intervention treatments. They are training professionals and select preservation methods. Kimberly Tarr manage the media preservation program and the head of Media Preservation Unit. Jessica Lian is an object conservator and dealing with collection care at NYU Libraries. The unit trained graduate students from NYU with a Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program (MIAP).

MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art, New York is playing a pioneer role to preserve and acquire media artworks. With Media Conservation Initiative MoMA as a key institution strive a

⁶ <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/time-based-media-working-group>
30/10/2018

collaborative series and fill gaps to require advanced trainings in the care of ephemeral and Time-Based media materials. Kate Lewis is a Chief Conservator at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she focuses on the conservation of audio, performance, software, video and film-based works. Also MoMA was a key member in a collaborative project between the New Art Trust (NAT) and its partner museums, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and Tate to help preserve media artworks with practical tools and examples. All concerning information is available and published online.⁷

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has the Lab for Time-Based Media Conservation. Joanna Phillips is senior conservator and founder of this professional conservation division where she heads an interdisciplinary team that works on the acquisition, display, documentation, preservation, and research of media artworks.⁸

With a lecture of Media Art Conservation in Hungary the NYU has more intention about the concerns of Hungarian contemporary art conservation and the media art collection of Ludwig Museum. The commission was informed about the strategy of preservation and digitalisation and the current conservation and collection care strategy of Ludwig Museum such as the new museum collection management system (MuseumPlusRIA).

Also there was a great opportunity to meet with Glenn Wharton. He is a Clinical Associate Professor in Museum Studies at New York University. From 2007 he served as Media Conservator at the Museum of Modern Art, where he established the time-based media conservation program for Video, Performance, and Software-based collection. He is an art conservator and a professor with a background in archaeological and sculpture conservation, and currently specializes in modern and contemporary art. In the Museum Studies Program at New York University, He teaches seminars on the conservation of museum collections and the museum life of contemporary art.

4.1 CONCERNING TBM ART SHOWS VISITED

Programmed exhibition at Whitney Museum⁹,

Bruce Nauman at MoMA¹⁰

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer “Confirmation Bias” at Bitforms Gallery¹¹

URS FISCHER PLAY with choreography by Madeline Hollander at Gagossian Gallery¹²

Everything is Connected - Art and Conspiracy at The Met Breuer¹³

Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974-1995 at Sculpture Center¹⁴

⁷ http://mattersinmediaart.org/_30/10/2018

⁸ https://www.guggenheim.org/conservation/time-based-media_30/10/2018

⁹ https://whitney.org/exhibitions/programmed_30/10/2018

¹⁰ https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3852_30/10/2018

¹¹ https://bitforms.art/exhibitions/lozano-hemmer-2018_30/10/2018

¹² https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2018/urs-fischer-play/_30/10/2018

¹³ https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/everything-is-connected-art-and-conspiracy_30/10/2018

¹⁴ https://www.sculpture-center.org/exhibitions/10507/before-projection-video-sculpture-1974-1995_30/10/2018

5. SUMMARY

The Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation Aachen Research Grant has given an opportunity to research and gain new skills about the preservation of technological artworks at New York University (NYU).

Without institutional support, contemporary art works would become obsolete, because artists cannot ensure the proper conditions for the works. The introduced Research Project expanded the network of international institutions, essential for preserving media art and ensuring their accessibility. The meetings with professionals in New York University (NYU) covered activities pertaining to acquiring, exhibiting, installing, documenting, and advocating for media artworks.

The appropriate mapping of this diversified field would ideally involve local and international professionals with the future steps and would also facilitate an exchange of relevant professional experiences and skills.

This field is highly expected and essential theme of contemporary collection care. The research project can integrate the up-to-date knowledge into the collection care strategy, and draws on a coalition of experts and specialists in the fields of computer science, engineering, and film and video preservation.

This research grant at **Time Based Media conservation program in New York University (NYU)** creates the opportunity to establish a Media Conservation Program in Budapest as well. To achieve this, we need to set up a professional working group from various institutions, such the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Ludwig Museum, further suggestions to collaborate with National Library and Budapest University of Technology and Economics.

This program could establish a new conservation curriculum in this region, and for long term preservation of TBM it is indispensable to get a knowledge of collaboration during the acquisition, documentation, installation and exhibition, also the respective roles of the artist, curators, conservators, and technicians. To evaluate the Research Program, it achieved its objectives and could be completed as a starting point for developing a new conservation and museology program in Hungary.

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- New York University, NYC, USA
- The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NYC, USA
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), NYC, USA
- The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, NYC, USA
- Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University (NYU), USA
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- Miklós Peternák, Head of Intermedia Department, Director Hungarian University of Fine Arts, C3 – Center for Culture & Communication, Budapest (HUN)
- Hannelore Roemich, Chairman of the Conservation Center, Professor of Conservation Science at New York University (NYU), NYC, USA
- Christine Frohnert, Adjunct Faculty and Program Coordinator Time-based Media Art Conservation Curriculum Development at New York University (NYU), NYC, USA
- Glenn Wharton, Clinical Professor at New York University (NYU), NYC, USA
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- Caroline Gil, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Media Conservation at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NYC, USA
- Flaminia Fortunato, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Media Conservation at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NYC, USA
- Peter Oleksik, Associate Media Conservator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
- Mollie Anderson, Assistant for Administration at The Met, NYC, USA
- Alexandra Nichols, Sherman Fairchild Foundation Fellow in the Conservation of Time-based Media at The Met, NYC, USA
- Nora Kennedy, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge at The Met, NYC, USA
- Joanna Philips, Time-Based Media Senior Conservator at Guggenheim, NYC, USA
- Jonathan Farbowitz, Fellow in the Conservation of Computer-Based Art, assists at Guggenheim, NYC, USA
- Jessica Lian Pace, Preservation Assistant, Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department at NYU's Bobst library (NYU), NYC, USA
- Kimberly Tarr, Head of Media Preservation Unit, Moving Image Preservation Specialist at NYU's Bobst library (NYU), NYC, USA

- Deena Engel, clinical professor, Department of Computer Science, New York University (NYU), NYC, USA
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