Unfold Daily News

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Why COVID-19 means new media art has never been so vital

In 2001 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's 010101: Art in Technological Times and the Whitney Museum of American Art's BitStreams exhibitions put new media art on the international map. In recent years it has been an exciting, evolving field, embracing augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and extended reality (XR), internet-based work, generative artworks, digital animation and interactive technologies as well as video, performance and sculpture. With many museums and galleries closed because of COVID-19, audiences have been increasingly exploring and sharing screen-based works of art, which have never seemed more artistically vital.

Nevertheless, the perception remains that new media art is difficult to display, collect and maintain.Will audiences continue to grow once the lockdown is over? How can museums and private collectors seize this moment and act as advocates for new media art and artists by supporting scholarship, education programs, publishing and outreach? Talking Collecting: New Media Art will look to address these issues.

Digital and internet art has been gaining in popularity, with a raft of major international museum exhibitions in recent years, including the Whitney's Programmed: Rules, Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965–2018 (2018-19), I Was Raised on the Internet, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2018) and Electronic Superhighway (2016-1966) at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 2016. Artists including Lawrence Lek and Jon Rafman are widely shown, while there is growing awareness of earlier pioneers such as Manfred Mohr.

But digital art continues to raise conceptual and curatorial challenges for museums, galleries and collectors. How can work be authenticated and valued if it can be easily copied? What happens when the software used in a work becomes obsolete? Do curators understand technology enough to commission digital works? And how can museums and collectors make the most of the current upsurge in audience interest?

Brian Droitcour is a writer and curator based in New York, and edits Art in America's The Program, a weekly newsletter about art and technology. He will discuss these questions on a panel titled 'Collecting in the Digital Age: Building a New Media Art Collection and Challenges for Preserving & Exhibiting', as well as issues around video and virtual reality with Anita Zabludowicz, generative art with Anne and Michael Spalter, and net art and software art with Sabine Himmelsbach.

The Zabludowicz Collection in London is one of the world's leading private museums. It has championed many performance, digital and moving-image artists, including Jon Rafman and Rachel Rose. The Anne and Michael Spalter Collection is one of the world's largest private collections of early computer art, comprising over 750 largely historic works from the second half of the 20th century, with a focus on plotter drawings, other 2D media, sculpture and 16mm film. The HeK in Basel specialises in artworks involving new media and digital technologies, and the conceptual and technical issues around its preservation.

BRIAN DROITCOUR

SABINE HIMMELSBACH

ANITA ZABLUDOWICZ

ANNE & MICHAEL SPALTER

14:00-15:30 UTC

PANEL DISCUSSION

COLLECTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Building a New Media Art Collection and Challenges for Preserving and Exhibiting

MODERATOR: BRIAN DROITCOUR

PANELISTS: SABINE HIMMELSBACH, ANITA ZABLUDOWICZ, ANNE & MICHAEL SPALTER

BRIAN DROITCOUR | ASSOCIATE & ONLINE EDITOR
Art in America, New York, USA
AIA The Program Art & Technology
Brian Droitcour is associate editor and online editor at Art in America. In August 2019 he launched a weekly newsletter for A.i.A. called The Program, highlighting our coverage of artists working with technology. Digital media and internet art have been frequent topics of Brian's writing, which has appeared in several publications besides A.i.A., including 4columns, Parkett, Artforum, and Rhizome. He has also undertaken several projects exploring the relationship between institutions and their audiences that are based on an understanding of the viewer as a creative interlocutor with artworks. From 2012 to 2014, Brian wrote criticism on Yelp, adopting a voice specific to the platform in order to explore it as a place for non professionals to engage with art and its venues.
In 2015 he edited The Animated Reader, a poetry anthology accompanying "Surround Audience," the New Museum's third triennial. The book included social media posts alongside poems using strategies of translation, rewriting, and appropriation, aiming to convey a contemporary experience of constant response to media stimuli. In 2017 Brian edited Provision, a temporary magazine of critical writing, as part of Converge 45, an annual art festival in Portland, Oregon. The two-issue zine was produced over six days of intensive writing and discussion sessions with a group of local writers and artists selected by home school, an informal educational initiative. In 2018 Brian was a resident at the Luminary in St. Louis, where as part of the organization's "Commoning the Institution" program, he led a workshop with Alison Burstein about institutional voice. The same year, in collaboration with artist Christine Wong Yap, he produced The People's Guide to the Queens International (2018), publishing audience responses to the Queens Museum's biennial exhibition of Queens-based artists. Follow him @briandroitcour.

SABINE HIMMELSBACH | DIRECTOR
HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel) Basel, Switzerland
Since March 2012, Sabine Himmelsbach is the new director of HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel). After studying art history in Munich she worked for galleries in Munich and Vienna from 1993–1996 and later became project manager for exhibitions and conferences for the Steirischer Herbst Festival in Graz, Austria. In 1999 she became exhibition director at the ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe. From 2005–2011 she was the artistic director of the Edith-Russ-House for Media Artin Oldenburg, Germany. 2011 she curated 'gateways. Art and Networked Culture' for the Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn as part of the European Capital of Culture Tallinn 2011 program. Her exhibitions at HeK in Basel include 'Ryoji Ikeda' (2014),'Poetics and Politics of Data' (2015), 'RafaelLozano-Hemmer: Preabsence' (2016), 'unREAL' (2017), 'Lynn Hershman Leeson: Anti-Bodies', 'Eco-Visionaries' (2018) und 'Entangled Realities. Leben mit künstlicher Intelligenz' (2019). As a writer and lecturer she is dedicated to topics related to media art and digital culture.

ANITA ZABLUDOWICZ | FOUNDER
Zabludowicz collection, london, UK
Anita Zabludowicz OBE was born in Newcastle and now lives in London with her husband, Poju, and their four children. Anita studied Fine Art & History of Art in Newcastle's College of Arts & Technology and subsequently spent ten years working as a project manager in interior architecture before going back to study Modern Art & Auctioneering at Christies. From the mid-1990s Anita and her husband have embarked on a number of philanthropic activities and together they founded the Zabludowicz Collection to collect international emerging art and create a public platform to examine contemporary art practices. Zabludowicz Collection is founded on a commitment to producing a vibrant and sustainable ecology for art. It achieves this through a growing archive of contemporary art and is dedicated to the conservation and production of new work by artists from the earliest stages of their careers. The Collection runs an independent UK charity and an international programme of exhibitions, events, residencies and commissions across in the UK, USA and Finland. Our exhibitions are free and open to all.

ANNE & MICHAEL SPALTER | CO-FOUNDERS
The Anne + Michael Spalter Digital Art Collection, New York, USA
The Anne and Michael Spalter Digital Art Collection (Spalter Digital), New York, USA is one of the world's largest private collections of early computer art, comprising over 750 historically important works from the second half of the twentieth century. Spalter Digital, which focuses on plotter drawings but includes other 2D media as well as sculpture and 16mm film, is home to major and iconic examples from key artists in the field.
Spalter Digital has loaned work to the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa (Venice), the Daelim Museum (Seoul), and others.
Anne Spalter is a digital mixed media artist and academic who founded Brown's and RISD's digital fine arts programs in the 1990s. She is the author of The Computer in the Visual Arts (Addison-Wesley, 1999). Her artwork is in permanent collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Michael Spalter is the chairman of the board of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and is on the advisory boards of Harvard University's cultural entrepreneurship program and the Nantucket Project. In 2017, the Spalters were tapped for the Whitney Museum of American Art's inaugural Digital Art Acquisition Committee.