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Integrating the Moving Image into the Museum

A Master's thesis submitted in satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Moving Image Archive Studies

by

Alina Morgan Sinetos

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Integrating the Moving Image into the Museum

by

Alina Morgan Sinetos

Master of Arts in Moving Image Archive Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Jonathan Furner, Chair

The widespread adoption of video (and of film, to a lesser extent) by contemporary artists has forced curators to face the challenge of incorporating moving image projections and installations into the museum gallery. Limitations imposed by architectural layout, exhibition structure, available equipment and budget restrictions often lead to compromise. Although contemporary artists have the ability to define the essential components of their moving image works and to negotiate how they will be displayed currently and in the future, works by past artists are not always treated with the same respect. This thesis addresses technical concerns and conservation issues encountered in the exhibition of moving image works. Engaging with multiple perspectives, it builds upon direct observations of museum exhibitions, conversations with museum and moving image archive professionals, and analyses of existing best practices.

The thesis of Alina Morgan Sinetos is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Introduction

The art museum and moving image works have sustained a long and complicated relationship. As early as 1896, moving image pioneer Robert Paul appealed to the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum to include “animated pictures” but was not dignified with a response.¹ Despite his and similar efforts, museums did not begin to systematically collect film until the 1930s when the Museum of Modern Art in New York established its film department.² Even then, the film collection and traditional art collection remained separate and have largely remained so “until recently when a growing body of contemporary art that exists in film and video form has entered the upper storeys of the museum (whereas film has always been in the basement)—finally legitimized as art by *bona fide* artists.”³ The widespread adoption of video (and of film, to a lesser extent) by contemporary artists has forced curators to face the challenge of incorporating moving image projections and installations into the museum gallery.⁴ Limitations imposed by architectural layout, exhibition structure, available equipment and exhibition formats, and budget restrictions often lead to compromise in how these works are exhibited. Although contemporary artists have the ability to define the essential components of their moving image works and to negotiate how they will be displayed currently and in the

¹ Ian Christie, “A Disturbing Presence? Scenes from the History of Film in the Museum,” in *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 241.

² Christie, “A Disturbing Presence?” 243.

³ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴ The increasing centrality of video and film in contemporary art since the 1990s is remarked upon by Erika Balsom in “A cinema in the gallery, a cinema in ruins,” *Screen* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 411.

future, works by past artists risk neglect or the favoring of convenient solutions.⁵ The use of these films and videos is determined by the best judgement of the curators—an approach which at its worst can lead to the screening of poor digital transfers of film, projected in open spaces without adequate protection against light and sound leakage.

In relation to the art museum, the broad term “moving images” encompasses a wide range of art practices and works. It applies to experimental cinema from Fernand Léger and Man Ray, to Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, to Andy Warhol and Joseph Cornell, and to Ken Jacobs and Bruce Conner. Works of “expanded cinema” by filmmakers such as Anthony McCall and Neil Henderson that engage with the materiality of film and the physical presence of the projector in the gallery space fit within this category as well. The term “moving images” can also refer to the work of the first generation of artists to embrace video as a medium in 1960s and 1970s such as Nam June Paik, Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, and Martha Rosler. It must now also extend to the installations of a rising number of artists such as Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon, Tacita Dean, Lucy Raven and Candice Breitz that use film or video projection. The diversity of contemporary moving image art practice includes “single-channel works alongside multiscreen projection, film as well as video, looped exhibition and scheduled screening times, an interest in the virtuality of a represented world or in the phenomenology of spectatorship, an espousal or a rejection of narrative, and works made expressly for a gallery context and those made for traditional cinematic exhibition but now transported to the white

⁵ This is also true for the newer video artists who will make significant compromises in order to have their works shown at all in the context of a well respected institution like the Tate. See Sarah Cook (independent curator), interview by Crystal Sanchez and James Smith, June 18, 2013, Smithsonian Institution Time-Based and Digital Art Working Group: Interview Project.

cube.”⁶ Moreover, as museums continue to stage exhibitions about filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick, the connotation of moving images as motion pictures must not be forgotten.⁷

The temporal aspect of moving image works unites them. Duration is a dimension of any moving image work. To experience and assess the work, a viewer must allow it to unfold over time. Unlike a painting or photographic print, a moving image work is not self-contained. A film does not exist as an artwork when broken down into its component parts; instead, the objects associated with the work—such as the film reel, projector and loop—exist in a state of potential. For a work to be actualized, its parts must be installed and performed. In a lecture given at an *Inside Installations* workshop, Pip Laurenson described time-based media works as having two stages—the creation and the installation.⁸ This duality inserts a level of indeterminacy into the the exhibition and experience of a work. Moving image works can be displayed in multiple ways and in multiple contexts. While the controlled and standardized environment of the movie theater minimizes this indeterminacy, the malleable and open space of the gallery accentuates it. Flexibility leaves room for error. Museums must, therefore, remain vigilant when conserving and exhibiting moving image works. Working together with the artist and curator, the conservator must strive to understand the elements of the work that must remain constant—what Laurenson refers to as its “work-defining properties”—and the elements that allow for variation.⁹

⁶ Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 12.

⁷ *Alfred Hitchcock: Behind the Silhouette* on view at MoMA from April 15-August 17, 1999. *Stanley Kubrick* on view at LACMA from November 1, 2012–June 30, 2013.

⁸ Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, change and loss in the conservation of time-based media works of art,” Lecture given at Inside Installations Workshop, Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht, May 2006 (Manuscript), Maastricht.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The sheer range of works and media that fall under the heading “moving images” hampers the development of a standardized approach to their conservation and exhibition. Each work demands different requirements and considerations. The successful exhibition and conservation of moving image works, therefore, requires the cooperation of multiple departments of the museum as well as the artist. How a work is conserved and exhibited shapes, in turn, how it is perceived, engaged with and interpreted. Moving image works have become a fixture in modern and contemporary art museums. Yet if these works of cinema and artists films are to be given equal status in art history, museums will need to reconsider the preexisting strategies for incorporating moving images into the gallery space and into their collections.

Methodology

The titles of museum departments that handle moving image works frequently include the terms “media art” or “time-based media.” Within this paper, I avoid these terms in favor of the term “moving images.” This choice reflects the focus of the argument upon film and video works. I do not address the software-based works or technology-based works that fall under the purview of “media art” and “time-based media” departments. Admittedly, the term “moving images” downplays the importance of sound to these works—a consequence which does not reflect my personal opinion. However, the choice of term does underline a connection to the moving image archive field and to cinema in general. A narrower term than “media art,” “moving images” remains broad enough to include experimental film, expanded cinema, artist film and video, and cinema.

The foregrounding of cinema in this discussion has led to an emphasis upon film as a medium. Since works from the history of cinema were primarily shot on film, museums should consider the relevance of the medium to the content when determining the format for exhibition. Yet the cost of prints, availability of equipment and diminishing analog expertise present particular challenges for the exhibition of film within the museum setting. Moreover, film currently finds itself in a precarious situation. The continued availability of film for artistic and archival use depends upon the commercial market.¹⁰ Although Kodak has pledged to continue to make film, many of the stocks required for archival practices are in limited supply. Commercial film labs have shut down, limiting the number of places that can perform the duplication processes required for film exhibition.

The discussion surrounding the migrating of videotape to digital due to the former's obsolescence and limited life-span as a magnetic media is less fraught. For most archivists, the quality of digital transfers captures all of the information available on the tapes. One could still make a compelling argument for the importance of videotape as a medium for the historicity of a work; however, with limited space, I have chosen to focus upon the medium of film. Although film faces obsolescence, more and more contemporary artists have adopted the medium. Consequently, the approach of museums to film conservation remains a critical and timely matter.

In order to balance the theoretical and the practical, I adopted a case study approach involving site visits to museums and galleries. Location and time frame restricted the exhibitions that I had the opportunity to explore in detail. I visited art museums and galleries actively

¹⁰ Nicky Hamlyn, *Film Art Phenomena* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), viii.

engaged with the exhibition of moving image works, specifically Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Perry Rubenstein Gallery (now closed), Michael Kohn Gallery, The Getty, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Museum of the Moving Image and the Hirshhorn. Through conversations with curators and preservationists, I also learned about practices at The Warhol Museum, the UCLA Film and Television Archive and the Academy Film Archive. For descriptions and analyses of other relevant exhibitions, I relied upon reviews, photographs and publicity materials.

To supplement my direct observations, I conducted interviews with a cross section of museum and film archive professionals: film preservationists, media curators, media conservators, technical exhibition managers, exhibition designers, and artist representatives. These interviews do not represent the definitive perspectives and opinions of the members of each field. One conversation with a person does not suffice to fully grasp his or her own viewpoint, let alone the nuanced views of his or her entire profession. Rather than sum up the perspective of each group, these interviews were intended to expand my understanding of the ways in which various professions interact with moving image artworks. Too often discussions and insights that happen in one field do not reach the ears of another—there is little exchange, for example, between museums and film archives.

While I do not refrain from criticizing certain decisions and aspects of exhibitions, I strive to understand the motivations behind such decisions. Each professional encounters the moving image work with different priorities and responsibilities. There are different considerations that enter in from the conservation perspective as opposed to the curatorial perspective. One profession must balance the physical condition of the work with the artist's

intent, while the other must balance the artist's intent with a curatorial thesis. The condition of a work may conflict with the artist's intent. For example, the print of a film intended to be shown in vibrant color may have faded to pink. The decisions of all involved impact the ways in which the work will be preserved, exhibited and engaged with in the museum setting. All of these perspectives must be considered and weighed when making conservation and exhibition decisions about artworks.

In addition to analyzing theoretical texts, I sought out essays and lectures by practitioners who engage with moving image works on a professional basis. The conferences prompted by the Inside Installations initiative, the Electronic Media Group *Tech Focus* workshops, and various Getty symposia proved particularly rich resources for gleaning the perspectives of those who work closely with artworks in conservation but do not publish their findings with regularity. These additional viewpoints provided insights into cost limitations, time restrictions, ethical considerations and other decision-making factors. The conservation and exhibition of moving image works within the museum remains a developing area of the field, with museums continually testing out new strategies. My research therefore remains exploratory and open-ended.

The White Cube, the Black Box and the Spectacle

Over the course of its history, the museum as a cultural institution has developed a set of conventions for exhibition and viewing. The uncluttered and well-lit space of the "white cube" offers the illusion of a neutral presentation of art within its walls: "As white walls, even lighting from the ceiling, and hushed voices contribute to a sense of the museum as a space for quiet

contemplation (of a mostly visual nature, as opposed to the other senses), viewers also make assumptions about the availability of these images for repeated viewing...the conditions of the white cube tend to make art appear timeless.”¹¹ Within the museum, art works are carefully grouped together in categories based on period, country or theme. Visitors pass through each gallery, lingering in front of certain works and continuing past others with little more than a glance. The amount of text on the display placard and number of people stopped in front of a particular work tend to indicate its perceived importance. Always in motion, the museum visitor circulates through the galleries with the knowledge that he or she can return to the pieces at any time and find them unchanged. The museum visitor’s relationship with time is further analyzed by the philosopher Boris Groys: “He can interrupt contemplation of a particular picture at any time to come back to it later and assume viewing it at the same point it was previously interrupted. In the period of time of the absence of the viewer, the motionless image remains identical to itself and for this reason does not elude repeated viewing.”¹² This sense of control defines the expectations of the museum visitor.

But the suspended temporality of the art object in the museum does not hold for the moving image. The moving image work both stops the flow of movement through the museum by requiring viewers to pause in front of a screen or enter a separate space and contradicts the timeless quality that the gallery space purports to offer by relying upon the passage of time to unfold. In contrast to the display of artworks within the museum, the typical viewing experience associated with moving images is referred to as the “black box.” As defined by SFMOMA

¹¹ Andrea Inselmann “Moving Pictures Inside the Museum,” in *Stop.look.listen.: an exhibition of video works*, ed. Andrea Inselmann (Ithaca, N.Y. : Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2008), 46.

¹² Boris Groys, “From the Image to the Image File—and Back,” in *40yearsvideoart.de—part 1*, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.40jahrevideokunst.de/main.php?p=2&n1=4&n2=30&lang=en>.

curator Rudolf Frieling, “The ‘black box’ or ‘black cube’ also works by removing context (see the often detailed and controlled equipping of these installation rooms with sound- and light-insulating material), but it also isolates the subject in order to admit the sensual immersive element of ‘being in the picture’ that reflection usually provokes in retrospect.”¹³ Similar to the ambitions of the museum, the viewing conditions of the cinema seek to eradicate distractions, allowing the viewer to contemplate the images unfolding on the screen. However, while the cinema holds the viewer still in the dark and expects him or her to stay the duration, the museum fosters movement through the galleries at the viewer’s own pace. The contemplation happens in different ways and at different speeds. Thus the black box does not fit neatly into the anticipated viewing experience of the museum. The two key issues that prevent the assimilation of moving image works into the gallery setting are temporal duration and lack of optimal viewing conditions.

Discourses on high and low culture often create an opposition between the “black box” of the movie theater and the “white cube” of the museum gallery. The black box theater space in which films are traditionally screened becomes tied to mass culture and entertainment. Within this space, the darkness blocks out all other sensory perceptions, encouraging the audience to direct their undivided attention to the large, illuminated screen. The cinema’s harshest critics equate this immobile viewer with passivity and the mindless absorption of content. Associated with apparatus theory from the 1970s articulated by Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz, the criticisms equate cinema viewing with a lack of criticality and a reversion to a regressive state.

¹³ Rudolf Frieling, “From Form to Platform: Hybrid Spaces and Media,” in *Stop.look.listen.: an exhibition of video works*, ed. Andrea Inselmann (Ithaca, N.Y. : Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2008), 38.

Films force identification with particular characters and acceptance of constructed meanings upon passive viewers who do not question the viewpoint presented.

When defined in contrast to the black box of the movie theater, the white cube represents a space of high culture and intellectual engagement. Adopted by the art world in the 1920s, the white cube remains “inextricably tied to the ideology of modernism and the desire for an artistic autonomy free of the contaminating tentacles of a mass culture seen as governed primarily by market imperatives.”¹⁴ From this perspective, the white cube presents a space that exists outside of consumerism and popular culture; its pristine white walls allow for the pure and timeless exhibition of artworks. Within this context, the viewer critically interrogates the artworks on display. Art criticism often holds a tacit assumption that museum visitors are educated and culturally sophisticated; they therefore engage with artworks on a different level than the masses who watch films. Museums and art galleries permit their visitors to walk around freely and determine for themselves how long to linger in front of each artwork. Yet the ability to move about freely does not translate into elevated intellectual engagement.

The qualitative differences in spectatorship implied by the black box and white cube dichotomy prove difficult to sustain. Whether a viewer sits passively in a movie theater or actively roams around a gallery space does not determine his or her level of interaction with an artwork. For Erika Balsom, the very association of the cinema viewer as passive and the gallery visitor as active “rests on a spurious mapping of passive/active binaries into this architectural difference, as if to conflate physical stasis with regressive mystification and physical ambulation

¹⁴ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 39.

with criticality—a claim that holds true on neither end.”¹⁵ A level of criticality or lack thereof cannot be assumed in either context. Viewing conditions alone do not produce a particular type of spectator, nor create a specific form of interaction.

The spectator is not a one dimensional entity, but rather an individual who approaches works in the context of a movie theater or a gallery with a particular background, history and web of associations. In his book *Television Cultures*, John Fiske refers to these nuanced cultural consumers as “social subjects”: “The social subject has a history, lives in a particular social formation (a mix of class, gender, age, region, etc.), and is constituted by a complex cultural history that is both social and textual.”¹⁶ A sole position or perspective of the spectator cannot be assumed in the museum gallery or in the movie theater. Moreover, the quality or relevance of a spectator’s experience cannot be predicted. Art history and criticism often only seek to understand the intentions of artists or curators, rather than the reactions and experiences of viewers. In contrast, while the structure and content of exhibitions remain critical factors in shaping the viewing experience, museum studies as a discipline has shifted more of its focus to the museum visitor.

Museum studies theorists acknowledge that museum visitors are not blank slates. What people learn from a museum or an exhibition depends in part upon what they bring to the exhibition—factors such as their level of interest, their prior knowledge of the subject, their level of education, and their cultural background. John H. Falk’s and Lynn D. Dierking’s text *Learning from Museums* articulates the recent shift in museum studies to view museums as “free-choice

¹⁵ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 51.

¹⁶ John Fiske, “Active Audiences,” in *Television Cultures* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 62.

learning environments—not only places where individuals can freely select what to learn but also places where individuals freely choose whether to come in the first place.”¹⁷ Free-choice learning refers to a process that is non-linear and personally motivated; visitors decide for themselves when and where to participate in the engagement offered by the museum.¹⁸ Creating an enjoyable environment in which visitors can learn is the means by which museums remain culturally relevant.¹⁹ This catering to the needs of museum visitors reflects a shift away from the perceived prior focus of museums on building and maintaining collections of art historical value. The notion of museums as places for high aesthetic experiences gives way to the notion of museums as accessible sites of learning and entertainment. This ideological shift represents a need to justify continued public funding by demonstrating the enduring cultural value of museums.²⁰ Catering to the desires of their visitors, museums enter the “experience economy,” competing with other sources of cultural diversion.²¹

In recent decades, museums have increased the number of crowd-pleasing exhibitions in their line-ups in order to compete with cinema multiplexes, theme parks, and other cultural events for tourist dollars and public funding.²² In a conversation on film curatorship, the director of the Austrian Film Museum Alexander Horwath laments: “...even the big-name art museums

¹⁷ John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2000), 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹⁹ The need for museum to retain their relevance noted by Alison Trope in *Stardust Monuments* (New England: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 37.

²⁰ Stephen E. Weil, “From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 232.

²¹ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 178.

²² Dirk vom Lehn, “Embodying Experience,” *European Journal of Marketing* 40, no. 11/12 (2006): 1341.

have, in the past ten years, come somewhat under pressure to reduce their conservation and preservation budgets, their conservation staff—and to spend more money on attractive exhibitions for mass audiences, possibly curated traveling exhibitions.”²³ Exhibitions that attract record attendance numbers are referred to as blockbusters—a term first applied to the museum world in relation to the traveling King Tutankhamun exhibition in the 1970s.²⁴ As with blockbuster movies, blockbuster exhibitions refer to must-see events worth standing in line to experience. More contemporary examples involve fashion and lifestyle centered exhibitions, such as *The Art of the Motorcycle* sponsored by BMW and shown at the Guggenheim in 1998 and *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk* mounted at various venues including the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2014. For museums eyeing the bottom line, cinema-centered exhibitions present an attractive option: “In this new museum, the projected image provides a monumental, relatively cheap way of delivering exhibitions with vast appeal.”²⁵ Traveling exhibitions such as *Tim Burton* and *Stanley Kubrick* exemplify a growing trend of trying to draw audiences into the museum through associations with cinema. By scheduling such exhibitions, museums market themselves as places of entertainment and diversion.

The strategy of harnessing cinema to appeal to new audiences and appear more accessible harkens back to the introduction of the film department of MoMA—when attracting a different crowd and cultivating a different image were the primary motivations: “So, while collecting,

²³ Paolo Cherchi Usai, David Francis, Alexander Horwath and Michael Loebenstein, *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace* (Neubaugasse: SYNEMA Publikationen, 2008), 23.

²⁴ Erika Balsom, “Around the Clock: Museum and Market,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 54, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 182.

²⁵ Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 43.

preserving and programming films played an important part in the museum's activity—and film attendances certainly helped to counteract its elitist image...this activity was in effect kept apart from its role in promoting Modernism in the 'other' arts."²⁶ Film theorists like Erika Balsom hold few illusions as to the expected gains by the museum from welcoming cinema into its galleries: "While the concept of the flâneur has been invoked so frequently and loosely within the discipline of film studies so as to render it little more than a petrified cliché, its suitability for the gallery spectator rests not only in the emphasis on perambulation, but also on the comparison between gallery spectatorship and window shopping. For within what Rosalind Krauss has called the 'late capitalist museum,' the prevalence of large-scale moving images contributes greatly to a new spectacularization of art marked by qualities of commodification and fragmentation."²⁷

Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010) represents an ideal exhibition for the task, blending accessibility with critical praise. (Figure 1). Spanning twenty-four hours, the moving image piece is a montage of film clips that include shots of clocks or watches, or that reference the time; the seconds shown ticking by on screen coincide with real time in the gallery space. The exhibition of the work keeps certain elements of the movie theater setting while making adjustments for the conditions of the art museum. For installations in the Power Plant Contemporary Art Centre and the MoMA, the viewing environment resembled a private screening room. Dark overall, the room contained several rows of couches all pointed toward the main, large screen. A limit to the number of people permitted in the room at any given time resulted in crowds of people waiting in line to cycle through the viewing space. Visitors could remain in the room for as long as they

²⁶ Christie, "A Disturbing Presence?" 244.

²⁷ Balsom, "Screening Rooms," 31.

wished. Lasting twenty-four hours, the work is not intended to be seen in its entirety in a single viewing. Unlike the cinematic works it draws from that often follow a narrative structure, *The Clock* does not require extensive context to understand. Viewers walking in at any time could have a similar experience, despite seeing different content.

The lines of museum visitors waiting to experience *The Clock* solidified its status as a blockbuster. Five editions of the work were sold to museums for the hefty price tag of \$467,500 a piece.²⁸ A desirable commodity, the work succeeds in making contemporary art digestible for the average museum goer. The use of film footage from cinema history provides a level of familiarity. The exhibition of the *The Clock* at LACMA in 2011 prompted an enthusiastic review from the *Los Angeles Times* film critic Kenneth Turan: “Even though Christian Marclay’s art installation piece won the Gold Lion at the Venice Biennale, it may be best viewed not through the lens of high art but as an exhilarating and intoxicating moviegoing experience, an unintentional love note to movies, how they work and what they do, that immediately goes to your head and makes you giddy.”²⁹ The simplified premise of the work can be summed up as the creation of a twenty-four hour clock from found movie footage. This simple statement, “matched by an intensity of aesthetic experience that requires no backstory, no artist’s statement, and no special knowledge of art history,” equals a successful exhibition.³⁰ The duration of the work

²⁸ Balsom, “Around the Clock,” 179.

²⁹ Kenneth Turan, “Finest Hours,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/08/entertainment/la-et-turan-notebook-clock-20110708>.

³⁰ Balsom, “Around the Clock,” 181.

increases its marketability by providing occasions for the museum to stay open all night as a special event.³¹

Even with an artist as actively involved with the installation of his or her work as Christian Marclay, the pursuit of greater accessibility through cinema-centered exhibitions has tended toward a lack of respect for moving image works. Museums continue to challenge the restrictions placed on the exhibition of moving image artworks. LACMA reportedly submitted a recent proposal to Christian Marclay to exhibit *The Clock* on the exterior of their building.³² The constant loop would be visible to every person passing by, extending the reach of the artwork while also doubling as a billboard that advertises the museum. Such an installation of the work would not only have negated certain associations with cinema maintained by the screening room environment, it would have eliminated the sound component of the work entirely—a soundtrack meticulously crafted to aid transition between film clips and unify the work.³³ While LACMA denies proposing an outdoor exhibition of the work, the Tate did request to screen the work in Turbine Hall.³⁴ Although the massive space would allow for mass viewing of the work, the hall has notoriously poor acoustics.³⁵ For an artist and musician like Marclay, who pays equal attention to the editing of sound and picture in his video works, these suggestions represent a disregard for the artist's creative practice and history. Marclay refused the requests, offering a memorable comment in his *New Yorker* profile: "Venerable museums are acting like greedy

³¹ "Event-centric" programming has become another strategy for attracting museum visitors. Ann Temkin, Jessica Morgan and Jens Hoffmann, "The Museum as Spectacle," *Mousse* 38 (April-May 2013): 189.

³² Balsom, "Around the Clock," 189.

³³ Daniel Zalewski, "The Hours: How Christian Marclay Created the Ultimate Digital Mosaic," *New Yorker*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/12/the-hours-daniel-zalewski>.

³⁴ Kenneth Turan, "Finest Hours."

³⁵ Daniel Zalewski, "The Hours."

kids... There's a lack of scholarship. It's all about how many people they can get through the doors. How to preserve it, how to give it the best possible presentation—that doesn't matter. They just want a hit."³⁶ Although Marclay did not agree to such forms of exhibition, how would such a conversation unfold if the artist was no longer able to say no? The use of moving image works for the benefit of the museum community should not come at the cost of devaluing and disregarding the integrity of the work being exhibited.

Duration

Within the white cube context, the viewer must be able to gather the gist of a work in a single glance. As mentioned by Groys, the images in a museum have a certain constancy, meaning that the viewer can return to them at his or her leisure in order to probe deeper. This does not hold true for film and video works, which continue their own progressions. They do not wait, static and unchanged, for the viewer to circle back and examine a shot more closely. Instead, the temporal nature of moving image works requires a stationary, attentive viewer. The museum-goer cannot return to a moving image work expecting to resume his viewing from the same spot. Depending upon its duration, the film or video work might not even play to completion—let alone repeat—within the length of time that the viewer spends in the gallery.

The tendency to pass through a museum sampling or only focusing on well-know works differs completely from the experience of sitting in a theater, watching an entire film from beginning to end. The cumulative duration of the film and video works contained in a contemporary art exhibition is potentially longer than most people will spend in the museum as a

³⁶ Daniel Zalewski, "The Hours."

whole. Indeed, data collected for a study published in *Curator* in 1997 found that museum visitors spend as little as twenty minutes in exhibitions—no matter the size or subject of the exhibition.³⁷ It is unlikely that visitors will watch all of the moving image works on display through to completion—even if fortunate enough to catch them all at the beginning. Frieling articulates the typical stance of the curator: “Material is abundant, but the visitor’s time to spend in the installation is limited. We can deduce the crucial component to a time-based installation is not the unfolding of a linear narrative with a beginning and end (although these cases do exist), but rather the unfolding of a cinematic experience that is by its very spatial and organizational structure open to many different individual viewings.”³⁸ He is perhaps too dismissive of the significance of the beginning and the end relating only to narrative works. Every moving image work unfolds over time, making the duration central to the experience of the work—not simply narrative works.

Different artists have different relationships to the duration of their works. For the generation of artists who turned to film and video in the 1960s and 1970s, the moving image works often documented a performance or a process—the length arbitrarily determined by the length of the video tape or film roll used. Many of these artists deliberately worked against the narrative structures of Hollywood, filming themselves performing the same action over and over again. At first glance, the repetitive nature of their work fits well into the structure of the museum exhibition—a viewer can watch a snippet and gather the gist of a given work. The works are nevertheless comprised of actions that unfold over time, and the frequent repetition of

³⁷ Beverly Serrell, “Paying Attention: The Duration and Allocation of Visitors’ Time in Museum Exhibitions,” *Curator* 40, no.2 (June 1997): 119.

³⁸ Frieling, “From Form to Platform,” 37.

these actions can cumulatively affect the viewing experience. Consider, for example, Vito Acconci's *Pryings* in which he tries to open the eyes of a woman who tries to keep her eyes closed. While the conceptual basis of this piece can be understood after a minute, the agonizing task of sitting through the over seventeen minutes of footage produces a markedly different viewer experience.³⁹ The repetition of the action increases the sense of violation and trauma—producing a more visceral reaction. This is the difference between extracting the general concept of a piece rather than experiencing it. In this sense, the former is not much different than reading about the piece in a book.

Casual, passing engagement with moving image works is still more problematic for works with a definite beginning, middle and end. Since very few museum viewers will catch a moving image work from the start, they must reconstruct the narrative in retrospect. Museums counteract this problem by playing films and videos on a loop. To see the whole, the viewer must wait for the loop to finish, watch from the beginning until the loop circles back on itself, then mentally reconstruct the work. This results in a fragmented experience of the piece. For curators like Andrea Inselmann, this is a liberating experience that encourages viewers to engage with the work without reference to the traditional narrative, “abandoning the illusion of a centered and unified subject as the question, ‘if the viewer has really seen the work if she hasn’t seen it all the way through,’ drops into the background. Even without considering the content of the moving images themselves, the format of the loop and the focus on the surrounding environment challenge viewers to question received notions about spectatorship and open it up in ways that

³⁹ Vito Acconci, *Pryings* (1971), 8mm, b&w, sound, 17:10 mins.

are not possible in a theatrical venue.”⁴⁰ Yet Inselmann’s very dismissal of the subject matter indicates that she is perhaps not engaging with the works themselves but rather the idea of the work imposed by their viewer. Rather than a deliberate attempt to challenge the narrative structure of moving image works, the loop seems more like a convenience, making these works readily available.⁴¹ And rather than liberating, it often proves more disorienting for the viewer who does not know how long to stay and watch before moving on. The viewer rarely receives any indication of the kind of interaction that the piece requires.

The loop as a condition of museum exhibition increasingly informs the work of contemporary film and video artists. In her introductory essay for the exhibition *Image Stream*, an exhibition of moving image works at the Wexner Center for the Art, curator Helen Molesworth calls attention to the way in which Kutluğ Ataman self-consciously structures his *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* around the fragmented viewing experience created by the loop: “Viewers are aware that wherever they stand they are ‘missing’ something on another screen, which they can see but not hear. The cube functions like a minimalist sculpture, bumping the viewer around from one side to another, not to apprehend sculptural form, but to try and garner the entirety of the woman’s narrative. In effect the action of the viewer mimes the problem of the loop, as one literally loops around the work ever trying to catch up with the images that have preceded your arrival.”⁴² (Figure 2).

⁴⁰ Inselmann, 48. Adopting a more radical viewpoint, curator Chrissie Iles argues that active engagement with moving images only occurs in the “wakeful state of perception” created by the gallery setting. Chrissie Iles, “Between the Still and Moving Image,” in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 32-69.

⁴¹ With film projections, the loop is also used for financial reasons. Hiring a projectionist to rewind and rethread the projector throughout the day adds to the prohibitive expense of film exhibitions.

⁴² Helen Molesworth, “Image Stream,” in *Image Stream*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, 2003), 18.

The 2013 solo-show of the contemporary video artist Candice Breitz at the Perry Rubenstein gallery in Los Angeles provides another example of how the technological display of a work can enrich its content. The three multi-channel works on view dealt explicitly with show-business.⁴³ Breitz explained the grouping in an *Artforum* article: “I hoped that *The Woods*, as a title, might evoke the fictional space of fairy tales and folklore, a space in which morals and norms are passed on to children via entertaining stories. But the title also quite literally takes what the three film industries that were my point of focus—Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood—nominally have in common, to hold the three works together as a trilogy.”⁴⁴ The individual works take both their subjects and their names from three facets of the industry: *The Audition*, *The Rehearsal* and *The Interview*.

Displayed on high-definition flat screens, the exhibition of these works recalls the fragmented and heavily mediated glimpses of show-business that we see on television. *The Rehearsal*, for example, takes six Bollywood child stars and places them in the familiar context of the tell-all interview. (Figure 3). Very quickly, the viewer realizes that the children do not speak in their own words. Instead, they recite the rehearsed interview responses of Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan about his work ethic and his acting methods. Although each child occupies a separate screen within the six-channel installation, their responses to the unspoken questions merge together and overlap. By piecing together a single interview from the six performances, Breitz hints at the interchangeability of these child stars as they pursue adult stardom. The deliberately repetitive structure of the work counteracts the problem of viewers walking in at

⁴³ Candice Breitz, *The Woods* on view at Perry Rubenstein gallery from October 19-December 15, 2013.

⁴⁴ Candice Breitz as told to Zachary Cahill, “500 Words,” *Artforum*, January 5, 2013, <http://artforum.com/words/id=38473>.

varying times. With a total running time of nearly three hours, the composition of the three works in the Perry Rubenstein exhibition seems to anticipate the likelihood that viewers will not watch them all through to completion.

Narrative films suffer more from the looped viewing structure often imposed by the museum. The loop makes the action of the films appear cyclical, removing the force of narrative progression or climax. Many viewers do not stop to watch the whole of a moving image work; seats do not provide enough incentive to pause in the middle of their promenade through the museum. The lack of protocol for watching moving image works in the museum setting poses a further problem. Entering through curtains or a darkened doorway into a dark room can leave viewers discombobulated. Moreover, they receive no indication as to the point in the film at which they enter.

Frustrated by the lack of control over how an audience interacts with their work, some contemporary artists have turned back to the strict rules of cinema exhibition for a solution. Erika Balsom references several examples in her essay “Screening Rooms: The Movie Theatre in/and the Gallery”: a notice at the beginning of Janet Cardiff’s and George Bures Miller’s *The Paradise Institute* instructs the viewer to stay for the whole 13 minute work; Dutch artists Willem de Rijke and Jeroen de Rooij show their gallery-based films at scheduled screening times, expecting the viewer to watch the full duration of work; and artist James Benning does not release his “intensely duration-based works” on DVD or even allow them to be exhibited in the gallery setting.⁴⁵ If this return to screening times and an expectation to stay for the whole of the

⁴⁵ Erika Balsom, “Screening Rooms: The Movie Theatre in/and the Gallery,” *Public: Art/Culture/Ideas* 40 (2010): 29, 31. Since the publication of Balsom’s article, James Benning has revised his attitude toward releasing his works on DVD. See “The Sight & Sound interview: James Benning” on the BFI website, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/sight-sound-interview-james-benning>.

piece is not wholly feasible in the museum or gallery setting, the use of a timer to indicate the amount of time until the next showing provides an alternative. Within an exhibition of video works at The Hirshhorn, David Claerbout used this tactic by displaying a sign outside the screening room for his video *Travel* (1996-2013) that read: “Viewers are encouraged to view this work from the beginning. Next screening begins in x minutes. Screening takes place every 13 minutes.” (Figure 4). Due to the dimness of the halls, the screening room was open to the passersby, allowing them to glance inside to see if they wanted to return for the next screening. The countdown, visible from outside, did not distract the current viewer.

Viewing Environment

Contemporary artists with clout can ensure optimal viewing conditions for their works. Emerging best practices for contemporary curators advocate working together with the artist during the installation process—either in person or through back-and-forth communication.⁴⁶ Curators should respect the original intentions of the artist and approach each work individually, based on its own essential components. With fewer artists to accommodate, galleries and smaller museums can often isolate and create individualized viewing conditions for each work. The rooms of the Perry Rubenstein gallery exhibiting the works of Candice Breitz, for example, were separated geographically by hallways and even outdoor spaces. This precaution, along with the sound absorbing panels lining the walls of the rooms, prevented the sounds of one work from bleeding into another. Two sets of heavy black velvet curtains at the entrance of each room

⁴⁶ See Sarah Cook interview by Crystal Sanchez and James Smith, June 18, 2013.

similarly keep outside light from leaking into the exhibition rooms. While still having just enough light to see, the carefully arranged rooms were dark except for the light of the projection.

Similarly, Christian Marclay retained the authority to dictate the viewing conditions for *The Clock*. He detailed the instructions in a twenty-four page manual, specifying even the seating formation: “The sofas, arrayed in a grid, allowed viewers to sit comfortably for hours, and to leave without forcing others to stand up, as in a cinema.”⁴⁷ Invoking the viewing conditions of the black box movie theater as a model, Marclay completes his appropriation of the cinema. The viewing environment necessarily shapes the museum visitors’ interaction with the work on display: “Much of a visitor’s behavior in a museum is reactive, unconsciously responding to space, color, shape, form—in short, responding to design in general and the objects and settings in which they are displayed in particular.”⁴⁸ For *The Clock*, Marclay seeks the response of moviegoers who go to the cinema with the expectation of losing themselves in a movie. If a viewer approaches *The Clock* with this mindset, the realization that the time represented on screen is real time becomes all the more jarring. There is no slipping into cinematic time; it is the viewer’s own time that continues to tick by.

Yet there are other motivations for favoring cinematic exhibition as a model for moving image exhibition within the museum. The setting of the movie theater is controlled and standardized for the uniform exhibition of film prints and DCPs. In 2013, the Association of Moving Image Archivists published a set of Theater Presentation Guidelines for the exhibition of archival prints. The guidelines address proper film handling, specifications for 16mm and 35mm

⁴⁷ Daniel Zalewski, “The Hours.”

⁴⁸ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 113.

projection, projector maintenance, aperture masks, anamorphic lenses, variable film speeds and adequate darkness.⁴⁹ The cinematic viewing environment extends to the darkened hall, the large screen showing one work at a time, and the cushioned seats that enable a viewer to sit comfortably for the entirety of a film. The darkness, in particular, is necessary to allow for the perception of detailed images on screen that render the full spectrum of light and shadow. The screen, as the brightest element in the room, attracts and holds the attention of the eye.

The presumed ideal viewing conditions for cinematic works rarely accompany them into the context of the museum. Attempts to preserve elements of the theater viewing environment often resort to the insertion of the black box into the white cube of the museum space, sectioning off the film works from the rest of the art on display. The simple insertion of a black box into the gallery space poses its own set of problems. Viewers may wander in and out of the room, disrupting the concentration of those committed to watching the work in full. The confinement of black box spaces to corners of the larger galleries can lead to viewers ignoring the the moving image components of an exhibition altogether. Moreover, unless well blocked off, light may leak into the room from other galleries. Solutions such as black-out curtains create other disruptions, such as a bright flash of light every time visitors peak their heads in to decide if a work interests them or not (often not). The eyes may struggle to adjust to such dark spaces and, without clear aisles for walking, visitors run the risk of tripping over others. Controlling sound presents a further challenge. The sounds of one work may bleed through the walls and color the mood of a separate work; conversely, the noises of a bustling museum may overwhelm a delicate

⁴⁹ *AMIA Theater Presentation Guidelines*, Association of Moving Image Archivists, Projection and Technical Presentation Committee, February 2013, <http://www.amianet.org/sites/all/files/Theatre%20Presentation%20Guide%202012.pdf>.

soundtrack. While sound-absorbing panels are beneficial, they cannot deaden sound completely. Simply turning down the volume of a loud work could compromise the impact of that work.

In *Film Art Phenomena*, Nicky Hamlyn criticizes the museum's use of the geometric black box as a default for moving image exhibition: "The format (whose precedents lie in the Camera Obscura and the Diorama) has become a popular mode of presentation, in recognition of the fact that time-based media need dedicated, sheltered spaces if they are to be shown in galleries. However, the uniformity of this enclosed wall form means that it often bears little relation to the particular form of the film itself."⁵⁰ His critique of the uniformity of such rooms, while well founded, confirms his preference for "expanded cinema" works that actively engage with the space of the gallery and their means of projection. For works such as Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) (Figure 5) or Neil Henderson's *Black and Light Movie* (2001), the projector beam itself becomes part of the composition of the work, challenging the definition of a film. Works such as these were not constructed as a dialogue with cinema, but rather as an exploration of medium and apparatus. Many contemporary artists also situate their work outside of the cinema space. They create their film or video pieces with the flexibility of the gallery space in mind.

Hamlyn, however, proceeds to critique artists like Tacita Dean for not engaging adequately with the exhibition space and mode of projection: "Although her 16mm films are shown in art galleries, they are in many ways akin to straightforward cinema films, since the specificities of the space or the sculptural implications of the projection process are not explicitly addressed. The loop machines which allow the shorter pieces to run continuously are enclosed in

⁵⁰ Hamlyn, *Film Art Phenomena*, 184.

order to minimize their presence, while the longer films are shown from specifically constructed projection boxes. In this respect the work also conforms to the common practice of video artists using silent, digital projectors mounted high above the spectator.”⁵¹ His position seems to suggest that only works in line with the “expanded cinema” tradition warrant projection on film within the gallery space. This narrow-minded approach would effectively exclude works suited for a black box environment such as experimental films from museum galleries. Hamlyn effectively argues that museums should allow the nature of a work to guide its exhibition; however, this sensitivity should not come at the expense of perpetuating an hierarchy of moving image artworks and excluding all but non-narrative, structural film and video works from the gallery. If well-designed, the black box setting can offer optimal viewing conditions for a wide variety of moving image artworks, including artist films and experimental cinema.

Hirshhorn: Black Box

The Black Box was designated as a space for moving image works within the Hirshhorn in 2005.⁵² The allocation of a permanent space suggests both that moving image works will be shown there on a regular basis and that the room is equipped with proper projection equipment. The Black Box space occupies an area on the lower level of the museum—removed from the chance of light leak from windows. The grey-painted walls and black carpet reduce the need for black out curtains. In late March of 2015, two works occupied the space—Ragnar Kjartansson’s

⁵¹ Hamlyn, *Film Art Phenomena* 44. Tacita Dean herself dislikes for her work to be shown in the context of a cinema. She identifies as an artist who works in the medium of film and sees the rightful placement of her work as in the gallery.

⁵² “About Black Box” on Hirshhorn website, <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/black-box-series/#detail=/bio/about-black-box/&collection=black-box-series>

S.S. Hangover (2013-2014) as part of the Black Box series and the Miguel Angel Rios's *A Morir* (2013) as a recent acquisition. Although separated by a hallway and not intended to be viewed in relation to one another, the two pieces complemented each other well.

Ragnar Kjartansson's piece is a slow and meditative two-channel video projection of the *S.S. Hangover* sailing between piers of the Venice canals during the 2013 Venice Biennale. The small wooden boat stops to pick up and drop off musicians along its route; they perform a "melancholic brass fanfare."⁵³ Situated within a medium-sized room, the projection is shielded from outside light and distraction by a wall that juts out in front of the entryway. From the vicinity of the wall text, visitors can catch a glimpse of the projected dual-screen image and determine whether or not to enter the room. (Figure 6). If they decide to watch, there is no waiting for the 243 minute work to start over from the beginning. Once inside, dimmed lights from the ceiling draw attention to two long sofas along the back wall of the gallery. The walls and carpet are dark, directing the viewers' focus to the projected image on the opposite wall. There are speakers on either side of the screen and a dark projector mounted overhead. The design of the room allowed viewers to sit comfortably with their backs against the wall and contemplate the languid beauty of the work.

Down a darkened hallway was *A Morir* (2003). The three-channel black and white video projection by Miguel Angel Rios lasts 4:45 minutes. All three screens are focused on a grid upon which black wooden tops are dropped: "The game unfolds from various perspectives across three

⁵³ "Black Box: Ragnar Kjartansson," on Hirshhorn website, <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/ragnar-kjartansson/#collection=ragnar-kjartansson&detail=http%3A//hirshhorn.si.edu/bio/black-box-ragnar-kjartansson/&title=Black+Box%3A+Ragnar+Kjartansson>.

screens, but those who launch the tops remain off-camera and anonymous.”⁵⁴ The tops scrape and glide across the surface—colliding with each other, wobbling, and finally collapsing. The simple premise allowed viewers to quickly orient themselves within the piece and the short duration encouraged them to remain until the video completed its loop. Nevertheless, the design of the gallery left the screen visible through the doorway from the hallway. Viewers could stand and observe the work from the outside without committing to sitting down. Inside the room were three staggered benches. While the light from the hallway did not intrude, the sound did bleed slightly from one room into the next, particularly the brass horns of Kjartansson’s work. Once inside the gallery, however, the amplified sound of *A Morir* succeeded in drowning out most of the other sounds of the museum. Viewers could easily focus upon the work before them.

The well-designed Black Box space on the lower floor of the Hirshhorn presented a model for exhibiting moving image artworks in a black box environment. Although the museum isolated the two works for individual engagement, the pair achieved a successful balance of viewing demands and tone. On a higher floor, the museum concurrently hosted *Days of Endless Time*, an exhibition of fourteen time-based media installations.⁵⁵ While the works were well-selected and for the most part well-projected meditations upon time, their awkward positioning undermined the overall strength of the exhibition. Without enough room for each work to have its own designated space, certain works crowded each other and resulted in a bottleneck of visitors. The notes bowed on the cello from Su-Mei Tse’s *L’Echo* (2003), for example, spilled

⁵⁴ “Hirshhorn Museum Acquires Miguel Angel Rios’s ‘A Morir (’Til Death)’” on Hirshhorn website, <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/resource-centre/#detail=/bio/hirshhorn-museum-acquires-miguel-angel-rioss-a-morir-til-death/&collection=resource-centre>.

⁵⁵ *Days of Endless Time* on view at Hirshhorn from October 16, 2014 to April 6, 2015, <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/days-endless-time/#collection=days-endless-time>.

over into and colored the viewer's perception of Sigalit Landau's silent video *DeadSee* (2005). On occasion, the decision to proceed to the next artwork required crossing directly in front those watching a piece. The combined length of the exhibition prevented viewers from methodically taking in all of the works in their entirety in one pass. Museum fatigue can have the unintentional effect of privileging the works in the early galleries.⁵⁶ Yet, rather than present the works for individual consumption, the exhibition aimed to place the works in dialogue with each other. Effective strategies for incorporating moving image works into a thematic whole remain elusive.

Curatorial Vision

The practices of contemporary curators demonstrate a desire to incorporate moving image material into broader historical or thematic exhibitions. Placing moving image works in the dialogue with works from other media promises to provide greater insight into an artistic movement or the shape of a single artist's career. For example, several exhibition have attempted to present Andy Warhol's moving image works in the context of the rest of his career in order to expand the public and critical understanding of his oeuvre.⁵⁷ Indeed, moving image works should not be forced to the sidelines within art historical discussions. In 2007, the *Andy Warhol – Other Voices, Other Rooms* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum CS in Amsterdam gathered together works by the artist in all different media in an attempt to give proof of the diversity of his career.

⁵⁶ Awareness of "museum fatigue"—the tiredness that overtook the common museum visitor after a few hours roaming the galleries—dates back to the 1920s. Haidee Wasson, "Big, Fast Museums / Small, Slow Movies: Film, Scale and the Art Museum," in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 190.

⁵⁷ Julia Noordegraaf and Ariane Noël de Tilly, "Epilogue," in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 408.

Divided into three sections, the exhibition included Warhol's works in more familiar media—such as paintings, drawings, and Polaroids—as well as his films and works for television. For the *Filmscape* section of the exhibition, the museum selected nineteen works—primarily *Screen Tests*—to project simultaneously on a row of screens down a single long corridor. Due to the sheer number of projections, the film works were screened as digital transfers. Selected films with more of a dramatic structure were reserved for screenings in the theater which took place over a two-day cycle.⁵⁸ Within the gallery space, the simultaneous projection of the works in close proximity encouraged the viewer to draw connections between the films as well as to notice continued themes across all of Warhol's oeuvre, such as portraiture and celebrity. A qualified success, the installation proved overwhelming: "...the attention of the visitors was fragmented and distributed over space and time. The fact that each projection screen was accompanied by a numeric clock displaying the remaining time of the screening invited visitors to stay, move on, or return, thus further stimulating their *flânerie*-like spectatorship of the films."⁵⁹ Rather than a means to help the viewer with his or her own pacing through the gallery, the ever visible countdown acted as a jarring reminder of the passage of time.

Although mounted five years later, in 2011, MoMA's *Andy Warhol: Motion Pictures* did not improve upon the exhibition of Warhol's moving image works. (Figure 7). In her review of the exhibition for *Artforum*, Amy Taubin does not sugar-coat her opinion: "Andy Warhol remarked of his movies that they were often better talked about than seen. If your only experience of the silent films he made between 1963 and 1966 is the exhibition 'Andy Warhol:

⁵⁸ Noordegraaf and Noël de Tilly, "Epilogue," 407.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 410.

Motion Pictures,' on view at the Museum of Modern Art through March 21, you very well might concur."⁶⁰ The tone of her article conveys her own belief in the relevance of Warhol's moving image work within his oeuvre; she is unequivocal in her assertion that his films deserve to be shown within the main galleries of the museum along with his proclaimed masterpieces in other media. The exhibition promised one such opportunity for the artist's films to be accepted into the fold of the art museum.

Unfortunately, the exhibition devalued what it purported to celebrate because of its exhibition of poor quality digital transfers: "...the primary problem is that the films, with one exception...are being shown as crude video transfers, in which the grain of the original 16 mm wars with the video's pixels, resulting in dull, murky images, lacking definition, texture, and depth. The gleaming high-contrast black-and-white of the celluloid image is either reduced to the midrange of the gray scale or pushed so far that detail is completely lost in the darkest and brightest areas."⁶¹ The exhibition curator defended his choice to show the films digitally, referencing the discontinuation of 16mm stocks and the scarcity of 16mm projectors.⁶² Taubin makes explicit in her review that the cause of the poor quality images was, in fact, due to the use of Betacam SP "masters" rather than the 16mm elements within MoMA's film vaults as source material.⁶³ The fact that Warhol was not overly precious with his own work—frequently showing it in new contexts and different configurations—does seem to allow for greater flexibility in display; such license should not extend to the level of visual quality of the works exhibited.

⁶⁰ Amy Taubin, "Andy Warhol: Moving Pictures," *Artforum International* 49, no. 7 (March 2011): 260-261.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

With thematic exhibitions, the broader interpretation risks dominating the meaning of the individual works. Often the integrity of older works is subordinated to the needs of the museum and its exhibition. The desire to include the Andy Warhol short film *Blow Job* in the exhibition *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera Since 1870* trumped the desire to display the film in a way that would maintain its artistic integrity.⁶⁴ Projected high up on the wall above the door of an exit, the images suffered severely from light interference. (Figure 8). Rather than a silent 16mm projection, the digital transfer of the film was subject to the general hum of the museum galleries. Since the viewers could not even comfortably stand and contemplate the patterns of light and shadows that cross the man's face in the course of the 35-minute projection, the work was reduced to an illustration of voyeurism. Within the context of the exhibition, it served as a titillating backdrop and not as an artwork to be engaged with in its own right. Instead of the inherent narrative of the work, it is the narrative of the exhibition that predominates.

Indeed, while the changing attitudes of several contemporary artists suggest a preference for the viewing conditions of the cinema—including staying for the full duration of the work and reduction of unwanted light, sound or movement—there is a move in the opposite direction on the part of contemporary curators. When assembling an exhibition, the needs of the audience become a primary consideration for independent curators like Sarah Cook: “You might hear that last time they had a projection in that room, people kept tripping over whatever, or it was too dark, or that they have never been able to successfully black out the space, those types of things. Or, the venue director might say, ‘my audience never wants to go into a dark room, so we have to keep the space more open and airy because otherwise the audience will look in and then turn

⁶⁴ Andy Warhol, *Blow Job* (1963), 16mm, b&w, silent, 35 mins. Included in *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera Since 1870* on view at SFMOMA from October 30, 2010-April 17, 2011.

around and walk out again.”⁶⁵ These practical concerns have led curators to try to fully integrate film and video works into the general exhibition galleries so that they may be seen by visitors at all. For curators like Rudolf Frieling, advancements in technology allow for greater freedom when dealing with moving image works: “As monitors have given way to flat screens, daylight conditions and even proximity to painting have become a real museum option. Today, there are still issues with sound traveling through an exhibition, but the electronic image has become so enhanced technically that it can appear almost everywhere without necessarily being compromised by light.”⁶⁶ Frieling sees the history of video art exhibition as a natural progression from isolation in a room apart toward full integration into the museum gallery.

LACMA: *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film*

This integrated approach was implemented in the *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film* exhibition at LACMA in 2013.⁶⁷ Co-hosted by the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures and seemingly a model for their future programming, the exhibition aimed to intermingle projected video clips with promotional posters, photographs and paintings. (Figures 9 & 10). From the entry hall room of the exhibition, projection issues were apparent. The first projection of the cinematographer’s work—a series of very short clips edited together and shown on a loop—was only mildly shielded from the light of the corridor. A small note at the entrance of the exhibit informed the visitor that there would be many such large-scale projected clip

⁶⁵ Sarah Cook interview by Crystal Sanchez and James Smith, June 18, 2013.

⁶⁶ Frieling, “From Form to Platform,” 35.

⁶⁷ *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film* on view at LACMA from September 22, 2013-February 2, 2014.

sequences lasting from about five to ten minutes and that the films from which they were assembled would be indicated at the end of each clip reel. Yet the same text gave no indication of the original format of the films (35mm), how they were transferred or by whom, nor how they would be displayed, whether in standard definition or high-definition. For some of the viewers who had come to admire Figueroa's cinematography, this information would have been instructive to determine the extent to which the projections accurately reflect the original material.

Several more large-scale projections extended down the dark-grey wall of the first room of the exhibition. Each showed scattered scenes from different films. Spotlights positioned above the screens illuminated items on the opposite wall, occasionally shining in the eyes of visitors attempting to watch the projected clips. In order to view the clips at length, the visitor had to stand awkwardly and ignore the other visitors passing through the exhibition. Very much integrated into the whole of the exhibition, the large projections became almost moving image wallpaper for the exhibit. Sound from these four projections and unseen others bled into one another so that the viewer could not hear the sound clearly, even when standing directly in front of the image to which it corresponded. The large scale images, although the most difficult to watch comfortably, were the highest resolution. Moreover they served to draw out the affiliation of the cinematographer with the muralists of the period: "In the 1930s, Figueroa was part of a vibrant community of artists in many media, including Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, Edward Weston and Manuel Alvarez Bravo, who sought to convey the country's transformation following the trauma of the Mexican Revolution. Later, he adapted his approach to the very different sensibilities of directors Luis Buñuel and John Huston, among others. Figueroa spoke

of creating *una imagen mexicana*.”⁶⁸ The design of the display served a conceptual purpose, visually reinforcing the connection between the filmmaker and the other artists within his circle.

The other half of the room was divided into compartments, each enclosed on three sides with a single bench situated in front of a projection. Projected onto the far wall of each compartment were more edited sequences, grouped thematically rather than taken from the same film. Although an improvement over unprotected projections, the walled-in screening spaces still did not adequately block out enough light to properly see the nuances of the images. Moreover, the slightly improved viewing conditions of these rooms brought to the viewer’s attention the poor quality of the digital transfers. Not only were the images dust-filled and scratched, the poor resolution transfers lacked the clarity and nuance of the film originals. The lack of bit-depth, or dynamic range, caused the images to lose their detail in the shadows. If the renown of the cinematographer was not enough to alert the viewer to the infidelity of these transfers, the exhibition unwittingly drew a point of comparison by including enlarged stills from Figueroa’s films as well. Although some of the images were silver-gelatin prints, many of the enlarged stills were reproduced for the occasion using laser printing. Yet the quality of the composition and the tonal range still came through from the scanned black and white negatives. That Figueroa himself was particular about the correct exposure of his prints, the viewer could gather from the series of enlarged test print exposures for the opening shot of *La Perla* (1945) displayed near the end of the exhibition.

Smaller screens populated the exhibit as well, in addition to the large-scale projections.

With the exception of one high definition television with superior image resolution, the majority

⁶⁸ “Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film,” on LACMA website, <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/under-mexican-sky-gabriel-figueroa—art-and-film>.

of the flat-screens appeared to be standard definition and once again pixelated and lost the nuanced shades of the black and white compositions. These screens received far less special treatment, interspersed with other photographs—in one instance situated above a photograph so that the viewer had to turn his or her neck up to see it properly. While viewing this screen, the viewer's eye was distracted on occasion by another such screen in his or her peripheral vision. The sound coming from the screens was muddled by other compartments as well as by the sounds of the other visitors in the gallery. All of these factors detracted from the content of the images, which already lacked coherence. The projections consisted of a series of clips, sometimes switching from black and white to color, selected with no desire to preserve the internal continuity of the scene. One could make the argument that the clips were intended to illustrate the photographic qualities of the image and were therefore unconcerned with content—the exhibition celebrated a cinematographer, after all; however, if this was the case, the integrity of the works remained compromised by the fact that the museum failed to ensure that the high quality of the images would be represented.

The rich and nuanced tones of the film stills on display demonstrated the meticulous care that the Figueroa invested in his images. By granting blanket approval to exhibit clips from his films in any format, the museum did not honor his artistry. Since most museums are not equipped to have such a large number of works displayed on film at once, the exhibition of digital transfers seems inevitable. A preferable alternative, though not a cost effective one, would have been to treat each clip as an individual artwork that needed to be restored and exhibited in its optimum form. This approach would have perhaps resulted in including fewer clips, but each clip would

have more accurately reflected Figueroa's contribution to the world of film.⁶⁹ Fortunately, a brief screening series did accompany the exhibition, with selections of Gabriel Figueroa's films playing from September 20th through October 11th.

LACMA: *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*

Cinema-centered exhibitions often rely on the same components—film stills, production art sketches, posters, vintage cameras, props and film clips. Adventurous framing and design provide the necessary variety. *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*, another recent exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, similarly strove to integrate cinematic works into the same space as the drawings and paintings on display. The exhibition explored the German Expressionist film tradition and the jagged and heavily-shadowed aesthetic that defined the period.⁷⁰ (Figures 11 & 12). Another co-production with the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, the exhibition attempted to illustrate and elucidate the production practices of the period. Displays included film posters, art design sketches of the sets and scenes, cameras used in shooting, iconic props, photographs from on set, and moving image clips from key films referenced. The exhibition incorporated both black box and white cube viewing conditions into a playful expressionist design, with undulating walls dividing different areas of the exhibition and sharp geometric cutouts. Walking through the exhibition seemed to transport the museum visitor onto the film set of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (dir. Robert Wiene, 1919). Confined to a color

⁶⁹ High resolution transfers of these films could then potentially be sold in the gift shop to help cover the costs of such restoration projects—this prospect would of course be contingent upon the rights status of the films involved.

⁷⁰ *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015, <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/haunted-screens-german-cinema-1920s>.

palette of black, white, grey and red, the design informed the viewer's experience of the exhibition.

The inventive exhibition structure of *Haunted Screens* forwent the tenets of modernism and its white cube in favor of Gesamtkunstwerk—an immersive art experience. Within this totalizing art environment, every component relates to and enriches the whole: “The curatorial project, rather than the exhibition, is then the Gesamtkunstwerk because it instrumentalizes all the exhibited artworks and makes them serve a common purpose that is formulated by the curator...All these elements, as well as the architecture of the space, sound, or light, lose their respective autonomy and begin to serve the creation of a whole in which visitors and spectators are also included.”⁷¹ The visually striking design of the exhibition space disorients the viewer, contributing to the overall mood of the exhibition. The museum visitor must navigate an unfamiliar space, winding through galleries with works hung in unexpected corners and at unexpected angles. The space alternates from light to dark, with the black interior spaces containing looped digital projections of clips from German Expressionist cinema. These passageways present four screens with simultaneous projections. The viewer progresses from one screen to the next, potentially without fully engaging with any of them.

An exhibition designer from LACMA involved in *Haunted Screens* emphasized the importance of a strong thesis for dictating the organization of the works in an exhibition and striving to shape the viewer experience.⁷² *Haunted Screens* presents an historical narrative of a cinematic tradition. Adopting the immersive structure of Gesamtkunstwerk, the exhibition

⁷¹ Boris Groys, “Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk,” *e-flux* 50 (December 2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/>.

⁷² Interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition designer, March 6, 2015.

attempts to fold the cinematic works into the overall experience of the exhibition. The integration of works within the galleries draws out relationships between works and encourages visitors to make connections. By displaying the art design sketches and film clips in close proximity, the exhibition likens their relationship to that between preparatory sketches and finished paintings. Short clips suffice to illustrate the translation of creation vision into finished film. Unfortunately, these cinematic fragments suffer from a lack of emotional context and continuity.⁷³ Yet even fragments command considerable space within a gallery: “Even for short screenings (three to four minutes), for which the visitors do not have to be seated, a certain amount of space is needed to allow small groups to watch the films together without blocking the path.”⁷⁴ The exhibition designer must provide a space for viewers to stand and linger, once the illumination of the screen draws them near.

Implicit in the design of any such exhibition is the pacing of viewers. The organization of an exhibition subtly suggests a suitable level of engagement for different arrangements of works. Within *Haunted Screens*, the moving image works are allotted varying amounts of attention and different levels of accommodation. The two avenues of screens contained within darkened passages require the viewer to stand and negotiate the space with other visitors trying to watch the same clips. Even when the viewer pauses to watch one screen, the other screens remain slightly in view. The images projected on the screens within these passageways are severely pixelated; such poor image quality does not encourage sustained engagement but rather a glance

⁷³ Sabine Lenk, “Collections on Display: Exhibiting Artifacts in a Film Museum, with Pride,” *Film History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 320.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 324.

to gather the gist of the scene before proceeding to the next screen. Without the duration listed, the viewer does not know the length of a particular clip.

In contrast, the last section of the exhibition includes a high quality projection of a cinematic work. The large screen is placed against a black background, visible through a cut out in a white wall. The viewer does not need to enter into a separate room in order to view the work. A bench positioned directly opposite allows museum visitors to stop and watch the screen at their leisure. Despite this level of viewing comfort, the space between the bench and the screen serves as a walkway. Other visitors continually cross in front of seated museum goers, blocking the latter's view of the screen and disrupting their engagement with the work. The silent film is screened without any musical accompaniment—a decision that prevents sound from bleeding into other parts of the exhibition, yet colors the viewer's engagement with the work.⁷⁵ Yet even this film in the last section of the exhibition, though seemingly shown in its entirety, is not meant to be watched in full. No wall texts provide information about the work or its duration. Only the context of the last section of the exhibition, with its distinctive production design sketches and replica of a female robot, inform the unfamiliar viewer that the film projected is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The film serves as a point of reference for the other materials in the area rather than standing alone as a work of art in itself.

The use of films in the gallery merely to illustrate a curatorial thesis suggests that the exhibition will not be the viewer's only opportunity to engage with the cinematic works of German Expressionism. Indeed, LACMA programmed a film series to coincide with the

⁷⁵ Historically, silent films would have been exhibited with music, either live or from prerecorded tracks. The NPR segment, "Classical Lost and Found," praised Gottfried Huppertz's score for *Metropolis*: "The brilliant orchestration and the use of leitmotifs...hold the listener's attention, precluding the music's need for any visual sustenance." <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2011/07/26/138710330/classical-lost-and-found-remaking-metropolis>.

exhibition that included *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, *Faust* and *M*.⁷⁶ The series screened only once during the run of the exhibition, doubling as a horror series in the month of October. The individual screenings occurred in the evening, after the closing of the museum galleries. These factors suggest that the programming of the film series aimed to attract another set of viewers to the museum, rather than to provide an additional means for visitors who attended the *Haunted Screens* exhibition to engage with the films. Nevertheless, the complementary screenings of German Expressionist films in a theater setting granted the curator and exhibition designer greater freedom to incorporate clips from the same films in ways that suited the needs of the exhibition.⁷⁷ Such an approach limits the level of engagement with the films within the context of the exhibition and results in the use of clips purely for illustration purposes. The films do not hold the same status in the context of the exhibition as the drawings or even as the props. While not disputing the status of films as artworks worthy of the museum, the co-curator of the exhibition acknowledged that films on display in *Haunted Screens* were only facsimiles.⁷⁸ To be appreciated as artworks, the films should be seen in full within the context of a movie theater. Future cinema-centric exhibitions would benefit from more screenings hosted by the museum.

A conversation with the co-curator of the exhibition satisfied certain nagging questions about the exhibition as well as about why the museum chose to include such low resolution film clips. In addition to the involvement of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the

⁷⁶ “Academy Announces October Programming Slate,” *Academy* website, <http://www.oscars.org/news/academy-announces-october-programming-slate>.

⁷⁷ “Moving pictures are made to be shown in a cinema, with a good sound system, on a clear screen and with perfect projection.” Lenk, “Collections on Display,” 319.

⁷⁸ Interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, April 21, 2015.

Haunted Screens exhibition represented a collaboration with the Cinémathèque française.⁷⁹ In fact, LACMA borrowed numerous materials from the Cinémathèque, including original drawings, photographs, posters, and the robot from *Metropolis*.⁸⁰ The clip sequences used throughout *Haunted Screen* can also be traced back to the Cinémathèque. The institution digitized portions of the films in standard definition for an exhibition in 2006. While an acceptable level of quality at the time, standard definition clip sequences do not hold up well to the newer large scale projectors used in the LACMA exhibition. Without sufficient time to rescan the scenes from the films at higher resolution, the clip sequences included in *Haunted Screens* represent a reluctant compromise in quality in order to insure the mounting of the exhibition.⁸¹ The optional step of creating new scans should and potentially will be incorporated into future workflows for cinema-based exhibitions.⁸²

The disparity in image quality becomes more apparent after viewing the last work in the exhibition. Tucked away in a separate room at the end of the exhibition, the three screen projection of *Kino Ektoplasma* was commissioned from filmmaker Guy Maddin especially for the occasion. (Figures 13 & 14). A companion piece to the exhibition, the work deals with decaying silent film footage and the salvaging of disappearing cinematic images. Working from scraps of footage from lost silent films, Maddin recreates the scenes they contain. The resulting images are then manipulated; the faces of actors morph into distortions and scenes dissolve into

⁷⁹ Details of the exhibition communicated in the course of an interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, April 21, 2015.

⁸⁰ “Exposition *Haunted Screens* German Cinéma in the 1920s,” on Cinémathèque française website, <http://www.cinematheque.fr/fr/musee-collections/actualite-collections/programmation-exposition/exposition-haunted-screes.html>

⁸¹ Interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, April 21, 2015.

⁸² *Ibid.*

amorphous washes of color. The isolated, darkened room containing the work offered the viewer a square bench to sit on while contemplating the menacing yet hauntingly beautiful work. However, in addition to a lack of information about the medium of the work—such as whether or not it originated on film—the wall text contained no mention of the duration of the piece. The absence of information about the duration of this non-narrative piece suggests that viewers are not expected to stay until the end in order to experience the work in full. Perhaps the artist chose to embrace both the gallery space and the viewer who prefers to take in works at a glance. Nevertheless, the exhibition design allows only this moving image work to be considered as a work in itself, separate from the exhibition-as-a-work.

Museums as Collecting Institutions

When LACMA curators commissioned the filmmaker Guy Maddin to create a moving image work for *Haunted Screens*, he had a set architectural space to fill.⁸³ The museum then acquired the completed work, entitled *Kino Ektoplasma*. The filmmaker had previously exhibited variations of the work in different contexts, both with and without sound. For its *Haunted Screens* installation the filmmaker opted to screen the work as silent. Leading up to its acquisition, the work did not exist in a fixed and final form. Consequently, the work acquired by LACMA retains potential variability. The three-channel work may assume other configurations in future installations. Joanna Phillips, time-based media conservator at the Guggenheim, stresses the importance of the documentation of early iterations of a work: “The artist’s voice is especially important when the artwork is still in a stage of ‘infancy’ and thus still developing. It

⁸³ Details of acquisition gathered from interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, April 21, 2015.

usually takes an art installation a few iterations in different venues and under different circumstances until it is fully developed. In that process, we closely monitor and document the behaviors of the work in relation to various technical and spatial display conditions, and learn about its identity.”⁸⁴ Through this maturation process, the work will begin to define its essential properties—those that must be present for a work to be considered itself.

LACMA purchased an edition of *Kino Ektoplasma* from Maddin. For digital works reproduced without generational loss of image quality, the editioning of a work creates artificial rarity. Editions perform a principal role in the art world economy, satisfying a desire for museums and collectors to acquire rare artworks that have the potential to increase in worth. The purchase of editioned works often includes a packet of specifications that define how a work must be exhibited. These specifications define the edition by distinguishing the exhibition of an authorized copy from its surrogates, derivatives or individual components. The manual for a work may outline details such as exhibition format, approved equipment, size of the image, dimensions of the room, whether or not a work may be shown in proximity to other work, wall color and the presence and arrangement of seating within the exhibition space.

Before acquiring an artwork, a museum requires assurance that it will be able to exhibit its acquisition in the future. Kate Jennings, former time-based media conservator at Tate, explains, “Acquisition is also about securing the ability to display the artwork, so making sure you have the correct elements for printing exhibition reels, and insuring you have the right

⁸⁴ Caitlin Dover, “Analog to Digital: A Q&A with Guggenheim Conservator Joanna Phillips, Part Two,” Guggenheim Museum blog, March 5, 2014, <http://blogs.guggenheim.org/checklist/analog-to-digital-a-q-and-a-with-guggenheim-conservator-joanna-phillips-part-two/>.

equipment that is appropriate to show the work and that meets the requirements of the artist.”⁸⁵ Preservation and future accessibility did not always preside over the acquisition process. In “Keeping Time: On Collecting Film and Video Art in the Museum,” Chrissie Iles and Henriette Huldisch describe common practices of the 1970s: “An often contradictory array of arbitrary procedures emerged. Works were sold on VHS videotapes—sometimes signed by the artist—on specially editioned laser discs and, later, on DVD (which was mistakenly interpreted as a medium in its own right). Film loop works were acquired often with no clear agreement regarding preservation, access to the original negative, or the potential migration of film to video.”⁸⁶ In recent decades, museums have refined the process of acquiring moving image works. With more awareness of the deterioration of magnetic media, the threatened extinction of film and the rapid obsolescence of technology, museums collect more specific information and documentation before purchasing a work.

Museums like Tate, MoMA and SFMOMA—all participants in the Matters in Media Art project—have policies in place that determine what elements they need to acquire in order to exhibit and conserve a work. Matters in Media Art offers a set of generic documentation to guide the acquisition process.⁸⁷ Documentation and Conservation of Media Arts Heritage (DOCAM) offers equally helpful resources for beginning and documenting the acquisition process. The museum must begin by collecting as much information as possible about the work, including information about the artist, the physical qualities of the work, the preservation needs, the

⁸⁵ Kate Jennings, “Acquisition of Film Works,” lecture given as part of *Tech Focus II: Caring for Film and Slide Art*, April 27, 2012.

⁸⁶ Chrissie Iles and Henriette Huldisch, “Keeping Time: On Collecting Film and Video Art in the Museum” in *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, ed. Bruce Altshuler, (Princeton University Press, 2007), 66.

⁸⁷ “Acquiring time-based media: 2008,” on Tate website, <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/matters-media-art/acquiring-time-based-media-2008>.

storage needs, the possible risks of deterioration and the possible intellectual property rights restrictions.⁸⁸ MoMA sends a questionnaire as a first step to gain a sense of the nature of a potential acquisition and to determine the media needed to display the work.⁸⁹ Follow-up conversations with the artist or artist's gallery provide an opportunity to glean more detailed information.

Once an initial installation is mounted to the satisfaction of both the artist and the gallery, a set of standards for video conservation recently put forth by the Getty Museum call for the documentation of every detail:

Every aspect of the installation must be documented, beginning with the spatial elements, such as the dimensions of the room and of the projection screen or monitor, the color of the walls, the level of light in the room and the audio quality, how the public will access the space, etc.; all of this is in addition to documenting the individual object. Each component for reproducing the video signal will also have to be described, emphasizing either its aesthetic or merely functional value, and attempting to evaluate its life expectancy, obsolescence, possible substitution, reliability over time, and its future availability on the market.⁹⁰

Through this documentation process, the artist will continue to have a say in the installation of his or her works in the future. Significantly, these installation notes include references to the specific equipment used in the exhibition of a work—a factor that contemporary artists cannot ignore in the rapidly changing world of film and video technology. The notes for the Maddin exhibition, for example, would include the make and model of the projectors that were used in display, the format it was projected from and whether or not any of the particular devices or configurations are essential to the work.

⁸⁸ “Acquiring new media works,” on DOCAM website, <http://www.docam.ca/en/acquiring.html>.

⁸⁹ Email from MoMA media conservator, April 8, 2015.

⁹⁰ Iolanda Ratti, “The Specificity of the Video Installation,” in *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art*, ed. Barbara Ferriani and Marina Pugliese (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013), 150.

Exhibition and preservation guides for film and video art published by institutions like the Tate and the Getty Museum, as well as by online sites like Electronic Arts Intermix, alert curators to the fact that the display equipment for a given work will eventually become obsolete and need to be either updated or replaced. In a collection of articles for *Tate Papers*, time-based media conservationist Pip Laurenson spells out the necessary theoretical considerations involved in any given work for the contemporary curator: “Conceptual integrity refers to the relationship of the work to the process or technology employed and the spirit in which the work was made. Aesthetic integrity relates to the look and feel of visible components and the outputs of the system (i.e. qualities of the sound and image). Historical integrity refers to links made by the visible components and discernible outputs of the system to the time the work was made.”⁹¹

Upon exhibition and particularly upon acquisition, the curator must document the artist’s attitude toward variations in display as well as toward migration to different formats. The opinions of the artist may be documented in formal artist interviews, a record of emails or the documentation of the process of acquisition and preservation. Left out of these guidelines are concerns that relate specifically to the film and video works of past artists—such as the preferred display format if different from the original, the means to evaluate the quality of a film-to-digital transfer, and the appropriate exhibition context for different works. Determining the artist’s intent in such instances is difficult, especially since many artists did not give much thought to the fact that they were working in media that would relatively soon become obsolete. Any projected opinion of the artist runs the risk of being a mere guess at the proper method for exhibition and preservation.

⁹¹ Pip Laurenson, “The Management of Display Equipment in Time-based Media Installations,” in *Tate Papers* (Spring 2005), accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/management-display-equipment-time-based-media-installations>.

Museum Conservation and Film

Art museum conservators encounter particular difficulties with moving image works. Pip Laurenson, Head of Collection Care Research at Tate, sums up the difficulty: “Lying somewhere on a continuum between performance and sculpture, the time-based media installation lacks a material object that can be identified as ‘the work,’ undermining the traditional notion of what constitutes the object of conservation.”⁹² In an earlier essay she further explains the source of this difficulty for traditional conservation practice.⁹³ Rooted in the Enlightenment and scientific observation, conservation has centered its focus upon the artwork as an autonomous, aesthetic object.⁹⁴ The aim of the conservator is then to preserve intact these self-contained objects, preventing deterioration and loss. But material preservation alone is insufficient for a moving image work; exhibition context shapes the identity of the work as well.

The arrival of Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades in the late 1910s contested the primacy of object-based art. This period witnessed a shift in the avant-garde from the physical to the conceptual.⁹⁵ Art history embraced the distinction, resulting in a dichotomy between object-based art and conceptual-based art within conservation practice. Moving image works, with their lack of a singular unique object and incorporation of performance, tend to fall into the latter

⁹² Pip Laurenson, “Vulnerabilities and Contingencies in the Conservation of Time-base Media Works of Art,” in *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks*, ed. Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 36.

⁹³ Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations,” *Tate Papers* Issue 6 (October 2006), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/authenticity-change-and-loss-conservation-time-based-media>.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Monika Jadzinska, “The Lifespan of Installation Art,” in *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks*, ed. Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 22.

category; however, for those artists who embrace film as a medium suited to their creative expression, there is a danger in the assumption of the greater importance of content and concept in moving image art. Privileging the conceptual aspects of moving image artworks devalues the importance of the material art object—such as the reel of film.

As an artist, Tacita Dean has embraced film as her medium. Like any medium, film provides certain unique qualities that can be utilized by the artist to achieve particular effects. Each medium imposes limitations as it offers possibilities. The term “medium specificity” refers to the exploration of the inherent qualities of a medium. Dean’s comments during the “Reframing the Future of Film” discussion with Christopher Nolan and Kerry Brougher at the Getty Center centered on the intrinsic qualities of film as an artistic medium.⁹⁶ She articulated a clear distinction between film as medium and film as technology, echoing her impassioned writings in *FILM*: “For some reason there is a cultural blindness towards the difference between film and digital: a blindness with an underbelly of commercial intent that is invested in seeing one replaced by the other so the difference can be quickly forgotten. Both film and digital are pictures, perhaps copies of one another, but they are not the same thing—one is light on emulsion and one is light made by pixel, and they are also conceived, made and seen differently.”⁹⁷ As an imaging technology, film has the potential to be replaced by digital cameras. This technological obsolescence rests upon the ability of digital cameras and digital projection to equal the image quality of film. Yet the intrinsic qualities of film as a medium cannot be replicated or replaced.

⁹⁶ “Reframing the Future of Film: A Discussion with Tacita Dean, Christopher Nolan, and Kerry Brougher,” held at the Getty Center on March 8, 2015, http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/events/dean_nolan/index.html.

⁹⁷ Tacita Dean, *Film*, ed. Tacita Dean (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 16.

Many commercial filmmakers would consider the medium or physical support of an image as secondary to its content. In doing so, they inadvertently classify film as a technology, or a means to create a work which then exists independently from any of its physical manifestations. When considered as a technology, film will soon become obsolete. Such content-based perspectives predominate in the motion picture industry, including in film archives. For example, few would consider the transfer of a 1940s film noir from nitrate film to safety film to be a significant change in the nature of the work. Although the nitrate copy would still remain in the vaults as a reference, the safety print would effectively take its place in circulation. With a minimal decrease in image quality, such a transfer is widely considered acceptable. Purists, however, might disagree. Within the art museum, there remains a closer association between work and medium. The meaning of a work is intertwined with its medium.

Consider, for example, Tacita Dean's work *Kodak* (2006), a 16mm film shot within the Kodak factory in Chalon-sur-Saône, France. (Figure 15). The film documents the production of film at the French factory, a subject recommended by the fact that the artist had just learned that the factory would cease production of 16mm film. Dean explains, "The idea of the film was to use its obsolete stock on itself. The point is that it's a medium that's just about to be exhausted."⁹⁸ The work was filmed on a day when the factory turned on its lights for cleaning. She filmed the light reflecting off of the transparent sheets of film in the machines, producing vibrant blues and magentas. When exhibited, the film is projected on 16mm in a gallery space. Digital projection would negate the contemplative reflexivity of recording the demise of 16mm

⁹⁸ "Kodak," *Tate* website, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dean-kodak-t12407/text-summary>.

production at a Kodak factory with the very material that the factory will no longer produce. The medium of 16mm film is essential to the significance of the work.

Within Western culture, the art museum represents a place of valorization and protection: “In the museum, as has often been said, a work of art enters a new phase of its existence. It is taken into protection...On this basis principles of restoration can be applied with some precision.”⁹⁹ They commit to the collection and preservation of original works of art. They rarely collect facsimiles, except as study collections. A digital scan of an Ansel Adams negative, for example, would not take the place of a gelatin silver print from the artist himself. The art world values the integrity of artworks and seeks out specimens in their pristine state. Yet this philosophy does not always apply to film and video materials. Although the goal of the museum remains to “get in touch with the original,” Sabine Lenk points out: “In a film museum to pretend that ‘contact with the original’ means watching the moving images is...an unrealistic claim.”¹⁰⁰ Museums should extend their commitment to preserving and presenting films to the public in their original format. Doing so would educate audiences about the qualities unique to the medium.

Qualities intrinsic to film, such as tonal depth, grain structure, and an extended color spectrum, have yet to be equalled by digital technology. Moreover, there is the fact that film is a material through which light passes to create images, a different process from the arrangement of pixels in digital projection. Artists have explored it as a medium and tested out its boundaries. Describing the tradition of experimental filmmakers, Jon Gartenberg comments, “These

⁹⁹ Cornelia Weyer, “Restoration Theory Applied to Installation Art,” *Beiträge 2* (2006): 41.

¹⁰⁰ Sabine Lenk, “Collections on Display: Exhibiting Artifacts in a Film Museum, with Pride,” *Film History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 320.

filmmakers treat the film emulsion as a living organism. It is an organic substance, a shimmering silver onto which they directly imprint the delicacy of their emotions. They filter found objects from the world around them, and through a wide array of filmmaking techniques, including use of outdated film stock, over- and underexposure, scratching directly on the film emulsion, re-photography, and optical printing articulate distinct, individually defined processes of creation.”¹⁰¹ Artists physically manipulate the medium with techniques such as scratching into the emulsion, painting or drawing onto the film, or solarizing the image. With such works, one sees the hand of the filmmaker in the artistic process. Each decision reflects a creative choice. Some artists embrace the material qualities of film as the basis of a work in itself. Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1964), for example, consists strictly of an unexposed reel of 16mm film that runs through a projector on a loop. Any scratches or dirt accumulated during the process of projection become part of the work.¹⁰²

With few standardized production practices, these artist films reflect the individual creative process of their maker. The lack of stability in the creative process leads to a similarly undefined preservation path: “Experimental film cannot necessarily be approached with the ordinary routine of archival practice. Every aspect of an experimental film—from shooting through postproduction down to exhibition and projection—can differ fundamentally from the procedures we have learned in film schools, laboratories, and cinemas.”¹⁰³ Without standard production practices, the preservation work cannot be standardized. Therefore, in order to

¹⁰¹ Jon Gartenberg, “The Fragile Emulsion,” *The Moving Image* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 142.

¹⁰² Annette Groschke, Martin Koerber and Daniel Meiller, “Who Is Going to Look at That? Experiences, Possibilities, and Pitfalls of Keeping Experimental Film in a Mid-sized Film Archive,” *The Moving Image* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 134.

¹⁰³ Groschke, Koerber and Meiller, “Who Is Going to Look at That?” 130.

preserve or restore an artist film, a preservationist must reconstruct how it was made. The preservationist must research to ascertain which aspects of the film are the result of the creative choices of the artist and which can be attributed to age and wear. Moreover, the preservationist must gauge the artist's feeling toward his or her film in regards to its pristine or intended state. In short, the preservationist must consider both the process and the product: "In approaching the preservation of experimental works, decisions must be tailored in harmony with the artist's creative process and intent, not just with the product (the 'finished' film)."¹⁰⁴

The preservation process requires developing an understanding of the production of a film. Each apparent decision on the part of the artist must be interrogated. The process of experimentation must be traced: "The filmmakers embraced film artifacts such as grain, emulsion decay, misregistration of frames, fogging, solarization, and end-of-roll flashing; they played with diagonal crosslighting of Kodachrome in optical printing and intentional flicker; they applied debris, alien liquids, or bugs under clear overlays and made heat transfers of printed matter. Some artists rejoiced in dirt and the unevenness of bathroom processing; some loved to fiddle with rephotography or change frame rates at will."¹⁰⁵ From filming, to processing, to assembling, to projection, every aspect of a film allows room for the artist's intervention. Unfortunately, the decisions made by the artist throughout the initial creative process are rarely documented to the level that would aid or satisfy a preservationist. For works with numerous alterations, identifying the "original" version of a film can pose an additional challenge. The problem lies in the amount of individual control exercised at every stage of the creation of an

¹⁰⁴ Gartenberg, "The Fragile Emulsion," 144.

¹⁰⁵ Bob Brodsky and Toni Treadway, "Experimental Film on the Digital Doorstep," *The Moving Image* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 99.

artist film. The preservationist cannot even make the assumption that the artist working in film does so to engage with the medium. For some artists, film may have simply been the image making process most easily accessible; the resulting works need not be tethered to the medium of film.

The deliberate process of trying to retrace an artist's creative steps requires time and money. In their piece on the digitation of experimental film, Bob Brodsky and Toni Treadway lament, "Their technical challenges are wild, so they remain a low priority for conservation and preservation."¹⁰⁶ Ideally the preservationist would also involve the artist in the discussion, increasing the commitment of staff time and resources still more. The input of the artist, while invaluable for helping decipher the creative process for a film, can also bring additional complications. Artists assisting on the preservation of their past work must rely upon their potentially fallible memories of their own intentions. They may wish to make revisions to the work during the restoration process. If the artist has passed away, an estate or foundation may step in to offer advice as well. Such collaborations are time-intensive and may not result in satisfaction for all parties.¹⁰⁷

Preservationists working on artist films must keep in mind the need for moderation in regards to interventions. For certain artist films and experimental films, flaws are accepted or even created intentionally: "In analog film preservation and restoration, it is essential for the preservationist to understand the history, context, and materials of the original production to make critical decisions about color, exposure, and contrast as well as to know when to 'fix'

¹⁰⁶ Brodsky and Treadway, "Experimental Film on the Digital Doorstep," 97.

¹⁰⁷ Gert Hoogeveen and Simona Monizza describe the artist Peter Struycken's dissatisfaction with both the analog and digital reconstructions of his work 'Projekt I-'90 in their essay "When Visual Art Meets Cinema: The Reconstruction of 'Projekt I-'90' by Peter Struycken." *The Moving Image* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

scratches, dust, visible splices, registration, development variations, and other qualities considered defects in conventional films.”¹⁰⁸ Digital tools, with their ability to repair damage and erase flaws in the image, must be used with particular caution on artist films.

The process of exhibiting film in the gallery space requires the generation of multiple exhibition prints. These prints wear out quickly from constant use. A 44-minute film like *Kodak*, for example, might run seven or eight times in the course of a day. Its uninterrupted exhibition relies upon the use of a loop projector which continually circulates the film. In the repeated process of projection, the film prints become faded, scratched and dirty. The loop projector itself can also harm the film prints, causing tears or edge damage.¹⁰⁹ If the museum maintains a commitment to a pristine projection of the image, the film prints need to be changed out regularly. Even short exhibitions will require multiple exhibition prints. The continual process of striking prints for each exhibition of a film places museums in a financial bind. Used exhibition prints cannot be incorporated into the collection as pristine specimens of the artwork. Additional prints will need to be struck for every future exhibition of the film.

Exhibition represents a threat to the collection if the museum only owns a single print of a film. Many experimental films and artist films lack preservation masters. With 16mm reversal film, for example, the roll of film in the camera may ultimately be the same roll projected for the audience. Access to artist films becomes guarded when a museum or film archive houses only the original elements or a single print of a film. According to Annette Groschke, Martin Koerber and Daniel Meiller, many film archives find themselves in this unfortunate situation: “Most of

¹⁰⁸ Bill Brand, “Artist as Archivist in the Digital Transition,” *The Moving Image* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 94.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Cowan, “Installation and Exhibition: Film Projection in the Gallery,” lecture given as part of Tech Focus II: Caring for Film and Slide Art, April 28, 2012, <http://cool.conservation-us.org/cool/techfocus/techfocus-ii-caring-for-film-and-slide-art-tw/>.

our experimental films are still only available as films and not as digital copies. In fact, most of our experimental films are not available for any exhibition at all because we ‘only’ have the negative or a unique original print.”¹¹⁰ Not all of these works will secure funding for analog or digital preservation projects. Lack of viable exhibition prints or funding for preservation work result, in turn, in limited access: “...the main frustration of the archivist is to know that a film exists but not be able to present it because the funds for making a restored or even a duplicate print of it are lacking.”¹¹¹

In the museum, conservation efforts in preparation for the exhibition of film works can take one of two paths: “The first is to preserve not only the artwork but also its apparatus, meaning all the original equipment and the technology necessary to produce and maintain this equipment. As this will prove almost impossible to sustain in the long run, the second strategy, adapting the artwork to the state of the technology, is the one usually chosen by people or institutions involved in the preservation of media art.”¹¹² Film duplication services are becoming less available. Commercial labs are shutting, and film stocks are becoming scarce.¹¹³ Some museums view digital preservation to be a necessity for the continued viability of a work: “In this complex transition from analog to digital techniques, choices had to be made to guarantee not only a longer life span of the artwork but also its future exhibition. It is for these reasons that we decided that it was also necessary to explore a complete possible digital path for the

¹¹⁰ Groschke, Koerber and Meiller, “Who Is Going to Look at That?” 134.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹² Hoogeveen and Monizza, “When Visual Art Meets Cinema,” 119.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

preservation of the original 16mm image element and of the slides.”¹¹⁴ These reflections from an account of the restoration of Peter Struycken’s ‘Projekt I-’90 reveal a hesitancy to support the decision solely to preserve films photochemically when the result of the preservation project will quickly wear out. Most museums and collectors will expect their investments to hold or increase in value. They may not wish to acquire a work that has a built in expiration date tied into the discontinuation of film stocks.

Artists working with film and editing their work take the economic gamble that “scarcity and consequent high value [will] actually increase the chances of films being treated as precious objects worthy of long-term care.”¹¹⁵ The acquisition prices of works have the potential to determine their value in the context of a museum collection. Works with higher value receive closer attention and will likely be preserved with greater attention to their integrity. For museums and independent collectors, art works are assets. They demonstrate the importance of a collection. If the works cannot be exhibited, they lose their value as artworks. Yet the exhibition of artist films, primarily in 16mm, becomes more difficult. Kodak has discontinued many of its 16mm film stocks—from high-contrast black and white stock and black leader, to the black and white duplicate negative and black and white fine grain positive stock essential for archival work.¹¹⁶ The fear of film’s obsolescence is legitimate. Already, fewer and fewer museums regularly incorporate projected film into their galleries.¹¹⁷ In his essay “Notes from a Cautious Optimist,” archivist Haden Guest sums up the precarious situation: “The sober reality is quite

¹¹⁴ Hoogeveen and Monizza, “When Visual Art Meets Cinema,” 124.

¹¹⁵ Brand, “Artist as Archivist in the Digital Transition,” 95.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Academy Film Archive preservationist, March 10, 2015.

¹¹⁷ Gartenberg, “The Fragile Emulsion,” 142.

simply that fewer and fewer individuals and institutions are able or willing to project 16mm prints.”¹¹⁸

Will museums continue to collect works on film if they must continue to exhibit them only on film? For the sake of artists, like Tacita Dean, who have decided to edition their film works to sell to the art world, one hopes that more museums will finally extend the principle of respect for the integrity of an artwork to film: “At stake in the sale of film and video as limited editions is not only the artist’s present but also the artwork’s future. When a collector buys a limited edition—sold not as film print or as DVD but as a set of archival materials and rights governing the usage of those materials—he or she also takes on responsibility as to the care and preservation of that work.”¹¹⁹ The acquisition of works made on film requires commitment. Museums that actively collection artist films, such as the Tate, insist upon acquiring or retaining access to the necessary elements and check prints for preservation and sustainable exhibition practice. Yet the artist—not the museum—should retain the right to decide the medium and exhibition format of their work.

Bruce Conner: *Crossroads*

Bruce Conner oversaw every detail of his works’ creation and exhibition. He frequently showed his works within the gallery setting, compiling a set of specifications for optimal conditions. These included the use of the golden rule for proportions, dark grey walls and no

¹¹⁸ Haden Guest, “Notes from a Cautious Optimist,” *The Moving Image* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 91.

¹¹⁹ Erika Balsom, “Original Copies, How Film and Video Became Art Objects,” *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 114.

other sound works in proximity.¹²⁰ Along with the minimum requirements for room dimensions and size of projection, museums and galleries must abide by the conditions put forth by the artist and his estate. Despite his particularity in the exhibition of his works, Conner continued to alter the films themselves—repurposing and recombining the original footage. Moreover, eight years before his death, he began to transfer his films to video and to create video masters. While not a proponent of video, Conner made the decision to migrate his works to digital media as a means to insure their formal integrity in the future.

In 2010, Ross Lipman and Michelle Silva revisited *Crossroads*, completing a restoration with versions suited to different viewing environments including the museum gallery. Lipman detailed the process in an essay in *Artforum International*.¹²¹ From a conservative film preservation standpoint, Lipman and Silva took a controversial approach to the project, creating a restoration that pulls from both the original 1976 version and the reedited standard definition video version that Conner completed in 2003: “Our primary exhibition edition would be one that in essence had never existed before: a high-resolution reinterpretation of the final, 2003 low-resolution Conner cut. This would be remastered for appropriate presentation in a variety of contemporary exhibition conditions, including both 35-mm film and digital media.”¹²² Lipman and Silva aimed to actualize what Conner attempted to do but lacked the technical capability to fully realize. The choice to rely on their knowledge of the artist’s intentions rather than exclusively on a physical reference print foregrounds the subjectivity of their restoration process.

¹²⁰ Interview with representative of the Estate of Bruce Conner, April 14, 2015.

¹²¹ Ross Lipman, “Conservation at a Crossroads: The Restoration of a Film by Bruce Conner,” in *Artforum International* 10 (October, 2013), accessed on December, 1, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1443494237?accountid=14512>.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Yet, beyond Silva's intimate knowledge of Conner's creative practice as his former assistant, the pair had the benefit of the artist's own copious notes. Moreover, in addition to creating digital and 35mm film-out versions of the restoration, Lipman and Silva preserved each existing version of *Crossroads*.

The creation of a high-resolution digital version of *Crossroads* for exhibition in the museum setting was a primary desired outcome of the restoration.¹²³ Many museums lack the equipment or the expertise to project films in their original format; therefore, 35mm prints are rarely a viable option for museum exhibition.¹²⁴ In his article, Lipman brings up pressing concerns for film archivists in regard to exhibition, preservation or restoration—such as integrity of grain structure, stabilization of the image, and sound playback—which are not mentioned in any of the recent guidelines for curators of film and video works. Moreover, he analyzes the nature of “medium translations”: “It is fallacious to think that ‘perfect emulation’ of a static original is the consensus aim of restorationists—or, in fact, even possible. The perceptual experience of photochemical film is different from that of digital images when viewed on monitors, and yet again in projection.” Certain visual nuances cannot survive the process of translation. With *Crossroads*, Lipman and Silva “sought to represent the work’s essence when translating it to new media, wherein replicating the work’s “letter” would be impossible by definition.”¹²⁵ The thorough documentation that accompanies the pair’s restoration of Conner’s

¹²³ According to the representative of the Bruce Conner Estate, roughly 90% of current requests for the artist’s moving image works are for museum or gallery installations.

¹²⁴ Lipman, “Conservation at a Crossroads.”

¹²⁵ Interview with Ross Lipman, March 19, 2015.

film serves as a model for the documentation that should accompany the conservation and exhibition of any moving image work.

The end result of the recent restoration effort exhibited at the Michael Kohn Gallery in Los Angeles was stunning.¹²⁶ (Figure 16). Upon walking into the gallery space, the viewer was immediately struck by the size of the screen—nearly the size of a screen in a movie theater. The projected digital file, originating from a 4k resolution scan of the original negative, produced a rich and detailed image that preserved the grain and feel of the a 35mm original print. Although dark curtains blocked out the light from outside, the viewer could navigate the space by the light of the screen alone. The walls of the large room were painted a dark grey, with dark panels placed at intervals to absorb the sound. Four benches punctuated the space, with room to stand at the back as well. Remastered from the original stereo recordings, the soundtracks for the two halves of the work, by Patrick Gleeson and Terry Riley respectively, enveloped the viewer in the open space of the gallery. In her review for *Artforum*, Jennifer L. Peterson referred to the installation as a benchmark for future moving image exhibitions: “Presented on a giant thirty-five-foot screen in a spacious dark room with four benches, this is an exemplary model of what contemporary digital moving image restoration and exhibition can achieve.”¹²⁷ The carefully constructed viewing environment produced the desired impact.

The Bruce Conner estate requires that any museum or gallery that exhibits a moving image work by the artist meet similar presentation standards. The content of the film will often dictate the particular arrangement of the gallery. In the case of *Crossroads*, the screen was

¹²⁶ *Bruce Conner: CROSSROADS*, Kohn Gallery, November 8–December 20, 2014. <http://www.kohngallery.com/conner-exhibitions/2014/11/7/bruce-conner-crossroads-works-on-paper>.

¹²⁷ Jennifer L. Peterson, “Bruce Conner,” *Artforum International* (December 2014).

positioned two feet lower than normal in order to give the viewers the impression of looking out over the water.¹²⁸ Within the art world, the Conner estate has a reputation for strictness. The representative who oversees most installations of the artist's moving image works refuses to loan works without the assurance that they will be properly exhibited. Similarly, the estate does not sell to individual collectors in order to prevent the loaning of works for exhibitions to institutions that do not meet with its standards. Moreover, the estate polices streaming sites such as YouTube and Vimeo for illegal uploads of Conner's films. Inferior image quality and viewing experience aside, the uploading of streaming videos disregards the artist's insistence that his work not be shown in relation to ads.¹²⁹

The representative of the Bruce Conner Estate acknowledges the need to fight tooth and nail with museums and galleries to ensure the best presentation possible for the artist's moving image works. At times the judgement of curators can be swayed by the demands of an exhibition, "for example when an installation has to be adapted to a particular space and hence unintended changes are being carried out."¹³⁰ Younger artists eager for exposure and funding may accommodate the needs of the gallery and accept unfair compromises more readily. If the artist or artist estate does not demand optimal viewing conditions for the work, the museum or gallery will likely default to a cost effective and convenient solution.

¹²⁸ Interview with representative of the Estate of Bruce Conner, April 14, 2015.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Barbara Sommermeyer, "Who's Right—the Artist or the Conservator?" in *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 145.

Treating Moving Image Works Responsibly and Respectfully

Upon the completion of the *Inside Installations* research project on the care and documentation of installation art, Janneke Ottens observed, “A striking outcome of the project has been the widely shared recognition of the illusory nature of expecting to find neutral solutions for problems in the conservation of contemporary art.”¹³¹ This conclusion particularly applies to moving image artworks. In the exhibition and conservation of film and video artworks compromises are unavoidable. Constraints such as shortened timelines, reduced budgets for exhibition and conservation, obsolescence of equipment or media, desire for increased access, availability of equipment and lack of documentation all lead to difficult decisions. Museum professionals must weigh the benefits and consequences of each exhibition and conservation decision carefully, considering as many perspectives as possible. At times, choices are made without admitting potential alterations and compromises. Making responsible decisions regarding moving image works requires acknowledging practical and financial considerations.

Museums and galleries are still learning how best to exhibit and care for their moving image collections. Certain institutions, like SFMOMA, lead the pack by recognizing the need for collaboration across multiple departments. The museum acknowledges the amount of time and staff required to maintain the time-based media works in their collection and to acquire new works. At SFMOMA, preparing for the exhibition or the acquisition of an artwork involves the participation of curators, conservators and exhibitions technical managers as well as the artist or artist’s estate. The different levels of expertise offer different perspectives on how to determine, define, conserve and document the essential properties of a moving image artwork. All of the

¹³¹ Tatja Scholte, “Introduction,” in *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks*, ed. Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 15.

members of the team contribute documentation and research to the artwork files. Moreover, as part of its expansion, the museum plans to construct a black box workshop, a time-based media conservation studio and an exhibitions technical workroom where staff will have the ability to prepare, stage, document and repair works from its growing media arts collection.¹³² With its commitment to research and consideration of multiple perspectives in the care of an artwork, SFMOMA joins Tate, MoMA and the Guggenheim as a model for media art conservation and exhibition practice.

Despite advancements toward standards and best practices, museums must remain vigilant in their conservation and exhibition practices. Even a museum like the Tate, which remains committed to preserving and exhibiting film on film, falters occasionally. After all, the Tate did approach Christian Marclay with the insensitive request to exhibit *The Clock* in the cavernous space of Turbine Hall. In that instance, the artist himself kept the museum accountable. Yet, an artist's insistence on ideal viewing conditions and medium integrity can also have consequences—often resulting in reduced access. While an artist may make sure that works are only viewed under the proper conditions, it may mean that the works are viewed less often. These circumstances apply to the work of the experimental filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos, who withdrew all of his films from distribution at the end of the 1960s in order to supervise every aspect of their preservation and exhibition. As a result, his films are almost impossible to see.

On April 7, 2015, the Getty Center hosted a rare screening of Markopoulos's film *Galaxie* as part of a traveling series celebrating the publication of a book of the filmmaker's writings

¹³² Conversation with SFMOMA media arts curator, exhibitions technical manager and assistant media arts curator, April 30, 2015.

Film as Film: The Collected Writings of Gregory J. Markopoulos. Although the white-walled auditorium did not provide perfect darkness for the projection, it offered an adequate setting in which to show the work on film. Comprised of thirty portraits—each the length of a single roll of 16mm film—threaded together into a motion picture, *Galaxie* could only have been shot on film. Each portrait is built up in layers of composition through running the film through the camera multiple times: “With each compositional layer the film portrait grew, the kernel of a biography as Oswald Spengler might have put it became apparent. With the seventh compositional layer the subject was asked for suggestions (since each portrait was homage to the portrait sitter) as to some personal object that might be included.”¹³³ Screening the film in the context of a theater required the audience to watch it through to from start to finish and contemplate the portraits in relation to each other. The single screening offered a rare and ephemeral encounter with the compelling figures captured on film. Viewers could not simply re-watch particular portraits at a later time. They had to engage with the work in the moment, knowing that they may not have the opportunity to view the work again. Although only screened under desirable conditions, *Galaxie* risks falling into complete obscurity.

Warhol adopted nearly the opposite approach to the exhibition of his own series of portrait films, the *Screen Tests*. His own laissez-faire attitude toward his films—for example, projecting *Screen Tests* in the background during performances of the Velvet Underground—seems to embolden contemporary curators to program his works more freely.¹³⁴ Two programs of his *Screen Tests*—*13 Most Beautiful* and *Exposed: Songs for Unseen Warhol Films*—toured

¹³³ Gregory J. Markopoulos, *Film as Film: The Collected Writings of Gregory J. Markopoulos* (London: The Visible Press, 2014), 226.

¹³⁴ Callie Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Abrams, 2006), 18.

venues with the live accompaniment of contemporary musicians. Moreover, in the recent rehang of the Warhol Museum in 2014, approximately twenty-five of Warhol's *Screen Tests* were placed on twelve kiosk monitors in a designated room.¹³⁵ At these digital stations, the museum visitors have the ability to scroll through and watch *Screen Tests* at their leisure. The sacrifice of large-scale viewing results in increased image quality for lower-resolution transfers and the ability to include accompanying background information. Having these works constantly available onsite serves as a research tool and preserves the chance of discovery for the museum visitor.

Nevertheless, the flexibility that allows for these creative uses of Warhol's *Screen Tests* also creates the possibility for the poor quality exhibition of his films seen at MoMA and SFMOMA.

Overall, with increased professional scholarship and awareness, the standards for moving image conservation and exhibition continue to evolve and improve. Whereas the scans of Expressionist German cinema likely did not offend viewers at the Cinémathèque française in 2006, they no longer meet the expectations of the museum visitor for image quality. The unsatisfying compromise of using the standard definition clips in the *Haunted Screens* exhibition prompted LACMA curators to discuss redesigning their workflows for future exhibitions to allow time for rescanning content.¹³⁶ Moreover, in recognition of the rapid pace at which technologies and formats become outdated, the curators are also researching the optimal resolution at which to scan content for an upcoming exhibition about 3D. After its period on view at LACMA, the exhibition will tour several other venues; the same clips will be on display in one venue or another for five to seven years.¹³⁷ The forethought of the curators to scan clips at

¹³⁵ Phone interview with The Warhol Museum assistant curator, May 1, 2015.

¹³⁶ Interview with Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, April 21, 2015.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

higher resolutions will sustain the moving image content through the continuing developments in technology. The task for art museums such as LACMA remains to extend their concern for the continued viability of moving image works beyond high-profile, large-scale exhibitions to individual artworks, and beyond digital transfers to the full scope of their moving image collections. Forecasting that the future home of film will be the museum, Alexander Horwath arrives at a similar conclusion: “The place of film will be the museum....It will, of course, be necessary—and this is already slowly happening—for museums to act as responsibly and respectfully towards the film artefact (and the historical system of performing film publicly) as they have done with other types of materials.”¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Alexander Horwath, *FILM*, ed. Tacita Dean (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 80.



Figure 1. Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010. Installation view at White Cube Mason's Yard, London, October 15-November 13, 2010. photo: Todd-White Photography. fraenkelgallery.com/tag/christian-marclay.



Figure 2. Kutluğ Ataman, *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read*, 2002. Installation view at Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey, 2010. www.kutlugataman.com/site/artworks/work/54/.



Figure 3. Candice Breitz, *The Rehearsal*, 2012. Shot at Oakwood Premier, Mumbai, India: May 2011. From the trilogy *The Woods*. Installation view at ACMI, Melbourne.



Figure 4. Installation view of David Claerbout, *Travel*, 1996-2013, in the Hirshhorn exhibition *Days of Endless Time*. Photo by Alina Sinetos.

Figure 5. Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973. 16mm film, black-and-white, silent, 31 min. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. collection.whitney.org/object/15286.

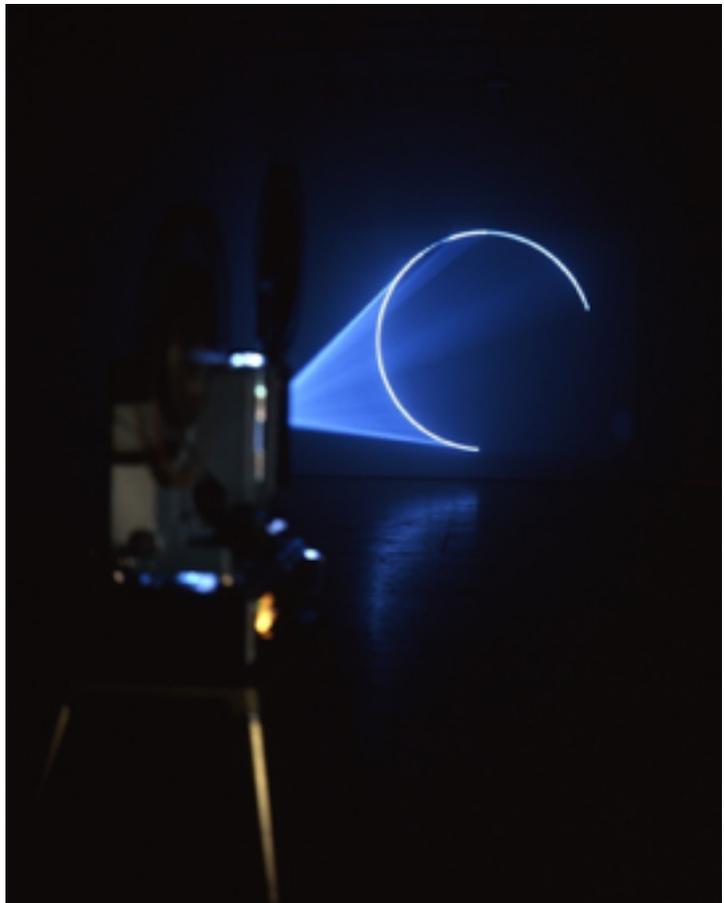


Figure 6. Installation view of *Black Box*: *Ragnar Kjartansson* at the Hirshhorn. Photo by Alina Sinetos.





Figure 7. Installation view of Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, 1963, in the SFMOMA exhibition *Exposed*. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/allaboutgeorge/5296148864/>.



Figure 8. Installation view of *Andy Warhol: Motion Pictures* at The Museum of Modern Art. Copyright 2010 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA. Photo: Jason Mandella. <http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/march-2011-andy-warhol-moma/2229>.



Figures 9 & 10. Installation views of *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa—Art and Film* on view at LACMA, September 22, 2013-February 2, 2014. <https://salvadorquiroz.files.wordpress.com/>.





Figure 11. Installation view of *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015. Photo by Alina Sinetos.



Figure 12. Installation view of *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015. <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/haunted-screens-german-cinema-1920s>.



Figures 13 & 14. Guy Maddin, *Kino Ektoplasma*, 2014. Installation view in *Haunted Screens: German Cinema in the 1920s*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 21, 2014–April 26, 2015. Photo by Alina Sinetos.



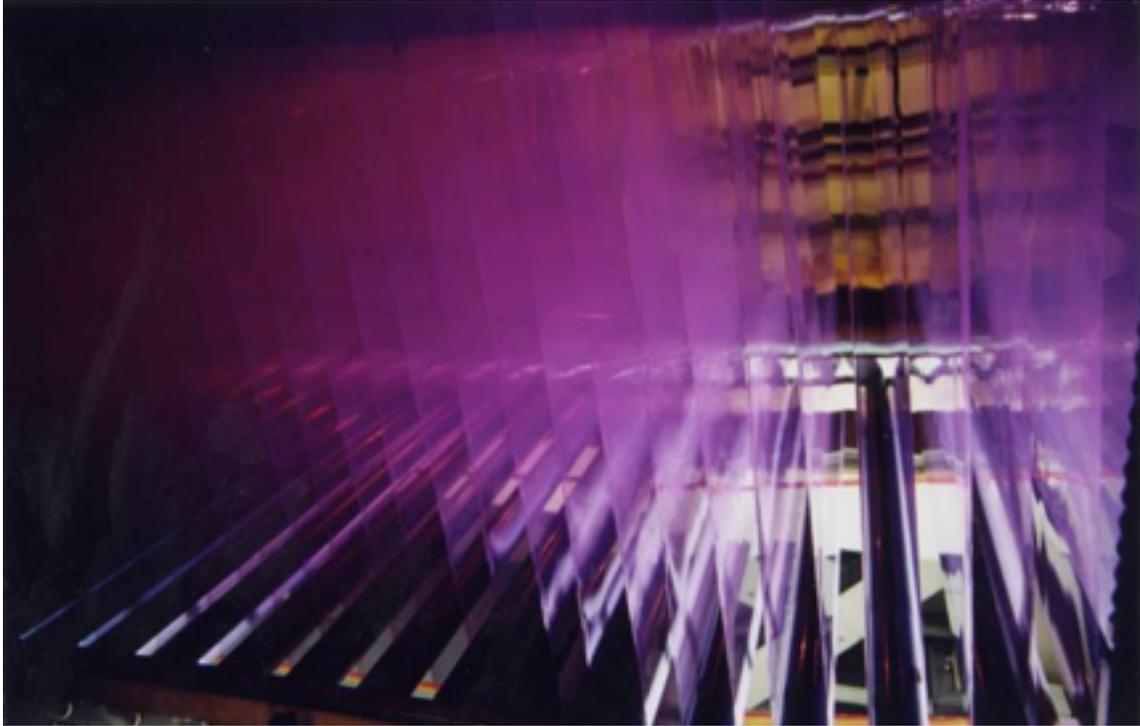


Figure 15. Tacita Dean, *Kodak*, 2006. © Tacita Dean, courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dean-kodak-t12407>.



Figure 16. Installation view of *Bruce Conner: CROSSROADS*, Kohn Gallery, November 8–December 20, 2014. <http://michelle-silva.squarespace.com/news/2015/1/21/kohn-gallery-bruce-conner-crossroads-works-on-paper>.

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