

Archiving Installation, Performance and New Media Art

Installation, performance, and new media art is not a single object, but an interaction of many complex parts. The artwork often lies in the viewer's experience of the piece. The archival record of these works must also be dynamic and interactive.

Using interviews, images of the exhibition, and describing the constituent parts of the work, you can create a living, polyvocal archive of your ephemeral artworks.

Artist Interviews

The first step is to record your own thoughts and reflections on the artwork. Solicit a curator, art historian, critic, or artistic collaborator to conduct an interview with you specifically discussing the artwork you wish to document.

- Discuss the work from many angles, from overarching ideas to minute aspects.
- Describe the evolution of the work, from conception to completion. What is the biography of the work?
- What is the essence of the piece? The intent?
- Detail the process of making specific parts of the work. What techniques were used?



Interview with artist Anna Delgado. Photo: Peter Barnett

Photographs

This is a widely implemented documentation strategy for ephemeral art: take photographs and video of the performance or installation. Interviews and in-depth descriptions of the artwork add depth and life to this photographic record of the exhibition.

Descriptive Inventory

In a spreadsheet or on paper, make an inventory of all the work's component parts, including lighting, sculptural objects, structures, projectors, software, etc.

- Describe each component, capturing technical details, materials, and how it fits in the installation.
- Pay particular attention to how different components connect and interact with each other.
- Take photographs of each component.

Audience members interacting with multi-media installation "Honey Cult Creek Camp" by Naomi O'Donnell. Photo: Peter Barnett



Audience Interviews

Installation and performance pieces evoke unique experiences from different viewers, and audience interviews are a way to create a living, dynamic archive of the piece. These experiences are an integral part of the work itself. Interviewing the audience opens up an ongoing conversation between viewers and the creator of the artwork.

Collaborate with a curator, art historian, or archivist, arranging for them to interview exhibition attendees. Conduct interviews while viewers are experiencing the installation, or just afterwards. The interviewer can create a set of questions to structure these interviews, or have informal conversations about the work.

Resources

- Variable Media Network: <http://variablemedia.net>
- Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts: <http://www.docam.ca/>
- Capturing Unstable Media: <http://v2.nl/archive/works/capturing-unstable-media>