

Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/Time Based Arts

Examples of access and use of media art in the digital environment

The Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/Time Based Arts promotes the wide development and distribution of new technologies in the visual arts. Since 1978, the Institute has collected about 1800 titles, samples of which can all be viewed on the online database. Every year around 30 new titles are added, half of which are by Dutch artists. In addition to collecting works, they also exhibit, preserve and distribute these works all over the world (www.nimk.nl).

When developing strategies for the preservation and presentation of media art, availability and accessibility to the content is the main goal says Gaby Wijers, head of collections. Since the early 1960s, artists have been using video as an independent medium. The carrier of the videosegment, the videotape, is very fragile: research shows that after ten years a lot of information on the tape may be lost. The problem with digitising video art is that the carrier is part of the work, and therefore digitisation always means changing the work of art, especially with video-installations. But preserving the tape and the playback equipment would be impossible in the long run. Besides technological issues, authenticity and artistic intention also play an important role in the preservation of video art. We let artists decide what their work will look like in the future, Gaby says, we interview artists about their ideas.

The most important collection of the institution is the distribution collection. Distribution of media art used to be by sending videotapes to festivals and museums. Today, because most of the distribution collection is in digital format, a wider audience can have access to our collection, Gaby explains: interested parties can view samples online of the works they might want to order. How we publish the work depends on the agreement with the artist. For the distribution collection we have different contracts: all artists agree to have samples of their work online, some of them also allow a low res copy of the whole work on our website. Artists are aware that an online presence means more exposure, we are now even working with them to put short clips on YouTube. Work that cannot be put online because of rights restrictions can be viewed on site, and we have special licences for educational purposes.

Besides our distribution collection we also have recorded performances, lectures and publications. This reference collection will be published online for free once the recordings have been digitised, Gaby says. If works are not copyright free, we just put the metadata on the net. It does not have a high priority, as it concerns documentation, not original art works, but we will make the effort.

A special user participation project that they developed recently is "Curator for one day". Everybody could make online a selection of six clips from the catalogue of more than 2000 works. On the condition that a motivation for the selection is given, the video works selected are then screened for the rest of the visitors for a whole day, with the accompanying text explaining the choice of this 'curator for one day'. All the selections will be archived. The project took off slowly, Gaby says, but luckily later on we got many responses. It is interesting to see what preferences people have. So far there have not been big surprises, although we had not expected so much interest for 'abstract' video works. (www.curatorforoneday.nl).