

Documenting contemporary artworks for reconstruction

Research Design

Research Questions

- Why is documentation of contemporary art important?
- What is the role of archivists in the documentation of contemporary art?

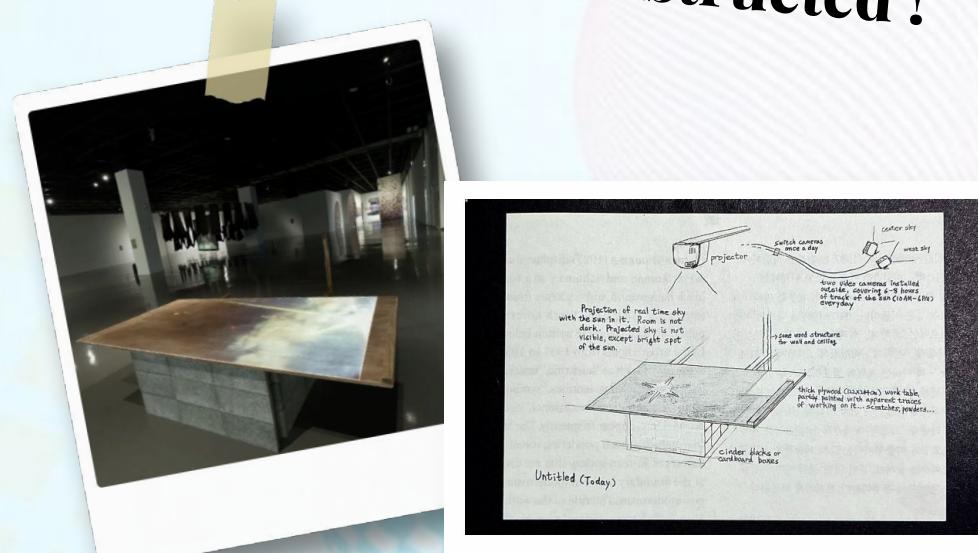
Research Objectives

- To propose documentation strategies that can support the sustainable reconstruction of contemporary artworks.
- To explore the role of archivists throughout these processes.

Research Methods

- Literature review & case study: Three artworks from Busan Museum of Contemporary Art
- Interviews and content analysis with art archivists

Without documentation, the work couldn't have been exhibited nor reconstructed!



[L] Baek Yiso, <Untitled (Today)> (2000/2024)
[R] Baek Yiso, Installation Drawing for <Untitled (Today)> (2000)

An installation piece reconstructed for the 2024 Busan Biennale after the artist's death. Reconstruction based on the artist's installation drawings.

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Documentation Framework for Reconstruction

Type of Installation - based New media art	Documenting Area	Documenting & Acquisition Method	Records curation & Acquisition	Archivist's Role
Digital Image	Concept & artist's intention	Artist interviews, notes, concept sketches	During early planning and creation process - Artist, Curator	Management of authorship information; collection of early versions of the work
Interactive Art	Technical Installation & implementation	Drawings, equipment lists, technical standards, installation guidelines, video/timelapse	Pre and Post installation - Artist, technician, and conservation experts	Support for collecting essential technical information; archiving of installation & implementation process
Time-based Art	Spatial Configuration & Decision-Making	Floor plan, Lighting & sound setup records, Meeting minutes & decision memos, Rehearsal footage	During installation and implementation - Curator, technician, installation supervisor	Provision of checklist for essential documentation items
Communication Art	Audience participation	Audience feedback, Audience flow/movement tracking, Documentation of audience participation process	During exhibition - Archivist	Collection of interaction data; archiving of key agent perspectives
Technology-based Art	Work of Collaborators (Experts)	Technical expert interview, Technical expert's work notes, Documentation of the collaboration process	During and Post installation - technician, artist	Interviews with technician; organizing for future reinstallation and reproduction
Common (Exhibition-related)	Exhibition context & work history	Exhibition proposal, Press release, Curator interview, Exhibition & conservation history documents, Record of changes, Reproduction manual, Certificate of authenticity	Pre, during, and Post-exhibition - Curator, conservation experts	Compilation of exhibition-related records; documentation of curatorial intent

Based on López Iniesta (2021), This framework classifies types of media art to identify essential documentation elements. It organizes key items, methods, timing, and agents, and includes potential areas for archival participation. The checklist was developed accordingly.

Case study



Archivist's View

Interviewed 3 art archivists

Archivists have specialized expertise in designing systematic documentation tools and strategies tailored to diverse types of artworks.

As the need for reconstruction grows in on-site engagement, Systematic documentation collection offers a valuable opportunity to highlight and redefine the role of archivists.

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Archivists are generally less involved than curators in close collaboration with artists and on-site engagement.

The complexity and variability of contemporary art, coupled with limited archival training and research, highlight limitations that traditional documentation methods can no longer address.

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