



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL  
MATERIAL INC.

## **The Shock of the New: Modern Materials, Media and Methods Joint Objects and Electron SIG Symposium February 8 to 10 2017 - Melbourne Museum**

### **Abstract**

#### **Title:**

Survival of the *Survival Series*: Conservation strategies for a moving message sign with an internal memory

#### **Name of Presenter:**

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#### **Affiliations:**

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#### **Abstract:**

The conservation of born-digital artworks presents a great variety of challenges. Due to the limited longevity of technology and its swift developments, it is rare and interesting to thoroughly investigate an artwork like *Selections from the Survival Series* (1983), a moving message sign from the collection of the Kroller-Muller Museum in Otterlo (The Netherlands) that still consists of the original hardware and software.

Holzer made everything but an arbitrary choice when she switched from more low-tech media to high-tech moving message signs. The subtle flickering of the LEDs, the speed of the sentences and specific effects like cascading words are all part of what she identifies as a digital equivalent of the intonation of the voice. One might be inclined to call this part of the artist's 'handwriting'. But how can this important piece of the artwork be preserved without falling back on subjective descriptions?

This presentation will describe different facets of the conservation process of *Selections from the Survival Series*, but it will focus mainly on how to document the output of the artwork in an objective way and how the boundaries within which the artwork can change over time have been determined. The chosen approach generates instantly usable data that can be the basis for emulation in the future, whilst ensuring a minimum of change in output.

The project started with data that was hardcoded into unknown custom-made software, and ended with developing a simple and effective way to document the complete artwork.

#### **Brief Biography of the Author(s):**

Ellen Jansen is an art historian and an independent conservator of modern and contemporary art. She has a long history in museum practice at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, mainly focusing on analogue and digital imaging. In 2012, she started as a lecturer in conservation

practice and coordinator within the contemporary art training program at the University of Amsterdam. Her special interest is born digital art. She does research into the conservation of interactive born-digital art and in collaboration with the Media Studies department at the university, she oversaw and carried out workshops in the conservation of new media art.

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