



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:**

[The robot has gone psycho, and other contemporary art survival stories]

**Name of Presenter:**

Di Whittle

**Affiliations:**

National Gallery of Victoria

**Abstract:**

Robots and drawing machines, merry-go-rounds and popcorn makers – welcome to the art gallery 2016. Interactive new media, installation art, and the machine that goes ping, contemporary art has a propensity for escaping definition and its enclosures. In recent years Objects Conservators at the National Gallery of Victoria have been challenged by everything from flat tyres, erratic water pumps, and taxidermied cats, to a functional carousel weighing five tonnes and otherwise a range of eccentric automata.

As the installations and mechanisms get larger and more complex, and the associated technology ages or fails, interesting stakeholder negotiations must be had around significance of original material and configuration, functional longevity, evolution and migration. The display scenarios for these artworks can also be problematic, contemporary art is intrepid and it is found in foyers walkways and stairwells where only the most robust or fortunate will endure. It can be high maintenance in every sense.

These new-media/sculptural hybrids are in part originating from the proliferation of web based maker and developer networks, sharing both open source and proprietary resources, and advances in manufacturing and computing, in particular related to the accessibility and modularity of electronics and prototyping platforms. As a result, the use of emerging and DIY technology may require specific skills and expertise for installation, operation and conservation support of the artworks, and this is an ongoing challenge for the profession.

In 2015, Rafael Lozano Hemmer described contemporary/media art conservation from an artist's perspective, as an acceptance of the alternatives of artwork death or future zombification. Our conservation interventions can prolong life or reanimate the works, but may come with compromise. This presentation will describe some of our recent experiences with technology based contemporary art – and suggestions for surviving in Zombieland.

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

Di Whittle has been working in Objects Conservation at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) since 2010 and is currently specialising in technology based artworks. Prior to joining the NGV she has worked in a number of areas including outdoor sculpture conservation, materials engineering and IT.

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