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A HANDS-OFF APPROACH TO CONTROLLING MEDIA-BASED ARTWORKS

BRAD DILGER AND RICHARD MCCOY

ABSTRACT

With the continued and increasing use of electronic media components in contemporary art projects, a need has arisen to efficiently and accurately control the active cycle of these components while on display. The Indianapolis Museum of Art has created a novel approach to effectively manage its contemporary art projects that have electronic media components using a hands-off approach. There are several methods controlling electronic media components in galleries, such as simple timers, manufacturer-based internal controls, the occasionally unreliable human controller, and computerized control systems. For the past seven years the museum has tested, installed, and maintained an innovative and effective approach to controlling its electronic media components in the gallery using a completely computerized control system. This solution, which was created through an inter-departmental working group composed of representatives from the Installation Department, Conservation Department, and Information Technology Department, does not require daily human interaction to maintain a gallery schedule. This relatively low-cost solution allows electronic media components to be controlled both autonomously and via web-based graphical user interface. This graphical user interface can easily function from smart phones. Autonomous control of electronic art is based on a system of linking together different software and hardware components from various manufacturers. This technology has had widespread use in commercial, educational, and residential applications to con-

trol all aspects of building functions: lighting, HVAC, security, entertainment, and irrigation are just a few systems that can be covered by computerized control systems. It is believed that the Indianapolis Museum of Art is the first museum to apply this system to electronic media components in contemporary art projects, and has been using the solution for nearly a decade with great success. This approach achieves the important goal of relieving staff from having to physically manipulate electronic media components in the gallery on a day-to-day basis, and has dramatically increased the efficiency and functionality of contemporary art projects by reducing gallery downtime caused by errors. This paper will discuss three case studies based on art installations in the museum. These case studies will demonstrate the successes and limitations of the system, as well as provide guidance for other institutions that are interested in installing this system.

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