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Electronic Media Group


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XFR STN: OPERATING AN OPEN-DOOR MEDIA CONSERVATION LAB

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ABSTRACT
For three months during the summer of 2013, New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art played host to a public, open-door, artist-centered media conservation laboratory called XFR STN. Derived from a project proposal to preserve the massive collection of video materials produced by the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club, XFR STN sought to address the wide need for artist access to media migration and recovery services. Throughout its ten-week run, XFR STN offered artists the opportunity of scheduling three hour appointments with trained technicians to recover work from a wide variety of obsolete analog video and digital media formats. Moreover, the project sought to eliminate the prohibitive costs associated with such migration services, addressing the fact that many artist’s media-based materials may not survive beyond their lifetime if they have not already achieved commercial success.

The XFR STN project also inherently addressed issues of distribution, scale, and the economics of preservation for small institutions. By partnering with the Internet Archive to host all digitized material, XFR STN offered a nuanced approach to common institutional challenges surrounding the cost and maintenance of a long-term digital repository, while twinning conservation of material with widespread public access to resulting preserved content.
This presentation will offer a practical case-study surveying the nuts and bolts of such a lab; detail the day-to-day logistics of running a public and appointment based service; provide background on streamlining metadata capture and processing; outline pedagogical approaches and educational outreach to artists and the public; and relate practical and technical lessons learned throughout the course of the exhibition. The presenters will also enumerate strategies by which XFR STN rallied institutional support and expertise from a wide array of cultural organizations’ preservation departments to realize the project’s equipment and resource needs. The aim is to provide guidance with which other institutions may build upon for the successful operation of similar conservation recovery services.

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