

ACQUISITION AND INSTALLATION OF TIME-BASED ART AT THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM: LENDING ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of two years, staff at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., previewed, prepared, packed, shipped, and installed more than 20 film, video, and computer-based works (from its permanent collection and loans) in a highly complex three-venue international loan exhibition. This paper describes the steps taken by the exhibition and collections staff in conducting artists' interviews, previewing the individual works, preparing the equipment, and developing the necessary installation and tracking documentation. A review is presented of the difficulties, troubleshooting processes, and the goals for further adjustments as the artworks are prepared to return to the museum. The paper provides a real-world account of the challenges faced when putting on a substantial and complex moving image exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image was first installed at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 2008. It is described as:

. . . an unprecedented two-part exploration of contemporary moving-image art and the ways in which the cinematic has blurred distinctions between illusion and reality. The two exhibitions, *Dreams and Realisms*, include film and video installations by a range of influential and emerging international artists, including Omer Fast, Gary Hill, Runa Islam, Isaac Julien, Anthony McCall, Steve McQueen, Tony Oursler, and Andy Warhol among others. (Hirshhorn 2008)

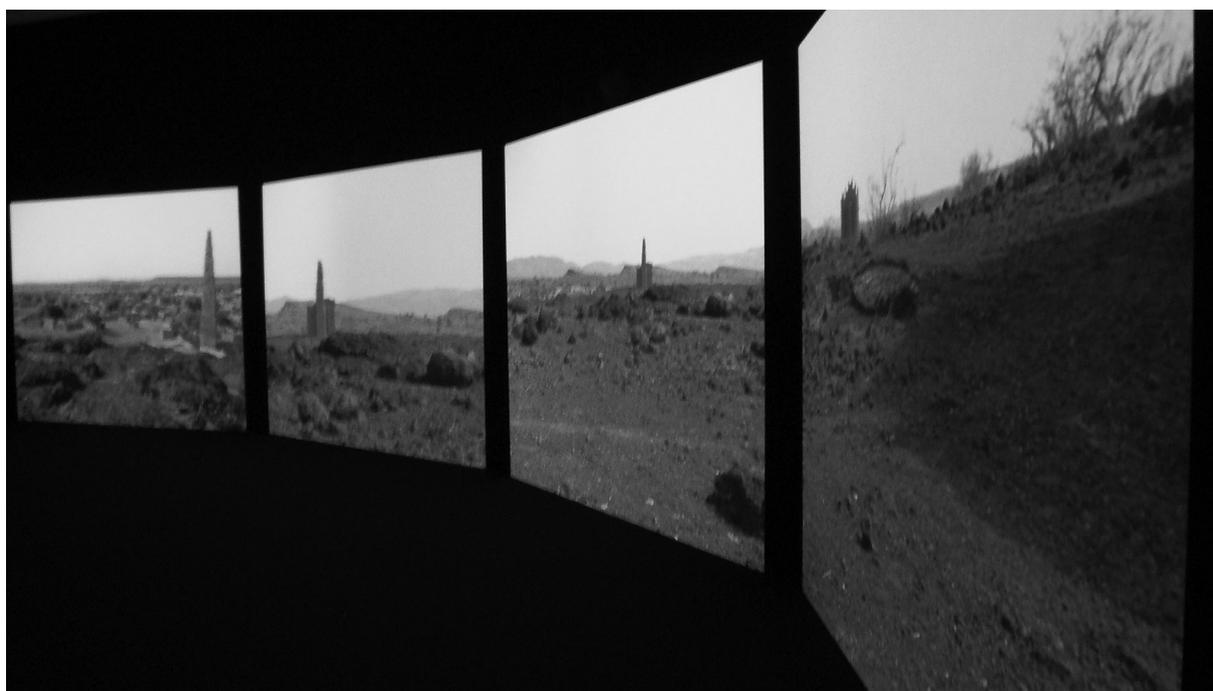


Fig. 1. Isaac Julien, *Fantôme Créole*, 2005, Four screen projection, 16 mm color film transferred to Digi Beta transferred to DVD, with sound, 23 min. and 27 sec., dimensions variable, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Purchase Fund, acc. no. 05.32. Courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The first part, *Dreams*, was curated by Kerry Brouher and Kelly Gordon, and the second part, *Realisms*, was curated by Anne Ellegood and Kristen Heilman. There were works by over 30 artists total. In 2011 a selection of 20 works from both installations traveled to CaixaForum in Spain to be exhibited in three parts at three different venues. *Realisms* was installed in CaixaForum Madrid in January, *Dreams* in CaixaForum Barcelona in May, and in October 2011 a combination of the two shows opened in CaixaForum Palma.

When the show was first installed in 2008, there were only rumors of the show traveling, nothing was certain. Then, halfway through 2009, it became official: a selection of works from both parts of the show would travel. And not just any traveling, it would be traveling overseas, and so would all of the equipment. The task at hand was to test all of the equipment for functionality, have any needed repairs done, prepare the media, create installation notes and documentation for another venue's staff to upkeep the installations and equipment, create a

tracking system for all components that would be traveling, pack all of the equipment, and hope that we could get it all done in time.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE TRAVELING EXHIBITION

In late 2009 I was assigned to assist our time-based media coordinator with preparing all of the equipment. The first issue we tackled was the lack of a solid checklist for any of the venues. There were 10 artworks that we owned and were definitely going to be included so I started there. My approach for testing was to pull all of the equipment for one installation and set up the entire artwork with the media and let it run for a few days to a week, depending on the complexity of the installation.

The next organizational question that we had to answer was how to track every component that we would be sending. Our senior registrar, Melissa Front, and I came up with a system that would work for several purposes. She needed to be able to track equipment for packing logistics and insurance purposes, and I needed to track

things because of the sheer volume that were going to be traveling; in total about 550 separate components.

After trying a couple different systems for labeling equipment, we finally settled on splitting everything up by type. Our 20 projectors were identified as P.01–P.20, our speakers were S.01–S.30, and so on with other types of equipment. In addition to equipment, we were responsible for providing cables that were less than three feet long. This meant that we were only responsible for providing audio and power cables, since most runs from the player to the projector were going to be longer than three feet. To minimize confusion, we simply sent enough for each installation and we labeled them with artist name.

The most equipment-intensive installation was a piece from our collection, Isaac Julien's (b. 1960) 4-channel projection, *Fantôme Créole* (2005) (fig. 1), which had a total of 80 component parts.

To keep track of all of the equipment, I created a master spreadsheet in which I listed every component that would be traveling (fig. 2). At the Hirshhorn, we had a pre-existing database listing all of our equipment so compiling the information was relatively easy. Because we did not have checklists for all of the venues, but had a general idea of what would be installed, I started by listing the available equipment and then listing which installation would be using the equipment at each venue.

Cinema Effect Travels to Spain and Must Share

Component #	Model #	Serial #	Madrid	Barcelona	Palma
	Panasonic Projector				
P.01	Panasonic 5500	SH5529011		Gordon	
P.02	Panasonic 5600	SH6430008	Fast	SPARE	
P.03	Panasonic 5600	SH6430003	Thompson	Gordon	
P.04	Panasonic 5600	SH6420075	Thompson	Warhol	
P.05	Panasonic 5600	SH6360097	Thompson	Girardet	
P.05	Panasonic 5600	SH6430014	Thompson	SPARE	
P.07	Panasonic 5600	SH6360137	Fast	SPARE	
P.08	Panasonic 5600	SH6430021	Rosefeldt	SPARE	
P.09	Panasonic 5700	SH7550008	Julien	Hubbard-Birchler	
P.10	Panasonic 5700	SH7550002	Julien	Wolbers	
P.11	Panasonic 5700	SH7550017	Julien	Conner	
P.12	Panasonic 5700	SH7550014	Julien	SPARE	
P.13	Panasonic 5700	SH7550069	Islam	SPARE	
P.14	Panasonic 5700	SH7550036	Islam	SPARE	
P.15	Panasonic 5700	SH8220104	SPARE	SPARE	
P.16	Panasonic 7000	SW6320012		Richardson	
P.17	Panasonic 7000	SW6460011		SPARE	
P.18	Optoma TX-780	361616		McCall	
P.19	Projection Design	8030261	Chan		
P.20	Projection Design	7030060		Staeble	
P.21	Eiki 16mm			Dean	
P.22	Eiki 16mm		Islam		
P.22	Eiki 16mm		SPARE	SPARE	
	Pioneer DVD Player				
D.01	V8000	GIMP001806UC	Fast	Richardson	
D.02	V8000	GFMP001680UC	Thompson	Gordon	
D.03	V8000	GFMP001663UC	Thompson	Warhol	
D.04	V8000	FHMP000544UC	Thompson	Girardet	
D.05	V8000	GIMP001777UC	Thompson	Staeble	
D.06	V8000	GFMP001637UC	Fast	SPARE	
D.07	V8000	FHMP000439UC	Rosefeldt	SPARE	
D.08	V8000	GFMP001639UC	Julien	Hubbard-Birchler	
D.09	V8000	GFMP001668UC	Julien	Conner	

Fig. 2. Master Excel Document

This was a working document that changed often and was the most useful and important document that I created, consulting it on a daily basis.

During this process of setting up, evaluating, and labeling all of the equipment, I discovered that we needed to send out a few pieces for repair or cleaning. This was very time-intensive and we were having items repaired up until the very last minute.

In May of 2010 our time-based media coordinator left for another job and I assumed his role. Up until that point my only responsibilities had been to prepare, label and document the equipment and works; now I was in charge of the coordination of all the technical aspects of the installations. Things got really hectic, really fast. I started receiving almost daily e-mails from the team at CaixaForum which consisted of two architects who were designing the space, one curator and projector coordinator, and one technical installer, all based in Barcelona. The questions they sent about the installations lead me to discover that the notes from our 2008 installations were either vague or nonexistent. For works that were in our collection, I relied heavily on documents that were created by our contract media conservator, Jeff Martin. His notes gave me a base to start from that influenced the type of information that I collected for all of the other works in the show.

From here on out when we didn't have enough written evidence we relied mostly on staffs' memories of the installations or information directly from the artist. This, as it turns out, was a great way to collect all sorts of information about works in the collection that had only been installed once, for example, Anthony McCall's (b. 1946) *You and I Horizontal, II*, 2006, computer, computer script, video projector, and haze machine, dimensions variable, acc. no. 08.18. We had handwritten notes created by McCall onsite at the Hirshhorn, but when reviewing the projector we realized that a custom pedestal had

been built because of the unique throw of the lens. Scott Larson, the head of our installation crew, drew up the pedestal from memory and this now has been added to our artist file.

As part of the process of preparing, we had a Cinema Effect team made up of our two conservators Jeff Martin and Gwynne Ryan, our registrar Melissa Front, our project coordinator Larry Hyman, our curator Kelly Gordon, and our exhibits representatives Al Masino, Scott Larson, and myself. For several months leading up to the first installation, we met on a weekly basis to touch base and try to hold on to our sanity amidst the feelings of chaos that surrounded the preparation. We would review communications with our Spanish counterparts, push for final check-lists and also plan what the next steps were going to be in the process of preparing.

In June of 2010 we had 5 months until we needed to have everything packed and ready to be shipped to the first venue in Spain. My team and I were still testing equipment and plugging away at labeling components when Melissa Front and Gwynne Ryan started the conversation of how exactly we were going to pack the equipment for the trip.

Ideally, we would have shipped everything in the manufacturers' boxes, but because we did not initially realize the show was going to travel and also due to storage issues, we had thrown away almost all boxes. As part of our original purchase for the *Cinema Effect* installation we had 20 Hantarex monitors that came to us in old Anvil crates; and, in the interest of time and money, we decided to use these crates for the packing. We had an outside contractor come in to advise us on the best way to pack the equipment. His recommendation was to leave the crates as-is and to create boxes to fit inside of the preexisting foam. Every box was the same length and width on the outside while the inside would be padded to fit the specific piece of equipment.

Isaac Julien | 1/3
Fantôme Créole

The Cinema Effect

Isaac Julien, *Fantôme Créole*

This is a synchronized four-channel color installation with a single soundtrack players. The DVD players have an internal timer that should be set according to the installation is open to the public (See separate instructions for setting DVD screens are MDF and butted up against each other. The DVDs are synchronized with a synchronizer- if you have trouble see separate document about how to load a soundtrack is on Screen 1 DVD and the installation is 5.1-surround sound and see separate notes).

Total run-time: 00:23:27 (looped).

Broadcast Standard: PAL

Daily Maintenance: Turn the projector on and off daily. The timer on the DVD player should be set according to hours of venue. All other equipment can remain on.

Venue needs to provide: (18) Outlet adapters, 4 large interconnected shop vacuum hoses, BNC component cables for DVD to projector, Speaker cable, (1) 2 RCA Male to RCA Female (Denon to Subwoofer), (1) RCA Male to RCA Male Cable (Subwoofer to Subwoofer)

*****Special Notes:** Number of Frames (used when setting the Dave Jones Synchronizer)

Installation Images:



Isaac Julien | 3/3
Fantôme Créole

Equipment:

(#) Description	[Component #]
(4) Panasonic PT-D 5700 Projectors	[P.10-13]
(4) Pioneer V8000 DVD Players	[D.08-11]
(3) Rane ME60 Equalizers	[E.01-03.a-b]
(3) Crown XLS 202 Amplifiers	[A.05-07]
(1) Denon AVR-983 Receiver	[R.04]
(1) Dave Jones 4-BN Synchronizer	[VS.03.a-e]
(5) JBL Control 28 Speakers	[S.05-09.a-b]
(2) Velodyne Powered Speakers	[S.25-26]
(4) Panasonic DLE-100 Lenses	[L.01-04]
(13) Power Cords	[U.09-21]
(1) Coaxial Cable with RCA adapters	[U.22]
(5) RCA to XLR cables	[U.23-27]
(5) XLR cables	[U.28-33]

Fig. 3. Installation Documentation

This also started the process of deciding where everything would go within each crate; this was mostly based on the fragility and weight of the equipment. One recurring question that we had when packing was: is it better to pack like materials together or to split equipment up by installation? While packing like things together makes spacing issues in the crates easier to deal with, due to the risk of damage or loss, we decided this was not the best option. We attempted to split equipment up by installation as best as we could; this also helped to keep the overall weight of each crate down and made unpacking a bit less hectic.

We had a group of approximately eight to ten people working for several months on creating boxes from scratch and making custom packing for all of our equipment; and, they did an amazing job. During this time our registrar created detailed packing and condition notes since most of the equipment would be unpacked and repacked three times during the trip.

I remember thinking that at some point I had to come to terms with the fact that the shipments would be leaving, no matter how unprepared I felt. Finally, right before Thanksgiving, all of the crates left the museum.

Isaac Julien				
<i>Fantôme Créole</i>				
Component #	Description	Model #	Serial #	Crate #
U.01	DVD- Exhibition Copy			10
U.02	DVD- Exhibition Copy			10
U.03	DVD- Exhibition Copy			10
U.04	DVD- Exhibition Copy			10
U.05	DVD- Back Up			10
U.06	DVD- Back Up			10
U.07	DVD- Back Up			10
U.08	DVD- Back Up			10
U.09	Power Cord			20
U.10	Power Cord			20
U.11	Power Cord			20
U.12	Power Cord			20
U.13	Power Cord			20
U.14	Power Cord			20
U.15	Power Cord			20
U.16	Power Cord			20
U.17	Power Cord			20
U.18	Power Cord			20
U.19	Power Cord			20
U.20	Power Cord			20
U.21	Power Cord			20
U.22	Coaxial Cable with RCA Adapters			20
U.23	RCA to XLR Cable			20
U.24	RCA to XLR Cable			20
U.25	RCA to XLR Cable			20
U.26	RCA to XLR Cable			20
U.27	RCA to XLR Cable			20
U.28	XLR Cable			20
U.29	XLR Cable			20

The Cinema Effect
Isaac Julien 1/3

Fig. 4. Excel spreadsheet listing component number, type of equipment, use, and location.

I had the next month to wrap up my installation notes and really prepare for what would be happening on the ground in Spain. While we were packing and testing equipment, I came up with a template for each set of notes. I tried to approach it by thinking about what I would like to receive if I was on the other end and structure them in a way that took into account that I would not necessarily be there to explain everything. I had no idea if the installation teams in Spain would speak English; and, I do not speak Spanish. Because of this, I started out collecting as many photos as I could of the finished installations. I also tried to create a run-down of what the

work entailed, if it had sound or was silent, black and white, or color, etc. I also listed any daily maintenance required, such as turning the piece on and off or common trouble-shooting issues. Finally, I listed all of the components that would be needed to install the work (fig. 3). In a separate spreadsheet, I created a guide to all of the components for the work listing exactly what they were and where they could be found in the crates (fig. 4). And in a third document, I made a schematic of how the equipment all related to each other, because, again, I had no idea what level of expertise I would find in the installers on the other side (fig. 5).

Another part of the preparation was for our exhibits representative and conservators to meet and review pre-existing installation notes for works in the Hirshhorn's collection. Al Masino would be joining me in Spain specifically to install Isaac Julien's work *Fantôme Créole* (2005). Gwynne Ryan had identified the types of information that our notes were missing and that she was hoping we could collect while the works were installed. This included photographs of the settings of the equipment, the layout of the space and the components within it, and also video of the works running properly.

INSTALLATION

Finally, showtime. The first week in January of 2011 Melissa Front and I set out on a trip to install *El Efecto del Cine* (the *Realisms* installation) in Madrid. We had fourteen days to install eight works. When we arrived it was kind of surreal, not only to meet these people we

had talked to so often but never met, but also to see the space for the very first time. I remember when we walked into the galleries so much was already done; they had completed almost everything that they could without the equipment. Screens were painted and installed, carpet was installed, and poles for projectors were hung.

The first full day of work we started unpacking the most complex installations. In this case it was Isaac Julien's work *Fantôme Créole* (2005) and Runa Islam's (b. 1970) installation *Tuin*, 1998, 16 mm projector and 2 DVD projections, courtesy of White Cube, London. *Tuin* required a 16 mm projector; and, CaixaForum had a contractor who came to prepare the prints and looper. After about 45 minutes of everything running fine, the projector stopped working. I had been assured several times that it wasn't a power issue so I tried trouble-shooting some different things. After none of my solutions worked

ISAAC JULIEN, FANTOM CREOLE

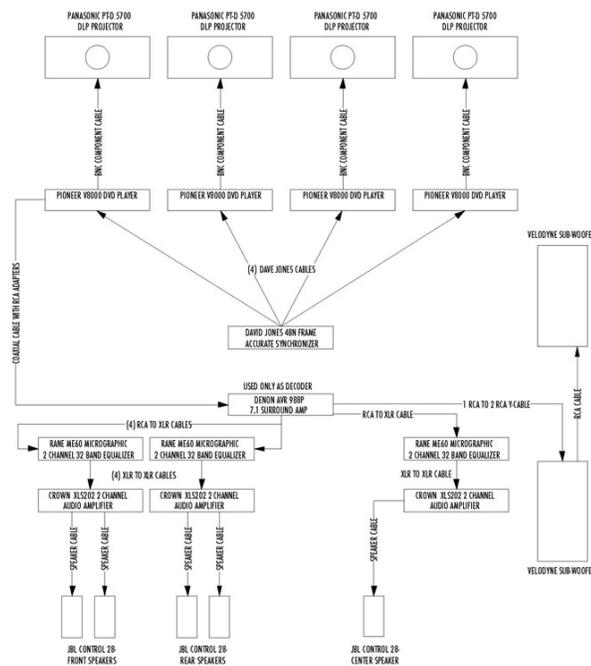


Fig. 5. Schematic of equipment for installation in relation to each other.

I finally called Robert Miniacci of Robert Film Services in Quebec, Canada for some advice. After listening to my story he was convinced it was the power.

I went back and asked to see the multi-meter with my own eyes; and, sure enough, it was running at 136 volts. Eventually, I was told that when the projector stopped running it “smelled like burning.” This was the beginning of a long battle. With my continued insistence that the 16 mm projectors needed 120 volts the team was scrambling trying to find a way to make this happen. The final solution for this was to install an ordinary household dimmer between the transformer and the plug.

In the meantime, we moved on to other installations and I started to find that everywhere in the space the power was reading between the high 120's and the mid 130's. The reason for this is that European power can run as high as 246 volts and with a 110 volt step-down transformer the power does not actually get low enough for our machines. So needless to say, we had other issues with equipment, mostly DVD optical discs starting to skip during playback, lamps in projectors burning out, and blown fuses. This is all to be expected when the internal components in a machine are running a bit too fast and hot for a long period of time.

Another issue of concern was that the outlet adapters that were provided did not have a hole for the grounding pin on the power cords, nor did they fit the fat blade of polarized plugs. So we had to insert a pen or something sharp inside to break a spring in the adapter and then push the plug into it, sometimes even adding electrical tape to the polarized plugs to make them stay. The lack of grounding was not a show-stopper, but you had to be careful with where you placed your hands so that you would not become the ground and receive a shock.

As things were unpacked Melissa Front and I kept notes of what piece went into which installation. We also powered on and tried to test every piece of equipment, even

if it was not being installed in Madrid so that there would be no surprises in Barcelona. The main installation team was not necessarily experienced at installing time-based media works. We ran into issues when it came to making final adjustments on projectors. At the Hirshhorn we don't use keystone correction or other digital manipulations on the projector to avoid distortion of images. Over time, Al Masino and I discovered that keystone correction was being used a lot because hanging apparatuses had already been installed, but they were not installed correctly or the screen had been painted to an incorrect size. Also the cables that went from the players to the projectors were all hand-made, which can be acceptable, but here they were not—as images would sometimes turn completely green. This is an indication that the red cable had gone down. There was much reworking and re-installation throughout the two weeks, often requiring twelve-hour workdays.

The language barrier was always an issue, trying to communicate with the crew was rather difficult; there were some people who were open to attempting it and others who weren't. The problem was not only trying to communicate using common words, but also words that a lot of people might not know that are specific to the installation of media; words that you may not learn in a regular language class. In addition, there was also a definite line drawn between the installation crew and the overseers of the installation, which I was not used to. In Madrid, every time I went to touch something someone would come over and insist on doing it for me.

By the end of the installation Al Masino and I had time to document all of the settings on the projectors and audio equipment for the works that we owned. I even got some really great footage of works running properly for our documentation. We also requested that dimmers be installed with all of our equipment because we were continuing to have issues. I am not convinced this is the best way to deal with voltage issues and would not recommend it to anyone. We did stop having complete

failures in equipment, but some things were still acting inexplicably strange. In total, five pieces of equipment quit during the installation. Of these, only one was because it was plugged straight into 220 volts. All in all, everything turned out fine, everyone was happy, and the only other piece to fail during the rest of the show was our back-up 16 mm projector.

Because the main team was not based in Madrid, a system had been devised to deal with problems during the run of the show. The company that installed the work sent someone to the exhibition space once a week to create a report of what was working and what wasn't. Had the reports been sent to us on a weekly basis, it could have been a good way of dealing with issues. Instead, we would get about three to five weeks worth of reports at a time and since the exhibition was only on view for three months, it did not always give us enough time to diagnose the problems. Fortunately, I was able to walk the team through some fixes. As the Madrid show continued, we were receiving final layouts for the *Dreams* installation in Barcelona. I made a point this time to ask for better power solutions, requiring that power stay within 116-124 volts.

In May of 2011 Melissa Front and I set out on our trip to install *Dreams* in Barcelona. Everything went amazingly well; the changes were like day and night. Again we had about 14 days to install 12 works. When we first arrived the space was nowhere near as far along as it had been in Madrid. A lot of the galleries were still far from being finished; drop ceilings were being put in and walls were being painted, but everything turned out fine and with time to spare. Better transformers and outlet adapters were provided and no dimmers were necessary. Not one piece of equipment failed during installation. The crew we had was spectacular; they definitely had experience installing media works. I barely had to explain anything and had to look very hard to find things to fix. Having already had so many issues during the Madrid installation, this installation seemed too good to be true.

One thing that really set the second installation apart for me was that we had a lot more artist's assistants and artists coming to the installation. In Madrid we had one artist assistant and one artist. In Barcelona we had two artist's assistants and seven artists. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to collect information directly from them regarding their installations for our notes at the Hirshhorn.

The installation in Palma was easier than the first two in some respects — the installation team from Barcelona had joined us in Palma, so there were almost no new faces or personalities to get to know; and, since this installation was a combination of the two shows, we had already installed each piece once. It gave everyone a chance to improve and tweak the installations. But there were also new difficulties: some of the less robust equipment was starting to show fatigue and some equipment needed to be replaced, like a plasma monitor that had burn-in from being on view for too long with the incorrect aspect ratio. There were also inconsistencies with how items had been packed at the last venue and some power cords and small bolts from mounts were missing. Personally, it was a little bittersweet; we were all acutely aware that this installation would be our last time seeing and working with each other, so we all tried to make the best of the time that we had together.

LESSONS LEARNED

If I were to provide a list of items to keep in mind when preparing a complicated time-based media installation, I would recommend the following:

- The things I used most during my time in Spain and could not do without were a flashlight, a multimeter, a Leatherman multi-tool, a pen, and a camera.
- Send extra of everything; equipment, installation hardware, fuses, lamps, cable adapters, anything you can think of.

- Be really specific about the power requirements of your equipment and see the voltage with your own eyes before plugging anything in.
- Try to learn as much about the venue you are going to and the people you are going to be working with before you arrive.
- When you do arrive, do not assume that anyone has read or even seen any of the documents that you have created.
- Save the manufacturers boxes and label everything, do not under-estimate the ability of cables and equipment to end up somewhere they are not supposed to during an installation.
- If you have subtitling projects start them as early as possible, they always take longer than expected.
- Do not forget to take into account the differences in culture and expectations of workflow.
- Last but not least: take photos of everything, even the most mundane photo could end up providing invaluable information.

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