

ACQUISITION AND INSTALLATION OF TIME-BASED ART AT THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM: CHANGING PRACTICES

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In 2009 and 2010, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., acquired two major time-based installation works, each of which presented unique challenges to traditional procedures for acquisition and installation. Taken together, the two works helped the museum refine not only its procedures for the care of such works, but also the conceptual framework through which it viewed acquisition of complex time-based art.

The first work acquired was Paul Sharits, *Shutter Interface*, 1975, 16 mm color film with sound, 64 x 264 in. image size, acc. no. 09.22, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution. When the work was created, Sharits, who died in 1993, also created detailed specifications for its installation. This documentation included precise dimensions for the projected image, the distance between the work's four projectors and the screen, and the height of the plinths on which the projectors are to be mounted. When *Shutter Interface* was acquired by the Hirshhorn, it arrived not only with these specifications, but also with requirements for its care. These requirements meant that the Hirshhorn had to develop a collaborative relationship with Anthology Film Archives, New York, New York, which oversaw the work's preservation, and with Northeast Historic Film, Bucksport, Maine, in whose cold-storage vaults the film's pre-print elements were held. Adding

to the challenges of conserving the work were the rapidly changing landscape of 16 mm film duplication, and the fact that Sharits never publicly discussed how the work might be shown if film projection became impossible.

The other acquisition, John Gerrard's *Grow Finish Unit, Eva, Oklahoma*, 2008, Realtime 3D animation, dimensions variable, acc. no. 10.1, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, presented very different challenges. Gerrard's piece is entirely digital—a real-time animation of a rural landscape in Oklahoma that relies on artist-created software to create its imagery. As with Shartis's *Shutter Interface*, conservation of Gerrard's work required the museum to build an ongoing relationship with an outside entity—in this case the artist himself. Gerrard has created a web-based infrastructure to support its conservation and exhibition. This structure, however, raises questions concerning the work's viability if Gerrard, his studio, or his estate is no longer available for consultation and support. It also instigated discussions about the boundaries of the museum's control over a work versus its desire to respect the artist's wishes for exhibition.

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