

Eddy Colloton

December 10, 2014

Metadata

Professor Rebecca Guenther

Time Based Media Art Expressed in PBCore XML

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has a broad-ranging and significant collection of Time Based Media art. In 2013, a team of conservators, technicians and registrars began work on a collection survey. Together, they tracked the location, housing, format, and general condition of the collection. This survey was the first step in what is an ongoing effort to develop a preservation workflow for LACMA's collection of time based media artworks.

The documentation of the survey was developed to track the collection efficiently. Determining "what is it?" and "where is it?" took precedence to a more thorough description of each of the works. Therefore, the metadata collected as part of this survey is primarily administrative and descriptive, focusing on the identifying information for a work, distinguishing the version of the work from other copies, and clarifying the objects location. However, some preservation and technical metadata was also collected such as the format and file size as well as prudent preservation actions, such as backing up or copying certain assets.

For each object the following qualities were recorded, when applicable:

"Unique Identifier" - generated by the museum's Collections Management department upon acquisition of a piece, and generally referred to at the museum as an object's "M number," the unique identifier would generally contain the year an object was acquired, a second number, separated by a period, which would be unique to the artwork that a particular object pertained to, and a third "component" number, again separated by a period, which would be used to differentiate and identify a unique component within a work. For example, a sculpture that was

acquired in 2001 with a dedicated pedestal might be identified as M.2001.50.1 and the pedestal would then be M.2001.50.2. The unique identifier would then serve as an access point to the object via the museum's Collection Management System, TMS (The Museum System).

"Title" - The title of the artwork an object pertained to would always be identified. Typically the item already had a unique identifier in TMS and the title would then be easy to identify, but on occasion a component would be stored with other parts of a work without specific identification. The media would be verified to determine if it is truly a part or a copy of the work it was stored with, and then an additional TMS record would be requested of the Collections Management department.

"Artist's Name" - Like the title of the artwork, the artist's name would be verified through TMS and recorded as part of the survey.

"Type" - One of the primary functions of the survey was to assign a "level" or "type" to every copy of a work that was examined. This meant deciding whether a DVD would qualify as an exhibition copy or only a viewing copy, or whether a Betacam SP would be preferred as a preservation master over an .mov file. Through a great deal of discussion, the creators of the survey chose to create a folksonomy for the many copies of a work that the institution collects. By doing so, they were able to be more specific in the role certain copies would play in a realized workflow, as well as prioritizing preservation action. "Artist" copies would be distinguished from "LACMA" copies if they bore the artist's signature or mark (lots of artists would draw on the DVDs). An "Artist" copy would then never be played and only held in storage. Copies of works were then further delineated based on format stability and quality (meaning resolution, sample rate, level of compression, etc.). The most stable, highest quality copy of a work would be called a "Master." However, at times, the original copy of a work provided by the artist, particularly if it bore the artist's signature, would be labeled an "Artist Master." A

“Duplication Master” could be a copy of similar quality and stability that would be used to make additional copies from, or it could be a high quality copy that was made by the museum some time in the past, which would serve the same function. Below these “types” are “exhibition copies” which would physically playback the media during an exhibition, and “viewing copies” which would be used by curators and researchers to study a work which was not installed. Any “tier” of a copy (be it master, exhibition copy, or viewing copy) could be either a “LACMA” or “Artist” copy.

“Format” - The format a work was recorded on, such as Digitbeta, DVD or 16 mm film.

“Location” - The location of each copy was recorded according to a system developed by the museum’s registrars for identifying each room and shelf in the museum.

“Quantity” - The number of a given object we had in our collection. For many of the objects in the survey, this quality was “one.” However, occasionally there were a large number slides, dedicated monitors, or accessories for a work which called for this field.

“Copy” - As a part of developing a preservation workflow, whether to create a new copy of a work, and where to store that copy, was decided during the survey, as each object was examined and described.

“Date created” and “Date acquired” - the date the work was created and the date the work was acquired were both taken from the work’s TMS record.

For security reasons, LACMA’s collections management system is only accessible through LACMA’s local intranet, and furthermore, it is only accessible on a PC with the appropriate software. While notes within the conservation “tab” of any record could be made, none of the practitioners of the survey had the clearance to change location, title or other data pertinent to the study. These fields were controlled by the Collection Management department.

Beyond these restrictions to access, it is difficult to quickly compare many records within TMS at a glance. Each record must be opened individually. This would make it difficult to make conclusions about the data collected in the survey. Data was then collected outside of TMS, but in consultation with the records held on TMS, and stored on google spreadsheets. The spreadsheet was then shared among the members of the survey team and collections management department.

To create more thorough entries of these records I have elected to map the data collected during the survey using the PBCore data structure standard. PBCore allows for a high level of specificity related to audiovisual resources. PBCore's documentation is rife with recommended controlled vocabularies such as AssetType, dateType, titleType, and the W3C Profile of ISO 8601 for displaying dates, which I've applied to clarify PBCore elements. I'm also using the Union List of Artist Names put forward by the Getty Institute as a controlled vocabulary for the artists' names described in the records I'm creating. In addition to the PBCore data structure standard I have also used an extension to map the acquisition date field, as PBCore does not have a standardized field for this information.