

Dark Arts: Artists' Information Practices in the Care of Digital Artworks and Archives

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ABSTRACT

Artists increasingly use digital technologies to make art, with implications not only for how art is created and experienced, but also for the long-term preservation of a digital visual arts heritage. Due to the rapid pace of technological development, digital artworks require preservation attention before they would typically enter into cultural heritage organizations, potentially altering these institutions' collection and conservation practices. Often, artists and small galleries act as the first stewards of these works, gaining new skills and finding information resources to address digital preservation issues shortly after the point of creation. For both the present and long-term care of digital artworks, existing conservation and preservation approaches are ill-equipped to attend to the particularities of digital technologies and the shifting ways in which digital art is being created, shared, and experienced by artists and audiences. To guide these new approaches, this research seeks to better understand the social, cultural, and technological factors impacting artists as they care for their artworks and archival materials early on. The research employs a case study design of Paper-Thin, a dynamic artist-run platform that includes an online virtual reality gallery and site-specific installations. The case comprises semi-structured interviews with the artists and curators, a collection of information resources used by the artists in the creation and care of their artworks, and the artworks themselves. Situational analysis methods are applied to position artists' information practices within the context of broader information worlds, examining how arts communities, socioeconomic factors, and various technologies all shape the ongoing care of digital artworks. The information worlds of these artists encompass traditional art world stakeholders, as well as many new kinds of communities like technology developers and social media users. While collectors, commercial galleries, and museums still play prominent roles, artist-run networked repositories like Paper-Thin have staked out alternative spaces for exhibiting artworks and experimenting with digital technologies. Although these artworks circulate outside of traditional cultural heritage institutions, this research highlights the viability of post-custodial strategies for information professionals in these artists' information worlds, such as helping artists to gain skills or to access resources crucial for digital preservation tasks.

TOPICS

information practices; archives; museums; community engagement; social software; sociology of information