ARTNews
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Pipilotti Rist's *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, installed at the Museum of Modern Art in 2008. Its components are multichannel video projection, projector enclosures, circular seating elements, and carpet.

When Your Art Has a Hard Drive

The fast-paced evolution of **new media** has created challenging problems of permanence and stability for collectors, conservators, and artists. What to look for, and what to look out for

BY ANN LANDI

NAM JUNE PAIK PROBABLY COULD NOT HAVE PREdicted that the cathode-ray tubes essential to his video sculptures would one day become obsolete, any more than Leonardo da Vinci could have anticipated that applying tempera to dry plaster would cause *The Last Supper* to fall apart almost as soon as the paint was dry. But with the fast-paced evolution of new media, ever trickier problems of permanence and stability have been confronting collectors, conservators, and even artists. Chromogenic color prints, like many made in the early 1990s, have faded; huge photos face-mounted to Plexiglas have developed gas bubbles; and videos made on magnetic tape have lost their sharpness. Furthermore, once exhibition equipment breaks down, replacement parts may be available only on eBay, if at all.

"Artists get enthusiastic about the creative potential of new technology," says Magdalena Sawon, director of Postmasters Gallery in New York. "They use it in the work, and then one thing gets replaced by the next, and it takes a lot of creative thinking to figure out how to solve problems down the road."

Sawon cites the case of photographer Anthony Goicolea. Early in his career, he mounted his large-scale works on durable foam boards, but they eventually chipped. Then he turned to aluminum backing, laminating the images to protect them. "After six or seven years, everybody realized that the lamination was shrinking, so the edges started to look

Ann Landi is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

FRED CHARLES/COURTESY THE ARTIST, LUHRING AUGUSTINE, NEW YORK, AND HAUSER & WIRTH, ZURICH, LONDON

strange," Sawon says. "So then we produced a kind of sandwich covered with a thin nonglare Plexiglas."

"We're in a period of major transition, going from analog photography to digital imaging," observes Paul Messier, a Boston-based specialist in photograph conservation. "That presents collectors with a lot of exciting opportunities to collect, preserve, and understand this historic shift."

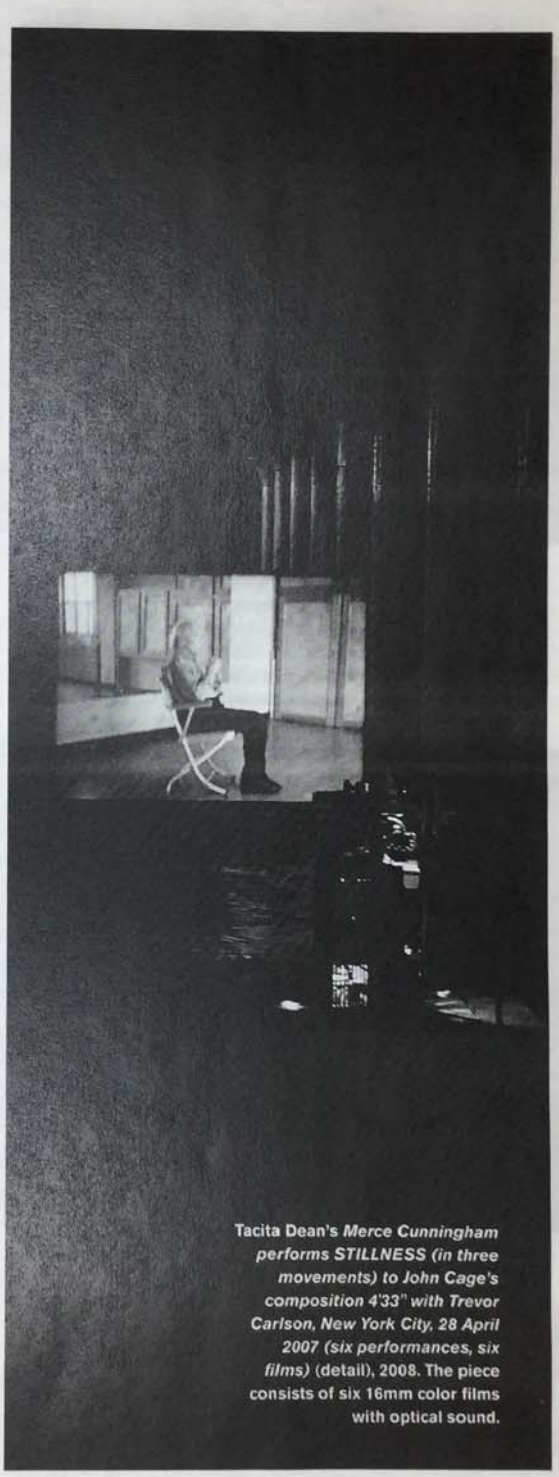
In many ways, color photography has become more stable in recent years. The bright saturation that appears in large-scale works by artists like Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth should hold up in future decades, says Robert Mann, director of the Robert Mann Gallery in New York. "Color was fugitive back in the 1960s through the early '80s. There are pictures that were made by well-known photographers that have gone through enormous shifts. We kind of expected it. But pictures done in the last 10 or 20 years, cared for properly," he adds, "should last a long time."

Collectors need to follow common-sense precautions. With a photograph face-mounted to Plexiglas, for example, "the surface of the artwork actually becomes the soft acrylic of the Plexi," says Peter Mustardo, director of The Better Image, a conservation studio based in New York City and Milford, New Jersey. Mustardo advises people not to put their big new photographs in places where they might get jabbed by sharp objects or to use Windex or other harsh chemicals to clean the works. "We use distilled water on a leather chamois cloth," he says. Even if scratches do happen—and the surfaces of these works are generally about a quarter-inch thick—they can sometimes be buffed out by a conservator.

Controlling exposure to light is key to the longevity of photographs. "You need to put in ultraviolet filtering to control the lighting from the source," says Mann, "and even natural lighting should be controlled." Keeping works in a good storage facility—a cool, dry place, protected from light—is also important, counsels Nora Kennedy, Sherman Fairchild Conservator of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "When I talk to private collectors," she adds, "I try to recommend that they have rotating exhibitions, so that works aren't on view for long periods of time. Damage from light can build up, so that if you leave a photograph up for ten years, you may see changes. And it's always good to show work in rooms where there are no large windows."

"As private collectors, we choose to live with the work and enjoy it and not treat it under absolutely pristine conditions," says Miami-based collector Dennis Scholl, who owns more than 300 photos and about 60 video works. "We rotate our collection all the time, but there's no reason to get really compulsive about protecting the work. There's always going to be some degradation, and that will be the problem of the museum I give it to someday. We're just interim stewards." Lending to exhibitions, he adds, can be wearing on newer kinds of media. "But if you're going to be a collector of young work, you have an obligation to the artist to make sure it gets seen."

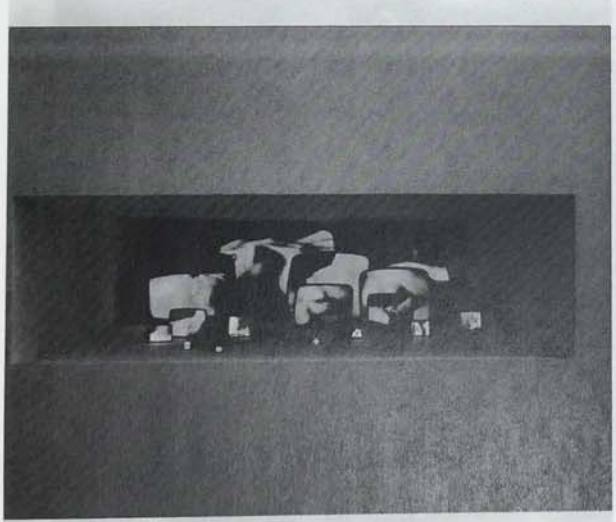
A DIFFERENT SET of issues comes into play with what have come to be known as time-based media—video art of all kinds. Video "needs constant management in storage, unlike a painting or sculpture," says Glenn Wharton, media conservator at the Museum of Modern Art. "And that



COURTESY MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK AND FRITH STREET GALLERY, LONDON

Tacita Dean's *Merce Cunningham performs STILLNESS (in three movements) to John Cage's composition 4'33" with Trevor Carlson, New York City, 28 April 2007 (six performances, six films)* (detail), 2008. The piece consists of six 16mm color films with optical sound.

Anthony Goicolea, *Burnt*, 2008, C-print mounted on aluminum and Plexi-laminated, 72" x 90". Early attempts to laminate large photos led to problems.



Gary Hill, *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place*, 1990, video and sound installation, installed at the Museum of Modern Art. Its components are 16 modified black-and-white video monitors, speakers, DVD players, and DVDs.

management consists of migrating the moving images from one format to another. Which means, with video, we might need either to transfer it to new stock, like magnetic tape, or we might digitize it, in which case we end up with an electronic file. That kind of active management needs to be done with a private collection as well."

Another concern is exhibition equipment—the projectors, screens, and playback technology. "That too can become damaged or obsolescent or difficult to repair, and components may need to be replaced," adds Wharton. A museum can fortify itself by buying additional equipment for exhibiting the art. "We sold a work by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy to the Met," recalls Sawon. "It was a video in a CD format, the technology before DVDs. There was a player built into the piece, and it was a visual part of how the work looked. The museum bought a number of those players, in addition to the one that was in the piece, at our suggestion, so that if one player breaks down, there is the next one and the next one."

As computer technology continues to evolve, Sawon notes, "You solve things any which way you can." In some cases, it may be wise to plan for the kind of problems that confront collectors of early video pieces like those of Nam June Paik. The Seattle-based artist Gary Hill cites the example of his work *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place* (1990), in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. "It consists of 16 cathode-ray tubes of various sizes, which have been removed from their chassis," he says, "and due to the nature of the work, the bulbous 'naked' quality of the tubes makes it crucial that the piece be displayed with them. That is, they're not just hardware but rather sculptural elements of the piece, including the long tentacle-like cabling connected to them.

"I would imagine the components will be made for another ten years or so," he adds, "and at that point, you either let it go or you do whatever you can to stabilize it. That's simply the nature of decay."

ARTISTS ARE SOMETIMES adamant that their art be shown in the original media, no matter how beguiling the changes in technology or how threatening the prospect of obsolescence. Pamela Kramlich of San Francisco, who, with her husband, Richard, owns one of the largest collections of time-based media in the world, cites the case of a work by Tacita Dean recently on view in the exhibition "Haunted" at the Guggenheim Museum. Dean "insists on her work being shown in the film in which it was created," says Kramlich, "and we have to promise that we will always do that. Certain artists have very strict rules. In other cases, artists aren't particular at all."

"I don't want to go into a digital format, because it's a totally different medium and the look would change," says Dean. "Film and analog photography have been around for much longer than DVDs. They look quite doomed at the moment, but I have great faith that won't be the case." Dean believes that when images made on film are transferred to a digital format, they "lose an enormous part of their quality."

Other artists embrace the new. "When I first started in the early 1990s, the projectors I used were extremely dim and very pixelated and had almost like a Benday dot effect," says Tony Oursler. As time goes by, and he migrates the original

TOP: COURTESY POSTMASTERS GALLERY, NEW YORK; BOTTOM: ALLISON ROSSITER ©2010 GARY HILL/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/COURTESY GLADSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK

pieces to newer technology, the work gets brighter and clearer. "I never intended my work to be shown in totally darkened rooms, but because the early projections were relatively dim, people sometimes ended up showing them in complete darkness. For me, it's been very fortunate because these can now be seen in a brighter light with the newer technology," Oursler says.

COMPUTER-BASED work raises similar problems. "If you made something in the late '70s or early '80s, and you're showing it in 2010, there are easier ways to show it than the cumbersome ways we sought out early on," says artist Lynn Hershman Leeson, much of whose practice is devoted to online art. "I made the decision to migrate the works to more efficient forms of showing them, upgrading to a newer computer or streamlining the software so it does the same thing but in a more efficient way."

One advantage of computer-based work is that it can be conserved in code instead of kept in storage. Steven Sacks, director of Bitforms Gallery in New York, says, "In the worst-case scenario, let's say a hundred years from now, when there's no way that the software will work, there will be people who will be able to decipher the code in which it was written and then emulate the experience."

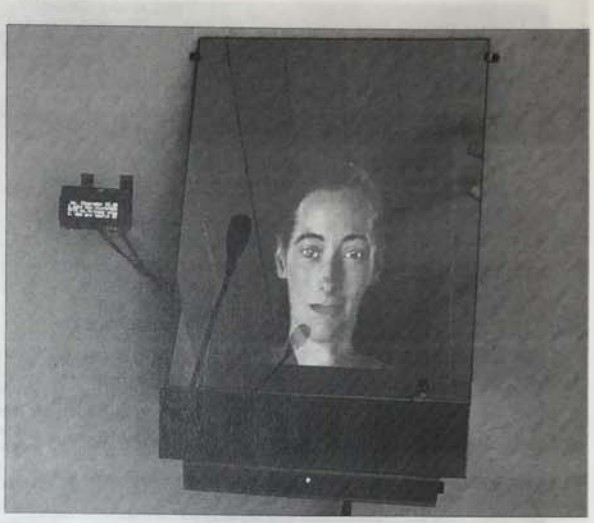
When buying work in a new and unfamiliar medium, dealers and conservators say, it's best to consult the artist and/or the dealer to understand the technology involved. Both the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan in New York have developed standardized questionnaires that must be filled out when a work is acquired. Conservation issues are discussed in detail early in the game. "I'll sit down with the artists and talk to them about the technology they've used to create their work, the technical history," says Wharton, "so that I know exactly what we're getting, what kind of equipment we need to show the piece."

Some artists are vigilant about giving collectors similar information to keep a piece in top form. Oursler, for example, offers a fact sheet detailing all of a work's parts, how the work might change, and what it may cost to replace the components. "I try to make everything as easy as possible," he says. "My work is not just something you can hang on a wall. You have to put in a little bit more energy, and pay more attention. But when it comes from my studio, I want repairs or upgrades to happen as quickly and painlessly as possible."

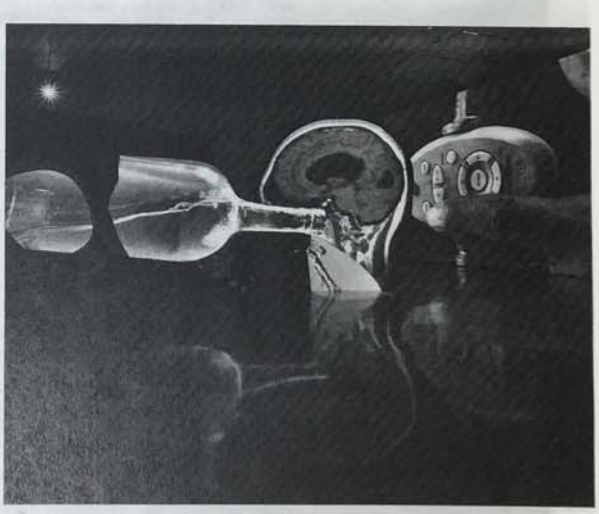
The collector can also consult with a conservator, but most say that when problems arise, the person to talk to is the maker. More and more artists are adopting the attitude of Oursler, who hires assistants to take care of any problems connected with his art.

If all of this sounds like an enormous headache, consider collecting on the cutting edge to be an adventure. "You need to be informed, and the only way to stay informed is to talk to other people," says Rudolf Frieling, curator of new media at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. "You can't just store the art, put it on a shelf, and forget it for the next ten years. And then say, 'Oh, we haven't shown this for so long, let's look at it now.'

"There is much more of a sense of continuity, of commitment," he adds, "and the beauty is that this is also a positive quality. It keeps you engaged." ■



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *DiNA*, 2004–05, networked artificially intelligent agent with Pulse 3D Veepers, Alicebot, and Natural Voices software.



Installation view of Tony Oursler's *LOCK 2,4,6*, 2009, at the Kunsthaus Bregenz. Components are computer graphics, paint, wood, video projection, and sound.

TOP: COURTESY BITFORMS GALLERY, NEW YORK; BOTTOM: MARKUS PRETTER/COURTESY THE ARTIST, KUNSTHAUS BREGENZ, AND LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY, NEW YORK

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Ambassador For the Art Of Performance

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

ON a sunny spring afternoon Colin Gee briskly but methodically worked his way through the Whitney Museum of American Art, taking notes and photographs. It's doubtful that other visitors noticed his compact, focused presence. But several guards did, smiling or nodding. They knew Mr. Gee from "Objective Suspense," the brief impromptu performances he gave during the museum's recent Alexander Calder exhibition, creating magical aerial acts using the play of his hands and delicate wire sculptures.

What the guards probably did not know is that Mr. Gee (pronounced ghee), who is 37, is now himself part of the museum's collection, at least temporarily. His Calder performances were halted early, with the Whitney tightening its budget like everyone else. But in January the museum's adjunct curator for performing arts, Limor Tomer, selected him as the inaugural Whitney Live artist in residence, demonstrating a new institutional commitment to performance at a time when the art world has once again become enamored of live art and ephemera.

"The recognition that performance lies within a lot of artists' work in current and earlier generations is something more and more institutions are not only accepting but seeing as an opportunity," said Adam Weinberg, the Whitney's director. "They're in effect mining the collection — Colin, and Limor as a curator — and not in an illustrative fashion but to try to extend it and to open more portals for people to rethink what the collection is."

Mr. Gee, who unveils a new solo show on Wednesday at the Chocolate Factory in Long Island City, Queens, is an intriguing choice. He has no particular ties to the art world, and his work, which employs minute, nuanced movement, text and film to create intimate psychological portraits, hovers between physical theater and dance.

"He's not placing himself in the context of what else is going on," said Brian Rogers, the Chocolate Factory's artistic director. "When dance artists grab onto theatrical ideas, they tend to do it in very glib, self-consciously ironic and skill-less ways, and vice versa, in terms of how people incorporate dance into their theater work. I can't really think of anybody else in the frame of the dance world who is doing things that have a real strong theatrical confidence about them, and an earned confidence."

Mr. Gee's confidence is certainly earned. His eclectic background includes an education at the École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris; time as a director and actor with the Flying Machine, a physical theater troupe; and a stint as a Cirque du Soleil principal clown from 2001 to 2004, which required 10 performances a week in front of audiences as large as 2,500. (The Chocolate Factory seats just 50.)

Quietly humorous and prone to dense, thoughtful responses peppered with philosophical takes on matters like mythology, circus dramaturgy and clowning as the art of failure, Mr. Gee hardly comes off as clownlike in person. Both his conversation and his art require close attention. At the 2006 Dublin Fringe Festival he earned a best male performer award for "Dakota," which spliced hermetic choreographic phrases and spoken text with footage from a spare, hypnotic film portrait of a broken family man in which movement functions as a key narrative device.

"There's a certain kind of listening I'm interested in," Mr. Gee said. In intimate spaces, he added, "there's so much more subtlety and articulation and control."

"Across the Road," his imminent Chocolate Factory show, uses a structure similar to that of "Dakota" and charts the interior conflicts and desires of two people in a fraught relationship over the course of one day. Depicting both characters, Mr. Gee channels and distills immense, often oppressive forces through taut, subtle shifts of limbs, eyes and torso.

His psychological explorations are further focused in a series he is developing during his 18-month Whitney residency. Titled "Portrait and Landscape," it is both a film and a performance project, shot in various architecturally distinct locations and displayed, for now, via YouTube on a Whitney-supported blog (colingee.wordpress.com/) that Mr. Gee describes as his studio page.

The residency itself is a work in progress and a reflection of the tenuous relationship between museums and performance. There are plans for live shows and for collaborations with institutions like the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, where Mr. Gee is working with the filmmaker Nara Garber as a visiting artist in residence.

Mr. Gee, who spent three weeks at the Chocolate Factory developing "Across the Road," receives neither rehearsal space nor financial support from the Whitney, though he has unlimited access to the collection. At an "Objective Suspense" rehearsal in October the museum staff fluttered about him, worrying over the unpredictability of live events. "Colin can protect himself," one employee remarked. "The art can't." (During the 2008

Media and Performance Art, Dep't of

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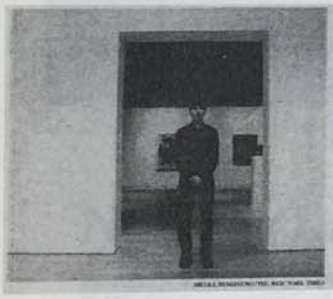
biennial a dance piece called "Animal Scores" was canceled after two performers bumped into an installation, though no damage was caused.)

The choreographer Ryan Kelly, who runs the Moving Theater company with Brennan Gerard and performed "Impermanent Collection" at the Whitney in 2007, said that because museums hadn't typically collected it, "performance hasn't really arrived at a certain seriousness, by comparison to the plastic arts." He praised Whitney Live for doing a lot on a shoestring budget. "There's a long tradition of performance in museums," he said, "but no history of museums collecting performance."

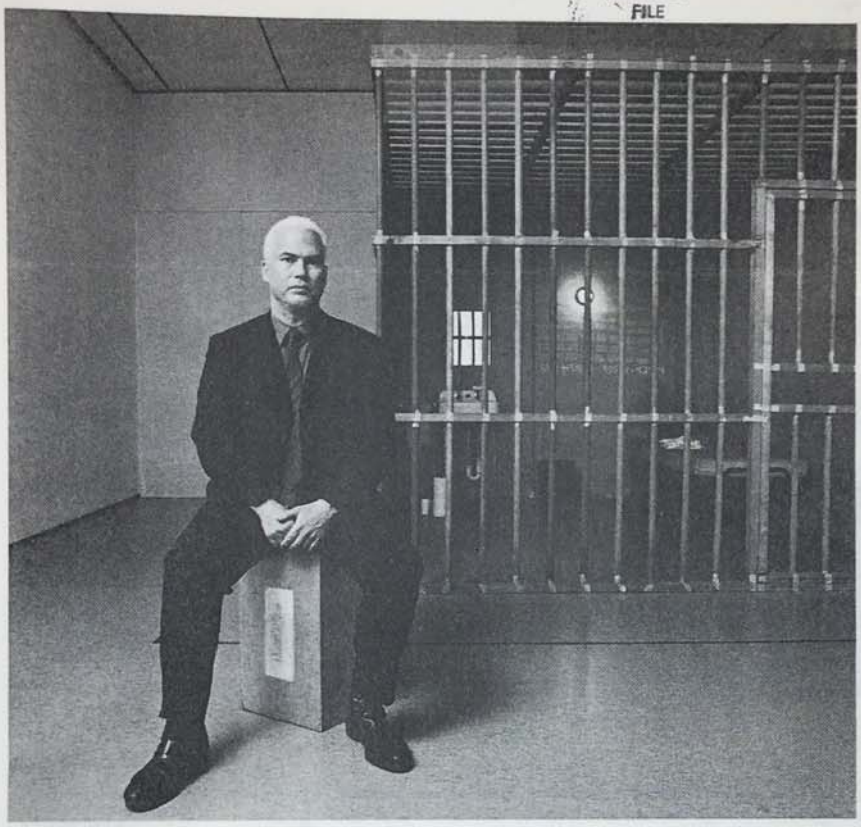
This too is changing, with the Museum of Modern Art, for one, now acquiring performance art. And Mr. Gee, like Mr. Weinberg, describes his presence as an expansion: though he is an American artist, he recognizes that the Whitney represents something of a foreign land.

"The work that I generate is in some ways derived from the residency and the museum," he said on that spring afternoon, surrounded by canonical paintings by Rothko and Pollock, "but it is also adding new work to the collection. That seems very much an immigrant experience."

The latest item in the Whitney's collection might object to being hung on the wall.



Colin Gee is the first Whitney Live artist in residence at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Last year museum visitors got a taste of his talents when, near left, he offered roving performances as part of an Alexander Calder exhibition.



Nothing Lasts Forever

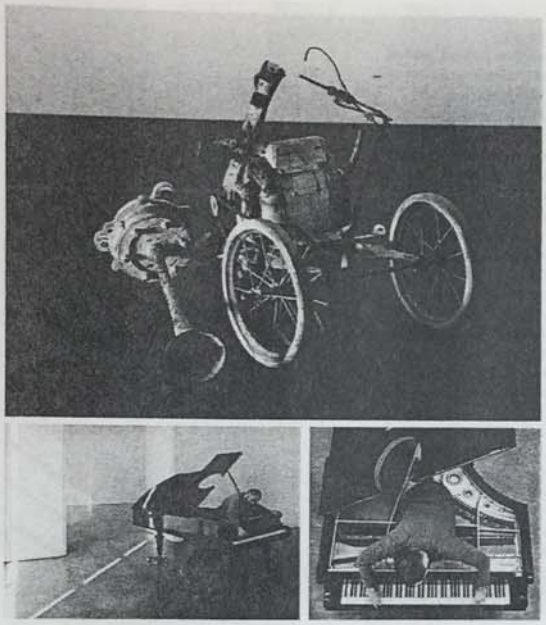
The basic premise of performance art is that it comes and goes with the artist. But a new program at MoMA aims to preserve these beautiful moments in time | *By Kate Taylor* | *Photography by Ben Pier* |

In the fall of 2002, just when she had moved to New York City from Berlin, Jenny Schlenzka went to see an unusual exhibition at the Sean Kelly Gallery in Chelsea. The performance artist Marina Abramovic was living in the gallery for 12 days, not eating or talking, but going about other mundane activities—dressing, undressing, bathing, drinking—on a platform in view of a steady stream of visitors. Schlenzka, who was in her early 20s at the time and hadn't studied art history, had only a vague sense of Abramovic's importance in the world of performance art. But she found the work, which was called "The House with the Ocean View," "mind-blowing," Schlenzka recalls.

Seven years and a meteoric ascent through the ranks of the art world later, Schlenzka is now half of a curatorial team—along with her boss and mentor, Klaus Biesenbach—that is leading the Museum of Modern Art into the uncharted territory of collecting and preserving performance art. Last year, Biesenbach and Schlenzka began organizing a series of invitation-only workshops where curators from major museums and prominent figures from the world of performance art could meet and discuss how, as the leading generation of performance artists ages, museums should attempt to preserve its legacy. In January, MoMA debuted *Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh*. The two-room exhibit houses the Taiwanese-American's 1978–79 work "Cage Piece," for which the artist locked himself in a cage constructed in his Hudson Street loft in New York City for one year.

For those who are not familiar with performance art, and even for those who are, the concept of a museum or individual "collecting" such work may seem strange. After all, the definition of a performance is that it is live and ephemeral. In the past, museums and private collectors have generally aquired either documentation of performance art (photographs and videos) or props used in performances (called "relics"). For continued...

HARD TIME *From left:* MoMA curator Klaus Biesenbach with Tehching Hsieh's "Cage Piece"; rare photos of Tino Sehgal's "Kiss," as performed at the Berlin Biennial, 2006.



ON DISPLAY *Clockwise from top left:* "Homage to New York," 1960, by Jean Tinguely; Jenny Schlenzka with part of Hsieh's "Cage Piece"; "Stop, Repair, Prepare," by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla.

...continued example, MoMA owns a video of Joseph Beuys' famous 1974 "action" (Beuys favored that term over "performance"), titled "I Like America and America Likes Me," in which he spent three days in a room with a wild coyote. MoMA also has relics of a bizarre, self-destructing machine called "Homage to New York," that the Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely created for a one-time performance in the Sculpture Garden on March 18, 1960. (In the performance, the machine did various things—a balloon was inflated and burst, bottles were broken, and a recording of the artist's voice played—while emitting colored smoke. The performance was finally halted by the fire department.)

What's new today is that curators like Biesenbach and Schlenzka are increasingly interested in acquiring actual performances, so that a museum becomes responsible for "preserving" the performance and in certain cases, reproducing it in the future.

"The concept that you can actually own a performance and allow people to restage it, that's kind of the next frontier," says Nancy Spector, the chief curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, who is curating a retrospective of the performance artist Tino Sehgal that will take place at the Guggenheim in early 2010.

MoMA recently acquired a Sehgal piece, titled "Kiss," in which two dancers move through a prescribed choreography that references images from historical paintings of couples embracing. Sehgal's work intentionally raises the question of how a performance can be acquired and preserved. Although his works are sold by a major New York gallery, Marian Goodman, what is transferred in each sale is something completely intangible. Sehgal does not allow his work to be photographed or videotaped, nor does he create a written set of instructions. So when MoMA acquired "Kiss," all that occurred was that about ten people—Biesenbach and Schlenzka, Marian Goodman, Sehgal, a notary public and some other representatives of the gallery and the museum—met in a room and talked. Sehgal gave the museum curators oral instructions about how the piece should be performed, and the notary stamped a document stating that the museum owned the work. (Or, to be completely accurate, the museum now owns one version of "Kiss." To make things even more confusing, Sehgal releases his work in editions of three.)

Biesenbach, jetlagged from a recent trip to the United Arab Emirates to attend the Sharjah Biennial, describes another performance work that he hopes to acquire in the near future. A work by the San Juan–based artist team Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, titled "Stop, Repair, Prepare," consists of an early 20th-century Bechstein grand piano that has been "prepared" by cutting a hole in its center, so that instead of sitting at the keyboard, the pianist stands in the hole and reaches over to play the keys from the wrong side. In the performance itself, which was shown earlier this year at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, six different pianists in turn play the Fourth Movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony ("Ode to Joy"), while standing in the hole and pushing the piano, which is on wheels, continued on page 119...

...The City Art continued from page 52

around the gallery in a free-form pattern.

Biesenbach describes "Stop, Repair, Prepare" as "a metaphor for artistic freedom." In acquiring the work, he says that the museum will acquire the actual piano—a fascinating object in itself, Biesenbach notes, reminiscent of Gordon Matta-Clark's site-specific sculptures, in which the artist would remove sections of an abandoned building's floor, ceiling or walls—as well as the right to re-create the performance in the future.

Biesenbach and Schlenzka, who are 10 years apart in age, have in common not only their German background but also their prodigious rises in the art world. Biesenbach founded the Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in an abandoned margarine factory in East Berlin when he was 24 and had dropped out of medical school. In 1996, he founded the Berlin Biennale and became a curator at P.S.1. He joined MoMA in 2004.

The next big project for the wunderkind pair is a retrospective of Abramovic's performances, which will open at MoMA in March 2010. It will include both a new performance by Abramovic herself and reenactments of her past works by other artists, whom Abramovic is currently selecting through a complex audition process. While some artists might not be comfortable with other performers reenacting their pieces, Abramovic is actively interested in this process of borrowing and adapting. In a show at the Guggenheim in 2005, "Seven Easy Pieces," she herself reenacted seminal early performances by artists such as Beuys, Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman.

Nancy Spector, the Guggenheim curator, says it's natural that, as scholars increasingly recognize the importance of early performance artists, and as younger artists such as Matthew Barney produce work that bears their influence, curators would start worrying about how they can preserve performance works that otherwise threaten to vanish, even from memory.

Schlenzka, for example, is very aware that she's too young to know important early performance works through anything but documentation. "I was born in '78, so of course all I know about these pieces is from photographs or films," she says. Perhaps it's no coincidence that members of a younger generation, conscious of what they missed, are now leading the way toward establishing a theoretical system for preserving performance art.

Such is the case for Schlenzka, who says her career path was set in motion by Abramovic's "A House with an Ocean View" back in 2002, when she found the action both confusing and riveting. "I was completely new in the city, far away from home in this new language, and it really fascinated me," she recalls.

That, of course, is the kind of fleeting connection between an artwork and a spectator that is impossible to bottle up and preserve. Still, curators can always try.

ARTS&LETTERS

MUSEUMS

MoMA Adds a Department for 'Media'

MEDIA MASTER Douglas Gordon's 'Play Dead; Real Time' (2003), a video installation. The work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art this summer as part of a Gordon retrospective curated by Klaus Biesenbach.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/ROBERT MCKEEVER

By KATE TAYLOR

New media. Digital art. Interactive installation. No matter what ungainly term you choose, the field of artists whose work falls outside the traditional realms of photography, film, and video is growing. In recognition of that fact, the Museum of Modern Art announced yesterday the creation of a new Department of Media, to be run by a curator from the department formerly known as Film and Media, Klaus Biesenbach. Mr. Biesenbach recently curated the mid-career retrospective at MoMA of the video — er, media — artist, Douglas Gordon.

Asked to define the kind of work that will fall under his department, Mr. Biesenbach described it as "time-based" work that is meant to be viewed in a gallery. "In contrast to [film], you're not sitting and watching from the beginning to the end in a dark room with other people," Mr. Biesenbach said. "It's basically always gallery-based. It can be moving pictures. It can be beautiful sound installations, like the Janet Cardiff piece we had here at MoMA. It can be performance pieces. They're all time-based, and they're all moving in some broad sense."

Nomenclature in emerging fields is often tricky. In choosing the term "media" over, say "new media" — a title that would instantly become dated — MoMA seems to be standing on firm ground.

The creation of a new department signals that the field of interactive media art has reached a kind of critical mass.

As Mr. Biesenbach pointed out, another problems with the term "new media" is that the field actually dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when technology like film equipment first became widely accessible to artists. (Several of the works in MoMA's collection date from this period.) A seminal event in the development of the genre was a 1966 exhibition at the 69th Regiment Armory called "9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering," which was organized by, among others, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and a group of engineers from Bell Labs. The event led to the formation of a group called Experiments in Art and Technology.

In the 1990s, with the spread of digital media, the field grew. "In the '90s, in the contemporary art production, when you look at the Venice Biennale and other international shows, a large portion of the works are media-based," Mr. Biesenbach said.

Museums and schools around the country are still struggling with how to define these fields and adding or renaming departments to keep up with changing artistic practice. At Pratt Institute, for instance, "Media Arts" refers to the traditional genres of photography, film, and animation, while another track, called "Digital Arts," more closely aligns with MoMA's new department.

And, until just last spring, that department was called "Computer Graphics & Interactive Media." "Part of the reason we changed the title is because it's more encompassing of what we do," the chair of the department, Peter Patchen, said. "We do not only 3-D animation and rendering and modeling, but also the development of physical interfaces and interactive installations. It uses very cutting-edge technology as a means of artistic expression." The new name, Mr. Patchen said, "reflects our interest in pursuing [this work] to a greater extent."

Meanwhile, at MoMA, the creation of a new department signals that the field of interactive media art has reached a kind of critical mass. "Throughout the last decade, it became [clear it was] not only one season, not only two seasons — it became a significant contribution to contemporary art," Mr. Biesenbach said. "There were time-based pieces and moving-images pieces in the galleries, in the big biennales, in the big collection. We are just giving attention to preserving them, conserving them, giving them a chance to be seen in the museum."

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Looking Back One Too Many Times

By FRED KIRSHNIT

Formed in Colorado and now resident at the University of Texas at Dallas, the Clavier Trio offered an interesting and challenging program to a completely sold out house at the Weill Recital Hall on Sunday afternoon.

Like the ensemble itself, Aaron Copland's Vitebsk is an American opus with a decidedly Eastern European flair. Opening the concert with this short aural vignette, violinist Arkady Fomin honored his own father who was born in the village of Vitebsk (in present day Belarus). Copland's vision of the diaspora is the aggressive juxtaposition of a Central Asian motif written in quartertones — that is, with the interval between notes half again as small as the shortest Western construction — and a lyrical Jewish melody with its own Oriental tinge. The piece is a bit repetitive for my taste, but the trio certainly attacked those exotic phrases furiously.

The concert as a whole had the subtitle "Mozart on my Mind" and featured a reading of the C Major Piano Trio, KV 548. This was a rather elegant traversal, measured and distinguished, if a little stiff in spots. Settling in to some less violent music, the trio showed some of its unfortunate technical shortcomings, most especially a disproportionate level of accuracy. It was clear that pianist David Korevaar was the superior player, at least in terms of intonation and limpidity. This was a good performance, but there was just enough equivocation to cause a bit of concern.

The net result of the pairing of the comfortable and the irritating is extremely ear-catching, and not a little disturbing.

Wolfgang himself started the Mozart nostalgia craze when he had the stage band in "Don Giovanni" entertain the diners with popular airs from "The Marriage of Figaro." Since then, virtually every major composer has referred to some Mozart piece during the course of his career. Not surprisingly for a trio whose leader comes from Latvia, the Clavier included a work by his Estonian neighbor Arvo Pärt. Mr. Fomin has a personal connection to this essay, as it was written in memory of his friend and classmate, violinist Oleg Kagan.

"Mozart-Adagio" has a musical connection to Vitebsk, as well. Mr. Pärt begins the trio with dissonant minor seconds, the closest interval to those Asian quartertones. After painting a landscape of the most discordant kind, the composer introduces in the piano the lovely Adagio from Mozart's F Major Sonata, K.280. The net result of the pairing of the comfortable and the irritating is extremely ear-catching, and not a little disturbing. Mr. Pärt uses this as a jumping-off point for a melancholy and nostalgic view of the anguished 20th century's harkening back to the optimism of the Enlightenment. Like Gustav Mahler's inclusion of the post horn — the brass instrument that was used to announce the arrival of stagecoaches — in his Symphony No. 3, Mr. Pärt captures just the right feel of longing for a time that can never be again. Both the piece and this rendition of it were quite affecting.

Had the recital ended there, this would have been a very satisfying afternoon. But the ensemble, like Lot's wife, looked back once too often and paid a rather steep price. The inclusion of a huge work of Romanticism like the C Major trio of Brahms was simply a bad decision, the proper execution of such a titan beyond their means. As a group, their tone is quite thin while Brahms demands that most zaftig of sounds. Further, the Clavier suffers from what I like to call "Beaux Arts syndrome." As in the resident trio at the Metropolitan Museum, two of the three members of this Texas band are much younger than the third and, quite naturally, defer to his expertise and experience. The problem for both groups, however, is that the violinist and the cellist of the Beaux Arts and the pianist and the cellist of the Clavier are cowed to the point of unproductive self-effacement.

I felt significant sympathy for Clavier cellist Jesus Castro-Balbi. After toiling away in relative obscurity for the first three pieces on the program, he blew his one big solo in the Andante con moto of the Brahms, emphasizing one either very flat or simply wrong note of the otherwise lovely melody. I was reminded of the story of Brahms who, as the soloist in one of the first ever performances of the Schumann Piano Concerto, purposely made the same mistake that the oboist, who introduced one of the lovely themes, had just committed so as not to embarrass the man. But this day, violinist Fomin did not extend a similar courtesy in his immediate reprise.

Weill is too opulent of a room to ever install a gaudy electric sign warning patrons to turn off their cell phones, but they must do something to prevent the constant assault that we all had to endure this day. I am not opposed to equipping the ushers with sidearms, but of course if they discharge their weapons, they must always employ silencers.

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Masterpieces of the universe

How is virtual art valued, bought and sold? Natasha Degen explains the new collectability of internet-based works

This month Cao Fei, one of China's most lauded young artists, will open a city in the online virtual world Second Life. Its 10 leased buildings may be constructed from zeros and ones rather than concrete and steel but their prices are very real: they range from $80,000 to $200,000.

A fast-paced, pulsating vision, "RMB City", condenses contemporary urban China into an amalgam of symbols and icons, from shiny new skyscrapers to the much-loved panda.

"The project comments on the current hyperactive pace of Chinese real estate development and urbanism, so it is fitting that the spaces of the city follow the market system conceptually," Cao says.

Buildings are being leased to collectors and institutions with the expectation that buyers will programme events and activities in them. "As 'RMB City' is a huge art project in Second Life, it takes much funding," she continues. "We had to find a way to realise it, so we decided to sell to collectors and institutions."

After opening a sales office at the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair last year, Cao – whose Second Life avatar is called China Tracy – transformed New York gallery Lombard-Freid Projects into a real-estate showroom. According to gallery partner Lea Freid, all the photographs exhibited were sold and all the promotional videos (in editions of 10) have been placed in major collections, among them New York's Museum of Modern Art, Minneapolis's Walker Art Center and the Louis Vuitton collection. The project is now on display at the Serpentine Gallery in London.

"RMB City" is an example of the new collectability of internet-based art. Whereas web artists once worked outside, and even in opposition to, the art establishment, artists today make their internet-based pieces into objects that can be sold in galleries and displayed in museums and homes. Cao, for example, has sold photographic and video documentation of "RMB City", as well as opportunities to participate in the project.

"'RMB City' is a new model for communication between collectors and artists in the virtual world," says Guo Xiaoyan, chief curator of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. The Ullens Foundation has bought access to a building in the virtual city, and will host events in the structure for the duration of the project, until 2010. City-wide, Freid says, activities will run the "gamut of arts and cultural disciplines, from poetry readings to lectures to visual art displays", rendering the city a 24-hour culture centre.

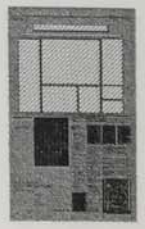
Cao Fei isn't alone; more than 1,000 galleries exist in Second Life and many artists are using the online community to create art. Eva and Franco Mattes make portraits (at $10,000 a piece) of the avatars, or digital surrogates, that people create to participate in Second Life. They've also re-enacted, again in Second Life, a series of historical performance art pieces, including Vito Acconci's "Seedbed" and Marina Abramovic and Ulay's "Imponderabilia". Another duo, eteam – artists Franziska Lamprecht and Hajoe Moderegger – have maintained a public rubbish skip in Second Life for the last year, documenting the project with still images and text.

This new kind of web-based art reflects the phenomenon commonly known as Web 2.0. The term refers to the increasing interactivity of internet-based technologies, epitomised by websites such as Google and Wikipedia, in which users drive content. Web 2.0-style projects contrast with the subversive, hacker-like interventions that characterised the net art of the 1990s. These early artworks took the internet, then a new and uncharted technology, as their primary subject; the results ranged from parodies of famous websites to web-based flash animation to conceptual art embedded in a site's source code.

The ascendency of the internet not only inspired artists but precipitated the dotcom boom, with its heady energy and soaring stock prices. Arts institutions flocked to internet art to "tap into the money of surrounding dotcom businesses," says Julian Stallabrass, a reader at the Courtauld Institute of Art and author of the 2003 book ***Internet Art: The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce*** (Tate Publishing). Museums founded new media departments, and exhibitions of net art were mounted.

However, "around the time of the dotcom bust [in 2001], everyone pulled up their socks and readdressed the medium," says Barbara London, associate curator in the department of media at MoMA. "We've taken our eyes off it but we can always return to it," she says. MoMA continues to show internet art: last year's ***Automatic Update***, for example, reassessed the art of the dot-com era, revisiting first-generation web art now that the new media frenzy has fizzled. Still, no internet-based work can be found in the museum's permanent collection.

Initially, as Stallabrass points out, "no one knew the value of these things or how to conserve them", but today's internet art is nonetheless following an established model. Much like video or performance art, virtual pieces are now being transformed into limit-



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ed-edition objects that can be collected and displayed, even though the works are often readily available online.

"Part of the way we're marketing internet art is by taking it offline," says Bryce Wolkowitz, director of Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery in New York. "It becomes an art object by putting it on a data storage system like an external hard drive." At Wolkowitz's gallery, such works range in price from $10,000 to $20,000.

Vuk Cosic, a prominent first-generation web artist, explains: "What a collector buys from me is not really the piece of net art itself but a relationship with me. They get a contract with my signature, a copy of the piece and the right to list it in their annual reports and media."

This saleable product suggests the importance of the object in collecting, even when the artwork is virtual.

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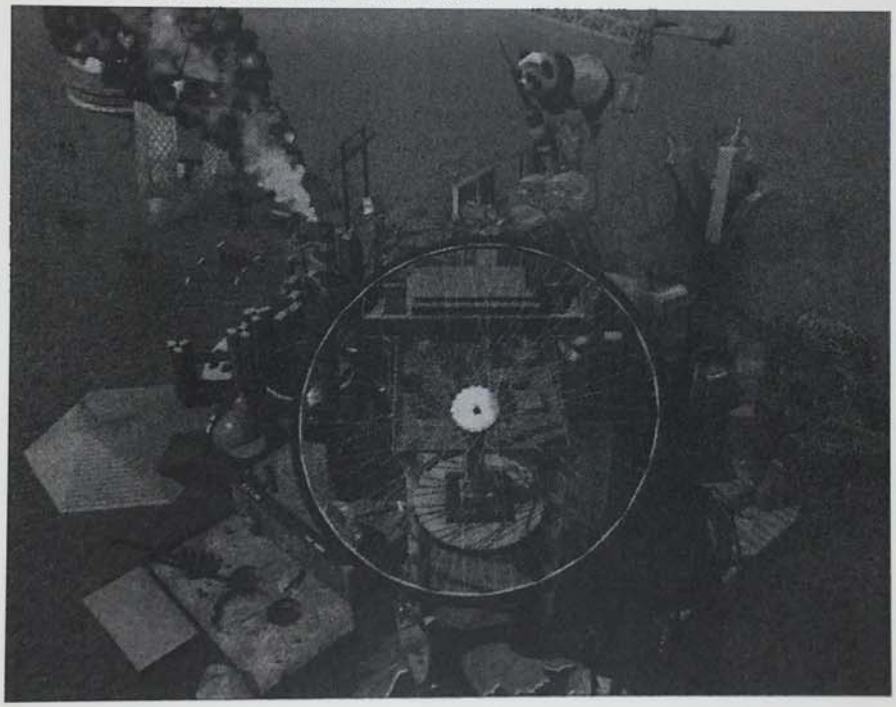

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Amalgam 'RMB City' (top) and 'Mirror' by China Tracy, aka Cao Fei Cao Fei

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National News

Media Is MoMA's Message

NEW YORK—As increasing numbers of artists embrace emerging technologies as their medium, the Museum of Modern Art has responded by creating a curatorial department devoted exclusively to such media art. Formerly part of the film and media department, the new division—called Media—will be concerned with works that are intended for a gallery setting and feature time-based presentations, moving-image or sound installations, interactive digital components, or other high-tech elements.

Klaus Biesenbach, the department's newly appointed head curator, says that as these mediums have been investigated more deeply by artists like Douglas Gordon and Janet Cardiff, the new division just "naturally evolved." He notes that on a recent trip to the São Paulo Bienal, he found that roughly half of the works on view fell into the category of media art.

Curator Klaus Biesenbach.

Throughout the museum's history, departmental changes have reflected innovations in the art world. In 1935 Alfred Barr Jr. created the museum's film department, which was reborn as Film and Video almost six decades later. By 2001, as the digital revolution was rendering VHS obsolete, the department became Film and Media. Now, Media has become the seventh curatorial department, joining Painting and Sculpture, Architecture and Design, Drawings, Photography, Prints and Illustrated Books, and Film.

In addition to leading Media, the German-born Biesenbach, 40, is also head curator at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens, a MoMA affiliate. Before arriving at the Museum of Modern Art, he founded the Kunst Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin in 1990, and he has also curated several international exhibitions, including the Berlin Biennial in 1998. Biesenbach was hired as a curator at P.S.1 in 1996 and became a curator at MoMA in 2004. He is now joined in Media by Barbara London, an associate curator with whom he worked in Film and Media, as well as by a curatorial assistant. He says that they will begin making acquisitions this winter.

Biesenbach's first exhibition for Media will be "Doug Aitken: sleepwalkers," a series of synchronized film loops projected on the museum's exterior. The show—which features performances by Donald Sutherland and Tilda Swinton, among others—will run from the 16th of next month through February 12.

Because the exact terrain of Media remains to be plotted, Biesenbach acknowledges that some territorial confusion could arise. For instance, he says, a Matthew Barney work might conceivably be claimed by either the photography, film, or media department. This issue is most pressing in terms of conservation, says Biesenbach. "How do we preserve the work most efficiently, with several artists falling under different departments?" he asks. "We are working on all these questions."

—Michael Calderone