

Documenting Practice - Creating art using digital tools

16 February 2015, Chelsea, E305, 3-5pm

Attendees: Thanasis Velios, Stephen Scrivener, Malcolm Quinn, Michael Asbury, Chris Followes, Claire Mokrauer-Madden

Questions that arose:

- Knowing the process, how does that change how we interpret the output?
 - Material data is useful
 - Shift in art historical analysis from art made pre-1960 to art made after that
 - Art has to relate to its past
- If you rely on the object you can get an analysis, but can you contextualise it?
 - Ask the artist for stories about how they got to the point of making the work
- When someone recounts the past, what are they recording? Their sentiments?
- What does an artist retain for themselves? Why do artists record one thing but not another?
- How do you understand creative logic?
 - Malcolm recommends Fred Orton- Figuring Jasper Johns
- If the artist can't be contacted, how do you find out about the work?
 - Ask the gallery
 - Art historians can interpret
- What is at stake in a practice? How do you position a practice within a movement? Can we still track movement?
- Why find the 'funnel'?
 - It simplifies, gives power
 - People want to define their era
 - Artists can act as witnesses of historic events
- How do you document making?
 - Digitisation creates more documentation
- How have digital tools changed practice?
 - Artists use a small portion of what programmes are capable of
 - People only learn what they need for a particular task
 - It is not easy to bring all the types of documentation together from different programmes
- How concentrated is process?
 - A lot of what artists produce (drafts) is never looked at again
 - It is now possible to create so many versions (in creative and text-based work)
- Would artists object to being tracked in an open access situation? How do artists feel about auto-tracking? What privacy issues are there?
 - This could affect how the artist is viewed
 - Gerhard Richter manages how he is presented
 - Itracker
 - Artists use their personal archives differently, but don't all artists use MAC OS10?
- What do we need to capture?
 - We can't assume that data reflects practice
 - Automation can be part of documenting, but it won't tell the whole story
- Why did you use/choose that material?
 - It's a brick, but look how I used it

- o Thinking about use partially reflects process
 - o Don't assume artists are logical or methodical
 - o But are art historians methodological? Their intents are different from artists'
- Look at the value of making artwork- how engaged is the artist with their tools? Is it just a means to an end?
 - o Some believe technology will change the world, some don't
 - o Cybernetic Serendipity was not really about art, but it attracted people interested in process
 - o In Kafka's Hunger Artist, his process is starvation
- What is post-digital art?
 - o Most artists use computer, so now that's normal (traffic was surprising when cars were new)
 - o Programming shouldn't be an elitist thing
- How will future art historians look at what is happening today? Will they rely on what's being written about it? Will they approach it from a conservator's perspective?
 - o There's a willingness to look at an data at all, but it depends on the art historian's questions
 - o Data for a single output may not be as interesting as data on an entire body of work
- If we track life drawing we might learn about what people look at, but how do artists self-archive? What choices do they make?
 - o Suggest archiving as a challenge to artists- approach it as a case study
 - o The data could reflect anything, but what would the artist's reaction be?
 - o Art historians say there is no truth, instead you use materials to reconstruct
 - o Duchamp is surrounded by mysteries and lies
 - o If artists document their work, they reveal information about themselves
 - o People don't believe that the sketchbook is a mirror of the artist's thoughts anymore
 - o 30 years of worrying about the immediate requires looking back and contextualising or editing
 - o Museums try to preserve material that was designed to die
 - o PhD students are disabled by MA courses- teaches them to turn to theory rather than their own self- archive
 - o The data we see is selected to make a point

Possible case study:

- Make case studies of different types of practice- use a sample to look at criteria and data, asking everyone to reflect on a certain point
 - o Have each one solve a problem and see if there are patterns in the data? Look for common ground
 - o What would the scope of this be (level of artist, career aspirations, student relationship to tools, separate from curriculum, etc.)?
 - o You could interpret this as an attempt to find a metric system in practice- there are ethical issues with automating evaluation
 - o Could this work for 1st year PhD students? This ought to be an issue for them. Call it pedagogy?