

SFMOMA: Artist Initiative Responds to *Predictive Engineering*

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Participants

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Julia Scher, Artist

00:00:03:22 ROBIN CLARK: Thank you, Jill. You've set us up very nice. Welcome everyone, and thank you Julia and Rudolf, for such a wonderful talk last night, which really got to the heart of some of the questions, and also was one of the most entertaining hours and a half I've spent in a long time. I wanted to start for a few minutes with Rudolf and Martina talking about some of the work that we have done on *Predictive Engineering* to date. And then we've invited some wonderful colleagues to respond to the piece. Followed by that, there'll be a conversation that we hope you'll all jump into. Do we have [inaudible]? I'm sorry. So Jill mentioned the Artist Initiative. It's a collections research grant at SFMOMA that brings together artists, conservators, curators and other museum colleagues, to pilot more fully integrated approaches to the stewardship of our collection. And stewardship includes care of the physical works, when there are physical works; care for the intention and the concept of the works; sharing the works broadly with our public.

00:01:20:14 So I just wanted to share this graphic to let you know that the Artist Initiative actually comprises five research projects over a five-year period. They map to the different collecting departments of the museum. There are two programs in painting and sculpture, one with Vija Celmins and one with Ellsworth Kelly. And an important component of the Kelly project is on view now, in four beautiful galleries devoted to his work upstairs. We are doing a project with our architecture and design department, about Bay Area product design, and wrestling with some of the questions about how do you present software-driven works and interactive works in an art museum context? There's a project on preserving color photography, and we're working with the photographers to think about how they reimagine their work with new technology. And then certainly not least, is our project with Julia Scher, which has been an extraordinary adventure.

00:02:18:17 CLARK (Cont.): I just want to say that in the several years of working with Julia, we've had a number of extraordinary residencies, during which she has shared a lot of her thinking about the work. And indeed, the conversations and meetings with many folks on our staff and Julia over the years have, I think, been fed into the piece and provided rich context for the piece. And in the coming days, we'll continue to talk about what the work is now and how it can be preserved for the future.

00:02:50:20 So its proliferation grows in the store. When Julia's with us, she's often making drawings and sharing them with us, not unlike the work that Ananya's doing right now. And I think this doodle that Julia gave to me has to do with the fact that there is so much accumulation of experience and knowledge and questions and materials, and we're trying to find ways to save these things and understand how they form a constellation that is the work.

00:03:24:18 And as Jill said, we are a large team, and the team has probably doubled in size since this photo was taken a while back. There are two curators, two conservators, a wonderful consulting programmer, exhibition technician, and sound engineer par excellence, our web and digital mastermind, and a lot of

supporting help from our colleagues, and Julia out in the front, embraced by us. So I think I'll stop there. I had a lot to say about *Predictive Engineering*, but so many others will be responding, so I think Martina, and then Rudolf will continue.

00:04:12:20 MARTINA HAIDVOGL: So welcome, everyone. I just want to give a brief overview, just to refresh people on what the work is and why it is so challenging, and what we were doing when Julia was here, and what came out of this residency. So the work is iterative. And it is very much connected to the buildings that SFMOMA was in. And we first were on Van Ness Avenue, at the War Memorial Building, where the first iteration of *Predictive Engineering* sort of happened, as part of a group exhibition. And as Julia was talking about yesterday, it happened outside the exhibition, in two parallel hallways. And it was fake footage, as part of a closed-circuit surveillance work.

00:05:09:10 HAIDVOGL (Cont.): And then we moved to the new building in 1995, and here, it was a monographic show, *Predictive Engineering 2*. And the work then sort of incorporated the first iteration and the mother became the grandmother. So how can we as conservators or as a museum, how can we deal with a work that almost reinvents itself? And technology gets updated and how can we deal with this change? How can we follow this algorithm? And with a work that is so very much connected to the artist herself. So we were looking— First of all, I think, our first approach was to really gather all the data. And we were looking at the software components of the second iteration and— You know, maybe I should mention that SFMOMA has actually not acquired the first version in 1993. We acquired the work in 1998. And I feel like only through this residency, we learned that we sort of— Like, all of it is *Predictive Engineering*, not just this one version. Well, anyway, so we were looking at the software, we were looking at the components that the second iteration was comprised of. Julia has a whole tape archive, so that's maybe also something I should mention. Each time the work is on view, it also records people. So not only do you see foot[age]— You see live footage, you see fake footage, and it also records the live footage that then gets recycled into the next iteration. And so part of that was also, too, for conservation, how we're dealing with this raw footage that is more or less a part that the work is built on, but it is not necessarily maybe the primary layer of the work.

00:07:22:22 So while we were working with Julia, we were updating our own records. Well, we were creating them and we were updating them. And this afternoon, we're going to talk more about a platform that we created. It's the MediaWiki platform that we're trying to see if it works for our use and actually, like, sort of even going further and saying if the work is— Does the work exist anymore after it is being deinstalled? Because it is so site-specific and so iteration-specific. And can the record then be actually— you know, can it stand for the work while the work is not on view. And if that is so, how should this record look like, and what should it evoke, if it stands for the work in the meantime? So these are very big thoughts here. And then I think I'll leave it to Rudolf to talk about the third iteration, which was now in the new Snøhetta building, which you can all see on the seventh floor.

00:08:34:09 HAIDVOGL (Cont.): But before I hand it to Rudolf, I actually wanted to incorporate Julia's voice in that because— So while we worked compiling this record and— We actually found something on YouTube, a video that— I don't know if you created that, Julia, but you are most definitely a part of it. And it turned out to be actually one of our most valuable records. And so I'm just going to share that with you. And Julia can explain much better what the work is about than I can. [clip plays; static noise]

00:09:22:23 JULIA SCHER [in clip]: Being able to find a resource and a geography within a location that talks to its symbolic and remunerative qualities. So in this first piece here, *Predictive Engineering*, it talks about the place of the museum, the museum as site and locator of architecture and the body. Artwork has always

been a passageway piece, going to another location within the architecture of the museum. So in the same way, in 1993, 1998, and now 2016, the piece continues to function as a hallway piece. So it's a corridor. The lighting here, for example, it's just archetypal museum spotlight, but it's the color of amber. And these first screens here are the old *Predictive Engineering* from '93 and '98. The light was used to think about the idea of images stuck in amber, and objects stuck in amber.

00:10:30:12 The period of time, then, is suggested by the coloring of the light. So these are old images. So each iteration of the piece *Predictive Engineering* includes the forebears, the grandma, the great-grandma of the new piece, which is *Predictive Engineering 3*. So it's like the baby sharing the DNA of the museum, not just the artist's input, blabbing away. So here, you have an old script from 1993, from Scala, which is a program that controls text over live images. The reason for this was, there were two separate hallways with two side-by-side monitor screens. One screen had the words of like a computer talking. The other was like a live guard. So the text was actually quite different. But now here in this iteration, you see the text of the computer voice and the human voice combined. As in the other iterations of *PE*, you can set off sensors and work yourself into the piece by being recorded and by making audio interventions into the microphone. So this voice is my voice. It can also be your voice.

00:11:52:19 JULIA SCHER [in clip] (Cont.): Looking at the screens, you wouldn't know what was real or what was fake. The idea being, from the nineties, that no one could tell if surveillance was real or fake. Or in fact, what was surveillance. Now that everyone knows, it's kind of a moot point. But the piece is an old one, so I maintain the mix, real and fake. Hollywood or not Hollywood. Suppressive fascistic control, or pure fun which is out of control? Here in this space, the mirror reflects and doubles your own image, mixed in with the camera feeds, so that you're recorded back into the piece and become part of the mixture for future iterations.

00:12:36:20 I love the building. And I wrote up a whole thing about what the museum means to me over the years, and what it meant as an organizing principle of life, not just culture, and what means to the future. And I think the architecture is addressing many of those points. And also the fact that the vision for the museum is a multi-use, multi-generational use. And it's also about making art, not just preserving it and holding it, so that rich benefactors can give their seed money, and young artists can bring their seeds of imagination and cultivate their own projects here.

00:13:18:17 Maybe in the future, no one will have a studio. And then maybe the museum is that locator, that place that is saved for people, for all people. They still target art as something to destroy when there's a war, so there's something so valuable in having this wonderful new museum. This museum has made great efforts to discover new ways of thinking, constructing filter[s], getting rid of them, building new ones that accommodate the world as it is today. Problematic of the filter is a longstanding one, biological, political, landscape, religion. But the museum's open, finding new ways and new kind of iterations of what new spaces might be and what those spaces need. Life. What does the world need? It needs more life. Needs more art. [static noise; applause]

00:14:31:09 RUDOLF FRIELING: Okay, my turn now. Always a tough act to follow Julia. She said a few really important things in this. And I'm struck by the fact that history is now embedded in YouTube in this way. This becomes part of our archival record. And very bad resolution, I would say. But the point being, you— You know, as a curator of media arts, I'm very familiar with the problem that we do not have a given work of art that we just unpack and install; but that we actually always have to rethink the way that we exhibit and present a work that is based on a changing set of FRIELING (Cont.): technological devices. So in other words, we do not just exhibit a work; to a certain degree, we always produce a work. And this idea of the museum as producer has

been— I've tried to champion that idea for a number of years now, and I think it's a very important one. Not just in the straightforward sense that we actually commission works, but also that we produce new iterations of past works.

00:16:02:00 What the work is, or what a work is, in this case, is very much a question. And as my dear colleague Steve Dye just mentioned earlier today, in 2011, I made an insane proposal to show *Predictive Engineering*. Why would I make an insane proposal? Well, first of all, that's my job, pushing us to insane proposals. Secondly, I had no idea it was insane. I had no idea what it would take to actually unravel this set of archival records into a new proposal. And specifically, the degree to which we actually had to reprogram the work, I couldn't imagine. I don't think any one of us had imagined, at the point when then I made the second proposal to maybe include this particular project into the Artist Initiative, that it would take that much work.

00:17:06:23 Also, none of us really had an understanding of the openness of the work, the openness of *Predictive Engineering* as not just a set of instructions, not just a set of archival records, but actually, almost as an attitude, as an approach, as a spirit, as something that pushed us into a certain direction, A) without really known what kind of spaces we would get here. That was a very physical, material problem for us. But also, in which directions this work could develop. It was clear that each iteration would provide an opportunity to actually do something new. Well, first of all, to do something old; that is, to repurpose and re-propose component of historic iterations. But also then to add to that. To push it maybe into a new direction and to expand the understanding of *Predictive Engineering*. Which in the end, led us to two major contributions, which we briefly discussed yesterday. One was a text messaging service, and the one were drone shots.

00:18:30:09 But then the experience of the actual film production onsite, with Julia being the director over a few days, directing a number of colleagues, directing stunt actors and actresses and other volunteers, made me realize to what degree the diversion that we're seeing now is really shaped and influenced by her personality and her spirit. And that is possibly one of the biggest FRIELING (Cont.): challenges for me as a curator in the future, to even think about a future presentation. And then a final realization for me, literally standing the space, installing the work, and Julia was not there. She was here a lot. You were here for like two weeks for the production, and we made a lot of decisions; but it was a work in progress, and not everything was ready at the time that she was here. So we were constantly making decisions as she was absent. And it made me realize that I had a crucial role in asking questions.

00:19:53:00 Well, what should be sensors actually do? And Julia would very often say very interesting things; but in the end of the day, we had to make very concrete and specific decisions about the space, about the spacing, about the kind of aesthetic that sensors might have, et cetera. So minutia and details, but important. So I came out of this process with a sense of gratitude, because it was actually a very gratifying experience to really see this happen and open the building with this particular work. I think it's still a very good and appropriate decision, to show this work at the opening of our new building. And at the same time, I still don't know. I still don't know what the work is. And I think that's why this colloquium is so important for all of us, that we get feedback, and that we possibly come up with a way of now reviewing three iterations and— Certainly, there is an expectation from our end that we come up with an archival record that is not just material, that is not just cables and sensors and maybe a code, an algorithm, but that is in some way, also a trace of an experience. What that means, you know, is to be discussed.

00:21:38:09 So to conclude, I would say we still don't know what the work is. But I would also suggest that maybe there is not a work, but a practice and an experience. And that maybe in that spirit, one could only think about *Predictive Engineering* to the power of four. I've said my part. [applause]

00:22:20:13 [END]