Collecting archives of objects and stories
On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum
Wielocha, A.B.

Publication date
2021

Document Version
Other version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 4

Barbara Kruger’s Wall-Wraps: The distributed artwork in the light of the artist interview

KRUGER: I’m very pleased that people come to museums, and I’m convinced that a lot of people, if not most people, who go to museums don’t know why they’re there, except this strange need to affiliate with what they think is high-class “culcha.” I don’t go to museums very much, but every time I go I remember the kind of staging ground for power that they can be. I would be only too happy to – I’d love to – be in there to make other assertions and to plant some doubts and ask some questions. (W. Mitchell & Kruger, 1991, p. 444)

MITCHELL: There was one other question I wanted to ask you, and that’s about interviews. The old idea about artists was that they weren’t supposed to give interviews. The work was supposed to speak for itself. How do you feel about interviews?

KRUGER: I think that the work does speak for itself to some degree – absolutely. But I also feel that we’re living in a time when an artist does not have to be interpreted by others. Artists can “have” words. So it’s not like I think I’m going to blow my cover if I open my mouth. (W. Mitchell & Kruger, 1991, p. 448)

4.1 Introduction: Musealisation, quality of representation and the importance of research

When trying to understand why today’s art museums are challenged by contemporary art and speculating on potential solutions to face this challenge, it is important to address the foundation of the museum as a concept. One of the persistent lines of critique towards the museum from the time of its inception in the late 18th century has been disagreement about whether artworks (or artefacts in general) should be isolated from their contexts in order to make them accessible to the public. For contemporary
art, where context plays a major role and has been indicated as one of its key features (see: Chapter 1), this critique seems to be even more relevant, resulting in a conflict seemingly impossible to resolve. How, then, can these two mutually exclusive concepts – contemporary art and museum – be brought together?

This chapter addresses this question by turning the museum’s contested de-contextualisation into a virtue and considering it as an agent of ontological change in artworks’ nature. In so doing, the chapter proposes to reconceptualise the musealised artwork as a set of documents that represent it. Following this standpoint and building on the model of documentation proposed in Chapter 1 (see: p. 74), it addresses the accuracy of representation and suggests accumulation as a possible way to secure its quality. By examining an artwork that has no stable physical representation, and that when not on view exists only as a set of digital files, this chapter focuses on the characteristics of new technologies for managing documents in the museum setting, as well as their consequences. The research into these theoretical concepts brings into focus complex interpersonal relationships that govern institutional contemporary-art collecting, especially those that transgress the polarity between artists and museums. It scrutinises their impact on the implementation of novel methods for the institutional care of contemporary artworks, and advances a model that may allow the identified problems to be overcome. The study culminates in a critical analysis of the artist interview and a preliminary reflection on its potential functions within the proposed model.

In his philosophical history of museums, literary scholar Didier Maleuvre (1999) surveys the criticisms levelled against museums and their decontextualising function, starting with the very first such institution – the Louvre. His list begins with the writings of art theorist Quatremère de Quincy, who already in 1806 publicly criticised how the Louvre was being instrumentalised in order to pluck artworks out of their original context, instead of serving as an instrument for the preservation of art. The critique presented by Quatremère was followed later on by many 20th-century thinkers – from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey or Adorno (Maleuvre, 1999). The latter expressed his disagreement in the opening of his well-known essay Valéry Proust Museum, which with time became a symbol of museum criticism:
The German word, ‘museal’ ['museum-like'], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture. (Adorno, 1967, p. 175)

The idea that art separated from its original environment is like a dead body also shows up in postmodern debates about the museum model. Supporting artistic practices that reflect upon and question the museum as the means to secure art’s critical hold over its institutions, art critic Douglas Crimp has stated that “it is upon this wrestling of art from its necessity in reality that idealist aesthetics and the ideal museum are founded, and it is against the power of their legacy that we must still struggle for a materialist aesthetics and a materialist art” (Crimp, 1987, p. 265). To summarise, although the rift between the artwork and the context of its creation has faced criticism since the very founding of the museum as such, in spite of alternative propositions and approaches de-contextualisation has always been at the very centre of the museum model.

But what if instead of criticising this condition, it were viewed as an asset? The isolation of the artwork from its context as a given condition is embraced by the concept of ‘musealisation’. The term is a neologism gradually accepted and used since 1970 among members of the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) introduced by the ‘father of scientific museology’, Czech scholar Zbyněk Stránský. Musealisation is defined in ICOM’s glossary as an “operation of trying to extract, physically or conceptually, something from its natural or cultural environment and giving it a museal status, transforming it into a musealium or ‘museum object’, that is to say, bringing it into the museal field” (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010). The same text describes musealisation as a scientific process, which includes the essential museum activities: preservation, research and communication. According to museologist Bruno

262 I am referring here for instance to the concepts of ‘ecomuseum’ and ‘community museum’ that emerged as a consequence of so-called ‘new museology’ – critical discourses around the traditional concept of museum as a cultural authority, and its social and political roles. New museology positions museums as political agents, contrasting with a traditional collection-centred vision of museums as repositories for objects (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010).
Brulon Soares, with the terms musealium, museality and musealisation Stránský shifted the focus of museology from the museum as an instrument for a specific end, to the processes of attributing value to things (Soares, 2016). In more general terms, musealisation has been defined by Stránský as an expression of the universal human tendency to preserve, against all natural change and degradation, the elements of objective reality which represent cultural values (Soares, 2016). What distinguishes musealisation from other forms of preservation is precisely this decisive moment of transition from reality to the level of the cultural, museological realm, or ‘the acquisition of the museum quality’ (Soares, 2016). Accordingly, musealisation acknowledges and accepts de-contextualisation and points towards the inevitable change in artefacts’ nature that accompanies their transformation into ‘musealia’. This was aptly captured by another museologist, Kenneth Hudson, in the famous dictum: “a tiger in a museum is a tiger in a museum and not a tiger” (Hudson, 1977).

In the context of the argument presented in this dissertation, the change embedded in the concept of musealisation may be seen as akin to the ontological shift from ‘a thing’ to its ‘representation’, which forms the foundation of Briet’s theoretical approach to documents as presented in the Chapter 1 (see: p. 73). Briet’s expanded notion of document embraces any indexical sign that is preserved or recorded in order to represent, reconstitute or prove a phenomenon (Briet, 2006). Thus, the change in a contemporary artwork’s nature upon entering the museum might be seen as its transformation into a set of documents that represent the artwork, namely what in Chapter 1 was referred to as the ‘artwork-related documentation’ (p. 70). This shift is evident for conceptual art or performance art, i.e. art that has no fixed, material embodiment. The assumption that the art-object in contemporary art is also a document makes it possible to extend this approach to other ‘types’ of contemporary art.

If we are to acknowledge that upon entering the museum artworks inevitably transform into a self-representation through documents, we must ask ourselves about the quality of this representation: is it accurate and faithful? There is a stimulating idea linked to these concepts, introduced by art historian and curator Richard Rinehart (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014), that makes it possible not only to address this question but, additionally, to expand the theoretical model of artwork-related documentation as established in Chapter 1. For the sake of theorising institutional approaches to preservation of
media art, Rinehart drew a parallel between the so-called process of ‘quantization’, as used in digital signal processing, and documentation, viewed both as a concept and a practice. In Rinehart’s comparison ‘quantization’ is a computer method for creating a digital representation of an analogue source. It entails sampling the initial source and assembling these samples in order to represent the source. Rinehart uses as an example the effort to portray continual gradations of the evening sky in digital imaging, where tiny snippets of the sky are ordered in such a manner that the human eye recognises them as a continuous gradient. Since each sample can have only one value, in the case of the sky each sample (pixel) would be equal to one shade of blue. No matter how small the samples are there will always be something lost in the transition. To mitigate this loss the sampling should be performed at least at twice the rate of the intended output. How does this apply to documentation? Rinehart argues that nowadays the stories that document artworks are not stored as linear narratives but instead as records in databases. These isolated records correspond to the samples in the example of the digital representation of the evening sky – they do not represent the whole of the artwork, as there is always something lost in the process of musealisation. For Rinehart this constitutes an argument in favour of accumulating as many stories as possible since, by overlapping or/and competing, they help mitigate the loss of certain shades and nuances (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014).

In the day-to-day museum reality, artwork-related documentation functions as a set of records in one or more databases. Thus, an action is required in order to make particular documents interact with each other – an indispensable condition for Briet’s vision of dynamic documentation and the continuous production of knowledge that keeps an artwork alive. Databases simplify work processes and help to administer large qualities of information. However, as art and media historian Harald Kraemer aptly noted when referring to computerised forms of working with data, if they are simply accumulated they provide no information about the relevance or quality of the information: “Digital data makes no distinction between Duchamp, Duchamp’s urinoir, the photographer of Duchamp’s urinoir, Duchamp’s own words about his urinoir, and the art historian gibberish about Duchamp’s urinoir” (Kraemer, 2007). Computers, at least at present, are not able to substitute human analysis and interpretation, especially when it comes to art, which is created by and for humans. Therefore researchers – be they scholars, curators, conservators, registrars, artists or users – must use documentation in an active way
(Kraemer, 2007). Thus, to complete the model of artwork-related documentation, it is necessary to rely on the time and effort of a human being. Accordingly, what animates the interaction of basic units of the documentation and minimises the losses caused by musealisation is ongoing research, which this book promotes as a key tool for the conservation of contemporary art.

Following the focal points identified in Chapter 2, this chapter further investigates how the artwork-related documents are produced and distributed in the framework of an art museum, and how this production and distribution is conditioned by the internal dynamics and structures of an institution. At its core stand all the concepts presented above – the transformation of the artwork during its musealisation, the accumulation of stories in artwork-related documentation as a way to secure the quality of the artwork’s representation, and the need to foster interaction between the documents by means of research. It scrutinises multifarious ways of carrying out musealisation and ponders over how these different approaches can affect the artwork’s possible futures. Finally, the consolidated and expanded model of artwork-related documentation is compared with the concept of the artist interview. The latter is studied both as a practice and as a document that enters and modifies the body of documentation by interacting with its other elements.
The study presented in this chapter is practice-based and follows the process of gathering, analysing and evaluating documentation of an artwork from a museum collection as part of the artist interview understood as a methodological approach (see: Chapter 1, p. 61). It was carried out during a five-month research fellowship at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (hereinafter referred to as SMA), which granted me the status of collection researcher, with all the privileges of a museum employee, including unrestricted access to the museum’s resources. From the outset, I was assigned a specific task related to the 2010 spatial installation *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* by Barbara Kruger, acquired by SMA in 2012. The challenges that this non-object-based piece’s institutional keepers encountered when faced with the work’s continuation were related mainly to its transient nature. My mission was to gather and analyse existing documentation on the installation in order to interview the artist about the future of the piece, and finally to recommend the institution long-term preservation measures.

4.2 The Stedelijk Wall-Wrap

4.2.1 The Institutional History

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA), the setting of my fieldwork and the host of the artwork studied, is the largest museum in the Netherlands dedicated to modern and contemporary art and design. The story of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* by Barbara Kruger started during the directorship of renowned American curator Ann Goldstein, the first woman and non-Dutch person to hold this position. In 2010, the SMA, located on Amsterdam’s Museumplein, had been closed to

---

263 As the conservation problems of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* fall outside the scope of this dissertation, a detailed report on the proposed conservation strategy for the piece has been excluded from the main body of text. It was submitted to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and stored in the ‘Objectdossier’ on Kruger’s work in ‘360°’, a document management system used by the museum. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). *Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger’s Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*, ‘360°’ SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.

264 A partial description of the fieldwork conducted for this case study was published in Wielocha, A. (2018). The Artist Interview as a Platform for Negotiating an Artwork’s Possible Futures. *Art and Documentation*, (17), 31–45.
museumgoers for six years due to delays in the construction works on its new building. There was extreme pressure, both from the public as well as financing bodies, for the museum management to take action in order to improve the image and visibility of the institution, and solving this problem became one of the main tasks of the newly appointed director.\textsuperscript{265} Although the new building was still not finished, the renovation of the old one had already come to an end. Goldstein chose to explore this opportunity and use the latter as a provisional venue. The Temporary Stedelijk: Taking Place was planned as a show that would welcome visitors back ‘home’ to the SMA.\textsuperscript{266} Since the exhibition was designed to take advantage of the temporary nature of the situation, artists were invited to make site-specific works for the gallery spaces, and this ‘site-specificity’ became a trademark of the project. Most of the works presented had


a conceptual character, which, aside from the fact that conceptual art was one of the new director’s main areas of expertise, also had a more practical motivation. As the museum’s infrastructure was still unfinished and the galleries did not meet exhibition standards, the presentation of vulnerable objects would not have been possible due to conservation requirements.267

One of the artists invited to the show was Barbara Kruger, who has a long shared professional history with Goldstein.268 The space designated for Kruger was the Erezaal (Hall of Honour), the main gallery of the SMA’s old building, for which Kruger designed the temporary immersive installation *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*, an example of her ‘wall-wraps’. This term is borrowed from advertising, where it describes large-scale prints covering walls and/or floors in public spaces like airports or shopping centres. All walls and the floor of the Erezaal were covered by words in Kruger’s characteristic Helvetica typeface printed in capital letters whose size was adapted to the specificity of the space by entirely filling the area, and the only colours used were black and white (Figure 48). Because of the messages’ immense size, in order to read the content of the work it was necessary to wander across it. The text is an arrangement of sentences written in English and Dutch, most of them authored by the artist, while some are quotes from other writers, such as Orwell and Barthes. As curator Yılmaz Dziewior once remarked, Kruger’s text combinations “in fact frequently make too much sense, that is, they enable multiple levels of interpretation and association, generating forms hindering the easy consumption that is existent in advertising” (Dziewior, 2014, p. 74). The basic, personal interpretation of the piece

267 “We have to go back to when Ann Goldstein arrived, the building, this building was closed for many, many years. At the moment she came, there was another delay in delivering the new building. And then she said, ‘Why should we wait for the new building, if the old building is already renovated? So let’s start working there, let’s open the [old] building, which was called Temporary Stedelijk’. And there was a project she did, where she looked […] into the works we had in the collection that don’t need […] full climate system – so all the conceptual artworks, as her background was also very much in conceptual art”. (B. Rutten, in-person interview, September 26, 2016)

can be made as an emotional and/or intellectual reading of separate messages as well as the discovery of relations between them. The key features are the directness in addressing the viewer, and the sheer scale of the text. However, a broader study of both the artist’s practice and the context of the wall-wraps’ creation allows for a different, more complex reading of the artwork that will be presented later on. From a technical point of view, the installation consists of a digital print on vinyl film stuck directly to the walls and floor of the gallery space. The basis for the print is a design created by the artist which was then produced as a set of digital vector files by the studio that has worked with Kruger on her spatial installations for many years. Due to their physical characteristics wall-wraps are transient by nature – after each show the printed vinyl is removed from the architectural surfaces and destroyed.

In 2012, two years after the first presentation of Untitled (Past, Present, Future), the construction works at the museum were nearly complete, and the preparations for the grand opening of the new building started to gain speed. The first event planned for the 1,100-square-meter gallery in the basement of the new wing was an exhibition titled Works in place, which addressed the way contemporary artists make use of architectural space in their work.269 It was announced as a presentation of the collection and Kruger’s piece was to be installed again. As Goldstein wanted to show the artwork as a recent acquisition, at that point the need to regulate its status became urgent.270 The musealisation of the artwork, which in this case consisted of its transformation from a temporary installation using the museum as a space, to part of the museum collection, started with the purchase, which was finalised in mid-August 2012 ahead of the show’s opening at the end of September. The new manifestation of the artwork was radically different from the previous one (Figure 49). This time it was arranged in the lower-level gallery around a pavilion built exclusively for the purpose of the show, and the words occupied the floor and the external walls of the space. While


270 In the letter to employees involved in the preparation of the exhibition Goldstein stated: “It is critical that the work is purchased and acquired by the time of our reopening so that it is presented as one of the collection works” (Goldstein, A. (2012, August 5). [Email to SMA employees]. SMA Archive, Amsterdam).
there were several new phrases added, the major difference was the addition of a third colour – green. During the acquisition an oral agreement was made between the artist and Goldstein that Kruger would provide three alternative installation options. This was also to include the adaptation of the original version designed for the Erezaal in 2010, incorporating the two additional doorways added after the renovation of the old building. Ann Goldstein resigned as director in December 2013, as of which time none of the aforementioned adaptations had been delivered.

In 2016 the museum staff started to work on the redesign of the permanent exhibition and the reinstalltion of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* was again taken into consideration. The new location, a space on the mezzanine containing the entrance to the auditorium, was proposed by curators and accepted by the artist, whereupon the museum got a second chance to resolve tasks related to the lacking installation options. In preparation for the installation of this third and supposedly final manifestation, the museum requested that the artist produce the modified drawings agreed upon under Goldstein, as well as installation instructions and a certificate of authenticity. As details of the agreement between the artist and the former director were never recorded on paper, it was ultimately decided that the best way to collect the missing information about the uncertain future of the piece once all agreed versions had been executed was to conduct an interview with the artist. As these circumstances coincided with the beginning of my fieldwork at the SMA, I was assigned the task of compiling the existing documentation on the artwork and preparing the interview.

The details of the oral agreement were shared by the director with selected museum employees in the aforementioned email: “Barbara will provide alternative installation options, including an adaptation of the original version for the Erezaal (which now will incorporate the two additional doorways) and for one other smaller space like one of the large interior rooms we are using for Newman, etc. - we can confirm locations when she is here early next month. These additional plans this will come asap but not immediately. Barbara will invoice us this week. [...] W) should proceed to process immediately as it is critical that the work is purchased and acquired by the time of our reopening so that it is presented as one of the collection works” (Goldstein, A. (2012, August 25). [Email to SMA employees]. SMA Archive, Amsterdam).
Preparatory research is certainly one of the main challenges of interviewing, and at the same time a firm foundation that allows the interviewer to pose appropriate questions and interpret the participant’s answers. In the museum framework this challenge is conditioned by the time and skills required to accomplish the task. Although the aforementioned Guide to Good Practice (2002) recommends close collaboration with a curator or art historian, in everyday museum practice this advice is usually difficult to follow due to the internal division of duties and notorious work overload. The responsibilities of curators in modern and contemporary art museums have shifted in recent decades from collection-focused to exhibition-focused, and so the process of artwork documentation has been passed on almost completely to registrars and conservators. At the SMA this gap was filled by a team of researchers – art historians who are regularly involved in conservation-related investigation. However, during recent rearrangements of the museum’s structure this unit has been reassigned from the section responsible for the collection to the one in charge of curatorial concerns. As a result, priorities have changed, and most of the researchers’ work has shifted its focus to exhibition making. Nevertheless, having the time, means and willingness to fully analyse the implications of the interview process, I decided to face the challenge of preparing the artist interview alone.

The first step of the investigation was to learn about the place of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) within the context of Kruger’s artistic practice. For this purpose, as well as to analyse the development of immersive installations as a medium, I created a complete list of Kruger’s wall-wraps based on a survey of the literature. The beginning of immersive,
site-specific installations in the artist’s oeuvre dates back to the late 1980s. Over the following three decades Kruger created more than 40 installations in various types of interiors, covering their walls, floors, and occasionally ceilings with words. In the first decade, the text was almost always complemented by black and white images, and in many cases it contained direct quotes from Kruger’s older, formally more traditional pieces, amplified and often cropped differently. This (self)-appropriation extends to fragments of texts, both the artist’s own writings as well as numerous quotes from other authors. During this period the predominant colours are black, white and red, which are characteristic of Kruger’s oeuvre in general. Although Kruger associates her first experiments of filling spaces with words and imagery with her interest in architecture, in various interviews the artist has stressed the fact that in contrast to architects, she never works with drawings or models. Her method is much more intuitive: “I walk into a space and pretty much know how I’m going to engage it” (Colomina & Wigley, 2014, p. 125), or similarly: “I can walk into a space and pretty much know immediately [...] how I think things will play out” (Blazwick & Kruger, 2014).


274 For the purpose of this research, all wall-wraps designed and exhibited by Kruger have been gathered in the form of a provisional catalogue, which has been deposited in ‘360°’, a document management system used by the SMA. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger’s Untitled (Past, Present, Future), ‘360°’ SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.


276 “And I [...] don’t build models, I don’t have acolytes and assistance, [...] not that it is wrong but it is not my methodology, it is not my way of working.” (Blazwick & Kruger, 2014); “I plan my installations I don’t do models. [...] It was only after I sent all my final image files to the Hirshhorn Museum that they made a model and put my work on it.” (Colomina & Wigley, 2014)
One of the aims of compiling a list of Kruger’s wall-wraps was to understand whether the artist considered these installations from the outset as autonomous artworks. In Kruger’s case, an example of such works would be formally more traditional pieces, for instance prints designed to be hung on a wall, framed in characteristic red frames. This issue was addressed by tracing the development of the room-wraps’ titles through the history of their presentations, and the study was built upon the assumption that an autonomous artwork would be assigned a title of its own. This ultimately turned out to be a rather challenging task, as not all artworks are always listed in a show’s description. Nevertheless, based on this investigation it was possible to conclude that, at least in the beginning, room installations were not titled, but rather were referred to under the general name of an exhibition. This is the case of the iconic work presented at Mary Boone Gallery in New York in 1991, which, judging by reviews from the show, at the beginning had no designated title. A title was assigned to a wall-wrap for the first time in 1994, and this fact is directly related to the musealisation of one of the installations by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. Outside of the collection context, a title appears in relation to the installation Untitled (Between being born and dying) commissioned by Stockholm’s Moderna Museet in 2008. Interestingly, the room-wrap shown the following year in the Lever House Art Collection in New York was given the same name as the one presented in Stockholm; however, this time

---

277 I would distinguish between autonomous artworks and, for example, projects carried out in public spaces such as billboard campaigns. Ultimately, what characterises this distinction is artworks’ collectability – their capacity to be collected in a traditionally understood way, namely as an object.


279 It is important to mention here that the issue of titles in Kruger’s artistic practice is rather unusual as most of the artworks, not only wall-wraps but also those called by the artist during the interview ‘plain pieces’ are called Untitled with a subtitle between the brackets, like in the case of the Stedelijk Untitled (Past, Present, Future). The case of the piece Untitled (Ohne Titel) 1994/1995 from the Ludwig Museum in Cologne will be explained in details in the following part of this chapter.

the word ‘Untitled’ had been removed. Since that time the wall-wraps have been given independent titles that differ from the names of the exhibitions in which they appear.

The study of the titles, together with other features of Kruger’s oeuvre, provided grounds for the assumption that wall-wraps, even those commissioned and/or acquired by art institutions, were at first designed as temporary interventions. To better understand their character, it is necessary to adopt a broader perspective and look at room installations as a practice which emerged in parallel to Kruger’s politically and socially engaged projects in public spaces. In the context of the artist’s common employment of mediums such as billboards, advertisement-like wall compositions, stickers on urban buses or posters in bus shelters, the wall-wraps are just another way of intervening. The project Empatia, in which Kruger covered the walls and ceilings of a Mexico City underground station with words and phrases, confirms this assumption. Besides the latter case, Kruger intervenes with wall-wraps mostly in art-related spaces and contexts – galleries, museums, exhibition venues, etc.


282 Two installations: Untitled (Suggestions), 2013 and Untitled (Reminder), 2013 was shown in Kunsthaus Bregenz during the exhibition Belief + Doubt. For 2016 in the exhibition Mashup: The Birth of Modern Culture in Vancouver Art Gallery Kruger designed piece Untitled (SmashUp), 2016, etc.

4.2.3 Unpacking the Nature of the Artwork

I attempt to investigate the complex interrelationships between power and society, but as for the visual presentation itself, I try to avoid a high degree of difficulty. I would like for people to be drawn directly into the work. (Barbara Kruger quoted in Wagner, 2006, p. 13)

The study of Kruger’s oeuvre allowed for a basic understanding of the concept and methodology behind her room installations. Yet, one of the issues left to be addressed were their context-dependent idiosyncrasies (in this case site-specificity and their relationship to a particular historical moment) and media-variability – key features of contemporary art which are crucial when considering an artwork’s possible futures. The existence of bonds between Untitled (Past, Present, Future) and the local socio-political context was insinuated by museum employees who witnessed the commission and production of the artwork. During a personal interview, Bart Rutten, the SMA’s Head of Collections, described this relationship as follows:

[… T]he work deals with the combination of quotes from Dutch newspapers, plus if I’m not mistaken, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, something like that, it was Hamlet or Richard III, I do not know, but Shakespeare. […] So the semantics are retrieved from Dutch newspapers. […] So in 2012 a lot of right-wing politics were taking place in the Netherlands, and you could also see the translation of that in the kind of quotes you could find in the newspapers. (B. Rutten, in-person interview, September 26, 2016)

A similar conviction was expressed by curator Margriet Schavemaker, who was Head of Collections during Goldstein’s directorship: “That was very much based on the headlines from that period […]” (M. Schavemaker, in-person interview, May 16, 2017).

This, however, is a misinterpretation, probably caused by the use of images from local newspapers in another two wall-wraps, one of which directly preceded the SMA’s commission. The first one was made in 2005 at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow and the second one in 2012 at Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin.
My analysis of the sentences employed in the piece relied on the advice of the artist herself, who has often emphasised that “no one needs a PhD in conceptual art to understand my work” (Kruger & Dahan, 2014, para. 4). After translating the parts of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) written in Dutch I found not local headlines but a series of familiar sentences that Kruger has repeated continuously in other works – room installations, videos, as well as formally more traditional ‘hanging’ pieces. Characteristic and powerful quotes from Barthes and Orwell (e.g. “All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype”) are combined with short phrases directed to an undefined ‘you’ (e.g. “please laugh”). The only element that recalls the geographic location of the installation is the use of Dutch. Accordingly, whereas the artwork as such is not site-specific, its iterations are site-responsive in terms of the actual relationship between the dimensions of the artwork and the particular architectural space. Nevertheless, the artwork is not bound to the Stedelijk Museum, to Amsterdam as a geographical location, or to idiosyncrasies of Dutch culture, and as such it seems that it can be adapted to any other architectural space which meets the right conditions in terms of dimensions, even outside the SMA’s walls. As I will demonstrate later on with examples, even the use of the local language, or rather the translation of phrases from previous wall-wraps, might not be a fixed sanction, but a conditional adaptation (see: p. 256).

The next issue to analyse was the media-specificity, understood as the rigid bond between the materials employed and the reading of the work. In 2010, when the artist was invited by the SMA for the first collaboration, Kruger had already been working comfortably with digital printing for almost a decade. She typically executes her wall-wraps in commercial printing labs that work with different types of printing techniques on vinyl film. It is important to mention that this was not the case in the very earliest of Kruger’s immersive room installations. Her first wall-wraps were screen-printed on

---

285 When using the term ‘site-specific’ I have in mind a combination of two notions defined by Miwon Kwon – ‘phenomenological site specificity’, which binds an artwork to the experience of the physical characteristics of a particular place, and ‘discursive site specificity’ where the anchor lies in the socio-political issues and circumstances (Kwon, 2002). The term ‘site-responsive’ could be replaced by ‘site-dependent’ or ‘site-related’ as employed by Stigter in her analysis of the conceptual artwork by Jan Dibetts All shadows that struck me in the Kröller-Müller Museum (Stigter, 2016, p. 195).
paper and/or vinyl and then stuck to the walls in pieces. In subsequent sections we will examine a case of an installation originally printed in this traditional technique and later reprinted digitally (see. p. 183).

As no physical samples of the artwork’s material presence were kept by the museum after any of the two past displays, the understanding of the significance of the materials employed required a trustworthy source of information. As previous instantiations of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* were all produced by the same printing lab, Omnimark, I opted to interview the company’s project manager, Hwie-Bing Kwee, who coordinated the process in both instances. The 2010 and 2012 instantiations were produced in a similar manner. Digital files were sent to the museum by the studio that collaborates with Kruger in the preparation of her spatial installations. The museum passed the files on to Omnimark, which executed them as a UV-cured print on 3M PVC self-adhesive film, laminated with a matte coating. According to Kwee’s account, in 2010 Kruger assisted in the installation of the piece and took an active part in changing the original design to adapt it more precisely to circumstances encountered in-situ. With the help of a technician from Omnimark, the artist altered drawings prepared by her studio to account for the empty spaces in the walls.

Wall and floor graphics in both instances were printed in panels whose size depended on the capacity of the printing machine and the available width of the PVC film rolls. In both cases, the rolls of film employed were of the same width; however, while in 2010 the wall graphics were divided into vertical panels, in 2012 they were printed on horizontal panels which were split into two parts, resulting in a horizontal joint at mid-height. As the panels were precision-cut on the digital cutting table, the joints were barely visible. However, there are many ways to make this division: it can be performed mechanically according to the width of the roll, or in a more careful, precise way by hiding the joints between the letters to make them even less perceptible. The choice of method, which affects the production budget, was consulted with the artist:

---

286 Kruger describes in detail her struggles with the shift from analogue to digital in the interview conducted by Iwona Blazwick. See: Blazwick & Kruger, 2014.


288 The drawings at first did not include the semi-circular planes at the junction of the wall and ceiling of the gallery.
I was a little bit worried about the panelling. But she loved the panelling because she said, [...] ‘I want to be recognized like a graffiti artist, don’t make it invisible, make it visible’. So with the floor, if you have the panels’ seams – she loves the way you could recognize the panels, it is her way of being a graffiti artist. (H. B. Kwee, in-person interview, February 17, 2017)

4.2.4 Summary: Perpetuating interventions

After analysing the data gathered, I came to understand that the artwork’s process of musealisation had been influenced by the special circumstances in which the piece was commissioned and later included in the collection, namely the transitional moment for the institution during the delayed construction of the new building. Furthermore, the affinity between the artist and the director played an important role; this relationship of trust allowed arrangements to be made quickly, as required by the fast pace of the art show’s preparation and planning.

Nevertheless, the current condition of the artwork presents challenges for ensuring its continuity, at least in its initial form as an immersive room installation. Although after the execution of its third instantiation, *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* could be, in theory, reinstalled following any of its past manifestations, in practice this would not be an easy task. The architecture of the first location has changed since then, and the artist would have to adapt the initial design to the new situation. The second manifestation was bound to the design of the temporary exhibition, and in order to repeat the architectural context the pavilion would have to be rebuilt. Moreover, to complicate matters, the lower gallery recently underwent a renovation.289 These two examples and the history of the frequent architectural transformations of SMA’s exhibition spaces triggered a reflection on architecture as a support or medium which

---

289 The distribution of the space in the new permanent exhibition of works from the SMA collection was designed by OMA, the architecture firm founded by Rem Koolhaas, regarded as one of the most important architectural thinkers of his generation. For more about OMA’s involvement in the reinvention of the permanent exhibition see: STEDELIJK BASE - The new collection presentation from 1880-now. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/stedelijk-base-the-new-collection-presentation. Although the solution offered by OMA it is not a permanent one, it will most likely remain in the museum for some time.
can become obsolete, similarly to hardware in the case of technology-based art.\textsuperscript{290} Certainly, both spaces can be reconstructed by creating life-size models, but as I will argue later, such an approach seems to go against the wall-wrap’s nature.

The study of Kruger’s artistic practice related to room-installations led to the conclusion that the wall-wraps were not intended to be permanent and are intrinsically ephemeral and temporary. The main goal of the wall-wraps as an artistic practice was to increase the impact of the messages used by the artist in her more traditional pieces meant to be hung on walls, which is why her installations combine elements from older works. The character of the piece evokes other forms of art occurring in public spaces, for instance graffiti art, and its transience and thus variability is directly related to the idea of the ‘intervention’ and the ‘occupation of space’. Moreover, following this line of thought, a wall-wrap recreated in the same space over and over again would give up an important part of the ‘freshness’ inherent to the idea of artistic intervention and thus a part of its conceptual integrity. Additionally, to my current knowledge, none of the wall-wraps has been reinstalled so far without changing its location.\textsuperscript{291} Based on a detailed analysis of issues related to both past executions of the piece at SMA, it is safe to conclude that the materials employed should not be considered as fixed and therefore, to a certain extent, are not significant for the reading of the artwork. Since the artist was continuously adapting her technique to the available technical possibilities, such an approach can likewise be employed in the future under certain conditions, such as keeping the colours and the finish of the surface as close as possible to the initial ones.\textsuperscript{292}

\textsuperscript{290} The SMA’s architecture has undergone various significant changes during its more than 100 years of existence. The collection, first housed at the Rijksmuseum, was moved in 1895 into a building of its own. In 1954 a new extension was opened, the so-called ‘Sandberg Wing’, named after the museum director at the time, Willem Sandberg (Leigh, 2008). More than 50 years later, in the fall of 2012, SMA finished a complete renovation of the 19th-century building and opened a new extension, preceded by the demolition of the ‘Sandberg Wing’. See: Stedelijk Museum opens September 23rd. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news-items/stedelijk-museum-opens-september-23rd.

\textsuperscript{291} As of July 2017.

\textsuperscript{292} A detailed description of the artwork’s medium, material specifications and possible preservation measures has been provided in the report prepared by the author of this text for the SMA. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger’s Untitled (Past, Present, Future), ‘360°’ SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.
At present the continuity of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* depends on the collaboration between the museum and the artist, and the planning of the third presentation of the piece afforded an opportunity to foster this inevitable dialogue. The historical information collected and the analysis of Kruger’s artistic practice that led to the interpretation of the piece might already be seen as a firm foundation for the artist interview. However, as the interview is not an end of this investigation but rather a means to develop the overall argument, I will first reflect on how the information gathered and evaluated during the preliminary research is structured and distributed within the museum. This proposed detour will allow us not only to map the topography of the artwork-related documentation, but also to ponder over its structure.

### 4.3 Institutional Gaze: The wall-wrap as a musealium

Unlike artworks that are represented by a fixed, physical object, *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* is not kept in the museum storage, but instead dispersed among various, mostly virtual locations. While the previous subchapter looked at Kruger’s piece as an artwork, the following considers it a musealium and analyses the transformation that the artwork underwent upon entering the museum collection. Following the selection of focal points of the investigation as set in Chapter 2 (see: p. 155), it addresses the structure of the artwork-related documentation together with museum organisation and practices related to collection care. For the latter, I will specifically look at how they mimic traditional classification principles and if and how that might influence the continuation of a contemporary artwork, in this case a concept-based piece without a fixed material representation.

#### 4.3.1 The Artwork as Multifarious Virtual Entities

In everyday museum life, all artworks from the collection exist as records in a cataloguing database known as the Collection Management System (CMS), which is the main source of information about the collection for internal purposes.\(^{293}\) In each institution

---

\(^{293}\) The SMA uses Adlib Museum, the most popular software among collecting institutions in the Netherlands. For more on collection management systems see: Chapter 1, p. 67.
the structure of the database is divided into different categories, which might be departments, sections or specific collections and sub-collections. In the SMA’s system *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* is assigned to an administrative section called ‘Painting and Sculpture’, and the artwork is a part of a collection called ‘Installations with Various Non-Cinematographic Materials’. Usually this categorisation, determined when the artwork enters the museum, assigns responsibility over a musealium to a given administrative unit. In the case of the SMA, the categories of the database do not match up with the museum’s structure. The CMS was implemented in the 1990s and certain categories follow old organisational charts which have changed several times since then. The information about Kruger’s work in the CMS turned out to be limited, as besides the name of the artist, title and two dates (2010 and 2012), in the column ‘notes’ it stated that the record was ‘in bewerking’ (in progress). Most of the bookmarks, including the one related to the physical characteristics, had not been filled in.

The next step in gathering information about an artwork from the SMA collection is to consult ‘360°’, an electronic document management system implemented in 2012 that acts as the ‘operational heart’ of the museum. The application of this kind of tool is quite unique within the museum field, at least in the context of institutions visited as part of this investigation. This system allows all employees to access digital documents

---

294 In Dutch: Afdeling Schilderijen en Beeldhouwkunst en Installaties mbv Diverse Niet-Cinematografische Materialen.

295 Gert Hoogeveen, Team Leader of Audio-Visual Art Handling at SMA, commented on the origin of this categorisation as follows: “It is a very old-fashioned thing, they decided on that I think late in the sixties, beginning of seventies and the structure [AW: of the CMS] has never been changed because it is very complicated to do that, it takes a lot of work” (G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017).

296 As of July 2017.

produced by the institution in an easy and organised way. It functions as a virtual archive of all kinds of textual data produced by the museum, as well as information related to the artworks from the collection. Since its launch in 2012, ‘360°’ slowly started replacing the traditional ‘analogue’ archive, and so most of the documentation of artworks purchased around this date is stored there. Each object from the collection has a separate folder in ‘360°’ called ‘Objectdossier’, where all information related to an artwork produced across different activities can be easily stored. The museum’s email application, as well as text editors such as Microsoft Word, is equipped with a special extension for storing emails and documents directly in the repository. The software allows users to save various types of documents except images, audio and video files, which due to size constraints are kept on separate servers. The ‘Objectdossier’ is linked to and therefore accessible from the CMS entry of each artwork.

The ‘Objectdossier’ on Kruger’s work contains a vast quantity of emails, both internal as well as exchanged with and between different administrative entities and individuals involved in the production of the artwork’s manifestations, the artist included. Other types of documents which can be found there are low-res annotated preparatory drawings in pdf format, quotes from printing labs, scans of press clippings, etc. In the absence of the archivist, it all seems to be quite messy and chaotic, but its concise file-naming system and powerful search engine make it easy to browse. This is the location where the aforementioned email from Ann Goldstein describing the agreement made with Kruger can be found. Undoubtedly, not all the correspondence on an artwork produced by the museum gets archived in ‘360°’. The selection depends on the particular decision of the employee and there are some, like registrars, who devote more time and attention to this matter than others. Nevertheless, the unwritten rule is that all important information should be kept and, judging from the case of Kruger’s piece, one can assume that it is generally followed. Interestingly, the documentation

---

298 This view is based on the author’s own experience with ‘360°’, preceded by the short introductory workshop organised by the museum for all new employees. However, it is important to mention that opinions about the system vary across the institution, which has been reflected in the interviews conducted during this study. Some of the employees find it complicated and unintuitive, and are therefore reluctant to use it. An extended reflection on the possibilities of ‘360°’ is provided in Chapter 5 (see: p. 296).

produced within the conservation department is exempt from this regulation, and as such is deposited only in the internal archive of the unit – an issue I will come back to shortly (see: p. 259).

Furthermore, *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* is represented in the museum by digital files stored on two separate servers, supervised by different organisational units and accessible through different ‘gatekeepers’. While the photographs from exhibitions featuring the piece are kept on a ‘photographic’ server managed by a designated employee, the digital drawings used for the production of both manifestations are stored on the server of the Audio-Visual Department (AVA).\(^{300}\) In the museum these drawings are conceptualised as substitutes for an art object, and are meant to be cared for and conserved. During my research I analysed and assessed these files as a potential source for the execution of subsequent manifestations of the artwork. My familiarity with the history of the piece triggered certain questions about which version of the drawings was actually stored in the repository. As mentioned, on the occasion of the initial production of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* Kruger modified the original files during the install. Moreover, as described by the project manager involved in the production of Kruger’s piece, the ‘final’ versions of drawings sent by the studio were in both instances adjusted to the actual dimensions of the architectural spaces.\(^{301}\) The lack of descriptions makes it difficult to know if the files hosted on the AVA server are the drawings originally created by the artist’s studio or those modified later on by the printing lab.

While all of these virtual entities represent the artwork while it is not on display, they are not considered by the institution to be the artwork as such. All of them reside within the museum walls and are not accessible to the public. In the open online SMA collection catalogue the piece is not listed at all.\(^{302}\) However, the piece is

\(^{300}\) Specifically, they are editable vector drawings created in Adobe Illustrator and saved as EPS (Encapsulated PostScript) files in the case of 2010 version, and Adobe Illustrator format (.ai extension) for the 2012 version. All files are stored on the so-called ‘AVA’ (Audio-Visual Department) server.

\(^{301}\) H.B. Kwee, in-person interview, February 17, 2017.

\(^{302}\) As of August 2018.
partially accessible to the public, even when not installed, through imagery available on the Internet. A search in ‘Google Images’ based on the title of the work and the artist’s name turns up plenty of images, for instance from art-related blogs and websites, Instagram, Flickr or Pinterest (Figure 50). Interestingly, museum employees’ first choice when looking for photographs of a particular piece from the collection is also the Internet, as opposed to any of the aforementioned databases.303 These images depict the installation from different angles and perspectives and show how people interact with the piece, whereas the photographs hosted on the ‘photographic server’ present Kruger’s installation ‘cleaned’ both of imperfections and visitors.304

Figure 50. Results of the Google Image search for “Stedelijk Barbara Kruger”.

---

303 This observation was made during the fieldwork conducted at the SMA.

304 The photographs kept on the ‘photographic’ server were taken to create an ‘official image’ of the artwork to be distributed in the media and catalogues, and do not show Kruger’s piece as a ‘physical object’. This difference, while not obvious to the broader public, is rather well known to museum professionals, especially conservators. There are many ways an artwork can be photographed depending on which of its qualities are of interest to the photographer. Pictures taken for cataloguing purposes usually do not depict technical details or imperfections important for understanding how the artwork was made. Images of both past manifestations of Kruger’s piece which can be found on the server do not show, for instance, the joints between printed panels, which proved to be a significant feature for understating Kruger’s artistic practice (Figure 4).
One could argue that all artworks from the institutional collection when not on view function in the museum environment as virtual entities. The difference lies in the possibility to refer to fixed material objects at any time. If there are no objects, these virtual entities form the basis for the artwork’s reading, as well as for decisions related to the future appearance of the artwork’s physical manifestation.

4.3.2 The Artwork as an Exhibit

On the occasion of each presentation, the status of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* within the institution shifts from the ‘musealium’ to be cared for and preserved to an ‘event’ which needs to be carefully organised, budgeted and produced. As a consequence, the vast majority of the correspondence with Kruger regarding the artwork was held by project managers responsible for the preparation of the exhibition, with almost no involvement of the staff responsible for collection care, conservators included. The organisation of the third display followed the same logic.

The new location for the piece, a space on the mezzanine containing the entrance to the auditorium, was proposed by the museum and accepted by the artist. The photographic documentation of the space was prepared and sent to Kruger together with the architectural plans. Although only a few emails about the choice of the space have been stored on ‘360°’, it seems that the SMA was constantly adapting the specification of the conditions for the new manifestation to the circumstances of the forthcoming show. Due to the concerns related to the durability of the materials, at the beginning the institution proposed to modify the initial design so as to not cover the floor. On the basis of the first sketches delivered by the artist’s studio, the museum team built a scale

---

305 However, it is important to acknowledged that various SMA employees approached Kruger several times to remind her that the promised modified drawings for the Erezaal, and well as the certificate of authorship, had not yet been delivered. These emails, mostly the outgoing correspondence, are stored on ‘360°’.

306 In the email sent to the project manager, Kruger explained: “Again, these are only sketches. I did them when I had no idea that, unlike the earlier installations, the floor was to be excluded. I think the floor is an important part of the work.” (Kruger, B. (2017, January 3). [Email to Lucas Bonekamp], SMA Archive, Amsterdam). The initial decision to exclude the floor was caused by concerns related to the durability of the material employed, as the installation was to stay up for the next five years.
model of the installation to get the curators’ approval (Figure 51). The space selected for the third presentation differs from the previous two in important ways. Both the Erezaal and the gallery in the museum basement are cuboid, with mostly right angles. Meanwhile, the new space includes stairs, an escalator, a glass elevator shaft, and some organic-shaped elements, for instance a round-curved window and a kind of an ‘avant-corps’ containing entrances to the auditorium. Thus, the new manifestation of the piece needed to be significantly adapted to this distinct architectural setting. While in terms of colours it followed the same scheme as the previous manifestation, the set of phrases was significantly modified, with some sentences disappearing and others being added. What drew my attention was the fact that, although Kruger repeatedly emphasises the physical reception of the space as an important part of her working method, the third adaptation of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) was carried out based on photographs and architectural drawings alone.
The lack of documentation on the complex decision-making behind the production and install of the piece can be explained by the scant involvement of the employees responsible for collection care. Although the story can be partially recreated thanks to the correspondence stored on ‘360°’, certain decisions, such as what guided the approval of the material samples, has been never recorded. Nevertheless, as the next paragraph argues, it is not clear who would actually be responsible for carrying out this documentation.

4.3.3 The Artwork as ‘the Object of Conservation’

Because of the lack of fixed material representation and unclear affiliation in terms of formal categories, Untitled (Past, Present, Future) seen as a musealium and ‘the object of conservation’ eludes institutional procedures. The category ‘Installations with Various Non-Cinematographic Materials’ assigned upon its accession does not match any particular organisational museum unit or specialisation. While most of the SMA curators have no defined area of responsibility, conservators are grouped into teams according to traditional disciplines – paper and photography, painting, applied art and sculpture. Since technically Kruger’s piece is a print on a plastic support, the conservation department assigned it to the category ‘Photography’. Nevertheless, due to the processes and dynamics described in the previous subchapter, conservators were involved neither in the production of the piece nor in its acquisition, which is unusual within SMA procedures. However, besides the conservation department, the separate Audio-Visual Department (AVA) is also involved in conservation-related issues. It deals with artworks that have to be plugged in or switched on to work correctly – from installations built with fluorescent lights through video and sound.
art to software-based art.\textsuperscript{310} Generally, the main responsibility of the AVA department is broadly understood to be the care of time-based media artworks – pieces that have duration as a dimension, excluding performance art.\textsuperscript{311} Nevertheless, whereas \textit{Untitled (Past, Present, Future)} is collected by the museum in the form of digital files, it has no duration in time and therefore is not considered time-based art. Thus, in this case, the contribution of the AVA department was limited to the storage of the digital drawings in the museum digital repository, and did not include standard procedures for digital artworks such as analysis of the files, description or documentation. This is the reason for the lack of annotations on the collected files as previously described (p. 242).

4.3.4 \textbf{Summary: Across the institutional divisions}

Upon its musealisation, \textit{Untitled (Past, Present, Future)} transformed into a set of documents distributed between various institutional repositories. The allocation of the documents as well as the assignment of responsibilities in terms of broadly defined care depended on how the information was categorised: the data describing the artwork entered the CMS and fell under the responsibility of registrars; information related to the circumstances of the artwork’s execution was gathered on ‘360°’; images of the artwork were stored on the designated server, while the ‘digital object’ was sent to the repository of the AVA department. The investigation proved that this classification is random and often hinders a proper understanding of the artwork, as the information conveyed by different documents is complementary and often valid only when juxtaposed with other sources. The inclusion of the section that relates to the images encountered on the Internet aimed to demonstrate that not all of the

\textsuperscript{310} The official name of the department is Audio-Visual Art Handling Department; however, on the museum website it is referred to as the ‘Audiovisual Collection Care Department’. See: Audiovisual Collection Care: Behind the scenes. Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/dig-deeper/collection-care-conservation/collection-care/audiovisual-collection-care. The description of the department’s duties has been made based on the interview with the Team Leader, see: G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017.

\textsuperscript{311} It is worth mentioning that as of June 2017, the SMA no longer has a time-based media collection as such. The Audio-Visual Department is in charge of two collections: Bewegend beeld en/of geluid (moving image with/without sound) and Installatie mbv Cinematografische Hulpmiddelen (Installation with Cinematographic Components). Software-based art falls under the latter. (G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017).
information significant for the understanding of the artwork is actually collected by the institution, and, because the Internet is an ‘unstable archive’, that information is left outside of the scope of the institutional care.

Using Domínguez Rubio’s designation, *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* is an ‘unruly’ artwork that cannot be easily stabilised and transformed into timeless ‘objects’ of formal delectation, and as such it had resisted the standard institutional classification processes (Domínguez Rubio, 2014). Due to this fact and the unusual circumstances in which it was commissioned and acquired, it evaded museum procedures and workflows and fell into a kind of ‘responsibility gap’. Which features of the institutional organisation of duties triggered this situation? The SMA example points to the deep divisions between institutional units, which originated in the traditional museum structure and classification processes, such as assigning artworks to particular categories. The decision on the acquisition of the piece was made within the curatorial department, but curators were barely involved in the process itself. Exhibiting as a museum priority raised the importance of project managers in charge of the success of the exhibitions in terms of organisation and logistics, but not involved in issues related to conservation. Conservators responsible for securing the continuation of the artwork were left aside because the work has no fixed, physical representation. Lastly, the AVA department, which takes care of these musealia that exist only as digital files, was not fully involved because the piece was not classified as a ‘time-based media’ artwork.

How do these divisions influence the content of documentation? For instance, each administrative unit initiates and carries on communication with an artist on its own terms and pursuing its own goals. In the case of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*, this

---

312 In his often-quoted article, Domínguez Rubio introduces the concepts of ‘docility’ and ‘unruliness’ to define how artworks behave within the museum collection. See: Domínguez Rubio, 2014.

313 These divisions can be illustrated by a quote from the interview with Jasmina Mertz, assistant curator responsible for the ‘production’ of one of the manifestations of Kruger’s wall-wrap from the collection of Museum Ludwig in Cologne that will be discussed in detail in the next subchapter: “[...] for me, at this time it was important to install the piece and I did not have all these [AW: documentation-related] questions because these are questions from the collection [AW: point of view] and I am not involved in collecting, I am more interested in display. And these are really different and complicated questions” (J. Mertz, in-person interview, May 11, 2017).
was done mainly by consecutive project managers in charge of successive exhibitions featuring the piece. These separations entail the formation of internal, often competing priorities, or responsibilities being ceded from one part to another. One further example is the conservation-related documentation, which is kept in a separate archive that, due to its structure, is accessible only by or through conservation personnel. Researchers, whose responsibilities consist of in-depth study into the history of artworks, act as a link between conservators and curators, and their work informs the assignments of both. However, at SMA the aforementioned shift of priorities toward exhibiting has resulted in moving the research team from the collection to the curatorial department. In terms of museum practice, it means that most of the researchers’ tasks are related to the organisation of temporary exhibitions, which usually differs from research carried out for the sake of collection documentation. The overall impression is that the common goal of the museum, i.e. ensuring the continuity of the work of art, gets dissolved within the internal dynamics of the institution. In my view, although thanks to existing procedures particular aspects of the artwork are taken care of, the aforementioned divisions get in the way of the artwork being considered and cared for as a whole, which could have a negative impact on its perpetuation.

This study has shown that the cluster of documents collected in various institutional archives can function as an artwork only if compared and juxtaposed. For example, the collected ‘digital object’ (drawings) can only be interpreted together with the photographs and statements recorded in the interview with Hwie-Bing Kwee, the Omnimark project manager, in which he mentions the final alterations made by the artist. This juxtaposition supports not only the comprehension of the artwork but also the identification of gaps in the documentation. As the example of ‘360°’ demonstrated, the creation of a common, easily accessible space where the documents can interact supports the understanding of the artwork and in consequence its care, while their distribution among various repositories may potentially hinder the process. Although the current system is not devoid of limitations and its potential is not fully exploited, it provides the possibility of accumulating information and allowing documents to overlap and be juxtaposed, which, according to Rinehart, can mitigate the loss caused in the process of musealisation (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014, see: section 4.1 of this Chapter).
4.4  Other ‘Musealised’ Wall-Wraps

The condition of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* in the SMA collection exemplifies one way a wall-wrap can be musealised. However, it is not the only institutionally collected room installation by Kruger. The preliminary survey of the artist’s practice made it possible to identify two more instances, one in Los Angeles and one in Cologne. How have other institutions handled the transformation of a Kruger wall-wrap into a collectible? Have they faced similar challenges as the SMA? The following subchapter addresses these questions by presenting a study on institutionalised wall-wraps carried out at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Museum Ludwig Cologne. The differences between these various approaches offers further evidence of how the musealisation of a complex, concept-based piece is a process contingent on different factors, where the relationship between the artist and the institution plays a crucial role. This phase in the research enabled me to collect additional factual information and to assess the scope of possible negotiations with the artist during the upcoming interview.

4.4.1  *Untitled (Shafted), 2008* from LACMA

*Untitled (Shafted), 2008*, was commissioned for a newly opened BCAM (Broad Contemporary Art Museum) building within the campus of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and installed on the walls of the main, centrally located elevator shaft (Figure 52). Similarly to the SMA case, it took several years for the artwork to be acquired for the collection, which finally took place in 2011. What makes the two artworks different is the role of the location – LACMA’s wall-wrap has a fixed location that dialogues with the title, whereby the piece can be interpreted as site-specific. Nevertheless, the contract signed between the museum and the artist does not specify it as such.\(^{314}\) The artwork is defined there as a digital image submitted to the museum on a CD, and the institution is free not only to reprint the

---

\(^{314}\) Due to the museum’s data protection policy, it was not possible to consult the artwork’s documentation, which is classified. The factual information in this section originates from an interview conducted with Chanelle Mandell (Registration Administrator, Permanent Collection, Registration and Collections at LACMA) and Janice Schopfer (Head of Paper Conservation at LACMA).
existing wallpaper but also to reformat it and show it in other locations. Should it be reinstalled elsewhere, the artist can be consulted, but her presence is not listed in the contract as an obligatory condition. This agreement was designed by the museum’s Legal Department in collaboration with the Registration Department and accepted by the artist. The conservation staff was involved neither in the installation nor in the acquisition of the piece.

Although LACMA is aware of the need to expand traditional documentation methods and the value of conducting artist interviews, in the case of Untitled (Shafted) this was not deemed necessary, as the purchase agreement is believed to be detailed enough to guarantee the persistence of the piece. However, as Chanelle Mandell (Registration Administrator, Permanent Collection, Registration and Collections) assured, despite the provisions of the contract, such instances as the loan request or the change of the location would certainly be consulted with Kruger, as the museum holds artworks’

“Basically, the artwork is a digital image that we have on the CD, and we can print it in the way we want to” (C. Mandell, in-person interview, September 9, 2016).
integrity to be a top priority. In short, while the institution remains open to further discussion with the artist, it maintains the right to make decisions that guarantee its own independence and flexibility.

4.4.2  **Untitled, 1994/1995 from Museum Ludwig Cologne**

The wall-wrap from the collection of the Museum Ludwig in Cologne was originally designed for Mary Boone Gallery in New York and presented there in 1994 (Figure 53). In 1995, after the New York show, it was acquired by the Peter Ludwig Foundation and permanently loaned to the Museum Ludwig Cologne, where it was immediately installed (Figure 54). The museum archive holds a note which confirms that Kruger was actively involved in the first reinstallation of the piece and visited the museum twice before the show: the first time most likely to choose the space and the second to supervise the process.

Unlike other wall-wraps discussed in this chapter, the first two manifestations of the piece were created prior to the digital era and screen-printed. What entered the museum collection was a set of prints made for a specific location. The actual ‘object of acquisition’ and technical requirements for its display were specified in a letter from the gallerist Mary Boone, who mediated the conditions of the purchase:

As per our conversation BARBARA KRUGER has agreed to execute this work in a room not smaller than 6 by 9 meters. In order for the Work to have the desired impact it must have this scale. [...] We understand that you and the museum would like to install this Work on additional occasions. In order to make it possible Barbara will provide you with three printings of this

---


317  Exhibition *Barbara Kruger*, Mary Boone Gallery New York, 1994. For more about the show see: Goldstein et al., 1999, p. 171.


This excerpt proves that from the outset the possibility of re-installing the piece in another setting was under consideration. The screen prints on the walls were complemented by magnesium plates inserted into the imitation-granite vinyl-tile floor (Figure 57). Kruger emphasised the significance of the plates in an interview conducted by art historian Carol Squiers the year of the artwork’s creation:

Those plaques [magnesium plates] were all questions, and I tried to use humor in them. When you first came in, the one you saw was a man shaking his finger – and to me that is the slogan for the whole show. It says, “How dare you not be me?” That’s the dance. That was a sort of mantra for the entire installation. (Squiers, 1995, p. 65)
The work was shown again in 1996, this time in Melbourne, where it was adapted to the architectural context of the display space (Figure 55). The fourth public presentation of the artwork took place in 1999 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles during the retrospective exhibition curated by Ann Goldstein. In this instance the conditions of the loan were negotiated between both museums in advance, and MOCA requested the production of an exhibition copy under the supervision of the artist. In 2003, the artwork went on loan again, this time for the purpose of the show organised by the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne (Figures 56-57).

After a decade, the work was displayed again at the Ludwig Museum. Kruger commented on that instance in an interview conducted by Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley in the following words:

320 Exhibition Barbara Kruger, 17 October – 24 November 1996, Museum of Modern Art, Heide, Melbourne. For more information about the show see: Cotter, J. (1996). Barbara Kruger. Retrieved from http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/non-cms/globe/issue4/bkrutxt.html. Interestingly, there is no record of this exhibition among the loans listed either in the Museum Ludwig archive or in the collection record available online (see: https://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05023084). Thus, my recognition of the piece as the one owned by the Museum Ludwig relied only on the images available in catalogues and on the Internet. Taking into account Kruger’s practice of self-appropriation of images and texts as well as the lack of distinctive titles, the installation shown in Melbourne could also be a separate variation on (not an instantiation of) the one from Cologne.


322 “[MOCA] will provide all the materials for the reproduction, tailoring it to the space of the exhibition. In addition, the exhibition copy […] will be credited to the Museum Ludwig Cologne and destroyed upon the completion of the exhibition” (Koshalek, R. (1999, April 15). [Email to Jochen Poetter]. Museum Ludwig Archive. Cologne).

323 Exhibition Me & More, 9 August – 23 November 2003, Kunstmuseum Luzern. For a detailed description of the show see: Fischer, 2003. This loan is listed in the artwork’s record, but unfortunately is not documented, so the details of its conditions remain unknown. Nevertheless, the early 2000s were marked by a technological shift in Kruger’s practice from traditional to digital printing, and so it is possible that the Lucerne version was printed digitally. In the catalogue of the exhibition the work is listed as “Untitled, 1994 – photographic prints, vinyl tiles, photo engraving on magnesium tiles, sound” (Fischer, 2003, p. 139), where “prints” could mean either analogue or digital.

I’m also remaking an earlier installation that was purchased by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne in 1995. But I had originally done it for a particular space and I’m now altering it to work in a differently scaled room in the museum that will allow for an aerial viewing. So I’m changing the configuration of the floor to accommodate that kind of sight line.

(Colomina & Wigley, 2014, p. 125)


As the excerpt indicates, the museum together with the artist decided to change the original location of the piece and install it in another part of the building. Along with the location, Kruger importantly modified the concept (Figure 58). Although, as the excerpt from the interview conducted by Squiers demonstrates, the messages on the magnesium plates were significant to the understanding of the artwork, these, together with the vinyl-tile floor, were replaced by white words on a red background printed on synthetic film. Sentences bordering the upper part of the walls were translated from English into German and the wallpaper was printed digitally on vinyl film.325

4.4.3 Summary: Towards the interview

There are various ways Kruger’s wall-wraps can be musealised and later on used as a musealium, and both depend on the context, circumstances and general strategies or/and policies of the institutions involved. At the SMA the acquisition relied on the mutual trust between the artist and the museum, or rather the artist and the director – no contract was signed and the conditions of the agreement, especially in

terms of the authority over the artwork, clearly benefited the artist. LACMA was more interested in protecting the interests of its collection and the artist agreed to concede an important part of the control over her work to the institution. The story of the piece from Museum Ludwig demonstrated that a wall-wrap can be loaned to other institutions and repeatedly adapted to different spaces, which confirms the previous assumption that its site-specificity is more related to the use of architectural surfaces as a support than to the core concept of the work. The study of five different manifestations of Untitled, 1994/1995 from Museum Ludwig Cologne prompted a question as to whether it would be feasible to register patterns in the artwork’s transformations and consequently to construct a set of guidelines for its future presentations. And if so, would it be possible to apply a similar strategy to the piece from the SMA?

At this stage my understanding of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) was that of a set of components which, following certain rules and constraints, can be employed in infinite combinations. This observation was made on the basis of the assumption that the limitation to three manifestations is not a meaningful, conceptual condition, but rather a practical provision to limit the artist’s involvement in the ‘adult’ life of her works. Following Nelson Goodman’s distinction between allographicity and autographicity as used by scholars in the field of contemporary art conservation, Kruger’s artwork can be classified as allographic, which opens up the possibility for re-performing it in

---

326 Interestingly, the SMA does not work with acquisition contracts on a regular basis. Many works from the collection have no contracts at all; however, with the emergence of copyright issues – especially complicated in the case of video art – this practice is gradually changing.

327 In my understanding the components are: the set of all the text used in the three consecutive manifestations, the size of the room, and the relationships between the texts and colours.

328 The concept of artworks having ‘life stages’ from infancy to adulthood is persistent within the contemporary art conservation literature, see e.g.: Laurenson & Van Saaze, 2014; Phillips, 2012; Williams & Scheidemann, 2001.
the future. What was lacking in order to open up this option was a ‘score’ or ‘script’ which could guide future presentations. After analysing the history of the artwork’s transformations throughout its consecutive manifestations, I started to consider the possibility of designing guidelines or instructions enabling future adaptations of the piece to other spaces, following Kruger’s way of thinking about the relationships between the words and a particular space. This solution would require a precise specification of the features which tie together the separate elements of the installation and make them function as a coherent piece. Would it be possible to invite the artist to (re)define the artwork ‘independently from the medium’, understanding ‘the medium’ as the walls and floors of particular spaces within the Stedelijk Museum?

Undoubtedly, the design of this kind of instructions would require close collaboration with the artist and her willingness to grant a part of the control over the final result to the artwork’s institutional keeper. At this stage, the time had finally come to approach the artist herself.

---

329 Nelson Goodman’s concept of ‘allographicity’, developed in the context of the performing arts, has been employed to devise conservation frameworks that account for differences between manifestations of artworks which have no singular or fixed physical presence. It was introduced in the field of conservation of time-based media art by Pip Laurenson (2006). However, it is important to highlight that since then this binary division has been critically discussed among academics, e.g. Renée van de Vall (2015). Despite the criticism, Goodman’s distinction has become a useful reference while speaking about different approaches to the perpetuation of contemporary artworks. See: Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols (1968) (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2009); Caianiello, T. (2012). Materializing the Ephemeral: The Preservation and Presentation of Media Art Installations. In R. Buschmann & T. Caianiello, Media art installations: preservation and presentation: materializing the ephemeral (1st ed., pp. 207-229). Berlin: Reimer.

330 The idea to (re)define the artwork independently from the medium comes from Variable Media Paradigm, introduced in the framework of Variable Media Network, whose methodology is based on “seeking to define acceptable levels of change within any given art object and document ways in which a sculpture, installation, or conceptual work may be altered (or not) for the sake of preservation, without losing that work’s essential meaning. The Variable Media approach integrates the analysis of materials with the definition of an artwork independently from its medium, allowing the work to be translated once its current medium becomes obsolete” (“The Variable Media Initiative,” n.d.). See also: Depocas, A., Ippolito, J., Jones, C., Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology., & Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. (2003). Permanence through change : La permanence par le changement : The variable media approach : L’approche des médias variables. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications.
4.5 The Interview

A ‘successful’ interview – one that perhaps produces a nice coherent and fluent narrative containing a balance between information and reflection – is likely to be the product of shared values between the parties, a good rapport and the willingness of the interviewer to permit the respondent to shape the narrative, avoiding unnecessary interjections. An ‘unsuccessful’ interview – one that fails to produce a coherent narrative, in which the respondent offers short or factual answers to questions without elaboration or reflection – may have its roots in a poor interview relationship, lack of empathy or rapport, and an absence of understanding or comprehension on both sides. Of course, these are rather value-laden definitions of success and its opposite, but many would agree that the interview relationship (alongside good preparation) is the key to eliciting a narrative response. (Abrams, 2010, p. 11)

It is inevitable that there will be discrepancies between the desired result and the actual interview. This does not mean that the interview is less valuable. (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 47)

4.5.1 Conservation and Artist Interviews at the Stedelijk

One factors that shapes the outcome of an interview is the scope of interests of the interviewer, which depends on the purpose of the investigation. As this dissertation focuses on the use of novel documentation practices within the framework of a museum, the decision was made to prepare the encounter with the artist not as an independent researcher but as a representative of an institution. This required familiarity with general institutional policy on interviewing artists for conservation purposes. At the SMA this policy is not a written set of rules, but a body of knowledge formed through practices developed over time and shaped by the range of available resources.

The SMA’s Conservation Department is divided between traditional disciplines, and the sub-departments are independent from each other in terms of approaches and procedures. Sculpture conservators, responsible for various artworks from the

---

331 Other ramifications of the Conservation Department have their own practices related to the inclusion of the artist’s statements in the conservation-related documentation. For instance, paper conservators usually send a detailed questionnaire to the artist or the gallery with queries about materials used and framing. Source: R. Timmermans, in-person interview, April 11, 2017.
collection which are non-traditional from a formal perspective, such as installations, understand the artist interview as any contact with artists or their representatives, who could also be galleries or family members. These interviews can be done by email, by phone or in-person. In most cases there is a specific reason to reach out, and often the initiative is undertaken because of actual conservation or exhibition-related problems. Based on the time spent preparing, which in turn determines the depth of questioning, according to the INCCA Guide to Good Practice (2002) this sort of interview would be called ‘brief’ or ‘limited’. Oral communication is usually not recorded; the result is summarised by the interviewer (conservator) in a so-called ‘object form’, which belongs to the body of conservation-oriented documentation. The set of issues to be discussed during the interview determines the involvement of curators or researchers from the curatorial department. Nevertheless, curators are always invited to ask whatever questions they might have, even if they are not strictly conservation related. The SMA’s Conservation Department does conduct ‘extended’ artist interviews as well, which ‘invite the artist to speak freely about his/her work’ (Guide to good practice: Artists’ interviews, 2002). However, these ‘extended’ interviews are not a part of the everyday practice and are usually linked to major conservation-related projects involving collaboration with external professionals and/or interns, and above all require additional funding. Since the circumstances of my investigation afforded sufficient time and funding, and because apart from collecting information related to the artwork my goal was to test the model of the interview as proposed in Chapter 1 (p. 61), the interview with Kruger was planned from the outset as an ‘extended’ one.

---


333 For instance, the project of documenting and reinstalling two installations by Joan Jonas, carried out by the Stedelijk conservation team together with external researchers in 2009, included several in-depth interviews conducted with the artist. See: Mink, A., (2009) Dossier: Organic Honey, Sweeney Ashtray, het behoud en beheer van twee installaties in het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the archive of the Conservation Department, SMA, Amsterdam. I would like to express my gratitude to Sandra Weerdenburg for providing access to the internal documentation of the SMA’s Conservation Department.

334 Information about the Stedelijk Conservation Department’s practices related to artist interviews has been collected through an interview with Sculpture Conservator Rebecca Timmermans (R. Timmermans, in-person interview, April 11, 2017).
4.5.2 Methodology and Planning

The personal encounter that is at the heart of the artist interview may be approached in different ways and may acquire different meanings depending on methodology, employed perspective and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Before proceeding to recount and analyse my interview with Barbara Kruger, I will introduce concepts addressing these three aforementioned subjects (method, perspective and relationship): in-depth interviewing, topic versus resource, and quality of interaction. These concepts will lay the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of both the encounter and its outcome, and make it possible to ponder over their accomplishments and failures.

In the definition of the artist interview proposed at the beginning of this dissertation, the formal approach to the interview understood as an encounter is framed as an oral, semi-structured, guided conversation with an artist where the interviewer plays the role of a guide (see: Chapter 1, p. 61). From a methodological perspective the approach that best matches these characteristics is in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviews are long-duration, involve a face-to-face interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, and seek ‘deep’ information and knowledge (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Researchers use in-depth interviewing as a way to check theories that they have formulated during their preliminary investigation; to independently verify factual knowledge gained through archival research, etc.; or to explore multiple meanings of or perspectives on actions, events, or settings (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). This method is recommended in instances where the research questions involve highly conflicted emotions, and where individuals involved in the same activity (in this case the perpetuation of an artwork) might have multiple perspectives on the researched subject. To be effective and useful, in-depth interviews need to develop and build on a certain kind of intimacy, as they entail a process of mutual self-disclosure and trust building. The in-depth interview has its own particular dynamics, and more often than in other interview formats it takes unexpected turns or digressions that follow the interviewee’s interests and areas of knowledge. Such digressions or diversions might be highly productive, and the interviewer should be prepared to deviate from the script and follow the path set by the interviewee. However, as experts advise, it is also essential to be assertive enough to return to the main course if necessary (Johnson &
Rowlands, 2012). Deep interviewing requires deep listening – hearing not only what your own intellectual development, beliefs, convictions and/or preliminary research have prepared you to hear, but, more importantly, what your informant really says.

In his manual for qualitative interviewing, sociologist Clive Seale distinguishes between two different approaches to analysing an interview – as a resource and/or as a topic (Seale, 1998). While in the first case the interview is a method to explore, gather or verify information provided by the interviewee, in the second the interest shifts towards the dynamics of the interview as a social event in its own right. While in the context of the artist interview the first perspective is evident, the value of the second one is less acknowledged. The development of the interpersonal dynamics and the power relations between the participants may provide significant information (e.g. about the artist’s attitude towards conservation) as well as help to decide on the future development of the collaboration (e.g. if it is feasible to arrange a follow-up interview). When the interview is tackled as a topic, it needs to be scrutinised in the context of the encounter – how, when and why it was set up, where and when it took place, by whom, for whom, and for what purpose (Bryson & McConville, 2014). An accurate account of the circumstances surrounding the development of the interaction can be extracted from the phone-calls, notes or emails exchanged prior to the interview, as well as any follow-up communication.

The descriptions of both of the foregoing concepts refer to the significance of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and its influence on the way the interview may unfold. As psychologist John Chirban noted, the true sense of the word interview is ‘inner view’, and originates from its French root ‘entre-voir’ – to get a glimpse of, ‘s’entrevoir’ – to see each other (Chirban, 1996). Mutual comprehension of emotions and motivations between individuals is considered key to any interview situation: building a good rapport can spell the difference between a successful interview and a failed one, between obtaining the required data or not. However, establishing a rapport with the interviewee is a difficult and rather time-consuming endeavour, and, based on my own experience, often turns out to be a failed enterprise. The two participants in the encounter usually have different agendas, and while that of the researcher – to gather knowledge relevant to his or her project – is usually easily recognisable, that of the narrator might vary. In the case of the artist interview, the
common ground between the two interlocutors is usually an interest in the future of the artwork in question. However, this may not always be the case. Although there are some artists who do not care if or how their artwork will be preserved, others might be keen on providing those in charge of caring for their work with all manner of information.

A relationship of trust and mutual understanding can be achieved by many different means. The tradition of feminist scholarship brought to social research the conviction that the basis for establishing rapport is transparency. According to sociologist Ann Oakley, researchers should inform narrators about the purposes of their research and the possible uses of their research findings, and be open to answering questions about their own opinions (Oakley, 1981; Seale, 1998). Another way of building a good interaction is through the use of open-ended questions, leading and loaded questions, agreements and disagreements with respondents, and so on (Jones, 1985; Seale, 1998). However, there are no rules when it comes to putting these tools into practice, and the choice of the approach depends, once again, on the circumstances in which the relationship started and how it unfolded. The important point is to reflect on the interviewer-interviewee interaction and to acknowledge the ways in which it may influence the nature of the outcome.

The stated aim of the interview with Kruger was to establish, together with the artist, a conservation strategy for wall-wraps collected by museums, with a focus on *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* from the collection of the SMA. Following the ideas expressed in the opening chapter of this dissertation (see: Chapter 1, p. 36), this can be done on the basis of the artwork’s key features: its conceptuality, contextuality, processuality and media variability as conceived by the artist, documented in her or his stories. Although the main research question guiding the interview was how to secure the perpetuation of the artwork, the artist was not expected to answer this question herself. I planned to elicit the stories that might provide insight into the nature of the artwork through ‘how’ questions centred not on the artwork but on the artist herself, for instance: How did you start working with spatial installations? How do you go about preparing immersive installations? How do you adapt existing wall-wraps to new settings? Although many of these stories were collected during the preliminary research, the interview provides the possibility of juxtaposing the information encountered in written sources with
personal accounts, and of making those different versions interact and overlap to create, following Rinehart’s concept of accumulation (see: p. 222), a more accurate representation of the artwork.

The exhaustive research into Kruger’s artistic practice guided the design of the interview’s script, which was divided into several blocks of questions. The first one addressed Kruger’s general approach to wall-wraps as a distinct genre in her oeuvre, including their history and development, and her creative process and practice as an artist. The second block was related to the musealisation of Kruger’s wall-wraps and her approach to their consecutive adaptations to various spaces. The third block started with questions addressing the persistence of institutionalised wall-wraps. I decided to open up a space for a reflective response by asking Kruger to imagine possible futures of the piece from the SMA’s collection, and to let her develop her own ideas. The latter, conservation-related part ended with the key question addressing the possibility of writing installation instructions to allow for future adaptations of the wall-wraps to different spaces without the artist’s involvement. The rest of the script was divided into two alternative options to be applied according to Kruger’s reaction to this idea. One elaborated on the subject with detailed queries, while the other, more focused on practical details related to the display of the work, was meant to release any tension if the artist had a negative reaction to the proposal.

The initial plan was to interview Kruger at the SMA on the occasion of her visit to Amsterdam for the third display of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*. In that case the interview would probably have been conducted alongside an SMA employee, most likely from the curatorial department. Unfortunately, I had to adjust to both the institutional schedule and my own research plan. Since the museum was constantly postponing the announcement of the exhibition’s opening date due to logistical issues, I finally decided to act on my own and arrange a meeting with the artist independently. The script of the interview was presented to and consulted with SMA employees. By Rebecca Timmermans from the Conservation Department and Margriet Schavemaker from the Curatorial Department.
4.5.3 **The Encounter**

We are all inclined to see people in social categories and to temper our approach accordingly. The story of a weekend away can be presented in numerous different ways (to a taxi driver, your colleagues, a spouse, children, your best friend, a law enforcement officer or a counsellor). The structure and relative formality of a research interview should minimise frivolity and facetiousness, but the process of ‘reading’ one another is still an integral part of the interview process. (Bryson & McConville, 2014, p. 138)

Building on Seale’s (1998) twofold method for analysing interviews – as a topic and/or a resource – this section combines both perspectives to show how one influences the other. The interview as a social event took place at a location proposed by the artist, a café in Greenwich Village. Only after listening to the recording of the meeting did I realise the importance of the Oral History Society’s advice on choosing the interview site: “Unless part of the […] process includes gathering soundscapes, historically significant sound events, or ambient noise, the interview should be conducted in a quiet room with minimal background noises and possible distractions” (“Principles and Best Practices for Oral History | Oral History Association”, 2012). The problem was not only that the noise of the coffee maker rendered entire utterances inaudible in the recording, but also that in the interview itself the participant and I at times had trouble understanding one another. Indeed, I had not taken into account the language difference; Kruger speaks American English, which I am not familiar with. Meanwhile, I speak ‘international’ English, with a fair share of borrowed constructions and expressions, combined with a foreign accent. The presence of constant background noise caused multiple misinterpretations of particular words. This, together with the specificity of Kruger’s digressive way of constructing her narrative, severely affected the course of the interview. The general feeling was that the aim of specific questions was not transparent to the artist and therefore her responses to the queries were neither clear nor direct. In order to obtain concrete information, I had to return to the same question over and over again. Understandably, the flow of the dialogue forced us to stray from the script. At one point I became so desperate to ‘save’ the interview that I started to interrupt the artist’s digressions with queries. The interview’s transcript reveals how, at a certain point, I grew impatient and forced the question regarding the possibility of re-installing wall-wraps without the artist’s involvement.
AW: We have this piece in the collection and they [AW: future museum curators] will reinstall it in 100 years in some way, and the idea behind our conversation is to collect your thoughts about how to do it in the future, as close to how you would like to have it as possible. What would be your vision then?

BK: I don’t want the text to change. I don’t want the image to change. I mean – who is going to do that?

AW: But two of the pieces have already changed...we have at least two different variations...the text changed...

BK: I’ve changed the text. But if I am not around...

AW: You don’t want anybody to change it.

BK: Who is going to change the text? The meaning?? The words?? No!

(B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017)

Following Abrams’s definition quoted at the opening of this subchapter, the interview conducted with Kruger could be considered unsuccessful. Due to the lack of rapport between participants, it failed to produce a coherent narrative and the responses of the participant were rather short, without elaboration and reflection. To understand the reason for this failure I will analyse the dynamic of the interaction, starting from the initial contact with the artist. During the preparatory research for the interview I carefully studied existing correspondence between Kruger and the SMA. Although the main focus of that study was to extract factual information that could help with writing a biography of Untitled (Past, Present, Future), it also gave me a glimpse into the personality of my future narrator. Emails addressed to museum employees portray Kruger as frank, self-confident and rather unkeen on changing her mind or adapting to the situation. She is a strong, charismatic woman with clear ideas, and besides that an internationally renowned artist, a legend of the New York art scene whose work has been presented in and collected by the most influential art institutions around the globe. In the emails exchanged prior to the interview, Kruger was courteous and expressed her appreciation of my interest in her work. However, when I presented the purpose of my research, she responded as if the future of her spatial installations would not be an issue whatsoever:
I am interested specifically in your ‘wall-wraps’ and I am looking at those that had been acquired into public collection: the piece from the Stedelijk, the one from Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the one from LACMA. The focus of my research is to find a way to document these artworks in order to be able to reinstall them in the future. (Wielocha, A. (2017, March 16). [Email to Barbara Kruger]. 2012.1.0189 Objectdossier, ‘360°’ SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam)

When the Stedelijk purchased the installation (which meant so much to me), the agreement was for 3 versions of the work to fit the space. This will be the third one. The LACMA work was specifically made for the elevator and will not be done to suit another space. The Ludwig reinstallation of a few years ago thrilled me because under the previous team at the museum there was little interest in my work, so Philipp Kaiser’s invitation to give the work new life was so appreciated. That’s the story. (Wielocha, A. (2017, March 16). [Email to Barbara Kruger]. 2012.1.0189 Objectdossier, ‘360°’ SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam)

Both aspects touched upon in the foregoing paragraphs – strong personality, the authority of the artist over her artwork, as well as an alleged lack of engagement in the investigated issue – undermined my entry into the interaction. For me this interview was the culmination of several months of intense research, a reason to cross the Atlantic, an expected highlight of my investigation and, above all, an opportunity to confirm my theories. What undoubtedly influenced the course of the event was a strong belief in the sense and validity of my approach to wall-wraps as performances that can be re-enacted according to a script designed together with the artist. Although during the interview Kruger indirectly confirmed that the limitation to three manifestations of the piece from the SMA was intended to avoid being endlessly involved in the same task instead of working on new projects, she firmly stated that she did not want the piece to be modified without her involvement. And yet, instead of listening to and following the opinions of the interviewee, I was desperately looking for any occasion to explain my strategy, hoping that this would open a gateway to further negotiations.
However, after a careful analysis of both the data collected during the encounter as well as the interview as a social event, I am convinced that the remark by Berkeens et al. quoted at the beginning of this chapter, stating that even an interview that does not fulfil expectations might be a valuable one, is still applicable to the final result of the project. During the interview, Kruger took a firm stance regarding further adaptations of the SMA piece, explaining her approach to the continuity of the work and providing a clear reference for future decision-makers. Moreover, the conversation made it possible to confirm certain suppositions and discard others. One of the most interesting moments was when Kruger reflected on the nature of the work from the SMA collection by recognising the three instantiations as, in fact, three different artworks. Furthermore, the conversation brought up new factual information that might prove useful in planning how her work is displayed in the future. For instance, Kruger discussed her approach to dating her work, as well as to translating its linguistic content from various languages. On a practical level, the encounter made it possible to complete a set of preservation-strategy recommendations regarding *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* for the SMA, which without the artist’s opinion would be based on speculation, and as such scarcely reliable. However, at one point in the conversation, the artist openly expressed her scepticism towards the proposed documentation strategy that was to include the artist’s opinion. When I recalled once again one of the goals of our meeting, by explaining that recording the artist’s view on the future of the artwork may prevent its keepers from altering its meaning and doing “whatever they want”, she

336 “BK: This is site specific, this work [AW: the Stedelijk piece], and this is the third and the last time that I am, that we are, doing it. So the three installs, [...] you can use any of the spaces that have been used before” (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 11, 2017). In addition, she firmly expressed her disapproval of another person introducing any changes in the artwork (quoted on p. 191).

337 “BK: Yes, sure. Three.... It is actually...separate works in so many ways, it is not the same work. AW: It is not the same work?
BK: Like this last one, I didn’t have a stairway in the other work, so there is another text. [...] AW: So you think that those three variations of the Stedelijk piece are indeed three separate pieces?
BK: There are in many ways three separate works” (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017).

responded with a shrug: “But they will do it anyway!” This statement indicates that Kruger is aware of the consequences of the musealisation of her intrinsically temporary artworks, and acknowledges the impossibility of controlling their future careers.

The examination of the concept of the artist interview as defined at the outset of this dissertation requires a consideration of the last step of the process: post-production, or, in other words, converting the interview into a stable source. In practical terms the whole process was ultimately represented across numerous documents, including:

- the collection of scans from sources used in the course of the research (images, press clippings, excepts from catalogues, previous interviews with the artist, notes from interviews with other parties involved, etc.);

“AW: Ok. But let’s look at it from a different side. When artworks enter a collection and start to be owned by an institution they also start to be used by an institution in many different ways. Curators are telling their own stories with those works. And I assume that it is good to know what an artist thinks about the possible use of her artwork, to make the owner conscious about her concept and opinion. And I think that if the artist statement is not recorded, they can do whatever they want with the artwork in the future.
BK: But they will do it anyway!” (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017).
- the report from the preliminary research including the biography of the artwork supported with references, analysis of the artist’s practices and possible analogies;
- the unedited audio recording of the encounter;
- the transcript of the interview with the description of the interview’s purposes and circumstances, together with notes analysing the interaction of interviewer and interviewee;
- correspondence with the artist exchanged before and after the interview;
- the report on recommendations regarding possible preservation strategies for the artwork.

Besides the audio recording, this group of documents was deposited in the artwork’s ‘Object dossier’ on ‘360°’, where it can easily be put into interaction with other records. It has therefore become a component of the artwork-related documentation, or, if we hold that through musealisation a contemporary artwork transforms into documents, a part of the artwork itself.340

My contact with Kruger continued after I left New York. For the sake of the article written after finishing the empirical part of the investigation, I asked the artist for her approval to directly quote from the interview. In response, besides pointing out factual mistakes in the article, she firmly denied ever having referred to herself as a “graffiti artist” as Hwie-Bing Kwee remembered (see: p. 237), and stated that those are his terms and ideas.341 Indeed, this comparison does not appear in any other interview conducted with the artist. She also expressed her deep disagreement with my intention of overcoming her desire to limit the presentation of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) to three manifestations, and stated that she alone, as the artist, has

---

340 The audio recording could not be stored on ‘360°’ because the platform does not support audio files.

341 This misunderstanding could be simply a language issue and Kruger very well may have said something like “What I make is like street art”. Tate’s art term database, for example, includes Kruger’s work as an example of “street art”: “Many well-known artists started their careers working in a way that we would now consider to be street art, for example, Gordon Matta-Clark, Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger” (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/street-art). It makes perfect sense that a non-native speaker would conflate “graffiti artist” and “street art” as synonyms.
the authority to determine the appearance and meaning of the artwork. The email conveyed disappointment and discontent towards the 'subjective' character of my approach to our 'encounter'.

The new presentation of the Stedelijk collection featuring, among various prominent artworks, *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*, opened at the end of 2017. My fieldwork at the SMA had already come to an end several months earlier, and all resulting documents had been submitted early enough to inform the decisions related to the new display, so I was curious to what extent it actually influenced the final presentation. When I visited the site I immediately recalled Kruger’s critique of ‘smartphone culture’ expressed during the interview. Interestingly, the new manifestation of her own piece became a favourite ‘selfie spot’ for SMA visitors and one of the most ‘Instagrammed’ artworks in the museum (Figure 59). However, this factor is clearly beyond the control of the hosting institution – the museum cannot force the visitors to read the phrases instead of photographing them, it is how today’s public interacts with art. Nevertheless, there were a few other aspects touched upon in my report that influenced the final appearance of the work. During the interview I asked Kruger whether the issue of the authorship of the quotes that appear in her spatial installation should be addressed in wall labels. In response the artist stated that she always signs the quotes with the name of the author unless it is her own writing. When I showed her that in the drawings delivered for the third manifestation of the piece George Orwell’s name was missing, she affirmed that this issue needed to be fixed, and in the final execution the quote from Orwell was properly referenced. Also, probably inspired by the artist’s opinion, the wall label provided the English translation of the Dutch text. Nevertheless, in spite of Kruger’s disagreement in the course of the interview with her work being compared to advertising, the wall label stated that “wall-wrap is a term borrowed from advertising”. Ultimately, regardless of the artist’s recorded opinions, the artwork’s keepers are the ones who have power over it, and, in line with Kruger's stoic prediction, they do whatever they want.

---


343 B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017
4.5.4 **Summary: Failed interview, valid source**

This case study has demonstrated common practical issues related to the use of artist interviews in an institutional framework. Despite the extensive preparation and elaborate methodological approach, the lack of rapport caused by the participants’ differing agendas, among other factors, impeded a coherent narrative from emerging. Besides the obvious mistakes made during the course of the event as seen above, the development of rapport between two individuals is often a matter of luck. In the case of artist interviews, researchers are not able to choose their informants – usually there is one artist behind the collected artwork. The research team designated to conduct the interview is usually fixed, and consequently, to a certain extent the participants are ‘stuck with each other’. Returning to the issue of distinct agendas, the idea that preservation should be of equal interest to both parties is rather utopic. For museums, ensuring the perpetuation of artworks is a stated duty, and many artists are keen on handing over this responsibility to institutions. Furthermore, artists often consider preservation differently, in much broader terms than institutions. In consequence, from the perspective of the artist interview, singling out rapport as an essential condition for a successful interview is perhaps as advisable as it is unrealistic.

However, although the collaboration did not shape up as intended, the encounter did serve to juxtapose the visions and opinions of two stakeholders. Despite the dubious quality of the interview from a methodological perspective, its stated goal – to establish a conservation strategy for *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* together with the artist – was accomplished. The overall approach proposed by the conservator (me), which consisted of designing a script or instructions that would make it possible to re-enact the artwork in the future by adapting it to new architectural spaces, met with Kruger’s rejection. In consequence, other possible options needed to be offered, in line with the three variations sanctioned by the artist.\(^{344}\) Accordingly, whether seen as a general approach encompassing preparatory research and postproduction, or as the encounter itself, the interview proved to be a valid documentation method, and a suitable means of gathering data to inform decisions on the artwork’s future. However, recognising that

the difficulties encountered during the process are common, hard to avoid, and difficult overcome, does not diminish the importance of a concise methodological approach. On the contrary, improving interviewing skills and learning from other fields that use in-depth interviews undoubtedly enhances the method’s efficiency. Moreover, by considering the interview as a topic and not just a resource makes it possible to expand the knowledge-producing capacities of the source and make use of encounters even when they are ‘unsuccessful’. And, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, from the perspective of the theoretical model of artwork-related documentation put forth in this dissertation, an unsuccessful interview is still better than no interview at all.

4.6 **The Artist Interview’s Many Functions within the Artwork-Related Documentation**

Although Danh Vo and Barbara Kruger represent different generations of artists and the character of their work differs significantly, the accession of their works into institutional collections has had similar implications. The identity of the contemporary artworks by both artists has proven to be distributed between objects and processes, concepts and contexts that shape an artwork throughout its career. In the aftermath of entering the museum realm, these transient components were transformed into documents divided between the institution’s various domains as a result of each museum’s classification principles. This chapter has theorised this process by presenting this transformation as a shift in the ontological condition of a contemporary artwork from ‘artwork’ to its representation and a process intrinsic to musealisation. The case of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* has demonstrated that as a result of the partition between the collection and different institutional archives the identity of a contemporary artwork becomes blurred and its continuation compromised. Furthermore, this partition is one of the factors that impede the effective use of the new approaches to contemporary-art conservation developed over the last decades, including the artist interview.
The analysis of various museums’ practices regarding conservation-related collaboration with artists (see: Chapter 3 and 4) revealed that museums tend to use the artist interview as defined in Chapter 1 only on special occasions. The more usual form of interaction with the artist on a day-to-day basis is a short, problem-based consultation in which conservators address concrete questions related to current problems. Sometimes it is held face-to-face but often is carried out by email or phone. These conversations are frequently briefly summarised in condition or treatment reports, or not documented at all, as in the case of the collaboration between Danh Vo and the curator from the SMK (see: Chapter 3, p. 195). The choice of this more direct communication is often dictated by constraints related to the allocation of time and money – the artist interview outlined as a process consisting of preparatory research, encounter and postproduction is a time-consuming assignment that requires personnel and infrastructure.

Why is it difficult to organise resources to finance this task? The study has shown that interviewing artists, although often officially acknowledged as important and necessary, is not perceived as pertaining to the domain of the collection. Rather, it is cast as a form of documentation, and as such is regarded as an auxiliary activity to collecting and conservation. In other words, it seems that museums generally fulfil their obligations concerning a musealium without interviewing artists, a practice regarded as supplementary. The reconceptualisation of a musealised contemporary artwork as a set of documents, as proposed in this dissertation, transforms the artist interview understood as a method into a tool for collecting and conserving; seen as a source, it re-emerges as a significant part of the artwork to be collected.

Although the predominance of consultation over interviewing is caused by the lack of time and funds, I would venture that this is not the only reason. As one of the conservators from the institutions studied stated in a private conversation: “sometimes it is better not to know”. The position of artists in the art world is twofold – on the one hand, they are often exploited as producers by art institutions, while on the other, they are praised in line with the Romantic myth of lone genius and the modern

---

345 Personal communication. The author of this statement has chosen to remain anonymous.

This attitude can be partially illustrated by the situation described in Chapter 2 (p. 144), where the interview with an artist is not considered an event or task in its own right, but fitted into another occasion: “A lot of the times you can speak to the artist when they are in to install something in a gallery. Quite often you almost have to nip in and the curator might say: our conservator would like to ask you a few questions. And then you nip in and ask them things” (In-person interview conducted with Tate conservator in January 2017. The name of the interviewee will remain anonymous in this study).

A similar observation was made already in the early 1990s by American sociologist Vera L. Zolberg, who stated that living artists are seen by museums as a potential problem and as trouble-makers: “Museums deal with artists directly only when they have to, and on their own terms. Among these terms is that the artist must support the museum in upholding the aesthetic ideology of the autonomous artwork” (Zolberg, 1992). Although since that time the interaction between institution and artist has gradually changed and nowadays, at least officially, it is more and more based on partnership, the impact of this problematic legacy remains visible in day-to-day collaborations.
might raise issues that are ambiguous, difficult to interpret and finally to implement in museum practice. The collaboration with Barbara Kruger portrayed in this chapter has been partially shaped by the dynamics of power as described above, and resulted in guidelines which significantly diminish possibilities of displaying the artwork in the future, thereby affecting the interests of the institution. That does not mean that the artist has no right to decide on the future on her work, but rather demonstrates potential consequences of the artist’s involvement.

In consequence, another factor that keeps today’s museums from exploiting the artist interview to its fullest potential is the complex nature of the relationship between artists and institutions. There is an entangled and unequal distribution of authority, and a lack of space for real collaboration with artists on caring for their work. As a way to tackle this issue on a theoretical level, this dissertation proposes implementing the model of artwork-related documentation as introduced in Chapter 1 and expanded upon in Chapters 3 and 4. Documentation is defined there as an open set, a dynamic system containing interrelated documents conveying the stories that represent an artwork. The elements of the set create knowledge by interacting with each other. The organisation of the documentation is rhizomatic and thus non-hierarchical. This last property is key for approaching the issue of the relationship between museums and artists. If the artwork is reconceptualised as a set of documents that carry the artwork’s identity on equal footing, the artist’s sanction becomes just one of the stories to take into account while interpreting the work and deciding on its possible futures. In order to be used in an informed way, this story needs to be analysed and juxtaposed with the others.

The principal function of the artist interview within this model is a documentary one: to foster the collection of information, or according to the terminology used in this dissertation, to gather stories that carry the artwork’s identity. Following Rinehart’s proposition that accumulation and excess are a means of securing the quality of representation, even methodologically unsuccessful interviews are significant. They incorporate into the documentation additional data which, by interacting with the rest, produce knowledge enabling an informed future ‘use’ of the artwork. For instance, in the case of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* an example of this would be the information related to the precision of the joints between the vinyl sheets. While according to
Hwie-Bing Kwee, during production on the first manifestation the artist valued a lack of precision (see. p. 171), in the interview, Kruger clearly expressed that the edges of the panels needed to match up perfectly. These two opposing statements can be additionally completed by the close-ups of digital images documenting this or other wall-wraps. The informed decision on how the next manifestation should be executed requires interaction between all three stories.

Simultaneously the artist interview may perform several other roles. Firstly, it guarantees the artist’s presence in the artwork transformed into musealium. Prior to the transformation the authorship is unique and indisputable, but during the formation of the musealium through institutional processes, the museum acts as a co-creator. Thus, the artist interview may serve as a means to secure the original authorship. Moreover, within the framework of the same concept, it might create a space for negotiating the shape and content of the documentation. Secondly, following the assumption that the interaction between the documents in the set needs to be continuously fostered, the artist interview as a research method can function as a means to achieve this goal. Thirdly, the outcome from the interview can be used as a set of values – in this case, the artist’s values – a filter through which this documentation can be read and interpreted.

Revisiting Kruger’s statement quoted at the outset of this chapter, which presents the artist’s attitude toward museums, when referring to the museum as a “staging ground for power” she was probably alluding to a different kind of power than the one the institution might exert over her artworks. However, in the context of the issues discussed in this chapter, the wish expressed in the last sentence of the quote came true. While passing through the art museum’s apparatus, Kruger’s work engendered considerable doubts and gave rise to several uncomfortable questions that allowed for a critical reflection on institutional modus operandi. Nevertheless, the museum is the site that makes this critical reflection possible in the first place.