Building a Time-Based Media Conservation Workstation From (Almost) Scratch

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Background: Presently, the Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG) has approximately 70 time-based media artworks in its collection, ranging from early film artworks to internet-based pieces. Pulling from the detailed resources shared and published by larger institutions, YUAG has established a TBM conservation workstation that is customized to the current and potential future needs of the Gallery's TBM collection. It also leverages the resources available to the Gallery through Yale University's unique position as an educational and research institution and the accessibility and availability to collaborate with other departments throughout the University.

Building the workstation involved assessing the current needs of the collection, determining potential future needs, researching, cost-comparing, and sourcing equipment, and installing each element of the workstation. The full process took about 1 ½ years, with 6 months devoted to planning and 6 months devoted to building, working with various Yale departments and following Yale's policies for procuring and transferring equipment and electronics. The process of building a TBM workstation from the ground-up can serve as a template for other institutions looking to establish a TBM conservation workstation centered around their specific collection and needs.

Goals: Create a workstation outfit for viewing artwork content, completing condition checks, and conducting standard conservation treatments.

Results

The workstation is divided into 3 sections, determined by the media type of the artwork: film-based artworks, tape-based artworks, and digital artworks.

Video and Film Workstation:
CRT monitor, Beta video playback machine, VHS/SVHS video playback machine, film rewind bench, lightbox

Digital Workstation:
iMac Desktop computer, Mac mini computer, BenQ monitor, portable optical disc drive, Tableau Forensic write blockers

** For more detailed information about the equipment and supplies, please feel free to take a handout **

Main Takeaways & Suggestions:

- **Be flexible when it comes to design and spacing:** It is important to plan and research how you would like the space to look but be willing to adapt to changing requirements and possible roadblocks. It took 3 location changes before the Gallery's TBM workstation found its permanent home. Also, all the equipment is relatively mobile and can be easily transported to other locations.
- **Communication is key**. This applies to all avenues of communication. Communicate with the various involved departments and offices. Communicate with colleagues at other institutions who have previous experience, so you are not reinventing the wheel. Communicate with your purchasing personnel about priorities and necessities.
- **Be thrifty when sourcing equipment.** Contact local TV stations, movie theaters, and closing businesses to see if they are offering any useful equipment, even if it is just for stockpiling spare parts. If you find equipment on eBay and your institution or organization does not allow purchasing through eBay, contact the seller to see if they will do business directly with your organization versus through a third-party seller.
- **Build a workstation that fits your institution's needs**. Due to being part of Yale, the Gallery did not have a need for video or film digitization equipment, as Yale Library has digitization capabilities and a partnership with the Gallery.

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YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY