Technology Conservation Discussion

Technological artworks have shorter lifecycle than traditional artworks. A sculpture made of sand will dissolve in the first rain and may be appraised for a low value. A collector could require the sand be molded with cement or a casting made to preserve the artwork. Pictures could be taken to remember what it was. Documentation could teach others how to reproduce it. Sand could be stored to ensure the exact material would be available for a repair. There are many ideas how to conserve technological artwork, but they need to be implemented by technologist not collectors.

Technological artwork is subject to Moore's Law which suggested technology advances double every 18 months. Within the warranty period, technology is expected to become obsolete. Technology companies know this and design for replacement not for repair. Artworks built within this culture will suffer if the Artist and Fabricator does not require the a designed for conservation. Often Artist and collectors are not familiar with technology in the same way a painter probably is not familiar with the chemical composition of pigments or canvases.

Many feel to conserve technological artworks, a picture or video is enough then allow the artwork to fail with time. Others feel replacing the artwork with a modern representation is fine. Collectors after investing money into an artwork will pray there is a technologist who could repair the work to their investment. Some artworks even come with a few documents to provide a sense of security that minor repairs will be possible. In my opinion these options are not acceptable because there are existing methods to conserve technology, but they are out of reach of the single collector.

Technological artwork conservation needs to begin with the artist at conception. The artwork concept needs to be reviewed and may need to be tweaked to allow conservation, perhaps the collector will need to accept that conservation will need to be compromised for the art to be possible. For this proposal I am discussing artworks where conservation is a requirement.

The artwork needs to be designed for conservation using proven methods and reviewed by experts in conservation. The electronic components selected must have multiple sources or secure life cycles. The base technology needs to be evaluated for its acceptance into the conservation program and advice provided to the artist about what improvements are possible.

After an artwork is created and entered into a conservation program, the components used would be logged into a database and monitored for end of life. When needed alternate parts need to be researched or the original part purchased and properly stored for the life of the artwork. The conservation process will need to archive and preserve the tools, documents and other related information which can be used to educate engineers in the future to repair the artwork.

If conservation is successful, documentation, data and storage media will need to be conserved in a similar manner. Electronic data can degrade or the media, like floppy disks and digital tape, becomes obsolete with time. The documentation for the artwork will need to be migrated to modern technologies to ensure the artwork's antiquated technology can still be conserved.

My proposal is for the leaders in the art community to join together in discussions so an entity can be created to evolve my ideas into a viable and cost effective system. This assumes that there is a value to conserving artworks containing technology. Large centralized non profit entity would be capable of providing this service. It most likely would be similar to an insurance entity with engineers who review artwork's conservation needs and defines annual membership cost for an artwork. The entity needs to be well funded by museums and collectors. This concept would spread the costs across all members and share the knowledge acquired by the entity, while protecting the collectors' investments. Confidence in an artworks future, increases its value.