

Sydney Briggs, Amy Brost, and Mike Gibbons interviewed by Glenn Wharton, December 11, 2019

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Glenn Wharton: Today is December 11th, 2019. This is Glenn Wharton. I am here with Sidney Briggs, Amy Brost and Mike Gibbons, all staff at The Museum of Modern Art in New York who were recently involved in installing the work by Joan Jonas *Mirage* at MoMA. Our plan is to discuss this recent installation from each of their professional points of view.

Glenn Wharton: I'd like to add that Erica Papernik-Shimizu, curator for the installation, was not available for this call. She will provide comments later about her experience in installing the work. So with that, let's hear from each of you perhaps Sydney and then Mike and then Amy. If you could talk about your role, you might even begin with the typical role of the registrar, a technician and conservator in researching and installing media installations in the museum, and then give us some specifics about this particular install.

Sydney Briggs: Okay. So the typical role of the registrar in any installation is essentially to make the shipping arrangements, [condition check and an] accounting of the artwork as it arrives onto the floor. And to help provide the installation information and coordinate with Art Handling and Exhibition Design and AV to make sure that we have all the elements that are required for the proper installation of an artwork. In this case, the benefit of both Mike and I is that we had already installed this one time before. So having installed it previously, we had a lot of personal knowledge already about the work. When it was last installed, I think in 2009, so 10 years ago, at the close of that installation we actually worked on some of the packing arrangements and the crating. We really honed in on the components somewhat, so that they would be more clear for anyone coming afterwards. The work had since been out on loan as well, in between the installation at MoMA in 2009 and the current installation in 2019 at MoMA. So there was also another opportunity for any additional crating needs to be addressed. But it seems when I opened up the work this time that pretty much everything was the same. It had not changed at all. So basically, what I did was corral the forces. Because it was an entire room installation, we worked with the artist -- with Joan -- to figure out a date when she could come to give her blessing on the work and to make any tweaks. But in order to do that, we really needed to pre-

install the room. So I worked with Erica, and Erica worked with Exhibition Design and AV and Conservation, to make sure that we could all agree on a date ahead of when Joan was expected to essentially put it roughly in place. Which I think, which we did effectively.

Mike Gibbons: Yeah, worked out great.

Sydney Briggs: And at that time we talked about the monitor sizes, and there was a bit of light in the room, but we realized that we would bring the lights down for Joan. We started to initially lay out some of the first projection sizes. I think that's pretty much what I did mostly, Mike.

Mike Gibbons: Yeah. At that point, basically AV had the three projectors set up on three separate carts. And we had the monitors at that point on the floor because the plywood and MDF stands weren't created yet. I think we taped out where the stage and the table would be, so there was a visual reference for that. And the particular projectors we used, I forget the part number offhand but I know they're Epson lasers, their new projector for this year and they're actually a native 4:3, which is the only manufacturer I know that makes a 4:3 laser. So we used three of those and we were able to remote all the equipment back to a double wide wall. But we had everything set up local for the tasks. That way we can move it. Joan was able to see what the minimum and maximum sizes were. I think we ended up relatively close to what the test was set, so everything was more or less at mid-range. She wanted to wait until the pedestals for the monitors were built. So what we did is, we knew roughly what location in the room each monitor would be. So we pulled power to each corner that would let us hide an extension cord in the reveal until we popped out to the leg. That's really about it.

Sydney Briggs: Yeah, I think that what's really important for this, when you're dealing with a particular installation like this, a large-scale media installation, is that there's several levels of installation. So there is a point where AV really needs to come into the room and set projection distances and monitor heights. But we don't necessarily do that with the finalized furniture, because no one's really sure. But they come in with a little mini cart that allows for us to establish different levels, have heights, and also it's a makeshift projection set-up. So everything is not necessarily in the ceiling already. It's actually on carts that are movable so that people can try a couple of different locations. One of the big differences between the installation in 2009 to 2019 is that the room was much smaller. So the media space [2009] was really

probably the most, the largest she would probably accept, I think. And the space, one of the things we heard from her was that she really liked the space that we had given her for 2019. That seemed to be much more comfortable to her.

Glenn Wharton:

I'd love to jump in because I realize Mike's going to have to leave [for another meeting]. So I have a few follow-up questions for him and then we can move on to Conservation's role as well. So that's very interesting that you moved from a large room to a much smaller room that she was happy with that. I remember the 2009 exhibition it wasn't a very large room, very spacious feeling. So I can discuss that with others. But just specifically on the AV equipment, you said you used three new laser projectors. Could you walk us through the decision making on that? What role did you play? Was it a curatorial decision, the artist or a team? Who said what?

Mike Gibbons:

Basically what we tried to do is keep the projectors matching, and native, the work's native resolution. Also we decided since the museum was getting larger [due to the 2019 construction project increasing the amount of gallery space], laser projectors are a lot less maintenance. It wasn't really -- curatorial doesn't get involved too much unless the technology is part of the work. And in this instance, it isn't. One of AV's goals is always make the AV as seamless and equipment as invisible as possible. So these projectors all have lens shift and zoom, so it gave us a lot of flexibility.

Glenn Wharton:

I guess from my days of working at MoMA, I remember that there were some artists that were very concerned about the quality of projection. Even the noise from the projectors and so on and others weren't. Some curators were and some were less given what their concerns were for the exhibition. What were the concerns here? Did you engage with the artist or team or anyone else? And showing them it could be like this, it could be like that. And did you get any response?

Mike Gibbons:

I mean, no real response starting the preset, as Sydney was talking to earlier, as all the projectors on a cart. Which is useful for the artists because they can see the actual device at eye level, and it's not this mysterious thing floating in the air. So at that point I would hope that if the artist and/or curator had an issue with the equipment, they would voice their concerns before we made decisions of placement and image size. Because once those decisions are made, I mean, once image size is made, you can always use the projector you want. But once the

placements are decided on, you're stuck with a particular lens throw and everything else.

Amy Brost: And I will add that Mike, you guys already knew what the media was. So you could choose the appropriate projector for that.

Mike Gibbons: Yeah, we had already media. The media was already processed and it was also already put on the players which happen to be BrightSign players.

Amy Brost: And also the brightness that you knew, there were some additional guidelines provided by the artist about having bright projectors. So that was another consideration when you put forth this one.

Mike Gibbons: There's a huge difference between a bright projector in 2009 and bright projector 2019.

Amy Brost: Right.

Sydney Briggs: One of the things though that what she did talk about was the monitor size.

Mike Gibbons: Yes. Monitor size is always important ...

Sydney Briggs: She actually really made a very specific decision at that time. Because I think I wrote down that formerly we had used 25 inch Sony Trinitrons.

Mike Gibbons: Yeah.

Sydney Briggs: And then she changed the sizes. So the *May Windows* was a 21 inch and *Car Tape* and the, I forgot what the, *Vertical Roll* I guess was 27 inches.

Amy Brost: *Car Tape* and *Good Night, Good Morning*.

Sydney Briggs: *Good Night, Good Morning*. That's what it was. That's what I meant to say. Thank you.

Amy Brost: It's 27 inches. The other one is 20 [inches] I believe.

Mike Gibbons: In 2009 they were all the same size monitor.

Sydney Briggs: They were all the same. So she made a decision there.

Mike Gibbons: And also during this period we brought up both sizes of monitors for her to see.

Sydney Briggs: Right. So that speaks to your question about how the artist was involved and Mike was saying that that's the opportunity then, that initial install moment. Which is not really a set moment, it's more of a period to have the opportunity to make these decisions.

Amy Brost: Thank you, Mike.

Glenn Wharton: Yes. Thank you for joining us, Mike.

Mike Gibbons: No problem Glenn. We can schedule another time that works out better.

Amy Brost: Okay. Bye.

Glenn Wharton: So we're continuing now with Sydney Briggs and Amy Brost. Amy, do you want to jump in and talk a little bit about the role of conservation? Maybe once again, you could speak about what conservators would ordinarily do in preparing for a media installation? And then maybe reference the specifics of the work that you did for this installation.

Amy Brost: Sure. So from a conservation perspective, I think that we approached this, as Sydney mentioned, as something that we knew well. We had shown it before and we also were thinking of it as a mature work. I think our process in conservation reflected that this time around. Because as I learned in looking actually at the performance video that's part of this installation, the Tate performance video -- Joan introduces that video by explaining that she first created this installation version in 1994 and then proceeded to change it continuously. However, in 2005, which is the third date in the date of this series of this work, she said, "I don't touch it anymore." So I think that by the time we showed it in 2009 and then had the photographic documentation of prior installations, and looking at installing it in 2019 we felt like we had a good grasp of what this work is. There are some areas where there's this acceptable variability. But our feeling was that that variability is also conceptually consistent with the work. Because the work shows ritual and repetition and movements of the body, and the routine of day to night and night to day, and those are not robotically recreated. I feel like, similarly, there's variability in this work; it's not about hard and fast rules and getting it to be exactly the same every time. So I guess the role of conservation then at this time is how you work with the team

that knows the work well. And still work with the artist and achieve the successful installation and then document that. And, update your installation instructions that then represent your understanding of the work at this point in time. I think that's how we saw our role in conservation this time.

Glenn Wharton:

And could you describe any specific decision making that you were in on, in terms of either media migration or the specifics of the monitors, projectors, layout, placement of objects in the room?

Amy Brost:

Well, Erica did a lot of investigation of photography from past installations, of the past installations at MoMA and liaising with the [artist's] studio. Exhibition Design provided plans, floor plans and elevations that the studio weighed in on. And as Sydney mentioned, the artist came here for the initial placement and to see the display equipment. I personally also tried to do -- I went through the similar process that Erica went through, in terms of looking at past photo documentation. And making these rough sketches of where are the elements in the gallery, in these different installations and trying to look at what was changing over time and what was not changing. And I guess my actual involvement personally was first in the preparation of the media [video] files. There's a little variation there, which we can talk about. Some files were pretty much the same file as 2009 and there were some new files. The other part that I was personally involved in is documenting Joan creating the chalk drawing on the stage. And Sydney was also present for that, as was Erica.

Glenn Wharton:

So this was a new chalk drawing for this installation?

Amy Brost:

Yes.

Glenn Wharton:

Okay. Could you describe working with her or her collaborators, her studio or others outside of the museum, and what that was like?

Sydney Briggs:

I mean, I actually feel Erica would probably be the better person to talk to because as I said, there are steps that we followed in installing this work. And the initial moment was really with Erica. She initiated that with Joan just letting her know that we were interested in installing it. And letting her know that the space would be different and sharing with her, her ideas for how to take the old space and accommodate the work in the new space based on images from the 2009 installation, but also from the gallery installation and previous installations. As Amy said, Erica did exhaustive research to look at prior installations. And to also

think about the space that we had, and to run that past the studio for their input. So Erica is really the best one to talk about that liaising with the artist at that initial point. Then once we had that, then we knew what kinds of exhibition furniture we needed to design. But we wanted to be sure about this, the heights and how the furniture would fit with the monitors. So it was actually a good thing that we didn't pre-fabricate them because the monitor size changed. Which we didn't anticipate initially. Then also she elevated the table slightly as well. So those were things that she started to think about when she walked into the space, and then she made those decisions. She came back a second time once we had all that furniture done and we placed things, more or less exactly where she initially had said that she was interested in having them. She, together with Christophe [Cherix], because Christophe then came in, and he was also involved in the mix and talking with her and made some final decisions with her about locations of, there was one monitor that was actually really moved to an opposite end. I think the frame drawings that are on the floor, those were positioned differently than what we had initially when she came in. And then she also did the drawing.

Amy Brost:

Yeah, I think ... I was just going to say, I mean we can talk about that specifically. Because I do think what Sydney is bringing up is very interesting. One of the things we noticed when we looked at the whole exhibition history, is we noticed that there are, that what is one thing that is not changing in the work are certain groupings of elements. Those things are not changing. So for instance, the *Mirage* two-channel video and the prop table, having *Car Tape* video playing near that and having the chalk drawing that looks more like a braid. That's one group. Then the second group -- I know these are just my numbers -- but another group is the *Volcano* projection and the hopscotch platform. That's another, they don't change in relationship to each other. The photographs, the prior documentation, those are two rows of seven photographs and they are an element. The six standing cones are another element. And then you have the two CRTs that have *Good Night*, *Good Morning* and *May Windows*. So those are the elements you're actually arranging. You're not actually freely arranging every element independently. So once you see that these are the groupings, oh, and lastly, the moon chalk drawing. So those are the elements that you're placing in a space. And I feel like that process, that's where Erica started. It was, here are these elements and this is the space. And then working with the studio on how you arrange those. Then I noticed that the changes were interesting, from where they were originally placed and where they ended up. So one change

from the plan, and I'm going to refer to my notes here -- one change from the plan was the placement of those two CRTs. I'll start with that because the [Exhibition Design] plan called for the two CRTs *May Windows* and *Good Night, Good Morning* to be closer together and on one side of the doorway. Then ultimately when they were finally placed, *May Windows* was moved to the other side of the doorway so it was near the hopscotch drawing on the stage. And *May Windows* was facing that stage. *Good Night, Good Morning* was turned 90 degrees and then faced the North Wall where *Volcano* was projected. So the orientation of the monitors and where they were in the gallery space changed with curatorial input. That's just an example.

Glenn Wharton:

Okay. Well, we will follow up with Erica later, but I think it's very interesting to get the perspective of a registrar, conservator and an AV technician as well. Since you all think differently and notice different things and document things in different ways. Any other thoughts about working with Joan and then what it was like to have her in the room for the first inspection and when she came back later? Was she, did it seem like she was improvising, had an idea in her mind already? Did she ask questions of others or was she very directive about what should go where?

Sydney Briggs:

I think the first time she came she was very engaged with everyone. It's not her first time being at MoMA, so she knows that it takes 20 people to install anything. But she definitely connected with the AV staff because we were talking about projection, throws and the location of the monitors. And she asked them about what kind of [equipment], to show her what they had available and looked at the projections and told them no, I wanted bigger or they should be closer together, or let's try to shift them more to the left or to the right. So she was very active with them. I had condition-checked all the elements in the installation. So I didn't really have any concerns. We knew that the cones themselves are fairly, they have a lot of dings in them and those don't seem to bother her at all. They also have a lot of fingerprints that are, I guess corroding, so creating this blackish appearance. But she doesn't seem to mind that; she hasn't really ever commented about that. I would say she was attentive to where the location of the elements were, particularly the cones. She didn't think so much about the table until, the table where the double projection is, until the last time she came, because at that point that's really one of the last elements that is set. Even when she was looking at those things, she didn't seem overly concerned about condition, surface condition. It was more about their locations, but she didn't change very, very much. She just



suggested maybe opening up the cones a little more, but even Christophe got in there and sort of fiddled with it a little bit more and to create a sense of a grouping, a loose, almost I want to say chance grouping but not really chance. She seemed to like his suggestions. She was very open to everyone. I actually found her very open to everyone's comments.

Amy Brost:

Yeah, I would second that, and say that I guess what I was getting at is, once you have these primary groupings in place, the elements that are still variable, while they're minor adjustments, she is open to hearing what curatorial thinks. Or AV. About equipment and placement and orientation of elements and things. Especially things like where the CRTs, for *May Windows* and *Good Night, Good Morning* were and the chalk drawing of the moon. I mean, I feel there were some things that she said about the braid-like chalk drawing that's near the front, right leg of the prop table. At one point she said, well, this could move to the right a little bit more. But it was discussed and others felt like because of foot traffic, maybe it was fine where it was. She said, okay, yeah, fine. One visit she said, now *Car Tape* has sound, so it should be faintly audible. But then when she came for the chalk drawing she said, well, or it doesn't have to be audible. I mean, what I really want you to hear in this is the newsreel, the [sound output from the] right channel of the *Mirage* video. So she was leaving it open. Do we think it should be playing low? Does that interfere with the audibility of the right channel of *Mirage*? So things like the final tuning and the final minor adjustments, she was very open.

Glenn Wharton:

It is so interesting. Go ahead.

Sydney Briggs:

This installation was really different also, not just because of the room size, but that the room is juxtaposed next to two other installations. So there is foot traffic, it's a through-room. So people are walking [through], whereas the 2009, you really came into the space and you lingered and then you could walk out. But it really had a very self-contained feel. But this one you really do walk in from one area, you go into her space and then you walk out into a new area. So even though there isn't too much sound, there's only sound coming from one of the rooms. And you can hear Martha Rosler a little bit with her...oh gosh, I forgot the name of the ... thank you. *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. I love that piece. And you can hear occasionally, you can hear Martha saying something but it's in another room. So that would be the only outside sound other than people's discussion and foot traffic. And just the population of visitors as they walk through the space, which can -- maybe if there are too many people in

the space, you might not hear everything so clearly. But it's a different room [from 2009] because you really do come in from one position and leave out of another.

Amy Brost: Yeah. Because this gallery has two doorways and the other one had one.

Sydney Briggs: Right.

Amy Brost: And I think in terms of some of the things we wanted to talk about today, I hope I'm not bouncing around. But when I think about the conservation concerns, I think one of the primary ones is this idea that it's a mature installation. We understand it very well, but we have Joan. And her decisions are site specific. So this is difficult, because when you go to put an installation work into a space that maybe has different architectural features and different traffic flow, and how she thinks about that and how we will think about that on our own are very, very different things. So even as well as we understand, I do think there is a little bit of a comfort level working with her on this one to see that there was this flexibility and this collaborative spirit in the final adjustments. So that we feel there isn't some exact requirement to meet. That it can and should have a little variation.

Glenn Wharton: And it's very interesting. I just want to say that I think, what you're saying right now is, the information that the public never gets. The kind of collaborative decision making that goes on behind the scenes at a museum with the artists. I think a lot of people think, well, the artists determine everything. But in fact what you're describing is a situation where she had opinions, but she's listening to you all and modifying her responses. Then you're also talking about sound bleed from other works that might be coming in from the doors, the exhibition room and you're talking about the placement of objects given the foot traffic through the room and all of these decisions are made on the spot. And they're somewhat collaborative with the artist given an elevated place in the discussion. Do you have any response to that or would you like characterize that?

Amy Brost: Yes, I think that's exactly right.

Sydney Briggs: It is. And I think the other thing that Amy was bringing up is that, I don't know if you've heard that specifically. But it's just that even though it's a mature work and we do have a lot of experience with it, we still defer to the artists. We still rely on that last little what, it's an unnameable thing. That the artist knows about their work to say, "Yes, you did get it right. This is

right." We did these, I just going to add these two little additions, changes or not changes maybe, a little flair to the work. And yeah, that's it. It makes a difference, sometimes it really does make a difference to getting the feel that the artist wants. And I know that we're talking about Joan and it's so funny that I keep thinking about in my mind about Richard Serra. It's funny that I think about this, but I had a really wonderful experience installing *Cutting Device* which is a sprawl work of Richard Serra's and he wasn't there. But he had a very experienced person, art assistant, longtime assistant, usually who does the works in Europe who was there with me to do it. It was very interesting that experience because we're trying to give that feel of uncontrolled sprawl, but it is controlled. Right? But you want it to be by chance a little bit. You have a little, chance operations may be involved in it. And yet all of it, we mapped it out. But then there were little moments where he said, no, we're going to do it, we're going to move it a little more this way because he would never do this. And it's just, that is the extra that I think we still, that is what we all don't feel super comfortable with and we still feel like we need Joan. Because we don't feel like we have 100% that feel yet.

Amy Brost:

Well I think we couldn't, because the site specificity is always a creative element, always a creative decision. So when it comes time to make those decisions, we'll just be tasked with making them conservatively, basically. There are things, maybe ways in which Joan could make a decision that makes the work quite different. Or might be more radical that we wouldn't feel comfortable doing. Like when confronted with maybe an unusual space or unusual setting in the future.

Sydney Briggs:

Well, think about the chalk drawing. Remember? So when she did the chalk drawing, we had the old drawing that we had made a very high res [high-resolution] image of, and we projected it down. But yet and still when she did her own drawing, even though she kept the projection there, her lines were much more exaggerated. Remember?

Amy Brost:

Yeah. Well, I thought that was a great microcosm of the installation as a whole, was that we projected the 2009 chalk drawing onto the stage and she didn't exactly follow all those lines [when she made the chalk drawing in 2019].

Sydney Briggs:

Right.

Amy Brost:

So it's a great microcosm of the installation. It's like, this is how it was before, but her gesture on that prior hopscotch sketch was

not exactly the same, deliberately. In some ways the way a number was formed was different. So I thought that was instructive for us. And that comes back to what I was saying about just, I guess being conceptually consistent though. Because this idea of ritual and repetition, it's not about precise replication. And so that's where I think I feel good about us carrying this work forward from a conservation perspective. Another example is in 2009 I recall there were, the lighting had colored filters. And this time there were no filters. So instead of having the otherworldly bluish cast to some of the walls and ...

Sydney Briggs:

I think it was the objects.

Amy Brost:

Yes. So I was not here in 2009 but I did see that those were used, and then this time, [the artist said] Oh no we don't need it this time. And that was her decision. But I think as a conservator, if I were not doing this installation with the artist, I would think we needed those blue filters because we had them last time. So that's the change I'm talking about. I don't think without the artists' input I would say let's ditch the filters.

Glenn Wharton:

So in your opinion, if she changed her mind about the lighting for this installation, would MoMA have the right to install it either the way it was installed in 2009 or the end, the way it was installed 2019? Does one tend to go with her latest, either earliest or latest set of decisions?

Amy Brost:

I mean, I think that question could be asked about a lot of different installation artworks, but just thinking about this one on its own, and maybe this answer is always case specific, I feel like she had gone through this period of changing the installation from '94 to 2005 and while she didn't change it dramatically thereafter, I think she couldn't help but make changes. So I would be inclined to think of the latest installation is representing where her thinking is with this work and helping it mature and bringing it to this point. But I can see where someone might make a different argument, whether from curatorial or a different conservator, who would say that maybe showing the work in a room that has a single entry and exit, that maybe there was something about that. The spillover light from adjacent galleries into this room that was smaller anyway. That it somehow made her make that decision about the lighting. So yeah, I think it could be a point that is debated.

Sydney Briggs:

And also she added this, she added an element. She actually added an element, and its status is still a little bit unclear. Because she took the recording from her re-performance of this

work at the Tate. So she did a re-performance of *Mirage* at the Tate, and she took the recording and put it on a small flat screen on the wall. In the space, it's separated. So it's very clear that it's not part of the installation but yet still she added it, to add another element, almost a time element, right? To say, it's to give a sense of the arc of how long this piece has been in existence or even its possibilities. Because there is an active possibility in which you do the performance. And then there's also the static one, which is the presentation that we have. So it was interesting, and she hasn't said that we should install that all the time. But now that we've done it, maybe in the future it's not clear whether our curator will always want to include that or maybe not.

Amy Brost: Yeah, I think that's also a great question for Erica because I know that it's not being required as an element moving forward and it has a separate label. But since it's the artist's decision to put it in the same gallery, it's an interesting point to consider.

Sydney Briggs: So even if it's not permanent, it's still the fact that she has this impulse to add. It's still there. That's interesting.

Glenn Wharton: I'd like to ask you a few about a few other aspects of the installation before we move on some couple of other topics. We haven't talked about the floor material, the wall color, wall labels, anything else or the decisions in the room. Any other comments about the physical aspects about the installation and decisions that remain?

Amy Brost: Well, I would say one thing I noticed when I went through the file, is that the room dimensions of this gallery are closer than the media gallery to what was on the original installation instructions. So I think just space-wise the intimacy, the more intimate scale of this room is what at least came with the initial instructions, which said the ideal exhibition space would be 30 by 32 feet. That was the initial, and this room is about 37 by 29 feet. So that's the first thing. In terms of the space, I would say there have been -- I think this also speaks to the variability -- there have been several neutral gray wall colors that she has liked and used. So one of those, that was used previously, she evaluated on a visit and said, no, I think, it looks maybe it's too greenish. But there was some discussion internally that it wasn't the gallery lighting, the actual lighting conditions, and that maybe affected her judgment of it this time. Then they went with a different neutral gray. But just that there are several neutral grays, and this one is one that hasn't been used before.

- Sydney Briggs: But she definitely wanted -- the one she didn't like, again, she was looking at it under conditions that weren't consistent with the installation. But it's definite that she wants a darkness to this, she does want some darkness in the space. So it cannot be a light gray of any kind; it must be a dark gray. And also she was concerned initially with light bleed from the other rooms. Because there isn't any light locking situation. One of the ways we considered that there's a room of photography right adjacent to that gallery. So we painted the portals the same color as the walls so that it would help reduce some of the light infiltration.
- Amy Brost: Right. And there's no light lock for the space. There is some spillover.
- Sydney Briggs: Right.
- Amy Brost: And I think also, I just would mention too that the lighting that, we used the spotlighting. I think that some of the instructions mentioned that even spotlighting the props from a light on a stand, that that's something that's been done. But we have ceiling-mounted spotlighting. So the ceilings were high. They're over 14 feet. So if that also is different, I think the media gallery had a lower ceiling.
- Sydney Briggs: Maybe it was little lower.
- Amy Brost: But in this case it's nice to be able to have the lighting really totally out of your field of vision. The projectors are totally out of your field of vision. The speakers on the *Mirage* two-channel video are left- and right-flanking and they're ceiling mounted and then angled down. So you're not that aware of any display equipment in the room. You see the CRTs, but you don't see playback equipment.
- Sydney Briggs: It's true. And the only lighting and just to, there is just lighting on the cones, it's a very soft light. Then there's lighting on the object. I think it would be only, maybe only used one spot, very softly screened spot on the objects [props] on the table. Those are the only lights that are added and everything else is from the projection.
- Amy Brost: Right. It's the cones and the props and the photographs.
- Sydney Briggs: And the photographs, yes thank you.
- Amy Brost: But it's very, yeah. She was keen to say that the cones and props should not be overlit. And so that the lighting [level] was

adjusted downward a little bit. Also, there was some lighting on a chalk drawing that was removed. And the lighting across the photographs is supposed to be even so none of the photographs drop into shadow even though they're lit with a single light, so those adjustments were made. So that's the lighting learnings from this time. And I'm just checking my notes to see about, oh yes, the ceiling was white. It was the native ceiling and native floor.

Sydney Briggs:

But they're high enough you don't feel them.

Amy Brost:

You don't really feel that. You don't see -- it's not really in your field of vision, the ceiling.

Sydney Briggs:

Right. And also when we hang projectors from the ceiling and it's white, they paint the pipes white so that they also, you don't notice them.

Amy Brost:

These projectors are white ...

Sydney Briggs:

The projectors are white, so everything just bleeds into the ceiling above.

Glenn Wharton:

Okay. If you don't have any other comments about the specifics of the installation, I'd love to move on and just touch on documentation. I'm curious generically if you could very quickly say what kind of documentation you ordinarily create for an installation like this that might go into the collections management database or somewhere else? Both from a registrar and a conservation point of view. And maybe how that documentation is used by staff next time around when a work like this gets re-exhibited.

Sydney Briggs:

So now MoMA we're starting to move more consistently to digital condition checking. So as it from a registrar's point of view, the most important documentation that might be more specific to reg and to conservation are the object condition reports. I have an iPad that I used, and I took a lot of digital photos of the artwork, but we already had paper condition reports that had been created from a while back, which I also use as comparison and I will PDF those. I will create scans of those and add them to a digital file now that we keep. We have in the Y drive [shared internal server location], we have this newly established file "room" for our collection objects. Because we realize that we're using a lot of digital formats. So what I'll do is I'll upload the scans of the paperwork and put that in a folder for that artwork. And I'll still have the hard copy and that will still

live in our file room. But I'll have the uploaded digital copy. Plus I'll take all the photographs having to do with the condition reporting that I did to link those into that folder and I'll create a new folder then I'll make it specific to the fourth floor reinstallation on this date, so people will know what the dates are that the images are related to. So that those will be available to anyone who might have a question about the condition. So that is one thing. And then also I think I needed to just adjust ... I had to adjust the database for a crate that was not included for some reason. It was there, it just had been somewhat deactivated. And I reactivated it so that there was an accurate count of how many crates. And making sure that the crate contents are correct. So that was the main thing that I'm doing from this point. And Amy and I, I gave Amy many of my additional notes because she created a fantastic display documentation document and installation document, which we will then upload to TMS. So any of my particular notes about the display, I pass them on to her to be added.

Amy Brost:

I think this is a great question because we really rely on TMS. That's the first place people go.

Glenn Wharton:

TMS is The Museum System, which is the proprietary name of the collections management system the museum uses.

Amy Brost:

Yes. And we use, that's the first place people will look for information about an artwork. So when Sydney talks about organizing all the physical elements and describing them and tracking them there, we do the same with the media elements. So we have digital components created and described in TMS for all of the video. And when we are creating documentation of the installation, it used to always be that creating an iteration report or what we call Display Documentation could be localized in conservation. And it was generally medium specific. So if it's a film or video, maybe it's something I do on my own. But with a big installation like this, we really collaborate on documentation so everybody is interviewed -- it can be informal conversations, email exchanges, everything finds its way into a Display Documentation report, where that's organized and distilled and made available for teams in the future that are going to install the work. So I think that's very important effort that in some ways it takes as long as installing the work is making this dossier of documentation, of what we did and why we did it. One thing we noticed is looking at past installation photos, how difficult that is. If you want to know -- you maybe know that two different monitor sizes were used, but from a few installation images it's very difficult to try to guess which one is where. So



we try to create a lot of detailed documentation about exactly what equipment was used to show each of these videos and then have floor plans, elevations and measurements. And that type of thing so that there aren't these open questions in the future.

Sydney Briggs:

And we also have to estimate how much time is required. That's one of the most important things is to estimate how much preparation you need before you get to the floor. And, making sure that you have the time to make the exhibition files if they don't already exist. How much time that will take. But also reviewing them before you use them if they already have been created. And then estimating how many people you need to uncrate, to put everything into position and how much time it takes to do that. Plus have AV and there's multiple steps. So in this case it's probably something like a two or three day, maybe two- or three-day installation. Because first you would come out to the floor with everything we would condition check. We would open everything and start to lay out some of the larger pieces, and have AV come with their setups so that we could set the projections. Then everybody needs to remove some of that stuff so that the carpenters can get the projectors up into the ceiling. So you have the carpenters and the electricians involved with setting up the electricity, that can take a day. Then having the exhibition furniture created, which can take a couple of days. And then you come back again with the things and place them. So it could be about a week. A lot of time all together, but it's broken up in large chunks and maybe two days of real active time. We also place that estimation of time into TMS.

Amy Brost:

Yes. And we put that in our Display Documentation report because once we finish this documentation of the installation, we take that and update our installation instructions. But we have a document that is a bit more than just installation instructions. We call it a Display Specification document. And that is the document that we will send out to a prospective borrower, let's say. And it's not only how the work is installed, but what does it require? What does it need? And one of the pieces of information in that, is the estimate of the time to install. So it helps a prospective borrower understand what they're getting into if they borrow the work.

Glenn Wharton:

Well, once again, I think this information is really very interesting and it maybe even surprising to some of the future users of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, to learn the extent and depth of documentation that goes on in a museum like MoMA when an installation like this occurs.

Glenn Wharton: One more followup question along these lines. Do you sometimes embed questions or concerns that you have about this installation or staff next time it comes around? And were there anything, any specific concerns that you had about this installation that you would want future staff to know when they're going through your documentation?

Amy Brost: We do put open or unanswered questions into the documentation when we have them, but we were very fortunate to have Joan here and visiting and so involved and responsive and collaborative. And as a result, I think that when we had questions we had them answered. So we don't have those kinds of outstanding issues this time. On her last visit here to do the chalk drawing, she said, oh, this is the best I've ever seen it. So we knew that that had been fruitful. All of that dialogue.

Glenn Wharton: Okay. Well we've covered a lot. Do you either of you have anything else that you'd like to comment on before we close the interview?

Amy Brost: I realized I wanted to mention two things. One about media. For this installation, she had given the museum at some point the 16-millimeter film of the *Volcano* projection. And so for this installation we actually had that film scanned. So we were able to have a high definition, new, higher quality file for the *Volcano* video. So that was exciting. Secondly, I don't know if you recall this Glenn from 2009, but the *Car Tape* video at that point in time was modified so that it had a vertical roll effect baked into it. And it was actually our AV or conservation team that did that here to her specifications. And it was a modification so that it would simplify the exhibition, and the CRT wouldn't have to be [physically] adjusted to create that effect. So I think those are two kind of interesting aspects about the video files themselves that we have. The other thing that we have by way of documentation is we actually have two pieces of chalk, that Joan brought the day she made the chalk drawing. And one of them, she used to make the chalk drawing and we have them in our artists' materials box in conservation. And she knew the brand name of her second-choice chalk, but not of the first choice but she said it was not the expensive one, not expensive art materials. But it was the softest, brightest white. So we do have, from the past couple of installations, her chalk preferences and we now also have samples of her favorite chalk.

Glenn Wharton: Wonderful.

- Sydney Briggs: I would add also we, the other thing, which I don't know, maybe this is already in the documentation. But we had never tested this high-res image that we took of the hopscotch drawing. We had taken an image, but we hadn't ever really tested to see if it was a workable solution if Joan cannot make the drawing herself. So we did test it and we know that we always want the platform on the floor and we want an overhead projector to just project the image down on the platform.
- Amy Brost: I'm so glad you brought this up because, this idea that we have, in this installed work, Joan's original drawing, on the stage. And we weren't sure how [to prepare for her to do it and] we kept talking about it. Like when is she going to come in and do the drawing? How is she going to do the drawing? What's the best way to do the drawing? So there was trial and error and discussion -- curatorial, AV conservation -- everybody was talking about how to do this. And AV had this ingenious rig that mounted this projector and using the lens shift feature, they were able to project [the 2009 photograph of the chalk drawing] directly downward onto the stage. So she was on her hands and knees did the drawing, and that showed us a way forward [how to do it in the future] ... So actually, whereas that digital file of the hopscotch drawing had been in our artwork file, moving forward, it's an artwork component. Because now, it's the means by which we enable someone to do this, execute this drawing, if not Joan then someone else. So it changed the status essentially of an image we had in our files.
- Glenn Wharton: Interesting. Anything else?
- Amy Brost: I don't think so. We'd be happy to have Erica for a conversation and some further input from AV. And if you want to reflect on what we've discussed and let us know any specific questions you have for them, we can regroup.
- Glenn Wharton: We will certainly follow up. So I want to thank you. I know how busy staff is at MoMA. I thank you for taking this time and please thank Mike as well for this wonderful interview.
- Amy Brost: Great thank you so much.
- Sydney Briggs: Thank you so much.
- Glenn Wharton: Okay. Bye-bye.
- Amy Brost: Bye.

*This transcript is intended to provide an accessible form of interview audio content. It has been edited for factual accuracy and clarity. Any alterations are noted with brackets.*