

Rebecca Timmermans and Sandra Weerdenburg interviewed by Glenn Wharton, September 10, 2020

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Glenn Wharton: Today is September 10th, 2020. My name is Glenn Wharton and I'm speaking with Sandra Weerdenburg, head of Conservation at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and Rebecca Timmermans, Conservator of Modern Art at the Stedelijk Museum. We'll discuss their work at the museum, and in particular a project they conducted to research, document, and conserve two installations by Joan Jonas in 2006–2007.

Glenn Wharton: Before we get started, could you first describe the Conservation Department, its function, staff, and roles?

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes, Glenn, thank you. Yes I can. The Conservation Department of the Stedelijk is not very big. We have ten persons but if you relate it to...translate that to full posts, it's only about seven full posts divided over ten persons. And we have four conservation disciplines. One is the autonomous works, three-dimensional works / sculptures. That's one discipline. Then we have a discipline for paintings. Then we have a discipline for paper conservation, also photographs, everything on paper, typography. And then we have applied art. And applied art is, they're all [sorts of] possible collections, ceramics, furniture, etc., and this is all divided over those ten persons. None of whom is really working full time.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And then we also have a lot of externs, freelance conservators working for the department. Either for reasons of capacity, we don't have the time; or expertise. There's still a lot of specialties we don't have in the house and we hire in on it but we are always responsible and we do the coordination and the planning.

Sandra Weerdenburg: So I'm Sandra Weerdenburg. I'm head of the whole Conservation Department and I'm trying to keep everything working so that all disciplines can do their thing, cover all the museum tasks that we have to do. And yeah, we do all the normal museum tasks, condition checks, taking in, the intake of new works; [work] for the exhibitions, treatments, research, yeah. All the normal collection care which you do in a museum.

- Sandra Weerdenburg: I think that's about it. In our organization the Conservation Department is part of the Department of Collection Care. That's a bigger department. And that also involves the registrars, the exhibition building, the storage facilities, the transport, etc., so that's collection care and beyond. Our conservation department is part of that.
- Glenn Wharton: Okay, thank you for that. And ...
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Oh sorry ...
- Glenn Wharton: Go ahead.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: I just missed one important one, the Audio/Visual Department. That is an independent, separate department. It also belongs to Collection Care but it's not part of Conservation but it has a conservator working there. So there is a conservation task but their tasks are broader than conservations, so it's a separate department.
- Glenn Wharton: That's very interesting to me because it's always interesting how the Audio/Visual staff work with conservators with time-based media works. So thank you for that.
- Glenn Wharton: And could you describe the two installations by Joan Jonas that you worked on?
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes. We worked on two installations, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and then *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places*; that is *Sweeney Astray*. And the two...I'll give you a short history of the installations, how they came into our collection. Because Joan Jonas is, of course, a performance artist and she was very active from the sixties on. And she was using art ... as you all know, she was working with a lot of different themes like space, and senses, and she used a lot of different elements of dance, theater, drawing, sculpture, audiovisual things, photographs. And all those performances, they were not installations. And in the beginning of the nineties, the Stedelijk Museum wanted to organize an exhibition of Jonas's oeuvre and for that exhibition, it was not possible to perform all the works again. It was not really an option. So they decided to use film and video tapes, props, etc. Everything that was left over from the performances. They were working with Jonas on this.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: And in cooperation with Jonas, they decided to translate, transfer the different performances into installations. And in the end there were six installations made from a lot of performances

from Joan, and that was for the exhibition *Joan Jonas: Works, 1968–1994*. And from those two...sorry, from those six installations, two were purchased by the Stedelijk Museum. So two of them, *Organic Honey* and *Sweeney Astray*, came into the Stedelijk collection.

Sandra Weerdenburg: So that's how the installations developed, or how the performances developed into installations. And then they came in the collection. Rebecca, do you have anything to add to that?

Rebecca Timmermans: No.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Okay. So then once they were in the collection then it turned out they were dynamic installations, I just call them dynamic installations, you can also say changeable, not fixed. And so the whole museum practice with the two installations and the consequences of those dynamics—they are quite serious because those installations, the two that were developed, they served as the basis for every next presentation of the installations in different exhibitions, for instance in Stuttgart, Berlin, New York. And Joan was always there.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And so with every exhibition Joan herself made the...formed, made, installed the installations again in the space that was available at that specific place. And that means that they changed. Sometimes she took things out. Sometimes she added elements. She did everything that she thought was necessary to convey her meaning and the intent of the work. So any time the installation was different. And she used to work a lot for the Stedelijk installations, with Dorine Mignot, our curator; they worked very well together, they got along very well together. But the consequence was that ten years after the first presentation of those two installations, the filing of the installations contained ten different inventory lists and only Dorine and Joan were really the only persons who knew all the ins and outs of the installations. So if there was a loan request for another museum for the installations a lot of people in the museum didn't know where to start because we had those ten different inventory lists and well, it was very complex.

Sandra Weerdenburg: So there were problems because of this. I think you call it a challenge nowadays but, okay. There were challenges in the care, the collection care, of those two installations with the conservation because of this...also for collection registration, for instance, objects could easily get lost because there were many for each installation and things changed constantly, so in the end

nobody knew what belonged to the installation anymore. So that really needed looking into.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Another problem was the information on the condition was partly missing, especially the things you want to know about original condition compared to the current condition. That's also an issue. Then there was the meaning of the material which is, especially with Jonas, with a lot of artists of course, very important. And the influence of the condition on this meaning. And if you don't know the original condition it gets very hard to get a grip on the condition in relation to the meaning of the material and so the meaning of the work.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Both installations contained...

Rebecca Timmermans:

Outdated...

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah, outdated technical equipment. Also degradable materials. There were a lot of questions about authenticity and also the importance of the original because also in the past things had been replaced by Jonas herself. So that was an issue. And then there was a lot of unclarity, things were not clear, about the presentation because of all those ten years, as I said before, the installation changed constantly. And every time Joan was there, so that raised another question, how important is it that she is there every time? Can we install the installation if she's not there? If we want to do that, how do we do it? What are the parts? Etc. etc. So there were many questions that needed to be answered.

Glenn Wharton:

Wow. Well, first of all I like your choice of words, "dynamic" and "challenging." I can see how it was dynamic with both the artist and the curator being so involved and changing things for each instantiation, and "challenge" is a very optimistic way of framing it. But part of what we're doing with the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base is providing insight for our users into the roles of artists, curators, conservators, and others. And so I think bringing the two of you in and hearing about the work that you did will really help people understand how conservation works in a museum but also particularly with works like Joan Jonas's.

Glenn Wharton:

So I think you've set it up well. I personally, as a conservator, can already see the need for a conservator coming into this situation. So could you tell me about the aims of the project that you conducted in 2006/2007 and maybe a short overview before we get into the details.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes, well to put the purpose of the project...if I tell it in a very short version, is what we wanted to do is defining the two installations, get a grip on their material and conservation aspects, develop a clear plan for future presentations of the two installations, and in everything, everything what we do in that respect, we wanted to respect the meaning and the artist's intent. So basically, that's the purpose.

Glenn Wharton: Okay...

Sandra Weerdenburg: In short. And then I can say there are four... Did you have a question so far?

Glenn Wharton: No, no. I was going to say, could you tell me about the different elements of the project.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes. Well you can always discern more elements or less, but if you go to four main, important elements, which is much broader than the Jonas installations. Of course it's really common to all modern art installations. So we had a presentation element, I just mentioned it shortly. In practice that meant what are the parts of the installation, where do they have to be put in the installation? What is their place? Are there any demands? What demands are there to the space the installation needs to be installed in? The choice of the parts in such a way that the... everything is shown as much as... doing justice to the concept of the work of Joan and we need the right transfer of the meaning and interpretation of the works. And that means that you really need to know what the meaning of all the parts is and their role in the whole installation.

Sandra Weerdenburg: There is also the question, the role of the public. Is there a role of the public? If so, what is the role of the public? And then we already realized, of course, that those installations are dynamic because the spaces will change also in the future; where you can present them. So we also wanted, as far as presentation goes, we also wanted to keep room, make room, in the whole project for the documentation of changes. What are the margins? What are the dos and don'ts? What do we really have to do in this way and where can we vary, and if we change or vary, what are the margins, the dos and don'ts? So that's about the presentation. That is still the first, main element.

Sandra Weerdenburg: The second main element that we used was the documentation issue. How can you document this? How can you document an installation like this and what's the best way to do it? And also, how do you deal with changes, future changes? Some things are not easy to document with installations like this. Like the

intensity of the light, the general atmosphere, the volume contrast, between things, shadows. So that was also a specific point of documentation.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Then there was the matter of authenticity. Can you speak of a model, or an original as a point of...how [do] you call it...starting point for the whole installation and preservation, can you do that? And if so, how do you do that? What is authentic, what is not? How do you deal with authenticity? Can you replace things? Can you guarantee a certain amount of authenticity even though it is not the starting point of this installation because Joan is always playing with the elements and the parts. Well, again, what are the margins? Where can we change, where can we not? Also, in relation to replacements or conservation/restoration, of separate parts in the future, as well as the whole setup.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

So the authenticity question that was element three, and then we have element four, and that is the whole conservation and restoration issue; that is defining the original state of the parts, the material state, is [it] changing [different] from the current state? And if so, is that a problem? And if there is...if you can talk of dysfunctioning parts of...or degradable materials, can we repair them? Can we replace them? What is really important to Joan? What is not? And how do we ... how can we deal with the interpretation, and the meaning, and the intent of the work in this respect?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Then there is also the question whether there is a difference in relevance for the parts of the installation in...seen from a conservation point of view. Again, what can you do? What can you repair? What can you replace? Which part should absolutely not be replaced? Etc. So there were a lot of questions in that field. Also because the parts, the composing parts of the installations are so very different in materials, durability, etc.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And there was, of course, the question that if there is...if they really want to replace something, if it's necessary, can you already prepare for that? So already start gathering materials for in the future because they become obsolete. Which are they? Can we do it now? Is it allowed? What does Joan think? What do we think? That's another question. And there were a lot of technical questions, of course, related to the audiovisual [equipment] also with the...yeah, things becoming obsolete; and can analog recordings be replaced by digital recordings, etc. etc., and all of the elements I mentioned are very much intertwined. It's about preservation, conservation, meaning of the work. But

it's all intertwined and you cannot really separate that in your mind. Everything has to do with everything.

Glenn Wharton:

Thank you for that. And could you give us a sense of the time frame for the project?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yes. We started the project in...the whole project...the actual project was from 2006 to 2007. If we take a narrow time frame, we started in February 2006. And then that was really one meeting. We had a...that was also...there's also a bit of accidental things when you start projects like this. And at that time we had a promising student from the university of Nijmegen, an art history student who really wanted to do a project with us, so there had to be a large art historical part in this because she was an art history student. And then I discussed it with the scientific department...no she came first with the scientific department, Jan van Adrichem and Maurice Rummens, and they came to us like, okay, do we have anything? Can you combine anything? Because she's also interested in conservation. Then we came out [on] these two Jonas installations that we thought that could be perfect for an art history student with our assistance on the conservation. And the other elements of course.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And then we had sort of a working group with me, Rebecca, who is a sculpture conservator, and who was very much involved from the beginning, Anne Mink the student from Nijmegen who was going to do the main body of the work, especially in the theoretical and planning aspect; Dorine Mignot of course, she was a curator who was so close to Joan and worked so much with her on those installations. I already mentioned Jan and Maurice from the scientific department, and there was the curator, and head of the curators Geurt Imanse. And that was a small taskforce on this and I was the project leader and coordinator, and trying to get everything together.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And there are more people involved, of the museum of course, but I will come to that later. It's a ... yeah later I will say something about the museum staff because there were more than this small group involved of course. And that was everybody in 2006, then we started. Then Anne Mink, the student, wrote the research plan, all the things she wanted to do, and she talked with everybody of course, and then she wrote a very bright research plan that we could really work with. Then June and July, we started the inventory of all the separate parts of the installation elements and we will say something more about that later. And then in January 2007, after a lot of preparation had already been done, we managed to get two

rooms in our temporary building because the museum building was closed then because we were renovating. And we had a temporary building, the SMCS, and there we got two rooms for ten days to make a pilot presentation of those two installations and we also needed Joan there. So Joan was also coming down.

Sandra Weerdenburg::

And then in September 2012 and September 2007 there were follow up installations, but maybe it's clearer if I leave them out for now. So the strictest, narrow timeframe was February 2006 until January 2007.

Glenn Wharton:

Thank you. Actually I am very interested in the roles of different staff members at the museum. So you mentioned a number of people who were at these initial meetings. Could you go a little more deeply and describe who was involved at the museum, and the role of conservation in this project?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah. So as I mentioned conservation was quite important because there were so many conservation issues and, well I became the project leader of the whole thing, as head of the Conservation Department. But even as much as the sculpture conservator, and together with Rebecca, who's very much involved in getting all the practical things done, conservation issues mainly, and Anne Mink. So the three of us were very close. We were always very much.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And the other departments in the museum, which are really, really ... we couldn't have done it without them...again Dorine, the curator, I already mentioned them, the scientific department, Jan van Adrichem and Maurice Rummens; [and the] head of the curators; Saskia Stokhof, she was from the registration department, describing, measuring, all the parts, drawing the plans later in the process. Of course the Audio/Visual Department was very important, Gert Hoogeveen and Moniem Ibrahim, [and] Nicole Delissen was very important, Head of Collections and Presentations, to get the money, and the time, and the spaces. The exhibition building department we needed very much. Photography department, packing department, and then also a number of other conservators in the house like a textile conservator, paper conservators, they were also informed in different stages of the project.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

So the role, the general role of conservation was the...together with the scientific department and the curator we took the initiative for the project. We did the coordination and the planning. We made a structure, we made the formats, the forms for the object registration for each part. We coordinated...I mean we supervised Anne Mink, the student who was doing a



lot for the work, for instance a lot of the interviews that were in the rooms for the pilot and she did a lot of other things too. And it was always together with us, in cooperation and in supervision. And Rebecca, for instance, did a lot of the condition checks for the separate parts before we could bring the parts to the rooms, etc.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And then we did the condition checks, the conservation proposals, the proposals also later in the process, and the whole documentation, archiving, etc. And always together with a lot of other departments. That's mainly how the roles were.

Glenn Wharton:

Sounds like just about everybody in the museum was involved. Certainly all the collection staff.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah it was sort of a good example of what you can do if you really get all the...as we say in Dutch, we say, if you really get all the noses in the same direction. And it takes a lot of organizing and it takes structure, but then it's amazing what you can do. And of course, last but not least, Joan was really...we could not have done this without Joan's input. So we were very happy that she could come for two weeks—and we finally had the pilot installation—and work with us and answer all the questions, and discuss all the themes and issues.

Glenn Wharton:

Yeah well actually that was my next question because you mentioned that Joan was very involved in the curatorial process, working very closely with the curator, and I'm just curious, what was her role in this conservation project?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Well she came...she did not come in the preparing, first phase, when we were preparing things, the formats and the forms and doing all the documentation on the separate part. Then she wasn't there. But she came when we started on the pilot project, so then we were really going to install the works. And she was absolutely necessary. We couldn't have done it without her, again. Because she needed to define, also in close cooperation with Dorine again, the curator, the definite installation. She had to look at the parts, are these all the parts you want because you have added parts, parts were left out because they really belonged to other installations, or other performances. So what do you want? What parts? How do you want it installed? How do you want us to deal with certain conservation issues? If things are degradable can we replace them, can we not?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And everything always in relation to the bigger, the broader context of the work, the meaning, the ethics, the aesthetics, you name it. So she was unmissable for decision-making in, I think,

every respect of the installation, conservation, future conservation, and documentation.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And both Joan and the museum, [we] were really aspiring to make [do] “more or less”, we realized it could never be definite of course. But to make sort of an ideal version of both installations that could be used by the museum for future presentations. Given, of course, the margins of the space that it would be exposed in. Back in the Stedelijk, we can always use the space, we can always make the space that we want, the ideal space for this installation. But it is different in other institutes. So then we need the dos and don'ts, and the margins, but still Joan and the museum wanted to get more or less of an ideal version of both installations, and then you find the margins, where you can go from that, or leave it like that.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And still, it's important to mention, still it's not over because the installations have been reinstalled since the project a number of times and she's always involved. She's always there. And so you can always discuss with her the changes, the insights that change, and at the same time stick to the format we made so we have a very strong base to work on. And then, yeah, every time with Joan when it's installed Rebecca is usually there. Then you can see, what you can adapt and what not, and all those changes are different options, and document it again. So we have sort of a grid for the future. Because Joan won't be always around and then still we must be able to install those works in a responsible way.

Glenn Wharton:

That's very interesting to me. So even though this project was 2006/2007, she has continued to work closely with staff every time her works are reinstalled.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah Rebecca?

Rebecca Timmermans:

Yeah she did. We went with *Sweeney Astray*, for instance, to MACBA in 2007 and with the same piece to HangarBicocca in Milan. And every time the setup is a little bit, slightly different. So we tried to record it, to make plans of the room, and film the whole installation, and write down why it is different from the first one. And again, for *Organic Honey* we had the opportunity in 2012 to do it in the best way she liked. So there was a room especially built for the installation.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

[S]o, but also the museum reopened in 2012 after renovation and then that was really the perfect setup for *Organic Honey*.

- Glenn Wharton: So the museum documentation continues to grow.
- Rebecca Timmermans: Yes, exactly.
- Glenn Wharton: Getting back to the project, could you just go a little more deeply and describe the elements of the project itself and the actual content of the project?
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah. It already came along a bit. The first thing we did, that was also the first thing that was really necessary to do, was to make an inventory of all the parts, of the still existing parts, so compare all the ... gather all the documentation there was in the museum about the different inventory lists, photographs of earlier installations, the exhibitions, etc. That is something that Anne did, Anne Mink, the student. So we had a few of...then we had an inventory of, okay, this is what we have.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Then we tried to get some order into that and we started... Rebecca and I did that, making clearer—but not too long—formats with basic information about the different parts. And that means the basic inventory data of the works, a short description of the parts...sorry, a short description of each part with a photograph, description of the materials and techniques, of the condition as far as we could see it, because we didn't always know the original condition, the installation including the relation of different parts to each other and in the total installation. This, by the way, was something we did also later in the project but we put it as a point already on the form. But some things I mention now were filled in later because, of course, we couldn't describe [of] all the things in the installation, how Joan wanted it because she wasn't there yet.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: So the first choice was really making the form, putting in the data of the objects that we had, and then during the process adding on the forms things about the installation, conservation issues, packing, if it needed improvement, etc. And some things happened in the first phase, before Joan came, and other things happened during the pilot installation when Joan was there and we could discuss everything, and other things were added later. So it was a continuing process. But that was very important, make formats for the basic object registration of each part and cover as much as you need in it in the short way. So that was what we did.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: The next thing we did was make the pilot installation, I already mentioned a couple of times, at the temporary building. We had ten days, two rooms. And an important decision there was not to install the two installations together, but after each other.

And the purpose of that was that Joan would only have to busy herself with one installation. So she would also mentally, and for content, be only working on one installation at a time. It was also the most practical way of organizing it, but it is also very important for the content that she could really concentrate on one installation at a time.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

So *Organic Honey* was the first one to install. And then the next week *Sweeney Astray* followed. And before—this is a practical thing—before Joan arrived, all the elements of the installations were, as good as possible, unpacked, put ready, make ready photographs and tables for installation. And then, after that, Joan arrived, the artist working together especially, again, with Dorine Mignot very closely. And with museum conservators, and the Audio/Visual Department and of course the other supporting departments. She started working on getting all the elements where she wanted them. So she did the...she made the choices of the elements, she looked at them, in the end she removed some of them because they belonged to other installations or performances, and were put in more or less by accident.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

So that was very important. That was, I think, the core of the whole...the purpose to have Joan do that. And we could ask her questions, discuss all the things, and she was making choices. And what was funny to note is, Rebecca said it several times and it's true, she was using...Joan is very much using everyone around her as a sort of a mirror. So also for her it is still dynamic. She's discussing things, she listens to people, "oh yeah, maybe I can do this, or maybe I should do this, what do you think?" So it is a very open, inquisitive, and rewarding process with Joan.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Then of course we had...there were sometimes new elements that had to be added to the installation as sort of a supporting element, like a wedge, or visible supporting parts that have no meaning for the installation but needed if you want to put something at a certain angle. So those things were discussed too. And there were a lot of interviews that were filmed during these two weeks, ten days really, and the interviews were about...the main topics of the interviews were the ideal installation, and also the dos and don'ts for future installations, the meaning of the work, and also of the separate parts and the relations between them, and the conservation, restoration, and also I might add, documentation for conservation, future conservation also, I should say. And there were also some urgent matters that we had to address immediately.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

And this [was] all very interconnected, intertwined. And again with this purpose to get an ideal prototype of the ideal

installation knowing that it will change again. And then there is something about the interview techniques but I will get back to that a bit later. I think Rebecca can add something now about the specifics of *Organic Honey*, and also in relation to the specifics of *Sweeney Astray*.

Rebecca Timmermans:

Yeah the whole installation when we, after those days with Joan, it was not completely clear what all the elements...we know all the elements but depending on the space it was [in]...she was not really finished with the whole setup. So we were lucky with—I already told you—we reinstalled it [*Organic Honey*] again in 2012 which the whole installation is still...was more crystallized than *Sweeney Astray*, so we had to work more on the second installation [*Sweeney*], longer. And still we have some questions about it.

Rebecca Timmermans:

*Organic Honey* was already in... [the] first time that it was presented in Queens Museum of Art in New York and in Hotel de Sully in Paris, it was there already more crystallized; so that was more easy for her to see how it should be.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah so that was also very interesting that this difference between the two installations. The *Organic Honey*, which was much more crystallized, and then all the questions for *Sweeney Astray* because it...yeah, she really had to decide on things herself to...what she wanted with that one. So there was also a big difference in working on the two installations.

Glenn Wharton:

I'm really struck by a couple of things here. First of all I think most people have no idea what goes on behind closed doors in museums. And the fact that you did a pilot installation...I think it just wouldn't dawn on many people that you would go through all of that work to install a complicated installation so that the artist could be engaged, so that you could document it for future staff, essentially. That's a huge project. And from my point of view, very, very important.

Glenn Wharton:

I was a sculpture conservator as well, early in my career, and when I became a time-based media conservator, my work really shifted from primarily working on physical objects to building documentation, or institutional capacity to allow staff in the future to reinstall, reperform these works. So this project, from my point of view, is just a model project that I think other museums could emulate.

Glenn Wharton:

And also I was struck by the engagement of the artist, because we've now interviewed quite a few people for the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base: curators, conservators, and other technical

staff. And they all say the same thing about Joan, that she's right in there. She's really working with everybody. She's helping, she's making decisions, but she's doing it as the artist, but working collaboratively at the same time.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Yeah she's very open. It's this mirroring and she's constantly looking, searching, seeing if this is what she wants or maybe it is not, and I think that makes it very special to work with her.

Glenn Wharton:

How wonderful.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

A kind of openness. And of course, it also came up in the interviews. That was another important aspect because Joan was, as I already mentioned, interviewed a number of times, mostly by Anne Mink but also by others sometimes. Sometimes by Dorine, sometimes by me, on conservation issues for instance. And what we used, that's also interesting because we're Dutch of course, was the SBMK project, *Modern Art: Who Cares?*, a project that was done in The Netherlands and we were all really involved in that. And we used the interview techniques that were developed in the *Modern Art: Who Cares?* project from the SBMK Foundation. And this basically means that you start working...when you have an interview you start working from the broader perspective, the broader-meaning aspects of her work, and then you sort of zero in, that's what you say in English, zero in?

Glenn Wharton:

Mm-hmm.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

I think. On the more detailed aspects. So the way this worked with Jonas in the interviews is... So at first, she was extensively interviewed about her being an artist, what it means, what it is, the way she works. Then it went to the specific installations as a whole, the two installations, the context of the work, the implementation of the work, the transition from performance to installation, etc.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

After that, she was asked in more detail about the different parts, elements of the installation, the— how you call it— pedigree, where it came from, the meaning for her, the context, the relation with the rest of the elements, and then last but not least, there was... We tried to anticipate as much as possible on future presentation issues, especially differences, where can we change, where can we not. And also on future conservation and collection care issues.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And I think we covered it quite well, but never complete of course, but we have a lot of material, enough for us to work with and to serve as a good base for all those issues. And the interviews were filmed. So we have them digital, and they were also written down, also digital of course. And all those things are in the Stedelijk archives.

Glenn Wharton: You know I'd like to just provide a little background for the users of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, if you will allow me. I would just like to say that what was going on in Amsterdam at the time that you did this project really represented a sea change in our field. You referenced the *Modern Art: Who Cares?* conference in 199[7], if I have it right. And then there was another conference, *Inside Installations*, in 2010. And I'm struck that this project was really right in between the two of those. And I'd just like to say that what was going on in Amsterdam, it's still going on in Amsterdam, has made it the leader of innovation in the field, conserving contemporary art.

Glenn Wharton: There were these two organizations. One of them is the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art, INCCA, headquartered in Amsterdam. And the other is SBMK which you referenced. It's this organization that just doesn't exist anywhere else in the world, I don't think, where all of the museums—or many of the museums maybe—in The Netherlands that collect contemporary art all make a contribution to this organization and the organization, then, is able to provide the field with workshops and training...working collaboratively so that it allows the museums to work together to advance practice.

Glenn Wharton: And so this project that you're describing here was really building on these protocols developed by these two organizations and at the *Modern Art: Who Cares?* conference, which was international but there was so much happening in Amsterdam. And the Stedelijk Museum was right at the center of it. And I'm just struck that this project is right between these two seminal conferences that really changed our field. So it's just really exciting to me to hear you talk about this and hear how you were actually interviewing the artist and me understanding the context, that this was all pretty new for our field. Back in the twentieth century, we didn't interview artists so much but it was becoming standard practice by now, when you're describing this project.

Glenn Wharton: So forgive me for just providing that context but I think it was very helpful, for me anyway, to be placing it sort of historically now we can look back.

- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah, sure.
- Glenn Wharton: Do you have anything else to say before we move on?
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Sorry?
- Glenn Wharton: Do you have anything else to say about the context?
- Sandra Weerdenburg: No, you're very right. Also we really used a lot from *Modern Art: Who Cares?* because, as you say, it was in Amsterdam, we were there. I was also there at the meetings of *Modern Art: Who Cares?* and a lot of museums, at least in Holland, started implementing all the things we learned there fairly quickly, because we really needed that. And that's probably because we were very close to the fire, close to the source. So we knew what it was about, we knew why it was important, and we started implementing it probably in an early stage.
- Glenn Wharton: Okay. Well let's get back to the project.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah, the project. But yeah, you're right, the context is important. Why can you do a project like this? Because you've learned all the other things. Documentation and conservation was another important element of the whole project. So that started before the installation already in the depots, checking everything, describing everything. It went on during the installation. And so, in the end what it led to, that we have from each installation, we have a very well documented prototype, [an] ideal version that can be used for future installations. And this prototype, you can... well it is put, I don't know a beautiful English word for this, but this prototype is divided over several separate different documents, also these separate files sometimes. We, at sculpture conservation, have the whole document. So we keep the whole document and the history of the project, all the aspects, all the documentation. And basically it is the registration forms, during the pilot a lot of additions were made to the things we already wrote on the forms, on condition, and the way you want to install it, relations with all the things etc.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Then we have a lot of film and photographic documentation, videos mainly of the artist interviews but, of course, of the whole setup and of the separate parts, works. Then there are very accurate detailed descriptions, floor plans of the installations in...during installation, how you want them. The general guidances, the dos and don'ts, where can you...where do you really have to follow the guidelines or where can you be a



bit more simple with it? Then there are the specific guidelines for each installation, especially for instance for audiovisual instructions, light plans, formats, etc. The Audio/Visual Department is very important also in this, of course, because that is so ephemeral. How do you say that? So it can escape you, the quality of light, intensity of light.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

Then we have additions to the packing instructions. Create new packing materials, etc., adaptations of the packing, and a lot of additions to the conservation issues. What do we need to do? What do we want to do? How can we do it? How do we deal with originality, authenticity? We had some great interviews with Joan on this also trying to define, with some very specific objects, like the green silk dress. That was very interesting because it's also already degradable or decaying, how do you want us to deal with that? And that was very interesting because she was changing views and then we asked her again and we asked, okay what's your gut feeling? What do you want? That was very good. It's also in the interviews.

Sandra Weerdenburg:

So we gained a lot by doing this. As you said earlier, it is really a lot of work but you gain so much for the future and also if you don't have all this information I don't really see how you can deal with those installations in a responsible way in the future. And on top of all this documentation, which is more or less the normal museum documentation that you need, Anne Mink, the student, she wrote a master thesis describing...really going in depth into the whole art historical issues of the work, the meaning, Joan, the context. And that was one part of her master thesis and of course she also went into all the aspects of the whole project. So we also have that master thesis and the art historical part on top of the museum documentation, to put it simply.

Glenn Wharton:

Okay. Could you...did you want to say anything more about further documentation of these two installations before we move on?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

No, not really. It's very detailed of course. And because the moment you start documenting, you get into all the details. Do you have a specific question?

Glenn Wharton:

No. I just wanted to ask if you had anything else to say, but we could move on to storage of the works. Could you tell us how the museum actually stores things?

Sandra Weerdenburg:

I'm sorry, I do have an addition—the further documentation—I'm sorry, but that's really about after the project. So we were

mentioning, Rebecca and I were mentioning the new setups and the changes, again, and the adaptations to the project, and every time Joan is there, and those new setups—because they are dynamic installations—are each time documented of course. And then you get smaller changes, sometimes adapted guidelines, not really, but you get more of a sense, okay...what can we do? Where is our space? Where are our possibilities to vary, if we need to vary, because the space is totally different? Yeah, that is the further documentation of the two installations, and that's ongoing I think.

Glenn Wharton: Yeah, that's interesting. As we've said before, it's still building, every time you reinstall these works, the documentation.

Glenn Wharton: I am interested in how you actually store the physical elements of these installations?

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah that is the relatively easy part for us. We have a very good packing department in-house. And they make...they have very good packing systems. So it is, of course, kept in parts and they are all registered and numbered etc. They are in our collection care... collection, AdLib, our registration system. And the parts are packed in what is the best type of packing for that specific part. Can be a crate, can be a protective frame, it can be a box, can be together in a box. So whatever is best for that part. And they are stored in a depot, climatized depot, of course. And they are fine, I think.

Glenn Wharton: Yeah it's interesting you say that the physical storage is the easy part.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Relatively easy.

Glenn Wharton: Because I know when I was at MOMA building all of this documentation, artist interviews, videos of installations and performances, storing the documentation became a real challenge. How do we...and foremost in my mind was, how do I make it so that busy people in the future can access it and learn from all of the interviews and documentation that I was producing? So could you tell us how you actually archive the documentation at the Stedelijk?

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes, because what I was talking about just now were just the physical parts. Documentation, you are right, is a different story. Now, as I said, the whole project...we have copies of certain parts and they went to the relevant departments in the museum, for instance to audio/visual departments, the scientific

department, collection registration. So it is kept as a whole and it is also divided over different departments, but that doesn't mean this is quite finished. I can imagine that we could still work in the future, as you say, documentation, how can you make it accessible etc? And that really is an issue.

Sandra Weerdenburg: I think we can go through that again and improve it. But for now, it is kept as a whole and at the relevant departments but they only have part of it. Copies of parts of it.

Glenn Wharton: Moving on then, I'm interested in learning what your involvement is when you loan these works to other institutions?

Sandra Weerdenburg: At the Stedelijk, we have a meeting that's called a transport meeting, and there all the loans are discussed and they are also conservators sitting there, and curator, and all relevant people who are working with loans. So we always know in a very early stage already when it is only in application. If a museum is only asking for a work we know of it, and that's very good because then we have an early involvement, then you can deal with the questions and issues early.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And though the selection is already there, and what the guidelines...the guidelines we have of the installations, they are...if it is decided that installation can go on loan, then guidelines are shared. There is in a very early stage contact with Joan, what she feels about it, if she will be there, etc., all those questions. And then the guidelines are shared, the exhibition plans are shared—how do you call it—the maps. The photographs, everything they need. And every installation on-site is with a courier of the Stedelijk Museum. It's usually Rebecca. She is the ...

Rebecca Timmermans: [And] somebody from the Audio/Visual Department.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And the Audio/Visual Department is also, yeah, that's also very important. Yeah they're always there, the Audio/Visual Department, Rebecca, conservator, and Joan is always there. And yeah, between us we have so much knowledge of those installations now, and all the documentation, that that goes well.

Glenn Wharton: Rebecca do you have anything else you want to say about your involvement when these works are loaned? How does it...how are you engaged?

Rebecca Timmermans: Now every time I'm just doing my courier job. So as a normal courier, but is always nice to have the contact with Joan and see what she wants, and how she responds to the space, and... Yeah, what Sandra already said is she's really involved with all the people. Every time I'm learning more of what she finds important, how close the objects should be together, where the entrances should be, yeah that's been the...yeah, every time it's really valuable for me to be there, to learn more about the work.

Glenn Wharton: Well, before we wrap up, I'd like to hear maybe from both of you what your conservation concerns are for future treatment, installation of these works?

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes well, of course we have always been working with, in mind, the situation where Joan isn't there anymore. So we now have all those guidelines, formulated, that we know her opinion about conservation aspects. We talked on every object, every part. We discussed it with her from a conservation point. But still, then you have general guidelines. There is always the concern that if something happens, it is something that you just didn't discuss with her. It's always the "factor X." You didn't discuss it, you don't know it for this specific object, you know it in general but not specific. That's one concern.

Sandra Weerdenburg: The other concern is concrete, more concrete...finding replacement for obsolete audiovisual equipment. Our Audio/Visual Department is quite good at doing that, thanks to the internet, but at some point everything is obsolete and you cannot get it. So that's a concern. Joan, for instance, always wants to keep the black monitors. So you'll mainly have to make something different inside technically, later, or somewhere in the future. The fading of the felt tip drawings is an issue, photographs will discolor, availability of light bulbs. We are making inventories at the museum, in a broader context for all works. We have a big project on that, especially with applied arts, making inventories of light bulbs and ordering them ahead, but even that knows an end sometime, at some point in history. There's the silk dress, the green silk dress that we discussed that with her and we know what to do if it really, really gets very degraded. It might turn into a problem. There are other degradable materials.

Sandra Weerdenburg: So those are the ones we can think of now but we also know there will always be unexpected ones.

Glenn Wharton: And Rebecca do you have anything to add or is that pretty much—

- Rebecca Timmermans: No, we made this list together, so... In the installation there are lights and they are normal film lights. And then of course a lot of LUX, so degradation will speed up more. So hopefully we can show the piece but then in a responsible time frame. Not too long, not too many venues. So there are always risks involved, that it will get damaged also by the public.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah. That's also a concern.
- Glenn Wharton: Well, we've covered a lot and you described for us a really remarkable project that I consider a model project for others to emulate. This in-depth work of documentation that one can do in a museum and totally appropriate for an artist who's as engaged and complex as Joan Jonas. Do you have anything else you'd like to add? Anything we didn't cover?
- Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah we have some additional thoughts and I'll try to go through them quickly.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: So looking back on the whole project, for us, also when we were working on this interview, then you realize things again. And well we can say that the purpose of the project as it was described in the original research plan, when it was written in, the first half of 2006, most [of] the goals are...we got them. How do you say it? We reached them. The artist interviews and the research were very important because it gave a lot of insight in the work and the way Joan works, the whole context. Same goes for the material...the technical material description, inventory, research. We really have a grip on that now, what's in the collection, all the parts are in the installation.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: [The] pilot installation and the artist interviews in general we put on, they were so important. They were pivotal. We couldn't have missed that. We couldn't have done it without it and they gave...we expected them to give a lot of information and they did, on every aspect. The ethics, the authenticity, the collection care, the conservation, the documentation, the audiovisual issues. Never enough, but very much. Yeah we are quite happy with this, [although] realizing that our work is never done.
- Sandra Weerdenburg: The object registration forms, they are sort of the backbone of the whole physical side of this installation. So we are very happy to have those. Also the elements, the selection of the elements, their place, their order in the installation...also their importance and relative importance is so much clearer now. Then those are more what I'm describing now are more the physical things that jump to mind now.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Then are the forms with all the information on the meaning of the work, the floor plans, the light plans, the general conditions, the precautions, etc. So we have all that now. But on another tone, or another note, what is very, very important and it became very clear, also in looking back, is the cooperation within a museum. This whole museum perspective. You cannot do this if you don't have a good structure, if you don't have people also organizing on a higher level, the money, the spaces, facilitating things. You need very good cooperation between the departments. There is, for the future, continuity and also transfer within a museum are very important because those are very long processes. And if you don't have enough continuity, you will lose it at some point. And it asks a lot of commitment from the museum. It asks time, it asks money, it asks care and attention, a lot of love, really.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And if you cannot...I think it's a bit worrying because we as the Stedelijk could do this. At a certain point in time, we could do this. And people recognized it was important. All departments looked in the same direction. I wonder how it is with museum collections with less capacity to do things like that. So that is, I think, an important issue, that it asks a lot of commitment from the institute and it also asks a lot of good contact with of course the museum and the artist. If there is not a good contact between the museum, the curator or whoever, and the artist, things like this will never happen. And it is also the personality of the artist. Joan is always very involved and there is the personal friendship with Dorine.

Sandra Weerdenburg: So there are a lot of ifs, ifs, ifs, a lot of conditions to make this work. And you don't have all of them in hand, you cannot control all of them. Sometimes it is also a lucky constellation where you can do this.

Sandra Weerdenburg: And another very important conclusion is that installations like this, we are talking about an ideal installation presentation, sort of a prototype, a standard which you cannot freeze, you can never freeze them. You can try to document them as good as possible based on this ideal installation, but it will always vary in presentation. The conservation is insecure. You don't know what will happen further down the line. You need [a] space where you can fix it in. Every new installation brings a new insight. So you could never freeze it. And that is also a very important aspect I think of this whole project.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Rebecca, anything?

Glenn Wharton: Well thank you for those reflections. That's also very interesting and helpful. So thank you both for your time. Really appreciate this and I'm sure this is going to be a really wonderful contribution to the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yeah, well we also will thank you for all your time and all your work on the Joan Jonas database.

Glenn Wharton: It's truly a work of love and I think we all feel that.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Sorry, what did you say?

Glenn Wharton: I said it's truly a work of love on all of our parts because we've all come to know Joan in various ways through our work with her, and to be able to help other people in the future understand her work and how we worked with her I think is a real... just a wonderful thing to do.

Glenn Wharton: So thank you once again.

Rebecca Timmermans: Thank you.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Yes, you're very welcome. And thank you for making all this possible.

Glenn Wharton: Okay. Bye bye.

Rebecca Timmermans: Bye bye.

Sandra Weerdenburg: Bye bye.