

Lori Zippay interviewed by Barbara Clausen, Tracy Robinson, and Glenn Wharton, August 20, 2020

© the authors and Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, Artist Archives Initiative, 2021

<http://artistarchives.hosting.nyu.edu/JJKB/lori-zippay-interview-august-2020/>

Glenn Wharton: Today is August 20th, 2020. I'm Glenn Wharton and thrilled to be interviewing Lori Zippay, the Emeritus Director of Electronic Arts Intermix along with my colleagues, Barbara Clausen, Curatorial Director of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base and Professor of Art History at the University of Québec in Montreal, and Tracy Robinson, a recent graduate of the Museum Studies program at New York University and one of the key graduate students who's helped us in researching the works of Joan Jonas for the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base.

Glenn Wharton: Let's begin with a little bit of history. Lori, could you tell us about Electronic Arts Intermix and your long-time role in directing the organization?

Lori Zippay: Of course. First let me say how honored and thrilled I am to be part of this project. Joan is one of the most brilliant artists that I've worked with in my long tenure. I respect her, I love her, and I love her work. It's so important that you're doing this project. Such an amazing legacy of this amazing artist. I'm thrilled to be a part of this. The history, it's a long history actually, and a long history with Joan. EAI was founded in 1971, so it's coming up on its 50th anniversary as a non-profit arts organization. The mission of the organization is to foster the creation, exhibition, distribution, and preservation of media art, and it does that through multiple programs. Let me go back to the actual history of the organization, it was founded by Howard Wise, a gallerist who had a gallery in New York on 57th St. The Howard Wise Gallery. He focused primarily on kinetic art, the Art & Technology movement. He had a number of really quite prescient and important exhibitions that dealt with art and technology and, again, kinetic art.

Lori Zippay: Some of them were *Lights in Orbit* and *On the Move*. And his most landmark exhibition, which was quite controversial at the time, very provocative, was *TV as a Creative Medium*, in May 1969, which was the first exhibition in the US dedicated to video or television as an artists' tool. That exhibition, I think there were twelve artists' installations, the premiere of Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman's *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*. Again, it was a prescient and extremely important and controversial exhibition. Really, on the basis of that show...it really catalyzed a

movement among the artists who were working in video as a creative medium, and also activists. Artists and activists were working together at that time with this new tool.

Lori Zippay:

He closed the gallery in 1970 and founded EAI as a, I always call it, an alternative paradigm, because it wasn't a gallery, it wasn't a publishing house, it wasn't a film distributor. It was something else. It was an organization that was founded to help artists working in this nascent field and to administer projects to support the artist, to provide tools for artists, in a field that was just being born. It was emergent. It really didn't have a support structure around it, just to help provide access to the artists' works, access to tools.

Lori Zippay:

It was begun forty years, fifty years ago as an alternative paradigm. I always argue that today, even today, it still serves a purpose as an alternative paradigm. It isn't a gallery, it isn't the internet where works are available freely. It's not a gallery where artists' works are seen as unique objects. It's a third model that really has lasted for fifty years. It's, of course, evolved over the years. The first initial program was the editing facility that was founded in 1972. Free editing to artists working in video. At that point there were very few workspaces for artists to work in this new medium and help provide the equipment. I think Joan, I think, worked in the early facility in the early 1970s. In 1973, another pioneering program was devised, which was the Artists Media Distribution Service. That is the distribution service that survives today. It was really a way to coalesce around works that had been created in the editing facility, by artists such as Shigeo Kubota, and Nam June Paik, to provide a vehicle for the artists' works to be distributed and circulating. Again, inventing what didn't exist at that point.

Lori Zippay:

Of course, fifty years later, the distribution service is the key program in the organization. All the programs at EAI were spawned out of that distribution service, a collection which has grown to 4000 works. It's a multi-generational survey of artists' video and media from the 1960s to the present. The online catalog, which includes writings on the artists' work, writings on the works and biographies, bibliographies, expanded resources, a preservation program which was founded in 1985 to start preserving early works in the collection, public programs...just all the programs are linked to that core program, which is a distribution service to provide access and preserve works in the collection.

Glenn Wharton:

Thanks for that. EAI has played such an important role for so many years in initiating this genre of art and also distributing it,

and serving the artists as well. Could you tell us a little bit about how EAI actually manages these works and preserves them and distributes them?

Lori Zippay:

EAI has a very close relationship with our artists, which makes us unique as a distributor. Why I say we're a different paradigm and not quite just a distribution service is because for some reason, I think because of our history, because we are fifty years old, and the way we've evolved, from the beginning of the history of the medium, maybe because of longevity, the organization has a lot of continuity of individuals there. We have a very strong tie to many of the artists we work with. Even using Joan as an example. We worked with Joan through the editing facility. She actually still works in the facility sometimes. We house her works, we catalogue her works, we preserve her works, we store them digitally. We are involved actively in the distribution where--I always use a Venn diagram. This is the artist we distribute. These are the museums and constituents that we distribute the works to and work with. Right where those two circles overlap, that's EAI. We work equally as closely with the artists to distribute and preserve their works as we do with the exhibiting institutions that we work with.

Lori Zippay:

We have staff who are working constantly with museums on display, on preservation, on conservation of the works. We're also working, at the same time, with the artists. They're involved in those discussions, they're involved in those policies, they're involved in digitizing the works, so it's a very hands-on approach both to the exhibition, the exhibitors and the programmers, and on the other hand, the artists who we work with. I'm very proud of that actually. That's something I feel is very, very distinctive about the organization, is that we need to be hands-on, we're not putting tapes into bags and sending them out, it's really working with the conditions of the exhibition, working with the acquisitions. The artist always has veto power. The artist always has a say, or their representative or the estate. It's a real process. I feel like we're also—all these metaphors. I like metaphors—we are like an artisanal shoemaker, where we're making things to order. It's not like a monolith, it's very unmonolithic. Each order, each new acquisition, each work is dealt with individually. Each work is a narrative. Each order, each exhibition, each acquisition, is a narrative.

Lori Zippay:

It's a very hands-on, I know I'll say this a thousand times, but I can't stress enough how hands-on it is, the process. We work, as you know, with primarily non-editioned works, so we work with works that aren't editioned, which has become very...I think that's a problem for a whole other conversation, about how

complex it is to work with editioned works now that that model is changing in the art world.

Barbara Clausen:

I was wondering if you could tell us a bit, because what you've just said so applies also to Joan's work, and I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about how you met Joan and how you started working with Joan and EAI?

Lori Zippay:

I was trying to remember when I first met Joan. I feel like I've always known Joan. I still feel I've known Joan forever. There was never one moment that was like, "This is Joan Jonas," shaking hands.. I'll roll back. I started working in New York as a student and I first was still in school at Bard College. I came to New York and got an internship with Barbara London at the Museum of Modern Art, 1981. Barbara was a very generous mentor, she was a very generous boss. I was still in school, I knew nothing, and she brought me into the circle of artists who were going through her program—Gary Hill, Bill Viola, Mary Lucier, Tony Oursler, Dan Graham. It was wonderful to be able to meet these artists at that time as a young person, and they're artists who I still know and love and work with today, which is just amazing.

Lori Zippay:

I believe it was probably through Barbara (London) initially that I met Joan at the museum. Then when I went to EAI she was already with EAI at that point. I went to EAI, I started at EAI actually in 1981. To answer to your earlier question as to what was my role there: my role was everything from answering the phones initially to eventually becoming executive director and staying for more years than I ever anticipated. I thought I would stay for a summer and it ended up being my life's work.

Lori Zippay:

Joan was already a part of EAI as an artist when I got there in 1981. Although, interestingly enough, we did not have many of her very early works in distribution at that time. But it was something that happened later around the mid-eighties when, this is kind of a long story but... The mid-eighties was a turning point in many ways at EAI, and for me then, because it was when we began...I founded the conservation program there in 1985. At that point, half-inch black and white work had become obsolete, it had become out of favor, out of fashion. Mostly the artists working with editing at that point, were working in color and on CMX computers. It was a really different aesthetic that had kind of entered the field at that point. Half-inch black and white durational performance-based work was not actually quite...it was just not in favor at that moment. It was something that was not seen, it wasn't recognized as it is today.

Lori Zippay: It was work that I loved. It was work I felt very passionate about. It was work that we had sitting on shelves at EAI at the time. The New York State Council on the Arts gave the first grants for preservation in 1985/86. We got the first grant at EAI to do media preservation, specifically on that half-inch black and white early work. At the same time, the same year Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films closed and we started getting phone calls, from Vito Acconci, Charlemagne Palestine, John Baldessari, William Wegman. They had boxes and boxes of works from Castelli that had no home and no place to go and they wanted EAI to distribute these works. Of course, I fell off my chair and said yes. We had boxes and boxes of half-inch black and white video work coming to us that had no home from these most extraordinary artists, that had not been seen—for several, at that point, it was the mid-eighties—since the seventies because the work had not been shown as often as it should have been, it was not as recognized as it should have been at that point.

Lori Zippay: We started the first preservation program of transferring those half-inch works to one-inch analog broadcast standards at that point. That was the beginning of Joan's early works like *Vertical Roll* and *Left Side Right Side*, those early works. We did the first preservation project on those works in the eighties. Seems so early at this point. From then on, it's been decades of migration, migration, migration, migration over decades, to continue to migrate that work and preserve it. So this is a long-winded way of saying that Joan came into my life early at MoMA, then at EAI, and [inaudible].

Lori Zippay: I know I'm touching on many points at once. I'm skipping over topics.

Barbara Clausen: No. This is perfect. This is really because it's such an interconnected history.

Lori Zippay: Well, exactly. Exactly. And so one other thing, something else at EAI that is kind of law, but I insisted and I think is just, it's so important to me that preservation and distribution go hand-in-hand. Distribution's a form of preservation, and so access and stewardship of the collection go hand-in-hand. We never do preservation at EAI to put it on a shelf and let it sit and get dusty. We preserve works so that they can be distributed and circulated, so you can have access to them through multiple channels. Our distribution service has many channels of access: we have a screening room, we have online viewing, we have public programs, we have the straightforward distribution to museums, to classrooms. We have our educational streaming project, which is an educational streaming service where

professors can access and students can access the collection online for classrooms, which is an extraordinary new service.

Lori Zippay:

I think it's really great timing at this point, but it's all about preservation with access built in. Again, it's always, it's intrinsically linked with access and preservation go hand in hand, so it's stewardship and access.

Barbara Clausen:

Specifically Joan's work, the distribution of her videos, such as the videos related to *Organic Honey* and *Mirage*. I imagine there was really a lot of interest over the years, specifically in regard to...there is the conservation, but also the distribution, of these works. Could you speak a bit about that?

Lori Zippay:

Yeah. I mean, her works have always in demand. From the early days to the days of *Double Lunar Dogs*, *Volcano Saga*, the more highly produced works of the eighties and nineties. The early works, once ... somewhere in the 1990s, I think, the early works in general, half-inch black and white performance works, were recognized again in the art world as being extraordinarily prescient, important works of art that needed to be preserved and it's shown a renewed interest in that entire body of conceptual performance work. There was a real renaissance in the nineties of those works. There's been consistent interest in Joan's work across the decades. We've always, it's interesting, I was looking at the list of the titles of these works that you supplied, the works from *Mirage* and the works from...

Glenn Wharton:

*Organic Honey*?

Lori Zippay:

Exactly. *Organic Honey*, and particularly in *Organic Honey*, many of those works were available as single channel videos for years, so *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, for example, was something that we distributed as an independent single channel work for decades. Same with *Vertical Roll*. Again, I'm trying to get the exact titles. *Duet*, for example, that is a single-channel work. However, *Anxious Automation* was never in distribution. I'm not sure why. I looked in our database. There's seventy works by Joan listed in our database, twenty-four of which are in distribution. Some of these works that we have in the database are just performance elements, or installation elements, raw footage, just miscellaneous pieces that she doesn't want in distribution. It's really a mixture of works like *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, which is really [inaudible]—

Barbara Clausen:

That's so fascinating that EAI also takes care of works and footage that's not necessarily there for distribution, but where really the conservation comes into play and I imagine—

Lori Zippay:

Amazing, if I can say it's amazing, it kind of is. That's, again, just this idea that artists like Joan, there are other artists too, Carolee Schneemann, Nam June [Paik], artists who we're really close with, we have a real personal tie with. They used EAI almost like it was a studio. When Joan comes in she can just call up Jon [Deiringer] and say, 'can you pull that work out of storage?' And we have boxes of her work, that aren't in distribution which she maybe would then use. That's how the revisiting of early work [inaudible, note by Zippay: I'm speaking here of the making of *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* in 1999, edited from 1973 footage] all came about. It was at EAI back in the days when we were at Dia, back in 1999. We were in the Dia building across the street. Seth Price was there, he was the editor at that point, the technical director. Joan was going to look at some of the old footage that we had at EAI. She noticed we had this documentation of a performance at Leo Castelli. We all just fell in love with the work. We just thought it was amazing. She was convinced to revisit it. It was something that I thought was so important to see this. We all know *Vertical Roll*. It's a canonical work. We love *Vertical Roll*; it's so important. Then to pull back and see the performance, and the context surrounding it.

Lori Zippay:

It was just extraordinary. To me it adds so much to scholarship and understanding of her work to see this, watch her performing *Vertical Roll* at Leo Castelli Gallery. It blew my mind, to be honest. It was fantastic. I felt, again, in a way that having all this material at hand for the artist to just come back and revisit and to look at their own archives is so important. One thing over the years, we've migrated the works, digitizing the works over and over into different formats, initially first just transferring, then on to digitizing works. In 2019, one of the last things that happened before I left, which I still [inaudible], is that we received a grant from the Ostrovsky Family Fund to acquire a world class digital storage facility system for the archive, so everything is stored on cloud storage in perpetuity, I hope. And with that, I was able to sleep at night and I was able to leave. Because everything is stored digitally in the cloud, the collection, these files are now safely stored digitally... Because we not only have these primary works by the artists, but we have this wider hidden collection of treasures around the works of artists such as Joan, we have seventy works and twenty-four in distribution, so there's this rich material there that's just extraordinary.

- Lori Zippay: There are many artists from whom we have multiple works that are just being stored in-house at EAI.
- Glenn Wharton: Lori, I'm curious about the status of this archive that you have, of works that are not distributed, but footage that hasn't been made into works. You mentioned that the artist has access to them. But would researchers have access to them or what—
- Lori Zippay: Not unless the artist has agreed. It's really more a service for the artist. There are many things that, for example, because we know the material, the people who work at EAI know the material, there are times that we have persuaded an artist, we used our powers of persuasion to put something into distribution or to allow us to apply for funds to do preservation on them. In fact, that happened with *Wind* and *Songdelay*. We had them on our shelves, we had both of these works. The films were not transferred to video. In, I think, also 1999, was the first time Joan agreed to re-transfer them. At some point, we actually made these transfers in 1999 and we premiered them on the Dia rooftop in 2000, we had a wonderful program with Joan, it was one of my favorite things we did, probably, with Dia. It was amazing. We showed the new edit of *Mirage [2]*, the new transfer of *Mirage*, Joan performed live with *Mirage* in Dan Graham's pavilion. We showed raw footage of, color footage of *Glass Puzzle*, which was extraordinary and was also in our archive of Joan.
- Lori Zippay: We house the artist's archive for the artist. It's not for the public. But again, there are times that we're able to persuade the artists, we use our powers of persuasion to preserve and restore. I think it's so important that it be accessible to wider audiences to researchers, to educators, to students.
- Barbara Clausen: I think, in that spirit, I think Tracy had a question for you.
- Tracy Robinson: I just wanted to go back to your relationship with Joan, this very long, deep relationship. I was wondering if you could speak about the other people that have worked with Joan closely over the years?
- Lori Zippay: To be honest, it would be anyone who was at EAI, who was in positions of distribution and technical work over the years, particularly starting with in the eighties and maybe the nineties, Robert Beck the artist, who was technical director at the time. Goes by the name Robert Buck now. Certainly John Thomson, he was the distribution director in the 2000s. Seth Price, he was the technical director who she worked closely with. He also edited



*Mirage 2* together with Joan, when she revisited it. Stephen Vitiello, who wore many hats and did the preservation at EAI with Joan. Many, many iterations of preservation. Trevor Shimizu, who was the fairly recent technical director in the 2000s and of course Rebecca Cleman, who is currently the executive director now, who has worked many years with Joan [as well as Karl McCool the distribution director]. It's really been a series of people who worked with Joan, mostly for distribution. Because again, distribution and preservation are so closely linked in technologies. So again, with Joan we edited her work, make copies of her works for exhibitions, and she used our facility like an extra studio, an additional studio. It's really the key staff at EAI, particularly in the beginning in the 1990s and in the 2000s.

Lori Zippay:

I think before then she was, I'm not sure where she was editing actually in the eighties. Because she was doing the higher-end production. She was working at The TV Lab and television studios. She was making the more higher end works.

Barbara Clausen:

This question of media is also interesting in the sense of how Joan herself deals with the distribution of her video-based works. Of course, living in an online age, the question comes up of how does EAI operate, or how do you think about this idea of Joan's iconic works now partly circulating online in snippets and fragments, and how those relationships between screenings and online works from your expertise perspective.

Lori Zippay:

This has been the \$1000 question, the \$100,000 question. It's the question at EAI daily, the staff is dealing with this... Let me go back for a moment to something I said earlier about this unique paradigm, this alternative paradigm, it goes back again to what happened in the nineties, when the limited edition model for video became viable. Most artists make video or works that are limited editions. At the same time, increasingly work is circulating for free online, so you have these two extremes. One is the rarified object, you have what I call the agreed-upon fiction of the limited edition. Then you have, on the other hand, there are works circulating on YouTube that just have snippets, and are random, without any context. We try to provide a third way, an alternative. It takes aspects of the limited edition model and then we try to adhere to the integrity of the physical work, to provide artists with payment, to treat the work seriously as an artwork. We also provide access. It's taking the elements of both of those models and making sure that if the work is online, it's online because Joan allows it to be online, and it's contextualized, and the quality is excellent.

Lori Zippay: That's why we have this education streaming service, which we try to...It's going to be online. It's 2020, the work is online. We know it. We're trying to control the context, the integrity of the work, so the quality is the best we can get it to be, and that Joan gets paid for it, hopefully, if it's online. And that there's context around it. Joan is remarkably flexible. Even though her early works, since *Vertical Roll* is obviously a monitor piece. It should be seen on a CRT monitor, you should feel that relationship of the television set and the human face, all those relationships should be ... However, let's face it. The work is going to be seen in other contexts...and Joan is...we're working very closely with the artist to make sure that the venue is reliable, responsible, has integrity, the context has integrity. She has been flexible in allowing work to be online in certain places, to allow *Vertical Roll* to be seen on a flat screen, for example. It's been projected, things which I'd think would not be allowable, but in fact in certain contexts she's fine with it. It just depends.

Lori Zippay: Nothing is monolithic. Everything is contextual. So, like I said, Joan wants to be flexible and has allowed the work to be available in various forms and multiple platforms and multiple iterations. As long as she is part of the dialogue, as long as the artist is part of the conversation. It's very complex. It's not easy.

Glenn Wharton: During the years that I was the time-based media conservator at MoMA, we did a lot of work to document media installations and we would build documentation in order to help, well, future curators at MoMA and others. But also when we would loan works of art, we would loan it with a lot of documentation and we had a whole apparatus behind this that would go along with a loan like that. I'm wondering what it would look like at EAI. What kind of policies did you have, what would you actually distribute with a loan, say, from a media installation of Joan's?

Lori Zippay: Typically with Joan we would just handle the single-channel work. With the exception of *Mirage*, where we handle the two, *Mirage 1* and *2*, we really just handle the single-channel. However, there are times when she's asked us to work on elements of installation where we will provide some of the footage again. It's through the editing facility, technical facility, that provided footage from works that are elements that we have in the archive, we do not really have the entire work, we have elements from the installation. If that makes sense.

Lori Zippay: Iterations of *Mirage* is the one exception because we do have *Mirage* as a two-channel installation. *Mirage 1* and *2*. And again, she asked specifically, she wanted it shown in two projections. But again, she's remarkably ... I was looking through our

database to see, other than *Wind* and *Songdelay*, which must be projected, you know they are 16mm films now on video and beautifully rescanned by Anthology Film Archives, because of a conservation project in 2018. They must be projected. *Mirage* must be projected. Everything that is 16 mm film must be projected. Otherwise, she's remarkably flexible. Everything is really very piece by piece.

Glenn Wharton:

How would you communicate that flexibility or recommendations from Joan to someone who wanted to borrow a work?

Lori Zippay:

Someone requests one of Joan's works, we ask them to provide the floor plan, a detailed outline of what the equipment is, how they plan to show it, what their audio setup is like, is it going to be projected or on a flat screen? Then we come back to them. We send that to Joan, talk it over with her, get her input, and then go back to the venue and talk it through. So it's a dialogue, constant dialogue between Joan, EAI, and the venue. It really depends. Educational screenings for example, are just straightforward. We have an agreement with the artist where we can do educational screenings, projected in the classroom and that's fine, but that's the only thing that is kept casual. Everything else is much more formal in terms of... Again, once upon a time, distribution was monolithic. You just put a tape in a bubble bag and sent it out. Now, everything is very, very complex, wonderfully and maddingly complex.

Lori Zippay:

Because video is, as you know, it's malleable, it's variable, it's fluid, and EAI deals with fluidity.

Tracy Robinson:

Can you talk about the different curatorial and programming work that you've organized over the years with Joan's work at EAI?

Lori Zippay:

Yes. I have included Joan's work in so many programs. I find her work is so applicable in so many cases that I really have programmed it very often. I think the programs that stand out to me I think, there are several that stand out to me. One was the one from 2000 that I mentioned. It was after we had just done the restoration, or the first transfers of *Wind*, *Songdelay* and the color footage of *Glass Puzzle* and the transfer of *Mirage*. We did this collaboration with the Dia Foundation on the rooftop of the Dia, the old Dia building, which was the Dan Graham Rooftop Urban Park project. We showed those restored films, and then Joan did this performance inside the pavilion with *Mirage*. It was magical. It was September 28, 2000. It was freezing cold, unexpectedly cold, the program was delayed because of

problems with projection. I remember they were serving hot cider and whisky in the café. It was amazing. Joan performed live with *Mirage* which she had not seen in many years, the restored version. It was completely magical. That is one of the things that really stands out to me and stayed with me.

Lori Zippay:

I also programmed, also for Dia:Beacon in 2011/12, it was a program around our fortieth anniversary, because EAI was founded in 1971, so the program was an exhibition, survey exhibition titled *Circa 1971: Early Video and Film from the EAI Archives*. I put *Vertical Roll* in that exhibition. But we did a conversation with Joan Jonas, Nancy Holt, Tony Ramos, and Paul Ryan at Dia:Beacon. But again, it was just beautiful. Joan spoke so movingly, and so wonderfully, about her work. She said things that I haven't heard her say. I realize that transcript has never been published. That's something that I would like to do is provide a transcript of that conversation. It was just beautiful.

Barbara Clausen:

Absolutely, and let us know so we can also add it to the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, because that is going to be very important to actually include this continuous accompaniment to an artist and her work, like Joan's work.

Lori Zippay:

Also on the fortieth anniversary we did a benefit party and we did, as the 'entertainment,' as it were, we had four artists do three-minute performances. Michael Smith, Shana Moulton, Carolee Schneemann, and Joan did a performance as well. Joan did a live, spontaneous—again, it's such a cliché, but I can only use the word 'magical'—performance. It prefigured to me the Venice piece. I think she was almost trying out something for the Venice piece. We have documentation of it, which was, again, it was three minutes of pure spellbinding magic. She did it improvised. It was spontaneous. It was one of my proudest, happiest moments at EAI.

Barbara Clausen:

I think that's also part of the complexity of Joan's work is that she's somebody who never repeats herself and always moves ahead. At the same time, she has such a firm conscience and knowledge of her past work. She really operates between the past, the present, and the future, not just in relation to the subject, but really how she uses that material. I imagine EAI plays a very big role in that accessibility to past materials, present, and future.

Lori Zippay:

I feel I'm so happy and honored that she actually has that relationship with EAI and has trusted us to have the material at EAI, to come back and use it as this archive that she can revisit and tap into it as needed, which is very, again I feel so thrilled

we can do this for her [inaudible]...I'm speaking as 'we,' as you know I'm no longer director, but EAI will always be 'we' to me.

Glenn Wharton: Lori, you've already talked about preservation and distribution and said that they're interlinked. You've also mentioned that you routinely reformatted works for new playback equipment. But I just have to ask, for the sake of conservators who might be—

Lori Zippay: Yes, of course.

Glenn Wharton: ... researching the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. Are there any conservation issues related to Joan's work that, other than migration, that you got involved with? I'd also be very curious to know if Joan was involved, or if she just delegated when issues would come up?

Lori Zippay: A combination of both, to be honest. Because the first preservation we did on Joan's work would have been with the very first preservation project we did in the mid-eighties, which was very, very [inaudible]. We were just devising standards, we were making our way, moving along with trial by error. The first transfers were from half-inch video reel to one-inch broadcast analog. That was supervised, but it was, again, it was hard because the artist could really not be involved at that point, because we had to send it to an outside facility. It was so new at the time the artist really wasn't involved in a hands-on way. Later, when we became much more expert at what we were doing in terms of doing preservation ourselves and digitization. For example, we would send the files to the artist to check, or we would do all our work with the artist present. Joan has been much more involved in subsequent iterations of the preservation. As the field became more sophisticated, we became more sophisticated in what we were doing.

Lori Zippay: Some of the issues are due to the low original quality. Joan is wonderful because she's an artist who understands that you cannot change what was not there in the first place. There are many artists who really think that you can take a half-inch reel and make it into a 35 mm film. They believe we can somehow reinvent what never was there. But Joan understands, certain pieces like *Merlo*, for example, shot in black and white PAL video, the quality is very poor. It's a beautiful piece. It's been digitized. It still maintains its integrity but it will never be, there's a certain point at which you cannot supply pixels that were never there and Joan understands that and she has been a wonderful partner in that way.

- Barbara Clausen: Lori, can you repeat the title of the piece you just mentioned please, because we couldn't hear it.
- Lori Zippay: *Merlo.*
- Barbara Clausen: *Merlo, yes.*
- Lori Zippay: It's a piece she did in Florence. Or, *Disturbances* is another piece where the original quality is quite poor but in that case you just have to do your best. To use an unfortunate phrase, 'it is what it is' on a certain level. I think understanding what is even possible to do, I think is important to convey. Then again, it was probably ill-transferred back in 1972. It was transferred badly. There are just certain works where we have problems with the originals. They are what they are and in some ways we accept it as imperfect, but perfect in its own way.
- Glenn Wharton: Well, thank you for that. We've covered a lot of material—
- Lori Zippay: I've spoken very quickly, I realize.
- Glenn Wharton: No, it's been really wonderful and your knowledge is so deep. The years that you've worked with her, it really comes through in all that you have to say. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us? Any additional thoughts?
- Lori Zippay: We have covered so much. Just again to say that Joan is an artist, she's...it's so wonderful to work with Joan... she fits her medium so well because Joan is also the definition of a fluid artist. She's willing to try, she's willing to, there's no rigidity in Joan in her work. She's very flexible, very open. Her work, there is a video we have on our website where Joan is introducing a video, at a talk at EAI several years ago. She has a wonderful quote. She's talking about the early years and how, in the early years the artist felt that video would be everywhere at a certain point, it would be on television. She said it took years for it to really come to be more visible, but it's like water, video finds its way. That's something that's very Joan-like for me. There's a generosity and a flexibility to her that fits with the medium. It's open-ended. She revisits historical works. She pushes forward, she's working in multiple directions at any one given moment. There's a richness there, but there's also a quiet dignity to it. I just respect Joan so much and I think that her process, it's so much about the process. To me she's the kind of artist that made me want to work in video. It feels ephemeral but it has a strength to its core. So, that's really all I have to say.

Joan Jonas Knowledge Base

Glenn Wharton: What a great way to end.

Lori Zippay: Thank you so much.

Glenn Wharton: Thank you so much. We really appreciated it.

Barbara Clausen: Thank you so much. That was fantastic.

*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.*