



## **Archiving the Unarchivable – Das Unarchivierbare archivieren**

International conference by the documenta archiv  
in preparation for the future documenta Institut

Thursday, 22 November – Saturday, 24 November 2018  
documenta Halle, Kassel

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### **Second Session: Time-based Media Art: The New Discipline in Conservation**

**Friday, 23 November 2018, 16:45 – 17:30**

**Dorcas Müller**

*Sauve qui peut (les médias)!*

*ZKM | Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems*

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Artists began to work with video when the first mass-produced consumer systems became affordable in the 1960s. Since video pioneers of the first generation such as Nam June Paik or the Vasulkas started with Sony open reel recorders, over one hundred different – and therefore incompatible – video formats have been seen on the market. Founded in 2004 as part of the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, the Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems specializes in the preservation and restoration of video art made on magnetic tape. The machinery needed for this process includes a collection of around 300 increasingly rare video players with US and European system and coding variations. Almost all magnetic tapes in the archives sooner or later fall victim to chemical processes of degradation, even if they are stored under optimal conditions. It was only 1981 when the first Sony open reel tapes fell victim to the so-called sticky-shed syndrome and became unplayable. In the late 1990s, U-matic tapes were discovered to cause problems with erosion of the polyester based binding system of the magnetic layer. Today Betacam SP tapes often show poorer results than the original U-matic masters you will find in the second row of the archive. Electronic art that is stored in hermetic archives is continuously losing its value and is in greater danger of disappearing than any other art form. These media are often shorter-lived than the people who made them. Many hours of early video art



will only be rescued if transferred into digital formats. We have to face the suspicion that transferring obsolete media is an endless process which may only cease with the end of human culture. ZKM | Center for Art and Media accepts digitization requests from all over the world in exchange for copies of the artwork for their research library, or for exhibitions in their museum, or for inclusion in a wider collaboration.

— Dorcas Müller studied media art at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (Ulay) and received her doctorate in media theory (Boris Groys). Among the recognition she has received for her artwork have been stipends from Kunstfonds Bonn and the Körber Foundation in Hamburg, Germany. As a founding member of the Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems, she started to work for the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe in 2004 and became head of the laboratory in 2011. She has participated in numerous ZKM productions as an artist, author, video editor and video restorer. In 2017, two major ZKM archive exhibitions resulted from the work of the laboratory: *Aldo Tambellini: Black Matters* and *Radical Software: The Raindance Foundation, Media Ecology and Video Art*.

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