



## Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory (Leonardo (MIT Press))

By Richard Rinehart, Jon Ippolito



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How will our increasingly digital civilization persist beyond our lifetimes? Audio and videotapes demagnetize; CDs delaminate; Internet art links to websites that no longer exist; Amiga software doesn't run on iMacs. In *Re-collection*, Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito argue that the vulnerability of new media art illustrates a larger crisis for social memory. They describe a *variable media* approach to rescuing new media, distributed across producers and consumers who can choose appropriate strategies for each endangered work. New media art poses novel preservation and conservation dilemmas. Given the ephemerality of their mediums, software art, installation art, and interactive games may be heading to obsolescence and oblivion. Rinehart and Ippolito, both museum professionals, examine the preservation of new media art from both practical and theoretical perspectives, offering concrete examples that range from Nam June Paik to Danger Mouse. They investigate three threats to twenty-first-century creativity: technology, because much new media art depends on rapidly changing software or hardware; institutions, which may rely on preservation methods developed for older mediums; and law, which complicates access with intellectual property constraints such as copyright and licensing. Technology, institutions, and law, however, can be enlisted as allies rather than enemies of ephemeral artifacts and their preservation. The variable media approach that Rinehart and Ippolito propose asks to what extent works to be preserved might be medium-independent, translatable into new mediums when their original formats are obsolete.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

Art is just one professional field that is trying to grapple with the preservation of digital and new media material," says Richard Rinehart, director of the Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University. With fellow digi-trailblazer Jon Ippolito, Rinehart has penned what will be the first book dedicated to the subject of conserving new media art, *Re-collection: New Media, Art, and Social Memory*. It is due to be released by MIT Press in the spring.

(*ARTnews*)

Three specters haunt the digital cabinets of the cultural heritage sector: death by institution, death by law, death by technology. This book explains our options. Read it if you want to prevail.

(Bruce Sterling)

This book will arrive like a bombshell in the twin citadels of art museums and conservation departments. The incredibly interesting and compelling narrative explains the need to rethink conservation and the very idea of the artwork.

(John G. Hanhardt, Consulting Senior Curator for Film and Media Arts, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and former curator at the Guggenheim and Whitney Museums)

With years of experience in curation, preservation, art making, and writing, Rinehart and Ippolito have written their definitive statement on 'variable media,' that is, any kind of artifact designed (or doomed) to change over time. Materials decompose, technologies grow obsolete, and software stops running. But far from simply bemoaning the entropy of our times, this book offers a bold and inspiring manifesto on how best to care for the art and culture of the digital age.

(Alexander R. Galloway, author of *The Interface Effect*)

For almost 20 years, there has been debate and speculation about a potential digital dark ages, when we lose our collective memory through a plague of digital depredations. *Re-collection* is not just a clear-headed summary of the issues. Ippolito and Rinehart have written a manifesto and a virtual Swiss Army knife of what should and can be done to prevent such degradation. Curators, conservators, archivists, collection managers, programmers, lawyers, creators, and dealers alike will benefit and hence benefit the future by committing these principles and lessons to memory.

(Steve Dietz, Founding Curator, New Media Initiatives, Walker Art Center)

As curators, Ippolito's and Rinehart's sense of passion for saving digital art and our social memory is evident

in *Re-Collection* and their book is a manifesto for museum professionals who are feeling the anxieties over how to best hold on to a sense of our collective, cultural heritage in the digital age.

(*Hyperrhiz*)

Part informational overview, part professional manual, and part preliminary theoretical dialogue, this useful, thought-provoking book collates and calibrates information about the emergent field of cultural technology preservation.

(*Choice*)

Although the focus of the book is on new media art, it is of interest for anybody who deals with the preservation of non-traditional media in museums -- which also include digital exhibitions.

#### About the Author

Richard Rinehart is Director of the Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University. Jon Ippolito is Associate Professor of New Media and Codirector of the Still Water Lab and Digital Curation Program at the University of Maine.

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##### **Aaron Mullen:**

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**Mary Kenney:**

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