

# History of the Collections

## The Goldsen Archive

Founded in 2002, The Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art is one of the United States' most extensive and accessible collections of media artworks. Housed in Cornell University Library's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, the Goldsen benefits from CUL's long history with digital archiving technologies. Its collections and institutional position make the Goldsen an ideal test bed for the development and implementation of new digital preservation efforts and the broad dissemination of project results.

The Goldsen Archive emphasizes video art, interactive digital interfaces, and artistic experimentation by international, independent artists. Its collections chart the history of aesthetic experimentation with electronic media.

For the proposed project, we will focus on a large target art group of interactive digital works for CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, and the Internet. These works were created for exhibition on small-screen monitors in both private and public spaces. The project's significance stems from the important contribution it will make to the development of preservation practices for complex digital assets, as well as the extraordinary cultural value of the artworks in our target group.

### *Media Art and Cultural History*

The CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, and Internet artworks in our test group document key aesthetic and technological developments across two particularly transformative decades of media art history. Since 1991, the world has witnessed a prolific development of interactive artworks designed for access on personal computers.

The Goldsen's interactive digital holdings enhance the world's understanding of a significant set of influential artists and their oeuvre. These collections chart the transformation of artistic practices across the two most crucial decades of the digital revolution, an historical shift in emphasis within media culture from analog to disc-based to networked and Web-based applications. The vast majority of the Goldsen's digital artworks engage or interrogate the terms of this transformation. In addition to providing an important collection of national and international art history, the Goldsen Archive constitutes a vital record of our cultural and aesthetic history as a *digital* society. In the coming years, historical collections of interactive, born-digital assets like those in the Goldsen Archive will become increasingly valuable for study, appreciation, and understanding of digital cultural history.

During the first decade of this development, leading contemporary artists with prior emphasis on video art, conceptual art, and multimedia sculpture (artists such as Muntadas, Ann Hamilton, Lynn Hershman, Michael Snow, Takahiko Iimura, Chantal Akerman, and Janet Cardiff), began developing projects for small computer screens. A new generation of electronic artists began to test the scope, range, and interactive audiovisual capability of the new storage media of CD-ROM and eventually DVD-ROM. These experiments launched the careers of today's most influential new media artists, including Zoe Beloff, Art Jones, Adriene Jenik, Lev Manovich, George LeGrady, Jody Zellen, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Annette Barbier, and Christine Tamblyn. The rapid development of open computer networks helped launch or sustain the careers of other influential and "digitally born" artists who focused on interactive artworks made for the Internet, such as Natalie Bookchin, Shu Lea Cheang, Marina Zurkow, Diane Ludin, Mez, and Simon Biggs. Many of these artists worked on CD-ROM and Internet platforms as well as larger-scale installations; their small-screen interactive works contributed to the international prestige of interactive artwork and its impact on digitally inflected painting, sculpture, photography, and video.

The Goldsen Archive constitutes a world-class research collection of work by these leading artists. The digital works in our test group include new artworks created for the personal computer, interactive small-screen adaptations of larger museum-based artworks, and also numerous interactive research compendia focused on prominent artists such as Thierry Kuntzel, Michael Snow, and Stelarc. In addition to interactive applications, the collection incorporates documents, digital ephemera, interviews, and video and photographic documentation of installations and performances. Also represented are documentation and works from collective digital workshops, and a vast collection from digital artists who developed networked presences rather than museum and gallery prestige. The Goldsen is the only American *onsite-accessible* research collection of this work that continues to collect and preserve on an active basis.<sup>[1]</sup>

### *Educational Use and Public Programming*

A wide range of audiences explore the Goldsen, which supports on-site access to all of its holdings in keeping with CUL's archival mission. The Goldsen Archive is cataloged and accessible via the library's online catalog and the WorldCat global catalog. The archive's website includes guides and collection descriptions to facilitate discovery of materials by potential users. By registering with the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University Library, any person may gain access to the Goldsen's materials. The Division staff are actively involved in Cornell courses, teaching nearly 200 classes on the collections per year, including Goldsen materials. The Goldsen Archive is regularly visited by academic researchers, media and technology scholars, and artists. Goldsen materials are used by students and faculty in courses being taught and developed in Theatre, Film and Dance; History of Art and Visual Studies; Comparative Literature (for the undergraduate major track in "Literary, Visual, and Media Studies"); Art & Architecture; Music; and American Studies.

The Goldsen Archive has also conducted a number of public programming initiatives; notably, the touring exhibition "Contact Zones: The Art of the CD-ROM" highlights the collection. Its disc- and Web-based artworks are used in visual studies and media classes at Cornell University, Ithaca College, and beyond.

Lastly, the Goldsen Archive sponsors an annual research grant for scholars to visit the Cornell campus and work with its collections. It attracts international doctoral students, artists, curators, and academics to consult its holdings, and it regularly brings nationally and internationally renowned artists and scholars to the Cornell University campus for public symposia and conferences that focus on its collections.