ISEA Symposium Archives

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Abstract

The ISEA Archives are digital repositories containing almost four decades of records for the nomadic ISEA symposium series. The ISEA symposium focuses on the intersection of arts, humanities, sciences, and technologies, fostering interdisciplinary academic discourse and exchange among culturally diverse organizations and individuals. Archival materials related to academic papers, exhibitions, performances, and many other collective memories of the symposium series are stored digitally in the ISEA Archives. Managing such a vast number of records is a tremendous job; the upkeeping of the archives relies on the continuous contribution of volunteer time and effort.

Keywords

ISEA, International Symposium on Electronic Art, archive, symposium, preservation, electronic arts, digital arts, new media, research repository

Introduction

The ISEA symposium series, starting in 1988 in Utrecht, The Netherlands, aims to create and sustain a global network of individuals and organizations involved in electronic arts and fields related to the arts, sciences and culture. This year, ISEA2024 Brisbane, marks the 29th edition of the symposium series. With close to four decades of history, many changes have occurred to this nomadic event. The ISEA organization has also changed significantly over the years. Records of the activities and materials presented at the symposia are documented in two interrelated online ISEA Symposium Archives and a physical archive.

The secretariat of the coordinating organisation (first the association 'Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts', and later the foundation 'ISEA-International') is called the 'HQ' (Headquarters). Since 2022, the ISEA HQ has been hosted at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury, UK. During the HQs' relocation in 2022, the physical archival materials related to the symposium were transferred to the physical archival repository of the Computer Art Society (CAS) at De Montfort University from its previous home at the University of Brighton in the UK. Archivists from the ISEA Symposium Archives and CAS have been working closely to ensure all records are digitized and indexed to avoid duplicating efforts.

Different from the CAS, which focuses on physical collections, ISEA archivists are constantly entering new content and reviewing existing records, ensuring that each data entry is updated and accurate. They also maintain and extend the technical platform that enables the records to be publicly available and searchable as an open access, online archive.

ISEA Archives - The Online Repositories

Since 2006, the ISEA Symposium Archives team has progressively created and improved various versions of its online repositories to preserve and store the digital records of the ISEA Symposium series. The ISEA archivists are currently maintaining records from all of the ISEA symposium editions on two different active online archival repositories: the ISEA Classic Archive (see Figure 1), developed in 2012, and the ISEA Extended Archive (see Figure 2), previously named the ISEA New Archive, [1][2] created in 2019 as an improved version of its predecessor. Both the Classic and Extended archive versions are regularly updated with new content and undergo periodic reviews to ensure the accuracy of existing records.

Contents of the archive are digitized, indexed and cross-referenced through the use of data relationships and taxonomies.

Figure 1: The ISEA Symposium Classic Archive

The Classic version of the archive is text-based, whereas the Extended version features a complex data structure, embedded metadata, enhanced data management and search engine optimization. Maintaining both versions in parallel remains essential for cross-referencing and proofreading the content.
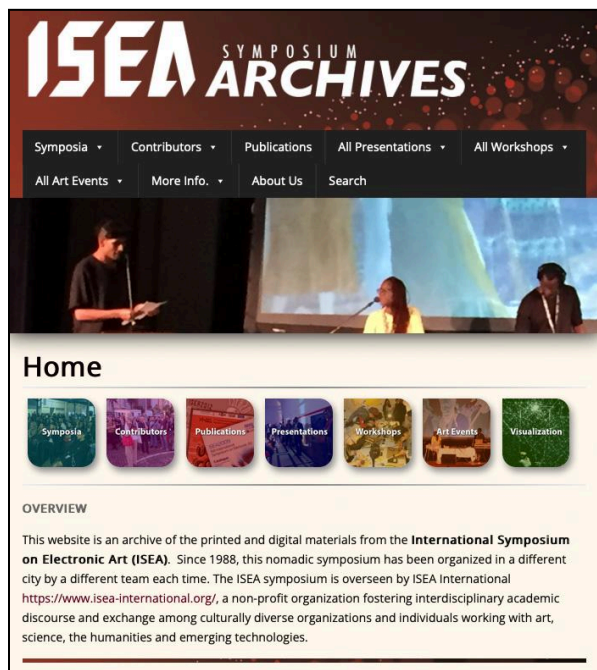

Figure 2: The Extended ISEA Symposium Archive

Extended version of ISEA Archive

The Classic and Extended Archives use a similar structure for organizing information for each symposium year. Data is systematically entered in both archives, using a consistent framework for each symposium's archival materials, as outlined below:

● Overview: General symposium details
● Venues*: Locations where various events occurred
● Presentations: Academic papers, panels, etc.
● Workshops: Symposium workshop and tutorial details
● Art Events: Exhibited, performed and otherwise presented artworks
● Gallery*: Photo Gallery of the symposium

* Gallery is only available in the Extended Archive. Venues are mentioned on the Overview pages in the Classic Archive.

Compared to the Classic Archive, the Extended version has improved its web interface design, resulting in a more user-friendly navigation experience. Additionally, there is extensive embedded metadata and a robust backend data structure. As a result, data can now be categorized and displayed using taxonomies. Another notable enhancement is the extensive inclusion of images and media files. Furthermore, data can be exported from the Extended version to create data visualizations.

New Contents and Verifying Existing Records

After the closing of the ISEA2023 symposium in May of that year, ISEA archivists began entering the content from the symposium to both the Classic and the Extended ISEA Archives. The upcoming 29th edition of the symposium, ISEA2024 in Brisbane, marks the 3rd occurrence of the symposium in Australia. ISEA archivists went back to revisit and verify the records of the past Australian symposia: The Third International Symposium on Electronic Art (TISEA in 1992) and the 19th Symposium—ISEA2013 both in Sydney. It was discovered that quite a bit of information was missing from the archives. As a result, the ISEA archivists reached out to the artists and presenters of TISEA and ISEA2013 in an attempt to recover images and videos and the archives have now been updated.

Volunteer-based Archives

Both archives are developed by volunteers with limited resources. Maintaining and upkeeping thousands of records is a very time-consuming and sometimes complex job. The ISEA Symposium Archives are constantly recruiting volunteers, with open calls for students, teachers, professionals, retirees, media historians, archivists, computer scientists, and digital artists. These volunteers not only help with the archive but also gain insight into the world of new media art and are exposed to exciting projects that have worldwide recognition. Volunteer tasks are primarily:

● Date Entries
● Problem-Solving and Programming
● Image Editing
● Researching
● Grant Writing, Sponsorship, and Fundraising

The ISEA Symposium Archive directors value the contribution of all the volunteers and we welcome new members to join the team. All members of the team are mentioned on the 'About us' page of the ISEA Archives and invited to join us at the symposium. [3] Also, the archive directors work with institutions and schools to provide credit and non-credit internship opportunities. Professors sometimes involve the students in their classes in helping out with the archive.

Conclusion

The rich history of the ISEA symposia and the content produced in the field of the electronic arts is a valuable resource to current and future generations. The ISEA archivists are committed to keeping this information up-to-date and publicly available. It is through the collaborative efforts of the archive volunteers that the development of the two ISEA archives was possible.

References

[1] ISEA Symposium Classic Archive Website, accessed January 13, 2024, https://www.isea-archives.org.

[2] ISEA Symposium Extended Archive Website, accessed January 13, 2024, https://isea-archives.siggraph.org.

[3] "About Us", ISEA Symposium Extended Archive Website, accessed January 13, 2024, https://isea-archives.siggraph.org /about-us/.

Authors Biographies

Terry C. W. Wong is an archivist and co-organiser for the ISEA Archives. He holds a bachelor's degree from the Applied Science Department of the University of British Columbia and a master's degree in fine art from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Currently, he is pursuing his graduate research study on connecting new media art archiving worldwide at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University. Terry has been involved with the New Media Art Archiving Summit at several ISEA editions since 2020. He is currently a member of the organising committee and the IPC for the Summit.

Bonnie Mitchell is a new media artist and Professor at Bowling Green State University in Digital Arts, in Bowling Green, Ohio, USA. Mitchell is a member of the ISEA International Advisory Committee and ACM SIGGRAPH History and Digital Arts Committee where she focuses on the development of their online archives. She is currently the SIGGRAPH 2023 conference History Chair in charge of the immersive Time Tunnel, history displays and retrospective talks. Her current creative practice focuses on development of physically immersive data visualization environments that showcase climate change over time. Mitchell's artworks explore spatial and experiential relationships to our physical, social, cultural and psychological environment through interaction, abstraction and audio. She has created numerous abstract visual music installations and animations that have been shown in hundreds of venues world-wide.

Jan Searleman taught Computer Science at Clarkson University for 37 years, retired in 2015, and since retirement has been an Adjunct Research Professor at Clarkson. Her research areas are Virtual Environments, Human-Computer Interaction, and Artificial Intelligence. A senior member of the ACM, Jan is also on two ACM SIGGRAPH Committees: Digital Art (DAC) and History. Jan and Bonnie Mitchell coordinated a DAC Online Exhibition "The Earth, Our Home: Art, Technology and Critical Action". She is co-director of the ACM SIGGRAPH History Archive with Bonnie Mitchell. Jan also co-directs the ISEA Symposium Archives with Bonnie Mitchell, Wim van der Plas, and Terry C.W. Wong.

Wim van der Plas is co-founder of ISEA and organiser of the three ISEA symposia held in the Netherlands. He led ISEA HQ in the first 8 years of its existence and was a board member of the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts and ISEA International (both of which he also was co-founder) until 2017. Since then, he is Honorary Chair of the ISEA International Advisory Committee and ISEA Symposium archivist. He received a Leonardo Pioneer Award in 2018.