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Interview with Martine Neddam, Amsterdam, 22 April 2024[1]

Title	Interview with Martine Neddam, Amsterdam, 22 April 2024
Subtitle	About intention, working method, presentation and conservation
Interviewee	Martine Neddam (27 January 1953), Visual Artist
Interviewer(s)	Olivia Brum, Research Assistant and Conservator
Others present	Sanneke Stigter, Researcher, Art Historian and Conservator
Place	Artist's Home/Studio, van Speijkstraat 91B, 1057 GR, Amsterdam
Date; time/duration	22-04-2024; 01:41:04 in total (MTS 1 – 30:22, MTS 2 – 30:16, MTS 3 – 23:33, MTS 4 – 16:53)
Temporal coverage	Lifetime of Martine Neddam, approx. 1953 – present (2024)
Spatial coverage	France; Holland; Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, de Balie); Breda (MOTI Museum); New York (Rhizome); Scotland
Keywords	Martine Neddam; mouchette.org; Mouchette; Robert Bresson; Rhizome; Bricolage; Craftsmanship; Internet Art; Language; Interface; Versions; User Interaction; ChatBot; Preservation; Page Navigation; GIF; ASCII; Reuse; Web 2.0; Language Models; Hidden Links; Conservation Decisions; Photoshop; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; MOTI Museum; Visual Art; Oral History; Contemporary Art; Digital Art; Restoration
Summary (Description)	The interview focuses on artist intention in the context of the Smart Care project at the University of Amsterdam. Information garnered from this interview is also intended for use in an article to be written by Olivia Brum with contributions by Martine Neddam in the serial publication *kunst en materiaal*. Martine Neddam speaks about her history as an artist, beginning with the creation of works for public space, and how the technological advances and supportive environment found in Amsterdam in the 90s created the perfect situation in which to develop the concept that would become her internet artwork *mouchette.org*. She talks about her making process, her thoughts on user interaction and community involvement and
Audience	Humanities; Arts and Culture; History of Arts and Architecture
Recording by	Sanneke Stigter, video, Sony Handycam HDR-CX450 (MTS file output) and Rode Wireless Go II (microphone)
Transcript by	Olivia Brum, Research Assistant / University of Amsterdam (July 2024) Annotated by Martine Neddam, Artist, with notes and images (June 2024)
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Related to	Smart Care: Artist Intent and Artist Interviews. NWO OC XS project
	Brum, O, (2019) "Interview with Martine Neddam on Mouchette.org and Mouchette.org-Version 01", https://doi.org/10.17026/SS/MRK0QQ, DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities, V1
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Setting

The interview takes place in Martine Neddam's studio. Olivia Brum and Martine Neddam sit on one side of her desk near her desktop computer which she uses to maintain her *work mouchette.org* while Sanneke Stigter films the interview from the other side of the desk near the door. Olivia Brum has had two interviews with Martine Neddam before this about *mouchette.org* as part of her Masters' thesis and they know each other further through other events held at Olivia Brum's other job at LI-MA. The atmosphere as a consequence is comfortable and the conversation easy going.

Transcript

(MTS 1)

00:00:00

Olivia Brum	So it's April 22nd, 2024 and I'm Olivia Brum and I'm speaking with Martine Neddam as part of the Smart Care Project and behind the camera is Sanneke Stigter. So, I wonder just to start if we can just ask you to introduce yourself.
Martine Neddam	I am Martine Neddam. I'm an artist. I am French from nationality, but I live here since probably 30 years, although I took a sort of moment to live in between, but... So, the art I'm known for now is doing virtual characters on the computer or on the internet. I'm sort of say internet pioneer, but I did many other forms of art.

00:01:00

Martine Neddam	Mainly, well, the two main axis of the art I was producing when I came over to Holland, I was already a sort of formed artist I didn't study here or anything, was language. So, language was my material, let's say. So, I produced banners, I produced things that you could hang on the wall with text, let's say. So, the text was not conceived as poetry, but more as addressed to the viewer. So that relation, that interaction, was already present in my use of language. I was more a linguist, you could say, than a poet, someone who studies and tries to

operate with the interaction value of language. For example, speech acts, like my sort of horizon in linguistic was a speech act and... So that was an axis of what my work was, working with language as a raw material, you could say, in the... in the world of visual arts, so I was not a literary artist or a poet. And the other thing I was... I was working with very much was the public space. So, language in the public space, you could say, but also construction, sculptures, but somehow the language was instrumental in the idea and the concept of these works in the public space.

| Martine Neddam | So, I did a number of... big public commissions and things like this. Also in Europe, in other places, in Scotland, in France, but here I could also find a lot of possibilities to make work in the public space. |

| Olivia Brum | Perfect. And can you introduce a bit your internet work, since we've started with your earlier works? |

| Martine Neddam | The way I usually tell it is say, but it really happened like this. I was quite successful with these public commissions. And the use of computer was, in fact (although some of the things I did were digital images, which was very new at that time in the public space) how text was integrated. What happens with public commission is that between the moment of the creation of the project and between the realization, you have lots of time, and also, which is, you could say, non-artistic, which is just logistics, meetings, things. So, in a way, I was quite frustrated sometimes as an artist, because I was just busy on papers, and meetings, and maybe waiting, and maybe these kind of things. And I was already familiar with computers, although I was self-taught. I would say everybody was self-taught at that time. Because I was using Photoshop a lot. So, when I heard of internet, I was really eager and I was really, it was a world of text, actually. And Holland, especially Amsterdam, was very, very active with that. So, I would go like many artists to de Balie, listen to a conference and try it at home, I would say. Even the people were very generous and you had that sort of people helping each other. Because my first modem, someone came just like this in a friendly way to help me install it and to show me an email program, which were only on text. And you had just a sort of little text window at that time. It must have been in 93, 94, I don't know, this kind of. So, you already had Hacktic.nl, XS4, which turned into XS4ALL just in these years. So, the atmosphere also, of course, my own appetite, eagerness to see how this, well, how language was this sort of formula to create new world... and the communication, but also the very, very welcoming and sharing atmosphere you had at that time did the thing. And the time I had on my hands also, and the frustration of not being able to show things because you had all these steps to go through and, you know, sort of. So that really was made... I was all the time on this computer, just on... You had, at that time, you had... The World Wide Web was just beginning, and all the communication happened through these small windows with ASCII characters. So, you had, I was, I started being |

busy on what people used to call MOOs, M-O-O, multi-user... They were sort of text games, but with people who communicated together and built with words spaces where they moved around and where you could at the same time be a participant, but also contribute to build this world. So that's really how I started feeling sort of alive in a sort of community of people.

Olivia Brum	Amazing. And how would you describe your mission as an artist?
Martine Neddam	My mission as an artist?
Olivia Brum	Yes, what you're trying to get across.
Martine Neddam	What I'm trying to get across? Wow, that's a big...
Olivia Brum	It's a big question. Or maybe perhaps, you know, what brings you joy in it? Or...
Martine Neddam	It's... It's hard to tell because it's so big, like I left the job, I should have been a teacher. I really, because I was in a sort of school for which I had a sort of school for teachers, with which I had a contract, I sort of brought... It was really, okay, not a matter of life and death, but something that really I had to, I had, yeah... It was really very strong, something I fought for. I didn't have art education in the beginning because I had... I studied languages, literature, linguistics, also later stage design. But that was later, I was already an artist then. But I was also at a time where people believed everybody's an artist, let's say. So you just have to say you're one. I still believe that, although later I became a teacher for an art school, but the fact of giving us not a legitimacy, I still miss that legitimacy in a way, because I never had it from the institution. Okay, my mission in art is very existential. We won't go into the details, but it was very existential.
Olivia Brum	But then how would you describe your intention with your work?
Martine Neddam	That changed a lot. I mean, like in my youth, just escape the rules of society, invent, create. But as it went, it took me... Tell me your question again.
Olivia Brum	What is your intention with your work? And if it helps, you can take just a piece if you want.
Martine Neddam	Just a piece? What, the intentions?
Olivia Brum	Yes.
Martine Neddam	Well, that's precisely, as I say, if I talk about it, it's very existential.
Martine Neddam	For example, like when someone like Marguerite Duras asking like why she writes, she would say something like, "To know what I would write if I wrote." There's this sort of existential element of self-discovery, knowing what you think, getting into... tapping into a sort of... Well with internet I often say tapping into a sort of collective consciousness which you already knew but you don't know it's already there. So, this kind of of course very vast and... And usually also, when I create something, it's not the intention or the clarity of

the intention that matters, but the thing I stumble upon that really makes upon that really makes you...go after something that was there and you didn't know was there, but it was really the thing you want to do. So, it has more that these qualities of not knowing what you look for, but looking for it. And, of course, the intentions, yeah. So, the intentions you of course can name afterwards. You realize afterwards that you wanted this or you recognized this because it was already something you needed.

Olivia Brum	Very interesting.
Martine Neddam	Which made you who you are now.
Olivia Brum	And which of your works would you consider some of your most important?
Martine Neddam	Well, right now, I would say certainly the creation of the character Mouchette, because I'm still working on it to this day. So, I created something which is more a sort of big corpus of internet work, not only internet, and an alternate persona. So, this would be the most important. I sometimes have a regret to sort of let other works, which were also sort of very important to let this work pass by or disappear. I would regret it. But sometimes it's too much, like you have to let it go.
Olivia Brum	And how do you approach the art-making process?
Martine Neddam	As I say, with stumbling upon something, and you learn as you go. Also, using tools or instruments or techniques that you already know makes it not art anymore, in a way. So, learning as you go and making this tool to your own hands and stumbling upon things that happen while you didn't know you could do them is very much a creative process. So know and then do has never worked with me. Even when you need, it's difficult and you need a lot of repetitions and like I learned Photoshop, you hardly had tutorials, even a sort of book in which you couldn't understand anything, but or create your own methods or spend.
Martine Neddam	So I'm pretty much that kind of artist, although I would say... Also, with internet and with making big public commissions, it's not like that. You have to have a clear intention and your intention will make you win the competition. With later internet project, I also tried to work like this because you have to ask for budgets and to convince people that it's a good thing to be doing. And then I find it very restrictive, although in some cases there is no other way. You need, for example with internet now, you need too much different sort of knowledge.
Martine Neddam	Especially when I started Mouchette, I did everything myself. I had all the knowledge, sound, animation, like I was not very good. Well, coding, HTML is not really coding, so it was included. So, I had that, that really made it possible. And that also was the exciting feeling that you could do everything you wanted, but you didn't have to

	know it all. I had practically zero notion of working with sound. A good notion of working with pictures since I was doing Photoshop and with text, but all the rest... And of course, I was not very good in programming.
Martine Neddam	I'm not... So sometimes I could find friends who helped me, or code was available. You could borrow code. There was a time where code was something you passed on and then copied and pasted into your HTML file, and then it worked or it didn't work, and if it didn't work, you didn't know why, and you tried something else. And so that was very much the way I started. I also had all this joy and sort of organic feeling of creating. Things go this way and then you follow it because things appear. And that was really for, I would say, at least the first five to six years.
Martine Neddam	that I did everything myself and I had so much pleasure in finding things. For example, now you can't get to your cache, you can only clean it. But at that time, your cache was a treasure trunk. You would go in the evening and look through it and say, yeah, this little thing, this little animation, I can reuse that. And so things were very different. And of course, this idea was also prevailed that the internet was a space where every receiver could be a sender, basically. And I even started making a web page at the time of Netscape 2, I think, where you received an editor with your browser, with the latest version of your browser, was an an editor.
Martine Neddam	And with the editor you had also access to templates. I didn't use them; I already had a sort of vague thing. But the idea that you don't need to create from everything, you could use a template. The only thing that it didn't do is to show you where to store it. So, I already knew that and could do it. So, to FTP, to send to the server. So yeah, that was really a time where my sort of type of art making really flourished because of that. And also, that utopia, which was real for a while, that you could create and send and then the next day somebody would see it.
Olivia Brum	And you've described a bit this dynamic between, you know, making art in public space and coming in with an intention and making art for the internet in this more exploratory approach. What happens when your internet artworks are shown in public spaces? How does that process go?
Martine Neddam	Do you mean public space?
Olivia Brum	Like exhibition.
Martine Neddam	Okay. Yeah. No. For me also what made it so important is that internet was a public space. I could compare it to the street where I had the sculpture in the roundabout somewhere. So, what it took also to make art accessible was also that you knew you were not exhibiting in a museum and your art piece in the public space had also to appeal to the passerby, as much as, of course, to the people who would grant you the commission. But also... So, I was already

very aware and working with that. And for me, internet was a public space. So, what you call here public space, I would name an art space. And of course, I lived in a bizarre way, this sort of dichotomy, because people wouldn't take it as art for a long, long time. But when they did, I was happy. I would want... But I didn't know... It was not created for that. It was really created for a sort of one-on-one exchange. All the intimacy in Mouchette, how I recorded the sound, the interaction of course. So, for me it was art and I would be happy to try and exhibit it in art space because to have a public from the art scene, in which I was already participating. But the form was not designed to communicate with how it goes in a gallery, in a museum. And so, my attitude, of course, when I was invited, which I was always very happy, was to try and find a dialogue. Say, how do you want to show it? What do you have to offer? And up to this day, it's the same thing. I still, the design is sort of public space in the general sense. Like someone who do not need to have all the extra information can just step in and leave it. And the art space is something else. It has rules. You have to get in. You're supposed to have a background to understand it or at least to connect your feelings to it or all these things. So, yeah, to negotiate, I negotiated as I could because it was also important for me to be able to negotiate these two spaces. But the ideal space was that, what I call public space, that is, anybody can come and find something in it.

Olivia Brum   And that kind of leads into the next question, which is, what must the work do, in your opinion?

Martine Neddam   What must the work do? Well, move, create emotions, trigger... Also in the linguistic sense, for example, I was as I said into speech acts. So, the notion, the sort of interaction in, I was already, I had already, also in the art I was doing with language, I had already a sort of, interest and knowledge and maybe even practice in in that. For example, that some works of art I did before the internet generate something in the other one, let's say. Say, for example, if you take a sentence and you turn it into a question by all using all the same words, but just giving it a question form, it creates something else. All the information is in the sentence or all the words, but the form is of a sentence with an interrogation. It creates, generates something in the one who hears it. That's why I say, for example, even a simple sentence can be generative, because if it's a question, it triggers, well, the need of an answer.   Even if it's not given, but it's made for that, to open a space for someone to... So, the fact of this interaction, I was already sort of, in my art, trying to practice it with language. So that's why internet was an ideal space. I knew how to formulate my pages to trigger... Not just the pages, of course, not just the word, but also the quality of the image. I had a very clear sense of that, in a way, to trigger an interaction. That they want to... Also, to get into the narrative... Also, so yeah, what it does is what it should do, of course, emotion is too vague, but to take you in. What people call also in

suspension of disbelief, that suddenly you play along. You know it's not true, but you play along. You feel like it. So, this kind of, I was already, when I started, that's why it was also so good to me to use internet, is that I was already aware of all these things, and trying to get the other one to play along, for example. Or to feel triggered by the question, and to feel like saying something back, or these kind of things, yeah.

Olivia Brum: Yeah. And how would you describe the idea behind Mouchette?

Martine Neddam: One of the idea is, well, a young girl. I was... I knew... Well, when I was in MOOs, you could create characters, so only with text, and I had tested several names, and usually the name I was testing were already taken (because it was a sort of system where you could only have one person with that name) so it would reject it. But I knew I had a sort of, well, interest in young girls. And I was in my mind sort of trying to find, in literature or in film, the young girls I like. For example, I liked this character by Raymond Queneau called Zazie, "Zazie dans le Métro." A very interesting young girl. I don't know if it's translated, but that could have been... But the name was already taken. And well, I stumbled upon Mouchette also because I like the... It's maybe one of the first film that has a young girl also with a tragic story and I was also a big lover of Bresson. Although when I chose the name, I'd already seen the film once, but it was more like by finding names and that I stumbled upon this one that was not taken. And then I went into, and of course it made a deep impression in me when I saw it, but I'd only seen it once. So, it was a sort of, like I say, a sort of encounter, like picking this name, because all others were taken, and encountering, in my memory, that film and that tragic story. Also, this idea of a young girl which is not pink and cute. A sort of, an inner world. I think, for example, in the previous generations, let's say, there was, say... This book was written in the 30s and then made into a film in the 60s. It was very unusual to give to a young girl an inner world, an interiority. Children didn't have interiority, or at least if they did, it was not the idea. So maybe I picked this one because it's clear that she has an interiority. It's clear that it's the subject of the book, the inner life, and also not just the tragic event, but the inner world she carries. And yeah, I was very into that. That's true.

(MTS 2)

Olivia Brum: And why did you decide to... So, she was first in MOO, right, as a character there, and what made you decide to kind of expand on it and take her into sort of a website form?

Martine Neddam: Well, maybe this feeling also that with computers you have things that are easy, you can do as you would, you know, as clay. You just had to form it. So very sort of... sort of craftsmanship and bricolage and the mixture of both, for which I found the pleasure again, which

was missing when I was doing these design big public commissions. And at some point, yeah, I missed very much that. Previously, the craftsmanship, I worked in clay before, like say, when I started learning things by myself as an artist, I learned. I could throw a pot. It needs quite a bit of practice. You don't get to do it after...you get into it after several months, if not a few years of practice. So, this sort of craftsmanship that you could find again on internet and bricolage in the beginning. Also, Photoshop was very much craftsmanship. You also... What was I saying? Like, what made me develop that? I think, in a way, you had the pleasure of craftsmanship and bricolage and things going easy.

Olivia Brum	And it's a work that has evolved over time. So, in the beginning, did it start with one page or how did you build out from the homepage?
Martine Neddam	Like this, by bricolage, I would say. Finding an idea and there's, oh, Rhizome has kept a very, very early, which I gave them, I think, a very, very early version, which was more reduced, and very little of it is still available. It had lots of text. It had, you know, all these things I would find, like mini... picture of a little pebble, or all this. Unlike what people think, there's a lot of tactility. There's a lot of craftsmanship and bricolage also, like working with your hands, that was very, very... So, say if you had clay and little branches, and you would say, oh, yeah, it looks like something. That's fine. So, there's a sort of, I don't know, I wouldn't say childishness, because in a way artists also have that sort of... They find in themselves that sort of spontaneity. And I'm aware it seems paradoxical to say I had it on Internet, but I did have it. To find these little mini pictures, to assemble them, these little sounds, and then the sort of combination of a sound, a picture, and mini animation. You had also mini program to make GIFs. All these put together would suddenly create a very strong sensation and would communicate together. I'm still very, to this day, I'm still... And for me, that was the language of the web. Language of the web allowed you to put a sound, a picture, an animation, a text, all this that could be, experienced all in the same vision, all in the same window. And to me, it seems like this language hasn't emerged yet. I still... Then came YouTube, for example, but that's film language. It's totally something else.
Olivia Brum	And it's constrained language in a way.
Martine Neddam	Yeah, with rules which already existed for decades and decades. And then came platforms that put language here and picture there and sound there. And they don't belong to the same vision, to the same experience of that moment. And so, when I was working, especially when I could do everything by myself, I was just working on that. That's the language of the web. So, some of the piece that stayed successful, they have that thing. They have a mini story, but it works with this. You need the sound. You need the atmosphere, the color of the page, the way the story is being put forward. Of course, the click

going to another page, which you wouldn't expect, because the link, how does the link brings you to the next one? And where is the link? So, all these formed a certain language with which I played. And to this day, I still wonder, where is this language gone? Uh, you go to an interface, or you go to a WordPress blog, or you go to... And this language is not there. There's not this fusion of putting these things together and making them alive as a work. Uh, well. So, for example, I still, my dream would be to make a new Mouchette chat Mouchette chat bot. The importance, it's very easy to make a chatbot, the importance would be also on the display. There's so much to be done on the display, let's say. Not just the dialogue, but, like, bring sounds, bring colors, bring fonts, bring whatever movements of the fonts, all these things that could make complete experience and work on... So that would be, let's say... It's still very difficult to work on something and convince someone that... But yeah, I can really talk about that, like when does a real language specific to the web come to life?

00:38:24

Olivia Brum   Yeah, I think I'm also interested from the early version of the website, when you decide to remove a part of this collage.

Martine Neddam   What do you mean remove a part of this collage?

Olivia Brum   So if an application or a GIF that was on an original page is no longer...

Martine Neddam   Yeah, well, in preserving, I had to make decision one-on-one, you know. And not always the best decision to the art. Also, you had to negotiate between what you could do, between what was possible, between the consequences it had on all the rest of the art. And that's why I often say it's not technical at all.

00:39:05

Martine Neddam   It's very artistic. that the intention of the artist is there. I could say a number of things. For example, you take the home page with the flowers. The flowers were meant to be much bigger. That is, the sense was immersive. That's how I designed them, that it would go beyond the frame. So, most frames were that small at that time. But also, there was a reason, it was not just because I could... Also, the way I photographed the pictures is that you always had a foreground that was unsharp. So, to create that depth, that foreground, is in fact very close because it's unsharp. So, to get that sense of you're very close, you have your nose on that flower. So, it was really composed in that, creating that identity, that closeness. Of course, now nobody sees it like this because it has this pattern. Everybody finds it very cute and vintage that this is patterned. And that sense of intimacy is gone, I would say. So why didn't I... In certain case, I still could think of one of the reason is that I had a part of the work where it was composed with speech bubbles, I could show it. And then I would have to remake this work. So, it would destroy this work if I would have it rewritten. First, I'm not sure my picture would be... big enough in resolution, but I could always manage that. I'm good enough in

pictures to manage the resolution so that it could, and also to ask that it would be displayed. But then I had to destroy another work that was based on the real image in a sort of fake transparency. So, then I let it happen. Now I'm not even sure I could go back. Maybe I would, because of course this work could be also rewritten in a different way and not hinder the fact of getting the image in the display. So maybe I would, maybe I wouldn't. It's still open for me. I decided not to do it, because not to destroy the other work, but of course, if I would recreate that display, I'm not very attached to the vintage effect. The vintage effect, that would be another. But it would be very different at that size. Maybe I could. So, for me, the question is still open. How I decide. Well, negotiation. Negotiate with what can be done. For example, I had a version of the fly where all the display text came in flash and was very fixed and everything was really smooth and then when I had to have it rewritten in HTML5.[2] I'm still a bit sorry because it depends on the network, so it goes fast or slow, or it doesn't have this sort of perfect smoothness. It's hardly visible, but I see it because the display depends on the network.

Olivia Brum
So then do you find retaining elements of the original code more important than an intended aesthetic?

Martine Neddam
No, it's a negotiation. Sometimes it's too complicated. Sometimes I could even say like this repetition, maybe I should keep it. It's vintage. It's Mouchette. Let it. Let it be. You know, let these things look like...Because vintage, unlike what people are saying, vintage was from the beginning. Also, I made Mouchette vintage from the beginning, using little bigger pixels that should have been, for example. So, you already had that sense of of an ASCII. ASCII is a vintage thing because ASCII was important, like making drawings in ASCII, when you didn't have pictures like in the web. But as soon as it came into the web, it was a sort of vintage thing. It was created when you only had text. So, it had this sort of vintage thing of building images out of text. So that's why I say there are artistic decisions, and not just technical, or a negotiation between what... And because I cannot, you know, it's not like a magic wand, say, make this work compatible, make it look like it's... Everything has changed, like the size of screens, but also the sensitivity. Also, reading an image. I'm not sure, especially at the time when... You used to read an image, I remember, because I really worked on the image very closely, not from the center, but from top left, because that's how they appear, especially at the time when they were were big.   And I wonder if it's not still like this, like if you take an image you compose for a wall and

[2] The work, *Lullaby for a Dead Fly* is composed of the reactions of the users to the question, "How can I write this since I am dead?" Originally the work used an online software, Adobe Flash, but when this software disappeared it had to be translated/rewritten into HTML5. With Flash, the sentences of the users would be displayed in a fixed rhythm, but with HTML5 the rhythm of the display would depend on the network speed and could consequently be slower or faster. For me it changed very much the feeling of the work but I had no choice. *Lullaby for a Dead Fly* can be accessed here: https://mouchette.org/fly/flies.html

you put it on the net. It will absolutely not work the same way. Of course, the sharpness is important. You read images much more like you read in text. You don't go into ambiguities. You don't dwell on it. So, the way to write an image for the web, also your eye doesn't go to the center, but more on the top left. I think, I'm not a scientific, I didn't analyze it, but that's how I felt that images were read. And also, and how I could, well, manipulate them to make them read the way I wanted. To create that feeling of closeness and intimacy. So yeah, so now, of course, I can sometimes still remember the intentions. But yeah, suddenly, yeah. This negotiation still exists. Maybe in a way, it doesn't totally belong to me. Sometimes it escapes you. And you say, oh, let it be. It looks like vintage. It has a repetition, and it looks like old. It's not what I meant, but it's like this now so many years. Let it be.

00:47:04

Olivia Brum	And speaking about how people read images differently, how do you think interactions with modern audiences have changed versus before?
Martine Neddam	Interaction with modern audiences?
Olivia Brum	With the work. With the work. How they interact with the work.
Martine Neddam	Oh, I could give precise detail, of course. For example, what I worked very much... One of the main thing in Mouchette is the circulation and how you go from one page to another, which is now totally not an item anymore. At that time, for example, it was very important to go on…an adventure.

00:47:51

Martine Neddam	You went in a page, and you lost it when you went in another page. That was the rule. Now it doesn't exist anymore. But this sort of traveling, travel, and then at the end of the day, you don't remember where you started from to end up there. So, you'd better bookmark it. Because that was the visiting the web was like this. Like walking in the forest, you know, there's not a path that tells you it's there, no sign. So, for example, with other internet artists, we played very much in hiding the links.
Martine Neddam	How could you, so I remember sometimes people would come, you had like board where artists would... And like, how can you hide a link? And still, but still give a hint so that people could find it. So, I had devised a number of ways of hiding links. If you put the link, the text the same color as the background, and then it only changed when you have clicked on it. Then you have the script says, this link has been visited. And then the text can appear bit by bit, for example. Or you can have a link with an invisible GIF, transparent GIF. So, there's nothing, but if you roll over a certain surface, you see the sign of the little hand that tells you there's a link here. So, there are plenty of these, like the homepage of Mouchette has many of these invisible

	links.
Olivia Brum	I'm learning something new.
Martine Neddam	Not many, but at least one or two. And I even didn't have now, when you browse the homepage, you have the pull-down menu. This pull-down menu was there, but it should have been hidden. So out of the... So, to the size of the screens of that time, it should have come below. So, you would have needed to scroll to get to the pull-down menu. So basically, you were just with a few words of presentation and little events, like little ants, little flies, or things that would... So, the idea was to... like you enter a forest, you could go left or right, or you could observe to see where is the beginning of a path, or to have that sort of curiosity attitude. So needless to say, it doesn't happen anymore. Also, I think, I'm not sure, but telephones and tablets, I don't know if they let you, but I think you suppose you could touch touch it. But yeah, it's so at least if for one thing, it retains the act of that, that it is there. If you would have the curiosity to find the link where it's not visible, that is to explore the page with your finger or your, or your mouse. I'm still very attached to the mouse. I'm not a person who works with a touchpad.
Olivia Brum	And do you, this is just because I'm curious, but do you track your web stats, your page stats, how many people visit such and such pages?
Martine Neddam	I used to have very good statistics and for many, many years I sort of had these free sites of statistics. And, of course, I did, a lot. Basically, because Mouchette was so much built on emulation, and of course the fact that people made parodies of it, and then I would sometimes reuse the parody as my work. Yeah, so it was, yeah, very important. And I consider them as a part of Mouchette in a way, not just its preservation. So, I would really go, and at that time, also you could, sometimes you had a sort of flow of people saying, what are they all doing here? Click, click, click, click, click. Because it was mentioned in a site that was considered a portal or something, or that functioned as a portal, and then you had lots of, and then it disappeared the next day. But you also had, you could find all the articles, all the things that... So, I would usually... Other lists in which you were included. I would usually copy the article to preserve them, or considering in a way, like from the beginning, that everything that is about Mouchette is Mouchette. So, this sort of idea that the website is not just what it goes under the domain name inside the server, but also what relates to it. So, if someone is willing to make a link to it, then that is Mouchette too, because that's the way to it.
00:53:59	
Olivia Brum	And I know we discussed in earlier interviews about "micro poems," I believe you call it. What people submit. The small amounts of text that they write into the different pages.
Martine Neddam	Well, yeah, I consider it as maybe the most precious thing in

Mouchette is what is collected by the database. Yeah, micro poems or whatever, they are read by a human. So even in the very long future, it shouldn't be read by an artificial intelligence which classifies it. Although it's well republished and classified, not all of them.

00:54:41

Martine Neddam   But I give it a very big value. I made also new works with these. So, some of them I think are not... I still didn't Flash, so I can't, I didn't re-... So, one or two I did record, but then the recording is not the same because when they displayed with Flash, they come at, or another, they come at random. You never have the, whether the, YouTube recording would make it a fixed follow-up, of course, so it's not a real memory. For me, it's still like the treasure trunk of Mouchette and it's still going on. People are still enjoying writing things and I'm still... So that's my daily work. I devised a certain communication in well, in some works, not all works, but some works are these sort of interactive narrative where people write a little story about... Well, would it be a few lines, or a few words, or one word, or whatever. And these are, so that's, and the fact of republishing. At the time, before Web 2.0, people would come to have the privilege to publish in my site, because you couldn't publish. But it's, although people, it's still active. Either people have this sort of, where I want to play along, as I'd say, like this, suspension of disbelief, and they like to write a little story and to say why they were killed as a fly. And then, yeah, then I use it to remake new works. That is to make a new display with that set of text, a text set, and create a new display for this text. And yeah, so it still go on. And I still would want to make new work sometimes, and especially composing on the display of this text. And of course, the fact that they are related to one another is the fact that they came out of the same story. But they also cover certain areas. So, in one case, the area of suicide, in another case, this sort of funny story about writing when you're dead. And yeah, so I find the work is sort of in perpetual... "Growth" is not a good word. But it continues.[3]

Olivia Brum   Would you ever say that there's a cut-off for how many submissions you can accept or how many mentions of Mouchette?

Martine Neddam   What do you mean a cut-off?

00:58:13

Olivia Brum   You know, I'm thinking like storage space or...

Martine Neddam   Storage space of text, you know, it's so small. Yeah. So I never asked pictures or things. So...

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[3] Here I am talking about different works that I made using texts from the database. They were composed in specially designed displays. These works were created using the software Flash, so I can't show them anymore because of that and since I didn't make any recordings of them. This is a practice I would really love to continue, it's a form of preservation/creation. The texts posted in the different works and kept in the database are really wonderful sometimes and worth being reused in new works.

Olivia Brum	Sky is the limit.
Martine Neddam	There's no limit, no, really. Even if you start considering it as a database, what would be interesting, so for example, to produce text. What would be interesting is that it's a very small database compared to, for example, databases, very small and limited. Yeah. People work on, well, huge, well, large language models, as they say.

00:59:02

Martine Neddam	But what about could be very interesting work to do in small language model. And it's not that it's not a non-model. It is a model, because all the people replied to the same question, let's say. Were in the same circumstance when they produce. For example, as I was saying, working on this and a display, and very small language model. I think there's a lot of, yeah. So, I'm still very, "proud" is not the right word, but I treasure all the database and it's very important to keep it because I think it can produce more works. It can produce more situation for works. It can produce more situation for creating.
Olivia Brum	And do you consider there to be different versions of Mouchette or is it all the same version?
Martine Neddam	When I had to sell, well, I didn't have to, but when I sold for MOTI, the thing, I called it version one, because I didn't know... Because I gave all the data, also including the database and the side sites, on a... Something you could call a data dump, this is everything, not just the HTML and everything that was on the server, but also the database. And while it was an answer to sort of selling Mouchette at that time, it was difficult to make because it's not an answer, it's more a question than an answer. What do you do with such a data when you own it? But I was the, you know, they... For example, the people of MOTI, they didn't want to buy work. There would have been work, let's say, that do not, that are self-contained and could resist more easily the time or even could be recorded and whatever. But they, well, they insisted on that it would be Mouchette. So, I discussed it with Annette Dekker at that time, saying what are we doing? And then, in the end, when it was decided that I would do that, just give them. And everything had the same date, because it's sort of a data dump on the date. Yeah, indeed, that was not an answer. But there was a question, a question to the future. Is the future interested? Will the future be interested to have any use of that? On concrete terms, it just allows because, well, to be included, in a very open way, to the collection. And that's very interesting because every time, well not every time, the first time they showed it in the collection they just put screens. That was really silly. Nobody had asked anyone, they just put screens, not even a keyboard.

Figure 1 – Depicting how mouchtte.org was displayed at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2018.

Well, and four artists in a row which had works. So, but okay, better ... My ... ause for a long... Well, this identity thing. But the fact that it's somehow included in the collection is pleasant. Later came Karen Archey, and she was very, very careful and interested. She made a long interview to all the artists who had, well, with this sort of donation from MOTI to the Stedelijk Museum. And, of course, we have a sort of friendly dialogue. She knew Mouchette since a long time, because she'd been working in New York, really in the beginning, I think at Rhizome, so she knew the early Mouchette. And as always, like when I connect to these people who have known this early Mouchette, they go all excited. Oh, it's you. I think they had something of Mouchette which I was hoping to give a sort of... Because it was also anonymous, but not just for that. They had... Well, so it was very easy and pleasant. And then lately she asked me what I wanted. She wanted it in a room. And she said, I thought of that wall. Do you have a proposal? I could make a proposal and what? A big print?

Figure 2-3 - Depicting how the work was installed at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2020.

Brum, *Interview with Martine Neddam*, 22 April 2024

It was absolutely fantastic. Only it was in COVID time and nobody saw it. And then when the new director came, it changed the hanging of the collection. So, Karen Archey's hanging didn't last very long and also was invisible for a long while because of COVID. But it had what I wanted, that is a possibility of a dialogue. And so, we sort of exchanged, we came to this. I could also see the space and make something. Although I didn't know exactly, but I was opposite Rosa Menkman. It was fantastic hanging. I was so happy. The atmosphere of the room. And a print was perfect. I got the print exactly the way I wanted. Also, I did sort of GIFs, but in the end they didn't come out properly because the color was changed on the display. I didn't want to have display online, so the sort of display of the photo display. It changed the color of the GIF. Okay, leave it. It's not important. And yeah, so I was happy to have that dialogue and I still hope to have it. Like I'm going to the Stedelijk to talk again because they have this video club and the theme is girlhood. So, we're going to talk what, so what, so she wants to include it because I suppose she likes it as a part of the collection but also as a part of the collection that needs a dialogue to come, to connect to the public. So, I'm going like Thursday and we're going to talk. That's for June. It's just a sort of what they do, like a video club. So that's the possibility to show to a public their video collection. And then we discuss what will be possible to show around the theme of girlhood. So that's a very pleasant way to be included.[4]

(MTS 3)

01:06:49

Olivia Brum | So speaking about Mouchette's exhibition and art spaces, what would you say is your favorite way that the work has been presented?

Martine Neddam | Well, for example, I enjoyed very much that one, like a big print, because it also belonged to a room. It also represented the frame of the... You could recognize an internet frame. I was very specific on the edges. Also, these edges, you know, all the... sort of materiality of the browser, the edges, the buttons, and they're very time-based, you know, if you put... So, I was... I even represented the edges in a way that it would be these of the time, which is very subtle.

01:07:44

Martine Neddam | I just slightly... So, I had to sort of fake it. I couldn't... I also augmented the... So, it needed some work, which I did with pleasure. And people recognized the web thing. And I even found a picture that showed, I didn't make it, I didn't even think of making it, but someone found on the web someone trying to kiss the screen. It's the tongue. So, this

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[4] This part concerns the first and second hanging of *mouchtte.org* in the Stedelijk Museum. The first one was made with no dialogue or even consultation and the second one was made with a lot of dialogue with curator Karen Archey. For more on the 1st hanging: https://about.mouchette.org/stedelijk-presentation-2018/ and more on the 2nd hanging: https://about.mouchette.org/screenshot-in-the-stedelijk/

sort of interaction also worked. Yeah, play mode. Also happened when you make a window, a screen window, like it was like maybe two meter by two meter. It did, it looked, yeah. So, I was happy to do that, but I was also happy to create... Like very often.... Because I also did non-... Well, to create objects or I made a shop. So, this kind of inventing by dialogue with other people. They present that situation, and you invent some new piece of Mouchette.[5] That's the fantastic thing.

Olivia Brum   Yeah. And I just have one last question, which is, when does the work no longer correspond to its intention for you?

Martine Neddam   Well, for example, now, if you put it on the screen... Well, what they did in the beginning, because they didn't ask anyone, they just said, we have four internet works, we're going to show them on four screens. That doesn't correspond to the intention. I'm sure none of the artists being displayed in that way and not being asked about how they wanted to be displayed. That didn't correspond to the intention. For example. Like if you ask... But even like say showing, I often show when it's not a possibility to show, to invent something new, then a screen recording is fine. Often it would be my preference that the people would do themselves the screen recording, because every screen recording is different.[6] But if they ask me, like, "Can you give one?" I said, yeah, I can give you one. Now I have one which I didn't make myself, which was done by Rhizome in an exhibition. But now it's got old as everything, you know, not old in itself, but the computers have changed. So, these are, you know, there are a million possibilities at least, like even... I really believe that the work is made to change. That's it. So, when I'm not here to change it myself in agreement with, then it will change anyway by what happens.

Olivia Brum   Yeah, but you would like it to have this continued online presence?

Martine Neddam   Absolutely, absolutely. And also, the interaction and also the keeping of the database are all these things that would really... That is the core. Showing it in a museum through a... Then, of course, it doesn't make sense to ask the public to exchange. Because having these two publics, the people who exchange, they're not art people. They just fall on it. So exactly the same way I was thinking of art at the time I did art in the public space that, of course, has to be approved by the art scene first, the art world first.   But it has to appeal to everybody who passes by and that is not the same... Mind, you could say, not the same apprehension of where the public is. So, to have that, that's still very important and the fact that a lot of people who react and

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[5] In 2011, I created a fan shop selling Mouchette merchandise curated by Annet Dekker for SKOR (https://about.mouchette.org/sales-50/). This brought me to create an online shop with similar items (https://shop.mouchette.org/).

[6] Links to different screen recordings made of *mouchette.org* for preservation and exhibition: https://about.mouchette.org/screen-capture-2009/, and https://about.mouchette.org/screen-capture-2016/.

who bring more to the work... In fact, they contribute to the work. It's perpetual contribution. It's still very important. And one of the latest work is that these screen recordings I found from these Russian kids and now it's part of the work because I integrated it.[7] It's not very visible for people who work... But I hosted it in a subdomain of Mouchette, so clearly, it's a part of Mouchette. Yes, so and it's not a new development. It was very clear this sort of contribution, exchange, interaction was very clear from the beginning. It's more even keeping an old spirit to make it possible that people still contribute, that their contribution also has artistic value or within the... For me, that's totally inherent to the creation. So, yeah, of course, if it would stop, then maybe it would not be Mouchette anymore.

01:13:46

Olivia Brum	Do you have any questions?
Sanneke Stigter	Did I understand correctly that you distinguish the museum audience when it's on display and the intended audience, real life?
Martine Neddam	I don't distinguish them in a way. I try to appeal to both, let's say. In fact, I don't ask myself... I have an art education. I eat art every day since many, many years. So, my way, my mind is composed with that. Marcel Duchamp, whatever. I mean, my way of making art is informed by my practice of art. So, there's no way I would distinguish. That's what I'm made of.

01:14:39

Martine Neddam	But the fact that I can connect to someone who doesn't have this practice, doesn't have these references, is still extremely important. And in the beginning, as I was saying, my only public was this one, because people wouldn't take it as art. And the fact that it still appeals that I have a way to acknowledge that it still appeals to an audience that is not interested, that doesn't have this background and that doesn't use any of this to understand it or to connect to it, is extremely important.

01:15:23

Sanneke Stigter	And I meant also in relation to how it can be displayed as a museum, of course, is constructed around display of their collection. You've also explained a little bit on how you negotiate an ideal situation. You mentioned the keyboard before. Is that a prerequisite, for instance?
Martine Neddam	Not at all. Actually, I don't think there should be a computer and a keyboard. This doesn't belong to what a museum should be. So, for me, a big print belongs much more to the aesthetic value, in a large sense, of an image in the space.

01:16:15

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[7] I collected the screen videos made by young Russian fans and it became a new work of art by Mouchette: https://visions.of.mouchette.org/

Martine Neddam	is still more important than... Because everybody has a keyboard. And now, people don't use it with keyboards anymore. They use it with phone. So now, thanks to these found videos, I see how it looks with phones. No, this is... I would say if the standard of visiting Mouchette should be set, then it's by the large public and not by the museum. The museum comes second.
Sanneke Stigter	Is a URL required?
Martine Neddam	The URL? What do you mean?
Sanneke Stigter	Would people have to see the address of the work?
Olivia Brum	As the title, I guess.
Martine Neddam	Oh, yeah, yeah. As the title, yeah. Then, for example, in the show, they had the Flash code so they could sort of just record it on their phone and say, well, this belongs to this site. And so even just the name, the URL.
Sanneke Stigter	Yeah. And before we started the interview, you said something very interesting, I think, in regard to conducting such an interview.
Martine Neddam	Yeah. I was saying about, yeah, that connects to what I was saying, like the fact that I preserve everything which is said about Mouchette. And this preserves Mouchette, so it goes both ways. They preserve Mouchette and I integrate it in it. So, of course, I'm very interested, because I think Mouchette is... It's not just my mind, it's everybody's mind. It's a collective creation in a way. So, I'm very open and very interested too. For example, interviews and where they came from. Usually, they come from the world of art, or now art history. Previously it was specific on the subject of internet, but now it comes on really, like two days ago, or last Friday I had a student, a Dutch student, making something for his bachelor, but in art history in general. Like his teacher didn't know about Mouchette, but is interested and has accepted the subject. And he came a number of times, and we had a talk like we had. And then I, of course, asked him to let me have a copy of his... And also, because it brings me to new questions. It brings me to new ideas. And maybe a month ago, I had also a student in art history, but from Paris, from Sorbonne. And she wanted... But she was particularly interested in gender. Possibly she was herself transgender, she changed, but internet and the notion of gender, that what she was, in the early internet, that was her subject. And I don't know what she was doing, I think a master's thesis. And so, it was all, well, I knew that my answers were read and so I could speak French. I could possibly say different things because I was saying them in French. So, for me, it's very precious. It asked to the... Well, that's the preservation. That's a form of the preservation of

	Mouchette.[8] That is what people think about it and how it represents also a number of things which seem to have disappeared also. This early internet thing which seemed to have disappeared or as if it never existed but which I think still exists because you can still see Mouchette. So also, well, talking with you, of course, is already in itself a form of preservation.
Sanneke Stigter	And has this informed the work in any way, this interview?
Martine Neddam	You mean this particular one? Well, like sitting next to my computer, I don't know, and I s ay... The physical presence, I was mentioning how I was happy to have top light and I've always worked in this space which is very high, which has a very good and pleasant light. And maybe if I had worked in a normal room or in a crammed up office, which could have in itself be possible, I wouldn't have kept all the pleasure. And the fact, for example, that my kitchen is here, my bedroom, so it's really an integral part of my life, really. That when I wake up in the morning, the first thing I see is my screen. So yeah, that when I say it's existential in the sense that it came to me also as very existential. The fact of making art much more than something... my family or there was no art around me. So, there's certainly something very existential to the fact that I really broke or rejected everything else to be able to do only that. But also existential is also the way I live with it. It's in between my bathroom and my bedroom is my computer.
Sanneke Stigter	Anything you would like to add that you think is important?
Martine Neddam	I can't think of any. No, that's why I say I thought it was nice that you come to my studio. And of course, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to say, oh, that's the first time I'm saying these things. Although some people who know me, they know I'm a bit sort of, especially in the beginning, they really had made fun that I spent so much time, that I was such an addict, and I was really an addict. I still are, but now so many other people are that I'm not being very special for that. But at that time, I was being very special for being an addict to that practice.
Olivia Brum	I think many early internet artists were addicted to the practice.
Martine Neddam	Of course, that was the only way.
Olivia Brum	It's your way of making art.
Martine Neddam	An artist is addicted to their practice. How long can they be away from the studio? Sometimes they just come to hang out in the studio because that's where the idea come to. And at that time, people called me addicted, but they didn't think it was art. Well, they called

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[8] Since 2011, I collect all the references, articles, interviews, etc. in a blog which I keep updating. I used it as a CV, it helps me remember articles, published texts, flyers for shows and so on. It has more than 1200 entries and I can easily retrieve information through the category system. People who research Mouchette also find their own way to use it. This interview will find its place in this blog (https://about.mouchette.org/) after it is published.

me addicted because I was, but they weren't. Now, of course.

Olivia Brum   Yes, perfect. Thank you. Thank you so much for speaking with us.

Martine Neddam   You're welcome. It was a pleasure.