

State of the Art Archives

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

“What a wonderful gift the organisers have given themselves, in the company of art history researchers and art lovers alike, on the occasion of three founding anniversaries at the same time!” With these words, Chancellery Minister of State Monika Grütters welcomed an international audience of approximately 130 people who gathered in the Max Liebermann Haus of the Stiftung Brandenburger Tor on 21 September 2017 for the three-day conference “State of the Art Archives” for archives around the world dedicated to the documentation of modern and contemporary art. For many of the participants this was a first opportunity to meet and learn about each other’s work. There was an astounding and enormous growth in knowledge and information with a wealth of new ideas for all – the reason why this report also became a bit longer. [A complete list of participants can be found at the end of this text.]

The conference was hosted by ZADIK – Central Archive for German and International Art Market Studies (est. 1992) in cooperation with the Department of Art History at the University of Cologne, basis wien – Documentation Centre for Contemporary Art (est. 1997), and the Institute of Modern Art Nuremberg (est. 1967) – all partners of european-art.net (online since 2002), which was also represented in its entirety and held their annual meeting prior to the symposium.

It was a forum for meetings between archivists of world-famous national and state archives – such as the Archives of American Art (est. 1954 in Washington), whose inventory can be measured in kilometres of shelves – with private collections, born in the underground as it were, like the Artpool Art Research Center (est. 1979 in Budapest), founded by the Hungarian artist duo György Gálántai and Julia Klaniczay, or the Archive of Fine Arts in Prague, which emerged from a private gallery in the 1980s and organises modest “shelf exhibitions” each month. Parallel, there were presentations by “newcomers” – for example, the archive (est. 2012) of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (est. 2008 in Moscow), set up by the oligarch partners Darya Zhukova and Roman Abramowich, with its important documentation of the alternative avant-garde from the second half of the twentieth century.

Although very different in comparison, in many Eastern countries it is and was private archives which cared for the conservation and mediation of documents about the artistic avant-garde outside of state art systems. The same can be said about Asia, reported Anthony Yung from the Asia Art Archive (Hong Kong), which has been collecting documentation of contemporary art activities in the complete, vast Asian region since 1989. European reception of contemporary Asian and African art still demands a legitimisation founded in the reception of their traditional art – this topic was not only addressed by Yung but also Sandra Klopper from the University of Cape Town in her introduction about the situation of the few, almost exclusively privately run and widely dispersed archives in Africa. As in other countries where the historical, social, and political context didn’t foster or permit the formation of an own archive culture (yet), when one goes in search of documents about the history of local artistic

developments, one must likely turn to North American and European archives that have (co-)collected for these countries.

The oldest Western archives are the so-called “house archives”, which emerged from collecting institutions – usually museums – that over time complemented the archived documents about their own history with numerous foreign archives. Amongst others: the Archives of the Finnish National Gallery (1880), the archive of the oldest biennial of the world, Biennale di Venezia (1895), as well as the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1929) and in Ljubljana (1948), the documenta archive (1961), the Kandinsky Library of the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1977), the archive of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest (2004), and the Archivo del Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Barcelona (2007).

Many of these and other “house archives” are also national archives at the same time. Archives that also collect on a national level include the Archives of American Art, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington) and the Netherlands Institute of Art History in The Hague, which was founded as the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in 1932 and still uses the old abbreviation “RKD” in its Internet address. Both archives count amongst the first – like ZADIK, too – who began collecting archives from commercial galleries. Although the art market archive is one of the most recent to be acknowledged in the history of archiving, it turns out that it is one with the richest and densest – and highly comprehensive – amount of information and is essential for an understanding of art development since impressionism.

The conference was accompanied by two workshops: one on Qualitative Art Market Research led by Nadine Oberste-Hetbleck (University of Cologne) and Konstanze Rudert (Dresden State Art Collections) and the other on Quantitative Art Market Research led by Christian Huemer (Getty Research Institute Los Angeles) and Maximilian Schich (UT Dallas Arts & Technology). They explored this new and dynamically expanding research field, which is informed primarily by resources in art market archives. On the basis of concrete case studies, participants could discuss the opportunities and challenges in these two strategies of the still young – currently being established in the university domain – field of art market research from the own specific perspectives (as archivists, researchers, curators, etc.). It became clear that qualitative and quantitative approaches must often be employed hand-in-hand in the research process. In this context the main points in the discussions were the consequences of digitisation, the interoperability of data, and the need for cooperations between art archivists and researchers already during the conception phase and application process for third party funding in projects, so that their different competences are combined, for example, in how archives are accessed.

On the opening evening an example of the “Invaluable Resources” was provided in the keynote lecture by Chris Stolwijk, who conveyed the results of a research team from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. With the aid of documents from the archive of Galerie Thannhauser in ZADIK, they could trace how the artist who only sold a single work in his lifetime became a key figure in the history of

modern art. Marije Vellekoop, research director at the Van Gogh Museum, presented the first copy of the publication "The Thannhauser Gallery: Marketing van Gogh" to the Chancellery Minister.

The dream of all archivists to also research themselves in their archives, which they increasingly do in the past decades, was already set in place by the archive (est. 1983) of the Getty Research Institute (est. 1980) in Los Angeles. Marcia Reed, chief curator and associate director, introduced its work and recent acquisitions: the archives of Robert Mapplethorpe and Harald Szeemann. The Szeemann archive, whose relocation to North America is deeply regretted in Europe, triggered a question posed by Anthony Yung from the Asia Art Archive in which he noted that his institution returns some archives, once they have been digitised, to their place of origin and their authors or owners. However, this didn't come into question for the Szeemann archive because it was left to decay at its place of origin, which elicited its sale in the first place. While using public funds to digitise an archive that one doesn't possess in analogue form would be generally problematic when not impossible in Germany – some authors or owners want to keep their archive (originals) at all costs, but would be thoroughly cooperative with digitisation and indexing – in the Netherlands there is even a state programme that supports the digitisation of private archives. In Germany there is a fear that an archive, in which one has invested much expensive work, could still change owners in the end.

While most of the older archives, specialised in unique specimens, only come into possession of documents once the author is deceased ("estates") or withdraw (parts of) their ongoing activities ("advances"), leading to an archiving interval of approximately a generation (25 to 30 years), the new archives, mostly privately run ones in the East, Asia, South America, and Africa, archive in "real-time" – something they have in common with European archives focused on documenting current developments in the art world. Such European examples include, for instance, basis wien and the Institute of Modern Art Nuremberg, which thereby also preserve many relicts of ephemeral art for the future.

All archives share the endeavour to provide easy accessibility and to attain public visibility and awareness. In the digital age archives can achieve this with facsimiles of their inventory, which can be disseminated – providing authors and personal rights consent – to broader audiences via the Internet. Many archives also utilise other publishing strategies, such as their own magazines or columns in newspapers or journals. Some, like the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, publish highly esteemed editions of their artists' correspondence material, for instance. Since the turn of the century an increasing influx of archive documents can be observed in art exhibitions, whereas previously they were only seen in art history exhibitions on occasion. Younger curators have recognised that it is possible to recontextualise the presented artworks visually with the exhibition of archive materials and not just in the catalogue literature.

In the exceptionally pleasant atmosphere there was ample opportunity for a direct exchange of ideas and conversations between students and archive professionals – the relatively small group made this possible. With the wealth of new knowledge and experiences, everyone, even experienced veterans,

agreed that they would be delighted to attend such meetings on a regular basis and definitely wanted to remain in contact, hence the list of participants with email addresses was provided to all. Fortunately, the conference supported by the Stiftung Brandenburger Tor and especially the German Federal Cultural Foundation was organised from the outset with an eye for sustainability: The specially designed website www.stateoftheartarchives.com, which initially served communication and registration purposes, will soon host the transcribed lectures and accompanying visual materials, the results of the two workshops, and an analysis of the questionnaires, which were sent to the participating institutions in advance, who submitted vital information.

The intention is to enhance the website into an online lexicon of art archives from all over the world, where one can find information about their history, collection profile, and services. To this end, all participants are asked to animate acquainted archives to submit their information for the website and in turn promote it via their own Internet presence.

Günter Herzog

We are happy to answer any further questions:

Günter Herzog: herzog@zadik.info and Brigitte Jacobs van Renswou: info@zadik.info

Andrea Neidhöfer: andrea.neidhoefer@basis-wien.at

Link List of the participating archives

[ZADIK - Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale Kunstmarktforschung e.V.](#) (DE, Köln, Günter Herzog)

[basis wien - Dokumentationszentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst](#) (AT, Wien, Helene Baur)

[Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg](#) (DE, Nürnberg, Kathrin Mayer)

[The Finnish National Gallery Archive Collections](#) (FI, Helsinki, Hanna-Leena Paloposki)

[Artpool Art Research Center / Museum of Fine Arts](#) (HU, Budapest, Júlia Klaniczay, vertreten durch Anne Thurmann-Jajes, Zentrum für Künstlerpublikationen, Bremen)

[The Museum of Modern Art Archives](#) (USA, New York, Michelle Harvey)

[RKD - Nederland Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis](#) (NL, Den Haag, Chris Stolwijk, Anita Hopmans)

[Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution](#) (US, Washington, Kate Haw, Laurie Stein)

[Getty Research Institute](#) (US, Los Angeles, Marcia Reed)

[Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou](#) (FR, Paris, Didier Schulmann)

[University of Cape Town](#) (ZA, Kapstadt, Sandra Klopper)

[Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia](#) (IT, Venedig, Debora Rossi)

[The Archive of Fine Arts](#) (CZ, Praha, Barbora Špičáková, Irena Lehkoživová)

[Archivo del Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona](#) (ES, Barcelona, Marta Vega)

[Asia Art Archive](#) (CN, Hongkong, Anthony Yung)

Workshop 1: Qualitative Kunstmarktforschung, Moderation:

Nadine Oberste-Hetbleck, [Kunsthistorisches Institut der Universität zu Köln](#) (DE, Köln);

Konstanze Rudert, [Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden](#) (DE, Dresden)

Workshop 2: Quantitative Kunstmarktforschung, Moderation:

Christian Huemer, [Getty Research Institute](#) (US, Los Angeles)

Maximilian Schich, [UT Dallas Arts & Technology](#) (US, Dallas)

Archive des [european-art.net](#) (AT, Wien, Andrea Neidhöfer):

[basis wien](#)

[Kunstbulletin](#)

[Swiss Institute for Art Research](#)

[documenta archiv](#)

[National Museum of Contemporary Art](#)

[Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg](#)

[Moderna Galerija Ljubljana](#)

[Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale Kunstmarktforschung e.V. ZADIK](#)

[Centre for Artists - Publications](#)

[Kunst- und Museumsbibliothek der Stadt Köln](#)

[artlog.net](#)