

Konzept / Concept

Intentions and Objectives

ActiveArchives is concerned with electronic, time-and-space-related artworks:

- > conducting research on those which have been forgotten,
- > restoring those which are acutely endangered,
- > conserving those which are no longer topical but still functional,
- > registering and documenting those which have just been created.

High Technological Standards but Accelerated Ageing

Electronic artworks of analogue or digital nature have broadened the understanding and self-image of artistic production, and have thus changed them. The traditional artistic skills have been expanded by media and communication strategies which are based on technology. Contemporary artworks are based increasingly on audiovisual, electronic, and information technologies, and so make use of the most demanding technical standards of their time. Thus, the electronic artwork is also subject to the conditions and contradictions of its time: rapid change and renewal are characteristic of its production, whereas its recognition, recollection, consolidation, and traditionalisation are forms of deceleration, which seem merely to impede the dynamic quality of advanced technology.

Increase of Value and Restoration Reality

Within the past ten years electronic artworks have experienced a substantial increase in value and popularity. Museums and archives are confronted with new problems: though they have long used information technology as a tool, they are perplexed when they encounter collection objects which are themselves in a technological shell. Many videos have been lost forever, while others are in miserable condition. Curators are often confronted with the unpleasant alternative of deactivating installations or of modifying them in such a way that their authentic character is falsified: Such inadequate "modernisation" can result from ignorance of the historical dependence of the artwork, but also from the lack of appropriate conservation strategies. Five to ten years after a work has been created it becomes very difficult to gain access to certain reproduction units: laser disc players, monitors (even of a common type), crt projectors, and even now LCD projectors. This situation also results from the fact that these works are increasingly sold not as a conglomerate of hardware and software, but only with a limited performance licence, with limits imposed on place and duration of exhibition.

The Electronic Artwork: Material Complexity and a Challenge for Curators, Restorers, and Art Researchers

ActiveArchives understands the electronic artwork as a unified whole, whose individual electrotechnical elements, audiovisual components, and those components made of other materials, must remain united. In addition to audiovisual image production and representation, the material complexity of these works extends from the application of all manner of plastic, wood, and metal to the use of various electrotechnical instruments and electronic elements, to the application of photographic and painting procedures, and even to architectural structures and lighting technology. All of these constituents must be considered with regard to restoration measures, conservation concepts, art historical models of interpretation, and scientific description. Our goal is to make authentic re-performance

possible, which, on reflection, gives this term key significance. This undoubtedly new approach is quite different e.g. from the mere transfer of informations to another medium. Of course, digitalising collections is also a crucial subject and area of research for ActiveArchives. Each transfer slightly changes the structure of the image and therefore the original substance, which thus demands the utmost caution in handling the transfer.

Goals and Procedures: Long-Term Perspectives and Institutional Cooperation

The concept of ActiveArchives comprises not only restoration measures and their development in the field of electronic art, but also scientific registration and interpretation of the artwork. ActiveArchives conducts research on artworks, secures them, and makes them accessible in an appropriate form: integral, partial, or as documentation. The forms of this accessibility will, in some cases, have to be developed, as will the inventory parameters. The resulting secondary information will also be stored and made accessible. ActiveArchives combines technological, art historical, and restoration information, and also conducts its own research in these fields. The findings are passed on to involved and interested institutions, such as museums, collections, research institutes, and to artists. They are also dispersed in education and publication to (future) restorers, artists, and art researchers, and to internet-based projects.

As works, information, and rights dispersed here and there are already available, it is indispensable that the project will be developed in close cooperation with the appropriate institutions, or that it even emerge from them. The project will be meaningful only if it is organised and guaranteed on a long-term basis. For this reason ActiveArchives seeks cooperation with those institutions which are most likely to provide continuity. With the works, there is no such choice: the owners, and possibly the producers and authors of the works, will be our partners. This form of partnership will be limited to the work which arises in connection with pertinent artworks in collections.

Detailed information and definitions of terms which are inferred from the direct experience of ActiveArchives with relevant media, institutions, and disciplines, and which characterise the self-evident nature of ActiveArchives, can be found in the „Glossary“.

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