NEW MEDIA MUSEUMS:
Creating Framework for Preserving and Collecting Media Arts in V4
Pilot project
February 2021 – June 2022

Coordinator: Olomouc Museum of Art (OMA, Olomouc)
Partners: Slovak National Gallery (SNG, Bratislava), WRO Art Center (WRO, Wrocław),
C3: Center for Culture and Communication (C3, Budapest), PAF (Olomouc)
Funding: International Visegrad Fund

http://newmediamuseums.cead.space

REPORT FROM THE OPENING WORKSHOP, 17-18 FEBRUARY 2021, ONLINE

Schedule

Day 1
Wednesday, 17.2.2021, 12:30-15:30

12:40 Introduction

Barbora Kundračíková, Head of Museum of Modern Art Department – Olomouc Central
European Forum, Curator of Graphics of the 20th Century, OMA

12:50 Project introduction, discussion

Dušan Barok, project coordinator

13:45 Presentations and discussion, Part 1

Jakub Frank, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Olomouc Central European
Forum, OMA

Lucia Gregorová Stach, Chief Curator, Curator of the Collection of Modern and
Contemporary Art, SNG
Petra Hanáková, Curator of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, SNG

Agnieszka Kubicka-Dzieduszycka, Curator and International Project Manager, WRO
Krzysztof Dobrowolski, Curator and Project Coordinator, WRO
Cezary Wicher, Assistant Curator, WRO

Day 2
Thursday, 18.2.2021, 10:30-12:30

10:30 Summary of Day 1

10:45 Presentations and discussion, Part 2

Miklós Péternák, Director, C3
Anna Tüdős, Curator, C3

Alexandr Jančík, Director, PAF
Marie Meixnerová, Programme Manager, PAF

11:45 Project budget and administration

Michal Šedivý, Project Manager, OMA

Introduction

Video and installations have become the staples of artistic practice in the last three decades. Working with sound and digital media is also becoming more common. New media, which had been given the status of a separate genre, are now a common means of expression for contemporary artists. Compared to painting or sculpture, media-based works are more compact and portable, however their acquisition in collections is still relatively rare. As a result, it is not at all obvious from a long-term perspective that post-1989 media-based art will have the same representation in public collections as it has had in national award exhibitions and historical anthologies.

A key obstacle in collecting media arts is the lack of expertise in its preservation. Care for electrical objects and digital materials is not the responsibility of curators, restorers nor depository staff, while museums' technical departments are seldom ready to take responsibility for parts of the collection. The installation of these works in galleries relies on the presence of the artist, who is tasked with the role of arbiter of aesthetic and technical decisions involved in the process. Museum staff have no freedom to make these choices on their own. We are still very far from the self-confidence that accompanies the installation of paintings and sculptures when it comes to video installation or interactive art.

The New Media Museums project aims to address similar challenges by creating a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration in collection, preservation and presentation of media arts and culture. Our founding members include art museums and other organisations involved in the presentation of media arts in Central Europe. The initial phase is designed as a practice-oriented research. The aim is to identify possible scenarios for the participating institutions to shape their preservation strategies and workflows to better incorporate new art forms. This is to be done through case studies that each partner will carry out on selected works from their collection. The subject of our opening workshop was the identification of key issues in building and maintaining media art collections, as well as the selection of a range of works of art for case studies.

Collecting time-based media art

The founding partners of the New Media Museums project include two museums and three NGO's. Their mandate to build collections and preserve works of art therefore varies. Museums are bound by law to preserve art in their collections. As Jakub Frank noted, for this reason, curators tend to refrain from acquiring media-based works. There is a real fear in museums that they cannot provide the necessary quality care for media art. This is directly related to the lack of expertise, a central issue that this project focuses on.

Both SNG and OMA have dedicated staff for curating and restoring their collections of modern and contemporary art which include a growing number of media-based works and installations.
In 2020, OMA has initiated the process of creating a collection of New media and intermedia artworks, acquired new works and started communication with the artists in order to provide them with satisfactory conditions to preserve their works. The SNG collection currently contains about one hundred media-based works, including 40 videos. The WRO and C3 collections are primarily digital and can also be referred to as archives. The WRO collection is linked to its biennial and exhibitions and mainly includes video art and video registrations of installations and performances, but also installations. The C3 collection includes net art, video art and media installations that the organisation has co-produced since 1996, currently counting 70 works by 40 artists. PAF has been developing a contemporary Czech moving image distribution platform for some time, adjusting the distribution strategy in the process towards more personal approach which proved to be more effective for an organisation of this scale and focus. However, all institutions have their stake in the presentation of works from their collections in gallery exhibitions and online.

Each partner operates an online catalogue with digital reproductions of works from their collections. OMA runs an online platform called the Central European Art Database (CEAD, http://cead.space/); SNG's collection catalogue is available on Web umenia (https://www.webumenia.sk/en); WRO's collection can be accessed through its Videoteka (http://video.wrocenter.pl/en/) and Media Library (https://wrocenter.pl/en/czytelnia-mediow/) as well as onsite; C3's collection is available at http://catalog.c3.hu/?lang=EN and http://www.c3.hu/collection/index_en.php; PAF's distribution can be accessed on http://www.pifpaf.cz/distribuce/ (earlier programmes) and through the mailing list distribuce@pifpaf.cz (new programmes).

Preservation issues, illustrated by examples of artworks

In the workshop, we discussed a wide range of artworks that present challenges to both presentation and preservation. These problems include outdated formats and the unavailability of master tapes for video and film, the role and dependencies of playback components in video installations, dependencies between components in spatial and

interactive installations, the fragility of electrical components in kinetic sculptures, broken software in digital works, as well as obsolete code and dependence on external services in the case of internet art.

An interesting example is the exhibition *Reconstructions* (2015) curated by Petra Hanáková and Vladimíra Büngerová at the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava (https://www.sng.sk/en/exhibitions/653_reconstructions). The initial impetus for the show was the lack of photo documentation of some of the complex works in the museum's collection, which was needed for the museum's online catalogue. The installation of media-based works presented a number of dilemmas that are key to the New Media Museums project. We will keep coming back to that. A brief summary is below.

The exhibition *Reincarnation of Media Art* (2019) curated by Agnieszka Kubicka-Dzieduszycka at WRO offers another perspective on preservation (http://wro2019.wrocenter.pl/en/works/reincarnation-of-media-art/). The selection of media installations was presented in their current unrestored state, along with the artists' narratives, which described in detail their intentions and the concepts behind the individual works.

The following works were among those singled out:

- Stanislav Zippe, *Spirála (Spiral)*, 1969. OMA collection. Kinetic sculpture acquired directly from the artist in 2000. The engine was burnt and glass parts damaged while the work was on loan and had to be restored in the museum. Video about the work: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T8xbXcmUtI
- Federico Díaz, *Sembion*, 2003-2004. OMA collection. Interactive installation interpreting audience gestures in the form of 3D-printed objects. Issues with software and 3D printer remain unresolved at this time. https://www.federicodiaz.net/sembion/
- Vladimír Havlík, video works. OMA collection. The artist transferred his Super8 videos in a "do-it-yourself" fashion - by re-recording them off the TV screen.
- Martin Sedlák, *Mesiac (Moon)*, 2000. SNG collection. There was an issue with a piece of light tape that was no longer on the market. An external electrician took part in the restoration. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_102.
- Peter Rónai, *Auto-reverse*, 1995-2005. SNG collection. Video installation. The work is fragile, which is why the museum avoids loans. However, the artist does not oppose the idea of gradual degradation of the work with each exhibition. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_97.
- Peter Meluzin, *Život po živote (Life after Life)*, 1993. SNG collection. Installation with single-channel video. The television set component in the work has an important aesthetic function, it must be old (a deteriorated figure "watches" it), while TV sets become obsolete. There are also issues with

video input and video content. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.P_2638.

- Ilona Németh, *Dýchajúca podlaha (Breathing Floor)*, 1997. SNG collection. Interactive installation. There are challenges with hardware component and maintenance, as the work may wear out during the exhibition. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.P_2683.

- Dorota Kenderová, *TV (On TV)*, 2003. SNG collection. Video installation. Television sets also have an aesthetic function. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_302-a-e.

- Jaroslav Varga, *Bez názvu (Untitled)*, 2011. SNG collection. Participative installation in the form of a library wallpaper. The digital file with wallpaper along with the instructions was acquired on a DVD. More about the work: https://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:SNG.IM_303.

- Piotr Wyrzykowski, *Embodiment*, 1994. WRO collection. VHS tape as an art object. In his 1994 performance, the artist perforated and dripped blood on a video tape containing a recording of his body and inserted the tape back into the cassette. Video recording of performance: http://video.wrocenter.pl/en/wideo/dca_europeana/embodiment/.

- Niklas Roy, *Pongmechanik*, 2003-2004. WRO collection. Analog computer game with joystick control. https://niklasroy.com/project/31/pongmechanik

- Olia Lialina, *Agatha Appears*, 1997. C3 collection. Net-based work, restored in 2008 by Elżbieta Wysocka during her residency at C3. Available online at http://catalog.c3.hu/index.php?page=work&id=7&lang=EN

- János Sugár, *Dokumentum-modell*, 1997. C3 collection. Net-based work, restored in 2020 for the exhibition *The Dead Web* held in the Ludwig Museum Budapest. Available online at http://www.c3.hu/collection/index_en.php?id=107

The works by Federico Díaz, Peter Rónai and Niklas Roy are among those considered for case studies within this project.

The involvement of the artist

For SNG, the first and obvious party to approach in solving issues associated with the presentation and preservation of problematic artworks is the artist. However, for museums, working with an artist is not necessarily straightforward. The views of artists on their work change over time, all the more so on the scale of several decades. On the other hand, their opinions are invaluable and there is an urgent need to document them in one way or another while they are still around. In the ideal situation, the artist would be interviewed on the occasion of acquisition or exhibition, and documentation of this exchange would remain available for further exhibitions of the work. While this may sound simple, it is not clear how to arrange these interviews to sufficiently resolve potential problems, nor how to keep this documentation available for future use. Both SNG and WRO conducted video interviews with artists leading up to their *Reconstructions* and *Reincarnation* shows. They are a potential basis for future

discussion on best practices in interviews and communication with the artist and on broader issues related to the production and organisation of documentation.

Institutional workflows and collaboration

Another topic discussed was institutional models to support preservation, as well as the involvement of external parties in this process.

There are different institutional models to support preservation. The development of a media conservation lab seems to be suitable for larger collections of media installations such as Tate, MoMA and Guggenheim. A different approach in the form of a cross-departmental working group was mentioned. SFMOMA offers the example of its "Media Team," which consists of curators, conservators, technicians and other staff who meet each month around issues related to the presentation, preservation, acquisitions and lending of media-based works. This is relevant especially for museums, where communication across departments requires extra effort. This example is discussed in more detail at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00393630.2019.1603921. Yet another model is offered by LIMA, an Amsterdam-based NGO working on the one hand as a distributor of media art and on the other as a facility for the conservation of media-based works and components for the network of art museums in the country. LIMA's experience is described in a chapter of a recent publication by Vasulka Kitchen Brno (https://www.vasulkakitchen.org/cs/vychazi-vasulkova-kuchynska-kniha-citanka-o-vystavovani-a-uchovavani-novomedialniho-umeni).

What feels relevant in our setting at the moment is to initiate communication on media preservation in institutions and to spearhead collaboration with third parties. Several pitfalls have to be considered. Of one hundred media-based works in the SNG collection, about 10 are problematic from a media perspective. This is not enough to develop a caretaking partnership with an external institution. Instead, the museum works on a case-by-case basis, although it is interested in a more systematic approach. For WRO, collaboration on preservation with external parties is limited by financial constraints, while its institutional status does not require a museum standard. Likewise, the use of its video digitisation station is limited to the institution and its offer as a service to third parties is not planned. The digitisation process was made possible by participating in the large international project Digitising Contemporary Art (DCA). C3 has collaborated with various partners and projects on preservation such as Gateway to Archives of Media Art (GAMA) and 404 Object Not Found.

Conclusion

The opening workshop served as an introductory event for the founding partners of the project. Several thematic threads have been inititiated, which we plan to develop throughout the project. In the coming months, the partners will focus on case studies of

selected artworks. SNG will also work on the documentation of media-based works in the Central Catalogue of Artworks (published on Webumenia.sk), revising and unifying some of the new-media art terms used in cataloguing. Later this year, another, larger workshop is planned onsite at the Slovak National Gallery. The date remains to be determined.

List of participants in the opening workshop

Dušan Barok (moderator), Mária Bohumelová (SNG), Michal Čudrnák (SNG), Krzysiek Dobrowolski (WRO), Jakub Frank (OMA), Lucia Gregorová Stach (SNG), Petra Hanáková (SNG), Alexandr Jančík (PAF), Agnieszka Kubicka-Dzieduszycka (WRO), Barbora Kundračíková (OMA), Marie Meixnerová (PAF), Miklós Péternák (C3), Michal Šedivý (OMA), Anna Tüdős (C3), Cezary Wicher (WRO).