

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe Archives

**Christian Haardt, Hartmut Jörg, Felix Mittelberger, Dorcas Müller, Margit Rosen,
Morgan Stricot, Matthieu Vlaminc**

ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe
Karlsruhe, Germany
wissen@zkm.de

Abstract

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe was founded in 1989 to provide artists with access to the latest technologies as well as a public space where exhibitions, events, and publications would allow the public to explore and discuss the potential impact of technological change on art and society. As part of a comprehensive restructuring of ZKM, the Department Wissen (Knowledge) was founded in 2017 comprising the collection, the archives, ZKM's public library, as well as the Laboratory for Antique Video Systems and the digital art restoration team. The archives thus include not only the history of the institution and archives of pioneers of media art, but also the constantly expanding archives documenting the restoration of the collection's media artworks.

The paper gives an overview of the structure and contents of the archives, as well as the potential advantages of the department's specific structure combining the expertise of collection, archives, library and restoration.

Keywords

media art archives ; media art collection ; digital art preservation ; video art preservation ; media art preservation ; library ; wiki ; museology.

Introduction

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe was founded in 1989 with the aim of providing support for artists exploring the latest technologies and creating a space for the public through exhibitions, events and publications to explore and discuss the potential impact of technology on art and society. The ZKM's mission has also included collecting works of contemporary art, especially media art, from the very beginning.

After about 25 years of existence, new demands became apparent: The separation of artworks depending on the medium used and the associated division of the collection into three departments – Museum of Contemporary Art, Media Museum and Media Library – had for some time

contradicted the practice of contemporary artists. Moreover, a need emerged to preserve not only artworks but also archives of media art and make them accessible to the public and the scientific community. Although archives had already been taken over since the institution's creation, an appropriate institutional structure for them was lacking.

A New Structure for Media Art Archives

The ZKM therefore decided on a comprehensive reorganization. As part of the restructuring, the Department Wissen (Knowledge) was founded in 2017. It comprises the collection – with artworks of all media –, the archive, the digital art restoration team, the Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems, and the ZKM public library. Combining these areas of work in one department – which is not common in museums – was a conscious decision to be able to meet the special requirements of media art archives.

The ZKM archive has two parts: the archive on the history of the ZKM and archives of artists and theorists related to media art and its precursors. The institutional archive contains documents and audio-visual media on artistic productions, research projects, exhibitions, events, and publications since 1989, while the archive of artists and theorists includes about 150 estates. A special focus here is the history of digital arts, video art, experimental poetry, sound art and electronic music. The extensive holdings of videotapes – over 27,000 tapes of artworks, interviews, and documentaries since the 1960s – were acquired for the archive mostly through the work of the Laboratory for Antiquated Video Systems, which has been rescuing historic videotapes since 2004. Of similar importance for the archives is the expertise and support of the digital art conservators.

Furthermore, the ZKM archives also include the documentation of all media art restoration processes. In 2019, a wiki was set up to document the software-based art collection. In addition ZKM has gathered a collection of historical software and of instruction manuals, thus creating an important resource for conservators and researchers.

The Department's unique structure has proven effective in addressing the unique challenges of media art archives.

Authors Biographies

Christian Haardt, Audiovisual Archives and Collection

Hartmut Jörg, Audiovisual Archives and Collection, ZKM

Felix Mittelberger, Archivist, ZKM

Dorcas Müller, Head of the Laboratory of Antique Video Systems,
ZKM

Margit Rosen, Head of the Department Wissen, ZKM

Morgan Stricot, Media and Digital Art Conservator, ZKM

Matthieu Vlamincq, Media and Digital Art Conservator, ZKM