

Global Archiving Network: The 2nd Summit Case Study Report

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Abstract

One of the primary functions of an archive is to act as a repository to store essential documents and records throughout history; consequently, these stored archival materials can help us re-imagine a collective memory of the past. With rapid changes in the dissemination of information in recent years, the conventional ways of archiving may not be able to capture all the essential records of our time. This is especially concerning in regard to new media art archiving. Many recently created important new media artworks have been disappearing without being archived. If this issue is not addressed, we may lose a significant part of our cultural heritage. To respond to the issue, archives worldwide have attempted to approach the problem collectively. This paper is a report on a proposed study presented at the Second Summit on New Media Art Archiving at ISEA2022, taking the Summit as a case study to review the progress made in connecting archives worldwide.

Keywords

Global archiving network; Summit on New Media Art Archiving; archive; new media art; digital culture heritage; ISEA Archives; Liverpool Declaration

Introduction

New media art is a contemporary-art category in which the media itself is very technology-dependent. Artists often incorporate emerging technologies in their artworks, constantly redefining and expanding the category. Unlike many more static traditional art media, this evolving genre of art faces a severe problem: many recently created artworks can no longer be exhibited and may disappear without a trace due to technology obsolescence, lack of data, and insufficient documentation. As technology changes, the challenge of archiving new media artworks has become more critical. If this issue is not addressed, we may lose a significant part of our history, cultural heritage, and the arts of our time.

As a result, discussions on this topic have become more frequent at different levels worldwide, ranging from individual artists, organizations, and companies to major institutions. Nevertheless, many related discussions are scattered without follow-up. In many cases, new media art archives are limited with resources and face their archival challenges independently while archiving new media art collections. There have been insufficient communication channels to allow archives to collaborate, share data, and learn from each

other, avoiding duplicate efforts in preserving this ever-changing medium.

Since 2020, the annual Summit on New Media Art has become one of the more organized and focused group conferences for related topics. The Summit provides a platform & communication channel to engage and connect like-minded stakeholders in the new media art archiving community for sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas, networking, and seeking collective strategies to tackle mutual archival challenges.

The Summit series has gained support from the new media art archiving community, with a growing number of international archive partners. Progressively, as of today, a core group has been formed by the partners, including the ISEA Archives, the Archive of Digital Art (ADA), the archive for the Histories of Media Art, the Ars Electronica archive, the ZKM archives, the SIGGRAPH History Archive, the Electronic Language International Festival (FILE) archives, and the MEMODUCT posthuman archive. [1] As the Summit gains broader worldwide involvement, an emerging global archiving network on new media art is gradually taking shape.

This paper intends to investigate the Summit on New Media Art, specifically taking the Second Summit last year at ISEA2022 Barcelona, as a case study for the emerging global archiving network phenomenon. The goals of the case study are: 1) to identify the current status of the emerging archiving network, 2) to analyze the various problems and solutions, and 3) to report the findings to the archiving community as a contribution.

A Brief of the Summit

The Origin of the Summit

The Summit series has been predominantly organized by the ISEA Archives with the other archive partners, with no financial support and limited resources. The Summit series has taken place at multiple ISEA Symposium editions, beginning as roundtable discussions and eventually evolving into a mini-conference series.

The International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) is an annual nomadic international art, science, and technology gathering with four decades of history, including papers, artistic creations, presentations, exhibitions, performances, concerts, workshops, and cultural events. Each

symposium takes place in a different country every year. One of the original aims of the founding of ISEA was to start a network of organisations interested in the relationship between art and science. With ISEA's nomadic nature and founding vision, ISEA Archives has embarked on the discussion of connecting archives with a global perspective.

Began with Two Roundtable Discussions

The discussion began with two roundtable sections during two consecutive ISEA Symposium years, the ISEA2018 in Durban, South Africa [2] and ISEA2019 in Gwangju, South Korea (see figure 1) [3]. The discussion is built based on the Liverpool Declaration [4]. Both roundtable sessions gained tremendous support and, as a result, became a foundation for the First Summit on New Media Art Archiving in the next year at ISEA2020.



Figure 1. Roundtable Discussion at ISEA2019 Gwangju

The Liverpool Declaration

The Liverpool Declaration, also known as the Media Art Needs Global Networked Organisation & Support- International Declaration, was initiated in 2011 [5]. The Declaration was well supported by stakeholders in the new media art field. It was signed by over 500 members from governments, universities, research institutions, researchers, artists, academics, funding agencies, foundations, libraries, museums, archives, learned societies, and professional associations. It has outlined the objectives of establishing a global archive research infrastructure with two main goals [4]:

1. Establish a sustainable-global funding structure
2. Support an international association for shared data

And the Declaration suggests an action plan to promote collaboration for the alliance through [4]:

- A. Recognize and build upon existing knowledge and resources
- B. Provide and foster channels of communication
- C. Enable data sharing among the stakeholders
- D. Encourage peer exchange and address new challenges

- E. Develop tools and methodology for the documentation and preservation
- F. Provide inspiration and resources for curators, artists, scholars, educators, and audiences
- G. Support new media art archiving related networks, conference series, repositories, and publications
- H. Promote new ways of understanding media art, science, technology, and its histories

First Summit at ISEA2020 (Online)

The one-day First Summit on New Media Art Archiving was held online during ISEA2020 from Montreal, Canada (see figure 2) [6]. Due to the Covid pandemic, the First Summit deviated from its initial planning of an in-person conference and became an online event. The First Summit was coordinated by representatives of the ISEA Archives, the Archive of Digital Art, the Ars Electronica Archive, and the SIGGRAPH History Archive. The Summit opened with a keynote speech by Professor Oliver Grau, initiator of the Liverpool Declaration. Twelve papers from nine countries covered international support, project infrastructures, new strategies, archiving technologies, documentation of artifacts, collections, preservation, and new approaches to archiving new media art. And four presentations were given by the coordinating archives. Followed by three breakout sessions: I) "Connecting New Media Art Archives," II) "Creating Ties to Museums," and III) "Funding for New Media Art Archives."

The First Summit concluded with a moderated plenary discussion that outlined concrete proposals and a roadmap working toward the goals of the Declaration. The Processings for the First Summit were included in the official ISEA2022 symposium Processings [7].

The First Summit triggered interest from many archives, and as a result, a core archive group was formed, with the addition of the FILE Festival Archive, to hold more focused and structured discussions.

Consequently, after the discussions at the First Summit, another initiative, the Connecting New Media Art Archives Project [8], also embarked with the interested archive partners. The project is ongoing and intends to connect databases between different institutions worldwide, enabling sharing of information and cross-institutional research for new media art.



Figure 2. First Summit on New Media Art Archiving online at ISEA2020 Montreal

Second Summit at ISEA2022 (Hybrid)

The Second Summit on New Media Art Archiving was held during the two days preceding ISEA2022 in Barcelona, Spain, at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) (see figure 3) [9]. The Barcelona Symposium edition was postponed for a year with many uncertainties due to the Covid pandemic. The Second Summit is in a live-streaming hybrid conference format with in-person on-site and remote online participants. A total of fifty-two sessions, with thirty paper presentations, four roundtable discussions, two panels, and sixteen archive presentations, were scheduled in the two-day Summit programme. In addition, a juried art exhibition for artworks inspired by the theme of archiving also took place during the Summit [10], bringing artists' views to the discussion of archiving. Presenters from fifteen different countries presented either in-person or remotely, covering topics on [9]:

- I) Museums and the integration of Digital Arts
- II) Communication and Coordination among Archivists
- III) Cooperation among Museums and New Media Art Archives
- IV) Funding Initiatives
- V) Developing and Maintaining Physical Archives
- VI) New Directions in Online Archiving
- VII) New Technologies for Archiving
- VIII) Ethics in Archiving

This also included archives presentations and artist talks. All Second Summit papers were also included in the official ISEA2022 Symposium Proceedings. [11]



Figure 3. The second Summit on New Media Art Archiving in the Modern Art Museum Barcelona (MACBA) at ISEA2022.

During the Second Summit, a dedicated presentation section for interconnecting archives was organized to continue the discussion on connecting new media art archives worldwide. The section consisted of a roundtable discussion titled "Towards a Global Distributed Network of New Media Art Archives" [12], a presentation titled "Interconnecting Archives: Paving a Path Forward" [13], and a research proposal presentation related to this paper titled "Global

Archiving Network: A Case Study on the Second Summit on New Media Art Archiving." [14]

Global Archiving Network, Case Study: Second Summit on New Media Art Archiving

This study intends to take the Second Summit on New Media Art Archiving at ISEA2022 as a case study to investigate the phenomenon of new media art archives establishing worldwide connections. The Summit series is an ideal selection for the study because the Summit series itself is an outcome of an initiative collaborated by archives in the emerging network.

Data Collection

The case study consists of data collection mainly through observations, literature reviews, and participants' data collection with surveys and interviews. Thirty-one Second Summit participants responded to an anonymized online survey. In addition, more data were collected from the Summit organizing committee members and the Summit archive partner representatives through in-depth interviews or surveys. Although the data collected may not imply the best practice in developing a global archiving network, the study result suggests a summarized opinion collected from a representative targeted demographic in new media art archiving within the case study bound.

Researcher's Involvement in the Summit

The researcher of this case study has multiple roles with the Summit as a researcher of the study, archivist and co-director for the ISEA Archives, and member of the organizing committee for the Second Summit. To minimize bias and differentiate the data collected from this study's participants and the researcher's view, the researcher only includes his ethnographic opinion in this paper's later sessions at the recommendation and conclusion.

Second Summit Participants

The collected data shows diversity in the Second Summit participants with a common interest in new media art archiving, including artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, curators, academics, historians, journalists, art administrators, writers, archivists, and researchers from various affiliations in fifteen different countries. Participants are eager to share knowledge, exchange ideas, network, and create collaborative approaches to solving the complex problems of preserving the history of new media art.

Challenges in New Media Art Archiving

Since this global archiving network research is the first case study on the Summit, the study also provides an opportunity to verify if the Summit has addressed the critical concerns of the various shareholders in the community and if any

crucial topics or challenges are not being covered. Therefore, as a reference, for assisting in decisions making on connecting archives and prioritizing collaborative projects in the future.

The survey results show that the Summit has covered the majority of topics concerning the Summit participants. Although, in many cases, problems faced in new media art archiving are unique case-by-case scenarios; however, many of the common challenges encountered include:

- 1) The technical challenge of technology having become obsolete
- 2) Lacking documentation for individual artworks and proper overall standards for documenting the ever-changing new media art forms
- 3) Public awareness of this art form as the art of our time and its importance
- 4) Lacking a sustainable funding infrastructure for the new media artwork conservation and archives
- 5) Institution systems itself is not closely caught up with the digital age, and their long-term vision for cultural preservation and curatorial planning does not include new media artworks

The above list is shown in sequential order based on the relevance to the survey participants in their archival practices. The scores are rated relatively evenly by the participants. But 1) technical obsolescence and 2) lack of documentation & overall standards are at the top of the list with a higher tied score. Anonymized survey participants have also expressed subsequent concerns because of these challenges related to decision-making on selecting the appropriate archival system, methodology, tool, etc. Many have stated the need for up-to-date guidelines to help decide appropriate solutions. Or, ideally, a live online communication platform/forum where archivists can share the most recent experiences on successes and failures in the different areas, predominately for lesson learning and avoiding duplicate efforts in similarly encountered situations.

Most survey participants also want standards and protocols for new media art archiving and preservation. However, due to the ever-changing nature of new media art, it is unusual to have a one size fits all solution, which makes developing standards challenging. Based on some survey suggestions, standards development may approach from the notion as a "boundary object," in which the standards should be both plastic enough to adapt to specific needs and constraints yet robust enough to maintain a common use. Moreover, a holistic view should be considered for including online, digital, and physical archives. Standards development is a complex challenge that should be approached strategically with collaborations among stakeholders and involve many communications.

Connecting via Continuous Communications

During the Second Summit, many participants showed interest in learning more and connecting with other archives.

Yet, establishing connections between different organizations is not an easy task. Careful consideration must be taken, balancing the desire to enhance the network's growth and a manageable working team. Generally speaking, building a solid network relies on many good point-to-point connections; this also applies to establishing a global archiving network. The quality of the emerging archiving network also depends on how archives are connected; in this case, continuous communications are essential to retaining bonding between archives. The Summit series is at the forefront, bringing interested parties worldwide to begin conversations and initiatives toward new media art archiving challenges. However, relying only on a conference that happens once a year is not enough to channel participants' enthusiasm and maintain momentum. Additional ongoing communication channels may be needed; suggestions were given by Summit participants ranging from composing an archive/ email list and sending out a periodic newsletter to creating an online platform. Moreover, quarterly workshops, mini-conferences, or meetings may be held throughout the year hosted by different archives each time to keep in touch with each other and cover various topics where the hosting archive may have more insight. Although these are all great suggestions, they imply resources for ongoing management and organization.

Funding Initiative

With no financial support, the summit series has been mainly organized by the ISEA Archives with the other archive partners. With limited resources, funding initiatives have been discussed to support the growing demand for tasks related to connecting archives worldwide, including organizing the Summit and potentially forming an independent body with a more neutral position and organizational structure. As a result, to sustainably realize some of the abovementioned suggestions that the Summit participants gave.

Other Initiatives and Being Result Oriented

On the other hand, the Summit series can be instrumental in bringing in the right people, engaging in discussion, and starting other initiatives targeting specific issues in new media art archiving. The development of the Summit series and the abovementioned cross-institution data connection initiative that began after the First Summit are good examples of this. Taking the Summit initiative as an example, with an outcome-oriented objective of preparing the event, should help to gather appropriate partners, engage in more constructive ongoing communications, and establish long-term collaborative relationships. As a result of the ongoing communications, the involved parties for the Summit have iteratively triggered other initiatives to follow, such as the cross-institution data connection initiative and a few others currently in discussion.

A typical comment by a few of the organizing committee members and Summit partners in their more in-depth

interview or survey was that any initiative should be practically result-oriented with thorough follow-up. Despite being obvious yet essential for the success of an initiative, once it begins, it is necessary to stay focused on the results and have dedicated moderators who lead and follow up during the process, ensuring progress, milestones, and the actual outcomes.

Summit Partners Involvement

The survey result also indicates that over half of the participants were unaware that the Summit is a collaboration of all the Summit Partners. This result could be due to the development of the Summit initiative, which the Summit series has been a part of the ISEA Symposium. Moreover, the uncertainties caused by the covid pandemic for the last few years have limited Summit partners' involvement in the collaboration. Regardless, this implies the need for improvement in promoting the Summit as a collaboration of all the Summit partners. In addition, more of the Summit partners' exposure and participation during the different states of the organizing of the Summit is needed.

Other Recommendations

Besides the above summarized collected data from this Summit study, the following are some additional recommendations based on the researcher's involvement as an archivist and an organizer of the Summit.

Hosting Summit and Network Events

The emerging phenomenon of forming a global new media art archiving network was begun as a worldwide common demand for preserving the rapidly changing arts and art media of our time. The Summit series has gradually become a meeting point and creates bonding among new media art archives. Even though, at the current stage, the Summit is closely associated with the ISEA Symposium. The international nomadic nature of the ISEA symposium in a different city each year provides a unique opportunity to reach out to archives in different regions. It would benefit the growth of a global archiving network by continually having the ISEA Symposium as a host for the Summit and other relevant events.

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that the ISEA symposium organizers at the different locations had provided various levels of support to host the Summit, including mainly the venue for the Summit, general administrative processes, registrations, technical support, and the publication of the Summit papers in the symposium proceedings.

On the other hand, in response to the abovementioned suggestions of having periodic network events between the annual Summits, these events can either be co-hosted by all Summit partners. Or, as suggested, handled by one dedicated partner at a time with a specific, focused topic to maintain momentum and participant enthusiasm.

Organizing Committee

For the Second Summit, the organizing committee was formed mainly with representatives from the ISEA Archives and SIGGRAPH History Archive. To encourage more involvement from other Summit Partners, it is recommended that invitations be sent to representatives from the other Summit partners to become members of the organizing committee for the future Summit to help build the network and maintain a more neutral position for organizing the Summit.

Forming a Network Task Focus Group

As abovementioned, the Summit participants gave many excellent suggestions for maintaining communications among the archives, but these also indicate that ongoing management and organization efforts are needed. A dedicated team may need to be formed to handle all the required work as the next step, this work would include organizing the Summit series and other related tasks.

International Funding

One of the biggest challenges related to international funding is that many existing funding applications are usually restricted to a geographical area, and international funding supporting multiple regions is rare. More research and expertise in fundraising are needed to embark on this initiative to overcome the geographical limitation. Moreover, another approach could be reaching out to some international cultural organizations—for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences, and culture [15]. Or The International Council of Museums (ICOM International), a membership association and a non-governmental organization that establishes professional and ethical standards for museum activities [16].

Limitation for this Single Case Study

This single case study concentrates on an unprecedented phenomenon: the emergence of a global archiving network in new media art. Generalization will necessitate consecutive years of longitudinal case studies conducted during the New Media Art Archiving Summit series.

Also, as Liverpool Delecreration suggested, paradigms of many other larger collective projects in other science disciplines can be used as a reference in further study assisting the development of a sustainable international structure and providing additional recommendations for establishing a global archive network.

Conclusion

The Summit series is a platform and communication channel for stakeholders in new media archiving. It aims to facilitate critical discourse and collaboration. Although the Summit does not directly solve problems in new media art archiving, it implicitly takes steps further by accumulating knowledge, connecting stakeholders in the field, and triggering discussions. As more collaborations and communications continue among archives worldwide, a global archiving network will be formed. As the network develops, it will gradually help systemically resolve new media art archiving challenges. It is a long-term endeavor requiring much collaborative effort and communication. The Summit core archive group is just the onset of a more mature global archiving network. It is essential to keep the Summit as a sustainable recurring event that engages more community members from the new media art archiving field.

To further investigate and reveal the overall trend and report on the global archiving network's development, the researcher intends to further develop this single case study into longitudinal case series, extending the research on the global archiving network for the later Summit editions. The current plan is to continue the study at the upcoming Third Summit on New Media Art Archiving at ISEA2023 Paris this May.

At last, meanwhile writing this paper, the researcher has the honor to co-direct the upcoming Third Summit with Wim van der Plas, co-founder of the ISEA Symposium and the co-director of ISEA Archives. Some findings and lessons from the Second Summit have already been incorporated into the forthcoming Summit's planning and organizing, emphasizing collaboration and coordination for all the Summit partners at the different phases of the Summit. Moreover, the discussion on establishing an international consortium has initiated during the preparation of the Summit among members of the International Programme Committee (IPC). The IPC is formed with representatives of the Summit partners, experts, and active members in new media art archiving. Further discussions are also planned in the Third Summit programme relating to connecting archives and future Summit planning. Aiming to make the Summit a sustainable event, consolidate the global archiving network, and lead to the possibility of forming an international consortium for new media art archiving.

As this is a critical moment in the field of new media art archiving and the development of the global archiving network, more details on the outcomes and further findings will be analyzed and reported in subsequent studies.

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