

## 404 Object Not Found What remains of media art?

International congress concerning the production, presentation and preservation of media art

19. – 22. June 2003 in Dortmund

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Westfälisches Industriemuseum Zeche Zollern II/IV</b> Grubenweg 5, Dortmund / Germany
<b>Organisation</b>	media_art_net dortmund > Museum am Ostwall > hardware medien kunst verein > Kulturbüro Stadt Dortmund
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<b>Partners</b>	<b>The Netherlands Media Art Institute</b> , Montevideo/TBA, Amsterdam <b>C3, Center for Culture &amp; Communication</b> , Budapest <b>Prof. Hans Dieter Huber</b> , Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Stuttgart
<b>and</b> (case study Dortmund)	<b>Diana Thater</b> , artist, Los Angeles <b>Goetz Collection</b> , Munich <b>Prof. Heinrich Müller</b> , University of Dortmund <b>Agathe Jarczyk</b> , restaurateur, Bern <b>Ulrich Stürmer</b> , restaurateur, Bern <b>Pixelboxx GmbH</b> , web based media management, Dortmund
<b>Patron</b>	<b>Dr. Gerhard Langemeyer</b> , Lord Mayor of the City of Dortmund
<b>Main support by</b>	<b>European Commission</b> , Culture 2000



**Kultur 2000**

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*“In memory of the heroic boys and girls that worked deep into the night for all those months, in those small and hot offices at CERN, Room 404 is preserved as a 'place on the Web'. None of the other rooms are still used for the Web. Room 404 is the only and true monument to the beginning of the Web, a tribute to a place in the past, where the future was shaped.”*

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## 1. Introduction

The **media\_art\_net dortmund**, which is a co-operation between the Museum am Ostwall, hardware medien kunst verein and the city of Dortmund's cultural department, has been initiated with the financial assistance of the European Commission's program „Culture 2000“ a year long research project, which examines the questions of production, presentation and particularly the preservation of media art.

Further partners are, amongst others the **Netherlands Media Art Institute**, Montevideo/TBA in Amsterdam, the **Center for Culture & Communication**, C3, in Budapest and **Hans Dieter Huber**, Academy for Visual Arts, Stuttgart.

To begin with, the research project concentrated on various **case studies** focusing on concrete works (for example a video installation by **Diana Thater**) to examine the problems and issues involved in the presentation, documentation and preservation of media art. The various forms of media art such as video, video installations, net and software based art were thereby taken into account.

The **congress** „404 Object Not Found. What remains of media art?“, which takes place in Dortmund from the 19. – 22. June, is to be understood as (interim) conclusion, public platform and the climax of the project. In addition to the presentation of the case studies, which have been completed up till then, additionally international experts will be invited to present their projects, talk about their experiences, problems and theories on the subject of production, presentation and preservation of media art.

## 2. The congress

The **priority** of the congress lays explicitly in bringing together numerous international initiatives and people of various professions, with different interests and skills, who have dedicated themselves to the complex problems involved in the presentation, production and preservation of media art. At the same time the congress seeks to create a forum for intensive discussions about specific works of art and/or specific questions. The aim is to initiate long-term co-operations that extend beyond the four days of the congress. The research project and the congress both support an open attitude of knowledge exchange - in the sense of “open source” philosophy.

During the last 10 years standards have been developed to preserve video tapes. In contrast to this the research concerning the set-up, the reconstruction and the documentation of complex **video/multi media installations** is still quite young – especially in Europe. Not to mention **software- and net based art**, which is hardly even taken seriously as cultural heritage. This is the reason why the congress will especially focus on the issues of installations as well as software- and net based art.

On the one hand the congress discusses the **technological and methodical aspects of preservation** (storage, migration, emulation, re-interpretation,...) as well as the demands placed upon the **documentation** of media art: **data bank concepts** (e.g. the data bank of the Variable Media Art Initiative) as well as open and standard documentation methods. The question is also to be posed, if it can be expected or indeed demanded that artists, during the **production** process, should take into consideration the long-term conservation of their work or compile complex documentation about it. And which „**low-budget**“ **solutions** can be considered, that would also allow institutes with a limited budget to present, document and preserve media art?

At the same time the discussions taking place during the congress will consider **art-theoretical reflections on media art**, for example concerning the problems of its hardly definable „materiality“, its often process orientated, instable nature as well as the specific spatial and contextual conditions of many media art works. In this cases the idea – or rather ideology – of preservation or reconstruction (e.g. of complex video installations) has at the very beginning already lost its „original“ or „authentic“ object of referral.

And what role do the specific ways/situations of the production play and those of the perception of media art, as well as its social („interactive“) nature? Another theme of the congress will be, amongst others the question of how net and software based art can be collected, exhibited and preserved.

In addition to a series of **lectures** the congress is composed of **workshops** in which the content of the lectures can be discussed in further depth and additional projects will be presented. Media and art historians, artists, curators and restaurateurs will contribute to the congress as well as computer scientists, technical assistants of artists or representatives from the ICT industry.

Additionally the congress encompasses various „**side steps**“: Questions of documentation and reconstruction will also be examined using the example of **Anna Oppermann's** installations. The artist, who deceased in 1993, created complex paper based „ensembles“, which can not be classified as belonging to the sector of media art in a classical sense, but however, in terms of aspects of „authenticity“ and „reconstruction“ pose similar questions. Additionally, examples from **computer-game culture** or **electronic music** will be discussed in regards to questions of presentation and preservation.

Parallel to the congress the **exhibition** „On Translation: Das Museum“ by Antoni **Muntadas** will take place at the Dortmund Museum am Ostwall. As part of the congress the exhibition will be visited in order to reflect on, amongst other things, the specific problems of the presentation (as an interpretation) of media art in museums, especially taking into account works that originally were conceived as interventions in public spaces, as a video conference or internet projects.

A **panel** should finally discuss which requirements must be placed on institutions, curators and exhibition sites as well as institutes of further education, culture politics and grant models to ensure a long term and in particular a decentralized infrastructure for media art, its production, presentation and conservation. Thereby infrastructures are required that also allows institutes with a limited budget to exhibit and collect media art.

## 2.1. Presentations

Various projects – data banks, documentation, case studies, models etc will be shown in the form of a presentation during the period of the congress.

## 2.2. Results

At the end of the congress a „letter of intent“ will be worded which summarises the main theories and demands arisen out of the discussion. Additionally, the research project, as well as the conference will be documented in the form of a publication and a web-site/data bank. Both are to be seen as tools for furthering discussions and for projects, which deal with the questions and problems involved in the production, presentation and conservation of media art.

## 2.3 Links

<http://www.hartware-projekte.de> (404 Object Not Found) provides an extensive link list, which is being constantly enlarged.

## 3. The research project

### 3.1 Initial situation

*„Digital information lasts forever – or five years, whichever comes first.“*  
Jeff Rothenberg

Museums and art institutions have in the last 10 years increasingly opened up to the variety of media art. Large-scale events such as the documenta or international Biennales have been dominated by the presentation of media art to a previously unknown extent. This increasing interest in media art is also reflected through the profiles of public art collections.

This positive development is in direct contrast to the lack of institutional competence concerning the documentation and preservation of media art as well as its presentation and production conditions. Practically no museum has suitably trained personnel. Most of the institutes for further education and training of restaurateurs and art-historians practically ignore a scientifically sounded examination of media art.

As the **data storage** of media art (video, laser-disc, CD-ROM, DVD, etc.) as well as its **presentation technology** (e.g. projectors) are, due to the speedy developments dictated by commercial suppliers, rarely current for more than 5-10 years there is an urgent need for both public and private collectors to act.

For example, certain works by Diana Thater or Stan Douglas are fundamentally dependant on a particular kind of three tube projector which is not longer in production. Also **software and net based art**, which the art world still is so hesitant to accept, is threaten by distinction. Early works by artists like JODI are threatened to disappearance due to the rapid development of commercial browsers and software versions.

A central task necessary to be able – both today and tomorrow – to adequately present (and to experience) media art is the careful **documentation** – as well as the **access to the documentation** – of the specific requirements for the presentation of media art works. A task, that is complicated, due to the fact that the „optimum” form of presentation is difficult to define precisely for many works of media art. Furthermore the original „authentic” state on which a reconstruction could be based often varies greatly through the course of different presentations. It must also be considered which international standards for the documentation of works of media art must be developed in order to enable the greatest possible access and at the same time ensuring the greatest flexibility in regards to the specific requirements of each particular work of media art.

The problems involved in the presentation, documentation and conservation of media art are extremely complex and pose themselves afresh with practically each single work. **Institutions, initiatives, conferences and institutes of further education**, which have devoted themselves to theses problems over the last years in Europe, USA and Canada (see links at [www.hartware-projekte.de/programm/inhalt/eulink.htm](http://www.hartware-projekte.de/programm/inhalt/eulink.htm)), have created important mile stones in the productive search for solutions – but they

are still extremely few. What is lacking is a continuously communication structure as well as models which enable institutes with a small budget to handle media art in the best possible way. Additionally the question of presentation and conservation of net and software based art has hardly been researched.

The research project and the congress „404 Object Not Found. What remains of media art?“ seeks to contribute to the creation of an interdisciplinary decentralised infrastructure for the production, presentation and preservation of media art as well as net and software based art.

### 3.2. The case studies

#### media\_art\_net dortmund

**Work:** Diana Thater, **The best animals are the flat animals, 1998**

**Team:** hardware medien kunst verein, Diana Thater, Goetz Collection (Munich), Prof. Heinrich Müller (University of Dortmund, graphic laboratory of the computer science Department), Agathe Jarczyk (restaurateur, Bern), Ulrich Stürmer (restaurateur, Bern), Anne Söll (art historian, University of Dortmund), Pixelboxx GmbH (Dortmund)

Diana Thater's video installation "The best animals are the flat animals", which belongs to the Goetz Collection, has been reconstructed by hardware medien kunst verein (Dortmund) according to a set-up dossier composed by the artist herself. The result was checked afterwards by Thater.

The two restaurateurs Agathe Jarczyk and Ulrich Stürmer (Bern) now will develop a documentation of the installation, as well as guidelines for its preservation.

Next to this, Professor Heinrich Müller from the graphic laboratory of the computer science Department at the Dortmund University works on a solution concerning the simulation of the specific qualities of the three-tube projector necessary for the installation. The simulation will be achieved through the manipulation of the video images.

Additionally the agency Pixelboxx (Dortmund) installs a specific data bank and a virtual working platform for the case study based on a content access management system developed by Pixelboxx.

### Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/TBA

- Works:**
- **Miguel-Angel Cardenas** (Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam): „25 Caramboles and Variations (Birthday Present for a 25 Year Old)“, 1979/1980
  - **Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield** (Collection artists): „Outside Inside“, 1984
  - **eddie d** (Collection artist): "A Word of Welcome", 1997-2005
  - **Servaas** (Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam): "Are You Afraid of Video?", 1984

**Team:** Jojanneke Gijsen (art historian), Vivian van Saaze (researcher), Ramon Coelho (media technician) and Gaby Wijers (video conservator) in cooperation with Miquel-Angel Cardenas, eddie d, Elsa Stansfield, Madelon Hooykaas, Ramon Coelho, Dorine Mignot, Gert Hoogeveen and Triomf.

*“...because of the performance aspect of many installations, conservators working with this medium will need to look beyond the material and consider that the "heart" of a work might lie primarily in its less tangible qualities. Preserving for the future something that is above all an experience might require conservators to take a more fluid view of what may or may not be changed about a work, challenging conventional notions of accuracy and authenticity.”*

William A. Real (2001). "Toward guidelines for practice in the preservation and documentation of technology-based installation art". *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, Vol. 40, no. 3, p. 226.

In the context of the project „Methods of production, presentation and preservation of media art“, a programme of studies regarding the preservation and presentation of four existing multimedia installations is being conducted at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/TBA. The installations will be set up at the exhibition „Dertig Jaar Nederlandse Videokunst / Thirty Years Dutch Video Art“.

The studies will focus on answering the following questions:

- Which aspects play a role in the preservation and re-installation of multimedia installations?
- What are the criteria for preservation and re-reinstallation?
- What technological know-how is required to ensure the possibility of presenting these installations in the future?
- How should installations be registered and documented?
- What is essential to the determination of origins and authenticity of the work?
- What are the essential aesthetic and technological elements that absolutely need to be preserved if the piece is to retain any integrity into the future?

An installation scenario, including context, history, registration, instructions and bibliography, will be drawn up for each work.

### **Center for Culture and Communication, C3, Budapest**

**Work:** Cryptogram, 1996-97  
VRML project by Zoltán Szegedy-Maszak

**Team:** Miklos Peternak (art historian), Nikolett Eröss (art historian), Zoltán Szegedy-Maszak (artist), Marton Fernezelyi (programmer), Gabor Acsai (programmer)