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GREY abART

Jiří Hůla

hula@artarchiv.cz

The Fine Art Archive

Abstract

The Fine Art Archive collects, processes, and provides a large collection of documents pertaining mainly to Czech and Slovak art of the 20th and 21st centuries. We distinguish 200 various types of documents; some of them belong to the category of "grey literature" (e.g., press releases, theses, bibliographies, exhibition catalogues, and annual reports). In our paper, we introduce our collection of grey literature and its processing and archiving in the abART Information System, provided by the Fine Art Archive since 1993. We'll focus on grey literature, searching in the abART system, records linking with all other related information, and availability of documents.

Keywords

Grey Literature; Fine Arts; Fine Art Archive; Databases

Introduction

The Fine Art Archive gathers, processes and makes available documents and information about contemporary fine art, predominantly Czech and Slovak. The history of the Archive stretches back to 1984, when it was established as part of the work done by the private Galerie H in Kostelec nad Černými lesy, since when it has become the largest specialised collection of this type in the country, holding hundreds of thousands of documents. The Archive is non-selective, in that it maintains and processes documents in this specific area that are generally not collected (for example, invitations to exhibitions, exhibition catalogues, death notices, documentary photographs and so on). The Archive currently holds hundreds of thousands of documents, making it the largest collection of documents specialising in this area in the country.

We store documents within the storage space of the National Library of Technology in Písnice, Prague 4. In addition to storage space, we also run a library that concentrates on fine arts at the DOX Centre of Contemporary Art in Prague's Holešovice district. The library at DOX also functions as a documentary and research centre, providing people with the opportunity to study documents from our archive, print them out, scan them and work in our abART database. The Archive has become essential to researchers, students, institutions and the general public.

The archived documents and processed information are/is used to prepare dissertations, biography entries, dictionaries and so on. The Archive also organises exhibitions, forums and talks, publishes catalogues, books (for example, *Edice Divadlo 1961–1970*, 2014; *Sídliště Solidarita*, 2014; *Zdenek Seydl a knihy*, 2015) and anthologies (*Výtvarné umění 1950–1971, 1990–1996*, 2008; *Rovnoběžky a průsečíky*, 2010; *Cesty mohou býti rozličné*, 2015), and it cooperates with a number of galleries, museums and publishing houses (Academia, Arbor vitae, Gallery, Kant).

We obtain catalogues, invitations, books and other types of documents, including grey literature, by exchange or purchase. In 2016, we were also able to take possession of the uncommonly large and specialised library of the now-defunct *Ateliér* magazine.

abART

The Archive has been developing the abART Information System, which it fully owns since 2003 in order to process documents and information. abART was created as a result of the need to provide access to information found in collected documents that might be hard to find otherwise. It is a relational, universal, open database (in terms of time, geographical area and specialisation) that is based on atomisation of the data entered (breaking down into elements that cannot be further broken down) and its mutual interconnection.

Example:

Milan Kundera. *Majitelé klíčů. Hra o jednom dějství se čtyřmi vizemi* (The Owner of Keys. A Play of One Act with Four Visions).

Description of document:
number of pages – 90, [2], Director's note added – 11, [1], cover
dimensions – 190 × 120 mm
year of publication – 1962
edition – 1st
number of copies – 4,200
volume number – 35
résumé – yes

Identifiers:
national bibliography number – cnb000623503
edition – Theatre
language – Czech
author – Milan Kundera (Epilogue)
        Otomar Krejča (Director's note)
author of publication – Milan Kundera
typographer – Jaroslav Fišer (cover)
publisher – Orbis, Prague
printer – Knihtisk, Prague
location – Archive, typography, Theatre, volume 35
        National Library, I 154373

A total of 143,313 persons were entered in abART at the end of September 2017, a total of 166,121 documents and 63,391 exhibitions and events processed and a total of 2,115,924 basic identifiers created. The target group of users is broad indeed – galleries, art historians, gallery owners, collectors, artists, journalists, state and municipal administration, Czech centres abroad, schools, libraries, tourist information centres and so on.
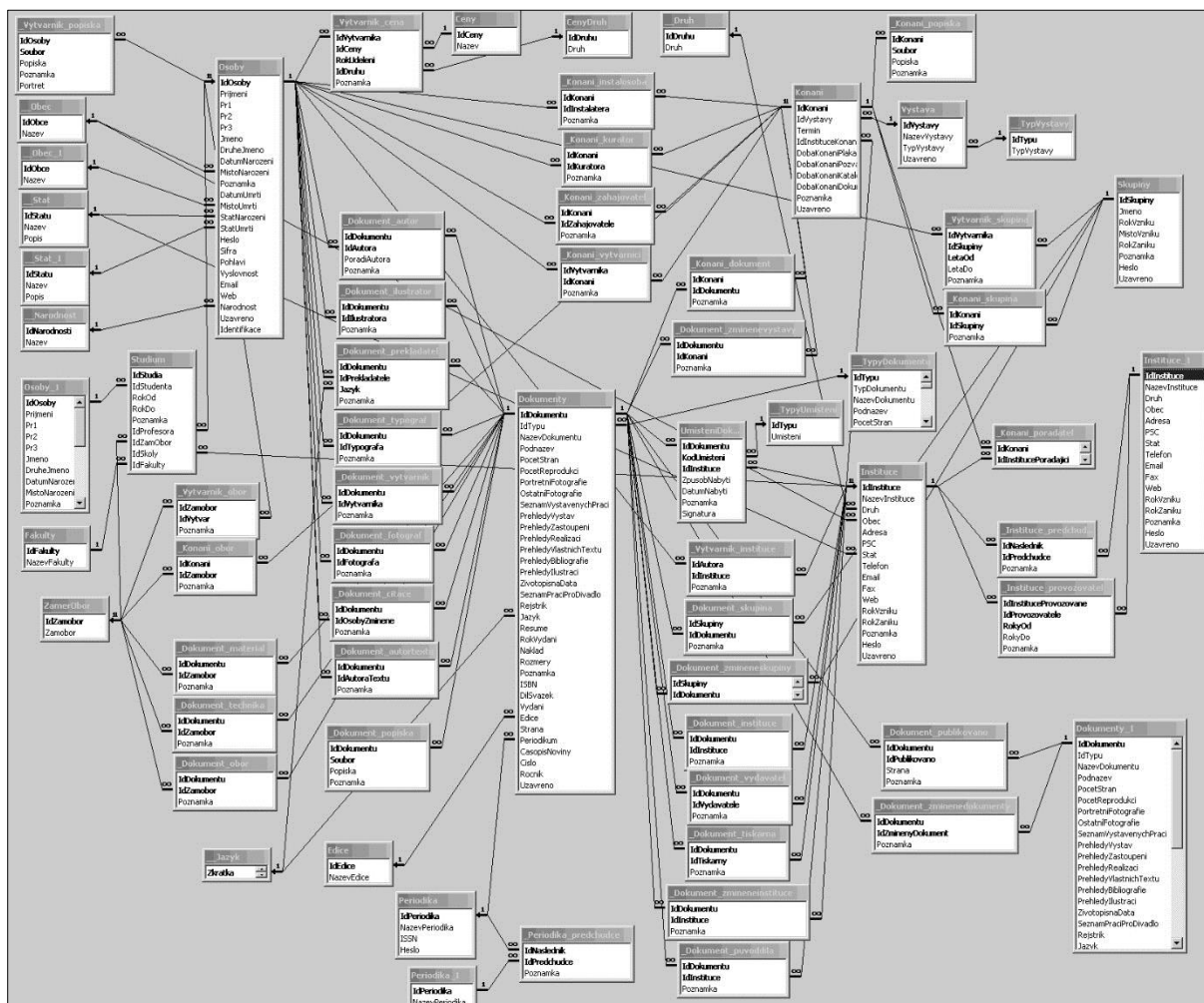
Figure 1 – The structure of abART

Code lists and identifier tables form the basis of the database structure of abART. Code lists of professions, languages, types of documents, types of exhibitions/events, key words, etc. are created in Czech and English and elements of the code lists of basic categories (person, group, institution, exhibition/event, document) are specified, if we are able to trace the original name, in the relevant language, including accents and special symbols. For example, Françoise Sagan, Ivo Andrić, Sławomir Mrożek, Poul Ørum, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych we Wrocławiu, Accademia Albertina delle Bele Arti Torino, Akademie der bildenden Künste, La transfiguration de l´art tchèque.

Translation into English is generated from the code lists based on a programme. It is also possible to broaden the browser version to include other languages.

Figure 2 – English version

Elements of all categories are stated only once in the code lists, apart from the required duplicate records – elements cannot always be reliably determined. It is often difficult to properly connect elements from different categories. Indeed it is currently impossible at this time. In such cases, we establish a new element with at least minimal identification (for persons, e.g. writer, painter, author of a text, curator) and a link to the source. In 2011 we organised an exhibition related to this issue entitled "Velká jména" (Big Names) (Lhoták, Kolář, Kubíček, Novák, Sýkora) at the Lesser Tower of the DOX Centre of Contemporary Art. This was about how to distinguish and assign the right artist when there are 11 Lhotáks, 48 Sýkoras, 51 Kubíčeks, 93 Kolářs and 332 Nováks in abART. Corrections and additions, dividing two different elements or unifying duplicate records is done in abART at one place and is immediately projected in all identifiers created. The newly-entered information is ordered in the browser version in the relevant place according to the relevant regulation (for example, attendance at an exhibition in the list of exhibitors alphabetically according to the surname of the artist, an exhibition/event according to its time, the authorship of a book according to the year of publication, etc.). abART does not collect data and information mechanically – it always refers to the source and primarily to its own documents – only a small part of the archive has been processed thus far. Text, image and other files can also be attached to all elements in abART (persons, institutions, documents, groups, exhibitions/events, terms).

Figure 3 – Karel Hynek Mácha – photograph

We are progressively matching persons, documents, institutions, communities etc. with the records in the databases of the National Library of the Czech Republic. Assuming the identification numbers of persons and the national bibliography numbers of documents makes it possible to automatically link abART to the National Library, or to other databases that also work with primary keys taken from the National Library, for example Wikipedia. However, some 35,149 persons that national authority databases do not specify are currently entered in abART. These are principally persons specified in abART by way of several identifiers (date and place of birth, date and place of death, profession, attendance at exhibition, authorship of book, authorship of text, work, etc.). The National Library now refers to abART as a reliable source more and more often in authoritative records and could therefore take persons sufficiently defined by identifiers into national authority databases and assign them with identification numbers. The identification of persons is generally relatively simple. What is more complicated, however, is the unambiguous determination of other elements – institutions, groups, documents, exhibitions/events, places of birth or death, work. Places of birth (death) are often unclear in national authority databases and are moreover specified in Czech in a case other than the nominative. By taking the places of birth (death) from the National Library, we carried a great many inaccuracies over to abART.

Figure 4 – AUT – full display of record

There are more than thirty communities taking the name of Lhotka in the Czech Republic. For this reason, abART always specifies the district or the superior municipality as part of the name of the community. The record * Lhotka, Klášterec nad Orlicí (Ústí nad Orlicí) means that the relevant person was born in the community of Lhotka that is part of the municipality of Klášterec nad Orlicí in the district of Ústí nad Orlicí.

Figure 5 – Miroslav Mynář – basic data

We term identifiers between elements of categories as "roles". With regard to a document, a person might be, for example, the author of a work or publication, the author of a text (an article in an anthology, magazine), a typographer, an illustrator, a translator, a photographer, he/she might be the subject-matter of a book or might feature prominently in the document (in a dictionary, encyclopaedia, catalogue). In such cases we talk of a strong person–person identifier in the document. A weak identifier (person–person mentioned in the document) allows us to create registers of books, catalogues, magazines, articles, etc. In abART. The roles of institutions in relation to a document are, for example, publisher or

printer. The location of a document (book, magazine, cutting, invitation, poster, work, etc.) is a special multiple identifier (document-institution).

Figure 6a – Bohumil Kubišta. Self-portrait – location

Figure 6b – Bohumil Kubišta. Self-portrait – location

abART is a product, a tool and a process.

As a product

abART generates overviews of exhibitions, awards, representations in collections, memberships of groups, lists of exhibitors, authors of texts, lists of literature, content of books, anthologies and magazines and registers.

As a tool

abART generates anniversaries, jubilees, natives and regional personalities, enables the export of selected data to other databases and to websites. As an example, two randomly chosen anniversaries of birthdays and two anniversaries of death from abART are shown on the archive homepage every day (artarchiv.cz). In addition to a date, such export is conditional on the existence of a portrait photograph.

As a process

abART shows errors and shortcomings, enables collective corrections and is updated daily.

Grey literature

In addition to basic sources (for the Archive these are catalogues, books, anthologies, magazines, articles, invitations, posters), abART also distinguishes another two hundred types of documents (including photographs, letters, New Year cards, calling cards, wedding announcements, death notices, handouts, texts, etc.). A number of these are categorised as grey literature: for example, press releases, university papers and dissertations, anthologies, annual reports, lists of work, overviews of exhibitions and lists of exhibited work. Other types of documents can be added to abART as required. abART processes all types of documents, including grey literature, in the same way. The grey literature processed in abART is shown in the browser version in the same way as other types of documents. In other words, it can be searched using full-text, identifiers and filters.

osoby   dokumenty   události   skupiny   instituce a místa   klíčová slova   vše   EN

HLEDAT: medek   hledat   filtr

ABART

Základní údaje
Fotografie
Díla
Studium
Výstavy/akce
Dokumenty
Zmíněná osoba
Autor publikace
Autor textu
Skupiny
Typograf
Ilustrátor
Fotograf
Zastoupení ve
sbírkách
Klíčová slova

Mikuláš Medek

katalog autorský

rok vydání, název (podnázev)

▮1965	Mikuláš Medek: Výběr obrazů z let 1947-65
▮1966	Mikuláš Medek
▮1966	Mikuláš Medek: Dvacet dosud nevystavených obrazů z let 1960/65
▮1967	Mikulás Medek
▮1968	Mikuláš Medek: Peintures, Paintings, Bilder 1958 - 1967
▮1969	Mikuláš Medek: Projektanti věží
▮1969	Mikuláš Medek: Kresby a ilustrace (1. výstava Tváře)
▮1969	Mikuláš Medek: Obrazy 1944 - 1969
1969	Mikuláš Medek
▮1970	Mikuláš Medek Prag (Im Kunstkreis Leinfelden)
▮1975	Mikuláš Medek: Výstava obrazů
▮1976	Mikuláš Medek 1926 - 1974
▮1988	Mikuláš Medek: Vybrané obrazy z let 1944 / 1974
▮1990	Mikuláš Medek: Obrazy (Výběr z tvorby)
▮1990	Mikuláš Medek: Malířské dílo 1942-1974
▮2002	Mikuláš Medek

Figure 7a Mikuláš Medek – documents

seznam článků/soupis literatury

rok vydání, název (podnázev)

▌1966	Referáty o výstavě československého umění současnosti v Západním Berlíně 1966

seznam vystavených prací

rok vydání, název (podnázev)

▌1966	Aktuální tendence českého umění I / Tendances actuelles de l´art tchèque
▌1967	17 tsjechische kunstenaars (autorské medailony, seznam vystavených prací)
▌1968	(300 5 50) (Vystavené práce)
▌1968	Nové věci
▌1976	Medek Austellung
1991	Seznam exponátů pro výstavu In memoriam
▌1995	Oblastní galerie v Liberci Umění frotáže 25. 5. - 9. 7. 1995 (Seznam vystavených děl)
▯1995	Přírůstky sbírek 1989 - 1993
▌1998	Podoby fantaskna v českém výtvarném umění 20. století (Seznam vystavených prací, resumé)
▌2003	Ohlédnutí, Výstava k 50. výročí právní samostatnosti Oblastní galerie v Liberci (Seznam vystavených děl, 2. část)

soupis díla

rok vydání, název (podnázev)

▌1976	Ausstellung Mikuláš Medek, Museum Bochum, 1976 (Werkverzeichnis)
▌neadováno	Návrh zápůjček obrazů Mikuláše Medka ze zahraničních a soukromých sbírek
▌nedatováno	Díla Mikuláše Medka ve veřejném majetku

Figure 7b – Mikuláš Medek – documents

Conclusion

The Archive maintains a large number of documents that are not traceable in other libraries and archives, or which can only be traced with much difficulty. All types of documents processed in abART are easily accessible, including grey literature. The best-known artists, art historians are processed, as are current events and orders, less-frequented authors, profiles of all groups and exhibition halls, regional and local personalities. The information stored in abART finds new connections thanks to its identifiers to non-artistic spheres (theatre, film, literature, music, history, etc.).

The Archive fills and improves a freely-accessible database, makes archived documents available and lends them for exhibitions, runs a study room, provides libraries and galleries duplicate books, catalogues and magazines, organises exhibitions and forums about art, and so on. The strengths of the Archive are having its own sources of information, its unique information system, the size of its database, the number of identifiers, its non-selective policy and its openness. Weaknesses? The status of the organisation, insufficient cooperation with experts and institutions, unsuitable capacity, poor publicity and marketing, insufficient

financing. One possible solution would be to involve the Archive in broader projects – for example, in the creation and filling of the national authority databases of the National Library, in the special subject gateway ART – Art and Architecture, in processing and exporting regional personalities to the sites of regions, districts, towns, libraries and galleries or in the creation of an international documentation and research centre.

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