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# abART, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, VIAF AND EARTHQUAKE

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**Jiří Hůla**

`hula@artarchiv.cz`

**The Fine Art Archive, Czech Republic**

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## **Abstract**

The Fine Art Archive develops and operates its own abART information system, a database of Czech and Slovak art based on the atomization and interconnection of the data input. There are six categories - persons, documents, events, groups, institutions and locations and terms. The system distinguishes 250 types of document, many of which (press release, diploma thesis, work collection, hand-out etc.) are grey literature. In addition to documents and art or cultural events (concert, auction, book launch), abART can also define other events, such as Sokol gatherings, fires etc. To process a remote field such as an earthquake, it would be necessary to create a broad information base and identify the entered elements (e.g. persons) with records in the National Library of the Czech Republic (NL). Yet what about the 50,000 people who have been filed in abART but who are not listed by the NL?

## **Keywords**

Database, information system, openness, non-selectiveness, link, fine art

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## Introduction

The Fine Art Archive (hereinafter referred to as the “Archive”) was established in Kostelec nad Černými lesy in 1984 as part of the activities of the private Gallery H (Hůla et al. 2016). The archive collects, processes and makes available all documents about contemporary – especially Czech and Slovak – fine art. It is non-selective and versatile, and open in terms of time, territory and field. Today it is probably the largest such specialized collection, with approximately a hundred thousand archival units. The Archive acquires new copies through inter-gallery and interlibrary loans, purchases and donations. The Archive also stores documents that are not systematically collected elsewhere yet are important information sources, such as invitations to exhibitions. The types of archived documents (photographs, slides, posters, clippings, songs, calendars, obituaries,...) and the way they are processed are presented by the Archive through the ‘View into the Archive’ cycle of exhibitions in the Small Tower<sup>1</sup> of the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague - Holešovice.



Figure 1: The Fine Art Archive (artarchiv.cz) collects, processes and makes available all documents about fine art.

## Archive's workplaces

The Archive has three workplaces in Prague, a selective library in the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, a cellar space close to Jiřího z Poděbrad Square (clippings and duplicates), and study and storage facilities near the Vyšehrad metro station (Pod Terebkou 15) leased from Prague 4. Last spring, the Archive had to leave the storage facilities of the National Library

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<sup>1</sup> Record of the Small Tower in abART, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/institution/24518/events>

of Technology in Prague - Písnice. A large part of the documents (typographic collection, additions, journals etc.) remains sorted but provisionally stored in banana boxes. All the document types (catalogue, invitation, poster, additions etc.) are sorted in the same way in the Archive – authorial works by surname and time of performance or edition, collective and group works by title, and gallery (institution) profiles by time of performance. The disadvantage of this sorting method is the necessity to release archival materials from time to time; the advantage is that the documents for one author or gallery are kept together and it is possible to find even those not yet processed in the archive database for study purposes.

Archived documents and processed information are used for writing doctoral or diploma theses, preparing exhibitions, bibliographic entries, catalogues, dictionaries etc. Archive users include not only historians and students of art history but also collectors, gallery operators, municipalities, schools, information centres etc.

## System abART

Since 2003, the Archive has been developing and implementing its own abART encyclopaedic system to process documents and make information available. abART, like the Archive, is non-selective and open, for example enabling access to the work of historians dealing with old or foreign art, exiles and personalities working in several different or outlying fields.

The bibliography of painter Alén Diviš (1900-1956), who lived in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s like composer Bohuslav Martinů, and in New York during World War II, contains among other things a crucial text by Bohuslav Martinů. In order to process his testimony of Diviš's personality and work in abART and link it to both the painter (person-document link) and the composer (person-text author link<sup>2</sup>), it was necessary to supplement the code list of persons with Bohuslav Martinů<sup>3</sup> (1890-1969).

abART is based on the atomization and interconnection of the entered data - links. Atomization is understood as the decomposition of data into further indivisible units, which can serve as the contents of search filters. Thus, for example, the decomposition of the date and place of birth or death - day, month, year, municipality (parent municipality), district - allows the creation of anniversaries, lists of natives, and regional (local, district) personalities, e.g. natives of Pilsen<sup>4</sup>. Listings of personalities are sorted by frequency of links created in abART.

The database structure is based on code lists and linking tables. The translation into English is program-generated from continuously supplemented Czech-English code lists. A new modification of the browsing version based on the full-text Elasticsearch search engine will offer users a more user-friendly environment in early 2020 (Elasticsearch 2001).

<sup>2</sup> <https://cs.isabart.org/document/3402>

<sup>3</sup> Record of person Bohuslav Martinů in abART, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/person/9767>

<sup>4</sup> <http://bit.ly/abARTosoby>

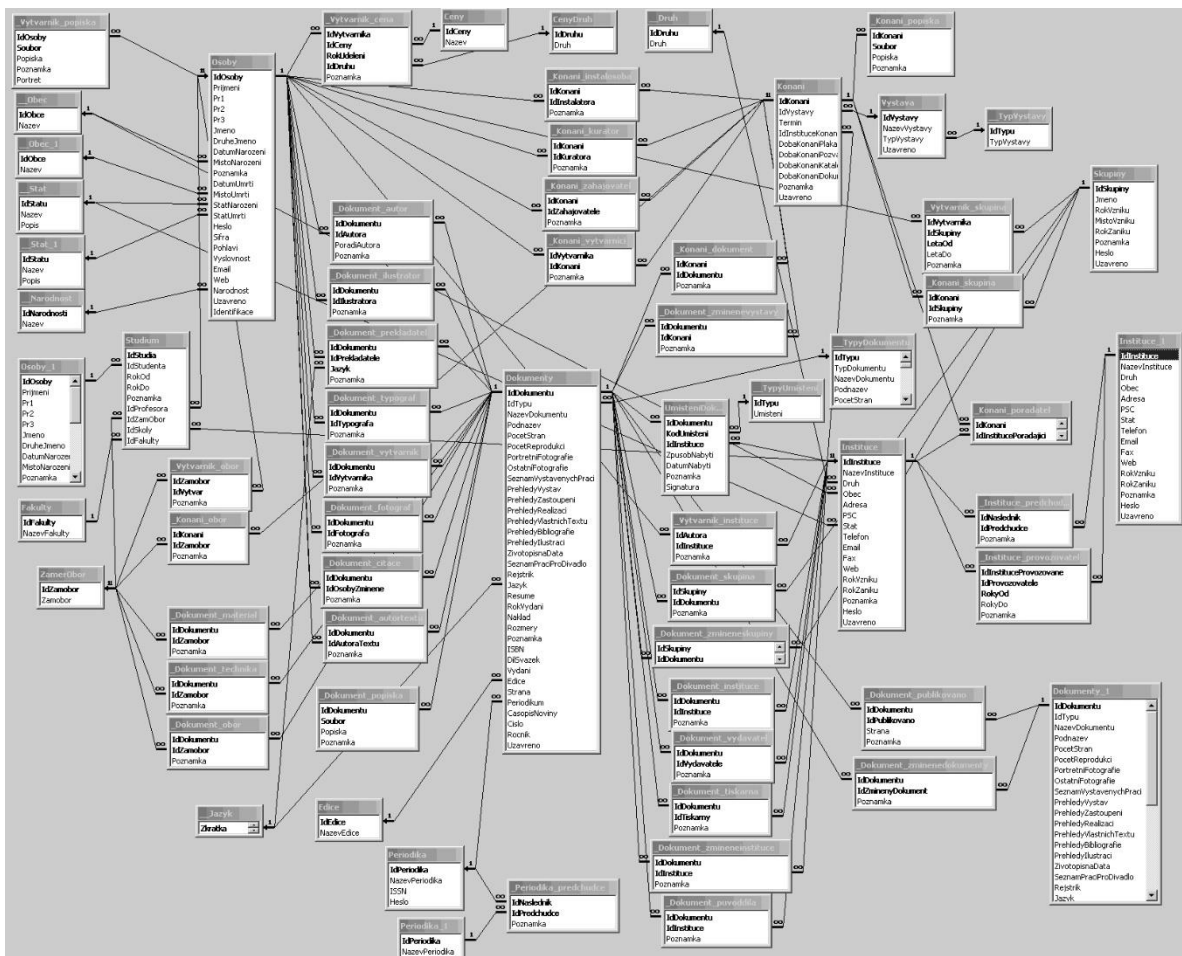


Figure 2: Structure of the abART database system (isabart.org). This image can be displayed separately in the attachment ([http://repozitar.techlib.cz/record/1427/files/Hula\\_diagram\\_of\\_sys\\_abART.jpg](http://repozitar.techlib.cz/record/1427/files/Hula_diagram_of_sys_abART.jpg)).

After the discontinuation of the Ateliér magazine, the Archive acquired its specialized library. In order to preserve the idea of this gift's uniqueness in its entirety, a now non-existent institution was established in abART as another document placement possibility - Ateliér, a bi-weekly of contemporary fine art<sup>5</sup>, a virtual library, to which documents from the now non-existent library were added.

Besides the preparation of exhibitions, publishing works and the daily storage of new data, the Archive is currently involved in two major projects: Mikuláš Medek's monograph, to be published by Academia in 2020, and a project supported by the Czech Science Foundation - Hypnotist of Modern Painting. Bohumil Kubišta and the Unrest of the Early European Avant-garde<sup>6</sup>. In addition to catalogues of exhibitions and literature, all the well-known works of both artists (paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures by Bohumil Kubišta, paintings by Mikuláš Medek) are filed in abART, including various titles and information on where and when the work was exhibited and reproduced.<sup>7</sup> Using the two-way document/work exhibited link, lists of exhibited works are created in abART together with the representation of the work at exhibitions.

<sup>5</sup> Ateliér available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/institution/39140/placed>

<sup>6</sup> Record of the project in STARFOS: [https://starfos.tacr.cz/cs/project/GA16-06181S?query\\_code=u4aiaacdirtvg](https://starfos.tacr.cz/cs/project/GA16-06181S?query_code=u4aiaacdirtvg)

<sup>7</sup> <https://cs.isabart.org/document/82855/mentionedexhibitions>

Properly created links also enable abART to create lists of exhibitions, literature, members of art groups and associations, students and professors, and to export selected data to other databases or websites. As an example, two birth and two death anniversaries randomly selected in abART are posted on the Archive's home page ([artarchiv.cz](http://artarchiv.cz)) daily. This export is conditional on the existence of a portrait photograph. (The Fine Art Archive 2019)

## Grey literature

In addition to the basic sources (for the Archive, these are catalogues, books, proceedings, journals, magazines, articles, invitations and posters), abART distinguishes another two hundred and fifty types of document (including photographs, letters, New Year cards, business cards, wedding announcements, telegrams and obituaries). Many of these are grey literature, e.g. press releases, Bachelor's, Master's, rigorous, dissertation and habilitation theses, proceedings, lists of works, lists of exhibitions, lists of exhibited works, hand-outs etc. New types of documents can be added to abART as needed or according to requirements.

All types of document, including grey literature, are processed by abART in the same way. abART files and describes them in a similar way as e.g. books (document type, title, subtitle, number of pages, number of images, dimensions, year of publication or creation, number of books published, edition etc.), creating relevant links (document language, person in the document, text author, publication author, photographer, illustrator, typographer, translator, publisher, printer, storage etc.). The grey literature processed in this way can be found in abART not only by name but also by document type, document author, the person in the document, the publisher, the typographer etc.<sup>8</sup>

As a trusted source, information stored in abART is increasingly referred to by the Czech National Authority Database operated by the National Library of the Czech Republic. Elements filed in abART (persons, events, documents, groups, institutions, municipalities and concepts) are gradually being identified with records in the databases of the National Library of the Czech Republic<sup>9</sup>. In the future, the use of personal identification numbers from the National Library is intended to facilitate the connection of the Archive to other information systems that also work with the primary keys listed in the National Library, such as Wikipedia or the Virtual International Authority File – VIAF (VIAF 2019).

## Events

In abART, it is possible to define not only other types of art or cultural events (exhibition opening, lecture, performance, discussion, concert and theatre performance) but also any other events, such as Sokol meetings, fires, volcano eruptions and earthquakes. One newly defined type of event (earthquake) made it possible to create a record of a natural disaster in abART, the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Example of searching the document type "hand out" in abART [http://bit.ly/abART\\_typedocument](http://bit.ly/abART_typedocument)

<sup>9</sup> Example of the record in the Authority database of the National Library of the Czech Republic [https://aleph.nkp.cz/F/?func=direct&doc\\_number=000576054&local\\_base=AUT](https://aleph.nkp.cz/F/?func=direct&doc_number=000576054&local_base=AUT)

<sup>10</sup> Record of the Great Lisbon Earthquake in abART, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/exhibition/70783>



Basic data


Portraits


Documents to exhibition


History

Great Lisbon Earthquake (event)

## Great Lisbon Earthquake





**The Fine Art Archive**

The Fine Art Archive collects, processes and makes available materials on contemporary art.

Náměstí Smiřických 49, 281 63 Kostelec nad Černými le  
ID - 26639327, bank - 187566169/0300  
office phone - 222 942 718  
[www.artarchiv.cz](http://www.artarchiv.cz)

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Figure 3: Any documents and events can be processed in abART, e.g. the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755.

The earthquake in Lisbon is considered one of the most devastating earthquakes in the history of Europe; most of the 60,000 victims died in the tsunami and the fires following the first quakes. This, the first scientifically examined catastrophe of its kind, marked the beginning of modern seismology. Like all exhibitions and events entered in abART, the Lisbon earthquake can be linked to the relevant institutions, persons or documents, websites, drawings, graphics, manuscripts, articles, texts, fair songs etc.<sup>11</sup>

## Kárník Archive

The archive of geophysicist and seismologist Vít Kárník (1926-1994), stored at the Institute of Geophysics of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, is a collection of diverse earthquake-related documents from the oldest records and testimonies to the present. In addition to books, journals and proceedings, the archive includes notes, extracts, quotes, seismic questionnaires etc. All the documents in the Kárník Archive could be linked to the relevant seismic events in abART.

<sup>11</sup> Part of the record of the Great Lisbon Earthquake in abART – exhibited documents, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/exhibition/70783/exhibited>

The catalogue of earthquakes in the Czech Republic published in the Geophysical Collection 1957 (Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Publishing House, Prague 1958) was compiled - according to the bibliography entries - by three authors: V. Kárník, E. Michal and A. Molnár. The first two are listed in the Czech National Authority Database and there have been assigned identifiers to them by the database. Those identification numbers were collected from there by abART.

Ing. Vít Kárník, DrSc., born on 5 October 1926 in Prague, died on 31 January 1994 in Prague, geophysicist and seismologist, has an identification number jk01053078. PhDr. Emanuel Michal<sup>12</sup>, born on 14 July 1894 in Starý Plzeňec (Pílska-city), geologist, teacher, seismologist, zoologist, has an identification number jk01081413. A. Molnár is not listed in the Czech National Authority Database.

The identification of people is usually relatively simple. What is more difficult is the unambiguous identification of other elements such as institutions, groups, documents, exhibitions/events, places of birth or death, or works. New and so far insufficiently defined elements are created in abART with at least minimal identification. In the case of persons, this can be e.g. profession, place of birth and place of work. If the person is not yet listed at the time of the search in the Czech National Authority Database, this is abbreviated in a note - NL no, 2019/09.

Geophysicist and seismologist Molnár<sup>13</sup>, first name Alexander, worked at the Institute of Geophysics in Prague in the 1950s. He is not yet listed in the Czech National Authority Database or the VIAF. If he was registered in the Czech National Authority Database, he would automatically be assigned a number in the VIAF. Dozens of national libraries participate in the VIAF, however linking in the opposite direction, meaning from the VIAF to the National Library, does not work. The identification number in the Czech database is unique, but in the VIAF the same person may be listed with several different personal numbers, e.g. painter Anton Perko (1833-1905) (ID1 - 53644535966399551900005, ID2 - 305601156, ID3 - 259797213)<sup>14</sup>.

## European Art Net (EAN)

In the summer of 2019, the Archive became part of the European Art Net (european-art.net) project linking twelve European institutions (archives, libraries and galleries) and their digital databases focused on information about contemporary fine art. (European Art Net 2019)

As of 26 October 2019, 76,928 exhibitions and 197,301 documents had been processed, 2,545,498 basic links and 159,676 records of persons had been created in abART, of which the Czech National Authority Database does not list 50,000 persons. These are often persons specified in abART through multiple links in addition to the basic characteristics. For example, graphic artist and sculptor Lenka Janušková, born on 22 April 1986 in Fryšták in the district of Zlín, took part in six exhibitions according to abART and is listed in five catalogues. The identifier assigned by the Czech National Authority Database would open the sculptor's access

<sup>12</sup> Record of the person Emanuel Michal in abART, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/person/154180>

<sup>13</sup> Record of the person Alexander Molnár in abART, available from: <https://cs.isabart.org/person/153735>

<sup>14</sup> Record of the person Anton Perko in VIAF, available from: [http://bit.ly/VIAF\\_Perko](http://bit.ly/VIAF_Perko)



to the VIAF. However, Lenka Janušková can easily be found in the EAN database using the full-text search engine.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 4: International Conference of the European Network of Art Archives - European Art Net, Fine Art Archive, 6 September 2019.

## abART and earthquake

abART is primarily focused on fine art. To be able to process and make available an area as remote as an earthquake in as much detail as possible, including new types of grey literature, it would have to expand the existing code lists with thousands of new elements - seismic events, geophysicists and seismologists, geographers, scientific institutions, localities etc. and create a broad background similar to that systematically being built by the Fine Art Archive since 2003.

## Conclusion

All documents stored in the Archive and processed in abART are easily accessible. Processing is performed from the most famous personalities, through current events and orders, less well-known authors, the profiles of all groups and exhibition halls, to regional and local personalities. Thanks to the openness and links to other cultural areas (theatre, film, literature, music,

<sup>15</sup> Search of person Lenka Janušková in the EAN database, available from: [www.european-art.net/eingang\\_besucher/index.cfm?](http://www.european-art.net/eingang_besucher/index.cfm?)

philosophy, history etc.), the information entered in abART can provide new, often unexpected, context.

The strengths of the Archive include its own information resources, a unique encyclopaedia system, the size of the database, the number of links, non-selectiveness and openness. Its weaknesses include poor promotion and marketing, organization status and poor cooperation with experts and institutions.

The information stored in abART is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0. abART is used by many people and institutions for their work and business. The archive database recorded 10,487 visitors in September 2019.

Depending on the structure of the records taken from abART (e.g. an author's exhibition always has the title and full event duration in abART, if it can be found), it is often obvious that the information comes from abART yet users usually do not refer to the source.<sup>16</sup> Cooperation is not a one-way street, cooperation is reciprocity.

It is often difficult to establish the right link between insufficiently specified elements – there are still many incorrect links and deficiencies in abART. Corrections and additions, splitting two different elements merged into a single record or unifying duplicates is done in one place and will be reflected in all links. Although all errors can be corrected in abART, it is not always possible to recognize them without the help of collaborators, art historians, gallery operators, librarians, collectors, students and other people interested in fine art. Clarifying the place of birth or death is often a major problem. The browsing version will include an attempt to encourage feedback through an electronic error form. However, the greatest weakness of the Archive is insufficient funding, even though the Archive's activities have been aided for a long time by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the City of Prague. One possible solution to the most pressing problem could be the involvement of the Archive in wider projects, for example in the building and updating of Czech National Authority Database, cooperation with similarly oriented European institutions, or the processing and export of regional personalities to the websites of regions, districts, cities, libraries, galleries, information centres and other institutions.

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<sup>16</sup> Example of person Jiří Balcar in the Artlist, available from: <https://www.artlist.cz/jiri-balcar-5253/>

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*VIAF Virtual International Authority File* [online], 2019. OCLC, 2019 [Accessed 27 October 2019]. Available from: <http://viaf.org/>