

International Conference

„Digital Curating: Ethics of Access and Sustainability“

of the Centre for Advanced Study “Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change”

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University of Münster

Abstracts and CVs

Jörg Albrecht (Burg Hülshoff – Centre for Literature)

Droste Worlds: How Digital Technology is Opening New Memorial Spaces

CV

Jörg Albrecht (born in 1981 in Bonn) is a writer. He studied comparative literature, history, literature, and theater studies in Vienna and Bochum. His first novel, *Drei Herzen* (Three Hearts), was published by Wallstein Verlag in 2006, followed by three more. In 2014, he published his doctoral thesis on interruptions as a creative device in texts and in their radio broadcasts. He has also published essays, texts for theater and performance, and radio plays. Since 2018, he has been the artistic director of Burg Hülshoff – Center for Literature, the program operator of the Annette von Droste zu Hülshoff Foundation.

Abstract

How can curating in digital times contribute to a shared and sustainable experience of memorial space?

This contribution looks for potential answers to this question by presenting *Droste Welten* (Droste Worlds), a learning environment opening in the Münsterland region in 2026. It is dedicated to enabling visitors/users to experience the life and works of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, the most famous female German poet of the 19th century. *Droste Worlds* consist of four spaces: a moated castle and a country-house (both including a permanent exhibition on Droste), a poetry path and a digital venue.

Curating in this spatial context avoids reproducing artificial boundaries between ›old‹ and ›new‹. It takes place online and on-site. It updates Droste’s heritage by offering its visitors/users different modes of exploring space, accessing texts or topics and challenging their knowledge and experience.

By giving examples from the permanent exhibitions of *Droste Worlds*, three propositions are made:

- 1) Curating in digital times establishes access to layers of time and text.
- 2) Curating in digital times works with glitches and bugs.
- 3) Curating in digital times builds an environment for challenging narratives.

By crossing periods of time, by connecting different voices and by working with the glitches of the system called ›museum‹, this way of curating reaches for the visitors’/users’ ethical sensibilities without overwhelming them. It enhances experience in and with the monuments, and it offers participation to people beyond common dichotomies of rural and urban spheres.

Hauke Behrendt (University of Stuttgart | Senior Fellow of the Centre for Advanced Study “Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change”)

Curating the Digital Divide: Ethical Challenges of Cultural Participation in Digital Infrastructures

CV

Hauke Behrendt is Assistant Professor of Philosophy (Akademischer Rat a. Z.) at the University of Stuttgart and currently a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study “Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change” at the University of Münster. His research lies at the intersection of social and political philosophy and the applied ethics of digital technologies, with a particular focus on questions of participation, discrimination, and justice. He serves as chair of the research group “Inclusion in Legal and Social Philosophy” at the Berlin Institute for Inclusion Research (ZfIB).

He has published on digital divides, algorithmic decision-making, discrimination, and the normative foundations of inclusion. His monograph “Ethik der Digitalisierung” (2025, transcript/UTB) examines how digital technologies reshape social practices and identifies conditions under which such transformations enhance or undermine participatory justice. He has also co-edited several volumes, including “Kunst und Moral” (2022) and “Privatsphäre 4.0” (2019), and recently co-edited a special issue of the “Zeitschrift für Rechtsphilosophie” on participatory justice.

Abstract

This talk develops an ethical framework for understanding how digital curatorial practices interact with and potentially intensify the digital divide. I begin by outlining several forms of disadvantage that emerge in digitally mediated cultural environments - ranging from unequal access and barriers to effective use to disparities in visibility, recognition, and the meaningful uptake of cultural resources. These patterns reveal that digital curation is not merely an aesthetic or technical activity, but part of a broader infrastructure that shapes who can participate in cultural practices and on what terms. By analysing how such infrastructures distribute opportunities for engagement, interpretation, and representation, the talk identifies key normative considerations that curators and institutions must address if digital transformations are to support, rather than undermine, equitable cultural participation.

Beatrice von Bismarck (Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig)
A Labor of Doubt and Repair: Archives and Digital Curating

CV

Prof. Dr. Beatrice von Bismarck is Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts (HGB). She lives in Berlin and Leipzig. Approaches to cultural production that combine theory and practice are at the center of Beatrice von Bismarck's working methods. Her current areas of research include the aesthetic, social, and political potentials of curatorial action, the consequences of globalization for the cultural field, and the functions of the postmodern artist's image. From 1989 to 1993, she worked at the Städtisches Kunstinstitut and the Städtische Galerie in Frankfurt/Main as curator of the 20th century department, where she supervised, for example, solo presentations of Richard Long, Bruce Nauman (1991), Dan Flavin, and Jürgen Partenheimer (1993). She then worked at the University of Lüneburg from 1993 to 1999, where she founded the "Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg" together with Diethelm Stoller and Ulf Wuggenig and realized exhibition projects such as "Services" (Andrea Fraser/Helmut Draxler, 1994), "Public/Private" (Thomas Locher/Peter Zimmermann, 1996) or "Interarchive" (1999-2002) with Hans-Peter Feldmann. In 2000 von Bismarck followed the call to the HGB Leipzig as professor and program director of the university's own gallery. From 2003 to 2011 von Bismarck was prorector of the HGB. She is the initiator of the master's program "Cultures of the Curatorial" at the HGB, which was established in 2009. In 2010 she was a Guest Scholar at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Abstract

Building relations in public can be considered as a core competency of the cultural practice of curating. With its capacity to generate encounters among humans and non-humans it generates different forms of connectivity, which in turn result in processes of meaning production. The digital might enter these new relations as a medium, a thingly agent as well as a method. Particularly when focusing on the curatorial in relation to archival practices the digital foregrounds the potential of the meaning-productive processes with respect to a re-reading of archival material in juridical, political and social terms. In the same way that the digital enhances curatorial participation in the politics of translation, of memory or of evidence, it allows to curatorially expose fissures in the corset of disciplinary, institutional or governmental convictions, laws and rules. Following the diverse threads of implications this has for a socially relevant curatorial practice my talk will discuss concrete examples of digital curatorial labor casting doubt on codified knowledges and assumptions as much as opening up onto potentialities of repair.

Dominik Bönisch Alpári (University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf, MIREVI)
Training the Archive: A Project Review and Lessons Learned

CV

Dominik Bönisch Alpári studied Cultural Studies at the University of Hildesheim and the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest. He is currently working as a research associate at the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf (MIREVI), focusing on the exploration of intermedia collections using artificial intelligence. Since 2024, he has been managing the project “LINKed,” investigating how audiovisual archives can be connected with AI. Until 2023, he headed “Training the Archive” at the Ludwig Forum Aachen, where he applied AI in curating. His research interests focus on the impact of AI on museum collection and archival practices.

Abstract

“Training the Archive” (2020–2023) was a joint project of the Ludwig Forum for International Art Aachen and the HMKV Hartware MedienKunstVerein Dortmund, carried out in collaboration with the Visual Computing Institute at RWTH Aachen University. The project set out to accompany ongoing advances in artificial intelligence (AI), critically examine these technologies, and explore their potential applications within museum practice. Its central focus was the question of how AI can be employed in processes of (digital) curating.

Following the successful implementation of the project, the publication of an accompanying book, and the release of an open-source prototype—the so-called Curator’s Machine—new questions emerge regarding the project’s legacy and the sustainability of software within museum infrastructures. Who continues to use and maintain such initiatives when institutional responsibilities change? How can distribution be ensured when museums engage in software development for the first time?

The presentation addresses these questions to initiate a discussion on the resources required for the ongoing support of such technological work within museums, and on how curators can be equipped with tools that enable them to explore their digitized collections in new and different ways.

Regine Ehleiter (Witten/Herdecke University)

Infrastructures of Digital Curating: Power, Platforms, and the Politics of Access

CV

Dr. Regine Ehleiter has been a postdoctoral research associate at the Chair of Digital Arts and Cultural Mediation at the Wittenlab.Zukunftslabor of the Witten/Herdecke University since 1 March 2025. Prior to this, she was a senior fellow at the Centre for Advanced Study “Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change” and a research associate at the Cluster of Excellence “Temporal Communities. Doing Literature in a Global Perspective” at the Free University of Berlin, the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig and the University of Hildesheim. Her work focusses on modern and contemporary art. Her research interests include transnational exhibition history, artistic writing and publication practices and ecological discourses.

Regine Ehleiter studied cultural studies, art history and journalism in Leipzig and London. Her dissertation on practises of exhibiting in publications, based on international archival research, traces the transformation of the publicising of art in the 1960s along the desideratum of participation and was published by Edition Metzler in 2024. In her habilitation project, she examines the concept of planetarity, which encourages a reconsideration of the history of global warming beyond the earth- and human-fixated guiding principle of globalisation, with regard to its potential for the discipline of art studies.

She has published numerous articles in art magazines and exhibition catalogues, is co-founder of the D21 Kunstraum Leipzig and has curated exhibitions on contemporary art since 2010, including for the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden and the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck. In 2024, she organised the first solo exhibition of Argentinian conceptual artist Mirtha Dermisache in Germany (“Mirtha Dermisache: To Be Read”, A-Z Berlin and oxfordberlin). As co-initiator and co-curator of the series “Reading Artists’ Books” (with Tabea Nixdorff), she is dedicated to the digital mediation of artistic publication practices.

Abstract

Debates and guidelines on sustainability in digital curating – when the issue is addressed at all – tend to focus on practical optimizations: energy-efficient design, “lightweight” web typography, or reducing file sizes and data traffic to lower emissions. While such measures matter, they risk narrowing sustainability to a question of better interfaces and greener user experiences. It is easy to forget, amid the seemingly immaterial circulation of digital content, that access is always bounded by material conditions and constraints, such as energy, hardware, servers, maintenance, and labour. This paper argues instead for an infrastructural critique that treats the symposium’s guiding concerns – ethics of access and sustainability – as inseparable: digital access is always produced through concrete material, legal, and political conditions, including server infrastructures, long-term storage and preservation regimes,

licensing, platform governance, and dependencies on proprietary systems. From this perspective, the ecological footprint of digital curating cannot be disentangled from questions of power, authority, representation, and responsibility – especially where projects that aim to expand access, challenge hierarchies, or interrogate canon formation rely on corporate infrastructures and partnerships whose power they simultaneously seek to critique.

Exemplary cases include curatorial research conducted in collaboration with Google Arts & Culture, as well as projects that build on commercial AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for text generation, mediation, or visitor interaction—settings in which critical ambitions can come into tension with platform terms, data economies, and algorithmic governance. A second example is FURL, a platform used in the early 2000s for collecting and exhibiting net art that later went bankrupt, illustrating how quickly “access” can collapse when curatorial work depends on unstable infrastructures and market-driven services. Drawing on the working group Exhibition Ecologies and the forthcoming edited volume of the same title (De Gruyter, June 2026; co-edited with Friederike Schäfer), the paper reads digital curating as a node within interlocking economic, technical, political, and ecological networks—thereby contributing to the symposium’s broader inquiry into the shared responsibilities that emerge where digital cultural access and sustainability intersect.

Chantal Eschenfelder (Städel Museum)

Accessibility and Cultural Participation: The Städel Museum's Digital Strategy

CV

Chantal Eschenfelder studied art history, German language and literature, and American studies. She worked as a project manager for culture and new media at the European Office of the City of Cologne and as a research assistant for the Museum Ludwig, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, and the Museum of Applied Arts at the Cologne Museum Service. Today, she heads the Audience Engagement department at the Städel Museum and the Liebieghaus Sculpture Collection. An important goal of her outreach work is to open up cultural institutions to all areas of society. She is currently working on transferring art education strategies to the digital space. In 2015, she and her team won the Grimme Online Award for the digital on the Monet exhibition. She also advises institutions in Germany and abroad on issues of cultural education and digitization.

Abstract

Accessibility and Cultural Participation: The Städel Museum's Digital Strategy

The lecture examines the offerings of the Städel Museum's digital extension against the backdrop of the debate on participation and cultural engagement in museums. It starts by addressing the role of museums in relation to their audiences and the question of their social relevance and responsibility. In a global world increasingly shaped by the media, museums today also take on social tasks that go beyond the mere communication of art and aesthetics. Given the digital transformation of society, however, reflecting on ways of transferring educational methods and standards into the digital realm has become a crucial necessity. This development presents a unique opportunity for the education sector. The lecture highlights the potential of digital teaching formats using the example of the Städel Museum. With the implementation of innovative projects, the Museum pursues the goal of making cultural institutions accessible to the multifaceted groups of contemporary society. The main focus of the educational work is therefore to present the art museum as an active platform for visitors of diverse backgrounds, expectations and needs. The wide range of users includes everyone: from art historians to dementia patients. But what are the challenges of digital art education? And how can we emphasize visual, example-based learning as a way of strengthening the users' powers of perception? While taking a close look on the variety of digital offers the Städel has developed, the lecture will introduce the motivational and developmental basis of its digital strategy. The extension of the educational mandate into the digital sphere encompasses a lot of initiatives and projects, which will be presented as examples for the fields of art education and museum strategies, like for example the Digital Collection, the Digital Archive and Artemis Digital. Finally, the lecture shares valuable experience in regard to collaborations with external partners as well as user feedback.

Beatrice Fischer-Miersch (District Office Mitte, Department of Art, Culture and History / Postgraduate Program CAMPI)

Digital Queer Curating as a Practice of Transformation – Between Responsibility, Power and Collective Spaces

CV

Dr. Beatrice Fischer-Miersch is an art historian, curator, and transformation researcher working at the intersection of cultural practice, institutional critique, and social change. She holds a PhD in art history and has a background in business administration, systemic coaching, and sustainable cultural management.

Her research and practice focus on how cultural institutions can rethink authorship, responsibility, and organizational structures in times of social, ecological, and digital transformation. She develops interdisciplinary formats that connect curatorial practice with questions of diversity, care, and sustainable institutional change, and advises museums and cultural organizations on these issues.

Most recently, she contributed to the conference FORM/FUTURE – Transformation by Design, conducted research for the Archive of Social Artistic Support, gave lectures for the Richard Schöne Society, and curated the exhibition Helga Goetze. She currently works as a knowledge manager at the District Office of Berlin-Mitte (Department of Continuing Education and Culture) and leads the postgraduate program CAMPI – Curating and Management in Public Institutions, where she focuses on future-oriented curatorial and organizational practices.

Abstract

The lecture examines curating as a critical practice that questions power relations, institutional routines and visibility structures. Digital curating is not a neutral expansion of access, but a site where responsibility, exclusion and power are reconfigured. The focus lies on curatorial responsibility, collaborative modes of working, and the question of which structural conditions are necessary for curatorial frameworks to become moments of sustainable, inclusive transformation.

Alina Fuchte (Kunstpalaſt / NRW Forum Düsseldorf) / **Marina Nething** (Museum Ulm)
Changing Museums with Swarm Curation

CV

Alina Fuchte ſtudied art history, cultural and ſocial anthropology (BA, MÜNſter/Amſterdam) and cultural analysis and mediation (MA, Dortmund). She completed her traineeship at the Kunſtpalaſt in Düsseldorf, where she has held the poſition of deputy head of cultural education ſince April 2023. Alina Fuchte headed the cooperation project nextmuseum.io for the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf (Stiftung Museum Kunſtpalaſt) for over three years.

Marina Nething co-developed nextmuseum.io as project manager for Museum Ulm 2020-2023. The buſineſs economist (BA, MBA, Southern Germany and Mumbai) and creative marketing expert brought with her years of experience from working at the media group Hubert Burda Media and her own creative agency. The end of the nextmuseum.io project in 2024 marks her ſtart as a digital curator at Museum Ulm.

Abstract

nextmuseum.io is a digital community platform for ſwarm curation, developed by NRW-Forum and Museum Ulm and open to everyone. Its miſſion: to uſe digital tools to create more differentiated, better exhibitions that are relevant to more people and promote greater democracy in the art and museum ſector.

As one of 15 pioneering digital projects funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation's Digital Fund, nextmuseum.io addreſſed from 2020 to 2024 the queſtion of how museums can uſe digital change in ſociety to remain ſocially relevant in the future. With collaborative approaches and the uſe of technology, nextmuseum.io rethought exhibition making. To this end, the technological baſis for ſwarm curation was developed in ſeveral ſtages and the diſcourſe on digital participation was advanced through a wide range of offerings. Topics ſuch as extended reality (AR, VR, MR), virtual worlds, metaverse, Web3/blockchain, artificial intelligence and open data were diſcuſſed, as were ſocial changes and their impact on the ſelf-image and work of museums, and much more.

After four years of project work, the team can look back on over 40 international open calls for collaborative exhibition projects, four digital extended reality experiments (in cooperation with the MIREVI Lab and ſtudents from the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf) and over 100 community events.

Does ſwarm curation have the potential to bring about laſting change in museums? In their preſentation, Alina Fuchte and Marina Nething ſhed light on the background to the project and report on remarkable exhibition projects, technical and human challenges, and (quite ſurpriſing) leſſons learned.

nextmuseum.io continues to be operated by Museum Ulm and Kunſtpalaſt Düsseldorf and can be uſed free of charge.

Berit Hummel (University of Münster)

Sculpture in the Expanded Field? Digital Access and Art in Public Space

CV

Berit Hummel studied Art History, Psychology, and Fine Arts at the Free University of Berlin, the University of the Arts Berlin, and the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig. She received a PhD in Art History from the University of Münster with the dissertation „Transitional Spaces: Cinematic Practices and Urban Change in New York, 1959–1966” (Dissertation Award 2022, University of Münster).

- Collaboration in interdisciplinary research contexts: 2012–16 in the Research Training Group 1705 „The World in the City” (Institute for Art History and Historical Urban Studies, Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin), and 2018–19 at the Collaborative Research Center 1265 „Refiguration of Spaces” (TU Berlin). Interdisciplinary teaching experience as a research associate at the Institute of Architecture at TU Berlin (2016–22) and guest lectures at TU Berlin and FU Berlin.
- Several years of extra-academic work in Berlin cultural institutions, including the KW Institute for Contemporary Art and the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Occasional curatorial and freelance projects.
- Substitute professorship (50% for Prof. Dr. Ursula Frohne) at the Institute of Art History, University of Münster, since fall 2023.

Abstract

Works of art in urban public space generally raise issues regarding their accessibility by an unprepared general public as their primal reception context. Furthermore, a certain amount of works produced for a specific situation in urban public space is no longer accessible in its original context, due to relocation or destruction. From this constellation arise questions concerning the possibilities of mediating such works within a multimodal digital environment, as well as the forms of publics generated this way with respect to a particular urban situation. In approaching digital access to sculptural as well as ephemeral and performative artworks originally produced for urban public space as a form of translation, I will ask for the publics created through ‚expanding the field‘ into the digital realm.

Interface-related environments usually consist of text-image-constellations and are even at their most basic level ‚curated‘ in that they are configured, algorithmically and otherwise, for enabling a reception for works of art in a meaning-creating framing.

Controversial works of ‚public art‘ are particularly useful for highlighting the creation of ‚publics‘ I aim to address here. Drawing from some basic considerations based on two paradigmatic cases, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981-89) and Olu Oguibe's *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* (2017/2019), I will zoom in on the public discourses the works themselves and the controversies surrounding them incited. Despite their relation to distinctly different urban, historic and cultural contexts, Manhattans Federal Plaza in 1980s New York and the Königsplatz with documenta 14 in Kassel, I will approach the discourse surrounding the dismounting of both works, involving in Oguibe's case the reinstallation in a less prominent and somewhat problematic location

closeby (pedestrian zone of Treppenstraße), via the public discourses created in a pre-digital (Serra) vs. a postdigital (Oguibe) reception environment.

Drawing parallels to deinstalled works from the Skulptur Projekte Münster, I will by means of conclusion reflect on potential forms of digital access and the discursive publics created this way.

Senka Ibrišimbegović (University of Sarajevo)

Virtual Present. Dreaming for the Future: Museum before Museum. Ars Aevi Sarajevo

CV

Senka Ibrišimbegović was born in Travnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She attended high school in Switzerland and graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sarajevo, complementing her studies with international programs at Yildiz Technical University Istanbul, MIT Cambridge (2001), and TU Wien (2003). She completed postgraduate studies in Italy, University of Siena, with master thesis “Museum Cultural District – M1 MuseumOne” in 2004. Same year, she began her long-term engagement with the Museum of Contemporary Art Ars Aevi Sarajevo, contributing to the Renzo Piano architectural project and participating in several Venice Biennale editions, including the 53rd Art Biennale (2009), the 15th Architecture Biennale (2016), and serving as Commissioner of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Pavilion at the 58th Art Biennale (2019).

She works at the Faculty of Architecture since 2008, earned her Ph.D. in 2015 and became Associate Professor in 2024. Her academic work includes numerous scientific papers and the book *The Art (of) Museum: Creating Contemporary Spaces of Identity*, Ars Aevi Sarajevo.

As Director of the Public Institution “City Museums” Sarajevo, she leads the development of the future Ars Aevi Museum. For her contribution to cultural cooperation with Italy, she received the Order of the Star of Italy – Cavaliere.

Abstract

Ars Aevi is a very ambitious artistic and cultural project. Ars Aevi has potentially massive importance for the development of South-Eastern Europe and the broader Mediterranean region. Examined in its own global geographical and political context, Ars Aevi is a stimulating example of international good will. It reflects the power of culture, architecture and art in unification. As Ars Aevi project has difficulties to have built museum building, where the collection should be exhibited, and due to Covid-19 restrictions and digitalization promotion we did an amazing project. "Virtual present - Dreaming for the Future; Museum before Museum".

In this project we sought to digitalize the planned Future Museums layout and planned collection exhibits within it. This means to create a platform which could convey Museum and its collection to our key demographics. Hence we chose to produce a website with an interactive tour as a medium that can be used between all ages. Within this we attempted to provide a unique experience, to be able to see the future building, to walk around it, to see the connections it has with its surroundings, and yet feel the space within.

A digital tour of the future museum will also be presented to all interested educational institutions to access planned collection exhibits and provide students with a safe

virtual outing. Our Museum before Museum project also gives a visualization of the building before any construction started yet. It also serves to representational purpose for our partners abroad and in the local government, to explain and imagine the physical potential of the project.

The objective of the Future Ars Aevi Museum is to create an international Multicultural Centre and Museum of contemporary world art in Sarajevo, a city where for the centuries differences between East and West have met in an atmosphere of mutual respect and love. In the cultural environment of Sarajevo and with its international heritage, the Ars Aevi Centre and Museum will be a permanent and visible symbol of the hope that instead of divisive differences can stimulate us to find beauty and value in diversity. After a while of break within the scope of modern technology, with this project accomplished, Ars Aevi is now back on track to lead the progress of art in this region.

Presentation to accompany the topic:

The lecture will present Ars Aevi as one of the most ambitious artistic and cultural projects in Southeast Europe, highlighting its significance as a model of international cultural solidarity within a complex geopolitical and historical context. Conceived during the siege of Sarajevo, Ars Aevi embodies the unifying power of art, architecture, and culture, positioning Sarajevo as a meeting point between East and West and as a future hub for contemporary world art.

The presentation focused on the period between 2022 and 2023, a critical phase in which the physical construction of the Ars Aevi Museum had not yet commenced. In response to prolonged delays in construction, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the broader acceleration of digitalisation, the project Virtual Present – Dreaming for the Future: Museum before Museum was developed and completed at the end of 2022, and publicly presented in spring 2023.

This initiative digitally translated Renzo Piano’s architectural design and the planned exhibition layout of the Ars Aevi Collection into an interactive online platform. Conceived as an accessible and educational tool, the virtual museum enabled diverse audiences to experience the future building, its spatial qualities, and its urban context, while also serving as a representational and communicative instrument for institutional partners, educational institutions, and decision-makers.

The lecture will conclude by situating this digital project as a bridge between vision and realisation. With the completion of the main design and the acquisition of the building permit in August 2024, Ars Aevi entered a decisive phase. As of spring 2026, the project stands on the threshold of construction, reaffirming the role of the “Museum before Museum” as both a cultural act of continuity and a strategic tool that sustained momentum, visibility, and belief in the museum’s future during a prolonged transitional period.

Jon Ippolito (University of Maine)

Temperature, Truth, and the Planetary. Consequences of AI

CV

Jon Ippolito is an artist, writer, and curator who teaches New Media and Digital Curation at the University of Maine. Winner of Tiffany, Lannan, American Foundation, and Thoma awards, Ippolito is co-founder of the Variable Media Network for preserving new media art, UMaine's Digital Curation and Just-in-Time Learning programs, and Learning With AI, a toolkit for educators and students that makes it easy to filter for AI assignments and resources by discipline or purpose. Ippolito has given over 200 presentations, co-authored the books *At the Edge of Art* and *Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory*, and published 90 chapters and articles in periodicals from *Artforum* to the *Washington Post*. His AI focus is creators—writers, programmers, and media makers and how the technical, aesthetic, and legal ramifications of generative AI empower and frustrate them.

Abstract

Generative AI has a singular impact on both the sustainability of archives and the sustainability of the planet. Superbeing and parrot metaphors notwithstanding, large language models are less synthetic organisms than thermodynamic engines. Such models can be thousands of times smaller than the corpus they were trained on, but this massive compression requires smoothing over outliers in favor of stereotypical responses. Compounding this reduction to clichés is the risk of overrelying on synthetic data; training on content that is itself produced by AI can "ensloppify" the world's archives, as eccentric primary sources get buried under normalized surrogates. Unlike sci-fi's cybernetic automata, transformer architectures are neither neutral nor cold. For a compression algorithm to generate new variations on existing content incurs a thermodynamic cost that is both statistical and environmental. Inference at scale keeps data centers humming, but inescapable inefficiencies in those GPU racks radiate heat, which demands more water and power. If we don't confront AI's lack of sustainability on both fronts, we risk a web that may be easier to query but will be harder to trust, and far more costly to our culture and planet.

Sarah Kenderdine (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne)

Computational Museology: New Relations between Machine Intelligence, Synthetic Artefacts, and Embodied Aesthetics

CV

Professor Sarah Kenderdine researches at the forefront of interactive and immersive experiences for galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. She is a professor at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland, where she leads the Laboratory for Experimental Museology (eM+) in the School of Computer and Communication Sciences. She is the former director and currently the curator-at-large of EPFL Pavilions, an amplifier for art and science in society. Sarah has pioneered the framework of computational museology, a scaffold that unites machine intelligence with data curation, ontology with visualization, and communities of publics and practitioners with embodied participation through kinaesthetic and interactive interfaces. She has created more than 110 exhibitions and major installations. Her upcoming book, co-authored with Lily Hibberd, *Deep Fakes: A Critical Lexicon of Digital Museology*, was published by Routledge on 17 November 2025 (OA). Sarah is a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy (FBA), a Visiting Professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong (Department of Computer Science), and an Adjunct Professor at the University of New South Wales, Sydney (Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture) and at IIT Jodhpur, India (Board of Governors).

Abstract

This lecture outlines computational museology as a framework that repositions the museum as an anticipatory system linking cultural heritage, emerging technologies, and diverse publics. By integrating machine intelligence with data curation, ontology with visualization, and embodied interaction with immersive interfaces, computational museology enables cultural organizations to form new connections among objects, knowledge systems, and participatory practices. Within this framework, discriminative and generative AI function as complementary modes of cultural computation. Discriminative AI reveals hidden relations within cultural big data—exemplified by *Narratives from the Long Tail*, which uses machine learning to produce narrative coherence across more than 200,000 hours of archival video—while generative AI produces novel cultural forms that invite public co-creation, as seen in the *Public Portal to Anticipation*. Together, these modalities position the museum as both archive and laboratory for cultural foresight.

Artificial intelligence, computer vision, and immersive media are also transforming how cultural artefacts are seen and understood. Replicas become provocations that challenge assumptions about originality and authenticity. Through examples ranging from sacred objects to digital augmented surrogates of cultural icons including the largest digital panoramic image in the world, the lecture examines how computational techniques reveal the “optical unconscious” of art—patterns and details imperceptible to the human eye yet rendered legible through algorithms and interaction. These

processes enable new sensory and performative engagements that blur distinctions between object and observer.

The lecture introduces Cultural Deep Fakes to describe technologically empowered artefacts that disclose hidden layers, propose new narratives, and elicit unexpected affective responses. Far from forgeries, they expose the politics of replication in contexts where heritage faces war, climate catastrophe, or cultural erasure. Digital copies can serve as reservoirs of memory and instruments for reclaiming identity, yet they also circulate within volatile economies shaped by cryptographic systems and speculative ownership. Here, the deep fake becomes a conceptual lens through which to rethink truth, cultural authority, and the futures of heritage—drawing on the book *Deep Fakes: A Critical Lexicon for Digital Museology* (Kenderdine & Hibberd 2025) and recent exhibitions at EPFL Pavilions and the Museum für Gestaltung.

Michael Klipphahn-Karge (Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig)
The Image as a Burden? Digitality after Sustainability

CV

Michael Klipphahn-Karge is an art historian and, since October 2025, Assistant Professor for “History and Theory of Art and Design” at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. He is also an associate researcher with the research group “Art, Environment, Ecology” at the Central Institute for Art History in Munich, where he previously served as a senior researcher. Previously, he was a research associate at the Chair of Digital Arts and Cultural Mediation at the WittenLab Zukunftslabor Studium fundamentale of the private University of Witten/Herdecke. He received his PhD in art history as a doctoral fellow of the Schaufler Lab at the Technical University of Dresden. Prior to this, he worked as a curator of contemporary art for various institutions. He studied fine arts, art history, and philosophy in Dresden, Berlin, Rome, and Ústí nad Labem. He is the author of several books, including the monographs “KI und Magie. Spiritualisierungen computationaler Systeme in der Gegenwartskunst” (Edition Metzler, Munich, 2026) and “Bildökologie. Materielle Lasten immaterieller Erscheinungen” (Wagenbach, Berlin, 2025). In addition, he has served as editor of numerous volumes, including “Dialectics of Ecology: Aesthetics and Capital” (co-edited with Linn Burchert and Alexandra Masgras, Verso, London, 2026, forthcoming); “On Extractivism: Planetary Exploitation, Pluriversal Worlding and the Data-Heat” (co-edited with Christiane Kruse and Hauke Ohls, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2025, forthcoming); “Uncertain Intelligences: Queer Reflections on AI” (co-edited with Ann-Kathrin Koster and Sara Morais dos Santos Bruss, Routledge, London, 2023); and “Queere KI – zum Coming-out smarterer Maschinen” (also co-edited with Ann-Kathrin Koster and Sara Morais dos Santos Bruss, Transcript, Bielefeld, 2022).

Abstract

Digital technologies are frequently framed in exhibition contexts as ecological alternatives to conventional modes of display and access. High-resolution digitization, virtual exhibition spaces, immersive formats, and AI-assisted research tools are commonly associated with promises of safeguarding fragile objects, reducing travel-related emissions, and opening collections to global audiences. At the same time, these practices rely on infrastructures that are themselves highly resource- and energy-intensive, ranging from data centers with elaborate cooling systems to complex client-server architectures dependent on rapidly obsolescent hardware. This presentation takes this ambivalence as its point of departure in order to explore the ecological implications of digital curatorial practice in a differentiated manner. To this end, two interrelated levels are brought into focus. On the one hand, the presentation addresses the material conditions of the digital: server farms, cloud services, and AI models whose operation and cooling require substantial amounts of electricity and water, and whose ecological costs are largely externalized, both spatially and institutionally. The presumed dematerialization of digital images thus obscures their entanglement in global chains of extraction, production, and energy provision, in which cultural institutions are structurally implicated through their digital strategies. On the other

hand, the—predominantly historical—collections themselves are embedded in resource-intensive structures, as the exhibition and conservation of artworks has for decades depended on climate-controlled storage and other technologies: The stabilization of temperature and humidity, particularly for paintings, photography, and sensitive paper-based materials, also entails considerable energy expenditure, regardless of whether these objects are digitally mediated or not. Against this interrelated backdrop, the presentation asks whether demands for ecological accountability should primarily be directed at curatorial actors and museums, or if institutions might instead take a more active role in challenging political as well as economical neoliberal logics that systematically shift responsibility from industrial infrastructures onto individual behavior. Rather than framing digital projects as either a “green solution” or an “ecological disaster,” the presentation argues for understanding them as an opportunity to render infrastructures visible, critically interrogate narratives of reach and innovation, and curate forms of deliberately limited, reductive digitality—not merely as marginal experiments, but as explicit curatorial positions.

Francis Marshall (London Museum)

Immaterial Culture: Collecting digital ‘objects’ at London Museum

CV

Francis Marshall is Senior Curator of Visual Media at London Museum (formerly the Museum of London). At London Museum, he has made numerous significant acquisitions, including Steve McQueen’s film Grenfell, as well as commissioned work from artists including Christiane Baumgartner, Blast Theory, Gayle Chong Kwan, Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen, and Thomson & Craighead. Additionally, he has been responsible for many exhibitions and displays, including Estuary (2013), and Perspectives of Destruction (2015) and Beyond Documentary (2018). Currently, he leads teams developing galleries for the new London Museum in West Smithfield, due to open late 2026.

Abstract

This talk will consider over ten years of digital collecting at London Museum. It will consider some precursors, some issues, some successes and maybe a missed opportunity. In 2014, the then Museum of London began a major project called Opening Up to Digital. One of the key strands of that organisation-wide activity was the question, how does an urban history museum, a museum of material culture, acquire the intangible digital world around us? What might an ‘object’ look like? Does it even make sense to talk about objects in this context? Over the following decade, we have attempted to grapple with these questions through a wide range of acquisitions from digital art installations to WhatsApp group chats. This has frequently involved more reflexive approaches to curating, moving away from insular specialisms to greater collaboration not only with artists and academics but with increasingly with London’s communities.

Grischka Petri (FIZ Karlsruhe Leibniz Institute for Information Sciences | Non-resident Permanent Fellow of the Centre for Advanced Study “Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change”)

Reversal, Retreat, Restoration? Assessing access in a Flooded Zone

CV

Grischka Petri (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2548-449X>) is an art historian (“Privatdozent”) and legal scholar. Since 2024, he has been Head of Copyright Research at FIZ Karlsruhe (Leibniz Institute for Information Infrastructure). His research interests include the relationship between art, law and the market with a specific perspective on museum law. He is a team member of the Legal Helpdesk of NFDI4Culture. Grischka’s research interests encompass a range of subjects, including British art history, the theory and social practice of photography and printmaking, the relationship between art, law and the market, and Duckburg as a topic of comic studies. He is consistently engaged with current developments in art, copyright and museum law, as well as the framework conditions of access to cultural goods from an aesthetic, ethical and legal perspective: “I am interested in how aesthetic transformation processes come into conflict with normative ideas.”

Abstract

Free access and open data have always met certain legal and ethical limitations. A series of rights of co-determination poses various obstacles. At best, these represent a to-do list; in other cases, they constitute a total blockage of free access. However, this usually involves preserving existing rights and curating access conditions.

We are currently witnessing a paradigm shift in which free access is not only having to strike a balance with conflicting individual interests, but is also being fundamentally called into question. The internet’s initial promise of freedom is failing. Free access benefits the powerful, particularly AI corporations and surveillance systems. This feeds the platform economy.

This is having an impact on open societies and their scientific culture. In this context, AI is both a tool and a threat; suddenly, new responsibilities emerge for gatekeepers, and access restrictions are introduced to prevent capitalist exploitation. This is an unpleasant situation, the full consequences of which have yet to be properly assessed. The goal, it is suggested, is to preserve at least some reserves of freedom for cultural heritage institutions and cultural studies. The paradigm shift is one from openness to protection.

Marie-France Rafael (Zurich University of the Arts)

Curating with the Carrier Bag: Institutional Critique and Feminist Collectivity in the Digital Realm?

CV

Marie-France Rafael (Dr. phil) is a professor for "Art in Context" at the Zurich University of the Arts. She studied Art History and Film Studies in Berlin and Paris. From 2011 to 2015 she was a research associate at the Free University of Berlin and until 2019 at the Muthesius University Kiel, Department of Spatial Strategies/Curatorial Spaces. In her research, writing, and teaching, she seeks to theorize the role played by contemporary art in human agency and social practices. In work that reflects her transdisciplinary approach—encompassing film and media, visual studies, and social studies—she explores how the entanglement of art with cultural and social practices is always reflective of a historical moment. This has led her to focus on how digitalization in contemporary art has taken on a new kind of presence—it is no longer just a virtual sphere of sociality, but increasingly, a technological interface that structures our embodied experiences. Her research and teaching is guided by questions on art and cultural history, gender constructions, image and media theory. Her books include among others *Raphaella Vogel: Outside Form* (Floating Opera Press, 2023), *Passing images: art in the post-digital age* (Floating Opera Press, 2022) and *Reisen ins Imaginativ: künstlerische Situationen und Displays* (Walther König, 2017).

Abstract

What digital practices of visibility and engagement with collections are necessary to overcome and transform current institutional inertia and create radical approaches? This lecture argues that Ursula K. Le Guin's "Carrier Bag Theory" can offer a transformative model for an ethical and sustainable approach to digital curating. Instead of the heroic "weapon," or the consolidation of a linear canon and hierarchical archival structures, Le Guin's metaphor of the "bag" as a tool for collecting, preserving, and sharing can be transferred to practices of digital curating.

Based on this feminist theory, this article aims to situate digital practices of curating between institutional critique and collective action. It will examine how the idea of the carrier bag as a vehicle in digital curating can lead to feminist collectivity and contextual accessibility to undermine more traditional archival structures and the algorithmic dynamics of social media, which canonize and exclude visibility.

The lecture will critically examine whether and how social change can be achieved through digital practices.

Reinold Schmücker (University of Münster | Director of the Centre for Advanced Study
“Access to Cultural Goods in Digital Change”)

Sustainable Curating: What it could mean

CV

Prof. Dr. Reinold Schmücker, founding director of the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald from 2004 to 2009, has been professor of philosophy at the University of Münster since 2009. From 2020 to 2024, he was dean of the university's History/Philosophy department, and from 2022 to 2025, he was president of the German Society for Philosophy. Reinold Schmücker's research focuses on the philosophy of artifacts, aesthetics and philosophy of art, ethics, cultural philosophy, political philosophy, and philosophy of law.

From 2010 to 2018, Reinold Schmücker was a member of the research group „Theoretical Fundamental Questions of Normative Justification in Medical Ethics and Biopolitics“. In the 2015/16 academic year, together with legal scholar Thomas Dreier and Czech media scholar Pavel Zahrádka, he led an international research group on the ethics of copying at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld University, which he had initiated. Since 2023, he has been spokesperson for the research group „Access to Cultural Goods in the Digital Transformation at the University of Münster“, which he heads together with art historian Ursula Frohne, and co-editor of the Journal of Aesthetics and General Art Studies. In 2024, he organized the XXVI German Congress for Philosophy at the University of Münster under the theme #digital|denken.

In 2025, Reinold Schmücker's Reclam volume „Gibt es einen gerechten Krieg?“ (Is There Such a Thing as a Just War?) (1st edition 2021) was published in a new edition expanded to include a chapter on the war against Ukraine. His most important book publications also include his book “Was ist Kunst? Eine Grundlegung” (What is Art? A Groundwork) (1998, 2nd edition 2014) as well as several anthologies he co-edited on fundamental questions of ethics and applied ethics: “The Aesthetics and Ethics of Copying” (2016), “Priority of Morality? A Metaethical Controversy” (2017), “Time – A Normative Resource?” (2018), “The Temporal Dimension of Justice” (2020).

Anna Sokolova (Artist)
KINBURN: Insight-Specific Game

CV

Anna Sokolova (1975, Minsk, Belarus) explores the interaction between architectural space and moving images. Working primarily with video, she creates site-specific installations that merge with their architectural context, transforming it into a living, pulsating organism and redefining our perception of space. Her artistic language is marked by a consistent reduction of pictorial elements, the rejection of narrative, an analytical approach to the media employed, and the active inclusion of the exhibition space as an equal component of her multimedia works.

She studied monumental painting at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, continued at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains in France and the Düsseldorf Art Academy, and completed postgraduate studies at the Academy of Media Arts (KHM) in Cologne. In 2013 she received the Fine Arts Prize of the state capital Düsseldorf. Her works are included in the collections of the imai Foundation – Inter Media Art Institute and the Benrath Palace and Park Foundation. A permanent public installation, created in collaboration with Oleg Yushko, is on display in Mechelen, Belgium. Since 2005 she has lived and worked in Düsseldorf.

Abstract

KINBURN is my personal art museum conceived as a computer game. It is designed to preserve and reimagine my own site-specific video installations outside of their temporary existence. My artistic practice centers on exploring architectural spaces and transforming them into dynamic environments by using video as a medium of light. While site-specific installations are inherently temporary and are dismantled after each exhibition, KINBURN gives my works a digital re-existence by embedding them into a virtual landscape modelled after the Kinburn Spit, a secluded nature reserve between the Dnieper-Bug-Liman and the Black Sea. This location, with its vast horizons and interplay of sun and moon, serves as both inspiration and conceptual framework. The video installations are recreated there alongside their former architectural settings and placed on individual islands, which form an archipelago. Gamers (digital museum visitors) explore these islands and experience the works from multiple perspectives, while newly programmed cycles of day and night continuously alter how the in-game structures are perceived.

KINBURN thus extends site-specificity into what I want to term 'insight-specificity', creating new digital representations of my works by altering the interplay of architecture, light, and time beyond their original, physical limits. In doing so, KINBURN also expands artistic interventions into curatorial practice and constructs interactive game-like environments that serve as sustainable models of preservation.

Magdalena Tyżlik-Carver (Aarhus University)

Fermenting Data and Curating Superintelligences: Sustainability and Access in the Posthuman World

CV

Magdalena Tyżlik-Carver engages the concept of posthuman curating to inquire into computational and data cultures. Currently her focus is on the digital transformation in knowledge making practices driven by AI technologies, semantic web, and data infrastructures. As a curator and researcher she develops participatory methods for data practices beyond big-tech extractivism and expansive infrastructural politics by working with speculative methods, curatorial formats, and open data principles.

At Aarhus University, she is Associate Professor in the Dept. of Digital Design and Information Studies, and co-director of the Centre for Critical Data Practices. She is also an associate researcher in the Centre for the Study of the Network Image at the London South Bank University.

As an independent curator she curated exhibitions and events including: Fermenting Data: Aarhus 8000-8220 (2021), ScreenShots: Desire and Automated Image (2019), Movement Code Notation (2018), Corrupting Data (2017), Ghost Factory: performative exhibition with humans and machines (2015), Common Practice (2009, 2010), (IN)visible networks (2008), Participation (2007).

She is co-editor of Curating Superintelligences. A Reader on AI and Future Curating (2025) and Executing Practices (2018), both published by Open Humanities Press in the Data Browser series. She is also co-author of Boundary Images (2023) published by Minnesota University Press. She regularly writes about digital and visual cultures with focus on digital images, and curating.

Abstract

As digital infrastructures and AI systems increasingly mediate how knowledge is produced, circulated, and governed, curating has gradually shifted from a primarily cultural practice toward an infrastructural and epistemic one. This keynote builds on the notion of posthuman curating to consider how curatorial agency now unfolds through entanglements of human and non-human actors—algorithms, platforms, datasets, and institutions.

Within this expanded field, curating emerges both as a site of intervention and as a critical methodology. It is no longer simply about selecting and organising objects, data, information, and knowledge; it also materialises power relations and shapes the conditions of access. Addressing these dynamics calls for rethinking curatorial responsibility beyond the stewardship of content and toward accountability for the infrastructures that govern visibility and participation.

The keynote draws on my recent projects, particularly *Fermenting Data* and the co-edited collection *Curating Superintelligences*, to explore speculative curatorial methods and material forms of engagement across digital and IRL cultures and contexts. The question “what if data could be fermented?” opens a way to move beyond viewing data as inert or extractable, and instead invites us to work with transformation, symbiosis, and collective care within computational environments. Engaging the concept of curating superintelligences foregrounds how machine learning and automated image cultures redistribute and appropriate curatorial functions and with it challenge forms of authorship, methods of selection, and expertise.

In dialogue with feminist, transfeminist, and Black feminist approaches to situated knowledge and labour, this talk will address curating as an ongoing practice of infrastructural care suggesting that attending to these relational and processual dimensions is essential for developing more sustainable, commons-oriented approaches to knowledge production and curation in posthuman networks.

Annette Urban (Ruhr University Bochum)
Artistic-Curatorial Practices of Virtual (Re)Construction

CV

Annette Urban (Dr.) is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History with a focus on New Media at the Institute of Art History at Ruhr-University Bochum. Since 2022, she is principal investigator of the sub-project "Virtual Art" within the Collaborative Research Center SFB 1567 "Virtual Life Worlds" (RUB). Her research also focuses on site relatedness in media art and digital im|material labour in contemporary art.

Abstract

When dealing with (in)tangible cultural heritage, a wide range of digitally supported approaches are currently being tested out. Some of these approaches favor speculative methods instead of exact reconstruction and extend design strategies into the past. In this way, retrospective preservation and prognostic, future-oriented practices are intertwined. Artists, with their specific abilities in imagination, transmedia storytelling, but also in sculptural molding, installation arrangement, or architecturally trained design, play a major role in the development of such methods. Thus, curatorial and artistic practices are closely linked in this field.

This contribution to the conference therefore focuses on selected artistic projects that deal with controversial heritage and use virtualizing technologies such as 3D replicas and non-human agents. Such projects oscillate between artwork and exhibition because they arrange the secured objects of their research in typical displays of collecting/exhibiting, as curators usually do. And they offer virtual environments as places of alternative accessibility to the selected artifacts. Looking at practices of dealing with culturally marginalized and post-industrial heritage seems particularly illuminating for the question of what modes of non-physical participation are possible in the course of techno-social memory as a projection of the future, and what benefits they bring.

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