VALIE EXPORT.
Research – Archive – Œuvre

Curator: Sabine Folie
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EXHIBITING AN ARCHIVE

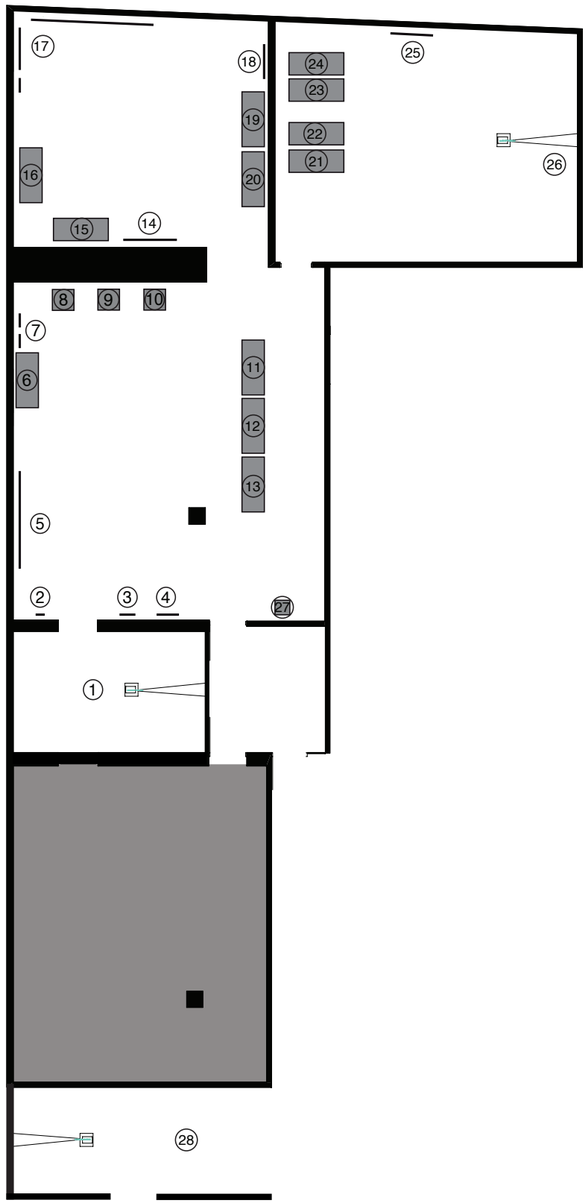
Exhibiting an archive initially seems like a contradiction. An archive is a hidden place, a vast place, not something that can be fully shown in an exhibition. An exhibition design that presents the archive in an experimental display creates an overview and helps to manage the proliferating system of the “wild” order of an artist’s archive.

Display Cases

The display cases are part of a horizontal axis in the exhibition space and represent the level of a deepening of thought processes, of research and communication/correspondence. They contain a selection of documents such as autographs (handwritten documents), sketches of ideas, notes, drafts, critiques, scripts, letters, contact prints, and more. They represent a cognitive, analytical “territory” of thought that is revealed in reading, writing and creating concepts. They offer insight into the artist’s thought and working process, as well as into the network that the artist was and is part of. They show her in her manifold roles as an artist, filmmaker, performer, theoretician, teacher, curator, or simply as a political subject. In contrast, the vertical order of the works in space demarcates the artistic practice in the form of a concrete production of works.

Archive Diagram

The diagram in the exhibition provides information about aspects of artists’ archives in general as well as of VALIE EXPORT’s archive in particular. It is intended to show the abstract, hidden, and multilayered dimensions of the contents of the archive, and to illustrate the artist’s personal thoughts on the archive as part of an art practice. The diagram as a scientific-artistic form, a popular technique in the Conceptual Art of the 1960s, is used to create an atmosphere of “science,” which playfully permeates many of the works. It also serves to make what is abstract more concrete.



An exhibition of the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz. Research Center for Media and Performance Art and the LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz (Austria), in cooperation with the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k., Germany) and with the kind collaboration of the Atelier VALIE EXPORT. All archival material presented belongs to the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz, inaugurated in November 2017, on which occasion this project was conceived. This exhibition is made possible in part by the financial support of the Federal Chancellery of Austria and the Cultural Forum of the Embassy of Austria.

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VOX
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ON THE WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

EN

Writing Attempts and Poems

1. ***Raumsehen und Raumhören***, video, 1973/1974
2. Concept ***Raumsehen und Raumhören***, work on paper, 1974
3. ***Flughände***, drawing, 1974/1975
4. ***SCHMERZ***, drawing, 1973
5. ***SCHRIFTZEICHEN/SCHREIBVERSUCHE***, 5 works on paper, 1973
6. **Vitrine: Poems**, 1956-1973
7. ***Metallene Gesten***, 4 photographs, 1973
8. ***Sehtext: Fingergedicht***, video, 1973
9. ***Hauchtext: Liebesgedicht***, video, 1970/1973
10. ***BODY TAPE***, video, 1970

The impression and the spirit of VALIE EXPORT’s art tend to be characterized as analytical and scientific. Yet there is also a strong focus on the aspect of *emotion* and feeling. This can be seen most clearly in a self-exploratory treatment of the past, and in societal diagnoses that are often manifested on the artist’s body. This reflects the experience of a divided self that sees itself as alienated in society and in the relationship between the sexes. Early prose-poems by VALIE EXPORT are shown in this “mental space.”

Projects and Exhibitions Curated by VALIE EXPORT

11. **Vitrine: Acta Occidentia Scientia**, 1971
12. **Vitrine: MAGNA**, 1975
13. **Vitrine: Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn**, 1985

Body Configurations

14. **Vitrine: Body Configurations**, 1972/**Blutwärme**, 1973
15. **Vitrine: Body Configurations**, 1972-1982

In the years 1972–1982, VALIE EXPORT created a series of conceptual photographs known as the *Körperkonfigurationen* [Body Configurations]. The archive includes the entirety of the studies, contact prints, negatives and, in some cases, final prints relating to this thematic complex. Some of the *Body Configurations*, which VALIE EXPORT also refers to as “visible externalizations of interior states through the orientation of the body in its surroundings,” became part of her 1983 film *Syntagma*. The *Body Configurations* are the result of VALIE EXPORT’s studies on the relationship of human beings in general and women in particular to their surroundings / the urban environment / architecture. Figuratively, she poses questions about how human beings are disciplined and put in their place within society. The *Body Configurations* of the 1970s are strongly influenced by the way a subject is made to adapt to the societal body (metaphorically this can be seen through the relationship of the body and architecture), something articulated in titles such as *Einfügung* [Insertion], *Einpassung* [Adaptation], *Ich/Selbst* [I/Myself], and *Zuhockung* [Crouching]. In contrast to this, the second cycle of the *Body Configurations* from 1982 deals with public institutions of representation and knowledge culture, such as the courthouse or the public library, and their specific disciplinary effects on people.

On the Mythology of Processes of Civilization

16. **Vitrine: Zyklus zur Zivilisation**, 1958-1981
17. ***zyklus zur zivilisation, zur mythologie der zivilisatorischen prozesse***, 8 photographs and 1 drawing, 1972

“The human body as a medium of interpersonal perception and communication, with its concrete individual needs, is the natural enemy of an abstracting social system that seeks—via the body—to fit human beings into a social mythology and structure by equipping it with signs of affiliation to genders, classes, territories and clans.”
VALIE EXPORT, exhibition catalogue VALIE EXPORT. Austria: Biennale di Venezia 1980

In the 1970s VALIE EXPORT focused intensely on how western thought is divided into categories such as mind/body and culture/nature. This was expressed in numerous actions that deal with how the human body is disciplined by social regulations as well as “processes of civilization” in which human beings appropriate nature and culturalize it. Here, EXPORT examines the transfer of substances, materialities and signs along with their ontological status. She becomes an anthropologist who explores the spectrum from pre-modern societies (Bateson/Lévi-Strauss) to the “socialized body” of modernity. In the process, she demonstrates that the logical result is a “deformation” of consciousness.

Ontologies of the Digital Age

18. ***Transparente Figurationen***, collage, 1990
19. **Vitrine: Digital Photography**, 1990/1991
20. **Vitrine: Digital Photography**, 1989/1990
21. **Vitrine: Syntagma**, 1983
22. **Vitrine: Ars Voices, Gläserne Papiere**, 1988-1991
25. ***ONTOLOGISCHER SPRUNG/ARM***, photograph, 1974
26. ***Syntagma***, 16 mm film transferred to video, 1983

In the late 1980s, VALIE EXPORT was one of the first artists to explore the possibilities and effects of new technologies, the computer, and the consequences of digitalization for society. The potentials available in film through montage, which EXPORT had already been using in her videos, feature films and other cinematic work since the 1970s, could now be used in a new and experimental way.

In terms of content, the digitally processed photographs can be traced back to the analog *Body Configurations* from the 1970s and early 1980s. However, digital manipulation offered a new way to address the topic of how living conditions change for humans in the post-industrial age: a fragmented individual, more and more veritably assembled from different parts of identity, whose body evinces the effects and the conflicts of the modern, urban, and technological “achievements” of civilization. Expressive titles like *Frau mit Hochhausarm* [Woman with High-rise Arm, 1989], *Selbstporträt mit Stiege und Hochhaus* [Self-portrait with Stairs and High-rise, 1989], or *Duale Duelle* [Dual Duels, 1989/1990], provide information about this.

The Virtual Body

23. **Vitrine: Virtual Body**, 1987-1999
24. **Vitrine: Digital Photography, Unica Zürn**, 1987-1989

“Human beings can transcend the natural limits defined by the body with the help of tools. The triumph of these tools over bodily organs belongs to the logic of cultural development in the battle against nature to protect humanity. After all, culture is nothing other than ‘the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations’ [Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Chapter 3]. Technology as the sum of all tools not only serves the cultural transformation of nature, but also has the tendency to transform and dissolve the body itself—particularly because technology is a cultural activity. The culturation of the body is simultaneously also a substitution and absence—the same way that all technology, civilization and culture is a ‘language of the absent’. As a language of presence, the body belongs to the rhetoric of the real. The body is the medium of the real and social, of control. To define the body as an exclusive site of nature is an extremely naïve idea. The culture that we assert also always means the culturation of the body as well as its technical extension and transformation. And in the ego’s process of becoming, the body itself develops into a part of the exterior world.”
VALIE EXPORT, excerpt from the script *Der virtuelle Körper. Vom Prothesen- zum postbiologischen Körper* [The Virtual Body. From the Prosthetic to the Postbiological Body, 1999].

27. ***Metanoia***, DVD box set, 2011
28. Presentation of the integral 29 films and videos from *Metanoia* collection (1968–2010) on Saturdays, starting March 9, 2019.

Artists' Archives

The naïve archive
(Yerushalmi/Derrida/Thaler):
state archives

Naïve archives (Yerushalmi) are useful not for research, but for maintaining legal certainty.

The sentimental archive
(Schiller/Thaler):
individual archives, artists' archives

"The sentimental archive is at variance with itself and with the world around it." (Thaler)

Artist's archives

A

Marks the "desire to transmit": conservation, documentation, protection against unauthorized access, the evidential value of a genealogy, the genesis of a work. In principle, the archive is not displayed (necessarily, as a fragment of art practice).

B

Document functioning simultaneously as a trace of the work and of its genesis: hermeneutical, the archive serves to control its interpretation (Thaler).

Exception

C

Archive = work that is justified by the "archival impulse" (Foster): "[A]n archival impulse with a distinct character of its own is again pervasive—enough so to be considered a tendency in its own right […]. In the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present."

"Sentimental" archive:
personal, anarchical, idiosyncratic ordering, not subject to any ordering of a constitutional nature.

Collecting artists = being a "ragpicker" (Benjamin): collecting based on the conception of dominant discourse, following a singular order = unintentional/intentional/intuitive/subjective/selective = a collection based on similarities, analogies, sympathies.

Comparison with the indifference that children show toward the common sense (Benjamin/Finkelde) of canon, toward the nomenclature of collection = creation of an order beyond symbolic order.

Art of the 1960s, Conceptual Art: dissolution of the boundaries between genres, blurring of the notion of the work in the "post-media era" (R. Krauss), conventions are redefined (Thaler).

Process = Path = Artwork

"All intervening steps—scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations—are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product." (Sol LeWitt)

"The discovery of the diagram as a tool for the interdisciplinary reorganization of art works goes hand in hand with interest in the technoscientific atmosphere of diagrammatic image forms." (Holert)

The status of the artwork is put on the test bed when the archival document (e.g., idea, concept) assumes the status of a artwork or forms an integral part thereof.

The archive as conceptual art strategy:

Archive = Work materials = Artwork

Aesthetic practice of archiving:

Archivistic approach, principles, procedures, categorizations, arrangements, pseudo-arrangements:

The archive is displayed.

The VALIE EXPORT Archive

VALIE EXPORT

PERSONAE
Artist
Filmmaker
Political person
Teacher
Sketches of ideas
Theoretician
Curator
Feminist
Writer
Concepts
Drafts
Drawings
Notes/ Notations
Models
Plans
Videos
Diagrams
Negatives
Work prints
Contact sheets
Screenplays
Films
Manifestoes
Poems
Letters
Professional correspondence
Tracts
Invitation cards
Newspaper clippings
Posters
Reviews
Statements
Slides

Archive, language, also linguistic structure, vocabulary, multiplied in different contexts

Allowing things from the past to become the present

The archive is a continuum

There have always been archives

Recursion, recursiveness of the nesting of sentences. Overlap, complex multitiered interweavings, crossfades, superimpositions, cinematic term transferred to a media concept ???

Archive = artwork

The archive is an organism

Things in the past, but that have something of the present

That which is between the individual "things" is noise, a TV effect, information in a non-specific frequency spectrum as expressed in physics

Parts are merged into a "skeleton" of an archive

It would also be interesting to "investigate" the themes, ideas, concepts, etc., to yield approaches to grasping how they are used.

In a way I am trying, dare I say, to introduce and also to map out other conceptual structures, conceptual systems, perhaps biological structures

The archive as residue of artistic biography and art practice (Thaler)

"Apparently ordered conditions" (Dziewior)

"Unruly archives" (Filser)

"Art practice having affinities with archiving" (Thaler)

"Archival constellations" (Thaler)

The nature of archives for VALIE EXPORT (Thaler)

A
Desire to transmit: critique of power, feminism, transgressing borders, anticonformism generates hostility, exclusion

Desire to transmit the artwork via meticulous documentation.

"The more times are uncertain, the greater the need for totally secure documents." (Thaler)

B
Aesthetics of archives: relationship between "archived item" (document) and "item of work" (exhibit)

"Archival constellations"

Dissertations
Lectures
Curatorial concepts
Concepts for publication
Library

C
The VALIE EXPORT certified stamp. Delivery of the certificate of authenticity. An administrative "signature". "Pseudo-administration".

The distinction between sketch/draft/archived record and artwork is not always clear-cut. Documents/sketches/outlines/sources of inspiration surrounding creation are increasingly "bound together" in the artwork, as components thereof, presented as a single entity and extracted from the archival context.

The most difficult thing about archiving my thinking is classification. I order things, but I notice that many other classifications would be possible, and that I should assign other entries to the documents. I haven't conceived of archival structure as a structure of archives.

The advantage I have over the museum or this type of collection is that I am always ME. In the museum, multiple entities are engaged in collecting—directors, selection committees, advisory boards—and thus represent their own interests, and perhaps don't really carry in themselves the notion of archives. That can't happen with my archives, because I am always the one who chooses, who establishes the connections or represents them, and who creates "visual structures."

An archive is always "nested" in itself as a composition, continually taking up certain of its parts, "altering" and reassembling them in different ways. It could also be described in film or media terms as a "super crossfade." That's how I've always looked at my archives. I have not archived because I believed I would preserve the NOW, for a time to come, but because it WAS of that time and that I thought could transfer THAT time into the future via a memory structure and a material memory—that is, the parts of the archive.

A collection in a museum constitutes a public good, a public memory, a museum-memory; accessibility is created artificially. The collection could also be open. An archive and a collection also have contrary structures when they are dealing with memory. In an archive, there are many more connections and paths than in a collection, which has the effect of bringing elements together or maintaining their cohesion. A collection may also be quite uniform, naturally interlaced, while comprising pieces of diverse origins, from varied contexts. One might also say that an archive has something—to borrow a term no longer used these days—anarchistic about it, because it takes up different things, assembles them, and is not governed by any strong rule. The rules are broken, or else they ramify, like a rhizome. The structures are more anarchistic, for they gather up differing structures or materialities in the form of statements, which a collection cannot do.

There is surely a connection to artistic activity, primarily, but, for a far back as I can recall, as a child, I already liked collecting very much, that's for sure—I would accumulate things that, on the one hand, made up my past and the present, but which I knew, on the other hand, would also have a future. As a child, you never know as clearly, and perhaps you cannot determine precisely why you collect things. For example, using photos of my father—who died during the war and of whom I had no memories—and other photos, I built altars. The photos of my father were his lifelines, which at the time I thought perfectly normal to associate with NOW. Obviously, it was not the NOW; it was my fantasy. It was a game, to learn to know him better. Ultimately, an archive also works in this way: you access the archive to extract something from it; you want to go find something unknown or find a connection between certain things, but you again find something else.

This diagram is extracted from larger one that was displayed during the exhibition *VALIE EXPORT Das Archiv als Ort künstlerischer Forschung* at LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz. Diagram: Sabine Folie. Graphic design: Salome Schmuki. Sources: Walter Benjamin, "Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus. Eine Rede über das Sammeln," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, Vol. 5, 1980 (Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969). Jacques Derrida, *Dem Archiv verschrieben*, Berlin: Brinkmann + Bose, 1997 (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Joachim Finkelde, "Vergebliches Sammeln. Walter Benjamins Analyse eines Unbehagens im Fin de Siècle und der europäischen Moderne," https://www.leuphana.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PERSONALPAGES/Fakultaet_1/Behnke_Christoph/files/literaturarchiv/Finkelde_Benjamin-Vergebliches-Sammeln.pdf. Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October*, No. 110, Fall 2004. Tom Holert, "'A Fine Flair for the Diagram.' Wissensorganisation und Diagramm-Form in der Kunst der 1960er Jahre: Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Arakawa," in *Materialität der Diagramme. Kunst und Theorie*, ed. Susanne Leeb, Berlin: b-books, 2012. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Artforum*, Vol. 5, No. 10, Summer 1967. Jürgen Thaler, "Archivalische Konstellationen: VALIE EXPORT," in *VALIE EXPORT. Archiv*, Yilmaz Dziewior, ed., Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012. Sylvia Winkelmayer, *Different und Synonym. Bemerkungen zum Archiv VALIE EXPORT*, Phil. Diss.,