

**CFP:** Conference: The Art Museum in the Digital Age

**Location:** Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere

**Date:** January 9-10, 2020

**Deadline:** 12 August 2019

## **The Art Museum in the Digital Age – 2020**

Following on the success of the 2019 conference, “The Art Museum in the Digital Age,” the Belvedere Research Center will again organize an international conference focusing on the digital transformations effecting art museums. While the 2019 conference was devoted to the *actuality of the digital* and the *questioning of the role of museums in the 21st century*, the January 2020 conference will highlight the *historical genesis of the digital in museums*, from its analog predecessors to the post-digital era.

The digital will be observable “only by its absence and not by its presence,” wrote Nicholas Negroponte in 1998 in *Beyond Digital*, in which he announced the end of the digital revolution. Two years later, the composer Kim Cascone introduced the term “*postdigital*” as a genre designation for electronic music generated from digital interference signals. The established, yet controversial, concept of the *postdigital (age)*, today designates a condition decisively characterized by the invisible omnipresence of the digital, among other things. Thus the digital functions “as a constitutive actor and integral component of our everyday life,” as Katja Kwastek argued in 2016. In this context, the re-evaluation of the digital becomes a pressing concern, given that the boundaries of the previously strictly dichotomous distinction between *analog* and *digital* are becoming increasingly blurred, and we are witnessing growing demands for hybrid forms (analog-digital combinations).

The two-day event will bring together interdisciplinary contributions from this point of view, which above all – but not exclusively – reflect on the following subject areas:

### **Museum digital – in retrospect**

The *postdigital* described above presupposes an earlier state. The entry of the digital into the (art) museum can only be understood within a larger historical context: for example, in debates on science and media theory, the introduction of zero in the Arab region around the year 1000, the dual system developed by Leibniz around 1700, and material innovations (e.g. *tabulating*

*machine*) are seen as of decisive importance for the emergence of digital technology. But what conditions were necessary for the development of a digital culture in art museums? What precursors existed with regard to media, content, but also cataloguing and categorization as well as systems development and systematization? Furthermore, the question arises as to whether the methodological changes in art history and in museums triggered by the digital can be best described as continuous lines of development, as isolated phenomena, or as a radical paradigm shift?

### **The participatory museum**

Originally debated in the United States, the call to allow visitors to participate actively in museum practice and, as a consequence, to free them from “isolation” as mere “passive” recipients, has become increasingly louder in Europe. The concept of participation, however, not only encompasses the idea of visitor engagement within the exhibition space, but also aims at a constantly changing interaction between institution and audience, whereby participation is understood, intentionally or inevitably, as an intervention in existing structures and work processes. Practical guidelines for museums, such as Nina Simon’s publication “*Principles of Participation*“ from 2010 and theoretical treatises on the subject, such as Anja Piontek’s “*Museum and Participation*” from 2017, are booming. In some museums, the participatory now appears to belong to everyday practice, especially where the focus is more on the audience. Yet to what extent is this a new phenomenon? The connection to social media seems evident. But could not the efforts of reform pedagogy to open museums to a broad public at the beginning of the 20th century cited by Piontek as well as the 2019 keynote speaker Hubertus Kohle also be mentioned here? Could the increased social orientation of museums around 1968, which was accompanied by institutional critique, be highlighted anew from this point of view? Submissions on this topic could both look back at earlier participatory processes in museums and describe current trends: What historical lines of development can be identified for the concept of the participatory, especially in the field of the digital? Are concepts of participation linked to technical/digital progress, and to what extent does one condition the other? In which contexts were and are aspects of the museum public’s participation to be determined?

And to what extent does participation, both today and in earlier times, mean the dissolution of a distance between the points of the constellation institution, audience and object?

### **The digital image – what about the future?**

In an age of networked technical intelligence, the question of possible instantiations of the digital image once again arises. By being based on a binary sequence of numbers, the digital

image eludes both a physically real reference and an unambiguously given dimension, while presenting itself as a flexibly changeable state. One of the potentials of the digital image lies hidden in this processual quality. The manifold possibilities of reproduction, structuring, categorization, contextualization, annotation and archiving of the rapidly expanding flood of images, now increasingly available on the Web, form the starting point for possible questions on this topic. To what extent do digital images elude principles of order (*digital disorder & new messiness*)? How are they made searchable (in an automated way) today and in the future? What role does the use of artificial intelligence (*machine learning*) play? And does our perception of the medium “image” change as a result of these new technical possibilities, from the two-dimensional digital surrogate of the analog (virtual semiosis) to virtual & augmented reality environments?

We look forward to your paper proposals in the fields of museum practice / museology, art and cultural history, media studies, and digital humanities. Please submit your abstracts for a 20-25 minutes presentation in German or English (max. 250 words), including a short biography and complete contact information as one PDF document by August 12, 2019 to: [j.aufreiter@belvedere.at](mailto:j.aufreiter@belvedere.at)

Prof. Dr. Holger Simon (Pausanio Academy, Cologne) has accepted our invitation as keynote speaker.

**Conference Committee:** Johanna Aufreiter, Miroslav Haľák, Christian Huemer (Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna), Holger Simon (Pausanio Academy, Cologne), Anne Helmreich (Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles)

**Conference Partner:**



Travel and accommodation costs can be reimbursed to a limited extent for speakers. Conference participation is free of charge.