

Discussion – Tuesday, 19 September 2017, 19:30, in English

Between order and disorder, finite and infinite, dispersal and arrangement, accumulation and categorization, memory and oblivion, useful and useless, a tension pulses in recent mutations of collecting and archiving. Should this 'archive fever' be seen as an archive inflation expanding the reign of commodification? Is a new form of archival time emerging? What do the nonconformist collecting and archiving practices adopted by contemporary artists say about the possibility of a different relationship to history, memory, and cultural heritage, that is, to the present and the future?

An obsessive preoccupation with the archive pervades the arts, criticism, and curatorial practice. In everyday life, digital data storage has turned the contemporary user into a potential archivist, taxonomist, and collector, relying on cloud services and social media networks as storage places for the safekeeping, sharing, and manipulation of even the most intimate facts and images of life. But the same technologies inspire a widespread archive dysphoria: an exhaustive melancholic state that fuels the current efforts for 'impossible archives', that is, counter-archives which question the idea of an all-encompassing repository of personal and collective information and knowledge.

The conversation will focus on archives and collections in contemporary art and take its cue from two recent publications: Cristina Baldacci's *Impossible Archives: An Obsession of Contemporary Art* (Italian edition, 2016) and Hilde van Gelder's *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* (2015).

Hilde Van Gelder is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the KU Leuven and co-director of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture. She is editor of the Lieven Gevaert Series and of the online journal *Image [&] Narrative*. Her research focuses on how photographic and moving images can function as a driving force for societal change as well as for both re-legitimizing and re-imagining fundamental rights. She has written numerous essays on a wide range of artists, and edited several books, including *Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools/The Dockers' Museum* (2015).

Stephen Ellcock is a London-based online collector and curator of images, writer, editor, former musician, and bookseller who nowadays spends most of his time creating an ever-expanding, virtual museum on Facebook and Instagram. So far, his ongoing attempt at creating the ultimate social media 'Cabinet of Curiosities' has attracted more than 180,000 Facebook followers and increasing media attention.

Impossible Archives, Infinite Collections

With **Hilde Van Gelder** and **Stephen Ellcock**

Organized by
Cristina Baldacci and **Clara Masnatta**



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