

ikono – a medial introduction into art

Elizabeth Markevitch
ikono
Greifswalder Straße 208, 10405 Berlin
Phone: + 49 (0)30 44 35 60 43
Fax: + 49 (0)30 201 632 869
Email: info@ikono.org

Until now, designated physical space and the printed catalogue have been the most common curated platforms for exhibiting art. But online museums, online galleries, and digital art projects are undeniably growing in recent times.¹ As with everything available on the World Wide Web, awareness of using virtual platforms for presenting art is rising. Many art institutions are maintaining their growing number of publicly available digital image archives, and the promotion of virtual accessibility to art offers undeniable benefits: the ability to reach an audience that otherwise would not have any possibility to participate, either in terms of mobility or due to social or political restrictions.

Interestingly, the discourse on linking art and digital media seems to disregard TV as a potential platform of representation. This should come as a surprise not only due to the fact that TV has been the most distributed and most employed technical-visual medium until today, but also because the music industry already discovered the medium's huge creative potential twenty-five years ago with the founding of MTV. Albeit all the critical discussions entwining around the channel: the union of music and film or video art did establish a new artistic category and was greatly influencing the surrounding genres.

ikono transfers this principle into art, providing thereby another way of presenting curated exhibitions: artists, curators and filmmakers are working together for establishing a new format of showcasing art. Film is used as a medium to detach the artwork from its hieratic modus of presentation, and to grant virtual access to international exhibitions, art collections and museums. By providing two 24 hours HDTV channels solely dedicated to the arts², ikono allows a broad international audience to discover the world's artistic and cultural heritage within a familiar surrounding by easily zapping into it. In so doing, the TV screen turns into an interactive frame and the living room into a gallery space, which every beholder is invited to pass through in her or his own way.

Creating and consolidating an unconventional and autarkic – virtual – exhibition space for all arts from antiquity through the renaissance and modernity to contemporary movements is one of ikono's main ambitions, pursued by the carefully curated filmic reproduction of art. The involved transformation of the respective artwork into a quasi altered aesthetic system has already been described by Walter Benjamin. In his often quoted thoughts on *The Work of Art*

¹ cf. Vip Art Fair (<https://www.vipart.com/>; last access: September 2012) or Google Art Project (<http://www.googleartproject.com/de/>; last access: September 2012) as surely one of the most prominent examples.

² ikonoMenasa in the Middle Eastern and Northern Africa region (amongst others broadcasted via ArabSat), ikonoTV in Germany (via Telekom Entertain). In 2013 ikono will also be on view in France, Turkey and China as well as worldwide via webstream; see www.ikono.org (last access: September 2012).

*in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*³, the philosopher not only connected the medial copy of a piece of art with the loss of its aura due to its detachment from its spatial, temporal as well as ritual context, but was also valuing this as great potential – and so is ikono. In gentle awareness of the film's medial scopes ikono is utilizing them not for replacing the original, but for decreasing institutional as well as individual barriers of enjoying it by affording all-embracing access without any epochal, medial or stylistic restrictions: Before sensing the artwork's aura while standing in front of, ikono is offering to seeing it.

Furthermore, ikono understands itself as the missing vital link to filling the gap between artwork and spectator: In 2011, a study by Martin Tröndle, visiting professor for cultural management at Zeppelin-Universität Friedrichshafen, revealed that the museum's average visitor does only spend eleven seconds respective three breathtakes in front of a single artwork⁴; definitely too less for catching its artistic, aesthetic and historic complexity. By using TV as main broadcasting platform, ikono is taking advantage of one of the most popular media closely linked to recreation and contemplation. Despite this the productions' underlying concept of filmic language is supporting the deceleration of beholding, too: the camera is tracing the artwork's single details in slow movements without adding any sound or comment. This is only possible by use of newest HD technologies, which enable to catch every single cell of the artistic surface, and which allow the viewer to dive into it in a qualitative intensity never experienced within art galleries and museums. During the films' average length of two to ten minutes each piece of art is getting medially dissolved, and the focus is laid on its single components; a process of alienation that actively involves the spectator.

Not running the risk of losing even the mostly skilled spectators within a monotonous and uniform world of images requires a conscious guidance through it, which ikono provides by the close collaboration of professional art historians and editors. While the latter are responsible for choosing the most suitable way of presenting the artworks within the film by arranging, animating or zooming into them, the curators are selecting themes, images and convincing details that will be serving as characteristic guidelines for developing the most appropriate journey of contemplating paintings, drawings, sculpture and video art, architecture or even design. Every piece of art is getting analyzed according to its own aesthetic demands, in order to subsume it within a larger artistic context. The moving image offers thereby the possibility to bridge a century-wide gap, medially unveiling that at some stage every art has been contemporary.

The cooperation of ikono's creative team is based on an artistic and curatorial concept that follows the aim to embrace every single artwork comprehensively. During the production process each piece of art is thoughtfully considered in all its unique characteristics as well as in its underlying artistic ideas. While focusing purely on the visual experience, the beholder will be offered a careful and extensive view on it, providing at the same time a closer understanding of the artistic position, of the presented exhibition, of the importance of a specific art collection or a digital archive. ikono guides the spectators to the artworks' relevant details, leading from one piece to another, and reveals their narrative structure by

³ Benjamin, Walter: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in: *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*, trans. H. Zohn, New York 1968 (Paris 1935), pp. 217-252.

⁴ cf. Rauterberg, Hanno: *Wirkung von Kunst: Und die Herzen schlagen höher*, in: *Zeit online*, 20.04.2012 (<http://www.zeit.de/2012/17/Museumbesuch-Studie>, last access: September 2012); see cf. initiatives like the international 'Slow Art Day' (<http://www.slowartday.com/>; last access: September 2012).

filmically tracing it; getting involved offers the opportunity to learn what to look for and how to look on it. Once prepared, everyone is enabled to browse and zoom in the preferred artistic detail on virtual platforms, as well as to rediscovering and truly experiencing them in real life.

By embedding all different kinds of artistic manifestations side by side within the curated program of its two HDTV art channels⁵, ikono is proving to offer the greatest possible historic and aesthetic access to art. With its presence both in the Middle East and in Europe ikono furthermore thinks of itself as a cultural bridge between different worlds, linked by the universal language of art; a bridge, which is not only sustained by TV: Common virtual platforms as vimeo, facebook or twitter, webpages of partner institutions like museums or galleries, screens within public foyers or lounges are presenting ikono's filmic productions. Newspapers, magazines or blogs are enriching their reviews by embedding ikono's exhibition trailers, sometimes even without adding any accompanying texts. The global transmission of ikono's moving postcards is built on the fundamental experience that watching art first and foremost is a pure visual enjoyment, and it strengthens the audience's awareness of the importance of art and contemplation in daily life.

⁵ ikono's daily broadcast is enriched by several special programs, which are explicitly focusing on selected themes or audiences, like for example on the world's most renowned museums (*Museums of the World*), on single artists (*Artist of the Month*), on kids (*Kids' Program*) or on hidden artistic treasures (*Rediscovered Heritage*); for further information see www.ikono.org (last access: September 2012).