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# **ON THE DISSEMINATION OF CULTURE DURING THE PANDEMIC. METHODS OF ACTION IN THE EXHIBITION SECTOR**

**Review paper**

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## Abstract

The transformations of our everyday lives resulting from the global pandemic caused by the CoViD-19 have greatly reorganized many of the areas of our lives to which we had become used. The issue of this problem is also clearly visible at the artistic level. Through the inability to organize events or join cultural meetings, the ways of popularizing culture have much changed, bringing out new methods of action often falling into a strong digression with the original goal of creativity, which is direct contact between the recipient and art. The article attempts to answer the question: “How have we dealt with this?”.

The study focuses on a retrospective and current analysis of selected activities involving the dissemination and promotion of art of various kinds, taking place in the face of remodeling of the reality caused by the government-enforced epidemiological restrictions. The analysis is supported by examples of activities of the sector of popularization of culture and art, resulting in reaction to the sudden lockdown, among others also activities taking place in the Fashion Start-up Gallery existing at the Department of Interior Architecture of the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, established thanks to the implementation of the project titled the “Design of the Future – the program for development of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow in the years 2018-2022”. The analysis has identified changes and tools that were used to remodel culture dissemination activities, consisting of multiple exposures of audiences to works of art.

## Keywords

exhibition, expositions, changes, CoViD-19, immersion, digitization, transmission, online, Web, dissemination, new media, new technology, needs, thoughts, transfer, new reality, networking, online viewing room, connection, cyberspace, interface, access, isolation, progress, space, fog, time, virtual

## Introduction

The pandemic has completely reorganized the way culture is used. At the time of writing this article, it was almost a year since we had been trying to face the new reality at almost every level of our lives. We have certainly become used to some aspects, we have assimilated them, but indirectly we are still building a number of responses to the situation. In the first reflex, uncertainty often arises in us, caused by a new, unknown, threat on this scale, often turned into a growing fear. As a result, uncertain what tomorrow will bring, we will obey new restrictions. We stay at home. Expecting, we still cannot be sure of anything that the future will bring in the near future. We should not assume any long-term stability. We mostly close our entire lives in four walls. We must learn to control emotions every day. This gives rise to a feeling of powerlessness, sometimes causing reflexes of panic or rebellion in the face of the new situation. Nothing is like before, we begin to take everyday life in a completely new form.

In response to the sudden lockdown, there was a drastically rapid exclusion from the functioning of institutions that promote culture and art. Artists have lost opportunities to present their works in stationary settings to wider audiences. We have moved away from the pre-pandemic notion of authenticity, which influences the way we react to art. By distinguishing reality from virtuality, authenticity and value as intangible parameters have become very important<sup>1</sup>.

## Cultural institutions during the pandemic

The closure of art galleries or museums has taken away the opportunity to experience culture on site, thus taking away from us the most important value of interacting with the work: the opportunity to experience it **here and now**, in contact with the original matter of the work in an authentic structure. However, it cannot be denied that the subject of the global pandemic is, on the other hand, at a later stage, also a wide area for exploration reflected in works of artists, thus summarizing the experience of seclusion, resulting also in an arousal of internally concealed fears or aspirations<sup>2</sup>. According to the "Culture Report", as many as 59.1% of institutions showed that they were affected by the pandemic as early as in the second quarter of 2020<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Michael Bird, *100 idei, które zmieniły sztukę*, TMC, Raszyn, 2012, p. 198.

2 Alain de Botton, *Architektura szczęścia*, Czuły Barbarzyńca, Warszawa, 2010, p. 103.

3 *Raport Kultura*, Fundacja Gospodarki i Administracji Publicznej, Kraków 2020, p. 11.

## **Closed galleries, open exhibitions – remodeling how to reach the recipient**

The entry of art into the digital sphere was inevitable in this case. It often became the only way to present creativity. It should be noted that galleries are no longer constrained to surfaces containing different types of display spaces. We often find in such facilities also rooms for theatrical or other performances, auditoria for meetings with artists, for film screenings or for concerts, and a number of other functions that make the commercial gallery a kind of conglomerate of creativity. Noticing and adequately identifying the emerging difficulties caused by the pandemic makes it possible to choose adequate methods of reaching audiences in new ways.

Despite the large exhibition space, the most important physically (and often the only available) media of content, Web sites or portals have turned into communication channels between the institution and the recipient during the pandemic. In the first actions, they were the main medium for transmitting content. Dependence on the characteristics of a given exhibition space ceased to be important, as it could not be physically used<sup>4</sup>.

However, the rapid diagnosing of certain strategies meant that, despite the closure of institutions, events stayed alive, rearranging themselves in new forms or new techniques in the new reality. During the pandemic, technology and how we use it have progressed much faster than it could have normally happened.

Perhaps, in some cases, the excessive desire to arouse interest by reaching the audience on many new levels gave an impression that art was becoming more commercial or more focused on marketing. However, this has undoubtedly maintained the effect of influence and reputation of institutions which had to remain closed for some time, achieved in a slightly different form. We realized the importance of **presence**.

## **Dissemination of culture – new methods of action**

Technology came to our aid. Thanks to progress we were able to continue our work, hobbies, passions to the extent that we could continue our basic activities.

In the last decade, as a result of the increase in the wealth of society, art gained a status of a luxury merchandise and the demand for art increased as a result of which all kinds of fairs or auctions significantly gained on popularity. Unfortunately, in the face of the restrictions, most auction houses, fairs or art festivals, which had become a popular medium for buyers of works of art, have gradually shut down. Already in the first quarter of 2020, global events such as the Tokyo Art Fair, the Art Dubai event and the world's largest contemporary art fair Art Basel were cancelled. As a result of

4 Maria Hussakowska-Szysko, Ewa Małgorzata Tatar, *Display. Strategie wystawiania*, Universitas, Kraków, 2012, p. 19.

the impossibility of holding a stationary event it was proposed to place works of art in a new digital platform, the so-called “online viewing room”<sup>5</sup>. It is a three-dimensional digitized version of the physical place where we would eventually see art in its original form. It gives the buyer a substitute for the real event. The online viewing room is an apparently programmed room, virtually housing one or more works, so that their exposition also becomes more individual and attractive than in the standard settings where there is usually a large exhibition space bringing together all the works<sup>6</sup>.

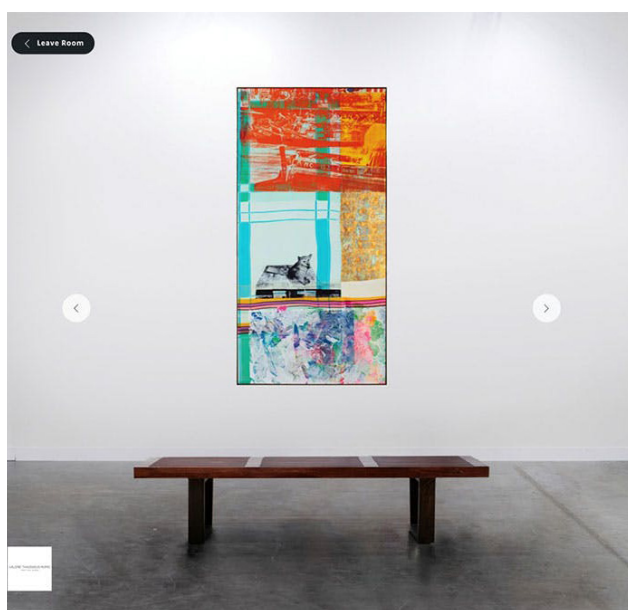


Figure 1. Screenshot of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac's online viewing room, Art Basel Hong, March 2020, courtesy Art Basel Hong Kong, <https://apollo.imgix.net> [accessed on: 21.05.2021].

To date, the technique of presenting art in line with the idea of the online viewing room online viewing room has developed to the level of online designing of entire virtual exhibitions. In some auctions, such as the Asia Week held in March, traditional and online forms of sales were combined. The auction of South Asian contemporary art organized in this way was a success: the value of works sold exceeded the original estimate by 100 thousand dollars, achieving 4.8 million dollars. 33% of the works in this auction were sold online<sup>7</sup>. It turned out that this kind of diversification, hybridity of activities, allowing us to combine traditional methods with those allowed by the technology, is becoming increasingly common and will certainly remain accepted as a standard. This is also evidenced by the fact that, as the research carried out in 2020 showed, the sales of art works in Poland were 30% larger than in 2019<sup>8</sup>.

5 <https://rynekisztuka.pl>.

6 <https://www.quora.com>.

7 <https://rynekisztuka.pl>.

8 <https://artinfo.pl>.

(...) the market achieved a record result of PLN 380 million. 467 auctions were held, many online, during which almost 22 thousand properties were auctioned. In December, the sales record in the modern art segment was broken: Wojciech Fangor's painting was auctioned for the highest ever price of PLN 7.3 million<sup>9</sup>.

Not only the time of the pandemic but years before its onset show that an increasing number of prospective buyers of art are choosing to buy online. Although many auctions have taken place outside the event also in the case of conventional auctions, the dissemination of such online activities will certainly become the norm in the future. Improving the possibility of acquiring various works online is becoming an additional alternative for the buyer who often could not have participated personally in such events, if only because of the need to move. It is also a benefit for galleries, auction houses and artists themselves who can promote and sell their works.

In order to meet the sudden constraints, art galleries, museums, cinemas, theatres, operas and philharmonics have started a series of experiments using new technologies, allowing the audience to virtually explore exhibitions and participate in events, shows or lectures. Because of the decline of the hitherto ways of acting many disciplines have been reclassified as a new way of accessibility for the recipient, deprived of the possibility of physical presence.

The lockdown of institutions is no longer an obstacle to visiting exhibitions, despite the total or partial limitation of visits, it is not a time of stagnation. Today we often have an opportunity to see an exposition on many levels. The arrangement of the event on the Web can be carried out in many ways and include not only Web sites, but also social media or instant messaging. The event can take place without the participation of the public but with full access to it for all who want to see it online.

Photorealistic mapping in the form of virtual walks has been known for years, if only thanks to the Google platform, but their specificity has recently begun to deepen. Thanks to the opportunities they bring, we already visit not only exhibitions but also other places bringing a certain value to the recipient. The virtual tour designed in this way creates a predetermined structure of information and ensures preservation of a specific chronology and proportions of the explored space. Control over the viewer's navigation is very precise. A similar principle of operation is adopted by the idea of scanning exhibitions, consisting in the embedding of panoramic photos in a specific location of the virtually scanned space. Both the online walking and the 3D scanning tour allows you to get acquainted with the presented object very carefully. Being able to expand pieces of information at any time we get an opportunity to get acquainted with everything that concerns the object in different digital formats. This is an unconstrained way to provide information about an object or place. One of the richer presentations in Poland made available online in this way is the collection of the National Museum in Krakow that offers access to more than 130,000 works<sup>10</sup>.

9 <https://biznes.newseria.pl>.

10 [www.zbiory.mnk.pl](http://www.zbiory.mnk.pl).

Some spaces can also be viewed using the virtual reality (VR). For example, after putting on the Google VR glasses we can digitally move to a different environment. This is another very extensive way to learn what we cannot actually come into contact with. The VR technology gives you an opportunity to manipulate space, change it according to our needs, recognize it.

The time of the pandemic is the time of acting through screens, that is, pictorially. A progressive form has also taken up by various types of events: private viewings, lectures and conferences. The live streaming technique allowed the conduct of an almost intact form for speakers, without the participation of observers who had only virtual access to the content.

New forms of private viewings, sightseeing through virtual walks or the scanning of space are only some measures aimed at improving availability of expositions to the recipient. All these are accompanied by associated events, usually equally easily accessible online: interviews with authors, arrangement of entire events online, access to various types of lectures, workshops or conferences. We can analyze and measure, among other things, viewings and their area.

As the way we communicate have changed, emotions that accompany us in the perception of art have also changed. Art has come closer to us, becoming more accessible. The sense of the sublime caused by a series of stimuli aroused in response to the designed exposition spaces was sometimes reduced to the availability on the screen.

It is only in its approach to real human life outside of studios, art galleries and auction houses that art can become something alive, alluring and fascinating<sup>11</sup>.

More and more diverse ideas about presenting life during the pandemic are coming into effect. In October 2020, the National Museum in Krakow took the initiative to collect pandemic-related artifacts for a planned exhibition on this difficult time in the history of the city and its inhabitants. The Victoria and Albert Museum came out with a similar initiative and established its virtual exhibitions, “Now Accepting Contactless” and the “Pandemic Objects”, illustrating how the value, purpose and importance of the objects around us have changed, elements of everyday life in the face of the urgent need to respond to the new threat<sup>12</sup>.

The way art was popularized during the pandemic has become almost a trend, a program or a medium presenting the then, how specific, course of reality<sup>13</sup>.

The following are two examples of exhibition activities directly affected by the CoViD-19 pandemic. The events took place in the Fashion Start-up Gallery, which operates at the Faculty of Interior

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11 Alicja Rybkowska, *Humor a współczesna kondycja sztuki*, Universitas, Kraków, 2016, p. 33.

12 <https://www.vam.ac.uk>.

13 Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel, Iwona Kurz, Paweł Rodak, *Ekspozycje nowoczesności*, Neriton, Warszawa, 2017, pp. 167-168.



Architecture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, established as part of the project titled the “Design of the Future – a program for the development of the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow in the years 2018-2022”.

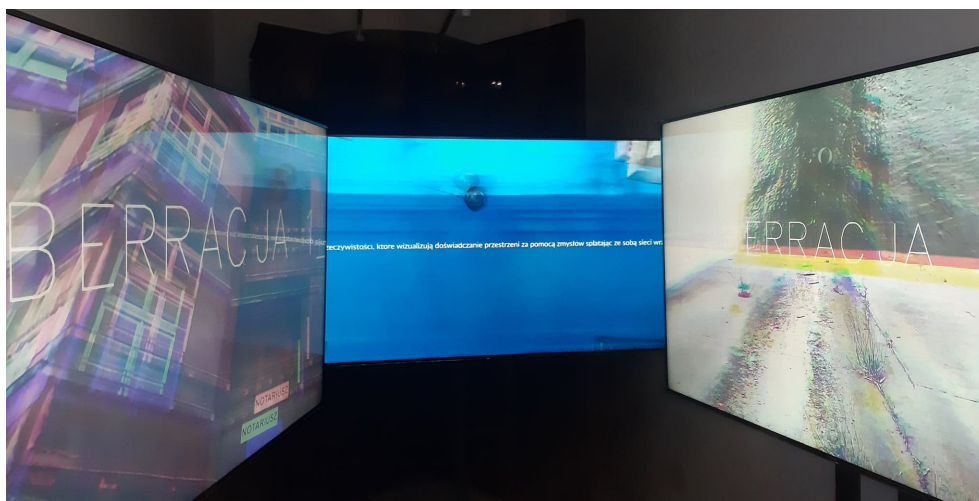


Figure 2. The “Aberrations” project by Patrycja Ochman-Tarka and Paulina Ochman presented at the Fashion Start-up Gallery as part of the KRAKERS Krakow Art Week festival, the “Fringe” section (presentation from Oct. 21 to Nov. 3, 2020).

As part of the annual KRAKERS Cracow Art Week festival at the Fashion Start-up Gallery, held in October 2020, a presentation of the “Aberrations”, a multimedia installation by Patrycja Ochman-Tarki and Paulina Ochman, was planned. This project was a multisensory creation combining elements of video projection, interaction with the recipient through reaction to movement, which gave an opportunity to manipulate, stretch, defragment and replicate space. However, the government-imposed restrictions did not allow for full implementation of the plan in its original form. The limit on the number of visitors, or even a complete ban on entering the gallery, created the need to rearrange the idea and adapt it to the new reality. Finally, all activities intended to take place in the physical space after the interaction caused by the movement of the recipient were effectively presented with multimedia projection in three parts.

The “Aberrations” project combines fibers of the real reality, which visualize the experience of space through the senses, with networks of sensations and fragments of the world accessible to sensory cognition<sup>14</sup>.

Another example of implementing a new activity in the Fashion Start-up Gallery activity structure is how authors communicate with the audience through a new form of the organization of events. Restrictions controlling the number of people in a given room do not allow the free organization of even private viewings or finishes of exhibitions in a hitherto known form. The very idea of the private viewing as a form of opening an exhibition or event, which is an opportunity to meet in order to



contemplate creativity, has been greatly violated. The opening of the private viewing of color drawings by Stanisław Tabish, the “Unicorn Moods’ Outfits”, scheduled for mid-November 2020, could not take place with the participation of a wider audience due to the restrictions. In response to this problem, thanks to the video streaming generally available already at that time, an online broadcast of the private viewing was organized, which took place physically with the smallest possible group of people, thus complying with all the restrictions. The possibility of streaming through a number of channels, along with the video recording, enabled the opening of the exhibition and the author’s tour to those who often would not even have the opportunity to visit the exhibition on the spot. The recording gives people who were not able to participate in it the event at that time an opportunity to get acquainted with the coverage. This way of presenting the event will certainly weave for good into the ranks of activities promoting cultural events. More than 70 drawings were presented at the exhibition, as a result of which a virtual gallery containing high-resolution scans of each of them was established.

Theatres, among others, have taken numerous measures related to the restrictions. In this case, however, the situation is much more serious, because with the inability to play performances there is a lack of work for those involved in the realization of art at every level. An interesting example of how to allow viewers to experience theatrical art in the face of the pandemic is the initiative of the Japanese Moonlight Mobile Theater. As Nobuyoshi Asai, the theatre’s artistic director and choreographer, explains, viewers have an opportunity to see avant-garde art through a mail delivery slot in a symbolic door, sitting in separate boxes around a circular stage where actors present their performance. The installation allows a new experience of viewing the performance by 30 people at the same time<sup>15</sup>. Of course, it is impossible to make profit in this way, as with the standard format of the performance but, on the other hand, such an experiment is the only way to maintain professional activity not only by actors but also by choreographers, screenwriters, directors, as well as an unusual opportunity for advertising their activities on a large scale: tickets for all the theater’s performances sold out instantly.

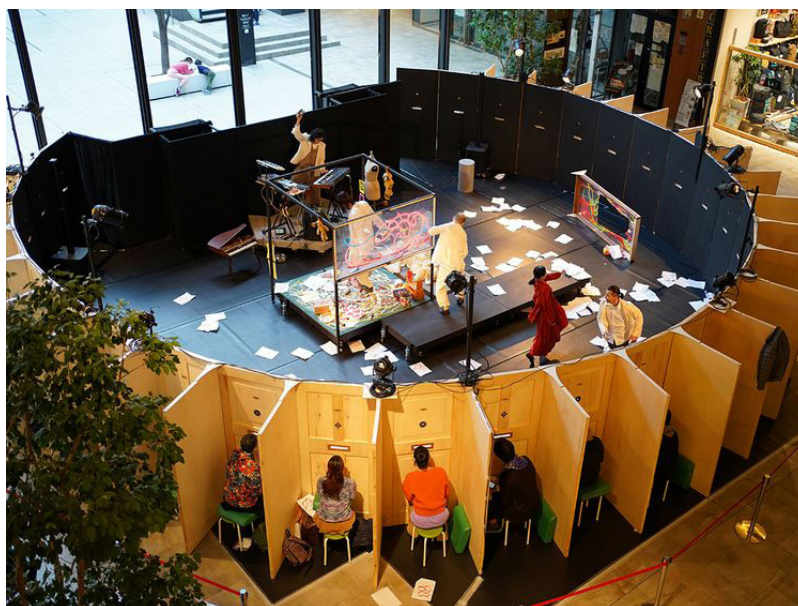


Figure 3. The Moonlight Mobile Theater, Japan – the form of experiencing the performance is the result of limitations introduced in connection with the CoViD-19 pandemic,  
<https://gulfnews.com/world/offbeat/through-the-mailbox-slot-japanese-theatre-offers-new-viewing-experience-1.1614701494277> [accessed on: 21.05.2021].

The conclusion of the above citations can raise a statement that digital culture has become a culture of universal and easy access. This is certainly the case, but we must not forget that for people who do not have access to the right devices or do not have the skills to handle them, or simply live in places where connectivity is difficult, it can cause more discomfort.

### **Do we need art during the pandemic?**

The lack of accessibility to public entities such as galleries and museums, but also events in the art sector, has made material art come into existence very clearly in the virtual world, which has become its almost sole cognitive medium at that time. The art industry has clearly suffered but, on the other hand, it has been an extremely creative time for artists. The dynamism and growth of online activities have taken on an unprecedented scale. However, the transfer of activities to the multimedia space still evokes different feelings. On the one hand, taking away the essence of the communion with a work, it destroys the originally desired relationship with the recipient, preventing the full exposure to full aesthetic experience resulting from direct contact with the work. On the other hand, it develops unlimited possibilities for the dissemination of creativity in the virtual sphere, creating an opportunity to exist where the work would never have appeared in its original form.

There is no denying that we are doing everything we can to ensure that art does not disappear from our lives. By searching for methods, we experiment, we provide stimuli that directly or indirectly

stimulate the scope of our activity. We develop operating models that allow us to embed the diversity of our activities in the new world. The cultural mission of the places through which we can experience multidimensional art allows us to take it in its truest essence. It has often been proven that culture is a link that, as a component of the links and interdependence of our lives, prevents a social crisis<sup>16</sup>. Ciągłe obserwujemy rozrost nowych metod upowszechniania kultury. Dzięki temu możemy śmiało powiedzieć, że jesteśmy świadkami wzrostu nowych sposobów rozpowszechniania sztuki. Dziękuję za uwagę.

We are constantly seeing the growth of new methods of cultural dissemination. Thanks to this, we can safely say that beauty affects the quality of our lives, and art is an inseparable part of it, functioning in us perhaps in different intensity, but invariably.

It should be remembered, however, that not only should we think how to constantly adapt to the pandemic reality, but also ask ourselves how we will be able to live with one another again when this difficult time is over.

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