

Staging the Archive

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My talk is dedicated to art practices that, in a variety of ways, mobilize the model of the archive. These “archival artworks” probe the possibilities of what art is and can do. But also the other way around, they explore and challenge the principles on which archival organizations are built. Although the earliest examples of such archival artworks go back to the 1930s, it is since the 1960s that archival principles have increasingly been used by visual artists to inform, structure, and shape their works. Their aesthetic practices consist of archival enquiry or construction, and the works are built out of archival materials. This use of the archive for artworks does not, however, imply an unreflected instrumentalization of the archive as artistic medium. On the contrary, these art works interrogate the principles, claims, potentials and effects of the archive. They usually interrogate the self-evidentiary claims of the archive by reading it against the grain. The interrogation by these artists may take aim at the structural and functional principles underlying the use of the archival record; or it may result in the creation of another archival structure as a means of establishing an archaeological relationship to history, evidence, information, and data; a structure that gives rise to its own interpretative categories.

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