

28.05.2021–3.10.2021 (Ground Floor + 1st Floor) and –9.01.2022 (1st Floor)
Reopening of the exhibition *Writing the History of the Future*

The ZKM opened its doors again on May 28 and, for the first time since August 2020, the exhibition *Writing the History of the Future: The ZKM Collection* is once more open to the public. In addition to historic masterpieces from the ZKM's unique collection of media art, the exhibition also includes works of currently much-discussed crypto art. *Writing the History of the Future* thus provides an up-to-date overview of the history of digital art from the 1960s to the present.

The vast dimensions of the airy spaces in the ZKM building with its industrial architecture offer optimal conditions for a visit to the exhibition in compliance with Covid-19 safety precautions. Interactive installations as well as works of video and sound art, however, did present a challenge because these works are normally touched by the user or presented in cabins. Over the past months the ZKM has developed a number of technical solutions to make such works accessible while complying with the current standards for hygiene. Video installations are now equipped with special air filters and "traffic lights" that control access. In addition, headsets are no longer necessary: these have been replaced with a touchless sound system that the ZKM has developed which operates with motion detectors. Visitors hear the audio as soon as they stand in front of a work. Additionally, disinfectant dispensers have been installed in all rooms of the exhibition.

Crypto Art

In 2014 it became possible to use blockchain technology to create one-off originals of digital artworks, so-called Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). Already in 2018, long before the spectacular sales of such works were fetching millions, the ZKM purchased its first NFTs. So far, only two museums in the world have opened their collections to this new art format that will have a lasting impact on the economy of art: the Museum of Applied Arts Vienna and the ZKM. Since early April this year selected examples of crypto art from the ZKM Collection as well as works on loan are presented in the exhibition *Writing the History of the Future* and on the screen of the ZKM Cube. The ZKM is particularly interested in on-chain NFTs: completely on-chain NFTs have all their media and metadata stored directly within their contracts, which give proof of ownership. This type of NFT is stored directly in the blockchain, or to be more precise, the code that generates the artwork. The exhibition thus features key works of generative on-chain art, including the first on-chain works: *Autoglyphs* (2019) by John Watkinson and Matt Hall, creators of the famous *CryptoPunks*. It is not mere coincidence that the exhibition presents topical crypto art alongside works by digital art pioneers of the 1960s: the

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*Writing the History of the Future***

Opening of the Museum
Fri, 28.05.2021

Duration of the Exhibition
Ground + 1st floor: –October 3, 2021
First floor: –January 9, 2022

Location
Atrium 8+9, ground + 1st floor

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younger generation of artists sees itself as belonging to the tradition of early generative art.

Key Works of Cybernetic Art

During the temporary closure of the exhibition due to the pandemic, the time was used to install a further key historic work of media art. The installation *Dynamic Object GF.E 16.4 CNSM* by Vladimir Bonačić (1938–1999), developed 1969–1971, is one of the first examples of using computer technology in the arts. The work visualizes, or rather “acousticizes” Galois field structures in the form of fascinatingly beautiful patterns of light and sound. Galois fields are a part of abstract algebra and only determinable in complex mathematical formulas. One important area of their application is cryptography. As in the 1960s portable and affordable universal computers were as scarce as color monitors, cybernetician Vladimir Bonačić constructed special hardware in order to make his vision of cybernetic art a reality. These artistic experiments, based on Bonačić’s research, were occasioned by the festival of computer art *Tendencies 4: Computers and Visual Research*, which was held in 1968 in Zagreb – at the same time as the London exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity*.

For more information on planning your visit, booking tickets, and preventive measures on site, see <https://zkm.de/en/notes-for-your-visit>

The original scenography and curation of the exhibition has been documented in a [360° tour](#). We continue to offer the [online audioguides](#) as well as recorded [video tours](#) of the first form of the exhibition. For further information visit zkm.de/en/writing-the-history-of-the-future

ANNEX

General Information about *Writing the History of the Future: The ZKM Collection*

In this exhibition the ZKM presents an exceptional configuration of major artworks from its unique collection of media art that is unparalleled worldwide. Curated by Margit Rosen and Peter Weibel, for the first time this exhibition shows the diversity of art as it undergoes changes in the age of media, and retells the story of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It features photography, graphic art, painting, and sculpture as well as computer-based art, interactive installations, film, holography, kinetic art, op art, sound art, visual poetry, and video art.

Technical media radically transformed the image in the twentieth century. Beginning with the scandalous medium of photography, in which images

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appeared to be self-generating, media “transformed the entire nature of art” (Walter Benjamin). Photography, film, television, video, computers, and the Internet redefined the relationship between artist, work, and viewer as well as our ideas about the act of creating. The exhibition *Writing the History of the Future* follows the transformation of art due to the changing technologies of production, reception, and distribution by providing well-chosen examples. It also demonstrates how artists anticipated media and social practices that were only taken for granted by society at large years later. As the title of the exhibition says, they were writing the history of the future.

Through its perspective that spans all genres and media, *Writing the History of the Future* opens up a new way of looking at the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in floor space that covers more than 6.000 m². This era of rapid technological change precipitated by electronic and digital information and communication technologies ushered in an unprecedented democratization of art and culture. *Writing the History of the Future* explores how photography fulfilled its promise to individualize visual representations of the world and how the promise was fulfilled again by the activists of video art in the 1960s. When video technology suddenly became available, activists depicted realities which were not shown on television or in commercial films; moreover, they developed an aesthetic that continues to influence our visual culture today. This expansion of the technical visual media, from the panel painting to the screen, disseminated art in a visual culture that was entirely new — popular culture and serious culture entwined. In the 1950s computer technology spread rapidly, which changed our notions of creative activities, and the automation and algorithmization of the arts began. Back then, the code-processing machines triggered debates similar to how today’s discussions center on artificial intelligence. Electronic media also transformed how sound was produced and perceived in the twentieth century. Sounds and noise that were previously unacceptable became media of the fine arts, of sound art.

Writing the History of the Future shows how fundamentally technical devices have changed relationships to the artwork – both with regard to production and to reception. Art production no longer focuses solely on the artist, but now includes a variety of actors, be they devices or people. The development of participative, interactive, and performative arts – from moving images to moving beholders – since the 1960s, has resulted in open works that invite the viewer not just to look, but also to act.

This presentation of the ZKM Collection, which has been selected from a total of more than 9.500 works, is notable for its cross-genre mise-en-scène. It shows the transformation of the genre of the portrait, the representation of the body, the landscape, and architecture – from

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paintings to interactive computer installations. It shows how information technology has updated the ancient media of writing and art to become formats for collective and individual memory. Therefore, the art that the exhibition presents is radically contemporary — it is art in which artists reflect on the present-day using the technological media of their time. *Writing the History of the Future* offers a unique and comprehensive overview of how art in the twentieth century actually developed – beyond painting and sculpture – and includes installations large and small as well as a great many incunabula of media art.

At present, more than 500 works from the ZKM Collection are on display. In the autumn of 2021 the exhibition will be reduced to fill the first floor of Atria 8+9 in order to make way for new temporary exhibitions on the ground floor.

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