

Searching for artistic research? A study between disciplines, interests, policies and systems

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This paper gathers interim results of a study on the accessibility of artistic research. Since no corresponding subject portal could be found, a specific data collection was started. Due to the study's background in Switzerland, the resulting *DataBase for Applied, Fine and Performing Arts* (AFPA-DB) focusses mostly on the German-speaking and European countries, while aiming to be expanded in the future. After summarizing the formal findings of the study, the authors explore the challenges that occurred during the research process. Their struggle in finding and/or accessing artistic research seems to be characteristic of the field and is therefore likely to affect similar projects in other academic art libraries.

The *DataBase for Applied, Fine and Performing Arts* (AFPA-DB) results from a growing need at art universities to provide access to artistic research (AR) as both:

- a) a source and reference for research and education; and
- b) in terms of publication: presenting and situating one's own research results in a larger academic environment.

While an overview of options for publishing art and design has been published as the first outcome of our research (Lurk 2021), this text focusses on the side effects of data collection.

In 30 September 2021, 1035 entries from 38 international universities (including 28 of the 44 German-speaking art academies)¹, 3 AR associations², and other individual entries were indexed in the AFPA-DB. Included were 183 monographs, 112 book contributions, 243 journal articles (including 154 contributions from the *Journal for Artistic Research*), 2 conference papers, 34 artworks, 7 blog posts, 32 documentaries, 2 films, 34 presentations, 22 reports, 94 student theses and dissertations (including 47 dissertations from German-language art schools), 17 video documentaries and 253 websites (including 108 entries from the international exchange programme *Atelier Mondial*).³

In August 2021, the AFPA-DB results from the 28 art academies in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany were analysed. Even though the results are too heterogeneous for comparisons, the collected entries were counted and listed according to document types. Furthermore, a *control group* was then created, in which only the results of a keyword search within the respective repositories/publication servers was counted. Beyond semantic differences, since the difference between AR outputs and AR reflection was ignored, the institutional websites were left out of the control group (but were, however, included in the AFPA-group).

The following considerations result from an analytical reflection on metadata information that was captured during the research and collection phase, focusing on: a) the location where the entry was found; b) accessibility, including copyright information; and c) keywords (or lack of keywords) used for description. After a brief outline of the motivation, the text discusses the effects of systemic weaknesses which became apparent during the research. In doing so, we look for reasons why the results of AR are so difficult to find.

1. Only a few are recorded in *OpenDOAR*, which might be caused by the lack of FAIR interfaces such as OAI-PM. The acronym FAIR stands for free and sustainable access to digital databases, as the contents are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable.

2. *Swiss Artistic Research Network* (SARN), *Institut für Künstlerische Forschung* (!KF Berlin), *artresearch.eu* (Gothenburg).

3. Since educational resources and research data (packages) only appeared in the control group, they are not mentioned in the figure above.

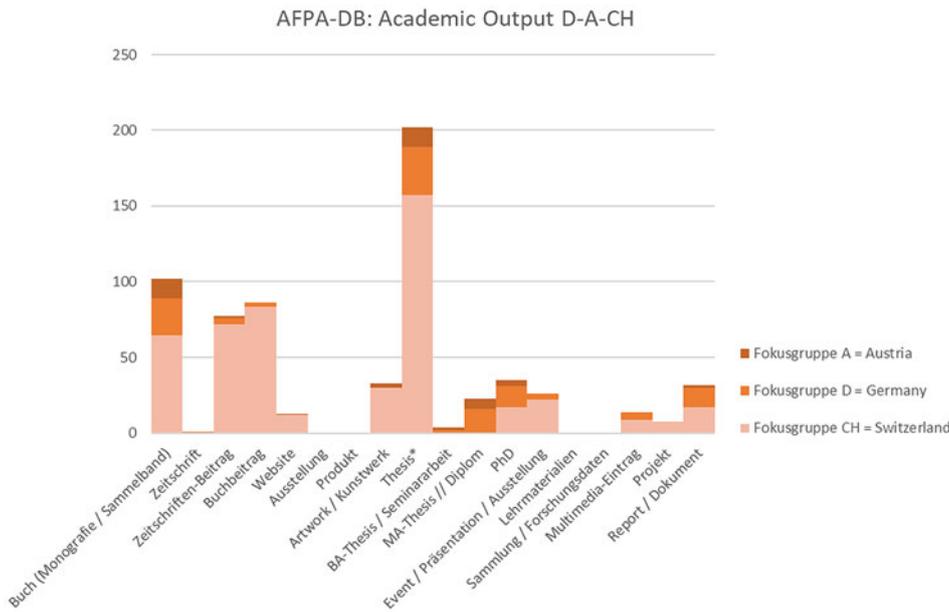


Fig. 1. Overview of the total number of entries, according to document type, sorted by country (German-speaking countries). Since educational resources and (research) data packages occurred only in the control group, the bars are empty here.

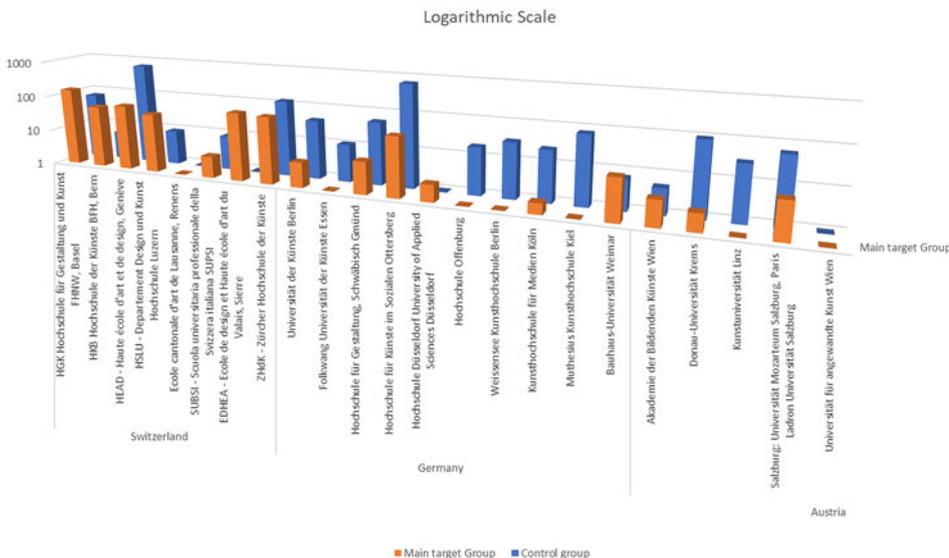


Fig. 2. Overview of the total number of entries (regardless of document type) sorted by academy/country. While the orange bars show the AFPA-DB entries, the sum of the hits of the respective control group is coloured blue.

Need for study objects

In the specific context of art academies, artistic or creative works have always been both objects of study⁴ and results⁵. Although art – at least art since the 1960s – has established its own genres of becoming public, discursive, or engaging in open dialogue with dedicated audiences, traditional scientific modes of communication, which increase especially with the research requirements of AR, still seem challenging. Thus, the artistic researcher continually discusses the “transposition”⁶ between artistic modes of approaching the public *within* the (art-)work and publication standards in the scientific community.

For the last 20 to 30 years, AR has become a topic of scientific funding, accreditation and evaluation procedures, including discussion on publication

4. Cf. Sandra Mühlenberend, *Sammlungen an Kunsthochschulen* (Dresden, 2020).

5. Cf. Peter Peters et al. *Dialogues between Artistic Research and Science and Technology Studies*. (New York: Routledge, 2020).

6. Henk Borgdorff, “Cataloguing Artistic Research,” in *Dialogues Between Artistic Research and Science and Technology Studies*, ed. Henk Borgdorff et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019) 19-30.

7, evaluation⁸, and methodologies⁹. Concerning the performance measurement of artistic “outputs”, the Swedish model seems groundbreaking.¹⁰ For staffing procedures, Lilja has proposed a question grid, and further considerations regarding assessment or quality management procedures can be found in different contexts.¹¹ While on one hand, the ongoing debate and (self-)questioning of artistic researchers leads to fruitful results, which continuously expand the discipline,¹² on the other hand the integration of AR approaches as a critical or methodological framework for teaching¹³ demonstrates how established the field has become – even in traditional subject areas such as painting.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the fractures still existing between art and academia lead to various daily challenges for art libraries.¹⁵ Starting with the questions of access (acquisition and information retrieval), continuing with publication and data management support (including rights issues), up to an increasing institutional interest in the bibliometric measurement of art and science, one can find seemingly endless construction sites. At the same time, all have a common interest in locating AR. This leads to a simple (starting) question: Where is AR – or rather: How can AR results and outcomes be located?

Searching for Artistic Research

The systematic search for AR on academic platforms such as *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, *JSTOR* and *Design & Applied Arts Index (DAAI)* results in a considerable number of findings. Nevertheless, most entries discuss or write *about* AR rather than being the results *of* AR in the sense that Borgdorff explained when stating:

We can justifiably speak of artistic research (‘research in the arts’), when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds ‘in and through’ the acts of creating and performing.¹⁶

The cited comment explains, among other things, why for example (digital) humanities repositories, publication services and research portals only partially cover the professional needs of art and design.¹⁷ Even though they are located in the same cultural environment as creative, practice-based/practice-led approaches, there are fundamental differences in:

- a) the way the research is conducted (including the definition of aims, the setting of methods and the prospecting for interim results);
- b) the way that outcomes and publications appear in a variety of formats; and
- c) the technical needs for describing, characterizing, or classifying.¹⁸

Narrowing down the previously mentioned search results using classic research routines such as keywords, filtering dedicated media or document types, or other formal (metadata) characteristics is problematic in that conventions do not exist for this, nor are there preferred or standardized subject terms, publication formats or source-types. Of course, there is a *Gemeinsame Normdatei* (GND) entry for AR,¹⁹ but finding or rather offering controlled vocabularies and classifications for dedicated subject areas in AR seems extremely difficult. Whereas on the one hand the lack of vocabularies or classification systems is problematic,²⁰ on the other hand the heterogeneity of the topics and methodologies, the creativity of the artists in questioning and (re-)inventing everything, and a certain scepticism complicate finding solutions.²¹

In fact, the discomfort of the researching artists often begins earlier – within the publication or indexing process: object types used by repositories or publication servers such as *OPUS*, *Dspace*, *Fedora* and *Zenodo*, as well as those of the web portals mentioned, seem rather coarse compared to the diversity of artistic ways of expression and becoming public. Of course, *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) and most academic bibliographic systems in general offer a remarkable variety of media formats, while *DataCite*²² and the *Confederation of Open Access Repositories* (COAR 2021) provide a remarkable list of resource type vocabularies. Nevertheless, the implementation is often pending. Thus, classifying artistic outcome remains demanding. In addition, Veerle Spronck points out:

The artistic researchers have to deal with art worlds (consisting of art critics, curators and festival organisers as well as the general art public), academic communities, and in some cases they contribute to public debates. To make

7. Barnaby Drabble, and Federica Martini, “Publishing Artistic Research”, in *SARN Booklet* (Basel: SARN, 2014).

8. Gerald Bast et al., *Arts, Research, Innovation and Society* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015).

9. Mika Hannula et al., ed., *Artistic Research Methodology* (New York: Peter Lang 2014).

10. Tomas Lundén, and Karin Sundén, “Art as Academic Output,” *Art Libraries Journal* 40, no. 4 (2015): 25-32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307472200020496>.

11. Eeva Lilja, “Art, Research, Empowerment.” Cf. also the scheme of Bartar & Huber (2020, 161). The provided grid for counter assessment of socially engaged arts- and community-based research can be transferred to other areas, in that it classifies: a) excellence of approach, b) innovation and originality, c) relevance for the particular field and other disciplines, d) scientific quality, e) quality of cooperation, f) dimensions of participation, g) added value for participants, h) process-oriented aspects, i) ethical principles, and j) open-science principles.

12. Regarding publication requirements, still the *Journal for Artistic Research* and its underlying *Research Catalogue* might be mentioned (Schwab 2013).

13. Cf. Ruth Mateus-Berr and Richard Jochum, *Teaching Artistic Research* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

14. Cf. Stefan Wykydal, “Nonverbal Words”, in *Teaching Artistic Research*, edited by Ruth Mateus-Berr and Richard Jochum (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 67-72.

15. As the *Vienna Declaration* (cultureactioneurope.org 2020) attests, incompatibilities hurt the artists and academic institutions even more.

16. Henk Borgdorff, “The Conflict of the faculties” (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2012), 47.

17. The *Registry of Research Data Repositories* (re3org) lists in Germany *arthistoricum.net* (University of Heidelberg), the two image databases *Foto Marburg* and *prometheus* (Cologne), and *ECHO - Cultural Heritage Online* (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science). In addition, *Kubikat* (bibliographic data), *heiData* and the digital and interdisciplinary object and multi-media repository *heidICON* (both

the outcomes of their research relevant and assessable to these diverse audiences and communities, work needs to be done.²³

Classifying art in a publication context

Understanding Efva Lilja's²⁴ recent statement "[t]he object of artistic research is art"²⁵ as a serious hint, another type of cataloguing system that has largely been neglected so far might come to mind: collection management systems.²⁶ Whereas Lilja's activating essay points to the risk of losing meaning or relevance when adapting (appropriating) scientific attitudes from other contexts too ambitiously, one might indeed ask how far scholarly communication could benefit from the ways of describing and documenting art.²⁷

Collection management systems specialize in taking the significance (individuality) of an artwork into account. While conservation science tends to speak of "significant properties", when works of art become more complex, semantically breaking down "the" work of art to a set of elements which might be preserved in different ways, and looking at materials and techniques (as ways of creation) can enrich the present discussion. With regard to AR outcomes, methodologies gain special importance. As Rachel Mader explains, when reflecting on Brad Haseman's concept of practice as research approaches to creative arts enquiry: "research is not only conducted to create content, but also to expand the methods and instruments of artistic practices in each single case".²⁸ Thus, AR methodologies might be understood as a natural progression of the material and techniques approach.

Expanding the forms of describing varying ways of creating, exploring, producing, and presenting, and the emphasis of methodologies calls to mind more recent developments in the context of scientific publishing as offered by data journals or data publications. Here, as there, the description of both the procedures of data collection and research methods, and the way in which the data was then structured and evaluated, contribute to the later understanding and subsequent re-use. Dedicated areas are therefore provided by the respective infrastructures. Relational models have replaced field-based indexing forms. Accordingly, a look at schemas such as *CIDOC CRM* from the cultural heritage perspective or *Records in Context (RIC)* from archival practice might be worthwhile. They stay structurally flexible and extendible, and therefore support creativity and liveness. Furthermore, conceptual models for describing such as the standard for open educational resources (IEEE 2020), would have to be examined. LOM's (*Learning Object Metadata*) capacity to address different target groups even at the metadata level seems extremely interesting.

Nevertheless, our aim is not to promote yet another standard that is not applied because it is too complex or specific or fails to gain acceptance due to other reasons. Quite the opposite: we have the feeling that the initial question of the availability or rather the findability of AR results relates to further structural problems.

Referencing AR as research outcome

Starting, for example, with a well-established, scientific practice such as the referencing of sources of literature, data, tables, graphs, etc. used in articles and papers, it seems clear that citation conventions are so well established that algorithms automatically recognize most quoted sources. Automatic reference detection is, among other things, the basis for quotation indices.²⁹

As opposed to literature, artworks and AR outputs often elude citation. Even if works of art are named within a text, the automated detection of their mentions normally fails due to missing or incomplete structuring conventions. While lists of illustrations sometimes present a specific kind of index within the text, they nevertheless seem so little standardised that automated counts with an accuracy equivalent to *Hirsch-Index* or *Received Citations* are not yet available. This affects virtually all the artistic formats, including musical or performative scores, theatre plays and photographs that are not dealt with by well-known publishers - even if a *catalogue raisonné* exists with established numbering.³⁰

On the one hand this ties in with considerations in the museum context, in which referencing, the preservation of context and/or the quality assurance of

University of Heidelberg) were looked through. All of them focus primarily on art historical materials. Regarding AR, *re3org* presents the *Research Catalogue (RC)*, *Portal de Datos Abiertos UNAM* (UNAM Open Data Portal, Colecciones Universitaria, Mexico) and *Portal de Datos del Mar - SNDM* (Portal Argentino de Datos del Mar, Argentina) when searching on a global scale.

18. Since researchers often record their content in research information systems, language plays a special role (cf. Wälchli & Caduff 2019). A differentiation between practice and theory, for example, also seems inappropriate, since many artists perceive their reflective work as *theoretical*. Same with media formats such as video or non-text formats. They are by no means primarily related to AR.

19. <http://d-nb.info/gnd/1068661038>.

20. Even Getty's vocabularies in the context of the *Art and Archaeology Technical Abstracts (AATA)* do not provide any specification for AR.

21. Duby, Barker 2017 comment: "The vocabulary of research has largely been predicated on scientific research or more precisely an oversimplified concept thereof which depends upon the supremacy of propositional knowledge".

22. "DataCite Metadata Schema Documentation for the Publication and Citation of Research data – Version 4.3," DataCite Metadata Working Group, last accessed on 6 October 2021, <https://doi.org/10.14454/7xq3-zf69>.

23. Spronck, Veerle. "Between Art and Academia: A Study of the Practice of Third Cycle Artistic Research". Maastricht University, 2016. <https://lkca.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/scriptie-2017-between-art-and-academia-spronck.pdf>.

24. Efva Lilja has been observing and participating in the Swedish AR development for decades.

25. Efva Lilja, "The Pot Calling the Kettle Black," in *Knowing in Performing*, edited by Annegret Huber et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 28.

26. For this reason, the *Portal Wissenschaftliche Sammlungen* (i.e. portal of scientific collections) was examined, even though primarily historical holdings are indexed. In contrast to the humanities' portals, a broader range of scientific material and

online (re-)sources are discussed.³¹ On the other hand, collaboratively created meta-searches such as *European-art.net* (EAN) are gaining importance.³² Initiated by *Basis Wien* and resulting from the EU funded *vektor* (2000-2003) project, EAN references not only artists,³³ exhibitions and publications of the 13 partner institutions, but also enables searching for artworks, if the source databases release this information. To what extent the trend towards the visualization of collection holdings, as found in the context of Linked Open Data, Knowledge Graphs, various other data models and as countless pilot projects, is relevant for the present context of referencing remains to be examined.

Easy ways out of the dilemma are not to be expected in the short term, for the following reasons:

- a) AR outcomes are spread across different genres (from dedicated works of art to curatorial work, from publication to performance, etc.) and artists tend to engage in different formats;
- b) publication venues and institutional framings seem constantly changing, from academic context via gallery and museums spaces to public or alternative sphere(s), including digital and hybrid environments; and
- c) communication channels often cover only temporary needs and disappear or migrate sooner or later to other media.

Furthermore, artistic outcomes, and especially those of AR, are bound to the presence of the audience. With Andrea Phillips one can state:

The claim of artistic research is that it is radically open and thus accessible to all comers, giving rise to questions of explanation, exposition, methodological investigation and publishing itself (in the sense of 'making public'), especially in a field dominated by privatization (both in terms of art's connection to infrastructures of its market and in terms of the pedagogical habitus of individuation of expression).³⁴

Free and Open Access

The statement highlights another conflict zone that becomes obvious when publishing: the basic understanding of openness in relation to access. While the *Budapest* (2002) and *Berlin Declaration* (2003) define – from a libraries perspective – what *Open Access* (OA) is and how it should be marked, for many artists and researchers in this field, content that can be “consumed” without login, payment or admission is considered open and accessible. Therefore, just under 12% of the current AFPA-DB entries can effectively be described as OA, even though almost 28% are accessible without restrictions (bronze OA). Some faculties still believe that a sentence such as “[title] is accessible online to all (Open Access)” and the provision of a digital resource (PDF, image, video) make the publication OA. Expectations clash with reality when informing them that OA requires a clear statement for reuse, indicated for example by adding a creative commons statement and holding a signed contract note in hand (or in the archive). Accordingly, Clarrie Bishop has pointed out that successful OA projects are “about placing relationships at the heart of your work and thinking about rights collectively”.³⁵

Leaving aside “things” that are also traded on the art market,³⁶ and focussing instead on AR results and their context, OA currently gains increasing importance. In a cultural framework of inequality, in which many artists are still seeking a voice, permanent identifiers and the commons play a special role. They bring reliability, traceability, and permanence to a digital environment that otherwise seems highly dynamic and unstable. As Henk Borgdorff stated, when weighing the advantages and disadvantages of AR in relation to increasingly easier accessible scientific infrastructures:

You gain stability and the potential for distribution at the cost of the singularity and materiality of the operator. In artistic research this involves the chain of reference between artwork at the one extreme and artistic research publication at the other.³⁷

To put it differently: OA does not require reluctant relabelling, accepting reduced quality caused for example by low image resolution or black and white printing.

tool collections are listed with remarkable contents.

27. In the context of art collections, characterization and key-wording normally follow at least in-house or internationally recognized, controlled vocabularies or typification.

28. Rachel Mader, “A Review of Artistic Research and Literature,” *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 6, no. 2 (2021): 540.

29. Besides bibliometric interests, automated recognition of whole text passages plays an important role in plagiarism prevention.

30. Comparable problems are found in texts when the transliteration systems are lacking. Stefan Schley (conversation 2021) has recently pointed out this challenge of Tibetology.

31. Stefan Przigoda, “Sammlungsdokumentation, Forschung und Digitalisierung,” in *Objekte im Netz*, edited by Udo Andraschke and Sarah Wagner (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020).

32. https://european-art.net/database_

33. Artists are assigned to GND and FIAV.

34. Andrea Philips, “Artistic Research, Publishing and Capitalisation,” in *Futures of artistic research*, edited by Jan Kaila et al., (Helsinki: The Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki, 2017), 24.

35. Carrie Bishop, “Creative Commons and Open Access Initiatives,” *Art Libraries Journal* 40, no. 4 (2015): 9.

36. Regarding goods of the art market, one could argue that their transmission to the future is otherwise guaranteed.

37. Borgdorff, “Cataloguing,” 21f.

Rather, the fracturing of incompatible legal systems creates space for new creativity, as encountered in different publishing contexts.³⁸ In a constructive, solution-oriented environment, it is then also possible to think carefully about what *re-use* can mean in the context of design and art.

Conclusion

AR seems to be a topic that is discussed at virtually all art academies. Nevertheless, when browsing the related scientific infrastructures, significant, partly structural, differences occur: while some art academies have developed digital memory infrastructures, others are still waiting for publication servers, repositories, or (supra-)institutional access. Differences determine the field in other contexts as well, for example financial and human resources, time span since resources were systematically documented, acquisition/indexing and publication policies, the question of how or where closed content is accessible (as metadata and data), accepted file-formats, evaluation mechanisms, and/or workflows and instruments for quality approval. Certainly, the size of the institution (measured by the number of staff and students), subject orientation (type of specializations), and structural scopes of action vary.³⁹

Since only parts of the AR outcomes find their way into the available repositories, the websites of the research institutes and their projects, associated PhD programmes and fellowships play a special role regarding AR dissemination. Even if neither plain HTML-websites nor portals with structured content management systems facilitate scholarly communication in terms of publication, access, and reuse (at least from a library perspective), these network-based channels still seem more easily equipped by artist researchers and thus more accessible than repositories or publication servers.⁴⁰ In addition, dedicated blogs, social media platforms and multimedia networks would require further consideration.⁴¹

Regardless of the popularity of repositories among the artistic researchers, the lack of appropriate forms of citation and referencing has emerged as a particularly problematic area. The topic goes beyond the AR community and requires other disciplines to take responsibility for their sources. Whereas AR outcomes are indeed widely dispersed and hard to track, and thus tend to get lost in the plethora of activities, lack of global directories and referencing standards also cause problems.

Nonetheless, OA has emerged as an element that constructively stimulates the dialogue between libraries, artistic researchers, and, ever more frequently, non-affiliated artists or communities who can contribute to the discussion or provision of sources. Increasing interest in collaborative, sustainable, and resource-saving practices as well as manifold forms of access, accelerate the ways of knowledge production and consumption.⁴² The tangible culture of cooperation and the claim to exchange ideas at eye level can contribute to the overcoming of existing divides. This can contribute to better accessibility of AR, too.

38. Stefanie Bringezu, *Was ist Kunst?* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

39. Art academies in Switzerland are for example located at the educational level of universities of applied sciences, which have no right to award doctorates. In Austria and Germany, too, not all art academies have the right to award PhD degrees, and some subjects areas are taught in faculties in which art is only one subject among others.

40. Micro affiliations and “unaffiliated knowledge workers” (Brown 2016) have (or are aware of) far fewer paths of publication in academically recognized contexts than academic members.

41. Without judging the trend, in 2010 the “alt-metrics manifesto” emphasized the growing importance of publication venues outside the classical academic setting (Priem et al. 2010). Regarding social academic networks, a quick keyword search of the outcomes has confirmed earlier experiences: the number of artistic outputs seems vanishingly small compared to the discussion about AR.

42. Cf. in this context the conceptual framework of *Documenta 15* (2022) regarding publication and participation strategies of the management team *ruangrupa*.

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