

## **Library of the Museum of the Contemporary Art**

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**Abstract.** The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (MoCAB) was opened on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1965. However, Museum activities began as early as 1958, when the institution of a Modern Gallery was formed with the purpose to oversee the development of contemporary art in Yugoslavia. After the construction of the new building was completed, the Council of the Modern Gallery gave a new name to the institution – the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The reasons for the foundation of the Museum were, in nutshell, these: to collect, research and display most valuable and distinctive works of Yugoslav art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; to organize exhibitions of local and international contemporary art and to publish publications which would enable further examination and popularization of contemporary art; to systematically collect and classify documentation about modern and contemporary art; to explore new educational methods in the fields of visual culture, and theory and history of art.

The founder and the first director of MoCAB Miodrag B. Protić developed the conception of the Museum based on analysis of the model of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. One of the important departments of the Museum in that respect was the Art Documentation Department. It consists of the library, hemerotheque, and photo documentation. Art documentation department gathers, prepares, categorizes and stores professional literature (book, catalogues, periodicals, and electronic editions), daily press, archive material and photo documentation from the field of visual arts, especially modern and contemporary international, Yugoslav and Serbian art. Thanks to the systematic gathering of material which followed the forming of various collections and the MoCAB exhibition activity, the department is now in possession of the finest and most complete documentation, including all the material about the artistic tendencies and the artists from the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. Another assignment of the department is the preparation of all the necessary materials for exhibitions, catalogues and programs of MoCAB.

**Key words:** Museum of Contemporary Art, Art Documentation Department, library

### **1. Introduction**

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (MoCAB) was opened in 1965, as the first Museum of contemporary art in Yugoslavia. The idea and the need for that kind of institution existed already at the beginning of the 20th century, and it was revisited again after the Second World War. The first consultations regarding this idea happened in 1950, and the Museum activities began as early as 1958, when the Cultural Council of Peoples' Committee of Belgrade with its legal act established the Modern Gallery. The institution began with the preparation work in temporary offices in an apartment building at the address Obilićev venac 5. The Executive Council of Socialist Republic of Serbia decided to accept the recommendation of the Peoples' committee to construct the building which would live up to the modern museological standards. The winning project at the open public competition for the new building was the one of the architects Ivan Antić and Ivanka Raspopović, for which they would later, namely at the opening ceremony of the Museum, be awarded with the October Prize of City of Belgrade for Architecture. During the construction, huge preparations were made for the permanent exhibition. After the construction of the new building in autumn of 1965, the Modern Gallery was renamed into the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Museum's founder and its first director was Miodrag B. Protić, artist and the author of many significant exhibitions, books and texts concerning the history of modern Yugoslav and Serbian art. His vision of the first museum of contemporary art was adapted to the actual social and cultural context of Yugoslavia.

Staying true to its founding principles and aims, the Museum has in the past 48 years grown to become the leading institution of modern and contemporary art in the ex-Yugoslav region and Serbia. Its body of works today forms the most representative collection of Yugoslav and Serbian art of the 20th century, which provides, together with the documentation and the archive about this period, an opportunity for a broad view of the art heritage from the period from 1900 till 2013. Today the MoCAB fund consists about 8.000 works and represents the most relevant collection of art from the Yugoslav art space which existed from 1900 to today. The policy of the Museum is based on the observation of contemporary art in Serbia, the Balkan region, and as much as it is possible, in Europe and worldwide.

Since its foundation in 1965, more than 900 exhibitions were organized in the building of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Gallery-Legacy of Milica Zorić and Rodoljub Čolaković, the Gallery of Petar Dobrović, as well as in other exhibition spaces in the country and abroad. Its exhibition policy was grounded on representation of the most relevant artists (retrospective and solo exhibitions), periods, artistic movements and tendencies of Yugoslav and Serbian and foreign art of 20th century.

Following contemporary museological principles of the conservation of cultural heritage and the politics of display, the Museum today represents a dynamic institution which by the scope and diversity of its program, by its researching and pedagogical work, its intensive international collaboration and openness to diverse modes of cultural activity and cooperation, represents an important factor of the cultural and art life of Belgrade and Serbia. As such, it has been playing an important role in the processes of cultural transformation of Serbian society in the transitional period.

## **2. The Art Documentation Department and Library**

The Art Documentation Department and the Museums library was established synchronously with the formation of the collection. From the beginning there was a need to provide the base for studying modern and contemporary art, and besides the growing collection, the literature and other materials from history and current period of development of Yugoslav and international art was collected. The main goal was to create documentaristic archive to keep artistic materials, books, catalogues and hemeroteques about modern and contemporary art form the Yugoslav artistic and cultural space. Another important segment of the Art Documentation Department is the archive of the photo documentation that contains photographs, negatives, contact-copies and slides of the artworks. The archive also contains and documents the photographs from the openinings of exhibitions, permanent collection, etc.

The Art Documentation Department was first of its kind in any Serbian Museum which shows its importance in the structure of the Museum from its very foundation. The Department was formed after the model of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was conceived on the same principles. The results were noticeable from the outset. The department facilitated more thorough research on local artistic tendencies and prominent artists and provided researchers with important data, documents, and facts. Moreover, it made possible overcoming of the positivistic-philological doctrine of art history and introduction of the modern interpretative tool – the research field that activates the new discourse in art history that uses all available cognizance on art itself. (Protic 1975)

In the Department work five people: the head of department (curator), one curator-librarian and three documentarists. The members of the department are active in professional associations: Museum Association of Serbia, Librarian Association of Serbia, ICOM, ICA etc.

The library was represented on the various consultations, forums and conferences, in the country and abroad. Within the activities of the section of Special Museum Libraries of The Museum Society of Serbia, the Department organized various lectures and educative programs with the aim to improve and promote library-information work.

The library of the Museum of Contemporary Art is a special library. Its main activities are the following: collecting, acquiring, exchanging books, catalogues and other materials. The employees in the library are involved in organisation of each museum exhibition. They are writing biography and

bibliography of the artists, checking and supplementing the artist's files, tracking press, classifying and sorting documentation etc.

### **3. Fund of the Art Documentation Department**

Today, Art Documentation Department gathers, prepares, categorizes and stores professional literature: books, catalogues, periodical, hemeroteque (articles from newspapers) archive material and photo documentation from the field of visual arts, especially modern and contemporary art from Serbian, Yugoslav and international context (Sretenović, 2006). The department is now in possession of one of the finest and most complete documentations in the region, which is necessary for the preparation of the exhibitions, catalogues and programmes of the Museum. It represents an important research documentation centre for studying of the 20th and 21st century art.

The library fund was formed gradually with the establishment of the Museum. Today, the library contains about 5.500 books from local and foreign authors on art history and theory, contemporary art, philosophy, aesthetics, architecture, design, film, etc. They are lined by topographic and by size. They are stored in wooden cabinets and locked up. That is not ideal condition for storing, but we are hoping to have resources for buying the metal cabinets in future. The majority of funds are catalogues, about 26.600 of them. The library possesses about 400 titles of periodical. There are very important editions from the beginning of the 20th century. The special attention was dedicated to purchasing the Yugoslav papers from the beginning of the 20th century or later, whose articles significantly facilitate studying of the art life of that time: *Brankovo kolo* (1894-1914), *Stražilovo* (1885-1894), *Javor* (1889-1893), *Revue Yougoslave* (1919-1920), *Delo* (1894-1910), *Letopis Matice srpske* (1874-1975), *Mladost* (1898), *Srpski književni glasnik* (1900-1940), *Vijenac* (1894-1927), etc. We have acquired important avant-garde magazines which represent bibliographical rarities. The library of the Museum of contemporary art has the following relevant avant-garde magazines: *Nadrealizam danas i ovde*, *Putevi*, *Nemoguće* (1930, may), *Svedočanstvo*, *Dada Tank*, *Dada Jok* (1922, January), *Zenit*, *Svedočanstva*, *Večnost*, *Pokret* etc. The magazines like *Zenit* represent important beginnings of the contemporary thought that opposed the traditional perception of the dominance of the Western cultural canon.

Very important and specific part of the library is hemeroteque (about 220.00 excerpts) which is being collected from the foundation of the Museum. By reading the hemeroteque one could follow the chronicle of the life of artists from the beginning of the 20th century till today. Newspaper excerpts appear as part of subject entries and artists' files, by subject (exhibition, international and domestic events, artistic groups, art colonies, happening) or by authors (artists). This part of the department represents specific documents which help researchers and curators during the preparation of the exhibition and with gathering data for their texts and essays. The Museum collects the press material from the local magazines, which are related to contemporary and modern art in Serbia and abroad. The hemeroteque is kept locked in metal cabinets far from the light, which is good condition for keeping.

In time, the fund is completed by collecting the catalogues from museums and galleries (two copies of all museum exhibitions catalogues are kept in fund), exchanging catalogues with great number of institutions in country and abroad, with presents and copying. The library has formed a catalogue which enables to follow the chronology of artistic manifestations and provides information on the exhibitions of Serbian artists in country and abroad. At the same time the catalogue of the organizers of exhibitions was created and it registers the activities of the Museum and galleries, as well as the register of the art critics and authors by name. These kinds of catalogues serve to prepare bio-bibliography of the artist, for the exhibitions, and at the same time they are available to other institutions and individuals. However, it should be noted that the bibliography of the artists is not written according to the ISBD standards.

Therefore, from the beginning, the library has the following catalogues:

- Subject and bibliography catalogue
- The catalogue of the chronology of art manifestations
- The catalogue of the organizers (museums, galleries) of exhibitions
- The catalogue of the art critics and authors.

That division is still in use today.

### *3.1 Completing of the fund*

Small number of books is annually bought. The fund is mostly filled by presents or exchange. The exchange of catalogues between special museum libraries in Serbia and the region is very important factor for completion of the library fund. The exchange is made with the institutions that have similar librarian material (history of modern art and art theory), and it is important to follow these principles in order to avoid stockpiling of literature, particularly due to the fact that space for storing the fund and the working space is never big enough.

### *3.2 Users*

The library use professors, students, colleagues, researchers which are following the development of contemporary art. The frequent users of the library are foreign researchers and curators that are interested in Serbian contemporary art. The books cannot be taken out of the library, they can be read only in the reading part of the library. One part of the library is therefore used for reading, where we have two places for the users. The employees of the library are very often active consultants in finding literature for the users. The development of the electronic catalogue will be providing faster search and browsing through the texts.

### *3.3 Digitizing*

There are still not enough professional books, magazines, articles and other artistic documentation that could be found in open access on Internet. That is why we have decided to digitize specific documents from the field of modern and contemporary art. With the purchase of the program for library functions, we began the electronic processing of our fund. We began the digitizing with

processing the material about the painter Petar Lubarda, on the occasion of the centennial of his birth. This project was made as part of the retrospective exhibition of Petar Lubarda. The scanned documents were available online to everyone, they were used for education and research. The aim was to bring closer the artist's work to a broader public through the digital reading space called "Reading about ...Petar Lubarda" (Čitajte o... Petar Lubarda) and to make open access to everyone. We have continued with the project of the digital reading space and the one that followed was called "About the Museum"

#### **4. Goals and plans for the future**

One of the main goals is reorganisation of the library fund and continuation of the process of digitization. It is planned that the Documentation department become an important research-documentation centre of contemporary art in Serbia and the region. The aim is to make research faster and easier, and to enable that information becomes easily accessible and available, but also to work on preservation, expansion and presentation of the fund. Since the main building of the Museum is currently undergoing reconstruction, the plan is that the Art Documentation Department gets new bigger space. The Department is therefore making thorough preparations for the return into the reconstructed building and how to adjust all of its units into the new spatial arrangement, and store publications in the new metal shelves that will be custom made.

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