The Artist Archive Project - David Wojnarowicz
New York University
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The David Wojnarowicz Information Resource
The David Wojnarowicz Information Resource serves as a knowledge base that compiles relevant information about the artist and directs researchers to additional sources to facilitate curatorial and conservation research. The content of the resource addresses the technical, logistical, and ethical concerns of the artist's work, and provides general statements about objects and media by or about Wojnarowicz including two- and three-dimensional objects, installations, time-based media, performances, and texts. Also included are annotated lists of sources such as a bibliography, additional resources, a directory of people with whom the artist worked, and information about selected exhibitions of his work. Designed with scalability in mind, the underlying database includes templates for individual entries about specific objects to which future researchers will continue to add content and map connections.

Objects and media made about or by Wojnarowicz often do not fit into typical art historical classifications of medium or style, or into standard archival descriptions. Wojnarowicz often used and reused images, objects and references in numerous different contexts such that a particular object or image develops an amalgamation of meanings and functions. Interpretations of objects, images and media shift and combine in new ways when they are exhibited as a works of art in themselves, used as source material, as documentation, or as a part of an installation. One specific example of an object that has been presented in multiple contexts is the life-sized shark that Wojnarowicz covered with maps and exhibited as a component of his multi-faceted "Burning Child" installation at the Gracie Mansion Gallery in 1984, however this object has also been shown as a hanging sculpture apart from the installation in addition to appearing in photographs. "The Magic Box," is another example, which contains 69 objects collected by Wojnarowicz such as plastic toys, jewelry, stones, feathers, seeds, photographs and others. "The Magic Box" disrupts archival and art historical concepts of classification, provenance, context and description since specific functions of box and its contents are not known yet the combination of objects hold complex symbolic and material values that illuminatingly relate to Wojnarowicz's life and art.

In addition to these complications, many of Wojnarowicz's works, particularly his films and videos were not completed during his life. Exhibiting an incomplete or posthumously assembled work has the problematic potential to misrepresent or deviate too far from the original work of the artist. Issues of appropriate conservation and exhibition practices, in addition to questions of authorship, authenticity, and artwork integrity that arise from Wojnarowicz's work are relevant to many contemporary artists who employ ephemeral or unusual media, conceptual strategies and create media installations.

The database compiles information about objects about or by David Wojnarowicz and aims to accommodate these unusual and unclassifiable materials by bringing to the fore the importance of the relationships between objects, media, people and places in Wojnarowicz's life and art. Modeled after this web of connections, the database combines conceptual aspects of the designs of both social media networks and art collections databases in order to present information through the linked interconnected networks of relationships between objects, media, people, and places. The database focuses on relationships rather than classifications of media and objects made by Wojnarowicz such as archival contents, people he knew and worked with, site specific installations, objects and images that he used and reused, photographs as informational sources and as works, exhibitions, galleries, and other institutions. Since the complex and open design is

drawn from its interrelated content, the database restructures the way in which information and objects about and by artists are presented and understood as relationships rather than classifications.

The David Wojnarowicz Project

Phase 1 of the project began in the summer of 2015, and will continue through the spring of 2017. Faculty, staff, and graduate students at NYU will undertake develop a model for creating digital archives relating to exhibiting and conserving contemporary art. The project focuses on the technical, logistical, and ethical concerns associated with the work of David Wojnarowicz. His archive in the Fales Library Downtown Collection serves as a principal resource for the research, in conjunction with questions raised by curators at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The current attention Wojnarowicz receives and the controversies surrounding the posthumous assemblage of his moving image and audio fragments into artworks make this research timely and critical to scholars and professionals in the art world. The Whitney Museum is planning an inaugural exhibition of Wojnarowicz' work in 2016-17, and the co-curators David Kiehl and David Breslin are working with the NYU team on exhibition and conservation concerns associated with the exhibition: http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/DavidWojnarowicz.

The project stimulates research on topics that underlie logistical questions pertaining to curating and exhibiting conceptual and time-based art. Expanded research will engage literature on topics such as artwork biographies, network theory, authorship, intentionality, and authenticity. Legal questions will lead to research on copyright, intellectual property, and ownership.

The project responds to a growing need to document the work and concerns of contemporary artists who employ ephemeral media on which their work is conceptually dependent. Many artists who create media installations and performance art transfer interpretive authority to those who acquire their work. Future interpretation, along with conservation interventions, will rely on the documentation provided by artist studios, archivists, conservators, art historians, curators and others involved with the work during the lifetime of the artist. Other models for artist archives are already emerging, and this project will build on these efforts in the design of an archive suited to exhibiting and conserving the art of our times. Among these efforts art the INCCA *Artist Archives Database* and the Guggenheim *Panza Collection Initiative*. Artist foundations such as the Donald Judd Foundation and the Calder Foundation conduct similar research and provide exhibition and conservation information on their websites.

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