CIFRA Platform for New Media Art

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Abstract:

The CIFRA Platform for New Media Art emerges as a contemporary streaming and anarchive. CIFRA embodies both an online and offline presence, transcending traditional delineations between these spheres. This presentation is a manifesto of the platform, which clarifies its philosophy and positioning within the broader landscape of other platforms for media and digital art.

[CIFRA](#) is an emerging platform for the streaming and storage of contemporary media artwork, fostering interaction among actors in the world of media art and serving as an anarchive [3]. CIFRA engages with the achievements of streaming models and modern distribution methods while carefully navigating to the ambiguous aspects of so-called "platformization." We see it as both a source of inspiration and a challenge, adapting to its nuances with thoughtfulness. Furthermore, CIFRA is a project that extends beyond the platform and screen and fosters a community around media art both online and offline. We want to present the manifesto of our project, outline the challenges ahead of us, and invite colleagues to discuss and join our community.

Media and moving image projects have always needed alternative dynamics to traditional art distribution. Contemporary media art has more overlapping structural properties with music and video games than with more traditional art forms [1, P.95]. Today's most well-known media art distribution and sales are streaming services and blockchain-based marketplaces. Although they were created and continue to evolve as new economic spaces, their functioning is associated with different contradictions.

On the one hand, contemporary streaming took a revolutionary step towards democratizing artists' access to the audience. Their developed models successfully contributed to the economic engagement of diverse audiences due to their accessibility. However, art's complete and simplified "platformization" risks repeating various imbalances the platform's model engendered [1, P.97, *see more details in the cited source*]. We acknowledge these lessons and hold them in high regard, integrating them into our ethos. However, we believe that streaming today represents a new avant-garde in the prospective creation of an environment for a new audience, its emancipation, as well as the distribution of moving images (a new leap 50 years after the creation of EAI, VDB). Many services involved in distributing and selling digital art have been inspired by models proposed by streaming services, such as Spotify and Netflix. For instance, exciting streaming projects, such as Niio Art, MANA, ikono.tv, MUBI, and many more aim to create an alternative economic and conceptual space, taking media art out from under the dogmas of the art market where the standing of media art is not as stable as painting or sculpture. We see ourselves as part of this space. However, our approaches and core principles may vary, so we would like to outline our activities and fundamental values that underpin our project's foundation.

Mission, values, ideas behind

- *Community.* We position ourselves as a tailor-made project, not only technically assembling and building the platform from scratch but also actively engaging with feedback from artists, curators, and experts, adjusting and reassembling various aspects of our architecture, approaches, and more. We are careful but flexible in our solutions, building the platform together with our community of different media art actors, preferring the concept of "ecosystem" to "infrastructure." Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, we do not limit ourselves to the online realm, which opens up more avenues for us to shape and strengthen the CIFRA

community. Besides working together online, we participate in offline events, where we present the project, conduct screenings, network, and gather CIFRA friends to talk and exchange ideas.

Online presence is an important and valuable tool, but we believe that a strict distinction between the real and the virtual is not entirely relevant in today's world. Referring to Hito Steyerl's observations and intuition [2], images have already gained a certain autonomy. They actively contribute to shaping the way we see, think, and act, and this is partly linked to new practices of their distribution. We do not see virtual space as a simulacrum of reality but rather as a space that influences and enriches our experiences. We emphasize the bridges between these spaces and the transitions from one to the other.

- *Accessibility and complex architecture*. CIFRA is accessible to a wide range of audiences. The platform has a complex landscape designed for different user groups — artists (both emerging and institutionally recognized), curators, viewers, collectors, institutions, and more. We do not aim to bypass intermediaries; on the contrary, we want to provide each actor with a place and easier access to information about each other. We also cater to media art researchers, educators, students, art experts, and various audience groups. We understand that art cannot be formatted, and not all art is screen-oriented. On the one hand, we aim to develop other formats for presenting complex technological art online. On the other, we believe that digital and media complement (do not oppose or replace) physical space and experiential encounters.

  We are also committed to lowering the barriers so that diverse audiences can engage with the intricate and nuanced work of artists. In addition to a visually intuitive interface, we strive to elucidate complex themes through associations, cultivate a structured genre framework, and develop a distinctive vocabulary.

  One of the formats we develop to promote inclusivity is CIFRA TV, our own media. CIFRA TV covers events in the media arts and interviews with curators, artists, and galleries, thus fostering the exchange of knowledge and increasing accessibility to the worlds of art and technology.

- *Artists' support*. We are shaping a model that allows different artists to share their work and earn from streaming. Our platform has a royalty system that we refine, considering the differences in various media and viewing experiences — media art is not as homogeneous in format as music. We approach all aspects of forming our ecosystem responsibly, developing a fund from memberships to support artists. We also support artists through the CIFRA Award in developing their media art projects and our own channels (editorial materials, newsletters, social media).

- *Representation of different regions*. One of our most important goals is to create an environment where everyone can make themselves heard. CIFRA does not have a narrow regional focus. We strive to pay enough attention to different artists so viewers and the professional community can discover new names and refine their discernment. CIFRA's art team has curatorial experience, and our approach is based on treating artists with the utmost respect and care. Experienced and critically thinking lawyers, marketers, and IT specialists also work on the project, and we constantly organize exchanges of ideas and approaches. Together with members of our community (curators, art historians, artists…), we regularly work to highlight different artists (institutional and renowned alongside emerging authors) and their works through thematic and regional approaches.

- *Anarchive*. We position CIFRA as an anarchive, referring to the concept developed by media theorist Wolfgang Ernst [3]. Ernst imagines the archive as a procedural and dynamic structure, contrasting it with a static repository of artifacts from the past. Inspired by these ideas, we are making efforts to engage different viewers to interact with the CIFRA media archive in real time. The anarchive seems to be a relevant format for moving images and other media formats. An encyclopedia or archive of moving images cannot consist entirely of text. Images are juxtaposed and assembled differently than text. The platform's architecture emphasizes users' active participation in reshaping the archive, allowing collective and non-linear work in terms of temporality (participants can shape their own experience). Thus, the archive becomes a creative space where new meanings and connections can emerge.

We place great importance on our immediate colleagues' professional insights, critiques, and suggestions. Collaboratively, we strive to progress responsibly, taking deliberate steps forward.

References

[1] Glowacki, S. (2023). *A New Era for the Distribution of Media Art*. Lima. P.95.

[2] Hito Steyerl. (2017). *Duty free art*. Verso.

[3] Wolfgang Ernst, & Jussi Parikka. (2013). *Digital memory and the archive*. University Of Minnesota Press, Cop.

Authors biographies

Olga Shishko is a professor, media art specialist, founder, director, and curator of the MediaArtLab Center for Culture and Art, which has been part of Ca Foscari University (Venezia) since 2023. She is the curator of numerous exhibitions and projects, including *Bill Viola. Journey of the Soul*, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 2021; *At the end abides the beginning. Tintoretto's Secret Brotherhood.* Church of San Fantin, Venice, 2019; *Man as a bird. Images of travel.* Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel, Venice, 2017; *The Golden Age of the Russian Avant-garde.* Museum and Exhibition Association «Manezh,» Moscow, 2014. Currently, she is a visiting professor at Ca' Foscari University. She works with the Media Art Lab Archive and researches media art in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Olga takes the position of head of the Art Department on the CIFRA platform for media art. She currently resides and works in Venice, Italy.

Anastasia Stravinsky is a *c*urator and art critic currently pursuing a double Ph.D. in History of Art and Cultural Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Anastasia has curated over 60 art projects, including *Last Whispers. Oratorio for Vanishing Voices, Collapsing Universes and a Falling Tree*, 59th Venice Biennale, CFZ, Venice, 2022; *Pump Up the Volume* video program, CSAR, Venice, 2021; *FACED2FACED* multimedia performance-mystery, 58th Venice Biennale: Ca' Foscari, La Serra dei Gardini, Bugno Art Gallery, Venice, 2019; *To See the Sound* international festival, The 6th Moscow Biennale. Anastasia is the director of the Art Department on the CIFRA platform for media art. She currently resides and works in Venice, Italy.

Elena Golub (presenter) is a film researcher, essayist, filmeur, and plant lover. Elena holds an MA in Art Criticism: Film Criticism and Theory (Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University) and a BA in Philosophy (Philosophy Department, Ural Federal University). With a background in culture, education, publishing, and the non-profit sectors, she currently holds the position of Coordinator of Educational Projects at CIFRA, a streaming platform for media art. Her academic and artistic interests include media theory, cultural and personal memory, techniques of the self, botany, film, and independent publishing. Elena lives and works in Tbilisi, Georgia.