

Institut für Gegenwartskünste | IFCAR
Institute for Contemporary Arts Research

Purpose

The Institute for Contemporary Arts Research (IFCAR) was founded in 2005 to promote and establish artistic research and other closely related inquiry on an institutional basis.

Artistic Research

In institutional terms, artistic research is a fledgling research discipline in Europe. In the arts, however, experimental exploration as a form of individual research is far from a recent development, for it looks back on a longstanding tradition. The cultural significance of such research and its findings has been granted social and scientific recognition; history proves this, and those sciences engaging with art bear likewise to the fact. While artistic and scientific research have much in common in pragmatic terms, their specific tools and strategies differ. Artistic research can be likened to the humanities and social sciences with regard to its subject and the knowledge it produces. Pragmatism suggests that its exploratory experimenting with the habitual distinctions about human action, perception, notions, and assertions renders artistic work comparable to philosophical thinking. Notwithstanding such affinity, it will undoubtedly take some time for artistic research and the findings it arrives at through genuinely creative means to gain widespread acceptance in the context of academic research.

Functions and Tasks of the Institute

The IFCAR has an operational and strategic function. On an operational level, it adopts both internal and external measures that strengthen the conduct of research. Internal measures include developing research skills, providing ongoing training for researchers, supporting the conception and management of research projects, and conducting internal quality assurance controls. The Institute is strongly committed to fostering exchange between the members of its research community and providing optimal research conditions. External measures include

sustaining relationships with research, industry, and funding partners, communicating with funding bodies, and conducting public relations and marketing. Strategic measures involve defining core research areas with a view to developing a distinctive research profile. It also formulates strategic objectives and adopts the measures necessary to achieve these.

The IFCAR has three principal tasks: research and development, service, and knowledge transfer. Research and development activities include initiating, undertaking, and publishing research projects, fostering professional dialogue, and maintaining public relations – the latter in particular through convening events designed to present research findings, along with themes and issues relevant to research. With regard to service, the IFCAR undertakes commissioned projects and employs its core skills and research projects to provide consultancy to third parties. Knowledge transfer activities comprise courses and lectures especially designed to develop research skills and disseminate research findings as well as knowledge exchange with cooperation partners and third parties. The IFCAR contributes to ensuring knowledge transfer within the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) through staff members who serve as faculty on Department of Art & Media BA and MA courses.

Core Competencies of the Institute

The IFCAR focuses on artistic research. Research in art means conducting research as artistic practice – through art and its specific activities and questions, which can be safely attributed to art as a discipline. Artistic research is largely carried out by artists, and becomes tangibly manifest in art projects or works of art. The knowledge or skills (that is, the procedural knowledge) arising from such research inheres in the work itself, in that insights are gained implicitly through its production and understanding. Production and knowledge are one. Within the framework of institutional research, accompanying observation and resulting comments enable one to render explicit the process of artistic exploration, that is, “verifiable” through closer discursive and intersubjective scrutiny. By providing such a framework, the IFCAR also accounts for the relevance of research projects investigating knowledge, the art system, and society.

The majority of IFCAR research projects involve cooperation with other disciplines or business and industry partners. Artistic research thus enters into relationships with other fields of action, competence, and knowledge. While such projects are as a rule oriented towards application, artistic research can nevertheless focus on basic research. It thus forms part of an

enterprise involving the sciences, technology, economics, politics, ethics, various cultures, and different forms of life.

The IFCAR also promotes and undertakes research projects not focused on *research* but on *utilising* and *rendering fruitful* artistic skills without a specific artistic intention.

Core Research Areas

IFCAR research is not organised along thematic lines or determined by prevailing media issues (such as “Art and Science,” “Globalisation,” “Media Change”); rather it reaches across various genres and is guided by categories like “function” or “forms of knowledge”. Current research focuses on four thematic areas; these are partly interrelated and may become more concrete or undergo change during the next few years.

The first area, *Technologies and Art*, comprises projects researching the functions that art can perform in interaction with new technologies. For example, media technologies available today enable translocal spaces which in turn create new kinds of social spaces – based on the various forms of exchange and movement occurring therein. Work in this area explores new forms of artistic practice feasible in such diversely integrated, intercultural public spheres. While artistic research starts out from the impact of technology on society, it reaches far beyond the experimental uses of new communication technologies.

The second area, *Art in Public Space*, investigates how art can reflect, and recreate, contemporary public concerns. Work focuses on developing and testing new functions that art can claim under ever changing social conditions, locations, and contexts. This area thus examines the interrelations between artistic experimenting and social factors hitherto unaffected by art.

The third area, *Philosophy of Art*, conceives artistic research virtually as philosophy, as thinking in art. Work focuses on the exploratory experimenting with habitual aesthetic and ethical distinctions, and with various forms of perception, sensory notions, and artistic claims. Whereas this area focuses on a specific form of artistic *activity*, the fourth, *Epistemologies of Art*, considers the epistemic distinctions between its *findings* and their status. Projects in this area centre on the various forms of knowledge resulting from artistic research. For example, work here produces and renders concrete procedural knowledge, sensory skills, specific insights, or “heightened knowledge” comprising various skills.

Even though IFCAR research focuses neither on devising a notion of research appropriate to art nor on the notion of art itself, the majority of research undertaken at the Institute involves ongoing work on these notions, and as such on a timely conception of art and artistic research.

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