

Jasenka Ferber Bogdan

The Fine Arts Archives

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, Croatia

THE FIRST VIRTUAL EXHIBITION ON DIZBI (DIGITAL COLLECTION OF CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS) – PICASSO’S 80th BIRTHDAY

Abstract: In the year 2013 the first virtual exhibition *Pablo Picasso, 80th birthday celebration, Vallauris 1961* was introduced to Digital collection of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (DIZBI) to widen the public interest in archival material and encourage more users to explore the collections. The exhibition uses the possibilities of different digitized formats, such as text, picture, audio and video, for presenting the material more vividly and attractively. The content of the virtual exhibition is automatically connected to the content and metadata of DIZBI, thus giving the full description and allowing more detailed view of the exhibits. By extracting the most interesting parts of the already presented material of the Fine Arts Archives collection the authors of virtual exhibition had new opportunities and freedom to communicate a specific theme in a more interesting way.

Keywords: virtual exhibition, Pablo Picasso, photographs, digitization, Fine Arts Archives, digital repository

1. Virtual exhibitions – wide possibilities for presentation of cultural heritage

According to the *Handbook on virtual exhibitions and virtual performances* [4], a virtual exhibition is a “hypermedia collection of carefully selected digital items, tied together to form a narrative or logical itinerary”. Its prerequisites are diverse media, such as text, image, audio and video materials – that is, the content of an exhibition. A prerogative of every virtual exhibition is context, which makes the exhibition lively and narrative-like, more approachable to viewers. Thus, digital objects have to be linked by “... some idea, theme, concept, relational scheme ...” [10].

There are two kinds of virtual exhibitions – an extension of real, “physical” exhibition or independent, in virtual space only. An “independent”, online presentation of a particular theme or narrative, which can be done with a very limited budget, becomes a new value, especially for archives and libraries, which do not have many opportunities to show their rich and diverse material, often displayed just as a supplementary part of real exhibitions.

An overview of the first kind of virtual exhibitions, i.e. the one that extends the real ones, shows a huge diversity of solutions with different degrees of complexity – from advertising showcase of real exhibitions with highlights of the most important artefacts [5], through virtual visits of real exhibitions [6], to complex virtual displays with full use of various media technologies [1, 8]. The best virtual exhibitions of this kind provide alternative experiences to the real events, involving the viewer in the process of discovery, knowledge acquisition and learning [4].

On the other hand, the second kind – independent virtual exhibitions, without the reference to the real ones – is less frequently present on the web. These exhibitions, usually made by institutions (archives or libraries) which do not have many exhibition activities in their regular programs, are very rare. However, in the recent years new projects have been emerging, specifically dedicated to development and promotion of this kind of virtual exhibitions, for example website *Europeana Exhibitions*¹.

¹ Europeana Exhibitions. Available at: <http://exhibitions.europeana.eu/>

There is a big difference between a virtual exhibition and a depository of images comprising descriptive texts. Although such depositories are usually referred to as *online exhibitions*, they do not use a full potential of the new media, but instead transfer visual concepts of traditional exhibiting methods to the Internet [2, 3]. Clearly, this confusion in terminology requires “new multidisciplinary theory and practice ... for the digital presentation of the heritage” [10].

Virtual exhibitions on Croatian web sites are usually extensions of real exhibitions and just a few of them exist only virtually. In the recently published *Catalogue of Croatian online exhibitions*, that appeared as a part of the doctoral thesis of Maja Šojat-Bikić [9], out of 33 online exhibitions only one third was made exclusively for online presentation, but even those did not fulfill basic conditions and terms of virtual exhibiting. Thus, the exhibition *Pablo Picasso – 80th birthday celebration, Vallauris 1961* [7], prepared by The Fine Arts Archives, represents a qualitative and up-to-date addition to the development of Croatian virtual exhibitions landscape.

2. DIZBI as a platform for virtual exhibitions

The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts was founded in 1861 as the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts with the goal of promoting and uniting the highest scientific, cultural and artistic achievements of all South Slavs. After Croatian declaration of independence in 1991 it changed its name to the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

In 2009 Academy’s rich scientific, cultural and artistic collections, held by various Academy units, became a base for building up a unified digital repository (in Croatian: *Digitalna zbirka - DIZBI*)² (Figure 1). DIZBI consists of nine different parts – the library, the archives, three galleries and four research units, offering free web access. Standardized and up-to-date technical support is provided by the IT company ArhivPro. The inclusion of more collections is expected in the future. Different kinds of material, including books, magazines, exhibition catalogues, art objects, photographs, documentation and manuscripts, are presented. The advantage of such an integrated repository is the availability of searching across all Academy institutions and metadata as additional source of information for every digitized unit.

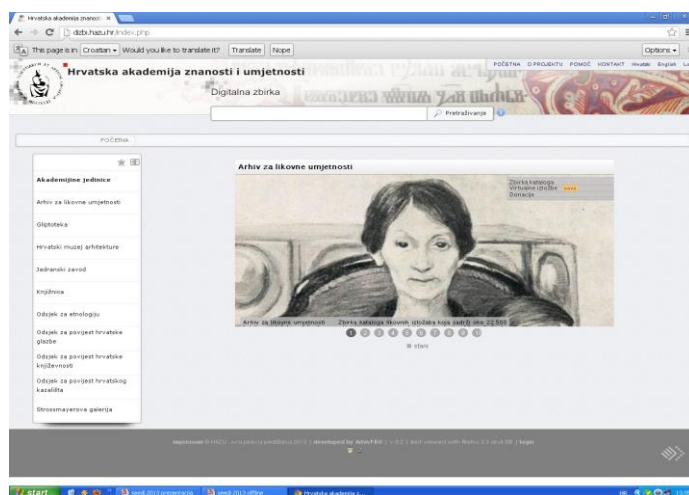


Figure 1: Digital collection of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts – DIZBI

² Digitalna zbirka Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti – DIZBI. (Digital Collection of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts). Available at: <http://dizbi.hazu.hr/>.

The Fine Arts Archives, founded in 1952 as one of Academy's units, is dedicated to systematic collection, processing and preservation of fundamental documentary materials related to Croatian fine arts from the 19th century to contemporary times. The Archives also holds art related documentation and exhibition catalogues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. The Archives' collection of Croatian and foreign exhibition catalogues represents one of the most complete collections of this kind in Croatia. Though the main focus is on Croatian art from 19th century to the present, this collection is of interest not only to Croatian but to foreign researchers as well. The Archives keeps several very rare exhibition catalogues, for example catalogue of the first Dalmatian-Croatian-Slavonic exhibition (*Prva izložba dalmatinsko-hrvatsko-slavonska*) held in Zagreb in 1864, *Catalogue de l'Exposition Austro-Hongroise* from Moscow, published in 1899, Yugoslav catalogue from *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, Paris 1925 and catalogue of *International Theatre Exposition*, New York 1926.

The Fine Arts Archives started digitizing its material in 2008, with the oldest and rare exhibition catalogues, that became the base for development of whole digitized collection (Figure 2). Further additions to DIZBI from the Fine Arts Archives side will include personal photographs, photographs of art objects and exhibitions, artists' correspondence, sketchbooks, press material, etc.

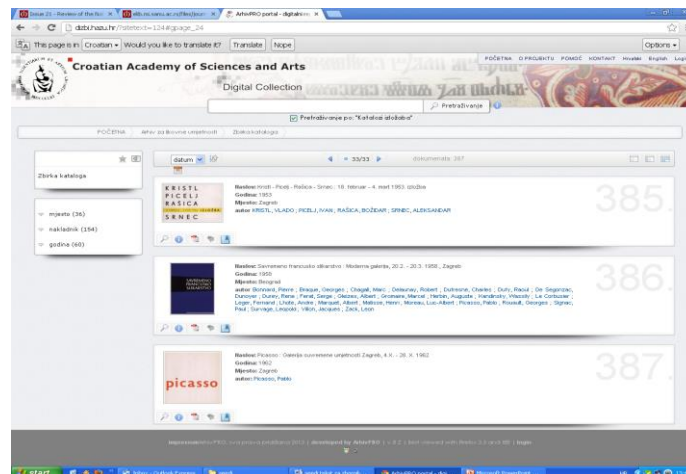


Figure 2: DIZBI/Fine Arts Archives – Catalogue collection

In order to increase the visibility of the project and widen the public interest in archival and library material, the DIZBI team decided to start developing online exhibitions, giving the Fine Arts Archives an opportunity to be the first to participate.

3. Planning and realization of the virtual exhibition *Pablo Picasso, 80th birthday celebration, Vallauris 1961*

The theme of celebration of Picasso's birthday was chosen because of its actuality and attractiveness. Namely, Picasso's exhibition, held from March to June 2013 in the Klovićevi dvori Gallery in Zagreb, was attracting lots of attention at the time. The Fine Arts Archives online curatorial team, Darija Alujević, Andreja Der-Hazarijan Vukić and Jasenka Ferber Bogdan, decided to bring out some of the rare and never published archival material related to this great artist – *dizbi.hazu.hr/picasso* (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Pablo Picasso – 80th Birthday Celebration, Vallauris 1961*, home page

The foundation of the exhibition was a collection of private documents, texts and photographs made by Croatian art historian Mrs. Vesna Barbić, donated to the Fine Arts Archives in 2008. In 1961, as the director of the City Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, she was invited to the celebration of Picasso's 80th birthday in Vallauris, France, where the famous artist lived from 1948 to 1955. During her visit to France, Vesna Barbić made a series of very interesting and unique photographs of the two-day celebration in Vallauris and the nearby museum in Antibes. Upon her return, she wrote several reports of the journey and published her impressions in the art journal *15 dana*.

The virtual exhibition consists of selected documents and photographs from the Barbić donation followed by texts in Croatian and English, with *passo doble* as favorite Picasso's music. The text is formed of excerpts from Barbić's reports, carefully chosen to follow the exhibits and make the story more complete. Technically predisposed linearity of this virtual exhibition logically corresponds with the narrative character of story-telling. The authors decided not to distract the attention of a viewer and the dynamics of the exhibition by adding numerous references, links or unnecessary text. The applied technical solution allows a viewer to post the exhibition on social networks. Furthermore, with the help of external links some video material is available, together with a possibility to visit web sites of relevant institutions in case a viewer is interested in more information on particular topic.

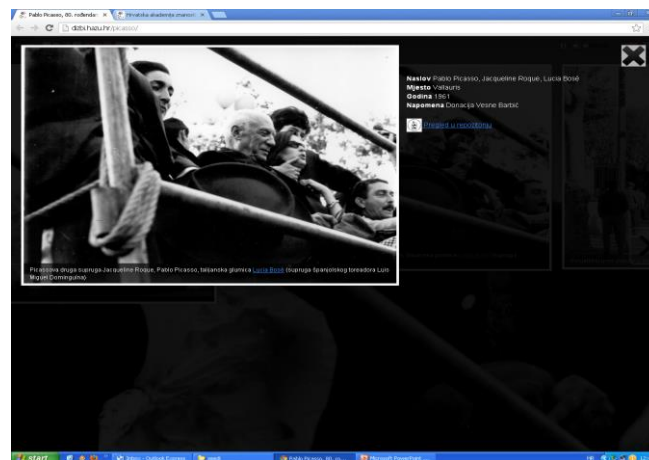


Figure 4: Set of metadata for the exhibition photograph

The first virtual exhibition on DIZBI uses an up-to-date method of connecting the content of the exhibition to the content and metadata of the repository. Each photograph is accompanied with the set of basic metadata from DIZBI (Figure 4), and a link to the repository where a viewer can enlarge the photo by using *Silverlight*³, thus getting a more detailed insight (Figure 5).

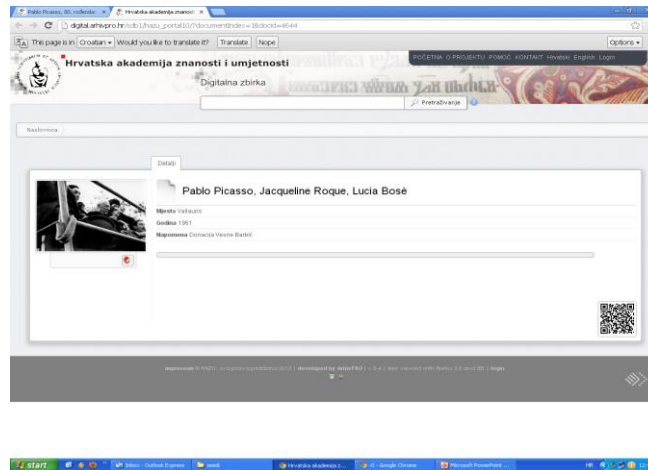


Figure 5: Repository metadata of the photography with the possibility of display in *Silverlight*

The exhibition was advertised through the website of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and through press releases sent to various institutions. Further dissemination included promotion of the virtual exhibition and a lecture given by Andreja Der-Hazarijan Vukić, one of the online curators, held at the Klovićevi dvori gallery. This event was a part of a series of lectures during Picasso's exhibition at the same gallery.

The exhibition was presented on the national TV channel, in the main cultural programme *Pola ure kulture*, which included an interview with Mrs Barbić, the author of the exhibited material. Also, it was reviewed in an article published in the daily newspapers *Večernji list* and advertised on several Croatian cultural websites.

4. Some final thoughts – the first experience of online exhibiting

There are many advantages of virtual exhibiting. Here are some thoughts drawn from the Fine Arts Archives' team experience:

1. The cost of this kind of presentation is low.
2. The exhibition is available to broader audience.
3. The exhibition remains accessible around the clock, since it is not limited to the duration of the actual event and "opening hours".
4. The exhibition can be modified even after it becomes public (which we found very useful already).
5. A new possibility of displaying archival material that is less appropriate for conventional exhibitions.

One of the problems that we became aware of during the preparation phase of the exhibition was related to the copyright. Complex copyright issues tend to be a problem for cultural institutions in Croatia, because of unclear copyright laws and lack of practice. Due to

³ Microsoft Silverlight. Available at: <http://www.microsoft.com/silverlight/>.

these facts it has been decided to choose exhibition material that had resolved copyright issues, i.e. just one person (the author of the photographs) and one institution (which prepared the exhibition and holds the donated materials) had the right to present material.

A new situation arose related to the planning of the exhibition in a virtual space - curatorial team actually never met with the IT expert, but instead numerous e-mails were exchanged, which saved a lot of time usually spent in long meetings.

5. Future plans

Future plans of DIZBI virtual exhibitions project is to continuously promote cultural heritage preserved by the Academy. For the Archives' team, this means referring to recent and historic cultural events and reminding the public of artists' anniversaries and opuses. One of the important online communication instruments – user feedback, was not included in this first exhibition project, but is certainly planned for the coming events.

By extracting the most interesting parts of the material already presented on DIZBI, the prospective authors of virtual exhibitions now have new opportunities and freedom to communicate a specific theme in a different and more attractive way.

References

- [1] *Archives of American Art. Monuments Men: On the Front Line to Save Europe's Art, 1942–1946.* Available at: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/exhibitions/monuments-men>
- [2] *Avantgarde museum. Fedja Gavrilović: Enformel kao protusvijet.* Available at: <http://www.avantgarde-museum.com/hr/museum/virtualna-izlozba/4298-enformel-kao-protusvijet/>
- [3] *Galerija Striegl. Slavo Striegl – Animalizam.* Available at: <http://www.galerija-striegl.hr/11-striegl-animalizam.php#1>
- [4] *Handbook on virtual exhibitions and virtual performances – version 1.0.* INDICATE, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, ICCU, 2012.
- [5] *Muzej za umjetnost i obrt. Saša Šekoranja.* Available at: http://www.muoz.hr/hr/aktualno/izlozbe/sasa-sekoranja_-viseglasja,1048,215.html
- [6] *National Gallery of Art. Van Gogh's Van Goghs.* Available at: <http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/gogh/html/realspace/room1-room0.htm>
- [7] *Pablo Picasso. Proslava osamdesetog rođendana – Vallauris 1961. (Pablo Picasso. 80th Birthday Celebration – Vallauris 1961).* Available at: <http://dizbi.hazu.hr/picasso/>
- [8] *Smithsonian. National Museum of Natural History. African voices.* Available at: <http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/>
- [9] Šojat-Bikić, M. *Modeliranje digitalnih zbirki i digitalnih proizvoda: sadržajno-korisnički aspekt komuniciranja kulturne baštine u digitalnom obliku.* *Muzeologija*, 50, 2013.
- [10] Šojat-Bikić, M. *Virtualne izložbe: Meštrović u Kaštelima i neidentificirani muzejski objekti (NMO) u kiberprostoru.* *Informatica Museologica*, 41 (1-4), 2010, 98-107.