Secondary Archive
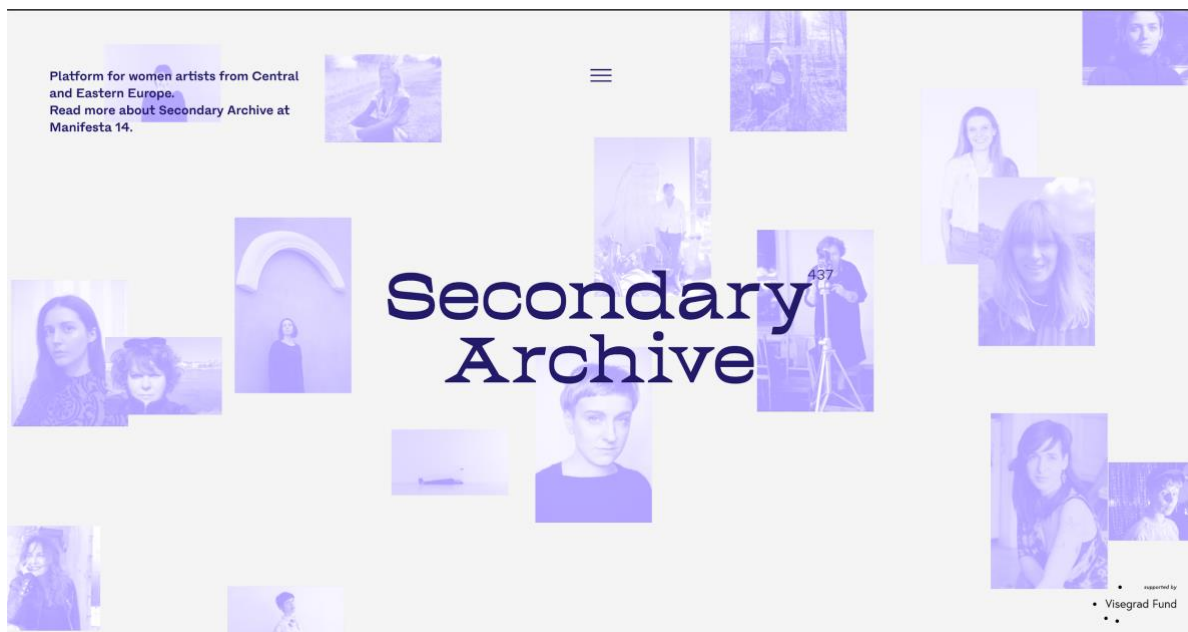
Reviewed by:
A.M. LaVey, Librarian for Ukrainian Visual Culture
The Ukrainian Museum, New York
AMLaVey@gmail.com

Home page for Secondary Archive

Secondary Archive is a website-based digital platform that documents information about women artists from central and east Europe, from the 1930s through the present. The 2020 project went online in 2021, showcasing artists from Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. In 2022 it grew to include artists from Belarus and Ukraine, and in 2023, from Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. The site's name references philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's monograph *The Second Sex,* in which the author states that women are secondary to men in their very existence. This is true in the art

world as well where it is a <u>matter of record</u> women are largely absent from the greater art historical canon. There is a *second* secondary meaning in which the countries of central and eastern Europe are not often included with the so-called first world of the West, and instead are relegated to the Cold War construct of the so-called second world. It is within this understanding that the Secondary Archive was created, to <u>make visible the doubly-invisible work</u> of central and east European women <u>neglected</u> by art historians both at home and abroad.

The website's format is intuitive and easy to use. The main focus of the website is the <u>artist index</u>, which can be sorted by country, generation and subject. Country, the default option, lists the about 500 artists first by two letter country code and then by last name both in Latin and Cyrillic formats per individual artist. Sorting by generation splits the artists up by the following years: 1930-1950s, 1960-1970s and 1980-2000s. Sorting by subject brings up a browsable, alphabetical list of wide-ranging controlled vocabulary terms referencing the media, subject matter, and abstract concepts represented in the artists' work, such as "mosaic," "memory," or "war."

Example of an artist's page, for Masha Maroz

Records for each artist include a portrait, a biographical note and the artist's statement–both in their native language as well as in English. The artist can also provide a website, along with additional textual and visual information, including reference photographs of their work as part of their statements. Some statements are written collaboratively with curators, while others are collected or edited by them.

The website's primary use of English allows for greater discovery and wider accessibility, as well as translating this information outside the artists' region. Importantly, the inclusion of the artists' original statements in their native languages actively prevents cultural erasure and provides researchers with primary sources.

There is no search bar on the landing page. The user must click the floating triple bar menu button and select the search option. Running a couple test searches in both Latin and Cyrillic search terms, the search function returned entries from artist records and essays, but also returned multiple website technical error messages on each search.

In addition to the artist index, the site offers critical essays by some of the project's curators and site news, as well as information about the archive, the regional curators, the project's management and funding. This project was initiated by a Polish foundation established in 2012 that focuses on women in various cultural roles with the stated aim of improving interregional development.

Art and artists from central and east Europe are largely unknown to the international public. This project is ongoing, but has indeed met its intention to bring attention to and make visible women artists from these regions by promoting them and documenting their work–including recording their own words. A quick bibliometric analysis shows that the site has been cited by international scholars since 2021. Also in 2021, Wikidata approved the Secondary Archive artist ID as an authority control property for artists.

This resource will be of great interest to scholars and students of art history, central and east European studies, gender studies and information studies, as well as artists seeking to make additional cultural connections and broaden their community of practice.