

RomArchive - Digital Archive of the Roma

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RomArchive – Digital Archive of the Roma

RomArchive, the Digital Archive of the Roma – funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation – makes the arts and cultures of Roma visible and illustrates their contribution to European cultural history. Through narratives told by Roma themselves, RomArchive creates a reliable source of knowledge that will be accessible internationally on the Internet to counteract stereotypes and prejudices with facts.

In terms of content, 14 curators define the presentation and select exemplary artistic contributions for the archive sections on dance, film, literature, music, theatre and drama, visual arts, and the interdisciplinary field of flamenco, as well as material on politics of photography, self-testimonies related to the persecution of Roma in National Socialism and scientific material on the civil rights movement. The archive's ever-expanding collection exemplifies the enormous range and diversity of cultural identities and national idiosyncrasies as an integral part of its approach, rather than conveying an unrealistic image of a homogeneous »Romani culture«. Here, the wealth of an artistic and cultural production—centuries old, lively and varied to this very day—becomes visible and publicly accessible for the first time in such a wide scope.

The participants in the project—within the various working groups there are around 150 actors from 15 countries across Europe and beyond—form a worldwide network of artists, scientists and activists, most of whom come from a Roma community. They make RomArchive currently the largest cultural project of, for and with Roma in which the principle of »Romani Leadership« is consistently implemented: Roma have shaped the archive in all key positions. The core group of the project consists of about 40 people who have met regularly to exchange information, including the curators of the ten archive sections and the international advisory board, which supported the curators and determined the strategic guidelines of the project. Thus, RomArchive has become an international place of intensive debate long before the actual realisation of the online archive. Here the most diverse interests, cultural identities and national differences came together—German Sinti, Spanish Gitanos, Eastern European Roma and Romani Travellers from Great Britain discussed a common goal: How can self-representation succeed despite all differences? How can counter-narratives and counter-images be created to contrast against the constantly repeated external attributions and stereotypes with which everyone is confronted?

For it is not Roma who dominate their image in public, but rather the clichés, attributions and images of others in the majority populations—which have always been marked by a mixture of fascination and contempt. There is hardly any positive counter-image or enlightenment about the reality and cultures of Roma. In the approximately 600-year history of Roma in Europe, they have been subject to numerous forms of discrimination and persecution almost everywhere since the end of the 15th century at the latest. The Nazi regime

organized the genocide of approximately 500,000 Sinti and Roma, which was recognized as such by the German government in 1982—only 37 years after the end of the Second World War. And it was not until 2012 that an important memorial for this social group was created in Berlin, the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime. But even political successes have little changed the fact that Roma continue to be subjected to sweeping defamation and social, economic and cultural discrimination.

Exclusion and disregard are revealed not least by the fact that the diverse cultures of Roma are largely ignored in European cultural institutions. To this day, there is hardly any place in Europe where they can tell and present their own arts, cultures and history. RomArchive will become this place. Here, the part that Roma have played in European cultural productions over the centuries and still play—for example in the music of Flamenco or Balkan Brass—is finally being made visible as theirs.

The archive website is trilingual (German, English and Romani) and through images and stories provides a lively introduction to the individual topics—an opportunity for majority societies to ascertain the richness of their culture, to which Roma have contributed much more than most people are aware, a way for minority representatives to reclaim their own arts, their own art history and their own cultures.

Following the launch of RomArchive, it will be institutionalized. The two project initiators, Isabel Raabe and Franziska Sauerbrey, will then hand over the responsibility of RomArchive to a European Roma organisation, which will be chosen by the advisory board. The archive itself is then to become a platform for networking: a trustworthy place to make one's own cultural production visible and to get in touch with Romani cultural practitioners and scholars.

RomArchive has strong partners: The German Federal Cultural Foundation supports the project with 3.75 million euros. This is a clear signal: One of the largest public foundations in Europe is dedicated to Europe's largest minority, recognizing and promoting the richness of its centuries-old culture. The European Roma Cultural Foundation and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma assisted the project from the very beginning. The Goethe-Institut supports the work of RomArchive and accompanies it with events. The Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen is the cooperation partner for the technological implementation. The Federal Agency for Civic Education is involved in the promotion of RomArchive and intends to support the editorial management of the archive for a further five years from 2019 onwards. RomArchive is also supported by the Federal Foreign Office.

www.romarchive.eu

Press contact

Denhart v. Harling, press@romarchive.eu, T: +49 179 4963497



Weblinks For Background Information

Video interview with RomArchive's project initiators

https://blog.romarchive.eu/?page_id=9023

Isabel Raabe and Franziska Sauerbrey explain how RomArchive originated and shed light on the structures and background of the project.

Video interview with Professor Ethel Brooks, member of RomArchive's Advisory Board

https://blog.romarchive.eu/?page_id=8357

What possibilities are there to fight stereotypes by using artistic strategies and how can Roma defend and reappropriate their culture?

Éva Ádám: »Investigation of Picture Agency Databases – On Poverty, Musicians and the Invisibility of Discrimination«

https://blog.romarchive.eu/?page_id=8512

Éva Ádám and the Politics of Photography archive section have carried out research on the classification and indexing of images of Roma in relevant picture agencies.

Jürgen Keiper: »Our precarious legacy – Discriminatory and racist materials in archives«

https://blog.romarchive.eu/?page_id= 7435

In 2016, archive representatives from a wide variety of fields discussed the presentation of discriminatory and racist content in their institutions.

Professor Dr Hristo Kyuchukov: »International Romani Language Day«

https://blog.romarchive.eu/?page_id=8874

Professor Dr Hristo Kyuchukov explains the history and linguistic backgrounds of the Romani language.



Project Participants

Curators

Dr Thomas Acton

Sociologist (Great Britain) Curator, Romani Civil Rights Movement archive section

Katalin Bársony

Filmmaker (Hungary)
Curator, Film archive section

Isaac Blake

Dancer and choreographer (Great Britain) Curator, Dance archive section

Dr Beate Eder-Jordan

Literary theorist (Austria) Curator, Literature archive section

Dr Karola Fings

Historian (Germany) Curator, »Voices of the Victims« archive section

Dr Petra Gelbart

Musician and ethnomusicologist (Czech Republic/USA) Curator, Music archive section

Tímea Junghaus

Art historian and curator (Hungary) Curator, Visual Arts archive section

Dr Angéla Kóczé

Sociologist (Hungary) Curator, Romani Civil Rights Movement archive section

Dr Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka

Anthropologist (Poland), Curator, Romani Civil Rights Movement archive section

Gonzalo Montaño Peña

Musicologist (Spain) Curator, Interdisciplinary Section Flamenco

André Raatzsch

Media artist and theorist (Germany) Curator, Politics of Photography archive section

Dragan Ristić

Cultural manager, theatre director, musician (Serbia) Curator, Theatre & Drama archive section

Dr Jan Selling

Historian (Sweden)

Curator, Romani Civil Rights Movement archive section

Miguel Ángel Vargas

Art historian, theatre director, actor, musician (Spain) Co-curator, Theatre & Drama archive section

Advisory Board

Pedro Aguilera Cortés

Political scientist (Spain)

Dr Gerhard Baumgartner

Historian (Austria)

Dr Nicoleta Bitu (Chair)

Democratic Federation of Roma from Romania (Romania)

Professor Dr Klaus-Michael Bogdal (Deputy Chair)

Literary theorist (Germany)

Professor Dr Ethel Brooks

Sociologist (USA)

Ágnes Daróczi

Cultural manager (Hungary)

Merfin Demir (Deputy Chair)

Terno Drom – Intercultural Youth Self-Organization of Roma and Non-Roma in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)

Dr Jana Horváthová

Museum of Romani Culture (Czech Republic)

Zeljko Jovanovic

Roma Initiatives Office (Hungary)

Oswald Marschall

Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma (Germany)

Moritz Pankok

Gallery Kai Dikhas (Germany)

Romani Rose

Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Germany)

Riccardo M Sahiti

Roma and Sinti Philharmonic Orchestra (Serbia/Germany)

Dr Anna Szász

Sociologist (Hungary)

Project Initiators

Isabel Raabe and Franziska Sauerbrey

sauerbrey | raabe gUG (limited liability) Elisabeth-Hof, Portal 1b Erkelenzdamm 59/61 10999 Berlin

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Partner responsible for the technical implementation



Further support









Quotes

»You cannot fight racism without making reference to history and the arts.« **Dr Nicoleta Bitu**

»The Roma Art label could become a really important way of reclaiming our practice, reclaiming our art history, reclaiming our culture.«

Professor Dr Ethel Brooks

»I am very glad that RomArchive allows us to raise awareness of our minority's important contributions to the cultures and histories of their respective home countries. We live in a democratic Europe, and this gives us the chance to voice grievances and at the same time to refer to and reassess our long history. This includes, for example, the role of Hungarian Roma in the uprisings of 1848 and, even more so, of 1956—just like the contributions to music, be it to classical music or modern jazz.«

Romani Rose

»Dance can be political. It can help people to analyze their own preconceptions of what is Roma.«

Isaac Blake

»The voices of the victims of the Nazi genocide are an impressive testimony to the power of self-assertion in the face of extermination.«

Dr Karola Fings

»Romani performers are masters of mixing historically separate genres, for reasons that go far beyond the oft-cited >Gypsy nomadism<.«

Dr Petra Gelbart

»We must start to write Roma history with Roma voices.«

Tímea Junghaus

»We want to tell the self-narrated history of the Roma movement and show Roma as agents for change.«

Dr Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka

»Emancipated images mean aesthetic resistance.«

André Raatzsch



Roma: Who Are We?

by **Dr Nicoleta Bitu**

(Chair of the RomArchive Advisory Board)

We Roma are first and foremost human beings, just like all other human beings. Unfortunately, we have not always been treated as such in history, nor are we even now.

Research in the fields of linguistics, anthropology and population genetics has meant that the long discussed Indian origins of Roma have started to be considered a fact. However, the exact reasons why we Roma left central and north-eastern India has not yet been clarified and remains open for further investigation. Our language, Romani, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan languages group, has been and remains the fingerprint of both our origins and our migration route, for it contains within itself the connection to the languages of the peoples we have come into contact with, such as the Greeks, Persians and Armenians in the pre-European era.

So if anyone wonders whether we are Europeans or not, the answer is found in these historical facts: we were most probably living in the Byzantine Empire – the territory of what is today's Greece – before 1200,² and there is consistent written evidence of our presence on European soil dating back to 1400, which is in fact when the first accounts of our deportations and expulsions appeared. By 1450 we had spread throughout Europe.

Meanwhile, in Wallachia and Moldavia (modern-day Romania),³ from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards we were forced into bondage and slavery for a period of five centuries, an enslavement comparable with that of African–Americans in the United States.

»Gypsies shall be born only as slaves; anyone born of a slave mother shall also become a slave«

(The code of Wallachia at the beginning of the nineteenth century)

We were owned by the prince (as »slaves of the state«), by monasteries and by boeri (as the aristocracy of the time was known). The slave owners had complete control over our anscestors' lives, from birth, through marriage, and until death – they even sometimes had the right to the virginity of young girls.

Towards the middle of nineteenth century, an abolitionist movement emerged among intellectuals in the Danubian principalities, influenced by the other European revolutions at the time, and this led to our liberation. It should

¹ https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/1.0_india-europe_english.pdf

 $^{^2\} https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/2.0_arrival-europe_english.pdf$

³ https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/2.2_wallachia-moldavia_english.pdf

be noted that the majority of private owners agreed to liberate us only if they received compensantation from the state. Once the emancipation of slaves had been achieved, the next issue to be raised – and one still being raised today – was that of our integration into the social and economic life of Romania. Traces of slavery persisted in the memories of former masters and their slaves, and the era of slavery has marked relations between the descendants of these two social strata to this day.

The fate of we Roma in Central Europe between our arrival and the eighteenth century was strongly determined by political changes and, of course, by conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, for example, in Hungarian territories we were confronted with two different policies until 1683, when the battle of Vienna took place: under Ottoman rule our artisanal and musical skills were appreciated, while in Habsburg controlled areas we were barely tolerated and faced bigoted assimilation policies. There were some regions along the western Hungarian border where both types of policies were present at the same time, making our lives even more difficult.

Although Roma were taxpayers, blacksmiths and soldiers, there were periods of time when we were forced to the peripheries of towns, evicted and subject to banning orders. Those of us who had letters of safe conduct issued by rulers were allowed to stay in central and western European countries. But even this limited right came to an end, and from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards more and more radical laws were issued to legalise persecution and make it more organised, a process which even led to killings. Spain and the Holy Roman Empire were the last to be affected by all these phenomena, which reached them only in the eighteenth century. We might say that these were all early manifestations of the anti-Gypsyism found across Europe.

Meanwhile, the Russian Empire treated us as equal subjects with corresponding full civil rights,⁴ while making an effort to make us meet our obligations as citizens. We might say that this was where mainstream policies were first implemented for we Roma. Wherever there was a »special« policy directed at Roma, the aim was to overcome separation from society without exerting pressure to achieve assimilation.

Spain pursued policies of assimilation, while Portugal and later the United Kingdom deported us to the Americas, which is one of the reasons for our presence there too. Another source of our existence in the Americas and Australia is what historians have termed the »second migration« in the mid-nineteenth century, with migrants coming mostly from central and south-eastern Europe in the wake of social changes and in particular the abolition of slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia.

More and more regulations were issued by the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1850 and 1938, restricting opportunities for Roma to earn a living, enforcing settlement and banning certain professions. Economic crisis and National Socialist propaganda aggravated the situation, and finally there was »forced labour, deportation and sterilisation« as a means of resolving the »Gypsy question« with a »National Socialist solution«.

Police checks on Roma were initiated as early as the mid-1920s in Germany and Austria. The media played a major role in promoting negative news articles and inflaming the existing prejudices. In the name of preventing crime the government identified and registered Roma and Sinti, which formed the

⁴ https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/3.2_russian-empire_english.pdf

basis for later systemic persecution by the National Socialists. In 1936 a central agency was formed to combat the »Gypsy problem« in Vienna. Heinrich Himmler intiated concerted action to eradicate Roma throughout the Reich. The Nuremberg racial laws of 1935 classified Roma and Sinti as »racially inferior«, leaving us without citizenship or rights. We were exterminated by means of forced labour, concentration camps, killings in forests or deportations. By 1945, roughly one in four Roma who had lived in pre-war Europe had fallen victim to Nazi persecution.

It is still unknown exactly how many Roma were casualties of the Nazi tyranny. Roma were not always registered as such, and might appear in victim statistics as members of the majority population, or as »others«, or not at all. Documents from the extermination camps and deportation lists were lost, are scattered in numerous archives or have not yet been analysed. Research has to rely on estimates, but whatever evidence is taken as the basis, a number of at least 250,000 victims is considered highly probable.

Even after we had been subjected to the Holocaust,⁵ our survivors were confronted with the same prejudices we had been forced to endure before 1933 throughout Europe. After 1945, there was no public interest in our fate at all. In Germany and Austria, restitution or compensation payments were issued later, but it took until the mid-1990s for us to receive proper offers. In the socialist countries, Roma were not officially recognised as victims of the Holocaust at all.

After World War II, a substantial number of us lived in the communist part of Europe, facing different degree of assimilation policies, while western European societies were marked by policies of integration or ignorance, combined with the sterilisation of women. The result of these policies has been an increase in the number of educated Roma but also an increased number of us losing our language and proud identity.

Despite this history of persecution, discrimination and marginalisation, we Roma have a rich cultural heritage – one that is part of European culture and has contributed to its development. This cultural heritage is now visible in RomArchive.

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⁵ https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/6.0_surviviors_english.pdf



RomArchive Ethical Guidelines 6

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The aim of RomArchive is to foster the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of Romani history, arts, and cultures. New narratives of both the past and present need to be created and preserved for future generations.

The RomArchive intends to counter and subvert not only the structural, secular racism that led to antigypsy representations of Romani identities, arts, and cultures, but also the hierarchy of non-Romani perspectives over Romani perspectives in the field of culture.

The material will be compiled and presented to proffer the entire scope of portrayals of Roma⁷ as protagonists, agents of change, survivors, and contributors to mainstream cultures and societies. This will also ensure that Roma are not portrayed solely as victims.

RomArchive is a cultural project, yet it reflects, and is framed by, its political context.

The work of the individual archival sectors is not intended to be an exhaustive and representative research project, but rather a curated collection that respects the following principles and guidelines:

- 1. RomArchive contributes to the cultural and intellectual diversity of Europe.
- 2. RomArchive increases the visibility of Romani cultures, in particular their self-representation, and actively seeks to enhance the profile, impact, and standing of these cultures. The archive approaches the history, language, and cultures of Roma as historical assets to be preserved, disseminated, and handed down to future generations.

⁶ These ethical guidelines represent the framework and principles for the entire project, governing its three main spheres—collection policy, access policy, and presentation policy. Some of these ethical guidelines are further detailed in the document »collection policy.« Issues of communication, property rights, and out-side fundraising are regulated in contracts with the individual curators.

⁷ The term »Roma« is used to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by RomArchive: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkans: Egyptians and Ashkali; c) Eastern groups: Dom, Lom and Abdal; and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term »Gens du voyage«, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

- 3. RomArchive guarantees equal rights and equal treatment of all persons, regardless of gender, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Only an atmosphere of mutual respect can ensure creative and productive work.
- 4. RomArchive guarantees freedom of opinion, freedom of artistic expression, and research and curatorial autonomy.
- 5. RomArchive rejects all racism and sexism.
- 6. The curators pledge to ensure that their work meets the highest standards of quality, and that their interaction with contributors is honest and accurate. No artist is to be included in the Archive against their expressed will. When it comes to the online-publication, personal and authorship rights (so far as known) as well as licensing rights and copyrights are to be strictly observed.
- 7. The curators also pledge not to use, or allow to be used, their skills or expertise for purposes that go against the goals of the archive, or for personal advantage or gain.
- 8. RomArchive is committed to Romani ownership as well as to the full participation of Roma.
- 9. The selection criterion for inclusion in the archive is the artistic quality of an artifact or its significance to cultural history.
- 10. Stereotypical or otherwise offensive representations⁸ of Roma may only be presented in the archive with contextualization or deconstruction of the content, in order to avoid additional harm or violation. This applies equally to art produced by Roma themselves.
- 11. RomArchive is fundamentally aimed at a wide audience, with broad access. Access for users will be free of charge.
- 12. RomArchive is not associated with any political party or association, and will respect the principles of transparency in all its activities.
- 13. RomArchive collects and presents artefacts and narratives in the original different dialects of the Romani language. When translating into the Romani language, an international academic Romanes will be used.

⁸ Racist or stereotypical representations can be divided into three distinct forms: racism that is obvious and personal; careless, unconscious or conscious use of stereotypes; and a deliberate (risky, provocative) artistic strategy for dealing with racism and stereotypes.



Collection Policy

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- 1. RomArchive respects the diversity among Roma⁹. All sections will try to prevent homogenization and essentialization of the Romani identity by covering as many artistic expressions as possible. Artists will not be included in RomArchive against their will.
- 2. Agreement on a common appellation for all Romani communities: »Roma« (en), »Sinti und Roma« (ge). These terms do also include those who lay claim to being Roma. If other appellations are used, either by outsiders or as self-identifiers, they will be contextualized in the presentation.
- 3. The diversity of Romani artistic approaches: Romani arts and cultures will be represented as a component and contribution to national and regional cultures in Europe and beyond. RomArchive does not intend to be self-segregating. The archive's collection will focus on not only well-known, but also lesser-known Romani artists. Artistic excellence, not just ethnic background, will be the key selection criteria. The focus of the collection will be on quality, not quantity. The selection will be left to the judgment of the individual curators.
- 4. Roma as historiographers; the archival focus will be on Romani self-representation. Work containing obvious and personal discrimination may only be included in the archive with contextualization and critical commentary. This applies equally to art produced by Roma themselves.
- 5. Putting the background of RomArchive curators in the context of their curatorial work fosters the construction of Romani artistic and cultural productions and critically reflects on the established hierarchy of non-Romani and Romani perspectives.
- 6. Respect for gender perspective. Where necessary, gender perspective should be emphasized in the piece's description.
- 7. RomArchive respects authorship and licensing rights, personal rights and copyright.
- 8. All languages are welcome. Presentation and contextualization of the objects will be translated into Romani, English, and German at minimum.

⁹ The term »Roma« is used to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by RomArchive: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkans: Egyptians and Ashkali; c) Eastern groups: Dom, Lom and Abdal; and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage«, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

- 9. Peer reviews shall be used within and across all sections during the collection process as much as possible.
- 10. During the collection process, all sections will, whenever possible, create space for Romani artists to reinterpret their work, as well as for interaction with other curators and artists. They will get involved in with current debates, will oppose the colonial point of view, create space for critical thinking, and cultivate emancipatory potential vis-a-vis fixed white perspectives.
- 11. All archive material should be accompanied by contextualization.
- 12. The target groups of RomArchive are the Romani as well as non-Romani public, educators, scholars, organizations and individuals, survivors and their families, and institutions, in particular those dealing with arts and culture.
- 13. The material acquired by the curators for RomArchive will become part of the archive.
- 14. The curators shall meet the highest technical requirements regarding the digitization. If, in exceptional cases, these requirements cannot be fulfilled, the ultimate criteria for selection are the artistic quality and the historical relevance of the item.