

## RomArchive - Digital Archive of the Roma

International online project informs about arts and cultures of Roma

### Press release

Berlin, February 1, 2018

Starting in January 2019, RomArchive, the Digital Archive of the Roma – funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation – will make the arts and cultures of Roma visible and illustrate their contribution to European cultural history. Through counternarratives told by Roma themselves, RomArchive will create 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—will become 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 shape the archive in all key positions. The core group of the project consists of about 40 people who meet regularly to exchange information, including the curators of the ten archive sections and the international advisory board, which supports the curators and determines 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 come together—German Sinti, Spanish Gitanos, Eastern European Roma and Romani Travellers from Great Britain discuss a common goal: How can self-representation succeed despite all differences? How can counternarratives 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. Through images and stories, the archive website, which is edited in a magazine-like and user-friendly way, 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.

RomArchive will be published in January 2019 and subsequently 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.

The project's blog ([blog.romarchive.eu](http://blog.romarchive.eu)) already accompanies the curators' work: Multimedia content such as interviews, controversial discussions and essays are regularly published here, as well as background information on the project's development. Like the later website, the blog is trilingual from the very beginning: German, English and Romani.

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 supports the editorial management of the archive for a further five years from 2019 onwards. RomArchive is also supported by the Federal Foreign Office.

#### Curators

Visual Arts: **Tímea Junghaus**, art historian and curator (Hungary); Film: **Katalin Bársony**, filmmaker (Hungary); Literature: **Dr Beate Eder-Jordan**, literary theorist (Austria); Music: **Dr Petra Gelbart**, musician and ethnomusicologist (Czech Republic/USA); Dance: **Isaac Blake**, dancer and choreographer (Great Britain); Theatre & Drama: **Dragan Ristić**, cultural manager, theatre director, musician (Serbia) and co-curator **Miguel Ángel Vargas**, art historian, theatre director, actor, musician (Spain); Interdisciplinary Section Flamenco: **Gonzalo Montaña Peña**, musicologist (Spain); Politics of Photography: **André Raatzsch**, media artist and theorist (Germany); Romani Civil Rights Movement: **Dr Thomas Acton**, sociologist (Great Britain), **Dr Angéla Kóczé**, sociologist (Hungary), **Dr Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka**, anthropologist (Poland), **Dr Jan Selling**, historian (Sweden); Holocaust "Voices of the Victims": **Dr Karola Fings**, historian (Germany)

#### Advisory Board

**Pedro Aguilera Cortés**, political scientist (Spain); **Dr Gerhard Baumgartner**, historian (Austria); **Dr Nicoleta Bitu** (Chair), political scientist and president of the Democratic Federation of Roma from Romania (Romania); **Professor Dr Klaus-Michael Bogdal** (Deputy Chair), literary theorist (Germany); **Professor Dr Ethel Brooks**, sociologist (USA); **Ágnes Daróczy**, 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.ug](mailto:sauerbrey@raabe.ug)  
Further information: [blog.romarchive.eu](http://blog.romarchive.eu)

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