

Panoramas as Memory of the World – Conference themes

This 33rd annual conference for the International Panorama Council in 2024 organized with the EPFL Laboratory for Experimental Museology takes a media archeological approach to celebrate the panoramic form through time. The pioneering role of panoramas as the first immersive media can be assessed in the light of technological developments from mechanical and analog, the experiments in media art using the panoramic form, through to digitally enabled presentations of the present-day.

Media archaeology is a discipline that explores the history of modern media by looking at antiquated, forgotten, or neglected media forms and practices. It's a way of understanding the evolution of media and communication throughout history. From a media archaeology perspective, painted panoramas are of significant importance for several reasons:

Early Visual Media: Painted panoramas represent one of the earliest forms of immersive visual media. They were often created to give viewers a comprehensive, 360-degree view of a scene, which might be considered an early attempt at virtual reality. By studying these, we can better understand the historical desire for immersion and realism in media, a concept that continues to shape the development of new technologies and forms of representation.

Media Innovation: The creation and exhibition of painted panoramas involved a host of technical, aesthetic, and logistical innovations. These include advancements in painting techniques to achieve realistic perspective and lighting effects, the design of special buildings and viewing apparatuses, and the development of transportable panoramas. These innovative aspects can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of media change and technological innovation.

Narrative Techniques: Painted panoramas often used unique narrative techniques to guide viewers' experiences. For example, they might have been used in combination with spoken narration, music, sound effects, or mechanical movement. These elements allow us to explore how multi-modal storytelling has evolved and how our predecessors used available technology to create engaging narrative experiences. These narrative strategies were extended an

explore by media artists starting in the early 1990s, setting a stage for new experiences to follow using digital technologies.

Cultural Practices: Panoramas were a popular form of entertainment in the 18th and 19th centuries and thus played a role in the development of cultural practices around media consumption. They were often exhibited in public places and were an event for social gatherings. Studying them can give us insights into the history of media use, public entertainment, and social behavior especially pertinent in the current quest for immersion and embodied experiences.

Mass Media & Commercialization: Panoramas were among the first forms of mass entertainment. They represent early examples of the commercialization of visual media, and studying them can offer insights into the economics of media production, distribution, and consumption, including the roles of advertising, ticket sales, and spectacle. The rise and fall of historic panoramas offer us insights into the business models of today.

By exploring painted panoramas from a media archaeology perspective, we gain a richer understanding of the historical trajectories of media technologies, aesthetics, and cultural practices, many of which continue to influence our media landscape today. We are also able to establish the basis for **UNESCO Memory of the World** listing by examining these pertinent issues.