



Dear members of the Society for Artistic Research,

As I am writing this introduction to the report one year after the beginning of the pandemic, the crisis persists. Concerns about artistic practice, and about where an education in artistic practices will lead to, in times of continued severe restrictions to local presence, to proximity in performance, and to reception with all the senses, are mounting, particularly for the current generation of students. It seems clear that artistic research – with its questioning approaches, critical reflections, quest for understanding, and opening of new ways, views and experiences (not least in the practices themselves) – will be an important if not central part of future artistic practices, reshaping the image of their value to society.

The power within our SAR community for inventive and fruitful crisis response came to the fore quite beautifully in the joint effort by a large number of the originally invited presenters in spe and the conference organisers of the cancelled *Crisis Collective!* conference 2020: together we created the Lost Conference Relic Website and brought it to life with 32 contributions – to be inaugurated and discussed by way of a ‘time capsule’ at our upcoming *care dare share* conference. For this action, new board member Chrysa Parkinson and myself teamed up with Anne-Helen Mydland from UiB (more detail in section 1 below), in a move now typical for how we work together in focus groups within the Executive Board work as part of our extended collective thinking approach. For example, Gabriele Schmidt, Ang Bartram, Chrysa Parkinson and Geir Strom are revising the SAR website, turning it into the central entry point for SAR members, the artistic research community and the interested public to view, access, and contribute to all SAR activities; new board member Michaela Glanz, Geir Strom, and Johan Haarberg are involved in the development of the Research Catalogue and the Portal Partnership Scheme; Michaela Glanz, new Second Vice-President Jaana Erkkilä-Hill and myself are advancing the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) initiative; and the three presidents together are attending to one of the identified areas of highest development potential: the increase in benefits for, visibility, and number of individual members, both outside and within institutions. We expect an added advantage of this for the local artistic research communities within our member institutions, making institutional membership even more rewarding and meaningful, and supporting intra-institutional connections. The focus groups open their topics up for collective thinking within the board during dedicated vision and strategy meetings, which we introduced in 2020.

Looking back at the year past, we see the implementation of significant improvements to Research Catalogue (RC) functionality (e.g., the media repository, see section 2). JAR has consolidated its issue numbers and introduced a number of measures towards inclusion and diversity (section 3). The Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research, for which SAR was one

of the co-authors, was published and is quickly becoming an important institutional reference document (section 4). There was a noted increase in portal partnerships. Due to the pandemic, the portal partner representative meetings were developed into ‘thematic seminars’ centring around high quality usage of the RC, its portal functions, and the journals based on it (section 5). It will be a great pleasure to welcome a solid number of new member institution representatives to introduce themselves at the GA (section 6). The imminent 2021 conference is co-organised with and hosted by mdw — University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in cooperation with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna. It is not only SAR’s first online conference, with the largest number of participants so far, but also its most diverse in terms of the contributors’ backgrounds. The annual prize for best RC exposition to be announced at the conference will be shared by two authors this time (section 7), and three Special Interest Groups (SIGs) will – for the first time – present their work on the opening day of the conference (section 8). The SAR announcement service SARA works smoothly in reaching a large readership (section 9).

Looking in turn into the current year and the near future: you are going to see actions and measures towards increasing member visibility, towards the generation of helpful and much needed research and educational resources, and of valuable discourse opportunities. We are also refining formats (like the thematic seminars) and creating new ones moderated by board members, in which we meet input from the membership with open ears. Preparations for the 2022 conference in Weimar are progressing strongly, and we are rethinking the basic approach to SAR conferences –addressing the difficult question of how to best combine locality and virtuality, and making them even more inclusive (e.g. childcare supporting measure for single parents). An exciting step towards fulfilling the presidential promise of opening up concerted means for collective discourse and dialogue will be a ‘continuous conference’ on relevant topics and research network which all members can become part of, gain from, and contribute to via a redesigned SAR website.

The positive news are completed by the financial report, which shows that the society – not least by establishing the position of Executive Officer in 2018 and through Johan Haarberg’s productive work in this role – has moved out of troubled waters and arrived at a stage of financial consolidation (see section 10). We are in full swing to further strengthen the SAR membership and to openly share new resources with the artistic research community at large, in a continued optimistic spirit of quality, plurality, diversity, ethical practice, open mindedness, dialogue, inclusion, and environmental awareness – adding to an enriching environment and community for all those who are working in the field, and all those who are currently qualifying for it.

We look forward to meeting you virtually at our conference and the General Assembly!

With my very best wishes,

Deniz Peters (President), on behalf of the Executive Board

What follows is an account of SAR activities and status quo in the period of 2020.

Executive Board members

Deniz Peters, President (Graz, Austria)
Geir Strøm, Vice-President (Bergen, Norway)
Jaana Erkkilä-Hill, Vice-President (Helsinki, Finland)
Angela Bartram (Derby, United Kingdom)
Michaela Glanz (Vienna, Austria)
Chrysa Parkinson (Stockholm, Sweden)
Gabriele Schmid (Ottersberg, Germany)

SAR Executive Officer

Johan A. Haarberg (Bergen, Norway)

1. Lost Conference Relic Site, Issue with 32 expositions, Inauguration at Vienna Conference

When announcing last year that the SAR Executive Board was looking for ways to honour the preliminary work that had gone into the cancelled conference, we had no idea of the amazing response the initiative, once the right idea emerged, would be getting. With the generous support both conceptually and financially of the conference host Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design of the University in Bergen UiB, Faculty Vice Rector Anne-Helen Mydland, web-designer and musician Jonas Howden Sjøvaag, and our President Deniz Peters designed and created a site which now features 32 – and counting – contributions in the form of an RC issue to be published and inaugurated on the second day of our quickly nearing 2021 online-conference in Vienna on April 7-10. What is more, thanks to a congenially benevolent gesture from our Vienna conference hosts, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in cooperation with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna, we are able to invite all authors of the Lost Conference contributions to the Vienna conference.

We are delighted to say that Anne-Helen Mydland and Deniz Peters agreed that the topics of cancellation, absence, and the general upheaval of (artistic) means through the current crises and the digital turn will be given further attention, and they are looking forward to a joint exchange during the discussion after inauguration, on future discourse and publication initiatives that are clearly called for by the enthusiastic response!

2. Research Catalogue (RC)

With currently around 16.000 registered users, the RC offers the largest existing forum and network for artists interested in research today. It is used as an institutional repository and archive, for profiling and self-publication, as a research management tool, for education and learning purposes, as well as a publishing platform for several online journals. The RC source code is openly available.

During the last years, several major development steps have been done, including a new responsive exposition format (text-based editor) for smart phones, tablets and similar devices. An application module has been developed – a provision within the RC to handle submissions for project funding and for the handling of admissions to degree programmes etc. The module has been used for handling submissions and selections to the Bergen Conference as well as the Vienna Conference, and will now also be used for the handling of applications to the Danish funding programme for artistic research organised by the new Danish International Center for Knowledge in the Arts (ICKA).

We are now in the middle of a major upgrade project, dependent on joint funding from a number of our portal partners. This upgrade addresses the connectability and repository functionalities of the RC, as well as the RC exposition formats. The upgrade facilitates the connection of the RC to external media repositories by implementing a programmable interface (API). Moreover, the upgrade contains the recently realised and introduced development of a new personal media repository for all RC users, which allows each to navigate and manage their media files and to share files with other users. In addition, a new fully specified exposition format that merges both existing formats is developed. This new format will allow for a wider use while building on a strict and transparent structural core. This will significantly improve the extensibility, referenceability, responsiveness and long-term archiveability. Included in these developments we have done a redesign of the RC front page implemented in the last part of 2020. The RC Team has also supported our RC-based journals to be able to register in the Digital Open Access Journal Register (DOAJ).

The portal partners that have decided to back this joint funding operation are Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen (KMD), Norwegian Artistic Research Programme (NARP), Rhythmic Music Conservatory, Copenhagen (RMC), Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH), Uniarts Helsinki, and University of the Arts The Hague. The Executive Board highly appreciates the support for this joint effort!

3. Journal for Artistic Research (JAR)

JAR had another successful year in 2020. Three issues (JAR20, 21 and 22) with 15 expositions overall as well as five reflections and ten book reviews were published. A JAR publication (Cocker et. al.) won the SAR RC prize the third year in a row. Publishing three issues in 2020 represents a particular achievement since it was decided to rush JAR19 out at the end of 2019 leaving the editors with virtually no accepted submissions in the pipeline. With altogether 59 submissions in 2020 (2019: 47), JAR's submission rate was up, six of these submissions were non-English ones.

The JAR Network space has continued to be of interest to our readers. With 13,870 unique page loads, its usage was up by 71%. JAR has also continued to expand its engagement on Facebook. The number of page followers at the end of 2020 increased by 51% compared to 2019.

The editorial workflows are established and work well, the language panels have been catching up. However, and probably due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, sourcing peer reviewers was difficult in some cases and leading to delays. To develop an adequate solution to the issue of copyediting will be a task for 2021; the Executive Board agreed on a raise in JAR budget for this specific task.

JAR completed the move to the CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license. On this basis, the journal was accepted in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The Inclusion of JAR in the Norwegian Publication Index, Scopus and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index indices is still an important goal, as this will make an important difference to artistic researchers in countries, where research funding is strongly linked to publishing in indexed journals.

Since we have yearly memberships, the number of individual members changes significantly from year to year. We gain most individual members before the annual conferences, hence the number is closely tied to lower or higher number of these signups.

In 2019 we reached the highest number of individual members to this day with 132 registered payments. For the period of 2020 we had 69 payments from individual members, and at this stage in 2021, we expect no major increase in numbers compared to last year.

A main challenge here is to keep our individual members from one year to the next, and we also see a significant number of people who request a membership without actually making a payment. The Executive Board is planning actions to be taken to make the membership more attractive for all different member categories.

7. SAR Annual Prize for Best Research Catalogue Exposition 2020

The Executive Board of SAR is delighted to announce the winners of the Annual Prize for Excellent Research Catalogue Exposition 2020 during the opening of the conference. This year, and unusually, the prize is offered jointly to two winners. The prize aims to foster and encourage innovative, experimental new formats of publication and to give visibility to the qualities of artistic research artefacts. We received twenty-four innovative submissions for the prize, and the jury (Ang Bartram, Karst de Jong and Christopher Williams) felt that two expositions met these conditions to a high level and in equal measure; both authors will receive 250€, a joint split of the annual 500€ prize money.

8. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Since the launch of this initiative in 2019 four Special Interest Groups (SIGs) have been endorsed by the Executive Board. ARIGA - Artistic Research in Generative Art (SIG 4), initiated by David Pirrò and Luc Döbereiner, has just been confirmed and established in March 2021.

SAR Special Interest Groups (SIGs) may be suggested, organised, and moderated by any SAR member (individual members, representatives of institutional members) with the aim of conducting a particular activity, theme or focus area under the umbrella of SAR and promoting the activity and its results within the SAR community. Endorsement of SIGs is handled by the Executive Board on the basis of a short proposal, including names of group moderator(s) and of at least three confirmed additional group members.

In preparation for the 2021 SAR Conference, the Executive Board renewed the Call for Establishing SAR Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Three of the four SIGs took the opportunity and will present their work to date or to discuss their plans in the frame of the offered consecutive time slots on the Opening Day of the conference.

The SIG concept currently under revision of the Executive Board plays an important part in the goal of fostering visibility, discourse, and resources; a new call for SIGs under the revised concept will appear before summer.

9. SARA – The SAR Announcement Service

SAR introduced a new announcement service in January 2018. This service offers both members and non-members an opportunity to make announcements for activities, positions etc. towards approx. 11.000 of the Research Catalogue registered users. The fees were adjusted from 01.01.19 and are now € 100 per announcement (reduced price) for members and € 200 for non-members.

We received 60 requests for SARA announcement in 2020 (56 in 2019), of which seven (ten) came from non-members. There was a significant reduction in the announcement activity during the first months of the covid pandemic, but the announcement activities increased strongly since. The income generated through this channel is of significant support for the organisation.

10. Finances and Budget

When the SAR General Assembly last met two years ago, we had to report on the difficult financial situation that had developed during 2018 – with a resulting deficit for that year of approx. € 50.000. We can now report that we have been able to turn that trend: The figures from 2020 shows a surplus of close to € 7.000. This positive shift is mainly due to a considerable increase in the number of portal partnerships. The annual fees from these members have grown from € 105.000 in 2018 to € 155.000 in 2020 – and will grow further in 2021. Behind this, there has been a very persistent recruiting policy led by our Executive Officer, an activity that has also been rather successful during the covid-19 pandemic. During the same period, we have also been able to create a consortium that has secured vital further developments of the Research Catalogue in the range of approx. € 100.000. We are now in the middle of these developments.

Further growth of membership numbers in all categories – and in particular, a consolidation of portal partnership numbers – will be important for the long-term sustainability of our society. There is substantial work going on to achieve these aims, including much organisational development work and membership recruitment. While the presented budget for 2021 shows a reserve to be kept at around the same level, some of this capital shall therefore be used during 2021 towards membership development and the generation of further resources for the members and the larger community.