

Case Study

# Premium Stuff

## Storage Ecologies and the Cronologicalistics of Conservation

The increasing global population –driven by economic models built upon overproduction, accumulation and unchained consumerism– urges us to explore material, energetic, and political dimensions of storage infrastructures. Storage facilities are the real spaces where most of the pieces of art live, unveiling that around 90% of the art in the world is being conserved for unseen but profitable purposes. The proposal is to approach these infrastructures not as passive spaces, but as active forms of accumulation, latency, and control

This case study aims to examine storage as a spatio-political apparatus central to contemporary regimes of value, preservation and extraction. It is organized to interrogate how infrastructures of containment also structure modes of temporal orientation, environmental management, and epistemic power. Taking art collections as a specific storing challenge to study, this case study seeks to prototype critical tools and situated interventions that expose the hidden logics behind the act of storing, while also exploring alternative practices of archiving, circulation, and conservation.

[Introductory video →](#)

**Pulso:** Andrea Muniáin

**Facilitating entities:** TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

**In collaboration with:** Hangar, centre de producció i recerca artística

## 02 Case Study conceptualization

Art collections are like icebergs: we can only see the tip, while most of their mass remains unseen underwater. Storage facilities are the real spaces where most art lives. Only about 3–4% of MoMA's collection is exhibited; the rest waits in a nicely controlled environment at a warehouse in Queens<sup>1</sup>. This drops to around 1% at the British Museum<sup>2</sup> and rises to 7% in the Louvre's case<sup>3</sup>. The resources required to keep a vast heritage rarely displayed are enormous: "QNS's energy consumption per square meter (328 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>) is actually higher than that of a large hospital (313 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>)."<sup>4</sup> Storages become technologies that "prevent objects from overflowing"<sup>5</sup> and, as bases of conservation, "are crucial to negotiating and sustaining the physical fabric of meaning and value."<sup>6</sup> In this paradox of acquiring pieces that will not be seen, heritage and value are thrilling to change their significance.

Before 1864, museum collections were often shown in their entirety. A report by John Edward Gray, director of the Zoological British Museum in London, changed the trend. For Gray, total display overwhelmed visitors

and strained conservation. Since then, collections have preserved most pieces in controlled atmospheres inside storage infrastructures. The relation has flipped recently: major museums, like V&A East Storehouse and Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen, now turn storage into accessible spaces. It seems like the problem is circling back. How do we break the display–storage circular loop? Is there room for ramification? Could we envision other ways or spaces in which to keep art alive?

Art collections, and their common desire of resting in a tax-exempt free-zone storage regime are, of course, part of the infrastructure space which drives the world today<sup>7</sup>. Infrastructure space, following Keller Easterling's notes on it<sup>8</sup>, is usually built under an open and shared narrative (its goal), and it usually functions because of a system which allows certain movements to happen, while constraining others, like an underlying "digital" software (by which means it is achieved). Understanding the act of collecting as a system embedded in a global network of agents and intentions is fundamental in order to articulate criticism and a possible system hack.

Stuff Premium will hack the narrative by understanding that heritage and conservation processes are linked to a fiction of eternal life that is actually producing suspended in time art pieces, far away from the common idea of life itself. It becomes really obvious when experiencing the traveling shot of the Moscow Zoological Museum in Anton Vidokle's latest film, *Immortality and Resurrection for All!*, where shelves full of taxidermied animal bodies unfold one after the other. Do we understand eternal life as a paralysis of time? The case will face other processes of understanding immortality by following speculative thinking around cosmism ideas within the museum and human life.

Re-signifying the meaning of life might be a way to reframe the actual narrative of the infrastructure that collecting enacts. Understanding that storages, roads, trucks, artists, institutions, collectors, family heritage, human desire, material processes, conservation trends, market value, taxes, governments, exhibition places, curatorial narratives, bacteria, boxes, etc., are part of a huge software enabling the collecting act might open a gate to explore other ways of keeping art alive. What are the active forms embedded in the act of collecting? Are we able to dismember the software behind the act? Is storage the fundamental spatial/active form sustaining protocols of unlimited growth? Can we re-signify heritage's fiction of eternal life, to get actual life in the arts? Let's collectively design a software for the desired institutional activism, modifying artistic practices of gathering, accumulating, storing, and circulating.

1. MoMA's primary off-site storage facilities are dispersed across locations in New York, including the Queens-based QNS warehouse. See Fernando Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Museum of Modern Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

2. British Museum, "Collection Fact Sheet" (2019). - [link](#)

3. The Louvre exhibits approximately 35,000 works out of a total collection of 500,000 objects. See Musée du Louvre. - [link](#)

4. Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life*, p.165.

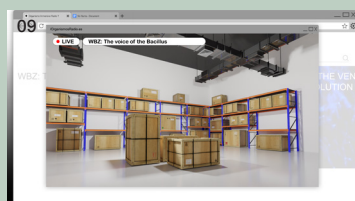
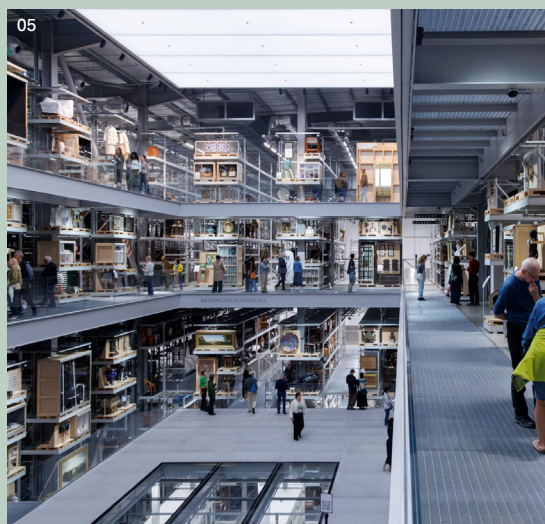
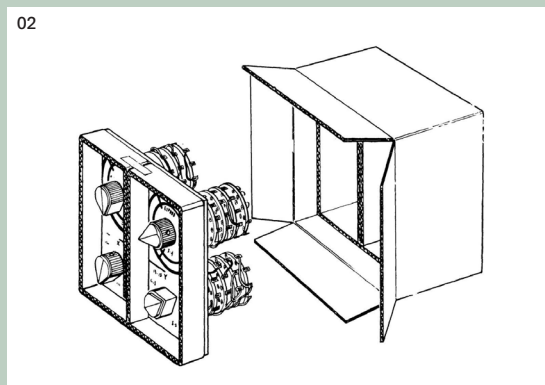
5. Javier Lezaun, Fabian Muniesa, and Signe Vikkelsø, "Provocative Containment and the Drift of Social-Scientific Realism," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6, no. 3 (2013), pp.278–293.

6. Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life*, p.149.

7. See Keller Easterling concept *extrastatecraft*, used to describe infrastructures operating beyond state regulation and control. Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014).

8. Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, p.22.





01. Museo Nacional del Prado, Los almacenes en 360°, YouTube.

02. Department of Defense, MIL-HDBK-304B: Military Standardization Handbook, Package Cushioning Design(Washington D.C., 1978), technical drawing of standard military boxes.

03. Frederick York, The Zoological Gallery, ca. 1875, The British Museum.

04. The British Museum: The Zoological Gallery; Crowded with Holiday Visitors, wood engraving, 1845.

05. Diller Scofidio + Renfro, V&A East Storehouse, London, inaugurated 2025, photograph by Iwan Baan.

06. Hito Steyerl, HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File, 2013, still image, Artforum.

07. Anton Vidokle, Immortality for All (film trilogy on Russian Cosmism), 2014–2017, still image, Cosmos.art.

08. Esther Ferrer, Performance a Varias Velocidades [Performance at Different Speeds], photograph of the burial, Morille Art Cemetery, August 1, 2009. Gravestone inscription: "Performance a varias velocidades" (Original version).

09. Florencia Guillén, Chris Harris, Pedro Matias, Angela McArthur, Diego A. Mejía-Alandia, and Andrea Muniáin, Organismo Immersive Radio, 2024, still image from video essay, single-screen HD video, 15'29".



## 03 | Key research approaches

### Temporal regimes of preservation

- How do storage systems discipline time? Temporal narratives embedded in storage: from the promise of permanence to the logic of expiration, obsolescence, and deferred use. The logistics of art storage differ from the logistics of consumer chains, where expiration dates are imposed to ensure constant circulation. The proposal is to analyze the narrative that celebrates conservation processes as tools capable of maintaining heritage value, in order to open other ways of understanding the passage of time, since, as Brian Kuan Wood writes, “the force that animates time itself is life,” and life is always linked to change.

### Governing space

- Storage alternative systems as a scenario to experiment with dynamic border politics. Art storage, like many other circuits of commercial goods, often settles in tax-free regimes, operating outside existing national tariff regulations. While Spain lacks the territorial figure of the Free Zone, in other European and global contexts the warehouse ends up demarcating a commercial border with its own political regime. Drawing on research by Hito Steyerl, Keller Easterling, and others, this case seeks to understand the sociopolitical implications for the art context derived from this extraterritorial condition.

### Storage as extraction by other means

- Interrogating how infrastructures of containment extend the reach of extractive systems by managing not only what is taken, but what is withheld, curated, or forgotten. The museum and its corresponding storage are places where identity narratives are constructed, based on what is shown and what is hidden. As Domínguez Rubio notes, “storage rooms contain all those other narratives that are no longer active, as well as those that could have existed and those that may one day exist.” For this case study, it is also crucial to understand storage as a space of possibility. How can we approach a system that is able to imagine futures beyond temporal paralysis?

### Counter-Archival practices

- Investigating alternative forms of storing, caring, and transmitting—those that resist the logics of control and accumulation, and instead enable new ecologies of memory, maintenance, and circulation. This case study proposes to examine projects that confront dominant logics of conservation, such as the Morille Art Cemetery where, since 2009, artworks have been ritually buried at the request of their artists, or strands of thought like Russian Cosmism, which proposed making museum conservation tools publicly available in order to pursue immortality as a social right.

### Storage as an active form within infrastructural design

- Addressing design processes shifting from final forms to system design, one capable of addressing future events and protocols of growth. The infrastructural model through which the world is currently organized is based on software, systems, and protocols—an approach far removed from traditional design practices grounded in final form. Through this research, the case study will dive into the elements that shape an infrastructural system in order to ultimately propose a new protocol capable of confronting the contemporary challenges embedded in the act of collecting.

## 04 | Pulso



### Andrea Muniáin

→ develops her research-based practice at the intersection of architecture, visual arts, and critical theory. Her work examines the entanglements between digitality, corporeality, and materiality, with particular attention to the political dimensions of how bodies are digitally represented and mediated. Through practicable scenographies, she explores how spatial narratives can articulate critical reflections on the biopolitical and techno-social conditions of the present. Her investigations have been supported by institutions such as TBA21, Fundación La Caixa, and Fundación Caja Navarra, and disseminated in international cultural venues including Fosun Foundation (Shanghai), Frankfurter Kunstverein (Frankfurt), The Clemente Center (New York), the Cultural Office of the Embassy of Spain (Washington), Centro Cultural de España en México (Mexico City), La Casa Encendida (Madrid), and Matadero (Madrid). She co-authored *El Giro Fotogramétrico: Truncando el 3D* (Bartlebooth, 2024), addressing the biopolitical implications of 3D scanning. Muniáin directs the Master's in New Media at IED Madrid and is Adjunct Professor of Design at the School of Architecture and Design at IE University in Madrid.

[andreamuniain.com](https://andreamuniain.com) →



01



02



03

01. Andrea Muniáin, *Photogrammetric Pack*, 2024.

02. Andrea Muniáin, *Goes magnetic*, 2025.

03. Andrea Muniáin, *DILSS: Digital intercontinental Large Supermarkets 2.0*, 2022.

## 05 Facilitating entities

### TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

→ is a leading international art and advocacy foundation. Established in 2002 by philanthropist and art patron Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, the foundation stewards the TBA21 Collection and its outreach activities, which encompass exhibitions, educational programs, and public engagement activities. TBA21, headquartered in Madrid, works in association with the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and operates key initiatives in Venice, Italy, through its art and science center, Ocean Space, as well as in

Portland, Jamaica. The foundation's work is inherently collaborative, driven by artists and guided by the conviction that art and culture serve as catalysts for social and environmental transformation, ultimately contributing to a culture of peace. TBA21 views peace as an ongoing practice rooted in the affirmation of life, diversity, and coexistence. Committed to this vision, the foundation seeks to theorize, experiment with, and advocate for peacebuilding practices in partnership with artists.

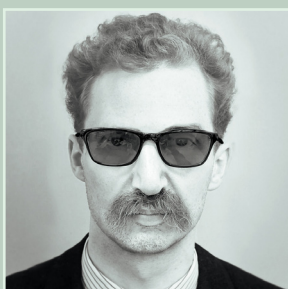
## 06 Guest experts Some of the voices informing this case study, among others, are:



### Fernando Dominguez Rubio

→ (PhD in Sociology, University of Cambridge, 2008) is a Professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. His work spans sociology, science and technology studies, anthropology, design, and architecture. He is the author of *Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination* at the Art Museum (University of Chicago Press, 2020). He is also co-editor of *The Politics of Knowledge* (Routledge, 2012) and *Fragilities: Essays on the Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics of Maintenance and Repair* (MIT Press, 2025). He is currently working on his next book, tentatively titled *The Promise of Facts*.

[fdrubio.ucsd.edu](mailto:fdrubio.ucsd.edu) →



### Walid Raad

→ in part, an artist and a Professor of Photography at Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA). The list of exhibitions (good, bad and mediocre ones); awards and grants (merited, not merited, grateful for, rejected and/or returned); education (some of it thought-provoking; some of it, less so); publications (I am fond of some of my books, but more so of the books of Jalal Toufic. You can find his here: [jalaltoufic.com](http://jalaltoufic.com)), can be found somewhere online.

[walidraad.com](http://walidraad.com) →

### M. Asunción Lizarazu de Mesa, Mónica Ruiz Trilleros, and Irene Villén Muñoz, Collections Department, CA2M Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo.

→ A museum can be many things at once. Its perception has evolved and continues to evolve over time and across different parts of the world, but there is a common thread that almost always remains at its core: the care of cultural objects. These objects become symbols within the museum, speaking to us about ourselves as individuals and as a society. At the Collections Department of CA2M Museum, we look after our collection, ensuring that the life of each artwork unfolds under the best possible conditions throughout its journey—whether in storage, during restoration interventions, in exhibition spaces inside and outside the museum, or while traveling.

We uncover the stories embedded in these works: in their materials, their processes of creation, the ways they are collected, their conceptual underpinnings, and the different perspectives that expand their meanings... through analysis and documentation. At times, we also keep ourselves awake at night, searching for solutions to the challenges posed by the conservation of contemporary art. Together with the artists, we learn to reflect on the transformation of substance and the ephemeral. Ultimately, we strive to unveil—to lift those veils that, over time, settle upon artworks, making it difficult for us to read them clearly, to perceive them with our senses, to enjoy them.

[ca2m.org](http://ca2m.org) →



## 07 Expanded study materials

visit [are.na](#) Premium Stuff →

- Andrea Muniáin, *Sustrato Documentation: Case Study Inventory - Immersive Narratives* (2024). - [link](#)
- Anton Vidokle, *Immortality and Resurrection for All!*, 34'17" (2017). - [link](#)
- Arseny Zhilyaev (ed.), *Avant-Garde Museology* (e-flux Classics, 2015). - [link](#)
- Eva Ebersberger, Daniela Zyman (eds.), *Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary: The Commissions Book* (Sternberg Press, 2020). - [Link](#)
- Florencia Guillén, Chris Harris, Pedro Matias, Angela McArthur, Diego A. Mejía-Alandia, and Andrea Muniáin, *Organismo Immersive Radio*, 2024, still image from video essay, single-screen HD video, 15'29". - [link](#)
- Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle and Brian Kuan Wood (eds), *Art without Death: Conversations on Russian Cosmism*, e-flux journal (Stenberg Press, 2017) - [link](#)
- Radio Web Macba, *Almacén #2 Poéticas y políticas del almacenaje y el uso circular* (Jul 07, 2025). - [link](#)
- Radio Web Macba, *Almacén #1 Poéticas y políticas del almacenaje y el uso circular* (May 23, 2025). - [link](#)
- RADMIN Reader (2019). - [link](#)
- Sepp Eckenhausen, *Art in Permacrisis #7: Kate Rich and Radical Administration* (Jan 28, 2025). - [link](#)

- Hito Steyerl, "Duty-Free Art." in *e-flux journal*, no. 63 (March 2015). [link](#)

"Think of the artworks and their movement. They travel inside a network of tax-free zones and also inside the storage spaces themselves. Perhaps as they do, they do not ever get uncrated. They move from one storage room to the next without being seen. They stay inside boxes and travel outside national territories with a minimum of tracking or registration, like insurgents, drugs, derivative financial products, and other so-called investment vehicles. For all we know, the crates could even be empty. It is a museum of the internet era, but a museum of the dark net, where movement is obscured and dataspace is clouded." PP6

- Keller Easterling, "IIRIS." in *e-flux journal*, no. 64 (April 2015). [link](#)

"The contemporary production of space intensifies the power of "knowing how" or the art of manipulating active forms within a spatial information system. Unfocusing to see not only buildings but also the almost infrastructural matrix space in which the building is suspended, it is clear that countless repeatable formulas and recipes make the most of the space in the world. (...) Active forms—things like multipliers, valves, governors, or switches—are the spatial equivalent of code for the heavy bulky world. Rather than object or declaration, they direct spatial processes as carriers of information. The more formulaic this matrix space, the more difficult it is to design object form, but the easier it is to design active form—to exploit the existing multipliers in the matrix with amplifying effects. This matrix that architects regard as the negative space or the unknowable opposite of object form offers not only new aesthetic pleasures but also new political capacities."

- Fernando Dominguez Rubio

*Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), p.149. [link](#)

"As temporal technologies, storages allow us to build into the world the pauses, ruptures, accelerations, and slowdowns through which we produce and sustain the linearities, cycles and repetitions that give time its form. (...) Storages allow us to slow things down and create the sense of temporal depth through which we build images of permanence."