

# Pedro Meyer's Retrospective Exhibition, Heresies – Bringing to Life an Innovative Model of Museum Presentation of Photography

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## Summary

*The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art from Rijeka, among 100 museums in the world was invited to participate in the international project Heresies, a retrospective exhibition of four decades' work of one of the world's most innovative photographers, Pedro Meyer. The aim of this project was to construct an immense retrospective involving the publication of his images via specially created web pages. In October 2008, it was simultaneously opened in 65 museums around the world as an attempt to bring a new model of museum presentation of photography into life. Pedro Meyer's personal innovations in the field of digital photography include the creation of the first CD ROM that combined sound and visuals, first digital prints ever made, and the creation of the famous on-line photographic forum <http://www.zonezero.com>. With the Heresies exhibition, Meyer has directed his visionary view on the concept of the museum exhibition of photography, asking the question what do they look like today and how can they be remodeled for the future. Pedro Meyer posted 300 selected images in a private section of the web site pedromeyer.com. Participating curators have chosen between 10 and 90 of these images. Any print selected for inclusion in the Heresies exhibition became the property of the museum's permanent collection, as a gift from Pedro Meyer. Some of the printable images on the web site have been linked to audio files containing the artist's comments, and could have been downloaded by the museum for use in audio guides or visitor provided iPods. Pedromeyer.com is a website that serves as a living collection of his works, and on-line portfolio. Furthermore it was an interactive site where participants and visitors could fully take part. Meyer's new and heretic paradigm of a photographic exhibition includes: creative collaboration of curators and artists, global networking of 65 museums participating in the Heresies program, enhancement of investigative capacity and museum holdings, and educational programs for the iPod generation.*

**Key words:** retrospective exhibition, international project, digital photography, website, database, on line, iPod.

## Introduction

The transition from mechanical (analogue) into digital era, the rapid development of digital technologies and the transfer of information have reflected on changes made in the production of art at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Analogue photography, although still present, has been continuously suppressed by digital photography. It has become a photographic technique for the masses because of its availability, ease of use and distribution, lower cost, and it gives the user freedom to modify reality using computer programs (Adobe Photoshop and others). The Mexican photographer Pedro Meyer is known for his captivating and provocative photographs, but also for his pioneering work in digital technology. Meyer's personal innovations in the field of digital media includes the creation of the first CD ROM that combined sound and visuals (in 1991), the first digital prints ever made, and the creation of the famous on-line photographic forum <http://www.zonezero.com><sup>1</sup> in 1993. In the 60's he worked with documentary photography, and since then many photographic cycles have evolved. When in 2002 Alejandro Castellanos, director of the Mexico City – based *Centro de la Imagen* (The Image Center) invited him to present a summary of the last five decades of his photographic work, he realized that the public would never have the opportunity to see his complete photographic opus, not even the greater part of his 80,000 archived photographs. He then started to think about the most appropriate way to reach a wider audience. He had to think of a new way of exhibiting, and the knowledge he gained by creating and maintaining the ZoneZero website helped him in this. Thus he created the idea of an international project named "Heresis" which after many years of preparation was held in October 2008 in 65 museums around the world.

## The role of Pedro Meyer

Pedro Meyer is one of the pioneers and most recognized representatives of contemporary photography, and one of the most widely recognized Mexican photographers. Pedro Meyer is the author of numerous exhibitions, lecturer in different academic institutions of the world.<sup>2</sup> He is the founder and president of the Mexican Council of Photography and the organizer of the first three Colloquiums, Biennials of Latin American Photography (1977-1983). His photo-

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<sup>1</sup> ZoneZero won an Internet award from Encyclopædia Britannica.

<sup>2</sup> Mexico, USA, Germany, Argentina, Spain, Ecuador, and Sweden

graphs are part of museum holdings of many renowned museums of the world.<sup>3</sup> He has received numerous international prizes and awards.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his life, Meyer has documented significant social events, such as the Student Movement of 1968, the Avándaro Rock Festival, the guerrilla in Nicaragua, and the tragic 1985 Earthquake in Mexico City. He also produced a major photo essay on Pemex, covered the presidential campaign of Miguel de la Madrid, and has done photographic portraits of celebrities of the cultural world, politicians, and of ordinary people during his many trips.<sup>5</sup> Christian Caujolle points out, in the introduction text of the book *Heresies*: “It is surprising or at least disconcerting: one of the most brilliant representatives of documentary photography in Latin America is also the person who has overtaken others and appropriated the historic mutations of images through the digital system to create disturbing images, rehabilitating photo-montage, using technology to continue expressing himself which constitutes the key to a curious, transformative work.”<sup>6</sup> Meyer’s photography consistently tests the borders of truth, fiction, and reality. With the development of digital photography in the early nineties, Meyer evolved from a documentary photographer of the so-called “real photography” into a digital documentarist who often combines photographic elements from different periods and spaces in order to achieve a different or a *higher* truth. Meyer’s often expressed opinion is that all photographs – digitally manipulated or not – are equally *true* and *untrue*. This has been called heretic among orthodox documentary photographers, hence the title *Heresies*. In the 1990s he is the one who promoted the transition from analogue to digital photography, with project like *Truths and Fictions*, *I Photograph to Remember*, and *ZoneZero*. Despite resistance by “classical” photographers, he managed to gain recognition for digital photography to become acknowledged as a technique for art photography. To globally popularize and make photography accessible to a wide audience he created the on-line photographic gallery *ZoneZero*. It has been one of the most frequented web pages on the Internet. In its on-line galleries, *ZoneZero* today hosts more than a thousand renowned international photogra-

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<sup>3</sup> New York Museum of Modern Art, The Victoria and Albert Museum London, The Musée National D’art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou Paris, The International Center of Photography New York, George Eastman House, The California Museum of Photography, Tucson’s Center for Creative, Havana’s Casa de Las Américas and Centro Studie e Archivio della Comunicazione dell’ Università Parma, Italy

<sup>4</sup> Guggenheim, 1987, Cultura Cita di Anghiari, 1985, National Endowment for the Arts, Mexican Photography Biennales

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pedromeyer.com/biography/biography.html>

<sup>6</sup> Caujolle, Christian. Presentation // *Heresies*, Pedro Meyer. Madrid : The Pedro Meyer Foundation Lunweg Editores, 2008. page 3

phers, and the pages are visited by more than 500,000 visitors a month and more than 5.5 million a year.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Heresies* project**

The fact that a large number of his photographs will never be seen by public motivated Meyer to think of a new way of museum presentation of photographs. He explains the creation of the project in his book *Heresies*: "I realized that I need to use the experience I had accumulated on the Internet in the years we had spent producing the ZoneZero website... We concluded that the only feasible solution would be to scan all the images and arrange them in a data base so that the person in charge of curating a particular topic could carry out the selection in the comfort of his own working space... Linking the on-line exhibition to the physical display would open up a host of possibilities. Thus, while a museum can display large-scale printed works, the Internet is capable of showing a far greater number of images and reaching a much wider audience."<sup>8</sup> In this way the public could search for photographs which are not exhibited in an on-line database. The problem of making available a large photographic archive was finally solved. A special program was developed for grouping, tagging and choosing photographs. Each digital file is tagged and has a caption which contains the name of the photograph, the dimensions of the negative, the technique (b/w, colour), the year and place where it was taken, the year of digitalization, and information about the digital modification. When that hard work was finished for the exhibition in The Image Center, it was decided that this worked out model should be offered to other museums around the world with defined conditions. During 2006 he invited one hundred museums from all over the world to participate in his project *Heresies* – retrospective exhibition of four decades' work. Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art from Rijeka was the only invited museum from the south-eastern European region, and the only one which had the opportunity to present this outstanding exhibition in the region. This fact gave encouragement to the museum staff because it acknowledged the international recognition of this institution. In October 2008, it was simultaneously opened in 65 museums around the world as an attempt to bring an innovative model of museum presentation of photography into life<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> During 2007 ZoneZero wins the following awards: "CNET Best of the Web" NET Magazine – awards ZoneZero, as one of the top all time 100 sites and one of the top 5 art web sites. Luckman Interactive gives ZoneZero a "Luckman Five-Star winner." NET Guide- gives 5 stars to ZoneZero and put it in its Platinum category. Izvor: [http://www.pedromeyer.com/biography/websites\\_en.html](http://www.pedromeyer.com/biography/websites_en.html)

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, Pedro. Behind the scenes and a list of acknowledgements // *Heresies*, Pedro Meyer. Madrid : The Pedro Meyer Foundation Lunwerg Editores, 2008. page 22

<sup>9</sup> List of participating museums available on: [http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums\\_list/museums.php?idiom=EN](http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums_list/museums.php?idiom=EN)

## Conditions

The invited institution received a written memo in which Meyer explained the project and defined the conditions which every participant had to meet:

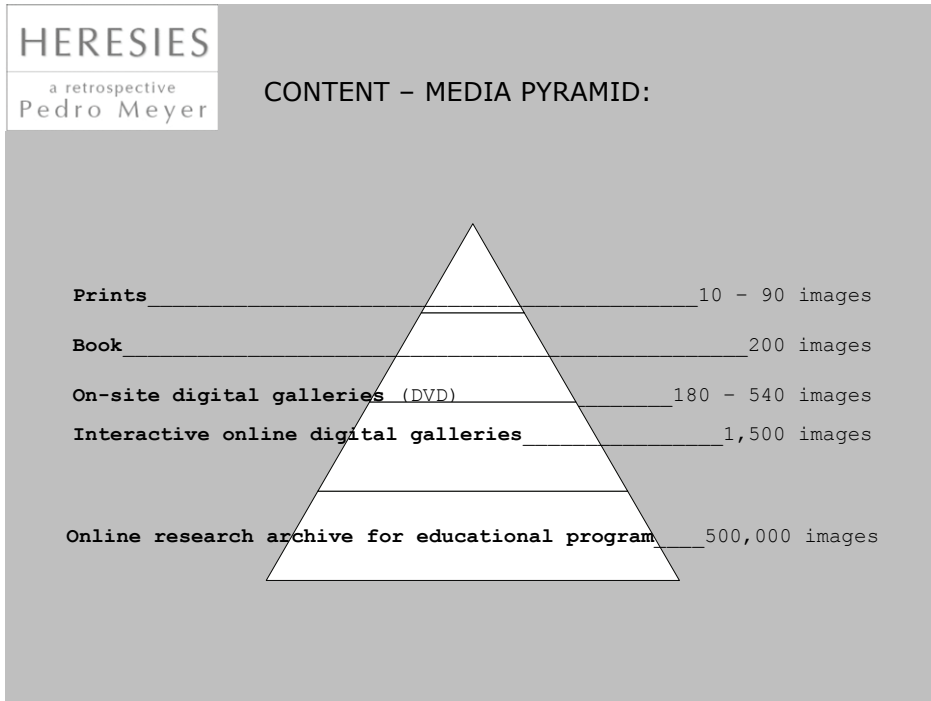
1. The opening of the *Heresies* exhibit must take place between October 6 and October 12, 2008.
2. *Heresies* must remain on exhibit in the museum for no less than 3 weeks.
3. All large-format archival prints delivered to the museum and hung in the *Heresies* exhibit will become the property of the museum's permanent collection at the conclusion of the exhibit. These prints may not be sold, given away or otherwise disposed of by the museum until October 12, 2058. Any print delivered but not hung must either be a. returned to Zone Zero at the museum's cost prior to the opening of the exhibit, or b. purchased by the museum for \$6,000 USA. No reproduction rights to any photograph delivered to the museum in any form will be transferred to the museum. These rights must be negotiated separately. No more than 3,000 prints are available for the entire *Heresies* exhibit program. These will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis and solely at the discretion of the exhibit organizers.
4. Museum also agree to display at least three "digital galleries" on 1-3 DVD players attached to 1-3 large-screen television displays or video projectors. Museums agree to provide a DVD player / screen for each DVD provided. DVDs will be tailored to each museum's configuration.
5. Museums agree to post suitable directions, provided by Western Arts Management crediting exhibit sponsors and directing visitors to [pedromeyer.com](http://pedromeyer.com) and to [zonezero.com](http://zonezero.com) to view on-line interactive galleries.

## Innovations

What is the innovative essence in the new model of the museum presentation of photography? The characteristics of *Heresies* set it apart from other photo projects that came before it. The aim of this project was to construct an immense retrospective involving the publication of his images, as well as more than 60 museums around the world that have joined in this global retrospective.

On the media pyramid we can see all elements the *Heresies* project included: Pedro Meyer posted 300 selected images in a private section of the web site [pedromeyer.com](http://pedromeyer.com). Participating curators have chosen between 10 and 90 of these images to hang in print form for the duration of the *Heresies* exhibition.

Picture 1. Media pyramid

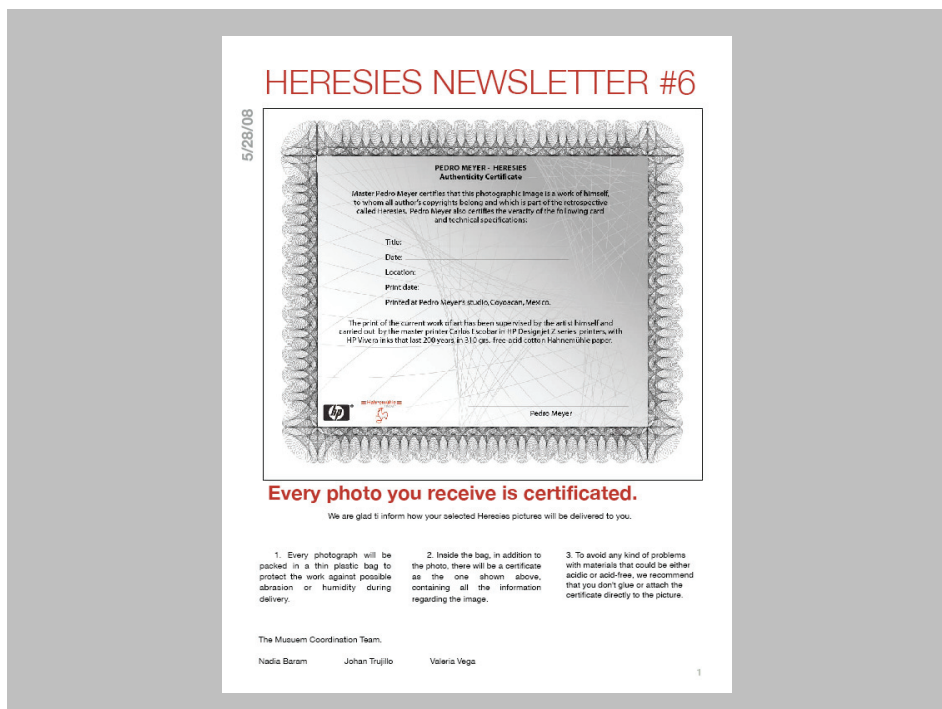


The large-format archival-quality prints were delivered to the museums no less than five weeks prior to the opening. Each photo is labeled by a certificate which guarantees that the print of the current work of art has been supervised by the artist himself and carried out by the master printer Carlos Escobar in HP Designjet Z series printers with HP Vivera inks that last 200 years, in 310 grs. acid-free cotton Hahnemühle paper. The printer produced approximately 2,500 images requested by the museums, all of which were printed at the photographer's studio in Coyoacán in Mexico City and subsequently delivered to 65 venues all over the world.

Participating museums have been charged a shipping and handling fee of \$995 USA. Any print selected for inclusion in the Heresies exhibition became the property of the museum's permanent collection at the conclusion of the exhibit at no additional cost. The curator of the Rijeka exhibition Nataša Ivančević, who leads the photography collection in cooperation with the consultant for photography Helena Srakočić have chosen 90 black and white and colour images from different Meyer's cycles, which are now part of the museum collection of photography. Some of the printable image on web site has been linked to a one- to two-minute audio file containing the artist's comments about that par-

ticular image. Audio files could have been downloaded by the museum for use in audio guides or visitor provided iPods.

Picture 2. Heresies newsletter number 6 with a certificate which labels each photograph



In addition, as part of the project, Editorial House Lunwerg, has published the book *Heresies* separately, with over three hundred photographs selected by photographer Francisco Mata, as well as texts and reflections on the work of Pedro Meyer. The book is more than a catalogue of an exhibit, because no exhibit, being all of them different, concurs fully with its content. Each museum took its own path when selecting the works it would exhibit. The printed book features an audio visitor's guide that can be listened to on-line, so that the reader has the opportunity of hearing a personal interpretation of the content of his work by the author himself. Also, the electronic version of the printed book in PDF format will be downloadable without cost<sup>10</sup>. This will dissolve the habitual barrier that renders books unaffordable for many individuals.<sup>11</sup> *Heresies*

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pedromeyer.com/book/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums/press.php?idiom=EN>

book was published one month prior to the opening. Museums purchased copies of the book from the publisher for sale at the museum.

Pedromeyer.com is a website that serves as a living collection of his works, and on-line portfolio. However, the database is the website's most important feature for it contains the entire body of Pedro Meyer's work. The objective of this database is to generate an on-line collection of images serving people in the field of research, communication, and knowledge. Furthermore it was an interactive site where participants and visitors could fully take part. In addition to the printable images, Meyer posted 23 "digital galleries" on website corresponding to the 23 subjects into which his work was divided for this project. Each digital gallery contained between 12 and 80 of Meyer's photographs selected by a leading editor or curator. In the Rijeka exhibition it has been presented as five digital galleries in a continuous loop. All digital galleries posted on web site were available for viewing by visitors, which means that they could investigate through 1.500 images.

Pedro Meyer and his staff have developed different educational programs which were available on web site. During the preparation period his main assistant and life partner Nadia Baram was sending newsletters with instructions and information necessary for the successful preparation of the exhibition, to everybody included in the project. Museums staff were invited to communicate between each other, and to post all relevant data on the specially designed link on web site. Each museum was invited to download photos related to the preparation and opening of the exhibition, and to all activities during the preparation and duration of the exhibition. Participating countries were: Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay, Cuba, USA, Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, Singapore, Croatia, Italy, Slovakia, Spain and Australia.<sup>12</sup>

Since the opening was all over the world during the beginning of October, Meyer could not attend all the openings. Instead of being present physically, he screened himself and sent via internet, a short movie with a message of greeting in English<sup>13</sup> and welcomed his visitors virtually all over the world.

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<sup>12</sup> The list of museums which participated in the project is available in the web site: [http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums\\_list/museums.php?idiom=EN](http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums_list/museums.php?idiom=EN)

<sup>13</sup> Type: QuickTime Movie, 18,7 MB, available on: <http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums/press.php?idiom=EN>



### 3. The documentation about the *Heresies* exhibition in Rijeka on its specially designed link on the web site

Pedro Meyer :: V 2.0

<http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums/panel.php?display=entry>

#### International Symposium (New)media Art in Museums, Rijeka, 15th -17th octobar 2008. 17/10/2008

[EDIT](#) [X DELETE](#)



Participants of the symposium visiting the exhibition



Participants of the symposium visiting the exhibition



Participants of the symposium visiting the exhibition

#### Press conference, 6th octobar 2008. 07/10/2008

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Curator Natasa Ivancevic with journalists



Curator Natasa Ivancevic with journalists



Curator Natasa Ivancevic with journalists

1 of 1

22.10.2008 9:27

Pedro Meyer :: V 2.0

<http://www.pedromeyer.com/museums/panel.php?display=entry>

#### Opening of the exhibition, 9th octobar 2008. 17/10/2008

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Curator Natasa Ivancevic



The audience at the opening



The audience at the opening



The audience at the opening watching speech of Pedro Meyer; photo by Istog Zorc

#### Promo material 17/10/2008

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Invitation card



Invitation card



1 of 1

22.10.2008 9:26

4. Photograph from the opening of the *Heresies* exhibition in Rijeka's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art



### **Conclusion**

With *Heresies*, Meyer has directed his visionary view at the concept of the museum exhibition of photography, asking the question, what they look like today and how they can be remodeled for the future. In the era of financial restrictions and the redefinition of the museum's basic role, Meyer's new and heretic paradigms of a photographic exhibition included creative collaboration of curators and artists, a worldwide networking of 65 museums participating in the *Heresies* program, enhanced research and collection-building capacity for museums and educational programs for the iPod generation.

### **References**

*Heresies*, Pedro Meyer. Madrid : The Pedro Meyer Foundation Lunwerg Editores  
<http://www.zonezero.com>  
<http://www.pedromeyer.com>