Art Museum Organization: Access to the Masses

Annotated Bibliography

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Classifying art seems almost profane. Art appeals to emotion and affects its viewers differently. Art pieces cannot be neatly defined or uniformly displayed. Art's most unconventional characteristics necessarily make it art. We can lose the beauty, the reverence, the terror, the sublimity or the horror of a piece when we "murder to dissect." This was the poet Wordsworth's apt description of how easy it is to become consumed by the minutia and forget the overall significance or be concerned with how to catalog a piece and forget to appreciate the piece itself.

Despite this danger however, art needs order to be viewed by the greatest number of people. Without order there is chaos and art depicts order. Art has an agenda. There is a reason why the artist created his or her piece. Art has meaning behind it and meaning comes from this order or pattern.

Many museums and organizations developed a variety of systems to increase art access. Geography is becoming less of a restriction to interested parties with globalization. Art patrons are no exception. Money will not prevent you from looking at museum pieces on the internet.

This bibliography was compiled for anyone interested in art museum organization and increasing art access for the entire world. It is specifically written to help library science students consider this career choice. Sometimes it is easy to forget art is an information-bearing entity too.

Art gives us many clues to our past and can capture our current thought. Many societies did not have a written language. Their art is sometimes all we have to make sense of how they lived and what they thought and valued. Technology allows us to

learn about people, things and systems far from us without having to travel there. It is just as important to preserve our art pieces as it is to preserve our written texts.

It is vital to examine what art organization systems exist to form better opinions and make wiser choices as a museum curator or art librarian. Ideas can be stimulated or refined by analyzing what is used now and what is being developed. Innovation is facilitated when current knowledge is used as a foundation and systems and methods do not become "reinvented" or "rediscovered." Reviewing literature prompts progression instead of stagnation.

My search was very frustrating when I first began to look for related information. I started at the University of Utah's Marriott Library. I went directly to the Fine Arts division of the library and tried to look up art exhibits, art organization, art museums and art displays. I was unsuccessful in finding what I needed. I searched many different art databases without finding anything even close to art organization.

I asked the Fine Arts librarian for assistance and she helped me find different books on museums and collections. These books led me to articles on forming a collection and why people collect. I changed my original bibliography focus. I was still unsatisfied because I knew art museums had to be using something to organize their work and I doubted each one created their own method. I'm sure each museum interprets existing organization methods and incorporates this into its exhibits and displays.

I also went to the Salt Lake City Library hoping to find something there but I knew if I couldn't find at the Marriott Library it was unlikely I'd find it at the City Library. I did find some books on museum exhibits but nothing specifically about organizing art. Discouraged, I began to spend more time researching collecting.

I also contacted various people at the University of Utah's Fine Arts Museum but the person I needed to speak with was unavailable. I left a message on his answering machine but he failed to respond. I finally gave up trying to contact him.

I don't know why it took me so long to think of looking in library databases. I looked through the Library Literature database through Emporia's William Allen White Library and several library databases at the University of Utah's Marriott Library. I finally found the information I needed. The articles I discovered from the databases led me to websites where I found additional information. I especially liked the recent publication dates from the website articles.

I found all my information through databases, the library catalog, asking a librarian and looking at the references included in the articles and books I found. I used the Google search engine too but I did not use directories or thesauri. I did look at the Getty's Art and Architecture Thesaurus but it did not direct me to additional sources but is rather a source itself.

Once I figured out where to look I was not surprised at the amount of information I found. It was surprising when I first tried to find information and found nothing I wanted. It helped to start my cataloging class as I used the term "cataloging" to narrow my search in various databases. Cataloging is a systematic method developed to organize any number of things.

Abels, C. (2001). From Digs to Digital: Carnegie Museum of Art is Recording Images of 40,000 Objects. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* G 3.

Many of the items in the Carnegie Museum of Art in 2001 were being digitized. Curators will enjoy the ease of looking up specific information about art pieces. The

public will enjoy looking at the collection on the Internet. Ninety percent of the Carnegie's collection is in storage. Digitization will make these objects visible.

Digitization is how art museums can make their collection available to people around the world. Standardization must be incorporated before this is begun or the project may have to be redone to enjoy interoperability. Our capacity to manipulate data increased significantly with digitization. Articles about museums digitizing its collections are additional evidence of the need for art museums to collaborate and increase art access world-wide.

Art and Architecture Thesaurus (Vols. 1-3). (1990). New York: Oxford University Press.

This is the first general resource to document art. In its forward the AAT (Art and Architecture Thesaurus) explains the need for its existence. Multiple standards divide art and make intellectual research difficult. The re-invention of controlled vocabularies also duplicates work. The AAT is a hierarchal structure that can accommodate diverse levels of cataloging detail.

I am pleased with the AAT and what it attempts to do for art. It reminds me of the Sears subject heading list used to catalog books. It is just a little over ten years old but it is already used widely. Standardization gives the greatest access to the largest amount of people. The AAT did much to help this move forward. Most of the articles I read refer to the AAT or the Getty Art History Information Program that has sparked a lot of art documentation work.

Art and Architecture Thesaurus Supplement. (1992). New York, New York: Oxford University Press.

This supplement is the first of a series of updates to the AAT. It is a work

that continually changes as terminology also changes. As the thesaurus is used the need for additional hierarchies is noted and written into the supplement. The supplement was only to be used before the next edition of the AAT was published in 1994. Each entry in this first supplement included a history of the term to be used and is included in newer editions of the AAT as with all entries after the initial 1990 AAT.

The newest version of the AAT is available online and is probably why the Marriott Library did not have the newer copies of the AAT in its Fine Arts Division. It is a wonderful resource that is susceptible to the changing environment. It is a valuable development and resource for anyone who catalogs art.

Bishoff, L. (2004). The Collaboration Imperative. *Library Journal, 129,* 34-42.

Retrieved January 20, 2004, from Academic Search Elite database.

The article advises librarians to work with their colleagues in museums and archives. The article states collaboration will lead to better collections and additional users. Colorado's Digitization Program is cited as an example of effective collaboration. Participants there considered the same digital imaging standards, metadata practices and legal concerns. Collaboration also facilitated additional mentoring and networking opportunities.

This is a very pertinent article to art organization. As collaboration increases duplication decreases along with time and money spent. Linking art literature to actual works of art will provide the patron with variety and enrich research. Standardization benefits cannot be overemphasized. Increasing access and interoperability is increasing as collaboration increases.

Bostwick, C. F. (1999). Art and Skill; Museum gets Help from Volunteer's Eye.

Daily News, AV 1. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from ProQuest database.

Amateur photographer volunteer Charles Brown is cataloging the Antelope Valley Museum's collection of basketry, stone and bone tools, shell ornaments and other Indian artifacts. Brown is a retired aerospace electronics engineer who moved to the Antelope Valley in 1990 and later became a museum volunteer. He spent his own money on the equipment and enjoys his museum work.

Although not specifically an art museum, the initiative of Brown shows he is keenly aware of digital cataloging and documentation. There were no mentions of standards in the article. I hope he is adhering to standards that will make his effort as productive as it can be given other museum digitizing and cataloging efforts occurring throughout the world.

Fitchard, K. (2002). The Communication of Art. *Telephony,* 46. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from ProQuest database.

Digital Imaging head Alan Newman is visually documenting many of The Art Institute of Chicago's pieces. About 10,000 pieces were completed and stored on high resolution photo files. Over 100,000 pieces need to be done. In addition to the imaging, a database of over 1000 image files was included for textbook publishers to license through the web. Video streaming is also a part of the museum's web features with daily lectures and academic presentations now available to the masses online.

Imaging is pivotal to art museums today. It improves the access and interoperability for patrons. Video streaming and the creation of image files are also great features to organize art and art-related discussion. The multi-media approach is an exciting feature technology allows today.

Franklin, J. (2003). From Inventory to Virtual Catalog: Notes on the Catalogue raisonne. *Art Documentation, 22,* 41-45. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from WilsonWeb database.

The article traces the history of cataloging from the 1720s. Estate sales with inventory lists were the first known catalogs. It traces the development of the catalogue raisonne used now to refer to a catalogue featuring a single artist. When the term was first used it could describe a catalogue with several artists. It also considers the credibility of older catalogs.

The article is relevant as it examines the development from a mere inventory to a descriptive catalog. It credits Edme-Francois Gersaint with developing the principle of listing the works of a single artist even if the pieces come from different collections. It also explains today's use of the term catalogue raisonne. It is important to view cataloging as shifting to serve the time period. It encourages modern art catalogers to continue to look for more effective methods to best serve its patrons.

Frontline Solutions. (2002). Museum smart label system is work of art. *Frontline Solutions, 3,* 15. Retrieved January 20, 2004 from ProQuest database.

The Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in the Netherlands is using the smart label to identify and sort its 15,000 paintings and prints. The new system records an identification number, object condition, number of restorations and object location. It is estimated the project will take three years to complete but it will save a lot of time when it is actually completed. The new system is a "talking tag" system by HELICON. The system will monitor items in place while another will track the item's

movements. Gates at strategic locations also alert the museum if the item leaves the premises.

This system increases the security of the collection. It is an important feature for art curators to consider. While the collection's security is vital, I maintain the need to digitize a collection supersedes what the smart label accomplishes. While the smart label merely tracks an object's physical location, digitizing a collection improves access, interoperability and improves security too.

Getty Information Institute. (1995). *Protecting Cultural Objects: A Preliminary Survey: Summary.* Retrieved January 20, 2004 from http://www.object-id.com/final/04-summary.html

The article summary discusses documenting cultural objects as crucial to thwarting illicit trade. It recognizes stolen cultural objects as one of the most prevalent forms of international crime. The summary also discusses the difficulty of recovering stolen objects without proper documentation.

This article discussed something I hadn't considered. Documentation is necessary to protect cultural objects that include art. It advised the museum and other cultural heritage organizations to join with law-enforcement agencies, customs agencies, the art trade, appraisers and insurance agencies to develop a universally applicable standard. I had thought of art organization with accompanying documentation as necessary for access when it actually also is vital to security.

Getty Research Institue. (2000). *Categories for the Description of Works of Art.* Retrieved January 20, 2004 from http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/standards/cdwa/1_introduct...

The article describes how the Art Information Task Force (AITF) made up of members consisting of art historians, art information professionals, and information providers developed guidelines to describe art, architecture and objects. The categories were created with the hope that curators, registrars, researchers, information managers and vendors use these to make decisions about the content of new and existing databases.

This is important information for any museum curator and anyone performing art information organization. Adhering to these existing categories only helps end-users access the works and related works. Despite these standards, individual museums can still customize collections by how it selects core categories.

Getty Research Institute. (2000). *Pathways to Digital Information: Glossary.*

Retrieved January 20, 2004 from

http://www.getty.edu/research/institute/standards/intrometadata

The glossary contains 90 metadata terms along with their definitions. The glossary listed six other similar sites along with respective web addresses. The terms included was extensive.

The list was extremely helpful to me. I constantly referred to it as I read other articles. Anyone without extensive knowledge will enjoy this list. It was comprehensive. I never needed the definition of a term not included on the list.

Gilliland-Swetland, A. J. (2000). *Introduction to Metadata: Setting the Stage.*

Retrieved January 20, 2004, from

http://www.getty.edu/research/institute/standards/intrometadata

This is a comprehensive explanation of metadata. It is very detailed and helps to

define metadata as it relates to cataloging art or any other object. Metadata's applications, qualities and questions it raises are also included. It was especially interesting to me to learn metadata was not necessarily digital. I liked the definition of metadata as "the sum total of what one can say about any information object at any level of aggregation."

The article explains why metadata is especially critical to cataloging art. It defines the term along with offering specific examples. It discusses issues that need to be considered with organizing art. Metadata involves not just the user or patron of a museum or library but also involves and accepts the ideas and thoughts of the person who documents the objects in an information system.

International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). (1995). *CIDOC Guidelines for Museum Object Information: Introduction.* Retrieved January 20, 2004 from http://www.willpowerinfo.myby.co.uk/cidoc/guide/guideint.htm

This introduction includes general guidelines that can be adopted by a specific museum or organization as the foundation of its documentation system. It defines categories to use to record object information, format rules and conventions and terminology. It also lists the objectives of museum documentation.

The CIDOC is a natural place to begin documenting art. The introduction described other organizations involved in documentation and what each contributes. Acquisition method, date and source were all important aspects to consider along with location and creation of the object. A museum curator will find this information extremely useful for implementing a documentation system.

Mathias, E. (2004). Anatomy of a Digitization Project. *Library Journal, 129*, 2-5. Retrieved January 20, 2004 from MasterFILE Premier database.

Eileen Mathais describes step-by-step object digitization instructions using the digitization projects conducted at a Natural Science Library in Philadelphia as a model for other libraries to follow. First Mathais advises to conduct sufficient research as technology is constantly being updated and to research web sites and the printed word. Next organizations are admonished to select with care exactly what to digitize as often the entire collection is too costly to undertake. In the selection process individuals are advised to be realistic and to plan for cataloging and mounting on the web. Determine your audience is the next step described. This could also be characterized as describing the user. Choose your weapons is the fourth step used to describe selecting correct equipment. Finally the article advises selecting carefully a way to put the digitized collection on the web. Keeping abreast of and incorporating standards are further advised as are considering navigating the collection and planning to migrate or move the collection as newer versions make the older files obsolete.

Mathais offers a comprehensive plan to digitize a collection that can be applied to digitizing art collections. She offers important questions and issues to consider when digitizing. Along with all of her recommendations she also gives www.libraryjournal.com as a site for an extensive list of resources about creating digital collections. This is a wonderful resource for art curators who should explore digitizing to enhance and expand the information of their existing collections.

Mitchell, T. (2000). New Curator has Vision for Museum: Official will use Computer

Technology at Rantoul site. *News Gazette,* B.1. Retrieved January 20, 2004 from ProQuest database.

Tom Hill is the new curator of the Octave Chanute Aerospace Museum in Rantoul, Illinois. One of Hill's central goals is to update the museum's web pages with on-line exhibits letting anyone with internet access have the chance to enjoy some of the museum. According to the article, Hill was selected because of his extensive experience with computers and using these to promote museums.

Although the article is not specifically about an art museum, the information can be applied universally to art museums. Online exhibits increase access to the museum collection and by including information about each object the curator necessarily is classifying and organizing the information. All innovative museum ideas can be used as models for art museums to follow.

Oka, C. (2003). The AMICO Library Review. *Library Journal,* 106. Retrieved January 20, 2004 from WilsonWeb database.

The article reviews the AMICO (Art Museum Image Consortium) Library. The AMICO library contains over 100,000 rights-cleared arts images. Basic cataloging information, curatorial texts, provenance history, multiple views of the work and multimedia are included. The review is positive about the high-resolution digital collection.

The article recommends AMICO library be an integral part of all art museums. It is a fantastic reference source for library patrons that can be placed throughout the museum. In addition to using it to train museum workers, the AMICO library can enhance public lectures and scholarly presentations.

Read, B. (2003). Art History Without Slides. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 49,* 29-32. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from Professional Development Collection database.

Smith College's art department is making digital imaging the core of its teaching. The article lists all the benefits of digital imaging but mentions cost as a real problem. Scanning requires additional time and equipment. Cataloging the images also takes additional time and staff. The article suggests a national framework to deflect some of the costs associated with a digital art collection. Fair-use and copyright issues are confronted again and again with image-sharing. AMICO's (Art Museum Image Consortium) over 100,000 digital archives is a start but the article states it is only a small piece of what is actually needed. ArtSTOR, a non-profit digital art archive with 225,000 images plans to test the fair-use policies. Smith's image collection director expresses hope in the article that in the future the Mona Lisa will only have to be scanned once.

This is vital information for art curators. Digital imaging will ultimately save money as it is used more widely. Organizing these digital files has been discussed and standards have been developed by a variety of organizations. It is exciting to anticipate the future when the work for existing art is complete and only one organization will create documentation to share with other museums. One day art organization will be comparable to book and periodical cataloging. Classic art will share the same cataloging record world-wide with some customization in place for community-specific preferences. Once the initial work is in place, the access will be incredible.

Seren, T. (2001). Integrated Art Documentation: the Guggenheim Perspective. *Art Documentation, 20,* 31-35. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from WilsonWeb

database.

This is a comprehensive article examining specific parts of each art entry. The title, date, medium, measurements, credit lines and object number are defined. The article recognizes no single manual to document art but lists excellent resources to use as guidelines. In particular the article recommends the Getty Art History Information Program that combines both library and museum resources.

The article is excellent for library students because it considers how books about a particular artist can be found along with the artist's actual work. The standard push it includes also makes records easier to search and interact with other art and library catalogs. The Centralized Information Management System explained in the article is exciting. With cross-searchable interrelated databases, it is fun to think of what will be retrieved in the future as all museums one day adhere to standards making interoperability seamless and globalization larger.

Stam, D. C. (1986). Choosing Our Words: Reflections on Authority Control in Art Information Systems. In Karen Muller (Ed.), *Authority Control Symposium* (pp. 55-67). Tucson: Art Libraries Society of North America.

Stam writes about extending authority control to art. What is especially interesting is there was no art authority control in information systems in 1986. It is a relatively recent development. MARC (Machine readable cataloging) is mentioned as is the VRA (Visual Resources Association) but most of the art cataloging and standards organizations didn't exist when Stam wrote this article. She resists authority control and specifically states she does not envision a megasystem for cataloging art.

It is interesting to look at how art documentation has evolved. Standardization is

extremely important and authority work is part of that. Without authority work interoperability will disappear. I am glad art authority work progressed despite Stam's pessimistic outlook. I do envision a megasystem for cataloging art that provides incredible art access to the masses.

White, L. (2002). Museum Implementation of Encoded Archival Description, *Art Documentation, 21,* 15-20. Retrieved January 20, 2004, from WilsonWeb database.

The OAC (Online Archive of California) has the MOAC (Museum and the Online Archive of California) division. MOAC helps increase art access across scattered geographical locations in California. MOAC partners use the EAD or Encoded Archival Description data structure standard.

This article is a good example of how states can begin to share resources and adhere to a universal standard that will eventually be adopted worldwide. Organizing art today is synonymous with digital documentation. Incorporating standards like MOAC does in the article is crucial to long-term interoperability and widespread access. I look forward to when I can access art around the world from a single art catalog as well as view any piece of art from my personal computer over the internet.