

OBSERVATIONS ON DIGITAL ART HISTORY: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, OPEN QUESTIONS

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Advantages & Opportunities

- Online projects can be less expensive in terms of production costs and can take a shorter time to go live.
- Online projects/publications can reach a much larger and broader audience, including underserved audiences all over the world.
- Online projects have built in “metrics” for gauging usage and “success” (number of online visits, searches, etc.).



Advantages & Opportunities *cont.*

- Online projects can be easily updated, ensuring that the content can remain “fresh.”
- Objects that are not physically accessible, dispersed, lost or destroyed, can remain “alive” on line.
- Online resources can be platforms for a variety of “products,” including hybrid publications (e.g., print book or article-cum-online annex or database).



Challenges

- Online publications may not contribute to an academic art historian's career success the same way that a traditional print publication does because of out-of-date institutional policies and standards.
- An authoritative "home" on the Web for some digital projects may not exist.
- Technical and financial support can be difficult if not impossible to obtain.



Challenges *continued*

- Technical training is necessary but not always easily found.
- Copyright issues can create barriers to access and to information sharing, and introduce more obstacles for international collaboration.
- Sustainability affects the longevity and survival of digital projects.



Challenges *continued*

- Online projects require frequent updates and maintenance to ensure currency and value as research and reference materials.
- "Deep Web" resources, such as databases, must be discoverable by Google and other commercial search engines to reach all intended audiences.
- Digital projects are not always inexpensive because they are digital.



Challenges *continued*

- Online projects take time (sometimes decades) and require a high degree of collaboration.
- The accuracy and relevance of some projects depend on inter-institutional cooperation and data sharing.
- Bureaucracy and legal issues can affect progress or success with time-sensitive content.



Data: the Biggest Challenge of All?

- The meaning of “data” may be understood very differently in the humanities and art history, as opposed to the hard sciences.
- Art-historical data is notoriously “messy,” inconsistent, often contradictory—this creates significant challenges for automated processing and analysis.



Questions

- What does working in the electronic environment enable an art historian to do in terms of research that was not possible using traditional research methods? – Art historians need to provide convincing examples.
- How can the “social” behavior of art historians be changed, since collaboration – particularly collaborative authorship – has not always been the norm in our field?
- How much basic technical knowledge does the scholar need to have so that technology does not pull the scholar’s focus away from research content?



Questions *continued*

- In interactive environments, how will the scholar's sphere be separated from the public's sphere?
- How will complex online environments be cited or updated to ensure that collaborative authorship is properly credited and dated?
- How should a dynamic publication be judged or evaluated for academic success?
- Are new standards required to signal scholarly validity of an online resource?




