DIGITAL MELLINI PROJECT:
AN EXPERIMENT IN ART-
HISTORICAL COLLABORATION

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"The design of digital tools for scholarship is an intellectual responsibility, not a technical task."

"Digital Mellini": Overview

- A collaborative project of the Getty Research Institute (GRI) and the University of Málaga, with help from the UCLA Digital Library Program

Objectives:

1. To explore new methods and tools with which to reinvent the concept of scholarly work and publishing
2. To create a model to develop collaborative critical publications in digital media
3. To contribute to the development of virtual research environments for art-historical scholarship

Over-arching Questions

- How can we develop critical and interpretive studies in digital media in a collaborative way that accommodates multiple scholarly perspectives?
- What are—and what should be—the behaviors of art historians using collaborative digital work spaces?
**Areas of Activity**

1. Digital implementation: development of platform-prototype. The idea is that this platform will serve as a model for the further development of similar projects in the field of digital art history.

2. Analysis of the use of the digital environment. To this end, the team will open the workspace to a small group of specialists in art history.

3. Investigation of the historical text and its context to provide a critical basis on which to consider online scholarly research.

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**Elements of the Digital Publication**

- Digital facsimile
- Transcription of original 1681 Italian text (marked up in TEI); transcription of conventional inventory from 1680
- English & Spanish translations (marked up in TEI)
- Links to other resources—e.g. Getty vocabularies, Provenance Index databases, Iconclass
- Critical essays (may have another “locus,” i.e. print)
- Glossary and/or link to TTC (thesaurus of historical terms)
- Images of related works of art
- Researcher-added “tags” attached to individual items
- Discussion forum
The Getty Provenance Index® Databases

Enhanced access via the Getty vocabularies
Digital Mellini

Why are we doing this project?
Why Digital Mellini?

- The focus of the project is an unpublished historical document, with transcription, translations in English and Spanish, links to other documents, links to images, links to other resources (e.g. ULAN, Provenance Index database, Iconclass, etc.).
- The online publication will eventually include tools not available in print publications, including “collaborative workspaces” for scholars and students and tools for “social tagging.”
Why this particular text?

- Unpublished and unique
- Potential for research on digital publications
  - Relatively short and well structured
  - We have other documents that are closely related: useful to make textual comparisons and to explore how to use digital technology to enhance such comparisons. (e.g., with “conventional” 1680 inventory of the same collection).
- Unidentified images: useful to promote scholar participation and to explore how to interrelate digitally texts and images in a meaningful way.
- Presence of aesthetic ideas, critical terms and concepts allows us to explore the possibilities of computational linguistics and other textual technologies to expand critical interpretations.

Developing a Virtual Research Environment
The Virtual Workspace

- Critical and collaborative **DIGITAL** publication
- Space for collaboration, interchange and discussion
Challenges and difficulties

- Technical issues
- Involvement and motivation of scholars
- Methodologies: protocol of rules for virtual collaboration
- Visualizations
- Authorship

Digital Mellini Research Questions

- What do historical documents like the Mellini poem and inventories teach us about the function of works of art in the political, social, and diplomatic spheres?
- What does the document reveal about the art market during the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century?
- What is role of words in the development of visual culture?
... more questions

- How does Pietro Mellini's terza rima inventory (a “virtual collection” based on a real collection) compare and contrast with Giambattista Marino’s “galleria” (an “invented collection” based on a blending of real and fictional works) of 1619?

- Despite the fact that Pietro Mellini based his poem on a real gallery of paintings, he re-creates a “new” virtual gallery in terms of display (mental display).
  - What is the “mental display” that Pietro creates using particular words and references? (linguistic construction - ekphrasis).
  - What role does the audience’s “visual culture” play?

- Who was the intended audience for the 1681 document?

Exploring new modes of research & publication (“design of digital tools for scholarship”)

- What should be the essential elements & functionalities (intellectual, technical, textual and visual) of a digital critical edition?

- What are the issues and challenges in translating historic texts?

- How can the discipline of art history begin to move away from single authorial models resulting in print-only publications, toward more open, collaborative models of research and publication that “take place” on line?
Communication and collaboration can be challenging!