

# **Picture This! the art of cataloguing images in the digital age – Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Wednesday 9th September 2009**

## **Practical metadata: John Hargreaves (JISC Digital Media)**

The day started with a session given by John Hargreaves from JISC Digital Media, which outlined the principles of metadata and organising digitisation projects. The speaker focussed on the issues that were important when planning a project involving metadata, and emphasised that planning the metadata at the beginning of the project was imperative to the project's success.

He explored various definitions of metadata then discussed the metadata needs of different types of institutions, such as libraries, archives and picture libraries. Various metadata schemes were outlined, as well as the possibility and process of adapting an existing metadata scheme. The discussion then focussed on vocabularies: controlled versus uncontrolled vocabularies and the use of folksonomies for metadata. The session ended with some examples of real-life metadata in action, including the photography website "Flickr" and the search-by-sketching facility of "Retrievr".

## **Sharing new standards: building a dual-purpose image collection: Sally Forrest (University of Derby)**

Next, Sally Forrest gave a highly pragmatic and very enjoyable account of the digitisation project which has taken place at the University of Derby. The speaker discussed the various drivers behind the introduction of a visual resources database at the university. These included the underuse of the slide library, increase in importance of university images for promotional purposes and changes in learning structure across the organisation.

She described various challenges associated with starting a visual resources database, such as copyright and adapting standard image management software to local needs. The decision-making process with regards to metadata and vocabularies was also discussed. For instance, it was found that a mixture of controlled and uncontrolled vocabulary was required. Again, the speaker emphasised the importance of designing the structure of the metadata near the beginning of the project, as this is highly problematic to change later on.

The speaker went on to talk about the results of the project: the database (EPIC) was launched and is available on the web to internal users. Interestingly, promotional images take up a higher percentage of the database than anticipated; conversely, art history images have proven less prevalent than originally intended, and encouraging academic art history staff to use the resource has proven challenging. An added benefit of the visual resources database has been the change in knowledge management for images within the university. Retrieval of images in the slide library was largely dependent on the tacit knowledge of the slide librarian; retrieval of images on EPIC is via explicit knowledge, and is available directly to all database users.

### **Cataloguing moving images: describing artists' videos with MARC21: Jacqueline Cooke (Goldsmiths, University of London)**

The final morning session was devoted to cataloguing artists' videos, and was led by Jacqueline Cooke, from Goldsmiths. She discussed the relationship between the artwork and the video; is the video the artwork itself, or is the video a representation of an artwork?

She outlined various cataloguing rules associated with artists' videos. Though there is – as yet – no international standard on cataloguing artists' videos, she applied AACR2 chapter seven, MARC21 coding and OLAC (Online Audiovisual Cataloguers) guidelines to artists' videos. From the speaker's description of cataloguing artists' videos, it seemed that most of the fields/areas of artists' videos proved very similar to general motion pictures and video cataloguing; however, there were some notable exceptions. Moving image cataloguing guidelines are based around shared responsibility for the work; generally, a video has many "authors". Conversely, artists' videos are often the responsibility of one key person: the artist. This has an impact on cataloguing.

The speaker mentioned the FRBR work/expression/manifestation/item levels in brief, and how these levels could be applied to video art. Unfortunately, there was not an opportunity for the speaker to expand this description any further; this would have made interesting listening and also would have illuminated the "work-concept" discussion which was prevalent throughout the session.

Overall, the morning sessions of this fascinating workshop proved to be an invaluable introduction to the terminology, issues and possibilities of visual resources cataloguing.

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### **Enhancing VADS, enhancing metadata: Marie-Therese Gramstadt (VADS)**

The Visual Arts Data Service (VADS) have been making enhancements to the website and have conducted user surveys as part of the JISC-funded Enhancing VADS project (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/digitisation/enrichingdigi/vads.aspx>). The subject index that Marie-Therese Gramstadt, Projects Officer, described in her talk is a small part of this project, and also a task still in development.

Marie-Therese gave a whistle stop tour of the steps VADS have taken in trying to establish a classification system for their collections. This goes back to the ADAM (Art, Design, Architecture & Media Information Gateway) Subject Headings (<http://adam.ac.uk/adam/public/SF3/SF3f9807.rtf>), which early members of VADS contributed to, and which formed the basis of a later set of 'saved searches' on the website. Until March 2008 VADS was funded by JISC and the AHRC to host digital collections, making them available through a cross-collection search and also preserving the digital material. The collections received by VADS are already catalogued, but there has always been a desire to provide an over-arching subject index in order to improve discoverability.

Carlos Silva, Software Developer, has created an open source tool to apply a three-level classification system to the existing images in the VADS database. Marie-Therese demonstrated the tool, explaining that although there were a large number of images already catalogued using the tool, the actual subject classification was going through a period of change and would probably be quite different from the examples given. She invited delegates to add their names to a list if they would like a copy of the classification when it is completed, and/or a copy of her background research of existing projects and classification schema.

### **Kultur: Andrew Gray (University of the Arts London)**

Andrew Gray is the Project Officer for Kultur, an Institutional Repository for use in the creative and applied arts. University of the Arts London is the lead partner in the JISC funded project in association with the University for the Creative Arts, VADS and the University of Southampton.

Andrew spoke about some of the key points of the project that finished in March. He explained that the focus of the project was on research and teaching & learning, and that Kultur differs from most Institutional Repositories in that it houses both text, images and time-based media.

One of the findings of the project was that there were much fewer than expected born digital works, and that most works were therefore displayed as digital representations of original works.

He went on to explain about how records are structured; within one record for an artist, there may be multiple images attached to it. Records have to allow for the different roles that contributors have. Some works have multiple creators: for example, theatrical works. The metadata scheme in use is modified/qualified Dublin Core, although the medium of the work has been modified. The item level metadata includes information about licences and so on as each work can have a different copyright licence. There is a field for exhibitions and researchers can add other metadata such as URLs for their own sites.

The aim of the Repository is for it to be user-friendly. The ideal scenario would be for researchers to add their own metadata, and for this reason there are only four mandatory fields for art & design submissions: title, date, format, and creator.

A question that Andrew fielded was on the aspect of quality control if researchers are allowed to add their own metadata. Research centres within the University will have their own criteria and these will be applied; also the requirements of REF will mean that all work will be checked for accuracy.

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### **V&A Factory project: Ella Ravilious (Victoria and Albert Museum)**

Ella Ravilious is a Curator in Prints & Drawings at the V&A. Her beautifully illustrated talk on the Factory Project, detailed how this complex project was managed.

The project started in November 2007, and aims to digitise and improve catalogue records for a large selection of prints, drawings, watercolours and ephemera from the Word and Image Department of the V&A.

The project is staffed by a Curator, Cataloguer and Photographer and a team of interns and volunteers. 27, 000 items have been digitised to date, and 6000 items have been catalogued. The photography and cataloguing strands work independently, with cataloguing

running behind the photography strand. The decision was made to run the two strands separately and look at the bigger picture. It was felt that it would be quicker to separate out the two processes.

The team are working through the collection systematically, instead of picking out the greatest hits, which it may have been tempting to do. It was felt that the most popular items in the collection are also quite likely to have pre-existing images.

The photographer uses a medium format camera. 70-80 objects are photographed daily. Collections held by the V&A that have been photographed to date include those of Cecil Beaton, Julia Margaret Cameron, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Paul Strand.

Batches of images are uploaded automatically overnight to VADAR, the V&A's digital asset management system. Cataloguing is done on the collection management system, with the two systems being inter-linked. As much of the work as possible is automated, with the benefit of reducing human error.

There is an auditing strand to the project, as during the project they found items that were not recorded. Auditing work is particularly engaging for the volunteers. Volunteers can be PhD students, and the project aims to utilise their areas of expertise if possible. They are trained in object handling and conservation, with some of the volunteers from a paper conservation course at Camberwell College of Art.

As part of the auditing strand, improvements have been made to storage and conservation standards, and so there have been many benefits overall as a result of the project.

Ella concluded the talk telling us to keep an eye on the V&A website for future developments. There are plans for public access, and the V&A is currently working on an entirely different sort of public access catalogue. If you want a taste of what is to come, some of the items can already be retrieved by the 'Search the Collections tool' on the V&A website. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>.

### **Cataloguing Computer Art: Honor Bedard (Victoria and Albert Museum)**

Honor Bedard's talk described work at the V&A researching, documenting, cataloguing and digitising Computer Art collections. I for one was unaware of the distinction between computer art and digital art and Honor's talk provided much food for thought about this under-researched area.

The beginnings of a National Collection are taking shape at the V&A after the donation of 2 substantial collections of computer art. These collections are CACHE, from the Computer Arts Society and the Patric Prince collection. The V&A has now a policy of actively collecting works of computer art, and owns over 600 works.

The current project builds upon the CACHE project which traced where archives existed in the UK, and a real mix of works was located. Sourcing information about the artists has been easy as artists tend to be computer literate and can be found via the web. However, they are very keen to get data on the art works from the artists themselves while they are still alive. Time is running out.

The time period from which the work originates is important; the earliest analogue works date from 1952, but the crucial factor is that the work was created before the advent of commercially available off-the shelf software.

Works in the collection are photographed at high resolution, a priority at the V&A.

As with the Factory project, the collection management system is used to catalogue works, and VADAR is used for images. Authorised records are made public through the Collections Online system on the V&A website.

Cataloguing has been difficult as there is little established terminology in the field. Artists worked with programming themselves and were typically computer scientists or mathematicians. Materials and techniques are the most difficult fields to complete in a catalogue record as it is often high level programming that created the art work. Works may be in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> manifestation. An addition, it is very difficult not to prioritise the computer in describing how the art work was made. Honor showed an example of a work by Herbert W. Franke to illustrate the difficulties in describing technique.

The project ends next summer. The next challenge will be working on born digital works and time-based works.

There will be a display in December 2009 and a conference in 2010

See [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints\\_books/features/computer-art/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints_books/features/computer-art/index.html)

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### **Cataloguing visual resources at the Royal College of Art: Neil Parkinson (Royal College of Art)**

Neil Parkinson, Special Collections Manager at the Royal College of Art, gave a very lively description of the RCA's Show Gallery, which is a live digital resource running on the College's intranet documenting their end of year shows. Hundreds of images of students' work are photographed every day, uploaded to the server and catalogued quickly. This year, a small team uploaded 4,500 photographs in 3 weeks! A collective gasp could be heard from the audience.

The college uses Portfolio Server 8.5 to store and catalogue the images, using simple fields, consisting of the artist's name, title of the work, their department and year. No descriptive fields are used but measurements are included provided the student has displayed this information with the work in the gallery. At present, only staff, students and alumni has access to the resource, but a selection may be curated in the future and made public.

### **Intute: Mary Burslem (Intute)**

Mary Burslem then spoke about Intute ([www.intute.ac.uk](http://www.intute.ac.uk)), an online resource aimed at researchers and teachers in higher education, which catalogues online resources for all subject areas. Originating as ADAM, a specifically art & design based resource, in the mid-1990s, it has undergone various metamorphoses until its re-launch this year with coverage of 19 subject areas, of which creative and performing arts is one. Intute lists a wide range of useful resources from museum collections and artist's websites, to websites that are themselves art objects, and JISCMail lists.

Each resource is catalogued to include the title, URL, a brief description (150-300 words) highlighting its important features, keywords and subject classifications. The classification system for the arts was created by Artifact, one of Intute's former guises, and uses 6 levels of subject headings. With the plethora of websites on offer, Intute seems to be an invaluable resource for sorting the wheat from the chaff.

**Wellcome images: Catherine Draycott (Wellcome Trust)**

Catherine Draycott from the Wellcome Trust (<http://images.wellcome.ac.uk>) described how the Wellcome Library catalogues its collection of historical, clinical and biomedical images. One of the images from the collection that Catherine showed us was an amazing multilayered anatomical illustration from the Renaissance that resembled the work of contemporary artists.

A programme to digitise the Picture Library was introduced in 1998 and the first digital collection was launched in 2002. Because of its specialist nature, US National Library of Medicine subject headings are used, and both Latin and common terminologies. They are working to standardise the metadata accompanying the images using PLUS and MILE standards. The images on the website are free to download, but images delivered to clients wishing to publish or broadcast have an invisible transaction specific watermark embedded.

**The 'Your Paintings' website: strategies for cataloguing oil paintings for web users: Aimee Blackledge (University of Oxford)**

The last presenter of the day was Aimee Blackledge, a research assistant in the History of Art department at Oxford University, who is working with the Public Cataloguing Foundation ([www.thepcf.org.uk](http://www.thepcf.org.uk)) to develop methods of tagging digital images. This work is related to the Your Pictures project, on which the PCF and the BBC are collaborating, to allow greater public access to paintings in storage in public collections across the country. These works are being digitally photographed with a view to launching an online collection in 2012.

Tagging by users is seen as a way of improving accessibility and encouraging the use of the collection by the general public. Much of the material has minimal metadata attached, so tagging would allow more opportunities to search the collection. Ways of controlling inappropriate or incorrect tagging are being explored, but it is hoped that interaction with the resource will encourage a deeper engagement of the user, similar to the relationship that a museum hopes to foster with its visitors, so that browsers become followers, and go on to be searchers and, ultimately, researchers.

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