Supporting the Changing Practices of Art Historians

A Response to the Ithaka S+R Report

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Introduction

- It has been a pleasure working with Roger and Matt and facilitating their visits to Princeton

- Participation in the Ithaka study has stimulated many thought-provoking conversations with colleagues on and off campus

- By way of response today, I'd like to draw attention to some recent research-support activities at Princeton and sister institutions that resonate with the report's recommendations

- A thread running through these initiatives is that they have been made possible through collaboration. In some cases, Princeton is at the hub; in others, it is at the periphery

- Participating in the Ithaka study has helped me see these existing projects in a new light, and has given me a greater sense of urgency about moving forward with new collaborative ventures

Encourage the exploration of digital methods

- Digital Humanities has become a buzzword that, unfortunately, obfuscates as much as it clarifies. What exactly is DH? Who's ahead? Who's getting left behind? Should librarians be proselytizers, skeptics, or a little bit of both?

- The Ithaka report's admonition is salutary: Libraries should focus on projects that scholars consider meaningful rather than on digital methods for their own sake

- At the end of the day, I suspect that DH is simply the modern expression of a certain systematic kind of humanities researcher's mind

- My touchstone is Allan Marquand, the namesake of the Princeton art library and a pioneer in both Renaissance art and computer science. Professor Marquand is credited with inventing the first pre-computer—an electrical logical machine—in the 1880s. One wonders what he would have done with the Della Robbias had he today's digital tools!

- I believe that compelling art-historical questions will motivate the development of a digital art history. If the appropriate tools, technical expertise, and humanities datasets can be assembled—cue the library—the result will be a transformative, computation-enabled branch of art history

Build a networked community of cultural and educational institutions

- DH at Princeton has been a broadly-based effort that originated with our faculty. A highly motivated group of professors, graduate students, IT and Library staff worked intensively over two years to create the DH program

- In the process, the DH Initiative at Princeton has built reciprocal relationships with digital humanists and DH centers at universities in the US and abroad

- When the DH Center recently became a reality, senior staff elected to seat it, administratively and physically, within the main campus library. It's important to note that the art library has had a seat at the DH table from the beginning, and this year I was appointed to the campus-wide DH Steering Committee.

- Princeton's DHC is focused on research support and will capitalize on the strong relationships between subject librarians and faculty, and is also allied with the library's digital archive-building efforts—especially Princeton's Blue Mountain Project


Digital Humanities @ Princeton

Blue Mountain Project

- ◻ The BMP, a repository of avant-garde arts journals, aspires to create a digital corpora that provides traditional print surrogates as well as a robust data set that is open and responsive to varied, computational queries

- ◻ Projects like Blue Mountain require a substantial, long-term commitment of institutional resources—and they can only thrive when built upon a network of partnerships. The BMP benefits enormously from partner institutions in the US and Europe, including some that are represented in this room

- ◻ The BMP also offers itself to the broader community as a test-bed for periodical digitization

- ◻ High on my list for the future of BMP is the incorporation of enriched metadata and non-verbal search tools that will privilege images. For this, we will be looking to institutions like the Frick and the Bavarian State Library that are experimenting with algorithmic image matching.

Plan collaboratively for library collections

- The Ithaka report asks us to plan collaboratively for library collections

- Collection building is a major focus for Marquand with15,000 new titles added each year and an active rare books program

- Art historians of tomorrow are depending on all of us to collect what will become the core materials AND rare resources of tomorrow

- In the midst of many priorities, we need to keep our eyes on this ball. No one will have it "just in time" if we don't collect it "just in case"

- There is an enormously diverse body of art historical literature and it takes all of us to cover the territory. Art libraries of all sizes and types have a role to play, and each can have a material impact on the discipline

- Here are examples of collaborative collecting with which Princeton is involved
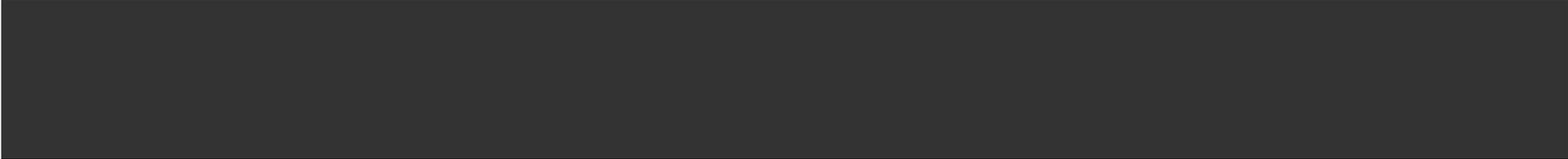
- The Ivies+ Art Architecture Group is finalizing an agreement for Contemporary Latin American Art. The goals are to build broader and deeper collections in print and other media, and to share acquisitions expertise across the consortium. There is even an emerging possibility of partnering with the true experts—our ARLIS/NA colleagues in Latin America

- Web-archiving is a critical collecting area where duplication makes little sense. Princeton is looking to 2CUL (the Columbia Cornell partnership) and NYARC (the New York Art Resources Consortium) for leadership

- Princeton's School of Architecture Library is part of a 2CUL pilot that builds on the Avery Library's web-archiving program for urbanism and architectural preservation

- Marquand is interested in East Asian contemporary art resources like artist and gallery websites, so have reached out to NYARC which, with support from the Mellon Foundation, is trail-blazing in this arena

- 2CUL and NYARC are establishing best practices, workflow models, and a framework for cooperation that will lead to the preservation of ephemeral, art history web resources

Create repositories that serve the entire discipline

- The Ithaka report encourages us to develop our individual libraries with service to the discipline at large in mind

- One way we can do that is to reach out to the publishers that are critical for our local programs

- Unlike the STEM disciplines, where libraries battle with juggernaut commercial publishers, art publishing is a relatively fragile biota that we need to nurture

- As e-publishing experimentation gets underway, art librarians are well-situated to engage with and advise art publishers—be they UPs, scholarly societies, museums, or practicing artists

- We can influence the creation of imaginative, value-added e-publications that better meet library concerns from the outset. Publishers have a lot on their minds and issues like long-term preservation and tracking iterations are not at the top of their list

- Here are some examples of where Princeton has been able to engage with art publishers:

- Marquand has an ongoing relationship with the video-art archive and distributor EAI (Electronic Arts Intermix) and conducted a beta test in 2011-2012 to help them develop a streaming product for the educational market

- We have also reached out to two innovative e-publishers to discuss library purchase and subscription models, and long-term preservation issues. Artifex Press is producing a series of web-based, catalogues raisonnés, and Badlands Unlimited is creating artist's books for display on devices like the I-Pad. Neither publisher had given much thought to libraries as customers, and seemed surprised that we would be willing to pay a higher list price for institutional access and archival rights.

- A university press has asked Marquand to consult with them and one of their authors about an ambitious, e-enabled archaeological series that the author has proposed. The scholar wants to publish a lifetime's worth of data about an archaeological dig and is adamant that print is insufficient to the task. The press has many concerns—infrastructure development costs, distribution platforms, and marketing. Is their author crazy, or would libraries really be interested in such a publication?

Foster better skills and research tools for working with . . .

- In closing, I'd like to cast a glance backwards to suggest a way forward

- Art history is in a transitional period, with a rich and continuing print legacy and electronic experimentation taking off

- The Ithaka report foregrounds the need to foster skills for working with digital materials—especially images—but there's another side to the coin

- Ithaka respondents said they had little trouble finding secondary sources, but all of us know that tracing citations in art history is complicated. Researchers in different specialties have told me—with considerable dismay—that they heard papers presented at the most recent CAA conference where they speaker repeated old findings as though they were new. They didn't believe this was done maliciously. Rather, the speakers seemed to be unaware of the earlier publications.
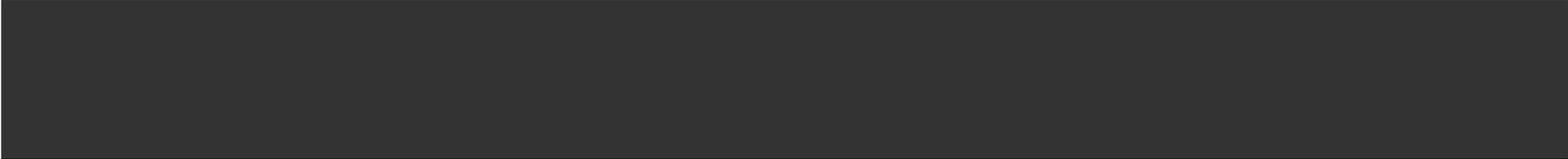
- The new WorldCat Art Discovery tool is a major leap forward in opening up monographic and periodical literature

- Yet, I'm sure we all have stories of younger researchers confounded to learn that an art journal exists only in print form. But why should they intuit that Google and one-box library searches barely scratch the literature of art history?

- One aspect of the changing research practices of art historians is an atrophying of legacy research skills—the bibliographic methods that older scholars take as a given. Introducing younger researchers to the arcane practices of tracing print bibliography is critical to the future of art historical research.

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