# Introduction*

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**Abstract**

Introduction to "Art History and Its Publications in the Electronic Age".

When this study began, scholarly publishing in art history appeared at serious risk. The crisis of the monograph, which other fields experienced as a slow decline, hit art history with an abrupt force: a major publisher of monographs ended its art history line; other lists were shrinking or refocusing on cross-over and more commercial books. Meanwhile art history was squeezed by the strictures of copyright and exorbitant image-related fees, problems unique to our field. The Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia[1] and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University[2] have two of the largest and most distinguished doctoral programs in the field. We feared our recent graduates would not be able to publish their dissertation research and infuse the field with new work. If that were the case, the intellectual vitality of the discipline as well as the professional advancement of a generation of graduate students and beginning professors would be jeopardized. These concerns motivated our study, which was initiated in September 2005.

In gathering information over the past ten months from a wide variety of stakeholders—scholars, editors, publishers, leaders of research institutes, museum officials, librarians—our sense of the problem changed. We confirmed the retrenchment of publishing of monographs but found emerging publication opportunities. Growing scholarly interest in the constitution of the visual world is prompting some university presses to launch new lines incorporating art history, and the increased number of exhibition catalogues with their wide readership offers a fertile resource for the field. We also found a remarkable responsiveness among art historians to electronic communication. Yet e-publishing programs have not emerged and taken advantage of the field's rapidly growing sophistication in the use of digital images and electronic research techniques.

Traditional solutions are failing, but we do not see a crisis. In our view digital technology is opening new opportunities and posing transitional problems that are soluble. While acknowledging the continued value of monographic scholarship in print, this study aims to identify specific transition issues and points of blockage and recommends concrete measures to allow art history scholarship to flourish.

We are grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation[3] for funding the study, and we especially wish to thank Donald Waters, Suzanne Lodato, Harriet Zuckerman, Joseph Meisel, and Angelica Zander Rudenstine for their interest in the project. Their sustained commitment to art history and to confronting large-scale problems of humanities scholarship was evident throughout this study. The Mellon Foundation introduced us to Lawrence T. McGill, Director of Research and Planning at the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy

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†http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
[1]http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arthistory/
[2]http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/fineart/
[3]http://www.mellon.org/

Studies at Princeton University[4] , who served as consultant to the study and conducted the data research. His findings are summarized in this publication, and described fully in his report *The State of Scholarly Publishing in the History of Art and Architecture*[5]. We also drew on the deep expertise of Kate Wittenberg, Director of the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia University[6] , in electronic publication, libraries, and university presses. Her pioneering work with Gutenberg-e[7] , another Mellon-supported venture, helped us understand the challenges and promise of electronic monographs. Eric Ramírez-Weaver, doctoral candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, provided crucial research assistance at several stages of the project. Fronia W. Simpson lent us her sharp editorial eye.

We owe a very special debt of gratitude to the large circle of scholars, editors, and other field leaders who gave generously of their time and shared their concerns and perspectives with us. The remarkable level of participation reflected a pervasive concern about publishing challenges in art history. After a series of meetings with scholars at different career stages and with art history editors, we convened a daylong summit of decision makers who affect policy concerning research, publication, and scholarly communication. We are indebted to the more than thirty leaders of university presses, research libraries, art history institutes, scholarly societies, art history departments, and museums for the robust and serious conversation that day, which helped shape in particular the recommendations contained in this report. The illuminating colloquium "Art History and Its Publishers" at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute[8] in the spring of 2006, supported by the Mellon Foundation, enriched our understanding of the editorial process. We thank Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury, Director and Associate Director of Research at the Clark, and Catherine Soussloff and Ken Wissoker, external hosts of the event, for inviting us to participate. Our work was also informed by conversations with Eileen Gardiner and Ronald Musto, founding directors of the ACLS History E-Book Project[9] ; James Shulman, Executive Director of ARTstor[10] ; and Peter Osnos, founder of the Caravan Project. Patricia Rubin generously informed us about the contents of two meetings about art history research and academic publishing that took place at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2005 and 2006. Carol Mandel and James Neal, the visionary leaders of the NYU and Columbia library systems, respectively, gave us the benefit of their strategic thinking and insight.

Just as we were finishing our report, Rice University Press announced that it would re-launch itself as a fully electronic press with a special commitment to art history. We were delighted to find Rice willing to partner with the Council on Library and Information Resources[11] (CLIR) to publish our report electronically, with the kinds of hyper-linking, response capability, and print-on-demand options we consider vital to the success of scholarly publication on line. At Rice University Press, Chuck Henry, Chuck Bearden, and Kathi Fletcher generously steered us through the technological and legal process. We received enthusiastic support at CLIR from Susan Perry, Michael Ann Holly, Kathlin Smith, and Ann Okerson.

This study is the beginning, not the end, of our work. We are eager to take the next steps to advance scholarship in the electronic age, and we welcome your comments toward that end.

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[4] http://www.princeton.edu/∼artspol/

[5] *The State of Scholarly Publishing in the History of Art and Architecture* <http://cnx.org/content/col10377/latest/>

[6] http://www.epic.columbia.edu/

[7] http://www.gutenberg-e.org/

[8] http://www.clarkart.edu/

[9] http://www.historyebook.org/

[10] http://www.artstor.org/info/

[11] http://www.clir.org/