Electronic Publication: Introduction*

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Abstract

Introduction to "Art History and Its Publications in the Electronic Age", Part III. "Electronic Publication".

Art history straddles the digital divide. Its pedagogical practices have been transformed by digital technology, but its scholarship remains wedded to the printed page. Important investments in digital image libraries, multimedia laboratories and electronic classrooms have created a new infrastructure and allowed art historians to convert from slides to scans, but the forces that have transformed the classroom, library and scholar's desk have yet to enhance publishing options. The field's born-digital, peer-reviewed journals are limited to *19th-Century Art Worldwide* and *caa.reviews*, which, as their names imply, are limited in scope. The journals of record are not published digitally, although back issues are available online through JSTOR[1] .

The absence of electronic publishing outlets tailored to art history has several explanations, some legal, some technical, some based on scholarly traditions. Copyright owners have curtailed access to digital materials, and entry barriers on university sites deter electronic publication. The delivery, display, and manipulation of high-quality digital images as well as the preservation of digital materials present technical challenges. The problems of copyright, image quality, and stability of the digital file tend to reinforce some resistance to electronic forms of scholarly publication. Art history is invested in the monographic book as the prime vehicle for transmission of knowledge and academic advancement, and this bias is reinforced by tenure and promotion standards that privilege books over other types of publication.

The spread of electronic publishing with print-on-demand options may appear as an inevitable development, but it is not obvious what immediate next steps will facilitate a productive transition. One factor to take into account is that technologically driven solutions are in advance of the slower pace of institutional and professional change. Many art historians operate within universities that set conservative credentialing standards. The challenge is to find a pathway that accommodates institutional realities but invites innovation and opens new territory. An electronic publishing initiative must meet three basic conditions: art history's rigorous and distinctive requirements relating to images; the discipline's historiographical tradition of individual scholarship; and university standards of tenure and promotion, which value peer-reviewed publications.

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[1]http://www.jstor.org/

This part of the report identifies two areas where electronic publishing initiatives would offer art history important benefits and respond to limitations of print publications: scholarly journals and collaborative, large-scale projects such as collection catalogues and catalogues raisonnés.