

The portals of art history (Williamstown, 11-12 May 07)

Clark Art

Colloquium:

The Portals of Art History

May the 11th and the 12th

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute
225 South Street, Williamstown, MA 01267

organized by Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury with the support of the
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

This colloquium, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant to the Clark's Research and Academic Program, brings together experts and pioneers of Art History as represented in the digital universe. As with all Clark colloquia, instead of formal "papers", meetings are supposed to concentrate on structured discussion and debate around a set of questions. It is our hope that long-term visions for the field of Art History/Visual Studies, and key strategic questions, will occupy as much of the discussion time as specific questions about individual technologies.

The aim is to bring together those who have been instrumental in creating the new digital gateways to information, scholarship, and resources in art history and criticism, whether in the museum, academic, or commercial worlds. We envisage two days of roundtable discussions: focused on what has been achieved by the new digital initiatives, what challenges these initiatives face, and what the future might have in store for the digital portal or gateway? What are the advantages, limits, and possibilities of on-line art history? What kinds of art history and criticism are represented on the web and what kinds are absent? What has motivated your own intervention in this field? What special role does your site/journal/initiative bring to the discipline? Where are future developments going to lie? And, how might the "webmasters" of art history's digital age collaborate to expand the possibilities? What might "Web 2.0" do for the art history community?

Organisators/Convenors:

- Michael Ann Holly, Director, Research and Academic Program, The Clark

Institute.

- Mark Ledbury, Associate Director, Research and Academic Program, The Clark Institute.

Participants:

- Petra ten Doesschate Chu, editor of Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide.
- Katy Deepwell, founder and editor of Nparadoxa.
- Charles Henry, Rice University.
- Godehard Janzing, Deutsches Historisches Museum, editor of H-Arthist
- Bill Kelly Jr, founder and editor of LatinArt.
- Christine Kuan, Grove Art Online.
- Teresa Lai, Project Manager, the Metropolitan Museum of Art Art History Timeline".
- Max Marmor, Director of Collection Development for ARTstor.
- John Prown, Director, the Chipstone Foundation.
- Didier Rykner, founder and editor of the website "La Tribune de l'art".
- William Tronzo, co-organisator of the Getty conference "Art History and the Digital World", Tulane University.
- Corinne Welger-Barboza, Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, founding member of the Observatoire Critique des Ressources numériques en histoire de l'art et archéologie.
- Chris Whitcombe, Sweet Briar College, editor and founder of Art History Resources on the Web.

In Attendance

- David Keiser-Clark, Webmaster, Clark Art Institute.
- Kent Lydecker, Director of Education, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Susan Roeper, Head of the Library, Clark Art Institute.

Clark Fellows:

- Malcolm Bull, Ruskin School, Oxford University.
- Darby English, University of Chicago.
- Lowery Sims, Studio Museum, Harlem.
- Carolyn Tate, Texas Tech University.
- Ernst van Alphen, University of Leiden.
- James Meyer, Emory University.

Program:

Friday 11 May

9:00 Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury. Welcome and Introductions.

9.15-11.15 Session 1 : Gateways and Gatekeeping.

- The Internet was championed as a tool of access --- in art history, how has that access enabled new audiences, new interests, new ways into the

"discipline" ? Where are the important "first step" sites in art history ?
Should the academic community care about these sites? What kind of art
history do they promote/represent?

- How are gateways patrolled? Gatekeeping is something the academic world has done efficiently, scrupulously guarding its hierarchies of knowledge and its credentials. What are the rules for gatekeeping art history on the net ? Who does it ? Who should do it ? Do we need it ? Do we need safeguards and quality assurance, and how might we make it possible for students and the public to understand the different kinds of knowledge available on the web ?
- What value does the community find in knowing that certain online sites contain content that has been peer-reviewed and/or written by scholars ?
- Is there a fine line between knowledge sites and advocacy sites/fan sites ? What does this line tell us about the assumptions we make about art historical knowledge and authority ? Should we actually re-conceive our models of authority in the discipline in this new era ?

Discussion leaders : Mark Ledbury, Bill Tronzo Christine Kuan and Teresa Lai.

11:15 Session 2 : The World's Database ? Archives, Collections, Art
Libraries, and the Web.

- Where are we with museum collections on the web ? Art history often regards itself as object-based, but are these objects well-represented by on-line resources established by museums ? What are the most fruitful and useful models of database currently out there? And what are the disasters/pitfalls of the short history of "collections databases" ?
- More philosophically, what can a collection database actually do for art historians ? Is it just a glorified list ? Can objects be modeled/represented in electronic form in a way which actually helps understand them rather than simply list them – or is it inevitably the case that only physical contact with an object can really bring the researcher "close" to it ? What kind of new models of database might we envision in the future?
- How do museums negotiate their double bind – needing to use their collections as revenue generators and yet having a mission to further understanding and knowledge ?
- What is the point of the exhibition microsite ? Which are the most successful examples of the genre ?
- What is the future of image databases for teaching and research ? What have we learned from Artstor ? What is the future of the project ?
- How can libraries and archives further research beyond the catalogue/database model ? How have book digitization projects helped/hindered research in the field ? Are we approaching the truly universal research library ? Are skills or materials "lost" in the process or is it win-win ?

Discussion leaders : Jon Prown, Charles Henry, Max Marmor.

3:00pm - 5:00pm Session 3 : Publishing on the Web.

- What are the successful models of art history publishing on the web?
Are we now at a critical moment for the "e-journal"?
- What kinds of journal are published on the web ? Is there a disciplinary/political/cultural difference between paper-based journals and web journals in art history ? Is there now a hierarchy of "importance" for web journals ?
- What are the obstacles to further development of web-based art history journals, apart from image rights ?
- Can ejournals ever be commercially successful, or even sustainable ?
- Do e-journals currently exploit the unique benefits of web-based publishing, or are they still slave to traditional formats and ways of thinking about what a journal is and should be ?
- What contribution do sites like the Observatoire Critique , Latinart.com and others make to critical awareness, international understanding (or the overcoming of cross-border ignorance...) in publication and the dissemination of research ?
- Is e-publishing a positive step towards a more globally-oriented art history ?
- Will the web change the footnote ?

Discussion leaders : Katie Deepwell, Petra Chu, Corinne Welger, Bill Kelley Jr.

Saturday 12 May

9:30 Session 4 : Art History and web 2.0.

- What does the (now rather clichéd) term "Web 2.0" mean for art history?
How can the art history community on the web be constructed?
- Will the same institutions dominate art history on the web in the future (ie Museums and Universities ?) or will individual and independent projects, linked together in networks, present a challenge to this older model ?
- How do listservs work to oil the wheels of the art history community ?
Are they effective? Are they sufficiently exploited and developed? Do they provide another model of web use ?
- What about sharing/community/networking in the discipline? Can art history use Flickr, or Myspace, or "Second Life" technologies? What else is around the corner ?
- What is the role of blogs, podcasts and the spawn of these technologies in shaping the community of those interested in or committed to art history ?
- What new technologies might enable swifter, more effective and more cordial communication between communities and interest groups in the

discipline (internationally and institutionally) that remain stubbornly uncommunicative ?

- What is the role of the commercial site vs. the journalistic site vs. the academic site ? Or must we now see these barriers as more fluid ?

- How might technology help diffuse other forms of interaction and debate than the book (i.e., conferences "live", web-colloquia, etc.)

Discussion leaders : Godehard Janzing, Didier Rykner, Christopher Witcombe.

2:00 pm Session 5 : Art History 2.0? Doing art history differently.

- As Bill Tronzo asks: The digital humanities are thriving. What are the major new research methods or techniques that have emerged in art history and how have they shifted or changed the constellation of problems and questions with which art historians occupy themselves ?

- Will the new digitized art history be more truly global ? Will it change canons, emphases or ways of seeing, or will the richest museums and institutions dominate the digital world even more than they dominate the paper world ?

- Can the internet really serve as a way of opening up art history to more interdisciplinary/collaborative research ? Is this even desirable ? Or will the best art history always be the result of the individual mind confronting the individual object, as some believe ?

- As Didier Rykner asks: Is it possible today to do art history without the Internet ?

- And if not, what skills might be lost/made redundant by the digital age? Should we be worried about this ?

- What would "Open Source" art history look like/be like !?

Mark Ledbury will coordinate this discussion.

5:30 Clark Conversation (panel discussion open to the public) and reception.

Reference:

CONF: The portals of art history (Williamstown, 11-12 May 07). In: ArtHist.net, May 11, 2007 (accessed Jan 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/29349>>.