Conservation’s Digital Landscape: one conservator’s perspective

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What I’ve been asked to talk about:

- key resources I use as a conservator
- expectations
- what is missing
- what remains problematic
Some resources that have influenced my thinking on this topic


Thanks also to

Members of the CoOL Working Group
Walter Henry
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Eryl Wentworth
What I do in the digital landscape:

• make stuff.
• find stuff.
• use & organize what I find & make.
• share what I’ve learned.

The view from my house.
Some examples of things I produce:

- Beginning to experiment with 3D printing
- Beginning to experiment with 3D images
- Using Photoshop for image processing & analysis
Some examples of things I produce:

3D reconstructions from CT

Reports, at least initially generated by a collections management database
What’s needed/problematic

• continue to develop recommended practices/standards for creation, processing & preservation of digital assets

• continue to develop & evaluate inexpensive methods of examining works of art

• give attention to how assets are created so that they can be easily shared

• Adobe’s new licensing model increases expense of doing work
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Search > Browse

Examples of what’s easy for me to search

*Not an exhaustive list *Your mileage may vary

- CoOL/CoOL DistList
- jurn.org
- AATA
- BCIN
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar/Google Books/Google Image/Google/Google Art Project
- CAMEO
- Digital Public Library of America (dp.la)
- WorldCat
- Internet Archive
- SIRIS
- Other art museum collection and other databases on their websites
Faceted Search > Google Custom Search; Google Scholar has its charms.
There’s lots of grey literature in our field.
It may or may not be easy to find.
What’s missing/problematic

- many places to look for information on caring for cultural objects
- terminology
- inconsistency of metadata applied to some resources
- metadata/keywords can be read by reference management; facilitates search
If you can’t find it, it doesn’t exist.
what’s harder to find & access.

- AIC Specialty Group Postprints that are not on CoOL
  - Inconsistently abstracted within AATA
  - Manner of distribution make access challenging
- posts in AIC Specialty Group electronic mailing list archives are difficult to access due to lack of keyword search
- Conservators papers within archives
  - often have skeletal finding aids
  - information is needed about which archives that will take conservation records
- ARTstor, articles on publisher’s websites (i.e. Springer, Elsevier)
- Images of comparative objects that aren't fine art

“soapbox zone” by Flickr user ruminatrix. https://flic.kr/p/6HQSUD Used under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license
Improve search

- linked resources?
- combining resources?
- related papers?
- more faceted search
- better options for searching for related objects.

New Art Discovery Group option within World Cat.
Thank you, Getty Research Institute & Kress Foundation!
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Digital tools

- ideally, work cross-platform/browser based & sync across devices.
- ideally, work together
- allow for exporting or sharing
- may or may not be used on mobile devices
- can allow you to look at your practice in new/different ways
- Tools I use help me with:
  - note taking & management
  - reference management
  - image & document annotation
  - image analysis
  - time tracking

[Image of digital tools interface with Bamboo DIRT website shown]

dirt.projectbamboo.org
Databases offer structure for documenting & analyzing work.

IPI's eClimate Notebook

Chris Stavroudis’ Modular Cleaning Program
What’s missing/problematic

- electronic lab notebook?
  - not ideal when using liquids
- measuring the results of treatments using computational methods
- good tools for comparing, annotating, & adding metadata to images on mobile devices
- improved cooperation between tools
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From the AIC Code of Ethics:

X. The conservation professional shall contribute to the evolution and growth of the profession, a field of study that encompasses the liberal arts and the natural sciences. This contribution may be made by such means as continuing development of personal skills and knowledge, sharing of information and experience with colleagues, adding to the profession’s written body of knowledge, and providing and promoting educational opportunities in the field.

XI. The conservation professional shall promote an awareness and understanding of conservation through open communication with allied professionals and the public.
Some options for sharing & collaborating with colleagues

- email, electronic mailing lists & forums
- AIC wiki
- research blogs & wikis for project collaboration & peer review
- document repositories like ResearchGate.net & academia.edu
- shared bibliographies on reference management systems like zotero.org & mendeley.com
- collaboration & document sharing software like Basecamp, GoogleDocs & Dropbox
- social media platforms, especially those which allow for real-time interaction like Google Hangout and Twitter
What’s missing/problematic
[Sharing with colleagues]

• more streamlined ways of finding & sharing treatment histories/images of specific works of art & artifacts
• archives that will accept conservation records from private practices
• image copyright policies
• time
• the capacity to share large images through SG mailing lists [archive space/preservation issues]
Sharing with the public

- much of what was mentioned on the previous slide
- conservation info & images on collections databases/websites
- Wikipedia
- social media platforms

Including the conservation history helps colleagues & contributes to public understanding.
What’s missing/problematic
[Sharing with the public]

• access to better tools for displaying complex images & allowing the public to interact with them

• best practices for evaluating our efforts

• social media platforms are ever changing - functionality may change

• best practices for preservation
How is your digital landscape different from mine? What’s missing from it? What’s problematic?

Thanks.