Artlibraries.net and arthistoricum.net: new developments and co-operations

Artlibraries.net

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What is artlibraries.net?

Artlibraries.net is a Meta search gateway for bibliographical information in the field of western, primarily European art. It works as a virtual union catalogue of meanwhile more than 60 important art libraries in Europe and North America. The www-catalogues of these cooperating libraries remain completely autonomous. There is no common database for all the bibliographic records of the partners and they do not have to change or modify in any way their cataloguing practice or data-base specifications. The technical infrastructure of this network is rather simple: based on a specific CGI-technology (Common Gateway Interface) for bibliographic Meta search, developed at the University of Karlsruhe in 1996, artlibraries.net allows simultaneous retrievals in various online catalogues of art libraries. The user starts with a unique, HTML encoded interface, where he decides whether his inquiry should be sent to all or only to single connected target systems. Then the CGI program communicates directly with all these catalogues. The individual structure of the input form as well as of the hit list production of any of the con-nected targets is documented in the CGI-script. In this way the search fields of the artlibaries.net interface correspond with the equivalent fields of the target data-base and adapt its syntax. With the knowledge of the hit list structure of the target the CGI-script in a second step enables the production of the result list in artli-braries.net. The moment it receives a positive or negative result from one of the targets, a uniformly formatted list appears on the screen and gives an overview of the responses of all the targets (HTML-parsing). On this list the bibliographical records are given in a previously defined short form only. Its basic element is the short title of the bibliographic record in the form of a hyperlink, which leads to the

full record information. Clicking on this link means to open a new window, to skip into the site of the target catalogue and to navigate from this moment on exclusively there. So much the technical specifications. But what does artlibraires.net mean for library policy?

The history of artlibraires.net

Artlibraries.net has two important characteristics: on the one hand it is a technical solution to overcome the heterogeneity of cataloguing systems and online catalogues, to collect as well as to enrich bibliographic information and to make it accessible in the most comfortable way. On the other hand the project is also an important platform for international cooperation that seeks to promote and to develop new forms of information supply in the history of art. The basis for the technical realization was the above mentioned project of the University of Karlsruhe with the first version of the so called 'Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog', which brought together bibliographic information of the big German library consortia. Due to the lack of a national library in Germany the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog became a sort of virtual national union catalogue of the holdings in German libraries, as far as they were documented in online catalogues of course. The characteristic anti-centralistic cultural policy in post-war Germany led also in the field of art history to a corresponding regional and institutional decentralization of libraries. So there is no leading national art library in Germany today. But since 1972 the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) has supported with annual funds the creation of a collection of scientific literature on European history of art divided on different institutions. Seven important museum and research libraries have been participating in this program until today. After 25 years of separate cataloguing of these holdings the technology of the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog promised for the first time to create virtually a union catalogue of the seven libraries without requiring a harmonizing of different cataloguing conventions and database systems. Under these circumstances the first version of the 'Virtueller Katalog Kunstgeschichte' (Virtual catalogue for art history) was launched in 1999. Beyond the seven art libraries the catalogues with the art historical holdings of the University Libraries of Heidelberg and Dresden, both specialized in European art history, were targets of the new virtual catalogue too. And step by step a couple of smaller, highly specialized art libraries were invited to join the project, because their catalogues were recognized as a valuable addition to the rather broad collections of the bigger ones. But with this unanimously accepted and reasonable step a debate on basic principles of the project's policy began. In short, two opinions concurred: national virtual union catalogue for more or less all German art libraries versus international bibliographic instrument for refined resource retrieval. It was not easy to convince the advocates of the first concept that the latter one was much more promising and innovative from the scientific point of view. And it was hardly understandable to plead for national categories at a time of the most vital movement towards a global communication on the internet. Thanks to the commitment of representatives of highly profiled research libraries in the group the second position gained more and more acceptance. A crucial moment came in 2002, when two outstanding international partners were won for participation: the IRIS consortium of art historical and historical libraries in Florence and the big union catalogue of the French national

museums with 24 art libraries in France. A short time later further partners form Switzerland and the Netherlands followed. The Virtual Catalogue for Art History became a sort of international institution with an increasing reputation in the scientific community. In 2004 the partners of the project met for the first time in Florence. Meanwhile the group consisted of 14 target systems with 44 libraries in five European countries. The further development was discussed and a steering committee of five volunteers from four countries was nominated.

This committee, which comes together at least once a year, first defined the guidelines for the expansion of the group of targets. There was and is unanimity that the project should concentrate on European and western art from late antiquity to the present. New partners should enrich and not multiply the bibliographic information. The catalogues should meet high quality standards. Additional access to information and resources is highly esteemed. These principles convinced three new important partners to join the project: the National Art Library and the library of the Royal Institute of British Architects in London and the library of the Gulbenkian-Foundation in Lisbon. And the next 'revolutionary' step followed immediately: the transatlantic cooperation. With the Getty Research Library, the Watson Library of the Metropolitan Museum, the Canadian Centre for Architecture and the library of the National Gallery of Canada the project has got an unexpected international profile and brought together in a relatively short time partners of the highest scientific prestige. In consequence of this strong multinational tendency the original German name 'Virtueller Katalog Kunstgeschichte was given up and the more appropriate artlibraries.net was chosen. At the same time also the search interface was completely redesigned.

And the future?

The members of the steering committee are very delighted with the current development of the project and with the high interest of important and prestigious libraries in becoming new partners. But we are also quite aware that the weaving of a vast web of existing online catalogues cannot be the only goal of such a project. As we all know, library catalogues have a new identity and a new functionality in the era of the internet. They increasingly become information providers and lose their traditional task to refer to physically existing book collections only. They communicate. And they play an ever increasing important role as complements to other data collections. In art history image archives have an outstanding importance and many of them make or intend to make their catalogues and their collections accessible on the web. Websites have become a new form of dissemination of scientific content. Full text collections and e-journals without an organic relationship to library holdings do already exist and claim the same importance as traditional publications. For the artlibraires.net project these new trends are more a challenge, less a problem. Two particular target systems already suggest the future development. Artguide, an intellectually controlled portal to free accessible internet resources, enables a search in the collection of meanwhile over 3.000 indexed websites under the same criteria as for bibliographic records. And the other already connected target, the "OLC-SSG Arts and Art Sciences" (Online Content-Special Subject Collection) is a sort of automatically generated bibliography of art historical journals, derived from

scanned metadata in tables of contents of more than 400 current printed journals. With these two target systems the step from the traditional documentation of library holdings towards a broader defined policy of providing information has already been done. And at the moment artlibraries.net is undergoing a test of integrating the online catalogue of an image collection – the famous German "Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur des Bildarchivs Foto Marburg" (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg's Image Index of Art and Architecture) with almost 2 million digitized photographs of works of art and architecture – as a future target system in artliberaries.net. Other image collections should follow. The increasing number of databases of digitized print and drawings collections is of particular interest in this context.

To sum up: the artlibraries.net project has overstepped a lot of borders. In a geographical as well as in a material sense. We offer to the scientific community a rapidly growing quantity of manifold information. In this way we satisfy the modern internet user's desire to find things he did not look for. At the same moment we are acutely aware of the necessity to help to navigate on the endless ocean of information. Thus the mission for the immediate future will be to find the right counterbalance between quantity and quality. In the world of global communication such a task can be achieved only in form of a vast, borderless collaboration. For this, there is no better platform than the international family of artlibraries.net.

Jan Simane

arthistoricum.net

As Jan Simane has explained before, artlibraries.net is a solution based upon a rather down-to-earth search engine technique. We are well aware of the fact that we are not pretending to be technical avant-garde. But the service is functioning well and proves to be useful. Nevertheless, as has already been said, artlibraries.net is making very clear the gap between 'traditional' online library catalogs and the challenge presented by academic online resources. The few targets allowing so far to search online resources through artlibraries.net: the ART-Guide web directory and the indexing of online articles within the Florence-Munich-Rom union catalogue (www.kubikat.org), are indeed by-products of the arthistoricum.net project (www.arthistoricum.net). arthistoricum.net, which has already been presented to an international audience in Art Libraries Journal 32.2007, 1 (pp. 38-43) and of course in the annual reports from Germany in the IFLA ALS newsletter, has finally much in common with artlibraries.net: Not only are the names similar, but both projects originate from the German DFG funded special collections system already mentioned by Jan Simane. Thanks to partners from the IFLA Art Libraries Section, artlibraries.net has rather quickly succeeded in making the decisive step towards internationalization, whilst arthistoricum.net is still an exclusively German, not to say: South German, affair, despite its multilingual interface and despite some probably premature and therefore unsuccessful attempts to gain institutional and individual partners in France. We are thus particularly grateful to the IFLA Art Libraries Section to be able to discuss the arthistoricum.net project with you here in Québec. Since publication of the ALJ article, significant progress has been made with funding from the DFG. On the

other hand, characteristic problems are remaining unsolved concerning the handling of electronic resources. But the arthistoricum.net portal has not been conceived as a miraculous solution to problems that can only be approached on a universal level, but rather as a catalyst for digital co-operation, information production and knowledge exchange as far as art history is concerned.
This subject gateway arthistoricum.net may be regarded as serving as a kind of superstructure to artlibraries.net, although both projects are so far quite independent from one another. Whereas the already established artlibraries.net is a pure search engine, arthistoricum.net is concerned not only with tracing and indexing websites and online publications but with furthering and developing digital workings methods for art history in general. Thus, arthistoricum.net is struggling for a stringent use of "the digital" within our very conservative discipline art history. In doing so, the project by no means aims at monopolizing, but just at doing a useful job for the community. Concurrent projects may of course exist in their own right and fulfill specific missions, as for example the "Virtual Library of Contemporary Art (ViFa Art)" (http://vifaart.slub-dresden.de/) or the Czech subject gateway ART (http://art.jib.cz/), which comprises even a "Virtual Art Library (VAL)" (http://vuk.upm.cz) apparently inspired by the artlibraries.net idea and by the German DFG funded subject gateways.

So far, arthistoricum.net is organised as a common project of the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich and Heidelberg University Library, with additional partners institutions and persons as partners, among them the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, Institute for Art History, the Saxon State und University Library Dresden, the German research institutes in Florence and Rom, the Kunstbibliothek Berlin and several groups of renowned scholars responsible for thematic portals and e-publishing activities. arthistoricum.net supports searches, provides information and offers possibilities for publishing.
The structure is currently articulated along five formal categories. Besides highlighting some characteristic or new contents it is important to stress that much attention is paid to the design of the interface, among others to Web 2.0 features and to advertisement and search functionalities. (These new functionalities will briefly be demonstrated.)
Given the fact that the portal is relatively young, the user statistics show astonishingly satisfying figures: monthly pageviews are around 200.000, the visibility in Google is very good. The statistics also demonstrate that 'E-publishing' is the section most visited by our users, followed by 'Thematic portals' and 'Resources' (i.e. above all digitizations of much asked for primary sources not readily covered by the big national and international digitization projects). The most successful contents of arthistoricum.net are the monthly online reviews journal KUNSTFORM and the thematic portal Photography. But as for statistics, we have to keep in mind that some important contents of arthistoricum.net is located on separate servers and therefore not taken into account by the main statistics. This concerns the online repository ART-Dok, located at Heidelberg University Library and the databases ART-Guide and ARTicles online indexing websites respectively articles in online journals. As already explained, the latter are also directly or indirectly targets of artlibraries.net. artlibraries.net is of course the bibliographic search engine recommended by arthistoricum.net and therefore provided with a direct access on the arthistoricum.net start page.

We invite you cordially to have a look at this portal yourself, because it is impossible to make a systematic presentation within the context of this paper. What is more important here is to clarify the logic behind, and to indicate the developments in the foreseeable future.

arthistoricum.net is taking over the "Hochschulnachrichten" database from the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg. This database is based upon the listings of recently begun or finished doctoral dissertations and master's thesis published annually in the monthly "Kunstchronik". It concerns not only universities in the German speaking countries, but also in the UK, North America, Israel and especially the Eastern European countries. With support from the "Kunstchronik" and in co-operation with Foto Marburg, this database will be redesigned and provided with very clear and efficient search features. On arthistoricum.net it will certainly gain new and improved visibility and constitute one of the portal's main attractions. It would be tempting to find a way to connect it to the very valuable TRHAA database provided by our French colleagues.

arthistoricum.net is also preparing additional thematic portals. Technically, these thematic portals, as far as link lists are concerned, will probably become increasingly intertwined with the bibliographic tools, above all with the web directory ART-Guide. On the other hand, the thematic portals will probably increasingly cluster around digitized primary sources prepared for the 'Resources' section, as already is the case with thematic portal 'History of Art History'. With partners coming from libraries, archives, museums and universities, thematic portals on arthistoricum.net shall become specialized research platforms for an international scholarly community. These platforms may exist continuously or for a limited period. Within the general arthistoricum.net guidelines, the persons and institutions responsible have full control of their thematic portals. Our CMS TYPO3 provides good conditions for this kind of decentralized networking. Being in line with our ongoing co-operative digitizing activities for German art reviews and exhibition catalogues from the late 19th century to the end of World War II, we are currently discussing thematic portals concerning the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellungen 1937-1944 in Munich (together with the German Historical Museum in Berlin and the Haus der Kunst in Munich) as well as a thematic portal dedicated to the 'Secession' movement in Berlin, Munich, Vienna and elsewhere, taking into account also its foreign filiations in France etc. (together with the Kunstbibliothek Berlin). Such projects are well suited to become international co-operations and research clusters accessible on arthistoricum.net.

arthistoricum.net may thus serve to make ongoing research activities much more transparent as is the case until now. Under online conditions, the traditional typologies or hierarchies of scholarly publishing are being increasingly blurred: Publishing serious results luckily gains more and more independence of the classical material and financial restraints of printed publications. However, the sociology based on the printed publication is still very powerful. And we have still big, big technical und legal problem with images in an online context! Apparently, the printed art book has even reached a last, impressing flowering. In this context, the online publishing opportunities provided by arthistoricum.net, especially the ART-Dok repository, constitute only a modest beginning. However, we are willing to support very firmly the ongoing emancipation process of the born digital type of publication. We librarians should give priority to online access wherever possible, even if we do not know whether our libraries will still have very much importance 20 years from today. It is true that so far we have not yet found adequate means

to handle really huge quantities of online resources, but at least our library data, especially authorities and subject indexing will probably remain very important in the future. arthistoricum.net is just one albeit significant contribution in the current transitory situation. Its funding as a project of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft will end in 2009. Then, we will have to define a new administrative und financial form of organization and the further path into the future. Your ideas and above all your practical contributions are really very welcome.

Rüdiger Hoyer