

When All You've Got's the Real Thing: Museums and Authenticity in the Networked World

J. Trant
Archives & Museums Informatics
jtrant@archimuse.com
for CIDOC 97

Architecture and Authenticity

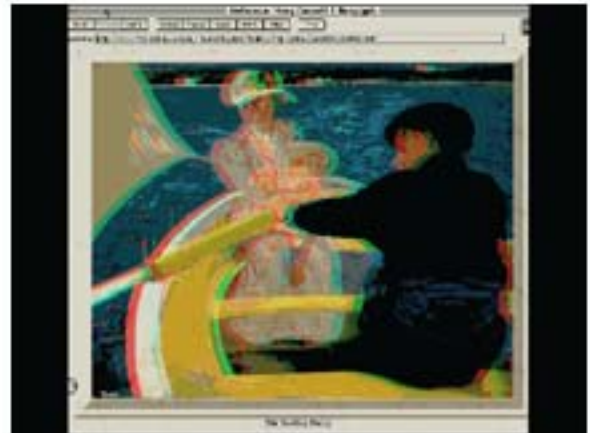
- Meaning is conveyed by the manner in which information is presented
- Museums have a traditional language of presentation based on architectural metaphors
- Traditional modes don't translate directly into networked space



Museums without Walls, or Buildings ...

- On the World Wide Web it is possible to present a museum without 'being' one
- Many personal museums exist as products of individuals' enthusiasms
- E.g. le Web Louvre / the webmuseum, Art Galaxy and texas.net Museum of Art





Personal Museum: Concerns

- Disregard for intellectual property rights
- No reference to the reality of objects themselves
- Unclear goals and objectives
- Appropriation of signs and symbols
- BUT ... examples of enthusiasm and interest

"Don't Fence Me In"

- Museums can learn from these personalized spaces
- Alternatives to the "unassailable voice" of authority
- Museums can use the Web to communicate the rich knowledge in our collections and documentation

Provide a Good Foundation

- Mary Cassatt's *Boating Party* can be found in numerous places on the Web
- Owning the object does not control its representation on the Web
- What sets the National Gallery of Art, Washington apart from the others?





Lessons from the NGA

- Context + depth = quality
- Physicality is intrinsically interesting: "Virtual reality" vs "virtual tours of reality"
- Must support references with links and enable movement between modalities, across themes and among collections

Museum Responses: Build Bridges & Pathways

- Museum to museum links build a web of 'trusted' cultural heritage resources
- Reflect themes and interests of visitors as well as 'facts' about collections
- Report contents to search engines: 'through the Web' is not 'on the Web'

Being Connected

- Lists of sites are not enough
- Beyond standards for collecting information to enabling its use
- Exploration of information spaces through lateral connections and associative links

Enable Access to Quality

- Metadata in network-wide standard forms - Dublin Core initiatives
- Design new distribution channels - AMICO to reach educational community
- Establish critical framework within which to assess information resources

Authentication Tools and Technologies

- Digital Object Identifiers - enable recognition of specific content elements
- Watermarking - to prove ownership of digital images
- PICS as means to 'rate' resources
- Caveat: ownership or source does not always equal quality

Opening Doors

- Enable user feedback mechanisms
- Provide user-sensitive information - ILEX system of dynamic labelling
- Reach out to different communities

Conclusions

- If you can't find it, it doesn't exist
- If it isn't relevant, people won't use it; if it isn't engaging, they won't stay, or come back
- Authenticity has roots in trust; a new generation must learn to value and use museum information sources