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Digital Image Archives for Australian Art History: Aligning International Paradigms with Local Needs

Abstract

It is generally acknowledged that dealing with rapidly evolving digital technology is one of the big issues confronting the tertiary sector in recent times. Teaching art history with new technologies and the impact of digital scholarship on research in art history have both been subjects of case studies and reports. However, the current state of digital image databases, their size, scope and specificities, and their relationship to art history, is an area left largely unexamined. This paper presents an overview and analysis of key databases and image banks of art. It examines the objectives and outcomes of some important image research projects and asks what can we expect from our archives of art, do they currently meet our community's needs? What can and should be done to ensure their sustainability and continuing usefulness? Is a national framework necessary?

Introduction

In 2012, National Gallery of Australia director Ron Radford stated, 'Our aim is to put online digital images of all the 165,000 works in the collection, to be seen in classrooms, in every home, indeed, anyplace, anywhere with internet access.'¹ This and other recent commitments from major Australian art galleries and museums to fully digitise their collections makes for exciting news,² but also invites consideration and raises questions. What state are our archives of art currently in and is there really a need to digitise everything? Who will benefit and who will be disadvantaged? What models have been and should be adopted, and what processes followed in the race to put it all online?

¹ Ron Radford, National Press Club Address, full speech accessed 14 October 2013 <http://artery.australiacouncil.gov.au/2012/10/ron-radford-looks-to-the-future-of-the-national-gallery-of-australia/>

² See: The Guardian Newspaper, 'Aboriginal art archive digitised – in pictures', 'For the first time, a team of researchers has taken a digital record of every object within the South Australia Museum's Aboriginal material culture collection. The project will provide open global access to the stories of Aboriginal Australians and give families a chance to know their ancestors' histories', accessed 19 August 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/gallery/2013/aug/19/indigenous-art-south-australia-museum>

This paper compares characteristics and qualities of large-scale, multi-national image databases, with more focused, national networks and local initiatives, distinguishing between the point and purpose of each. The selection of examples is based on qualities like 'the largest', the newest', and the most problematic. The paper asks, is there a need for a co-ordinated national approach to the digitisation, preservation and display of digital images of art in Australia, or is it sufficient to participate in existing international projects? Will international models work for national and local art history community needs?

PART ONE Going Global, read 'American': Google v. ARTstor

In an age of expectation that instant and unlimited access will be granted to everything via the Internet, Google Art Project already provides free virtual tours of the world's most prominent art galleries. Australian institutions have been quick to offer Google their collections so that select examples of Australian art now sit alongside international icons, in thousands of self-curated 'user galleries' — a potentially infinite re-presentation of world art history from populist perspectives.

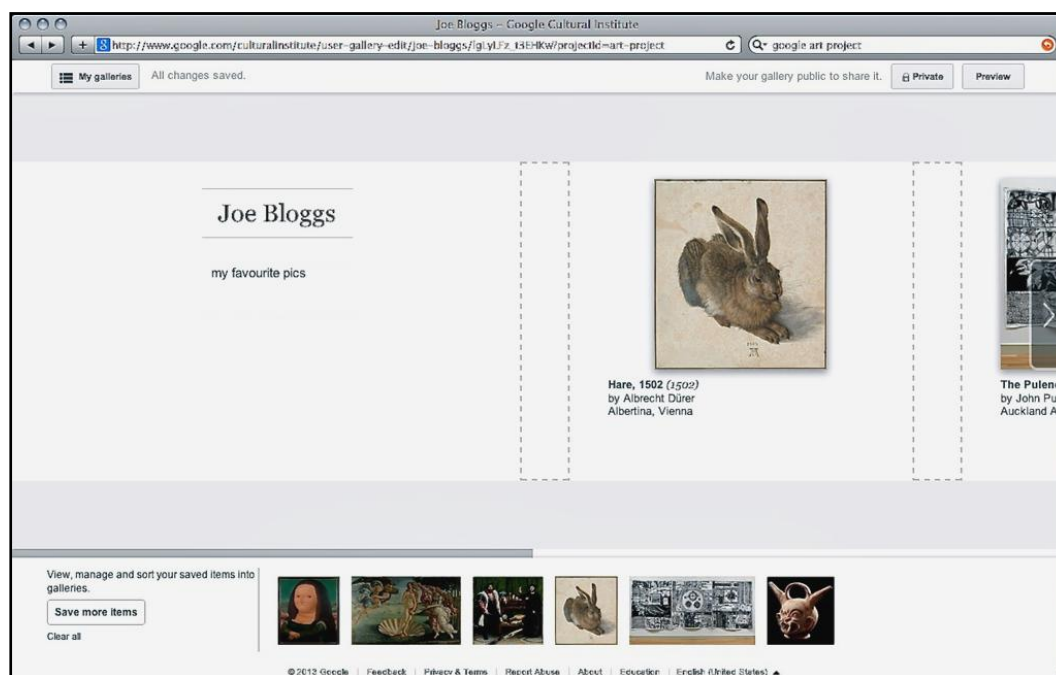


Fig. 1 *Joe Bloggs' Gallery*, 2012, screen shot, dimensions variable, Google Art Project.

169 of the NGV's greatest artworks together with more than 185 items from Museum Victoria's collection have been included in Google's Art Project in the hope that it will 'increase their international profile, align them with the world's most renowned cultural institutions and enable them to proudly share

Victoria's cultural treasures with the rest of the world'.³ While there is no doubt Australian art could use more positive exposure overseas, a cynic might view the time, money, and resources spent on providing more fuel for the automated algorithmic curators that feed invisible personalization filters of the internet better directed elsewhere.⁴

The Art Project, launched by the Google Culture Institute in February 2011, currently includes over 287 collections from cultural institutions across 40 countries, and over 48,000 digital images,⁵ everything from the highlights of the Tate Gallery collection, to Paul Taçon's photographs of rock art. One of the Art Project's selling points is that it provides online access to high-resolution 'gigapixel' images of artworks - showing brushwork detail beyond what is visible to the naked eye. The 'museum view' feature enhances the virtual experience of the gallery visit, bandwidth and software limitations notwithstanding. Although Google were unable to provide page view statistics,⁶ in 2012 it was estimated that 20 million people had visited the site at least once.⁷ Impressive by comparison, over the same period the NGV and Museum Victoria's own websites between them, attracted just over a quarter (approximately 5.5 million) visits online and just less than a quarter of this number (almost 4.3 million) 'actual' visitors through their doors.⁸

³ Ted Baillieu quoted in Arts Victoria Press Release, 'Victoria's art treasures join Google Art Project', accessed 14 October 2013, http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/About_Us/News/2012/Victoria's_art_treasures_join_Google_Art_Project

⁴ Eli Pariser, TED Talk about how algorithmic personalization of the web is not a good thing, posted in 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAMP1Wu_M2U

⁵ Google Press, e-mail message to author, 12 November 2013.

⁶ Google Press, e-mail message to author, 12 November 2013.

⁷ '[Diana] Skaar [director of Google Partnerships] declined to say which galleries and artworks receive the most visitors or provide any other metrics about popularity. Numbers she would provide: 20 million visitors have found the site so far, and 200,000 user "collections" — by which the visitor saves favorite images for future viewing or sharing — have been created.'

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2012/04/lacma-getty-sfmoma-among-134-museums-joining-googles-art-site.html#sthash.mjxdwgcA.dpuf>

⁸ Arts Victoria Press Release, 'Victoria's art treasures join Google Art Project', accessed 14 October 2013, http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/About_Us/News/2012/Victoria's_art_treasures_join_Google_Art_Project

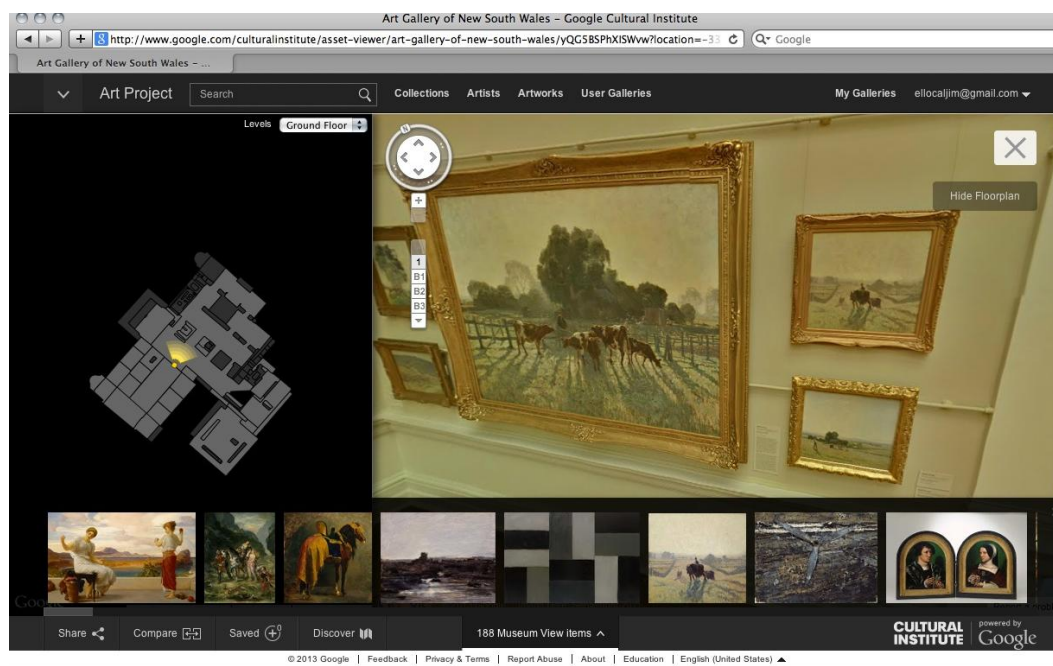


Fig. 2 Google Art Project, Gallery view of Australian art in the AGNSW, screenshot 2013.

Digital image collections are not necessarily the same thing as archives of art, although they can be. Apparently, anything can be an archive, as long as the collection has coherence, is not a random selection, and is preserved in a meaningful way.⁹ Google's publicly stated mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful, making it sound like the world's largest digital archiving project - of which Google are the custodians and select examples of the World's finest art are now a growing part.¹⁰

In addition to their ever-expanding image archive, Google also host 'Art Talks' where artists, curators, and art historians conduct online discussions on topics of interest. These recordings already constitute a valuable oral history archive, although it is not clear how topics or panels are nominated. After their live broadcast, the 'Art Talks' can be watched on YouTube, which is also owned by Google (since 2006). The 'tombstone' information about art works that the

⁹ Jennifer Wright, 'Just what is an archives, anyway?', *The Bigger Picture: Visual Archives and the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Archives blogspot, accessed 7 November 2013, <http://siarchives.si.edu/blog/just-what-archives-anyway>

¹⁰ The Art Project's Press Site states:

'The high resolution imagery of artworks featured on the art project site are owned by the museums, and these images may be subject to copyright laws around the world. The Street View imagery is owned by Google. All of the imagery on this site is provided for the sole purpose of enabling you to use and enjoy the benefit of the art project site, in the manner permitted by Google's Terms of Service. The normal Google Terms of Service apply to your use of the entire site'. Google, 'FAQs', *Google Art Project Press Site*, accessed 7 November 2013, <https://sites.google.com/a/pressatgoogle.com/art-project/faqs>

Art Project currently provides is rudimentary, but there is potential for further development, linking supporting documents, sketches and related works, interviews and film – in much the same way as the Art Gallery of New South Wales' new application for mobile devices currently does for their permanent collection.¹¹

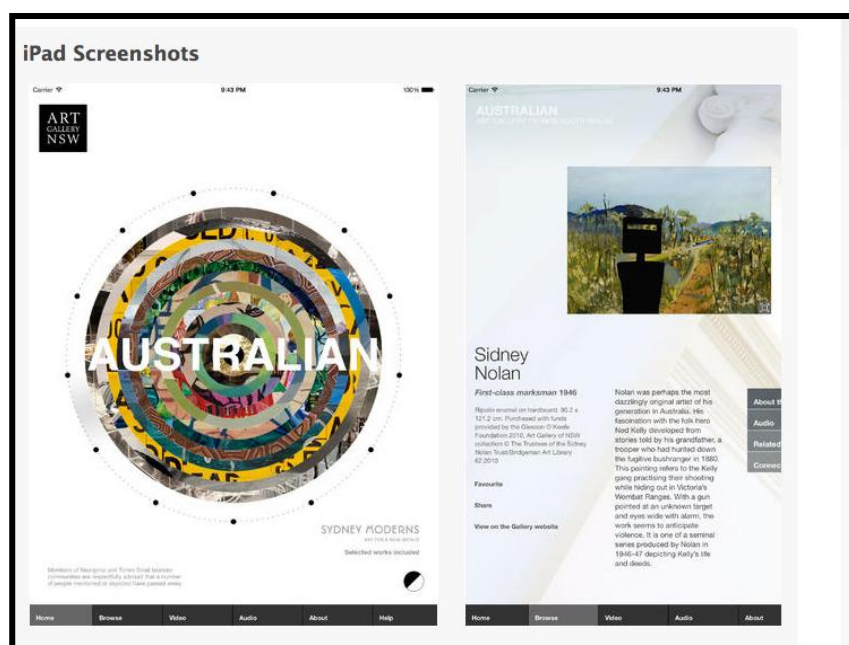


Fig. 3 iTunes Preview, Australian: Art Gallery of New South Wales, App Store screenshot, 2013.

In another Google Culture Institute project, online exhibitions about key historical events have been created 'to bring ... archives to life and make them available online'.¹² Photos, videos, manuscripts and documents on a wide range of topics, from the Irish War of Independence to the Film Archives of South Korea, are curated by Google's partner institutions, presumably to aid in their digitisation and increase their exposure. However, the material is assembled and accessed in quite rudimentary and prescriptive ways - the displays all progress in a linear fashion; no matter the topic, the template remains the same. History and the presentation of these individual institution's archives has been effectively 'Google-ised'.

Google is a relative newcomer to digital archives of art and is neither the biggest, nor the most original; it is also not the most innovative, nor the most

¹¹ Art Gallery of New South Wales Media Release, 'AGNSW launches Australian app for iPad', posted 2 October 2012, <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media-office/agnew-launches-australian-app-ipad>

¹² Google, 'Why has Google created the Cultural Institute?', accessed on 23 August 2013, <http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/>

useful. It serves as an opening example of an international model of easy to access digital imagery, owned by a publicly trading company - albeit necessarily tied to other Google products such as YouTube, Google Chrome (the optimal browser on which to view the Art Project), Google Maps, and Google Goggles.

ARTstor, the image based cousin of JSTOR, was inaugurated in the late 1990s by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in response to the growing need faced by educational institutions in the United States to convert their existing libraries of slide transparencies to digital formats. It began with a pilot project to build a digital repository of extraordinary, high-resolution images from 40 cave grottoes in the Gobi desert (one of the largest Buddhist art sites in the world), reuniting them 'virtually' with images of the silk banners and manuscripts originally from the caves, but brought to western Europe by English and French explorers at the turn of the 20th century.¹³ The project 'demonstrated the ability to digitally preserve objects in peril, to reunite for study in one location works of art previously scattered around the world, and to join people across geographic and cultural divides'.¹⁴

From there, ARTstor has evolved into a subscriber based, not-for-profit initiative, 'with a mission to use digital technology to enhance scholarship, teaching, and learning in the arts and associated fields'.¹⁵ Out of the 1.6 million digital images, drawn from hundreds of collections, including those of art history institutes (the Warburg and the Courtauld), artists (Judy Chicago), and artist's estates (the Rothko Family Collections) it is shocking to find only 1,000 results returned from a search for 'Australia', with only 118 of these being 'paintings'. Anyone using ARTstor to enhance their learning in this field would think that Australian art is a combination of approximately 70% bark paintings and 30% Dale Hickey.

At an initial joining fee of US\$34,000 plus an annual subscription fee of US\$11,000 being paid by each Australian institution,¹⁶ it is an understatement to say that as a teaching resource it fails some sectors of our local community twice: by currently being unsuitable for researching and teaching Australian art and by diverting dollars away from where they could be invested elsewhere.

¹³ The Mellon International Dunhuang Archive, Overview, last updated 13 December 2007, <http://www.artstor.org/what-is-artstor/w-html/col-mellon-dunhuang.shtml>

¹⁴ ARTstor, 'Mission and History', accessed 12 November 2013, <http://www.artstor.org/our-organization/o-html/history-and-mission.shtml>

¹⁵ ARTstor, 'Mission and History', accessed 12 November 2013, <http://www.artstor.org/our-organization/o-html/history-and-mission.shtml>

¹⁶ ARTstor, 'Fees', <http://www.artstor.org/subscribe/s-html/fee-high-ed-other.shtml>, accessed 20 March 2014.

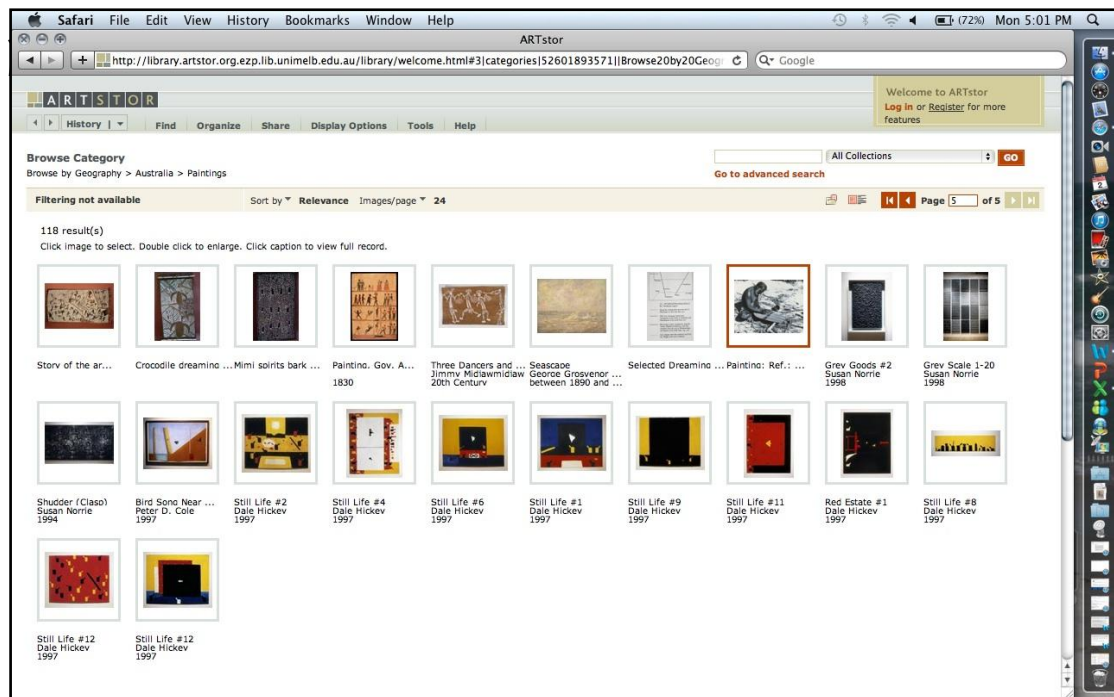


Fig. 4 ARTstor, screenshot showing search results for 'Australia > Paintings', 2013.

The encyclopaedia 'Oxford Art Online', built upon Jane Turner's *Dictionary of Art*, contains even fewer images, choosing instead to link to other resources, like Grove Art Online, ARTstor and Art Resource. This last company claims to be the single largest repository of high quality digital fine art images available and boasts an impressive list of museum and archive collaborators.¹⁷ Their holdings of Australian art number less than 1000 and consist of a salmagundi of poorly framed, badly lit, amateur looking snaps of lesser-known works by only a few of the big names of Australian art - colonial to contemporary.

Digital image repositories can equal big business. EBSCO, the Elton B. Stephens Company, is ranked 194 in the top 200 of America's largest privately held corporations,¹⁸ and has a diverse range of businesses: from real estate to outdoor goods, digital research databases and e-publishing. One of their purchases, the Art Archive boasts over a quarter of a million images drawn from over 900 different sources word wide. A simple search for 'Australia' returns over 2000 results. Again, there are a great number of bark paintings, with one example standing out amongst the rest. David Malangi's ochre and natural pigments on eucalyptus bark composition, *Funeral Ceremony* (1963), is key to his oeuvre. It depicts the chief ancestor figure for the Manharngu people, Gurrmirrinju. As Susan Jenkins records, 'the Great Hunter Gurrmirrinju is known as the "first man" by Manharngu, a law-giver and a warrior, and as such established their present beliefs and actions. He wandered these lands harvesting fruit, seeds and berries, and hunting goanna, kangaroo, birds and

¹⁷ Art Resource, 'About', accessed 12 November 2013, http://www.artres.com/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=ARTHO1_4_VForm&Flash=1&FRM=Abo utUs_MainMenuContent:ARTHO1_6

¹⁸ See: Forbes Top 200 privately owned companies, <http://www.forbes.com/companies/ebSCO-industries/>, accessed 20 March 2014.

fish ... The death of Gurrmirringu gave Manharrngu people the occasion to perform their first mortuary rites.¹⁹

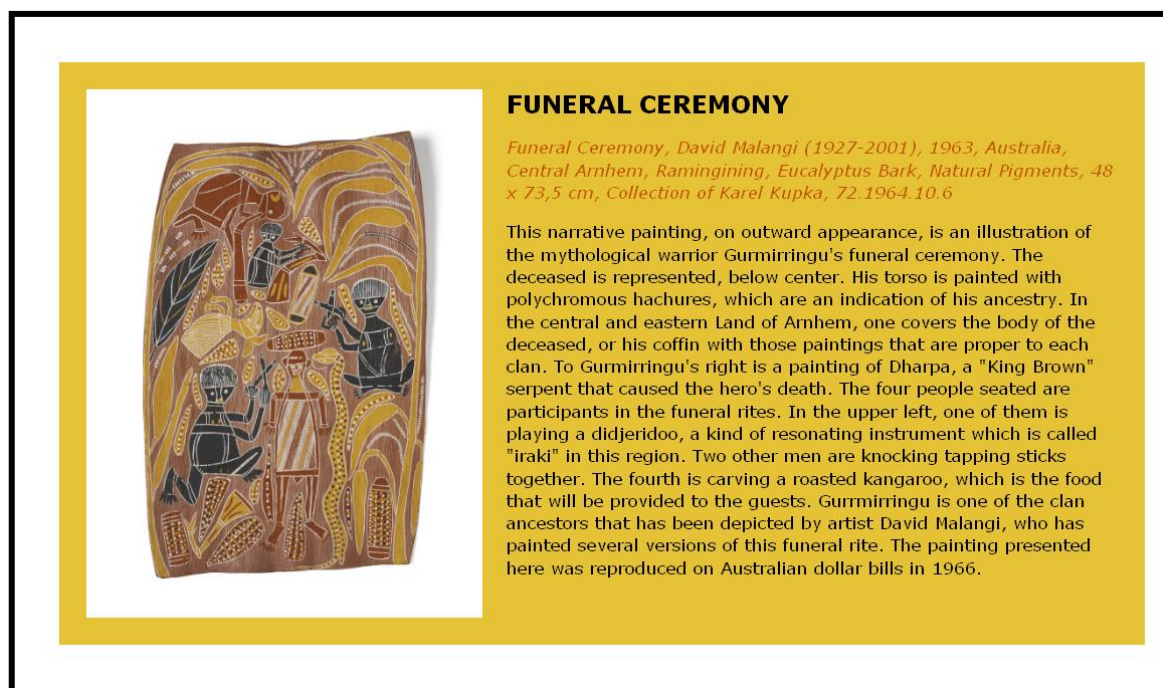


Fig. 5 Musée du Quai Branly website featuring David Malangi, *Funeral Ceremony* (1963), screenshot 2013.

The original artwork is in Paris, at the Musée du Quai Branly, and you can also see it displayed on their website. You can even read the story connected to the work; it is the most important one for the artist and connects him to his Glyde River country in Arnhem Land.

Dr David Malangi (1927-1999) is one of Australian best-known bark painters and a significant figure in contemporary art. He represented Australia at the Sao Paulo Art Biennial in 1983 and contributed 10 hollow log coffins to the Aboriginal Memorial, now installed in the entrance to the National Gallery of Australia. In 1988 he travelled to New York as part of the landmark *Dreamings* exhibition. But perhaps he is most famous for the fact that in 1966 his original artwork was reproduced without his knowledge or consent on the Australian \$1 note. When this image graced our first decimal currency, the graphic designer Gordon Andrews explained 'many [White] people were doing their own interpretations and imitations of their art, so I wanted to do an

¹⁹ Susan Jenkins, 'This is our story and this is our country', No Ordinary Place, accessed 4 December 2013, <http://www.nga.gov.au/exhibition/malangi/Default.cfm?MnuID=6>

“authentic” work and give the Aborigines a bit of a boost!’²⁰ This was a clear infringement of the artist's copyright and Malangi received compensation from the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr. H. ‘Nugget’ Coombs. The payment made by the Reserve Bank to Malangi is said to have been the beginning of the recognition of copyright for Aboriginal art.²¹

Viscopy, now part of the Copyright Agency, Australia's largest not-for-profit rights management organisation, confirmed that copyright for this image is held by the estate of the artist and administered by Viscopy.²² Yet the image appears on the Art Archive website, with the text ‘Image Copyright The Art Archive’ and the watermark ‘The Art Archive’ across the middle of the image of the artwork. While it has yet to be confirmed whether or not this is indeed a violation of the artists moral and copyrights (laws differ in different countries), it is ironic that this is happening to the very image that served as a catalyst for drawing attention to the copyrights of Aboriginal artists in the first place.

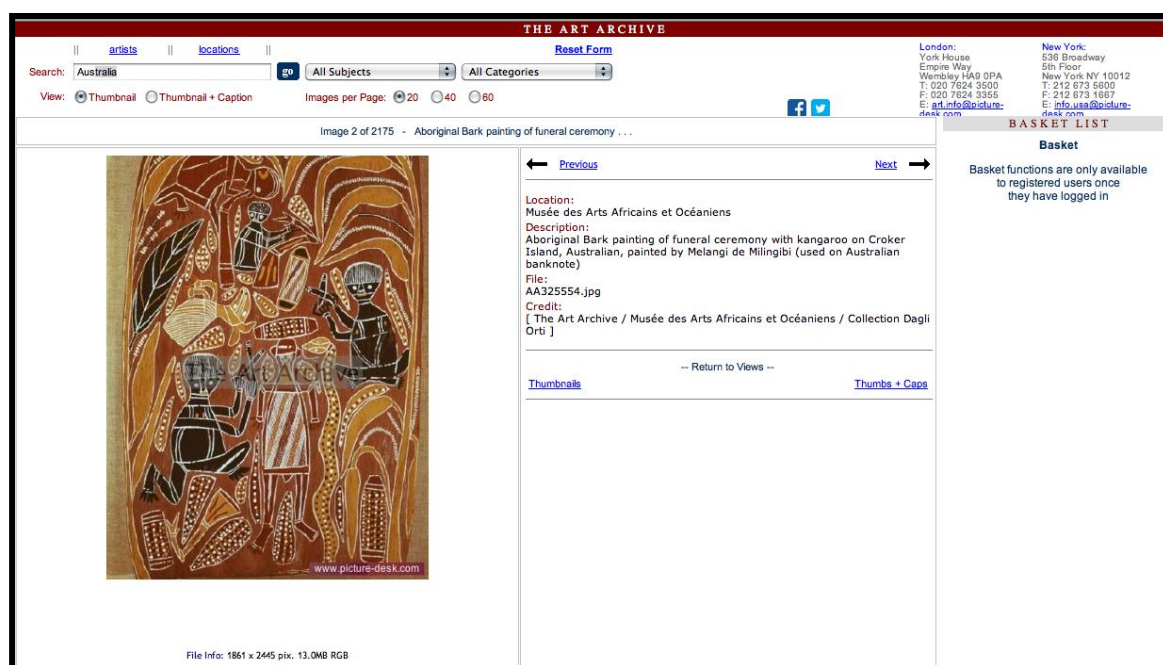


Fig. 6. David Malangi, *Funeral Ceremony* (1963), on The Art Archive, screenshot 2013.

So, going global is not necessarily a good thing for archives of art. Institutions and individuals who initially might enter into clear contractual agreements,

²⁰ Gordon Andrews quoted in Vivien Johnson, *Copyrites: Aboriginal Art in the Age of Reproductive Technologies* (Sydney: Touring Exhibition Catalogue. NIAAA and Macquarie University, 1996), 13.

²¹ Vivien Johnson, *Copyrites: Aboriginal Art in the Age of Reproductive Technologies* (Sydney: Touring Exhibition Catalogue. NIAAA and Macquarie University, 1996), 13-14.

²² Viscopy, e-mail message to author, 13 March 2013.

limiting the licence for the reproduction of their images, may see themselves locked into using a particular company's software in order to view digital reproductions of their own works. Third parties may end up paying large fees for the rights to access images in databases, which are otherwise freely available from the museums who own the original works; and corporate mergers and acquisition reduce culpability for copyright infringement to the point where it seems no one is responsible and nothing will ever get done about it anyway.

PART TWO National Projects: digital archives in the service of British art history

In what can only be described as an incredible effort of art appreciation in Britain, a recent joint venture between the BBC and The Public Catalogue Foundation has resulted in almost one quarter of a million of the UK's oil paintings from over 3000 public galleries and private collections being digitized. Billed as a landmark online art cataloguing project, *Your Paintings* promotes various outcomes closer to some of art history's point and purpose: 'thousands of oil paintings owned by the Nation are without artist attributions and sitter identities. Until recently most of these paintings were not [even] photographed. Now the probability of minor and major discoveries has increased substantially'.²³ This is exciting news for Australian art history; works of a great number of expatriate artists are finding their way onto this resource. Ironically, digital images of these artworks are more accessible than examples by the same artists physically located far closer to home.

The *Your Paintings* project's main selling points are that it provides the public with virtual access to works otherwise hidden in storage producing the potential to uncover forgotten treasures, sounding just a little bit like art history's answer to the Antiques Roadshow. While the 'tagging' function seemingly encourages the digital defacement of some of the UK's finest works, and highlights the different audiences to which such resources must appeal, the question remains: to what extent do large-scale public facing projects benefit the discipline of art history? Do they help or hinder academic research?

²³ BBC, 'Your Paintings: A Culture Show Special to uncover a Van Dyck at The Bowes Museum', accessed 13 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/bbc2cultureshow-yourpaintings.html>

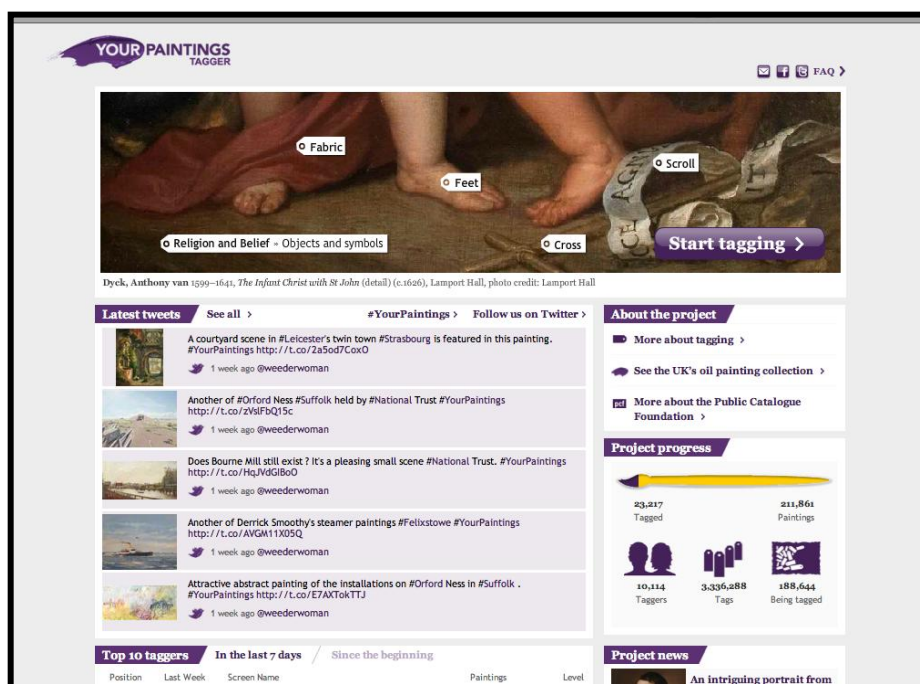


Fig. 7 BBC, *Your Paintings* website showing tagging function, screenshot, 2013

Of an altogether different genre, but of similar importance to enabling the accessibility of art history resources online, the *Raphael Research Resource* is something of a benchmark digitisation project focusing initially on just 10 artworks by High Renaissance artist and architect Raphael (1483-1520) held in the collection of the National Gallery, London, and linking them with some of the vast amounts of documentation that exists for each - including diaries, drawings, art-historical, technical and conservation-based information. The developer's aim is 'creating a platform which could eventually host Raphael's complete oeuvre in unprecedented depth.'²⁴ Originating in 2007 as a pilot scheme funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Resource has expanded to include more works by this great master and has united them with important supplementary documentation from a number of European institutions. Unfortunately, the website for the project appears to have remained static for a number of years now. Whether work is being done on

²⁴ Mara Hofmann, 'The National Gallery's Mellon Digital Documentation Project: The Raphael Research Resource', accessed 4 December 2013, http://mac.mellon.org/NGL_Raphael_Project_update_3-3-09.pdf

improving the software behind the scenes, or whether the money and enthusiasm have run out, only time will tell.

The Euro/American art history community has recently sought to clarify its perception of the role of digital technology and assessed the impact on the discipline by commissioning the *Kress Report* (2012). It found that there were disagreements about the perceived value of digital research, teaching, and scholarship, and also disagreements about the potential for digital art history to open up new avenues of inquiry and scholarship. The Report acknowledged that every discipline is struggling with how to evaluate digital projects and apportion credit to the individuals who work on them. Assessing digital resources (such as databases) or online research projects (such as the Raphael Research Resource) proved difficult due to several factors: collaborative authorship, the perpetually changing, 'never finished', nature of websites and the different kinds of output they generate.²⁵ The Report had relatively little to say about the digitization of archives or art.

This may have been because the United States of America, along with the United Kingdom, enjoys strong support and excellent existing resources for both archives and digital image databases of art. For example, the Archives of American Art, founded in 1954, has recently reached the milestone of 20 million objects and still collects materials related to American artists, art dealers, institutions and writers, including letters, notes, sketches, manuscripts, oral history recordings, photographs, and business records.²⁶ The Archives became part of the Smithsonian Institution in 1970 and are supported by numerous grants, many specifically for digitization, including generous sums from the Terra Foundation for American Art whose mission is 'to bring American art to the world and the world to American art'.²⁷

In the UK, the Association of Art Historians has produced and maintained an online list of archival documents relating to artists, designers and craftspeople in publicly accessible collections, (a project which they began in 1985 and completed in 2005). The Artists' Papers Register (APR) 'contains references to papers relating to painters, sculptors, designers, design groups and studios, craftspeople, those engaged in design occupations within manufacturing, and others - such as curators and historians - associated with these activities, regardless of nationality or status'.²⁸

²⁵ Kress Report, 'Transitioning to a Digital World: Art History, its Research Centers, and Digital Scholarship, A Report to The Samuel H. Kress Foundation and The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media George Mason University' by Diane M. Zorich Cultural Heritage Consultant, accessed 14 February 2012, 47.

²⁶ Archives of American Art, 'About Us', <http://www.aaa.si.edu/aboutus>

²⁷ Terra accessed 12 November 2013, <http://www.terraamericanart.org/about/history/>

²⁸ National Archives, 'Artists' Papers Repository', accessed 21 November 2013, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/art-and-artists.htm>

Described as a finders list, 'The APR can be searched by name, by type of artist and date. For example, it is possible to search for all listed sculptors between 1890 and 1900. It is also possible to search for records by repository, and by repositories in a particular region.'²⁹ It contains reference to many collections which do not appear on the National Register of Archives, including small collections of only a few or single items.

This last point is a crucial one. It would seem obvious that larger archives, in State funded institutions, would be well conserved and cared for - objects waiting in line to be digitised either as part of an in-house edict, a large national project, or a global information gathering exercise for the greater good. It makes sense that effort and funding needs to be focused on supporting the smaller, individual or special interest group archives - collections of materials under threat or dispersed in such a way that their value is not known or appreciated. But without a large grant-giving body, like the Terra Foundation or British Library's Endangered Archives Programme, what can actually be achieved on a local level?

PART THREE Australia's bigger picture

The final section of this paper outlines a range of existing resources and recognises that there are some unique challenges facing Australian institutions developing digital image databases. The discussion focuses on digital image databases, while recognizing their important links with source collections and supporting documents; the bigger picture examines the relationship between archives and art history in the Australian context.

The National Archives of Australia is really *not* the place to go if you are interested in art. Like most National Archives, it cares for the most significant records of the Australian Government including records about immigration, military service, transport, Indigenous Australians, science and the environment.³⁰ Not entirely bereft of relevance to art historians, it does have information and archives pertaining to the official war artist program and some of the records from Government arts funding agencies, and an image archive of over 110,000 photographs digitised from the national collection.³¹ Fig. 8 Number of items in the National Library's digital collections by collection format, as of 30 June 2014

²⁹ National Archives, 'Artists' Papers Repository', accessed 21 November 2013, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/art-and-artists.htm>

³⁰ National Archives of Australia, 'Collection', accessed 4 December 2013, <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/>

³¹ See: National Archives of Australia, 'PhotoSearch', accessed 20 April 2014, www.naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/PhotoSearchStartup.asp

The National Library of Australia's Pictures Collection has 945,426 items catalogued as 'Pictures', the majority being photographs (approximately 700,000 items), oil and watercolour paintings and prints comprise approximately 47,000 items, and there are roughly 1000 objects. 212,686 have digitised records (Fig 8).³² The Library used to maintain an image archive called 'Picture Australia (Fig 9) which seems to have morphed into two different entities. First, there is the small 'Digital Pictures Collection', which appears to use the same interface and software and holds images and metadata for several specific collection highlights including 'The Ducie collection of First Fleet art' and 'Ellis Rowan and Australian flora and fauna' — a selection of botanical watercolours painted in the late 19th and early 20th century. Secondly, the enormous 'Pictures, photos, objects' on *Trove* holds 7,992,441 images incorporating the former 'Picture Australia' collection renamed *Trove: Australia in Pictures*, and sourcing contemporary images from Flickr.³³ There are many images of Australian artworks in this digital archive courtesy of their home institution.

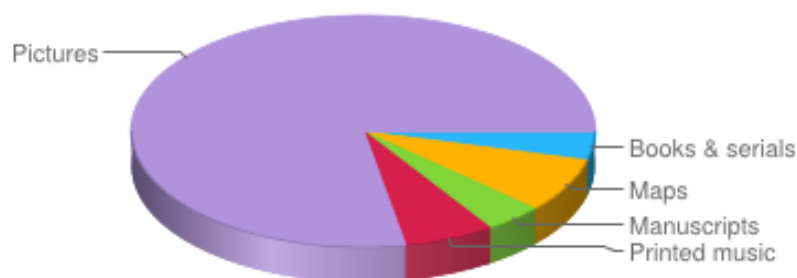


Fig. 8 Number of items in the National Library's digital collections by collection format, as of 30 June 2014

³² National Library of Australia, 'Collection Statistics', accessed 30 June 2014, <http://www.nla.gov.au/collections/statistics>

³³ See: Trove, 'Pictures, photos, objects', <http://trove.nla.gov.au/picture>



Fig 9. National Library of Australia, 'Picture Australia', archived on Pandora – (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia) screenshot, 2014.

As previously mentioned, both the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) and South Australian Museum (SAM) have recently gone on record with commitments to fully digitise their collections. Both commitments bring with them significant expectations and responsibilities. The NGA's key objective, to preserve, protect and manage the national art collection, is closely tied to the digitisation of their collection. It is a key indicator of NGA's performance: 'Our success will be measured by: the number of works of art in the national collection digitised every year'.³⁴ Such a commitment by our National Gallery should be applauded, but does a single public institution really have the resources needed to build and maintain such a tool? Will it detract from core business and would an image repository for teaching and research purposes work better if it were more closely aligned with teaching and research institutions?

Design and Art Australia Online (DAAO) is a collaborative e-Research tool that presents biographical data about Australian artists, designers, craftspeople and curators. It is not an image database, and does not store images for copyright reasons.³⁵ Instead, it uses links to existing online resources, in many instances Flickr, and provides users with information on

³⁴ National Gallery of Australia, 'Objective 1.2', *Strategic Plan 2012-2016*, http://nga.gov.au/AboutUs/DOWNLOAD/StratPlan_2012-16.pdf

³⁵ Design and Art Australia Online, 'Share Your Images With Us', accessed 11 November 2014, <http://www.daa0.org.au/how-share-your-images-daa0/>

how to upload links to images to which they own the copyright. Any committed researchers, whether artists, family historians or affiliated academics, are invited to contribute to DAAO's growing database. The developers maintain a commitment to sharing information and collaborative research. This liberated attitude towards intellectual and actual property in the digital age has been articulated on more than one occasion by the resource's founder and driving force, Johanna Mendelssohn and has also been reinforced by a pivotal figure in the Melbourne Art Network, David Marshall.³⁶

Some State-by-State Highlights

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) recently reported that 83% of the NGV's Collection is now fully searchable through their website.³⁷ This is a vast increase over a short timeframe, and work is ongoing to improve the size and quality of images online, perhaps in response to criticism about the percentage of works on display compared with storage.³⁸

The State Library of Victoria's visual arts collection has work of Australian artists as a primary focus. Books, magazines, catalogues, databases, manuscripts and a range of other resources are all available for those with an interest in Australia's art history. The Australian Art and Artists collection, often referred to as AAA, has long been an important primary resource for researches. Over 30,000 files containing exhibition material related to Australian art, artists, awards and galleries, art exhibition catalogues, invitations to exhibitions, press clippings and other ephemeral material from the 19th century onwards are held in this collection.³⁹

One of the strengths of this collection is the information it contains about Victorian art organisations such as the Victorian Artists' Society and the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors. Very often the brochures and cuttings found in these files are the only remaining evidence of the work of a particular artist or society.⁴⁰ While treasures hidden in the filing cabinets in the NGV Shaw Research Library's ephemera collection might only

³⁶ Charis Palmer, 'Art historians welcome open approach to image copyright', *The Conversation* 28 August 2012, accessed online: <https://theconversation.com/art-historians-welcome-open-approach-to-image-copyright-9110>

³⁷ National Gallery of Victoria, *2012/13 Annual Report Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia*, accessed 3 December 2013, http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/627429/NGV_AR_12-13_WEB.pdf

³⁸ Henrietta Cook, 'NGV artworks languishing in vaults', *The Age Newspaper* October 24, 2012, accessed 5 December 2013 <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/ngv-artworks-languishing-in-vaults-20121024-285z0.html#ixzz2mZXvyTVw>

³⁹ State Library of Victoria - art and artists files Persistent link: <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/110927>

⁴⁰ See: <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/our-collections/collection-strengths/art/australian-art-artists>

be known to few, it would be wonderful if both institutions could come together to fully digitize their holdings.

The Art Gallery of NSW has laid claim to being the first state gallery in the country to establish an archive and are one of the few Australian institutions today collecting, preserving and making available for research primary material on Australian visual art. The archive holds the administrative records of the Gallery from the 1870s to the present day, including information related to exhibitions, prizes and scholarships, the collection and building as well as operational matters. It also contains diverse manuscript collections holding the papers of a significant number of artists, as well as the records of numerous commercial art galleries from the Australian Fine Arts Gallery to the Watters Gallery and art societies such as the Sydney Camera Circle.⁴¹

The Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia has recently gone public with the admission that 'our whole digital area has been poorly invested in...We're quite frustrated that this special collection of nearly 40,000 works is not well represented (on the internet)'.⁴² Making the collection available online is identified as a major issue facing the Gallery in their annual reports.⁴³

The Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art has its own research library, much newer and better resourced than some. In contrast to others, the Gallery has a stated focus on depth and quality of engagement with the collection, as opposed to amount of images digitized.⁴⁴ Situated in the same geographic precinct, and part of the State Library of Queensland, the Australian Library of Art comprises collections relating to the fine arts including the James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Arts - books, exhibition catalogues, ephemera, posters and broadsides, manuscripts and private press publications.⁴⁵

The Art Gallery of Western Australia has reported slow but steady progress (currently 15 per cent of the WA State Art Collection has been digitised, and 4,400 images have been incorporated into the Cumulus digital asset management system). They have made a firm commitment to digitizing their collection through smart work strategies and investment in integrating

⁴¹ Art Gallery of New South Wales, 'Visiting the archive', accessed 7 Oct 2013
<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/research/archives/>

⁴² Nick Mitzevich quoted in Michaela Boland, 'After spate of looting discoveries, more art goes in search of its roots', *The Australian Newspaper*, accessed 11 November 2014, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/after-spate-of-looting-discoveries-more-art-goes-in-search-of-its-roots/story-e6frg8n6-1226807974478>

⁴³ See: Art Gallery of South Australia, 'Annual Reports', accessed 11 November 2014, http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/About/annual_reports.html

⁴⁴ Queensland Art Gallery, 'Strategic Plan 2014-2019', accessed 20 April 2014, http://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/165133/2014-19_Strategic_Plan_Final.PDF

⁴⁵ State Library of Queensland, 'Australian Library of Art', accessed 7 October 2013, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/about-us/corporate/australian-library-of-art>

software systems: 'All works are now photographed, colour-corrected and digitised as they are acquired, go on exhibition or go out on loan...A major project in 2013-14 has also been the integration of Cumulus with Vernon, AGWA's Collection cataloguing database.'⁴⁶ This same commitment to smarter working practices has been made by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.⁴⁷

In addition to the state institutions, there are also private databases devoted to digital images of Australian art. Reading the fine print in the back pages of any auction catalogue reveals that these companies reserve the right to photograph every work that comes to them for sale. Those images must combine to be an enormously important archive. Where they are, what format they are in, how they are maintained, and who manages them requires further research.

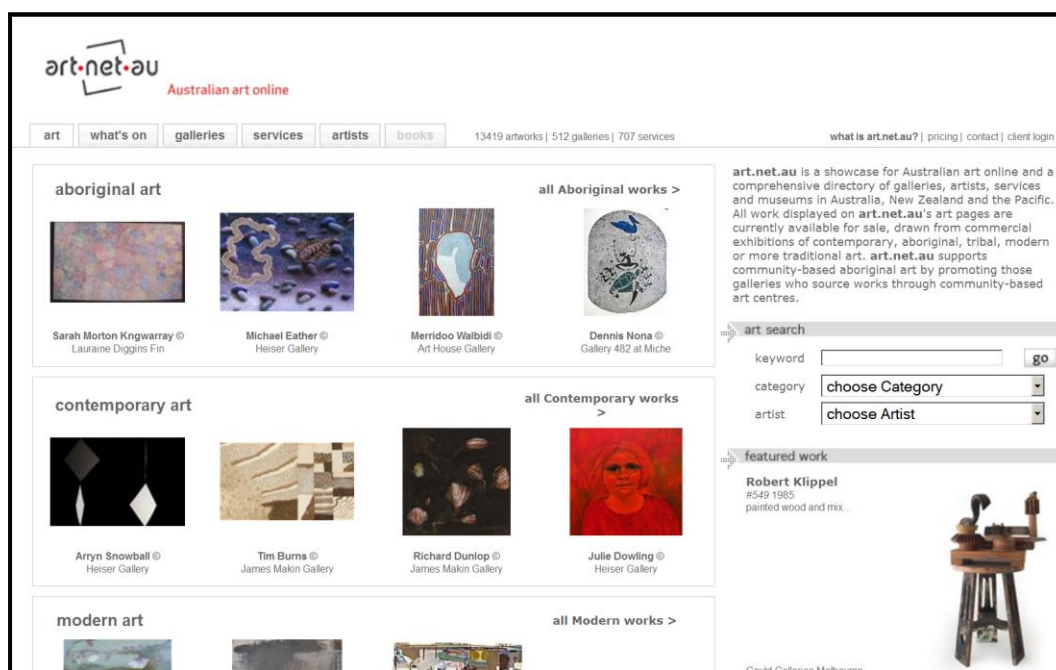


Fig. 10. Australian Art Online, 'About', screenshot, October 2014.

'Australian Art Online' is a web portal for commercial galleries in Australia. It connects buyers and galleries, but is not involved in the sale transactions, surviving instead on a subscription model. It is designed to provide greater exposure for commercial Australian art galleries, supplying them with reports on website traffic allows them to add or edit artworks and exhibitions directly.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Art Gallery of Western Australia, 'Annual Report 2013-2014', accessed 10 November 2014, www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/.../AGWA_AnnualReport_2013-14_002.doc

⁴⁷ Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, accessed 10 November 2014, http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/collections_and_research/tasmanian_herbarium/tasmanian_herbarium_collection

⁴⁸ Australian Art Online, 'About', accessed 10 November 2014, http://artnetwork.com.au/product_artnetau.shtml

Conclusion

In seeking to construct a snapshot of digital image resources for Australian art, this paper offers the briefest of insights into the current situation. Just as the Association of Art Historians has done in the UK, perhaps the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand should be tasked with surveying the purpose, content and size of key archival holdings at national, state and institutional levels. It is not clear that the needs and desires of the large-scale international projects outlined in this paper, such as Google, ARTstor, or Your Pictures, actually align with our own community needs and expectations. Should our efforts be focused on lobbying for greater inclusion of better examples of Australian/Aboriginal art in these image databases or should we be instead devising our own partnerships and pilot programs that meet the needs of our teaching and research communities?⁴⁹

Whilst only a preliminary outline of the Australian situation has been possible here, a more comprehensive report across all sectors and media is needed in order to properly comprehend the current state of our archives of art and to identify the gaps in infrastructure and resourcing. Such a report would enable informed decisions to be made about funding priorities at a national level and allow the differing requirements of the individual communities served by these archives to be met.⁵⁰ As we move deeper into the new millennia and contemplate how we engage with our art history communities in Australia and overseas, it appears that the former Google director of content partnerships was right: 'If it isn't online, it doesn't exist'.⁵¹

Biographical Statement

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⁴⁹ Links with major national galleries could be fruitful See:

<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/history.html>

⁵⁰ See Rose Holley's Blog - views and news on digital libraries and archives for an informed and informative discussion on the 10 main challenges facing Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums 'Dealing with the Digital Deluge', accessed 10 November 2014, <http://rose-holley.blogspot.com.au/2012/01/dealing-with-digital-deluge-10.html>

⁵¹ Gerber quoted in Haigh, 'How Google is making us stupid', *The Monthly* February 2006, p. 33.

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