

Hurting or Helping? Image Quality in Online Art History Journals

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Presentation for the session:

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Hypotheses, assumptions, and perceptions

- Online journal advantages:
 - may save money
 - provide easier access to content
- Online journal disadvantages:
 - difficulty in viewing related images within some of these articles.
 - Are libraries getting their money's worth if image quality is extremely poor in these articles?
- The art object is of paramount importance to art history research.
 - In many cases, the original art object cannot be studied.
 - Surrogate images of this object must often suffice.
- Hypothesis: Readers' difficulty in viewing in online art history journal articles hinders readers' comprehension of the content, therefore causing them to seek alternatives to locate better quality images to supplement their understanding of the text.

Highlights from Literature Review:

- "Text-cum-image" in art literature:
 - Reliance on surrogate images of objects
 - Reliance on links between image and text
 - Why is this relationship between image and text so important to art scholarship?
 - Stam, Deirdre C. "Art Historians and Their Use of Illustrated Texts." Presentation given at the seminar, Scholarly Resources in Art History: Issues in Preservation by the Commission on Preservation and Access, Spring Hill, MN, September 29-October 1, 1988.
- Similar studies in other disciplines:
 - Erdman, Jacquelyn Marie. "Image Quality in Electronic Journals: A Case Study of Elsevier Geology Titles." *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services* 30 no. 3-4 (September-December 2006): 169-178.
 - Joseph, Lura E. "Image and Figure Quality: A Study of Elsevier's Earth and Planetary Sciences Electronic Journal Back File Package." *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services* 30 no. 3-4 (September-December 2006): 162-168.
- Similar study in art/art history:
 - De Luise, Alexandra. "Full Text or Not? All Illustrations or Not?" *Art Documentation* 22 no. 2 (Fall 2003): 20-25.
- Studies on art historians' research habits:
 - Beaudoin, Joan. "Image and Text: A Review of the Literature Concerning the Information Needs and Research Behaviors of Art Historians." *Art Documentation* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 34-37.
 - Brilliant, Richard. "How an Art Historian Connects Art Objects and Information." *Library Trends* 37 no. 2 (Fall 1988): 120-129.
 - Durrant, Jennifer. "Art History, Scholarship and Image Libraries: Realising the Potential of the Digital Age." *LASIE* 28 no. 2 (June 1997): 14-27.
 - Getty Art History Information Program and the Institute for Research in Information and Scholarship. *Object- Image- Inquiry*. Santa Monica, CA: J. Paul Getty Book Distribution Center, 1988.

Background of Study

- Participants included 8 art graduate students as well as art faculty—the most habitual consumers of this literature.
- Study consisted of participants reading an excerpt (1st 6 pages) of an art history journal article and then answering about 7-10 questions about their experience in reading the article on the computer.
- The following article was read by all 8 participants as it was provided by H.W. Wilson's *Art Full Text* database in the fall of 2008:

Bann, Stephen. "Photography by Other Means? The Engravings of Ferdinand Gaillard." *The Art Bulletin* 88 no. 1 (March 2006): 119-138.

—This article elegantly illustrated how the text and images are very interdependent on one another; it also demonstrated common problems regarding image placement with figure references, poor image quality, and lack of images despite references in the text.

—Although this is an art history journal article, we wanted to apply its use to a sampling of graduate students and faculty at a small to medium-sized liberal arts institution like ours at The University of Montana.

- **Please see pages 119, 120, 121, 122, and 123 in the pdf of article for image:**

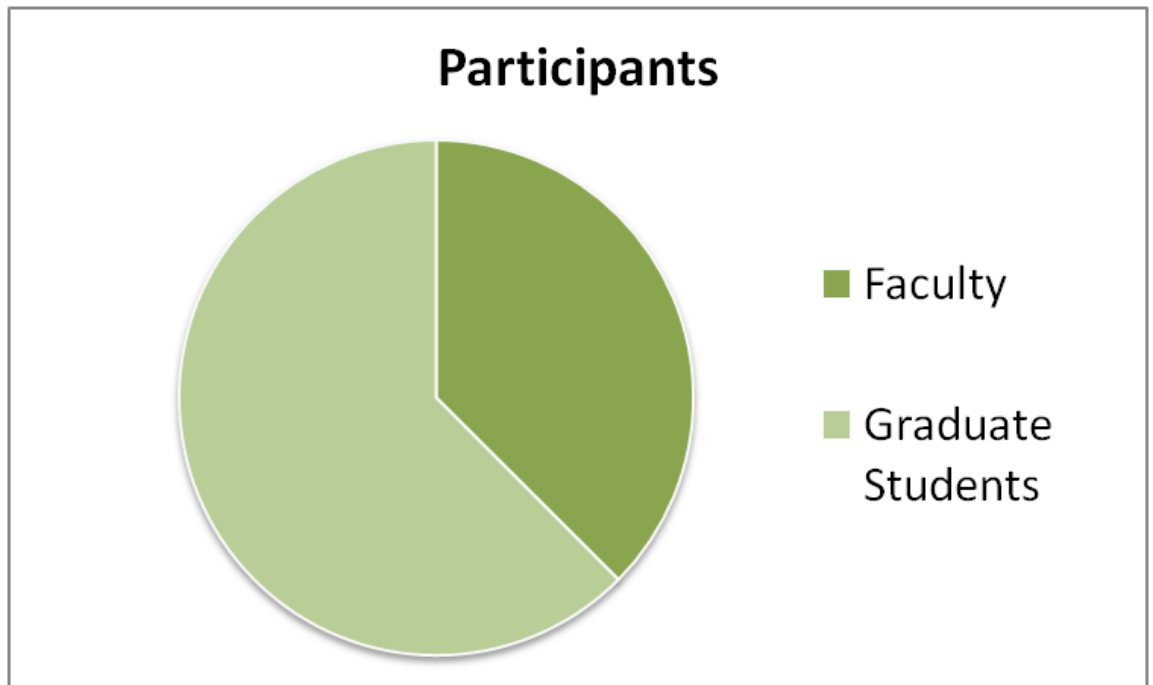
Bann, Stephen. "Photography by Other Means? The Engravings of Ferdinand Gaillard." *The Art Bulletin* 88 no. 1 (March 2006): 119-138. Available from H.W. Wilson's *OmniFile Full Text Mega* (Accessed 20 May 2009).

- Page 120 features an electronically reproduced version of Ferdinand Gaillard's *Portrait of a Young Man*, burin engraving after Giovanni Bellini, fourth state of five, *avant la lettre*, signed with drypoint, 1863. Reproduction features a strong moiré pattern.
- All other images in article also contain a moiré pattern.
- Text throughout the article was very blurry.
- There a mention on the first page of the article (p. 119) of an earlier version of this image in a quote by Olivier Merson (volume 6, of Henri Beraldi's *Les Graveurs du Dix-Neuvieme Siecle*); the corresponding image is not present in the article for unknown reasons.
- References to figures 4 and 5 are on page 121, but the actual images are on pages 122 and 123 respectively. Readers would need to scroll down from page 121 to the next two pages to see these images.
- Although participants in this study only read an excerpt of this poorly-reproduced article pdf from *OmniFile Full Text Mega*, it is possible to find a reproduction of this article with relatively good image quality in EBSCO's *Academic Search Premier*.

Participant Overview

These two illustrations show faculty and graduate student status breakdown as well as their teaching loads and types of research that they do.

Participant	Status	Teaching	Journal Use
1	Graduate	No	Extensive
2	Faculty	Yes	Extensive
3	Graduate	No	Beginning
4	Faculty	Yes	Extensive
5	Graduate	Yes	Extensive
6	Faculty	Yes	Extensive
7	Graduate	Yes	Extensive
8	Graduate	Yes	Beginning



Interview question categories

1. Importance of Digital Images in Art Journals
2. Image Quality Effect on Understanding the Text
3. Effect of Image Placement on Understanding
4. Effect of Use of Image Detail
5. Level of Detail Desired
6. Frustration Level with image quality in article
7. Prefer print or Computer Screen for Reading?

These interviews were conversational and, in addition to the questions listed above, also featured open-ended questions and follow-up queries depending on the participant's answers.

Results

Participant	Status	Print or Computer Screen?	Image Importance	Moiré pattern Understood	Image Quality Judgement	Frustration Level
1	Graduate	Print	Important	Yes	Negative	Low
2	Faculty	Print	n/a	No	Negative	High
3	Graduate	Print	Depends	No	Negative	Moderate
4	Faculty	Online	Important	No	None	Low
5	Graduate	Print	Important	No	None	Low
6	Faculty	Online	Important	Yes	Negative	High
7	Graduate	Online	Depends	No	Positive	Low
8	Graduate	Online	Important	No	Negative	High

Participant	Image Effect on Understanding Text	Text Discussion w/o Image	Effect of Image Placement	Effect of Image Detail	Level of Detail Desired
1	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Better
2	Positive	Negative	Negative	Negative	Better
3	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Better
4	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive	Better
5	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Better
6	Negative	Positive	Negative	Negative	Better
7	Positive	Negative	Negative	Positive	n/a
8	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Better

Explanation of results charts:

- Clear majorities in a particular answer are highlighted.
- Researchers depended on the descriptive text just as much as image, if not more so.
- They didn't necessarily have any indication of the quality of the scan of the images in the text (image representation).
- Researchers generally did not have the same sense of alarm regarding the image quality in the articles that we as librarians do
- See next slide for a rather illuminating quote demonstrating this finding.

Discussion

Quote:

“While I appreciate that people really want digital to do everything, I think that there’s an inherent laziness about that and nothing replaces the actual thing. [...] So, I think part of it falls on the user. To move outside of the zone of what the article is giving me.”

Conclusions

Participants indicated that they expected to take extra steps to get better image quality from a needed article.

Potential solutions to these problems

Librarian-initiated:

1.Indicator in link resolver software or journal management databases which could point to better surrogate images in art periodicals.

2.Give users ability to rate image quality in online journals articles for a particular title.

3.Provide links to image databases such as ARTStor, CAMIO, or others within art journal article searches.

1.Better advertisement of librarians' ability to assist with image searching through web guides, library instruction classes, etc.

Vendor-initiated:

One participant suggested changes to the format of online journal articles. Rather than using a scanned pdf, use a format that incorporates presentation software instead.