Use of the Web by Visual Artists
An Exploration of How Online Information Seeking Informs Creative Practice

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Artists

• Several consistent needs
• Wide range of sources
• Interactions are also important

Cobbledick (1996); Cowan (2004); Hemmig (2008)

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The Web

Pew Internet and American Life Project (2009)
Artists + Web = ?

Gregory (2007); Visick, Hendrickson, and Bowman (2006)
“There has been very little discussion of multimedia and Web-based resources in even the most recent literature. We can guess that use of these resources by artists has increased dramatically in the past decade, but there is no documentation of which sources are used or how they are used, or if they have supplanted more traditional resources.”

-- Hemmig (2008), p.359
Research Questions

1. What are the information needs of artists?
2. What motivates artists to turn to the Web to meet these needs?
3. How do the artists use the Web to meet these needs?
Data Collection

Diaries and follow up interviews

ACTIVITY ENTRY

Date/ Time:
Activity:

How long did you spend on this activity:
Starting point:
Other sites visited (if applicable):

Strategies:

How did the activity end?

Comments (optional):

Rieh (2004)
Recruiting

- Info distributed in print + online
- NC Triangle art spaces, associations, studios, supply shops, etc.
Question 1:
What are the information needs?

*a.k.a.*
Meet the artists
Career Progression

- Retired / returning to art (A)
- Mid-career FT artist (B)
- Daily practice aside non-art job (C)
- Late-career, established FT artist (D)
- All identify artmaking as a serious professional pursuit
Venues and Social Networks

- Show work on the Web (A, B, C, D)
- Show work in physical spaces (A, B, C, D)
- Social websites (A, B, C)
- Art associations & guilds (A, B, C, D)
Disciplines and Materials

• Drawing, collage, works on paper (A, C)
• Painting (B, D)
• Digital imaging (C)
Inspiration

• “Inspiration doesn’t come from sitting on the couch” (Artist B)
• Themes, concepts, techniques (A); color, memory, imagination (B); wordplay, games and puzzles (C); landscape, seasons, light (D)
participants consulted

books, periodicals, images, memory, language, imagination, landscape, works of other artists, communication with fellow artists, photographs, physical objects, art materials and processes, maps, directories, personal notes and files from

the personal studio, at home, libraries, museums, galleries, social events, workshops, discussions, the Web, and oneself
Question 2:
What motivates artists to turn to the Web?
Specific Info Need

• Artists A, B, C, and D
• ‘I need to find...’
Daily Routine

• Artists A, B, C

“It’s like a magnet” (Artist B)

CC Image by Flickr user ali edwards
I would not use the Web to…

…find images to reference in a realistic way (Artists A, D)

*But otherwise?*

“I love the Internet, it’s my buddy” (B)
It’s a “primary source” of information (C)
Question 3:
How do artists use the Web?
Goal-Based Searching

- Exhibition / career info (A, B, C, D)
- Technical info (B, C)
- Referential image search (A, C)
- Art materials (A, D)
- Practical

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Browsing

- Artists A, B, C
- Can lead to or connect diverse tasks and information
- Info found tends to inspire

CC image by Flickr user Sarah G…
Monitoring

• Artists A, B, C
• Web use only
• Routine / habitual
  – Checking page stats
  – Looking for new communication
  – Sifting syndicated information
• Can get “obsessive”
Displaying and Selling Art

- Artists A, B, C, D
  - Two personal homepages
  - Three presences on social sites
  - Two e-commerce shops

- Lots of data gathering going on!
Displaying and Selling Art

Yet… physical presentation remains important

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Participating

• Artists A, B, C
• Source of inspiration, encouragement, info-gathering
• “Being in touch with 800+ members is the much bigger resource” (Artist A)
• No chit-chat please!
Participating Artists spent time socializing online…

…unless they had a well established ‘real life’ network
Looking for opportunities

Improving marketing strategies

Sharing images of work

Connecting with artists and audiences

Finding new techniques

Image search
Thank You!

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Access the full report (PDF):

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References


http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Online-Activities-20002009.aspx
http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx


References


Image URLs

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