From Paper to Pixels: Digitizing Artists’ Books at MassArt to Promote Physical Interaction

In this hands-on workshop, students are presented with selections from the library’s collection of artists’ books. Included are works by Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Sol LeWitt, Sophie Calle, Ai Weiwei, and Julie Chen. Students learn about design, concept, and book construction techniques. The session helps them to create an artist’s book of their own when it is taught in conjunction with the first-year Visual Language course.

DIGITIZATION GOALS

- Populate library catalog with images of the artists’ books to provide information and pique interest during general searching
- Link the gallery and the catalog records to help with findability
- Foster interest in the artists’ books collection outside the context of classes
- Provide meaningful access to the collection when the books are not available for viewing

OUR GALLERY

Url: blogs.massart.edu/artistsbooks
Platform: Wordpress
Our Artists Book Gallery was built in Wordpress content management software. Wordpress is robust and dynamic allowing for near limitless options for web development, but also has a relatively user friendly interface. It’s enormous user base has created a robust support community. It is estimated that at least a quarter of all websites are built on Wordpress.

Hosting:
Campus Press
Our campus Technology department strongly encouraged us to outsource hosting. While it does limit customization to a degree, the technical support is responsive and we have been able to work with the hosting company to find solutions to most issues.

Theme: Fontfolio
Fontfolio provided and visual portfolio style website, with helpful built-in features important to us such as:

- Visual landing page populated by posts rather than a portfolio item type. (Sites built with portfolio item types can be hard to transfer to a new theme)
- Dynamic use of categories
- Easily customizable using CSS, plugins, and widgets
- Fontfolio has also been designed as a Drupal Theme.

Images:
Shot in house with small studio set up
We shoot the books as pieces of art rather than books on a copy stand, and attempt to highlight the interesting features of each book. Each post has 4-8 images and sized to 1024 pixels on the long side to reduce disk space.

Equipment:
- Fluorescent stand lights
- DSLR with a tripod
- Computer equipped with photo editing software
- Seamless paper with stands
Less than $500 was spent on new equipment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS PLUS PLUGIN

Inserts a table of contents plus a TOC-Plugin.

STATISTICS

35 in person classes were given by library staff reaching most first year students.

Without promotion outside of library instruction, the Artists’ Book Gallery had over 6,000 page views last year.

RESOURCES

W3Schools - www.w3schools.com: a great resource for learning web coding. Knowing some CSS greatly expands the possibilities for customizing the look and feel of your site.

Wordpress Codex - codex.wordpress.com: the official forum for Wordpress questions.

Artists’ Book Thesaurus - tinyurl.com/artislib: vocabulary used to populate our categories list

CUSTOM MENU FOR CATEGORIES

Certain categories can be excluded from a custom menu allowing for a manageable set of clickable headings.

JETPACK PLUGIN

Connects to Wordpress.com to enable a variety of features. We use the following:

- Slideshow embeds - allows you to embed slideshows through the gallery creation dialog. Ours is customized with a bit of CSS, to match our overall look and feel. An alternative also available with Jetpack is The Carousel.
- Related Posts - shows relevant links below a post
- Widget Visibility - allows you to turn off widgets on certain pages

INTEGRATED SEARCH

IN TOP NAVIGATION

Not all themes have integrated search and it is very important for scalability. After the collection gets too big, browsing gets cumbersome.