Art Instead of Just Images: Training Students to See Beyond the Screen
Lael J. Ensor, Assistant Curator, Visual Resources Collection, Johns Hopkins University

Introduction
As visual resources and art library professionals we often interact with student employees who may have virtually no experience in the humanities – how might we train such students to look at works of art? We might have extensive discipline specific knowledge or visual literacy training, but how can we practically prepare students without any such training? How might we approach and think about this complex topic?

Desired Outcomes
Identify concrete approaches for training non-humanities student employees to look at images of art. Develop a set of necessary criteria – what do we want students to know? Discover the points where art history and visual literacy might have extensive discipline specific knowledge or visual literacy training, but how can we practically prepare students without any such training? How might we approach and think about this complex topic?

What challenges do non-humanities students face in Visual Resources Centers and Art Libraries?
• Lack of discipline specific knowledge and vocabulary
• Lack of visual literacy training
• Difficulty comprehending the multivalent nature of humanities research
• Difficulty with formal analysis
• Lack of understanding of art publications / documentation

Practical Scenarios at Johns Hopkins University
Creating and editing images for use in institutional digital image collection for teaching and study. Students use a flatbed scanner and Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom to create and edit digital images from books, photographs, negatives, and 35 mm slides.

Evaluating image quality and identifying duplicate images of works of art. During the recent transition from MDID to Shared Shelf, students assisted with the analysis of over 170,000 digital images in the local JHU collection.

Understanding Art Images
• What is the medium?
• How is the description of the art object presented?
• What moment in time / condition of the art object does the image depict?
• Are multiple images that appear similar depicting the same art object?

Sources of Images
• How is art documented?
• How does source media affect digital image creation, editing, and evaluation?

For Students:
• Enhance the scope of student work;
• Improve quality of student work
• Increase the amount of time staff are able to spend on other projects
• Augment the personal reward for student workers

This project does not recommend teaching the expanse of introductory art history or its methods to all student workers. Similarly, it is not a goal of this project to teach the use of image editing software or of cataloguing interfaces. This project is about teaching students the considerations we may take for granted when looking at works of art and pinpointing the minimum amount of knowledge needed to be able to look at art images and perform related tasks

Future Plans:
This project is a work in progress. Going forward, I would like to continue researching these topics in order to more fluently discuss them and to develop a practical guide and toolkit to address relevant topics.

For Students:

What happened to my edge?

While different institutions will diverge on "cropping methodology," students will benefit from thinking about these issues. Why do it one way or another? How can cropping affect pedagogy and scholarly work?

Sources of Images
• How is art documented?
• How does source media affect digital image creation, editing, and evaluation?

Suggested Resources, Bibliography, and Acknowledgements:

Looking at Greek Art

How Prints Look: Photographs with Commentary

How to Read an Old Master's Painting: A Guide to Technical Terms

• What is the medium?
• How is the description of the art object presented?
• What moment in time / condition of the art object does the image depict?
• Are multiple images that appear similar depicting the same art object?

• How can digital image manipulation damage both the integrity of the digital image and the integrity of the representation of the art object?