Experiments with the Getty’s Provenance Data

Roderic Crooks (Ph.D. candidate, Information Studies)
Megan Driscoll (Ph.D. candidate, Art History)
Stephanie Gorman (B.A., 2015, Comparative Literature)
Tiffany Naiman (Ph.D. candidate, Musicology)
Haley DiPressi (BA, 2015, Art History)
Tori Schmitt (B.A., 2015, Art History)
Sally Márquez (B.A., 2015, Comparative Literature)
Raphael Sasayama (B.A., 2015, Art History)
Getty Provenance Index (GPI):
- constituted of 1.5 million records
- primarily in Western Europe since 1500.
Cases include:

- an exploration of the relationship between analog documents and electronic records

- an examination of the composition of private Roman collections of the 18th century

- a tracing of the growth of American institutional collecting in the first part of the 20th century
• a partial recreation of the coerced liquidation of Jewish art holdings in Nazi Germany

• an analysis of how descriptions of frames in sales records correspond to beauty and authenticity
VISUALIZING GERMAN SALES CATALOGS 1930-1945:
PLACES, PREJUDICES, AND PATTERNS
VISUALIZING GERMAN SALES CATALOGS 1930-1945: PLACES, PREJUDICES, AND PATTERNS

Goals:

- Reveal through data the practices of German auction houses during the Nazi regime

- Discover artworks and other items from Jewish families and the movement of that artwork

- Who were the buyers and sellers of items that were possibly acquired unethically
Word cloud of specific items sold at auction
Types of Sales by Year
All German Sales (1928-1945)
CONCLUSIONS

- the Dorotheum located in Vienna, the cultural center of European art music for over 200 years
- most coded language and musical instrument sales located here
- Cross referencing and triangulation with other data sets necessary
German Sales
1901 - 1945
Art, Auction and Provenance
German Paintings

When trying to verify places that were listed among countries in the descriptions there were problems in finding clear data. The observation lead us back to the complex history of Europe.

Some data has listings that date back to the Roman Empire, when nations and city states fluctuated in and out of existence.

The following visualization shows where the most popular items that were sold originated from.

It revealed the fact that German interests in painting collection was focused primarily in Europe. There was a large number Asian and Persian works in the system but mostly for ceramics and rugs.
Details in the Description

- some objects would be listed by culture, such as a “Greek” sculpture or a “Persian” rug.
- City & Country names: almost entirely absent from African or Asian art objects.
- Japan & China: the only countries listed in Asia, there were mostly “Asian” listings.
- Descriptions for objects originating in Europe were very specific. As the distance grew between the place of origin and the place of purchase, descriptions became vague.

  Ex. Coins from The Kingdom of Westphalia might list the exact region of origin, month and year, yet a bowl of similar value from Africa would be listed as “African.”
Why was this happening?

Could it be that while foreign objects of beauty were appreciated and admired, more attention was given to the familiar and local?

Yet, while European countries were more likely to value lineage and display nationalistic tendencies, perhaps the auction houses were not to blame. It could be they had no information because the people trading the Asian and African art did not care to get the specifics while they were overseas.

In the end, something so small as location and description opened a door that lead to many new questions that can be further examined through the lens of history and psychology.
Frames that Sell: Authenticity and Beauty in Descriptions of Frames in the Sales Catalogs
Methodology

Dataset -> Questions
**The Dataset:** 5,872 records
Authenticity and Beauty

carved

gilt

gold

fine

black

glazed

ebony

elegant

original

richly

white

ancient

broad

burnished

curious

oak
Adjective Histograms

Adjectives Used to Describe Frames, 1689-1787
Old, Ancient, Antique, Original

Number of "Authentic" Frames in Sales Catalogs, 1781-1843
"Authentic" Frames by Adjective in Sales Catalogs, 1781-1843
Italian Renaissance Frames

Nationality of Artists whose Frames are "Authentic" (1781-1837)

"Authentic" Italian: 32%

Nationality of Artists whose Frames are "Beautiful" (1689-1840)

"Beautiful" Italian: 17%
Sale Prices

Price of Paintings with "Authentic" Frames, 1816-1843
Sale Prices

Price of Paintings with "Authentic" and "Beautiful" Frames, 1781-1843
Specialists of “Authentic” Frames?
More Work

GIS

Text Analysis

Complete Access
Thank You!