A New Paradigm for Preserving Born-Digital Art Collection Records at the Yale Center for British Art

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Yale Center for British Art, Long Gallery following reinstallation, photography by Richard Caspole
Opened in 1977, the museum houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom.

The permanent collection includes approximately:

- 2,000 paintings and 250 sculptures
- 20,000 drawings and watercolors
- 40,000 prints
- 35,000 rare books and manuscripts
- 40,000 volumes in reference library
Permanent Collection Documentation

Curatorial Object Files at YCBA, photography by Abigail Lamphier
Permanent Collection Documentation: Examples

- Object files
- Collection research
- Loan records
- Acquisition records
- Conservation documentation
- The Museum System (TMS)
**The Museum System - TMS**

![Paintings and Sculpture](image)

**Objects Module, TMS, screenshot**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Painting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display Date</td>
<td>1818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 Historical Date)</td>
<td>1818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist(s)</td>
<td>Joseph Mallord William Turner, 1775-1851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donor: Given by Paul Mellon, 1607-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Owner: Yale Center for British Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort packet-boat from Rotterdam becalmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object Name</td>
<td>(2 Alternate Object Names)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62x62 inches (157.5x233.7 cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frame: 73x102x5 inches (185.4x259.1x12.7 cm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Line</td>
<td>Paul Mellon Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalogue Raisonné</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio/Series</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Born-Digital Records

• Created and managed electronically
• Require expertise and action at an early stage
• Risk Factors:
  • obsolescence
  • deterioration
  • bit rot
  • human error
  • natural disasters
Project Mission

• Extend Institutional Archives’ digital preservation framework throughout museum.

• Document how born-digital records can be stewarded according to professional standards.

• Retain immediate access to records required by records creators.
Project Significance

• Preserve complete history of permanent collection

• Advocate for institution-wide digital preservation practices

• Share knowledge with professional community

George Stubbs, 1724–1806, British, Zebra, 1763, Oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection recto, composite, cropped
Deliverables

- Proposal of preservation method(s) to capture TMS data
- Survey art collection records held by Conservation, Registrar, and Curatorial departments
- Develop preservation procedures for staff
- Staff training
- Digital preservation policy
Where I Started
Where I Am Now

• Creating unique workflows for Collections Departments

• Developing file structures in Preservica

• Examining database preservation options
Next Steps

• Test ingests in Preservica

• Establish new workflows, train staff

• Write digital preservation policy

• Complete TMS preservation proposal

John Frederick Herring, 1795–1865, British, *Foxhunting: Clearing a Ditch*, 1839, Oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection
Professional Engagement

- Mentorship
- Symposium, Is this Permanence: Preserving Born-digital Artists’ Archives
- SAA: Museum Archives Section Working Group
- New England Archivists
- Site visits
- Professional conferences

Charles Philips, 1708–1747, British, *Tea Party at Lord Harrington’s House, St. James’s*, 1730, Oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection
Takeaways – So Far…

• Be flexible when working interdepartmentally

• Volunteer with professional organizations

• Reach out to experts and ask questions

• Use time/ project management tools that work for you