**KAMPOSIORI — Tales**

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**Tales of a Discipline in the Digital Age: Information Practices and Needs in Art History**

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This poster explores the impact that the digital age has had on the information behaviour of art historians. As the rapid technological advancements and the proliferation of digital resources in recent years have greatly affected scholarly practices in the arts and humanities, there is a rising need to study the informational and methodological behaviour of scholars in order to create functional information systems that enhance scholarship in the area. Therefore, our goal is to focus on the scholarly workflow in the field of art history as a way of identifying the information needs of its scholars nowadays. For that purpose, we will look at the information practices of art historians throughout the various stages of the research lifecycle—from the formulation of the research subject to the dissemination of results. Moreover, we will list the digital tools and services that scholars in the field use during these stages as well as the challenges they face.

Our proposed poster reports the results of research conducted for the first author’s PhD thesis, ‘Personal Research Collections: Examining Research Practices and User Needs in Art Historical Research’, at the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, London, under the supervision of Professor Claire Warwick and Simon Mahony. This study used semistructured, in-depth interviews with 20 art historians at different career stages, as well as observation of their physical and digital personal collections in order to identify the particular needs they have when they build them. Actually, scholars’ personal collections of resources served as a departure point for examining the *what, where, why,* and *how* of art historians' information practices in the digital age.

Being at the core of the scholar’s workspace, personal collections play a significant role in the scholarly workflow; gathering various resources for research and teaching in art history can either constitute a solution to the many problems scholars often face (Grindley, 2006, 6), such as copyright issues, or facilitate other research activities (Palmer et al., 2009, 17–18; Kamposiori et al., 2013, 6; Long and Schonfeld, 2014, 23–24), such as writing or publishing. But what are the stories behind the building of these collections? What can they tell us about the information practices and needs of art historians at different stages of research?

Looking, for example, at the initial stages of a project where scholars use online resources for discovering the necessary information, our research showed that art historians nowadays tend to turn either to Google for checking ‘what is available out there’ or to resources they trust and they have always found useful, including digital libraries and museums’ digital collections. Yet we found that many scholars still had to deal with various problems when they went about looking for material—problems ranging from copyright issues and limited availability of resources in particular areas of study to the sometimes low quality of digital resources. Thus, easier access to quality information through, for instance, a ‘hub’ containing all the necessary information for useful resources in specific areas, like modern art history, was often one of their foremost wishes.

Furthermore, thinking about the later stages of research, the effective organisation and management of the gathered information was often a prerequisite for analysing the research data and constructing the scholarly argument. For instance, in the case of a digital art historian, digital archiving was considered a mandatory step before the analysis of data extracted from particular mailing lists; due to the ephemeral nature of this kind of information, if not archived, it would have been very difficult to find again. Hence, a tool that would make such a process easier would significantly facilitate this scholar’s research workflow.

What can we learn from examining the practices and needs as well as the challenges a group of scholars such as art historians face at the various stages of the research lifecycle? Moreover, and most importantly, how can we apply those lessons in building digital infrastructures that truly support research and teaching in the digital age? By outlining some of our results related to the aforementioned questions, we aspire that our poster will stimulate discussion around user requirements in art history, and thus it will be of particular interest to researchers or other professionals who are building tools and services for scholars in the arts and humanities.

**References**

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