



**Reframing Collections for a Digital Age: A Preparatory Study for  
Collecting and Preserving Web-based Art Research Materials**

**Summary of Consultants' Recommendations**

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## Abstract

This document summarizes the recommendations contained in reports submitted to the Frick Collection (on behalf of NYARC) by three consultants retained to advise as part of a study funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The purpose of the study, entitled *Reframing Collections for a Digital Age: A Preparatory Study for Collections and Preserving Web-based Art Research Materials*, was to address the issues related to the capture, delivery, and preservation of art historical materials that are web-based or “born digital.” The consultants were tasked with investigating the current landscape of such web-based materials, and then making recommendations for changes that will be needed to be made to the NYARC technical structure and its underlying workflows in order to present a unified access point to art documentation, whether it is available as print, digitized, or born-digital.

## Description of Consultancies

The consultancies were cumulative as to a great degree each one informed the following one.

1) Doralynn Pines was retained to investigate where the ‘tipping point’ from analog to digital for specialist art resources may lie. She reviewed existing ‘universe of publications’ studies, and interviewed publishers and other companies that produce art-related documentation, e.g. Yale University Press, Pace Galleries, Sotheby’s, Christies, and the Smithsonian Institution. She created a selective bibliography of current literature about web archiving and preservation of born-digital materials along with a list of notable web-based art publications currently underway, and led three focus groups with NYARC staff to help determine researcher requirements and existing services.

2) Gail Truman of Truman Technologies reviewed existing web archiving projects of a specialized nature to look for parallels that might serve as models for an art-related web archiving initiative. She also investigated software products in use or in development for web archiving in light of NYARC’s collection and the results of Doralynn Pines’

investigations. She made recommendations as to what NYARC can and should collect from a content and technical aspect, the best methods of web archiving, and what partners (technological, publisher, other research libraries or preservation consortia) NYARC should work with.

3) Lily Pregill, the NYARC Coordinator and Systems Manager, served as the third consultant and undertook a review of NYARC's technical infrastructure in light of the new recommended technical requirements. Her report recommends technical solutions for achieving a sustainable program for collecting, delivering, and preserving web-based art research materials.

### First Consultant's Conclusions and Recommendations

- Commercially produced art and art historical publications will continue to lag behind those in other disciplines; this is due to complex issues of image rights and a business model drive by the perception that print editions are preferred by customers. Although the production landscape continues to shift and at any point a trend away from print and towards digital-only could accelerate, NYARC must recognize that the tipping point from analog to digital will not occur in the near term (1-3 years).
- Catalogues raisonnés appear to be an exception to the overall slow pace of digital publishing in the arts. This is a transitional moment for the catalogue raisonné as a publication type, and we can expect to see a steady shift to digital-only given the need for constant updates.
- Another area where digital-only publications and websites have a rapidly-growing presence is in the gray area of publishing—websites produced by small to medium-sized galleries, museums, auction houses, scholars, and artists to showcase exhibitions, work for sale, and individual artists and artworks. The websites of many of these producers appear to have a high risk of disappearing or regularly losing content.
- The more an organization is focused on contemporary art, the more likely it will publish its materials electronically and without a surrogate.

- Print-on-demand is a growing trend and may offer cost savings(from just-in-time purchasing) that can be transferred to born-digital acquisitions.
- Focus groups demonstrate a need for citation permanence and for retaining access to e-versions of publications from auction houses, galleries, museums, scholars, and artists.
- Museum staff do not have a clear understanding of what born-digital means or what is being done to retain web-based information. There is a false sense that the producers will ensure preservation of their web output. Staff do understand that significant costs would be associated with retention and feel a collaborative approach at a national level is needed.
- Stay abreast of and join advocacy groups in favor of changes in fair use and image rights management that will benefit libraries by opening up modes of access.
- Create policy for collecting websites. In the cases of the few projects with similarities to NYARC's specialized collecting focus, using the same criteria for collecting born digital as for collecting print seemed suitable.

#### Second Consultant's Recommendations

- Use Archive-It as the web archiving tool because it does not require hosting and best meets our stated requirements for capture and storage
- Establish incremental growth of collections beginning with high priority or high risk material
- Join the National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA)
- Develop a tool for open nominations for site selection
- Investigate ways to further automate metadata creation
- Use students and interns for quality assurance
- Develop levels of restricted access to website archives
- Develop and maintain a framework of notifications to crawl, requests to share offsite, and opt out and take down requests
- Large doses of collaboration

### Third Consultant's Recommendations

- Create a policy document that reflects the goals and objectives of the NYARC web archiving program
- Develop a full-time post to manage the NYARC web archive and consortial digital projects
- Use Archive-It as the primary web archiving tool
- Implement a new library services platform to reduce staff effort for routine library operations
- Establish partnerships to enhance metadata management across diverse library platforms
- Integrate promotional activities and data sharing into NYARC's strategic plan
- Develop a local solution to manage requests for adding to the NYARC web archive
- Purchase a discovery platform to unite NYARC collections including web archives
- Subscribe to DuraCloud for the long-term preservation of the NYARC web archive