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LIS 647 – Systems Analysis for Information Management
Fall 2011
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New York Public Library Digital Gallery
<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>

INTRODUCTION

This paper was written to provide an overview of a digital library as an assignment for a class that has a focus on digital libraries. Those interested in digital collections of fashion materials may want to also look at the reviews undertaken by other members of the class. A review of the Claremont College's collection of fashion plates undertaken by Carina Chernisky is available on ScholarSpace at <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/15172>, and Alyssa Okimoto's review of the Bath, United Kingdom-based Fashion Museum's digital collection can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/15170>.

MISSION & AUDIENCE

The New York Public Library's digital collection is an image database containing over 700,000 images from NYPL's own collection of photographs, manuscripts, drawings, and more. Its purpose is to "fulfill the traditional mission of The New York Public Library: to select, collect, preserve and make accessible the accumulated wisdom of the world, without distinction as to income, religion, nationality, or other human condition." Thus, it is open to the public but may also be of special interest to anyone studying in the fields of applied science, art, culture, history, and social sciences: fields considered to be NYPL's strengths.

SELECTION

Images to be digitized are nominated by curators and evaluated for their "pictorial and artifactual significance". They also must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- in high demand by the public
- unique or too vulnerable for routine availability
- unwieldy or brittle artifacts that are difficult to serve
- key holdings in particular collection strengths identified with The Library
- little-known but important items from the collections deemed worthy of discovery

(NYPL Digital Gallery website: About)

There is emphasis placed on subject areas that the library identifies as its own specialty or strength, which are mentioned above. The collection is continually growing, as the collection of images includes far more than what has already been digitized.

ORGANIZATION

For the purpose of browsing, the collection has been divided into “guides” that are specific to subject, era, or creator, and can be explored by category. There are over fifty-five guides and they are subdivided into “topical themes” that are organized by source of material. The collections can be viewed as a whole or by these individual themes. These subsections are also organized by the specific location of the NYPL they were taken from, aka the “provenance collection”. Some holdings may be organized by artist, to allow searching and browsing by “creators” of items, depending on the nature of the items. These holdings may be taken from within the same area of NYPL’s physical collection, or from more than one area. If an item is currently in view, the interface provides the option to view images from the same location.

BROWSING & SEARCHING

Browsing options are available at the top of each page: library division, subjects a-z, and names. “Library Division” allows for searching by NYPL’s different general collections. Each division page includes all source titles from the collection, the collection guides where these

items can be found, and the option to explore other divisions. “Subjects A-Z” is enabled by metadata: both images and collections have Library of Congress subject headings attached, as well as terms taken from the Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Material. These can be used to sort by images or whole collection. Users have the option to browse and search by alphabetical subject or look at related items by subject. “Names” allow users to search by creator or author. Images also have unique IDs attached that can be searched. Search history is readily accessible and allows for easy re-entry of search terms.

CONTENT

Each guide includes collection history, background information, and library division. One can browse by collection content (organized by topical theme) or related subject (organized by LCSH). Users can also view all images at once or search the chosen collection for keywords. Advanced search allows for searching across multiple fields, within library divisions, and by image ID or call number.

When viewing an individual image, metadata information is visible and can be searched for finding related items. Image details can be viewed, and include creator, source, dimensions, medium and material type, record and digital ID, and call number. Images can be selected to be stored later viewing via “my selections”, and permalinks and embedding links are included for personal use. One also has the option to “Browse More” through the topical theme, greater subject collection, collection guide, or library catalog. Images are also available for print, either by order via the “buy” option of the image interface, or printed directly from the user’s computer in printer-friendly format. Print orders can be also be made for frames or notecards. For user help, NYPL provides an extremely useful page of FAQs, including some questions that directly

address printing options. Prices are not available through the help page, but there are instructions on obtaining digital files, permissions for use, and embedding for personal websites.

TECHNOLOGY

Each image has four files: a high-resolution, 300- to 1200-dpi digital file, created with a flatbed scanner or digital camera; and three low-resolution “derivative” files. The former is created for licensing and reproduction and the latter pictures are for web delivery. A detailed description of the process is available at <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgabout.cfm>. Digitization is undertaken both on and off-site, and once the high-resolution files are made, they are assigned a unique ID number. Images are added daily, and metadata is updated twice a month. The architecture of the digital library system was designed by NYPL’s own Digital Library Program and is run through an Oracle database management system (<http://www.oracle.com/index.html>) and open-access search engine, and Adobe’s ColdFusion software (<http://www.adobe.com/products/coldfusion-family.html>) is used for the interface.

CONCLUSION

The New York Public Library designed its digital gallery as a natural extension of its physical collection. Multiple search and browsing options, detailed and well thought-out organization, a thorough help page, and opportunities for personal use contribute to making the digital gallery a highly usable digital library that connects the user to the physical holdings of a famous library.