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Integrating art resources at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo

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Meeting: *77 — Integrating access to art resources – boon or bane? —* **Art Libraries**

Abstract :

This paper describes the experience of integrating the Exhibition History database into the Portal of the Walter Wey Library, an information center specializing on Visual Arts in São Paulo, Brazil. The library is attached to The Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, an institution that holds more than 8.000 art works with emphasis on Brazilian production from the nineteenth century until today. The museum is a leading institution among Brazilian museums that hosts temporary exhibitions throughout the year and also carries out research in collection items. Launched a few months ago, the objective of the Library Portal is to provide access to the library's collections as well as the Exhibition History database. The Museum's Strategic Plan includes actions to improve access to its collections.

INTRODUCTION

The Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo is the oldest art museum in São Paulo, SP, Brazil. It is committed to improve the public experience with visual arts, by studying, preserving and communicating its collections. By following this principle, Pinacoteca maintains an art library since 1959, the Walter Wey Library. Initially the library was created to support the Museum staff: curators, researchers and conservators. Today the majority of patrons are graduate students. The Library's collection is rich in representing Brazilian artists and contains materials pertinent to the Museum's collections but it includes materials from all over the world. The organization of the Library reveals the early interest of Pinacoteca in promoting research about Brazilian arts. When Pinacoteca celebrated its 100th anniversary, an exhibition was organized for. In order to recover the historical archives, the museum led to the creation of the Museum Archives Center, which is responsible for the custody of the institution's records. With the creation of this brand new department, the whole collection becomes divided into three main areas: Art Collection, Library and Archives.

Each of the departments has its own management system, developed on different platforms that do not allow integrated access to information:

- Art collection. Collection management is powered by the Donato1 software. It is a powerful system with cataloging tools and holding more than 8,000 records.   It makes collections available for public access on the website.

1   Created by MNBA- National Museum of Fine Arts, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

- Archives. System based on MySql and ASP with 25,000 sets of documents. It replaced an earlier MS Access database.

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- Library Collections. The ABCD[2] – Automação de Bibliotecas e Centros de Documentação, is an open source software, developed by Bireme - Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde, an integrated system with circulation, cataloging and OPAC modules. Based on UNESCO CDS/ISIS languages as CISIS, it holds about 11,000 records.

The areas mentioned above describe their collections by following general cataloging rules adopted for librarianship, archival science and museology. The lack of an integrated search system demands more time to perform a research, making it one of the biggest concerns of Museum's staff. Sometimes, users' expectations have not been met, because there are not information retrieval techniques good enough to manage the variety of structures of each database. Archives and Art collections are structured with relational databases and library uses textual structure, e.g.

In this context the Museum created in 2009 the Controlled Vocabulary Working Group, now called the Documentation Working Group. Formed by specialists from the Library, Archival, Museology, Conservation and Research areas, the Group's purpose to is to build space for reflection and analysis of current procedures, and seeking alternatives to improve access to information. One of the first activities of the group was to build up a common vocabulary. The project has been developed from May 2009 to August 2010. The result was a name authority list, covering all artists represented in the art collection, either Brazilian or not. That was a significant breakthrough. Until then, each department had its own list of names, i.e., the same artist was referenced in different ways. Currently the field of interest of the group is related to the discussion on updating standards for describing art collections, in order to cover the collections of photographs and works of contemporary art.

There is a general agreement that an integrated system requires staff to setting common standards and making strong efforts in order to apply them in data entry. On the other hand, each professional tends to discard other standards they are not familiar with. Discussing these topics within the forum revealed why some questions are so difficult to be addressed, for they involve political and ideological matters rather than technical issues. Also it became clear that the cooperative and multidisciplinary work is crucial for the integration resources to succeed.

With the use of ABCD System, since November 2011, the Library aims to emphasize its role as an information dissemination center. The software used earlier was CDS/WINISIS, a Unesco software. The migration to ABCD, a web-based software brought more flexibility in cataloging, and also brought a refreshing change in the library's routines.

The Library occupies a very pioneer role in integrating information resources at Pinacoteca. The system adopted has a multilingual tool, which allows to perform a meta search within all databases while conducting an online research. Another unprecedented event was the inclusion of the Exhibition History list, developed by the Museum Archives incorporated into the Library Portal.

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2   The ABCD, an acronym for Automação de Bibliotecas e Centros de Documentação - Automation of Libraries and Documentation Centres - is a web application, Open Source and multilingual family ISIS library management which includes the main functions of a library acquisition, cataloging, lending and administration of databases (sources: www.bvsmodelo.bvsalud.org and www.abcdisis.wordpress.com).

THE WALTER WEY LIBRARY

The main objective of the Library is to provide information about Brazilian artists. But also it focus on collecting contemporary art publications. It expanded international exchange programs with libraries from all over the world, with institutions like Centre Georges Pompidou, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporanea – Universidad Autonoma de Mexico, Centro de Arte Museu Nacional Reina Sofia and Museum of Fine Arts Houston.

The library was founded on 1959 and is located at Estação Pinacoteca building since 2006. The new place is much more comfortable and specially designed to accommodate the library.

View of the new reading room, with an art work of Brazilian artist Regina Silveira.   Photo: Isabel Ayres

According to Le Coadic (1996) the traditional library, which originally retained only books, turned out to be a library that collects far more diverse collections, both for their support as his background: images, sounds, texts. It became the media library". This definition describes well the functions of the Library, which is formed by books, multimedia, photo, exhibition catalogs, auction catalogs, photographs, posters, postcards and portfolios.

One of the highlights is the artist files collection. It is about 200 linear feet of newspaper clippings dating from the mid twentieth century, documents produced in the late nineteenth century, invitations, programs, tickets, brochures, flyers, catalogs, postcards, advertising, posters, certificates, almanacs, biographical information, bibliographies, bookmarks, ticket display that can serve as an information resource as well. That kind of information contained in ephemera has

Calling card with an reproduction of Francisco José Maringelli linocut

great value, because it provides unique information on artists and exhibitions.

This variety of items led us to create specific describing procedures for each type of document in order to ensure the accuracy of search results. It also required the creation of a set of four structured databases:

1. Bibliographic collection (books, catalogs, albums and multimedia library). This database is structured in MARC21. This collection includes a small rare books section, hundreds of solo and group exhibition and auction catalogs, serials and manuscripts. There are approximately 30,000 items. The library has been able to enrich its collections through donations, for it still has a limited budget from the State Government for acquisition. The subjects covered include contemporary art, art history, curatorship, museum studies and education in art museums. Although there are terminals for the online public access catalog, there is a range of material that still remains on catalog cards.

2. Controlled vocabulary. This database is used for control of the terms used for the indexing of bibliographic material. The Museum Collection and Museum's Archives use their own terms. The database was created using the model of Library Congress and MARC21. The terms are still under construction and most of them came from Biblioteca Nacional, (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) subject authority catalog. Some specialized vocabularies as AAT, from Getty, are also consulted.

3. Special Collections (photographs, posters, postcards). The fields were structured with ISAD and Nobrade[3] rules for describe documents and iconographic documents. This section houses personal documents of artists such the painters Almeida Júnior and Tarsila do Amaral.

4. Exhibition History. This database was developed by the assembly of all information allocated in the Documentation Center files and the resources of the Library. With the implementation of ABCD, the Library will be in charge of updating the records.

These databases can be searched simultaneously in the Portal, which will be described below.

Almeida Júnior cabinet card (part of special collections of the library)

INTEGRATING RESOURCES

The primary function of the Portal is to connect the users to library's resources and services. It was developed under a CMS technology and it was designed to act as a gateway for locating art information. It includes the following topics:
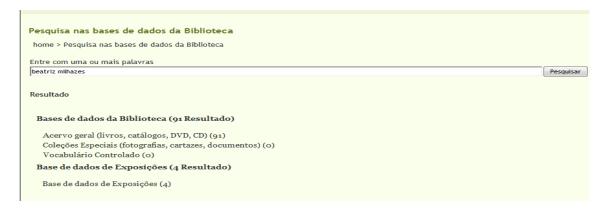
- Selected Bibliography on the Pinacoteca do Estado.

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3   *Norma Brasileira de Descrição Arquivística* – Brazilian Standard for Archival Description.

- Access to other Museum's collections.

Integrating collections enables users to perform meta-search in the available databases: general collection (books and prints), controlled vocabulary of subjects, special collections (photographs, posters and others) and records of exhibitions held by the Museum. We do not hold any external database access yet.

The Portal has a single search box powered by a federated search engine that retrieves information from multiple resources at once. When conducting a search, the system returns a list of results as follows:

In this paper, we will focus on the integration of two specific databases: Exhibition History Database and General Collection.

As other museums, the Pinacoteca provides a website which contains a calendar of exhibitions, a gallery of images, summaries, podcasts and other information related to these events. There is still another database for internal use only, which is used for the management and checklists that includes the circulation of art works, loans, mailings, sponsor, participating artists, among others.

The database developed by the library is a comprehensive and searchable listing of all exhibitions held at the Pinacoteca do Estado, since the inaugural Exhibition of 1905. This list was compiled from information about exhibitions that appeared in catalogs, paper cut clippings and documents, from both Library and the Archives Files as well.

The records are searchable by artist, curator, institution and title, through the free form:

Summary of information included in the Exhibition History Database:

- Exhibition Title and variations

- Curatorship information

- Awards

- Parallel events such lectures and debates

- Partnerships

- Artists

- Start and End dates

- Availability of a published catalogue, and if so a link to the General Collection database

The main criteria for inclusion of the events were:

- Exhibitions organized and held at Museum buildings

- Exhibitions carried out only with art works from the collection of the Pinacoteca

Example for a Beatriz Milhazes' exhibition record:

It is also possible to browse the records through the advanced form search:

One of the most significant resources of the Portal is the relationship between records from different databases. One of the advantages of this tool is the quickly retrieval of information from more than a thousand exhibitions held by the Museum. The list of exhibitions itself is a great source for information about the museum history, for they are the medium through which most of the art works from the collections become known.

The exhibitions study brings out the curatorial practices and its changes over time. It also provides resources for art historians as well. According to Mesquita (2007), "The history of exhibitions does not only treat the emergence, political-cultural context of each exhibition but also its receptivity with the public and the critics, as well as its effectiveness in the construction of a history of art". By studying exhibition history it is possible to create a reflection between museum's directions and its relationships with artists and other cultural aspects.

We have noticed that other institutions, like Museum of Fine Arts Houston, National Irish Visual Arts Library, The Cleveland Museum of Art that integrates Exhibition databases with other collections as well, but it was not possible to find any Brazilian institution that works like that.

Technological developments have improved library services by extending access to resources about these collections. The potential for a better service is enormous. The Library has an ambitious project to complete further information on exhibitions and also to include digitized information like images and downloadable publications related to the events. There are about 1,200 records currently, continuously updated by volunteers.

Both Archives and Library hold files related to the exhibitions. The archival holdings include photographs, business letters and contracts. The library holdings include paper cut clippings, invitations, catalogs, and printed material and general, posing other difficulties for information recovering. The integration of the Exhibition History database into the Portal and its use by both departments aims to minimize the consequences of this arrangement.

The Library has a major responsibility to support documentation activities of the Museum. One of most important activities of Research Staff is the project to review the cataloging of the art works of the museum collection, which started last year. The

methodology used included extensive research in the Library in search of sources to complement the data about works and artists as well. This includes the access to the artists files, which contains further information on work donations, like letters, forms, and lists of works. They became the very first users of the Portal, and their first impressions were positive.

The creation of the Portal aims to encourage the use of the library as an information source to find documentation related to art works from collection. By linking past exhibitions to general catalog we wish to facilitate research on Brazilian art history either.

One of the major concerns is connecting people to information, so the library staff does research not only in the Portal but also in all materials that are still in process. Because the library has started working with computerized systems only in 2008, it is a great challenge to include two thousand catalog cards on OPAC.

Although with limited resources, the Portal represents a significant advance for the integration of resources at Pinacoteca. The library is now facing its next challenge, to keep the continuous improvements for making collections accessible to the general public and continue to develop services to make research an essential element of the museum's development.

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