

Zurich Declaration on Digital Art History (2014)

drawn up by the international working conference on “Digital Art History: Challenges and Prospects” (26/27 June 2014) held at the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK-ISEA), Zurich

Methodology

Digital change requires critical reflection about the methods and practices of art history, such as the way pictures are analysed and canons are formed. There should be a productive two-way relationship between research questions and digital applications.

Authority data

Semantic networking and access to authority data on works, people, places and terminology are essential for digital art history. The coordinated international development of authority records must therefore continue, and open access to collection and research data held by museums, archives, libraries and scientific institutes must be promoted.

Archives and collections

Archives, museums and collections need appropriate technical tools and financial resources in order to fulfil their research and educational role in the digital age. The objectives are media-oriented, user-specific cataloguing and presentation of holdings, low-threshold provision of data, and long-term archiving.

Big data

Big data is expanding the horizons for art history research. This calls for appropriate IT infrastructure, scientific networks and funding instruments so that research can tap into the potential of growing databases. At the same time, research data and collection data from archives and collections need to broaden their reach.

Digital workspaces

Virtual research and teaching environments enable the shared production and exploitation of data, the use of digital tools and image databases, and scientific communication and networking. In response, the community must engage in a two-way exchange with the information science and technology to develop the necessary tools.

Open access

Open access publishing of scholarly work and research data should be promoted and should receive the same recognition as print publications. Working together with research institutes, funding bodies, stakeholder associations and publishing houses, framework conditions should be formulated that take account of specific requirements (e.g. image rights) and ensure quality.

Legal matters

Art history must be able to make use of data and visual material easily and free of charge. This calls for the creation of a legal framework in partnership with rights holders and the owners of collections, funding bodies, collecting societies, professional associations and, where appropriate, the legislator. Use should be made of the leeway provided by the law, such as limitations and exceptions to copyright.

Sustainability

Sustainability should be factored into research design and budgets. Implementation must be supported by funding bodies and research institutes at every stage of institutionalisation from planning to applications. The academic, data-related and operational aspects of sustainability need to be firmly anchored in the training syllabus.



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