Session 7

Encoded Archival Description: Protocol and Practice

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Art Libraries Society of North America 29th Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Moderator: Gregory P.J. Most, Chief Slide Librarian, National Gallery of Art

Recorder: David Austin, University of Illinois at Chicago

Sponsors: Visual Resources Division; Cataloging Section

Speakers:


“EAD Project Funding and Implementation: A View from the (almost) Bleeding Edge”

Anne Gilliland-Swetland , Ass’t. Professor, Dept. of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles “Implementing EAD in Individual and Collaborative Settings: The Development of the Online Archive of California”

Karen Weiss, Catalog and Internet Resources Manager, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC “EAD at AAA: Findings on Encoding Finding Aids at the Archives of American Art”

Richard Rinehart, Director of Digital Media, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives, University of California, Berkeley “EAD and Art Collections”

The Visual Resources Division and Cataloging Section co-sponsored Session 7, and Gregory P.J. Most, Chief Slide Librarian at the National Gallery of Art, moderated it. Gregg confessed to personal interest in the session that arose during the Pittsburgh VRD meeting because it poses interesting possibilities for the visual resources community. A major Web resource (http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/ead/eadhome.html) provides basic information about Encoded Archival Description, or EAD.

Anne J. Gilliland-Swetland, Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, began the session with her contribution, “Implementing EAD in Individual and Collaborative Settings: The Development of the Online Archive of California.” Anne summarized the development of the SGML metadata framework that provides electronic finding aids for archival information. The archival community developed the EAD in 1995 through the Berkeley Finding Aid Project. They intended it to supplant finding aids and narrative guides that are usually only found in-house, and to replace the more detailed, but also time consuming MARC Archival and Museum Collections (MARC-AMC) format that was developed in 1984. Visual resources curators will be particularly interested in the advantages of EAD in that its standardized data structure has the ability to contextualize works. That is, one EAD package can contain many items (as in the case of in-house produced printed finding aids), including various representations of the same item, whether it is a printed document, a photograph or slide, or a digital representation of them. The Online Archive of California, begun in 1995, as well as its acceptance by archives in this country as well as a few in Europe, stand as a testimony to the effectiveness of EAD, but work still needs to be done to establish best practices for the application of the framework. Anne stated the OAC has developed a toolkit (http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/FindingAids/uc-ead/tools.html) to help archivists get started.

Allen K. Townsend, Head Librarian of the Philadelphia Museum of Art related his experiences with Encoded Archival Description in “EAD Project Funding and Implementation: A View from the (Almost) Bleeding Edge.” Allen’s gained his experience with EAD through a Mellon Project that had as its objective to if the EAD was a broadly appealing form of access to the public. The project began in the summer of 1999 with staff recruitment and orientation, copyright checking, investigation of similar technical support secured. Actually work started in March, 2000. The project began with an affiliation of archives from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Brooklyn Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, though MOMA later pulled out due to other commitments. Thanks to EAD electronic finding aids for the Marcel Duchamp Research Collection, the Lloyd and Edith Goodrich Papers, and the John G. Johnson Papers may be found more easily than before.

Karen Weiss, Catalog and Internet Resources Manager at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art related her experience with Encoded Archival Description. Karen reviewed the description and history of her collection, describing how staff had earlier created printed finding aids for microfilm inventories of documents related to American art and artists. At first the Archives used the MARC-AMC format for cataloging their records, but discovered that the EAD proved more flexible in that the SGML language could more easily migrate to HTML and XML. Furthermore, field 856 in MARC records provides links to finding aids, including EAD. As of July 2, 2000, twenty-three EAD finding aids may
be found by users on the web http://www.aaa.si.edu/findaids/findaids.htm though the end user product still needs some work. Karen reported that the bad news about EAD is that it is labor intensive, requires technical and systems expertise and changes the workflow that previously existed. The good news, however, is that there is an EAD help page, a listserv, a tag library and applications guidelines available on the Web, and that there are lots of really smart people out there to help you.

Richard Rinehart, a digital artist and Director of Digital Media, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, described his experiences with two EAD projects. The Museums and the Online Archives of California (MOAC) [http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/moac/index.html] includes ten contributors and partners with the California Digital Library. Richard referred to it as a digital asset management (DAM) database. He also pointed out that museums cannot participate in more than one consortium at a time because the work is labor intensive and content standards vary from one consortium to another.

The Conceptual and Intermedia Arts Online (CIAO).

CIAO was developed in response to a need to represent time-based media (http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/ciao/index.html). A Web version of the tools and methodology along with a “cookbook” and technical specifications may also be read on the site. CIAO now includes thirteen members, including the Tate Gallery in London and the National Gallery of Canada. With projects like MOAC and CIAO managers need to ask whether the long-term time and intellectual investment balances out the end product. EAD work generally needs new kinds of expert staff and changes the workflow management of archives and museums. Those who employ EAD need to pressure software developers to simplify processes and improve the end user product.

Murtha Bacca asked the presenters if any work was being conducted to understand how users employ EAD as a finding aid. Anne acknowledged that users on the Web are much less knowledgeable than those who appear in person at archives or museums and that analysis is now being conducted to answer Murtha’s question.