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Session IV; Discovery on This Side of the Virtual Wall: Evolving Authority Control Resources and Techniques in the Digital Age
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Case study
The idea for discussing this topic took shape more than one year ago during the process of establishing names for a number of art dealers and auctioneers from 19th century France.
A rare occasion of a book auction,
actual, of an entire library, filled us with the excitement of being able to acquire additional rare auction catalogs to enhance our already prestigious collection, esteemed by many art dealers and researchers from New York’s famous auction houses, galleries and academia, and indeed from all over the world. The content came from the Heim Gallery, unfortunately gone bankrupt, and went for sale in Nogeant sur Marne, near Paris, in July of 2005, through the services of auctioneer Christophe Lucien. Auction catalogs and art literature formerly in the collections of such notables as the brothers Gouncourt, Marcel Nicolle, the brothers Pannier formed a hefty part of this library.
Although the auction wasn’t largely advertised, it stirred the appetite of bibliophiles on both shores of the Atlantic, so much so that some auction catalogs estimated at 1,000 Euros sold for up to 16,000, and one, with original etchings by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin and estimated at 300/400 Euros, sold for 31,000!

The Frick Art Reference Library wasn’t financially able to compete with such sums, but managed to purchase 116 auction catalogs, 68 of which were not found in any of the libraries contributing records to the SCIPIO database. The group was treated with outmost care, being cataloged by using RBMS rules when necessary. Names of artists, art dealers, auctioneers, auction houses were to be established in the Library of Congress’ Name Authority file. Fifteen individual auctioneers/art dealers were selected. That proved to be an inspiring challenge: we discovered that none of these individuals registered their full name on any of the catalogs: Boussaton, Chariot, Henry, Martin, Rochoux. Would I create an authority record that would read “Henry (Firm)”?

Our responsibility and unwritten expectation for rigor prevailed: after all, the Frick Art Reference Library has been the leader in contributions to LC’s NACO among art libraries for many years.

I decided to start with the name Rochoux because it sounded unusual, different, and thus seemingly easier to establish. We own ten auction catalogs from him, but none with his full name.

Z39.50 enabled me to search the catalogs of 22 other national and international libraries. The name appeared as either:
Rochoux
A Rochoux
Rochoux (Paris)
or even Rochoux, Armand Ambroise
and, as either a commisaire-priseur/auctioneer, expert, marchand d’estampe/prints dealer, or author of two books on … labor and immigration!

x Show slide from Dutch library search

Could this be the same person?

One great resource for checking detailed information of this sort is IDC’s “Art Sales Catalogues Online”, the digitized version of Frits Lugt’s “Répertoire des catalogues de ventes publiques” or “Index of catalogues of public sales”.

NYPL record. Millennium screen
Dutch library record. Millennium screen
With anticipation and gusto I view each page of the 1858 sale cataloged by the New York Public Library and seemingly containing Rochoux’s full name: Rochoux, Armand Ambroise.
But that form of the name doesn’t appear anywhere in the catalog. Why didn’t the NYPL cataloger indicate the source of that valuable information? And if it was at hand, why didn’t they establish the name?

Now I feel compelled to continue my research until I get to the bottom of this. I find it logical to look next into French resources: after all Rochoux was French, and Bibliotheque Nationale de France must have established his name for sure: I check their authority file, RAMEAU and am surprised not to find it there.

And Opale, their bibliographic catalog has the same forms and citations I found in the other online catalogs through my Z39.50 search; disappointingly nothing different.

That really frustrates me and I take a break from online files to rest my eyes on printed resources at the Frick Library. A book by Frits Lugt, “Les marques de collections de dessins & d’estampes”, or “Marks of drawing and prints collections”, 1956, doesn’t mention him, and Defer’s “Catalogue général des ventes publiques de tableaux et estampes”, or “Catalog of painting and prints sales”, 1865-1868, includes Rochoux’s surname only.

At this point I’m ready to slip out of my cataloger’s shoes and google the name: the first hit comes from NYPL Digital Library; followed by excellent metadata, including the creator’s name, Charles Méryon.
Google search. May 11, 2007
I feel the horizon opening and my enthusiasm growing. As it is my habit, I share this find with Cynthia Biber who works with me part time. We decide to look for some material on Meryon in the stacks. We must have plenty: The Frick Collection owns 13 of his “Etching of Paris” and one etching of Bourges. We are set on Roger Collin’s monograph “Charles Méryon: A Life” published in 1999. Avid for a new clue, we do find a reproduction of the same image of Rochoux’s “carte de visite.”
More so, a few pages discuss the person who commissioned it, Armand Rochoux, “art dealer, print publisher, author of pamphlets on art collecting, art criticism, art auctions” and of two books on … labor and immigration! Voila, here is my little “Eureka” I wanted to share with you. A path to discovery, routinely taken every day, but not in the least mundane; research that adds spice to our daily duties, a service to our patrons, as it is to our intellect. I now have sufficient evidence to establish the name in the LC’ Authorities, in a form that will not only disambiguate previous references, but one that will contain just enough intellectual content for meaningful discovery.
Armand Rochoux. Current LC Authority heading.

Otherwise, what can we infer from the LC’s record for Charles Méryon?
I believe that we are responsible for the content of the resources we create in order to increase their usability through technology. Thank you.