Describing Visual Materials in the Digital Age

Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words if You Can’t Find It in a Keyword Search?

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- What constitutes visual materials
- Decision-making process
  - What do you have?
  - How shall you describe it?
- Information sources for help
  - Identification
  - Description
  - Cataloging
What constitutes visual materials

- Works of art
  - Drawings
  - Paintings
- Photographs (on paper and digital)
- Printed graphics (posters, postcards, engravings removed from books)
- Architectural drawings
- Digitized images of any of the above
Decision-making process

- What do you have?
  - Photograph, mechanical photographic print
  - Poster, broadside
    - Is it more graphic or more textual?
  - Analog or digital?
  - Digitized vs. born digital?

- How shall you describe it?
  - Contents and/or subject?

- What provides the best access?
  - Collection or item level?
Use a 10x loupe to see if there is evidence of mechanical printing.
Poster

Is it more graphic or textual?

Graphic lettering

Printed text
Poster or Broadside: Consider size, paper weight, purpose, audience

Graphic

Textual
Ephemera

Decal

Doorknob hanger
Analog or digital?
Digitized vs. born digital?

Digitized

Centre Furnace Mansion, Centre County Historical Society, State College, PA

Born digital

Pere Antoine Restaurant, French Quarter, New Orleans, LA
How shall you describe it? Contents and/or subject?

- How to “read” an image
  - Is-ness: What is the image
    - Physical format (daguerreotype, engraving, postcard, electronic document)
  - Of-ness: What is it of
    - What is depicted in the image (people, buildings, objects, landscapes)
  - Aboutness: What is the image about
    - Does it represent an idea or concept (poverty, slavery, patriotism, women’s voting rights)
Poster: who, what, where, when
Flags and handshake—what does it mean?
Source of information

- **Who**: Searched images at Library of Congress, NARA, Imperial War Museum Web sites
  - Same poster or similar image design
  - Contacted by F.H.K. Henrion’s daughter to verify this might be one of his posters
- **What**: Identify the twelve countries’ flags
- **Where**: U.S. or U.K.?
- **When**: World War II
Frederick Henri Kay Henrion (born Heinrich Fritz Kohn, Nuremberg, Germany), 1914-1990, was a German graphic designer. During World War II he was interned as an alien but subsequently worked for the British Ministry of Information designing posters for campaigns like Dig for Victory, Aid the Wounded, and Grow More Food. He also designed posters for the U.S. Office of War Information.

This untitled poster, attributed to F.H.K. Henrion by the Imperial War Museums as created in 1941, depicts two male arms with their hands clasped in a handshake surrounded by twelve countries' flags (above the arms: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States, Norway; below the arms: Belgium, Yugoslavia, France, U.S.S.R., Netherlands, and Greece). It is stylistically similar to Henrion's D-Day poster of four hands tearing apart a swastika.
What provides the best access? Collection or item level?

- **Item level**
  - Single image
  - Works of art
  - Titled (unless part of a set)
  - Anticipated user needs

- **Collection level**
  - Multiple images (family photographs, university photographer’s job lots, events)
  - Albums
  - Unidentified images in quantity
  - Architectural drawings
Personal Author: Mamburg, L. L. L.,


Variant title: Title in English: Food will win the war, you came here seeking freedom, now you must help to preserve it, wheat is needed for the allies, waste nothing.

Physical Description: 1 print (poster) : lithograph, color ; 76 x 51 cm.
Quenshageny, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania.
Watercolor with pen and ink
O’Connor-Yeager Collection, Palmer Museum of Art, Penn State University
Item level: titled, user needs

Mira Lloyd Dock Forestry Lantern Slides Collection
Corporate Author: Pennsylvania State University. Archives.
Title: Photographic vertical files, Students, 1855-2013.
Physical Description: 95 cubic feet.
Organization/arrangement: Arranged alphabetically by subject.
Abstract: The collection contains black-and-white and color photographs of African American students, cheerleaders, customs and scraps, dance team, events (AIDS quilt, battle of the bands, concerts, dances, demonstrations, lawn displays, May Day, orientation week, parades, parents' weekend, queens, spring week), foreign students (by country), fraternities (men's, women's, and joint activities), honoraries and hat societies, honors, living accommodations, organizations (professional interest, special interest clubs), publications, religion, scholarship awards, student government, student life, and women.
Index notes: Selected digital images are available at http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/digital/psuphoto.html
Collection level: multiple images

Digital image collection title: Penn State Libraries Photo Archive—Students
Catalog record title: Photographic vertical files, Students
Title: Album of Pennsylvania R.R. scenery.


Physical Description: [12] leaves of plates : ill. ; 9 x 13 cm.

General Note: Plates on continuous strip 8 x 140 cm. folded to form 12 leaves.

Abstract: Also includes seven leaves of duplicate images from a different printing of the album published and copyrighted 1880 by Wittemann Bros., sole agents for North America for Louis Glaser's souvenir albums.

Subject: Pennsylvania--Pictorial works.
Genre index term: Viewbooks.
Collection level: unidentified images in quantity

**Title:** Historical photograph collection, 1868-1992.

**Physical Description:** 2,394 items.

**Abstract:** The collection consists of 3 posters, 30 glass slides; 176 photographic negatives; 1291 glass plate negatives; 691 photographic prints; and 2 albumen, 200 glass, and 2 print stereoviews illustrating labor, family, industry, railroad, and rural and urban Pennsylvania history. Included are a large number of negatives, 176 safety film and over 1200 glass slide negatives; prints are primarily in black and white; stereoviews formats include print, glass, and albumen. Subjects represented include primarily labor and railroad scenes in Pennsylvania, but also features over 1000 glass negatives of scenic views from other states. In this collection, photographs are grouped in folders according to their source, the format, and subjects; few photographs are described individually.
Personal Author: Izenour, George C.
Title: George C. Izenour drawings of the theater.
Physical Description: 1363 architectural drawings : India ink on mylar ; 36 x 48 in. and smaller.
Physical Description: 238 negatives : ; 24 x 36 in. and smaller.
Physical Description: 1 model : plastic and metal ; 86 x 64 x 48 cm. in case.
Access restriction: Unrestricted access.
Abstract: The collection contains architectural drawings for three of Izenour's books, Roofed theaters of classical antiquity, Theater design, and Theater technology, and exhibition drawings and negatives for the Izenour Drawings of the Theater exhibit in Spain of fifty of the most significant theater buildings in western cultural history. Also contains a working model for a mechanically-controlled three-configuration convertible theater.
Information sources for help: Identification


Companion Web site for 3rd ed.:
http://www.sagepub.com/rose/home.htm


Prints

  [http://www.philaprintshop.com/library.html](http://www.philaprintshop.com/library.html)  (Under General Printmaking, includes dictionary of printmaking terms, glossary of abbreviations used by printmakers, and discussion of print processes.)

- Washington Printmakers Gallery  
  [http://washingtonprintmakers.com/](http://washingtonprintmakers.com/)  (Includes dropdown menu of printmaking techniques to help identify prints.)

- Spencer Museum of Art  

- Rare Book School, Charlottesville, Virginia  
Information sources for help: Description

  - Suggests a theoretical basis for identifying and classifying the kinds of subjects a picture may have using previously developed principles of cataloging and classification, and concepts taken from the philosophy of art, from meaning in language, and from visual perception.

  - Attempts to develop some concepts and objectives to use as a theoretical basis for the descriptive cataloguing of pictures. The purpose of developing a theoretical basis for picture cataloguing is to provide the reader with the means of evaluating, adapting, and applying presently existing codes and formats, or for devising new codes and formats.
Information sources for help: Cataloging

- Visual Materials: Processing & Cataloging Bibliography
  http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/resource/vmbib.html

- Online Reference Sources for Cataloging Visual Materials
  http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/resource/vmrefcat.html
Information sources for help: Cataloging

- Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)
  [http://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmg/](http://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmg/)
  - direct successor to Elisabeth Betz Parker’s *Graphic Materials: Rules for Describing Original Items and Historical Collections*
  - free PDF
  - in issue 4, 2013 release of Cataloger's Desktop
  - “dcrmg” in the 040$e (RBMS, Library of Congress, and MARC Standards Office okay to use coming soon)
Authorities tools


- Getty Research Institute. *Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online.* [http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/aat/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/aat/index.html) ("More than 133,000 terms … and other information relating to fine art, architecture, decorative arts, archival materials, and material culture.")
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and
ScholarSphere: https://scholarsphere.psu.edu/files/7d278z27t