

The ARTstor Digital Library: A Case Study in Digital Curationⁱ

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Abstract

ARTstor is, like our traditional libraries, at once an *institution* – a “place” - and a *collection* of resources. As an *institution*, ARTstor seeks to work closely with both the community of content owners (archives, libraries, museums, photographers, publishers) and the the community of end users comprised of scholars, teachers, and students at the 700 institutions here and abroad currently participating in ARTstor. Above all, ARTstor strives to help bring both communities together around what should be a shared effort to create an enduring digital resource that will support the work of the scholarly, educational and cultural communities. As a *collection*, the ARTstor Digital Library currently offers more than 500,000 digital images and associated descriptive cataloging information, delivered within a networked space and a software environment that supports active use of these images in teaching, learning and scholarship while also addressing the significant concerns of content owners about appropriate – and inappropriate – uses of their “content.” ARTstor evolved at a significant moment in the evolution of digital libraries. *ARTstor was conceived to test the feasibility of building a digital library based on the needs of potential users.* ARTstor sought to pose the question: Is it possible to understand the needs of potential users of an emerging digital library *before* developing a collection development strategy for that library and before making substantial investments in the business of collection building? Is it feasible to target and pursue specific bodies of “content” – to build coherent and, to use the language of bookbinding, “bespoke” digital image collections – based above all on persuasive if not compelling evidence of their potential value to end users? In its effort to test this hypothesis, ARTstor has from the outset sought consciously to assemble and, where necessary, to help create coherent digital collections that would respond in meaningful ways to the core needs of educators and scholars who use – or wish to use – images in support of teaching, learning and scholarship.

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