

Call for Open Access to Digital Images

The Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), a co-initiator of the Open Access movement, has drawn up a set of best-practice recommendations concerning the scholarly use of visual media. The recommendations aimed at facilitating the scholarly use and publication of historical digital images were drafted following consultations with scholars and representatives of leading museums, libraries, image archives and publishers.

The aim of the document is to create a network of mutual trust and cooperation between scholars and curators of cultural heritage collections with a view to facilitating access to and the scholarly use of visual media. The recommendations can be downloaded from the MPIWG website which currently features a detailed report on the initiative.

The recommendations were prompted by the barriers encountered by those who wish to use and publish images of cultural heritage objects. High licence fees and complicated access regulations make it increasingly difficult for scholars in the humanities to work with digital images. It is true that the digitization of image collections has acted as a catalyst for scholarly research. However, archives, collections and libraries differ greatly with respect to the question of how, where and on what basis images may be used for scholarly purposes. Moreover, their policies in this regard are becoming increasingly restrictive, especially when it comes to new forms of e-publishing.

The MPIWG drew up its recommendations for facilitating the scholarly use of digital images following consultations with international experts which took place in January 2008. The recommendations call on curators and scholars to develop a mutually binding network of trust. The aim of the initiative is to encourage stakeholders jointly to address the current and future challenges raised by the digital age. The document urges curators to refrain from restricting the public domain arbitrarily and calls on them to accommodate the needs of scholars for reasonably-priced or freely-accessible high-resolution digital images – both for print publications and new Web-based forms of scholarly publishing. It exhorts scholars to recognise museums, libraries and collections as owners and custodians of physical objects of cultural heritage and to acknowledge their efforts in making digital images available. Moreover, it urges them to take their role as guarantors of authenticity and accurate attribution extremely seriously.

For more information on the best-practice recommendations, please contact:

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