Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Collections Online

Website link to fully digitized collections:
http://www.aaa.si.edu/collectionsonline/

Link to documentation:
http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/terra_collections_list.cfm

Collections Online is an innovative tool which aims to make primary source research in American art history available to all. Entire collections have been digitized according to their archival arrangement, including the papers of artists, dealers, critics and curators. The result is unprecedented access to the content and context of thousands of documents, photographs, diaries, sketches, writings, and rare published materials.

Collections Online provides access to the digitized documents through folder level access instead of item level access. All descriptive metadata is derived from the EAD (Encoded Archival Description) tagged data in the collection's finding aid as the metadata structure from which the digital image files are linked and presented online.

All of the Archives's EAD finding aids are encoded in using the text editor Note Tab Pro. The finding aids contain the typical EAD tags for descriptive biographical or historical notes, scope and content notes, and narrative series descriptions. Detailed container listings with numbered box and folder headings are also included. It is this box and folder listing that forms the file structure for the scanning technician to save the digital files, as well as the primary descriptive metadata for discovery of the digital files.

Using ColdFusion programming, each EAD XML file is passed through a parser that transforms the XML EAD data into an EAD *Document Object*, which is then transformed into a Finding Aid Record in a SQL Server Digital Collections Database. The Finding Aid Record in the database contains all of the EAD descriptive and component information, such as series, sub-series, folder headings, box numbers, and folder numbers.

In addition, the same Digital Collections Database holds the digital files from the scans as Digital Resource Records. Storing all of the EAD XML data and the digital files in one relational database allows for flexible output of the stored data for many different resources. It also allows the data to be linked with the other records or resources in the database.

Again, using ColdFusion programming, the Finding Aid Record and the Digital Resource Record stored in the database are then dumped into the Collections Online template and interface. The resulting web presentation allows users to view and navigate the digital

files within their archival context and hierarchy.

The Archives has also developed a fully web based internal workflow that includes improved methods for storing and updating the EAD finding aids.

Future plans include presentation of finding aids for collections that haven't been fully digitized through an interface that is based on Collections Online.

For further information about this project, contact:

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