

This week, I would like you to reflect on the role of art museum librarians and libraries within art museums, as well as reflect on the emerging role of visual resources work (whether called by that name or not) in making art museum digital collections accessible. What are the major challenges and opportunities for art museum libraries right now? How do art museum librarians and library collections support the work of curators, conservators, registrars, and other museum workers? What is significant about art museum library collections for art research and cultural heritage documentation? What value and impact does access to online digital images of objects and art works in the museum's collections have for art researchers and/or the general public? (These are just examples of things to reflect on; you don't need to address all of them!) In your post, please include at least three specific examples that help you answer some of the above questions from your readings or recordings so far, at least two of which should come from your Week 6 assigned or recommended readings.

Like many libraries of other types, art museum libraries are severely challenged by staffing and budget constraints. Often, because of this strain on finances, says Evenhaugen et. al. (2016), up to 50 percent of museum libraries only have one staff member. According to Sullivan (2024), Creative Commons and Public Domain work make previously unavailable works open to the public and available to all, but still require an additional employee to make these transitions possible. An additional challenge to digitization is cost. According to Evenhaugen, et. al. (2016), full digitization of an art museum collection comes with a high price tag that only the largest museums can afford.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, museum libraries (as well as other types of libraries) were forced to take their collections online and, in the process, found new demographics of patrons to the museums and better track engagement (Villaespesa, 2017). While this may seem like a negative consequence of closing a museum's doors, many museums faced this challenge as a net positive.

Ultimately, the primary purpose of the art museum librarian is to assist other museum employees with the research and development of collections within the museum. Even so, it can be difficult to justify the high cost of even a single museum librarian, particularly when finances are tight. Morris (2019) argues, like many others referenced, that digitization is preservation, and that any museum that can do so would benefit greatly from a digitized collection and preservation of "originals" as well. Preservation is essential to the continued sharing of these assets.

Fig. 1. The Kiss by Gustav Klimt.

References

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