

METADATA OBSCURA:



Refocusing digital collections through the lens of
art history

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Refocusing the Shields Trade Card Collection

★ Problem:

- Throughout its digital iterations, the collection lost its art focus
- Metadata did not align with art researcher needs, creating access and discoverability issues

★ Solution:

- Update the collection to support searching and browsing
- Create a new template using metadata standards like VRA Core, *Cataloguing of Cultural Objects*, and the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus*
- Add a description field for keyword searching

History of the Collection

Shields Trade Card Collection

★ History

- Donated to Special Collections by Charles Shields in 1987
- About 2,200 advertising trade cards from the 19th century
- Miami's oldest digital collection
- Are trade cards art objects or media artifacts?

A S'weat Girl. J.H. Bufford & Sons, 1887



Shields Trade Card Chronology

1999-2019

1999
1st Digitization

Shields Trade Card Collection becomes Miami University's first digital collection

The collection was reimagined at a higher resolution in color

2004
2nd Digitization

2006
Metadata Revised

Metadata revised to focus on business students' needs. Art history information suppressed

Most recent digitization of the collection focused on art needs

2019
3rd Digitization

Art User Needs

Art Users



**Visual
Artists**



**Studio Art
Students**



**Art
Historians**

Problems for Art Users



Old Record

- Key elements like medium, measurements, and style/period were absent
- No description field to aid keyword searching
- Not using established art standards

Object Description

Primary Advertiser	Birdsall & King (Dealers)
Primary Advertiser Location	Whitney's Point, New York
Printer / Lithographer	Wolf & Co.
Date.original	1882
Subject (TGM)	Children & animals Rabbits Girls Boys Flowers Children playing outdoors Clothing stores Home furnishings stores Palettes
Standard Industry Classification (ID No.)	General Merchandise Stores (53) Apparel And Accessory Stores (56)
Keywords	Hats Caps Boots Shoes Gent's furnishing goods Robes Blankets
Language	English
Accession No.	041
Resource Type	Image
Gift of	Charles Shields
Repository	Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio
Collection	Shields Trade Card Collection
Digital Publisher	Miami University Libraries-Digital Library Program

Art User Information Needs

★ Browsing

- Visual artists
 - Artists research for five main reasons: “inspiration, specific visual elements, knowledge of materials and techniques, market and career guidance, and knowledge of current trends in the artworld” (Hemmig, 2009, p. 683).
- Studio art students
 - Information needs also include inspiration, specific visual elements, and knowledge of materials and techniques (Münster, Kamposiori, Friedrichs, & Kroöber, 2018; Lo & Chu, 2015).

Art User Information Needs

★ Searching

- **Art historians**

- Use browsing as a technique at the beginning of a research project, particularly while looking for images (Frost, Taylor, Noakes, Markel, Torres, & Drabenstott., 2000; Graham & Bailey, 2006, Münster et al., 2018).

Conclusion: New metadata template enables browsing and searching. Description fields, art subject terms and metadata schemas, including medium, technique, and style/period were added for both searching and serendipitous discovery.

Refocusing the Collection on Art Users

New Metadata Standards

VRA Core Template

- ★ Visual Resources Association Core replaced Dublin Core
- ★ New template supported art fields for measurements, medium, work type, technique, style/period, and cultural context

Art Cataloging

- ★ *Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO)* replaced library cataloging standards
- ★ New content standard better aligns metadata description with art cataloging

Improving Art Subject Access

Art Subject Access

- ★ Improving art subject access was the central goal of the revision project
- ★ Better art subject access also improved browsing and searching functionality for art users.

Falstaff serenade, Falstaff Brewing Corporation, 20th century



Three Art Subject Improvements



**Controlled
Vocabularies**



**Subject
Description**



**Subject
Classification**

Controlled Vocabularies

- ★ The Getty's *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* was adopted
- ★ Except for the subject field, which uses the Library of Congress's *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials*

Dozier-Weyl Cracker Co., 19th century



Subject Description

- ★ A subject description field was added to facilitate keyword searching
- ★ Text was transcribed via optical character recognition technology and made searchable in a full-text field
- ★ Description fields improves accessibility of collection for visitors using assistive technologies

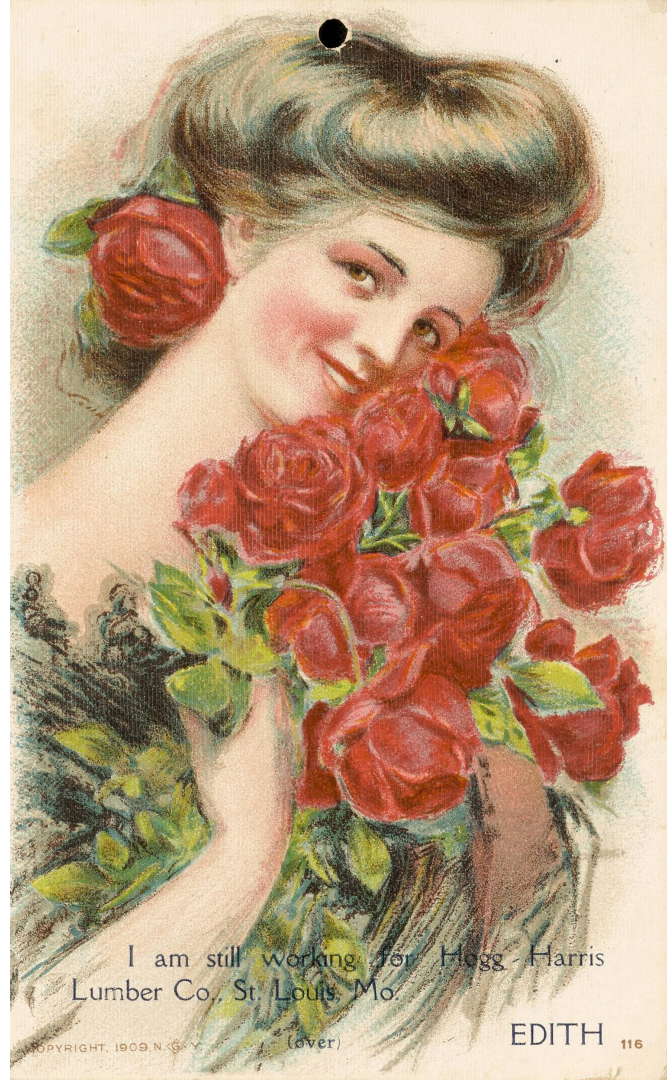
Be careful Willie, don't fall!,
Lautz Brothers & Co. 19th century



Subject Classification

- ★ Developed new subject classification guidelines to index artistic content
- ★ Existing general subject terms were reviewed for exhaustivity and specificity of art subject coverage
- ★ Additional *AAT* terms were added to index relevant art historical content.

I am still working for Hogg-Harris Lumber Co., 1909



Bringing It All
Together

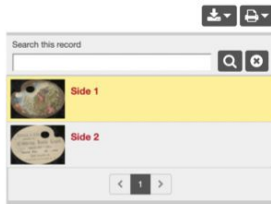
Comparison

Birdsall & King (Dealers)

Side 1



1 of 2



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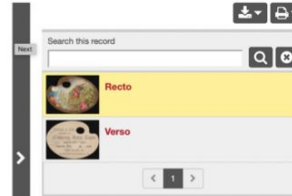
Old
Record

Birdsall & King, Dealers in clothing, hats, caps

Recto



1 of 2



Transcript

Object Description

Title	Birdsall & King, Dealers in clothing, hats, caps
Advertiser	Birdsall & King
Advertiser Location	New York (State)-Whitney Point
Industry (SIC)	561 Men's and Boys' Clothing and Accessory Stores
Date	1882
Description	This trademark by Birdsall & King is in the shape of a painter's palette shows two children playing with a small herd of rabbits. In the background a mountain is visible as well as a field of tall grass. A pink rose in the foreground frames the bottom of the scene.
Object Type (AAT)	Trade cards chromolithographs
Measurements	8 x 11 cm
Technique (AAT)	chromolithography die cutting
Printer	Wolf & Co.
Cultural Context	American
Subject	Children & animals Fashions Gifs Boys Flowers Mountains Clothing stores Palettes
Style Period	nineteenth century (dates CE)
Rights	Public Domain-Work-United States. This work is in the public domain in the United States.
Source	Shields Trade Card Collection, Walter Havighurst Special Collections and University Archives
Type	Image
Language	English
Identifier	STC-41

New
Record

Takeaways

- ★ Art collaborations should be sustained throughout all iterations of the project
- ★ Different art users have different browsing and searching needs
- ★ Improving art subject access had the most impact for art users
- ★ Accessible design is good design!

La Trépaka,
Pictorial Printing Co., 19th century



La Trépaka.

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THANK YOU!



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