

Project: Building a Research Collection

Digital Project for DH FLC (Spring 2019)

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This project was developed as part of the Spring 2019 [Digital Humanities Faculty Learning Community](#) for use in the upcoming Spring 2020 course HA 452 – Soviet & East European Contemporary Art. This document is a draft, to be updated once I have had a chance to test it in the classroom.

Background:

A recent study of art historians' research practices shows that while there is tremendous diversity in research approaches in art history, one thing that nearly all art historians do is to build and maintain personal collections of images for research and teaching.¹ The goal of this project is to equip students with the technical and conceptual tools necessary for building a personal research collection for use in art history research in order to prepare them for carrying out a research project in art history, such as a research paper or a curated exhibition.

Project Description:

Starting early in the semester, students will begin collecting digital images of objects related to the topic of the course (Soviet and Eastern European contemporary art) using a digital platform, like Tropy, Pinterest, Instagram, Google Sheet, etc. (TBD)

As they collect their images, students will also collect basic information about their objects in a spreadsheet using a prescribed set of metadata:

- Artist
- Title
- Date
- Media
- Dimensions
- City/Region/Nation of Origin
- Current Location
- Additional Notes

Over the course of the semester, different individual and group activities will help them to experiment with organizing, arranging, and working with their image collections to pose research questions and discover avenues of inquiry which will lead them to a more substantial research project on some part of their collection. These activities may include:

- Digital annotation using hypothes.is or another annotation tool to develop skills of formal analysis

¹ Matthew P. Long and Roger C. Schonfeld, *Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians*, Ithaka S+R, April 30, 2014. <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-the-changing-research-practices-of-art-historians/>

- Regular “quick presentations” to share individual finds week to week (most interesting, most confusing, thematic connection, etc.)
- Pair/share exercises (possibly in conjunction with quick presentations) where students pair up to discuss their own related objects along different axes of comparison (temporal, geographic, medium, artist, theme, etc.)
- "Conference questions" following quick presentation where the class poses questions about the presented artwork in order to help the student discover where more research is needed

Students will move from individual tasks (collecting and organizing digital images; gathering metadata; and digital annotation/formal analysis) to group or class tasks (presentations, pair/share, question rounds). The goal is to take the students conceptually from the task of collection to analysis.

Intended Outcomes:

Throughout the course of the semester, students will:

- Become comfortable with collecting, organizing, and analyzing their research collections;
- Develop a “mental library” of the variety of artworks and artistic practices produced in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union/Russia during the 1950s-1990s.
- Discover common tropes, artistic conventions, and themes among their objects and those collected by others;
- Build a community of learners amongst themselves who can share findings to better understand unfamiliar objects and ideas;
- Understand that art history is an ongoing process and that non-canonical art histories (such as art from Eastern Europe) require more basic research, such as building research collections;
- Develop research questions and individual lines of inquiry based on their research collections;
- Carry out research projects (research paper or curated exhibition) on some part of their collection (object or set of objects, artist, movement, idea, etc.).

Draft document
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