RISS Review: Art History Teaching Resources

The Reference & Information Services Section of ARLIS/NA, or RISS as it's commonly referred to, sponsors one article per issue of the Multimedia & Technology Reviews.

Reviewed February 2015 Martha González Palacios, Art & Architecture Librarian Architecture & Allied Arts Library, University of Oregon margp@uoregon.edu

Art History Teaching Resources (AHTR) is a multi-author platform that focuses on lesson plans and other resources to support teaching introductory survey courses, and more generally, art history pedagogy for the higher education environment. AHTR was co-founded by Michelle Millar Fisher, Art History doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center, and Karen Shelby, Assistant Professor of Art History at Baruch College, CUNY. Fisher and Shelby, both products of the Graduate Teaching Fellows at CUNY, cite Smarthistory (now part of Khan Academy) and Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History as some sources of inspiration. Their intention in sharing teaching materials online goes beyond time-saving or convenience for fellow instructors; rather, they are interested in promoting pedagogical inquiry that can lead to innovative and engaging ways to teach art history.

The project has slowly evolved since 2011, supported in part by grants from various institutions. For instance, in 2014, they received a Kress Grant for Digital Resources that was used to offer modest writing grants to collaborators; this has allowed them to have a complete set of lesson plans organized in traditional chronological order. In addition to the standard Survey I and Survey II lesson plans, AHTR has a growing collection of thematic lesson plans for those wishing to explore a less canonical approach to art history surveys.

Each peer-edited lesson plan includes a PowerPoint Presentation and is divided in to four sections: First Things First, Background Readings, Content Suggestions, and At the End of Class. These lesson plans, as most of the content in AHTR, is intended to serve as a base that can be repurposed and adapted by each user. The tone and level of content varies between lesson plans, as does the quality of the text and images in the PPTs.
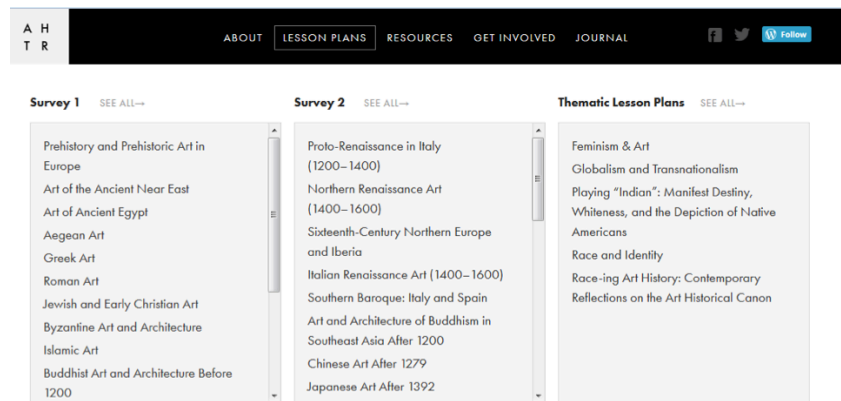
The AHTR journal, an integral part of AHTR, includes regular entries from a variety of contributors, many of them, editors and authors of other content on the site. In addition, guest authors contribute original writings or give permission to repost relevant content from other sources. Most of the entries explore art history pedagogy either discussing philosophical issues or new approaches in and beyond the classroom.

AHTR also includes museum videos that are meant to serve as visual aids in class to have more meaningful discussions when museum visits are not possible either because of location, schedule, or the class size. Unfortunately, to date, only four museum videos have been uploaded, all in New York City, so their use is quite limited.

As might be expected with a project such as this, most contributors have direct connections with the co-founders; a large percentage of the authors and editors come from the CUNY Graduate Center, or other institutions in New York, although there does seem to be an increase in diversity with more

recent contributors coming from institutions in other regions.

There are a few other issues that need to be addressed for the sustainability of this project including the hosting of PPT files, which are currently embedded SlideShare presentations from personal accounts.

AHTR recently launched a redesigned website with a fresher look and improved functionality that includes new content and revised sections such as a Library of Pedagogy and Basic Syllabi / Assignments / Rubrics.

While the current content in AHTR might be useful, it is also limited, and the site could easily become stagnant if updates and new content are not added regularly. However, it is probably worth it to keep an eye on its development—or even consider becoming a contributor—as AHTR has the potential to mature into a useful and inspiring resource.