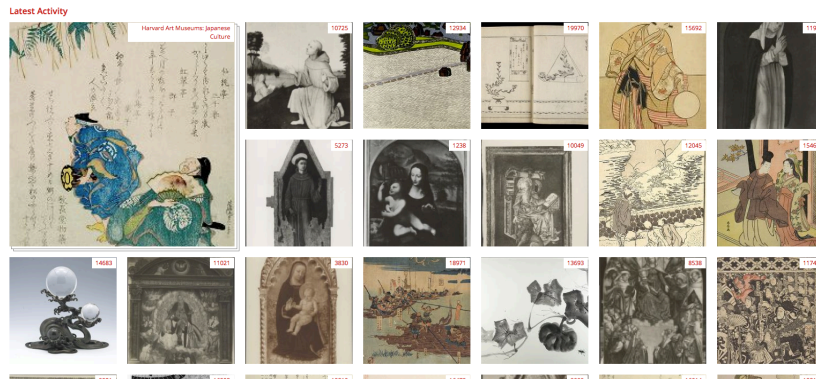


Curarium

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Associated with Harvard's Metalab, Curarium aspires to be a "platform for exploring, analyzing, and making arguments about collections and the objects they comprise" by providing the tools to "unlock the stories and arguments bound up in collections." The core

concept is for users to contribute images to Curarium and develop image sets based on their contributions and those of others. These image sets then comprise "collections." Curarium provides tools aimed to meaningfully engage users with these collections, thus facilitating discussions among the contributors of the digitized objects in the collections. The platform is currently in beta and consists of just two collections, the "Homeless Paintings of the Italian Renaissance" and the Harvard Art Museums Japanese Art Collection. With such limited content served through a beta infrastructure, the ambitions for this project are not yet fully realized nor, unfortunately, can they even be fully understood. That said, it is worth considering whether or not Curarium offers any added value to how one engages with an image collection.

After entering a collection, one can begin experimenting with the Curarium tools. "Exploring" a collection allows one to view a large set of images or a specific image. One can also rearrange the "visualization" of the collection as a whole, a feature with some promise in that it allows one to select a "visualization type" (e.g. list, tree map, thumbnails, etc), then filter by various "properties" of the images (e.g. title, date, etc). While this would be a great way to explore large sets of images, at the time of writing, all attempts to do so with the Curarium tools were unsuccessful. With freely available tools like Oxford Painting Retrieval, allowing you to search a vast collection of digitized images based on terms like "beard," "flower," or "cathedral," Curarium's "visualization" tool not only seems underdeveloped but redundant.



When working with individual images, one can annotate them, view their metadata, view "surrogate" images, share the images with other users, and add them to various "trays," which can be either individual or "social" (allowing everyone in your "circle" to contribute to said tray). These specific features are limited to users who have created an account (free) so as to ensure that the annotations and trays remain associated with that user. For example, if an individual user, or someone in that user's circle, created a "Madonna" tray, he or she can contribute a new image of the Madonna to that tray. If participants were to develop robust "circles" of, for example, architectural historians or surrealism scholars or Holbein experts, perhaps these shared trays may be of interest and encourage the kind of discourse envisioned by Curarium. At the time of writing however, few people seem to be using Curarium in this manner so one wonders about the impact Curarium has had.

It is too soon to tell whether people will be able to engage with one another, through the collections, as the Curarium developers intended. And it is difficult to track any developments with the resource; it is not clear when any enhancements have been made, what the next strategic steps are for, etc. There is a bug tracker form available where one can report problems with the resource. Regardless of any ongoing development, Curarium currently seems far too experimental to recommend as a productive "image engagement" resource, particularly since so few users seem to be adding and exchanging their own images or collections. While the tools are in theory fun to play with, Curarium will need to attract a large number of users if it ever wants to unlock the true potential of these tools. It is a fine proof of concept, but little else.