

Shared Shelf

Partnership plans to launch networked image management platform

ARTstor, eight partner colleges and universities, and the Society of Architectural Historians have embarked upon a new initiative for the management and sharing of digital images called "Shared Shelf." The institutional partners include Colby College, Cornell University, Harvard University, Middlebury College, New York University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Miami, and Yale University. Harvard and Yale are serving as lead partners. The project intends to make it practical for institutions, large and small, to combine images created by individuals, those held by the institution, and those in ARTstor's database — and to do so without the need for local on-site infrastructure.

Partners are contributing significant staff knowledge and time, in addition to investment funds, and ARTstor is developing the common software platform. The goal is to create an efficient and innovative infrastructure informed by the shared expertise of key participating institutions.

James Shulman, President of ARTstor, acknowledged the value of the partnership to ARTstor's efforts to serve the educational community. "Working with such experienced partners will help to build a system to unlock images from archives all around the campus as well as from scholars' own collections. ARTstor's collections are a good starting point, but a platform that enables all of us to standardize and share material promises to be both efficient and effective."

The initiative will enable institutions to build, manage, access and share visual content across their own campuses, with other campuses — or, in the case of the Society of Architectural Historians, across a geographically distributed community of scholars. Because the platform will enable institutions to integrate their own images with ARTstor's digital image library (of more than one million images) and also allow campuses to share content in a range of ways, the platform will facilitate the expansion of a trusted and collaborative network of institutions, and their individual users. The project also aims to lower institutions' costs in supporting the management of image collections by developing a common infrastructure upon which this content can be stored and accessed.

The project has developed from ARTstor's pilot "hosting" program, which now includes almost two million images from 130 colleges, universities, and museums. Each institution's images are served back to the institution (or consortium) via ARTstor's online library platform, and each institution's images are seamlessly integrated and cross-searchable with ARTstor's own collections. This ability to bring together institutional and ARTstor collections has been very valuable to scholars and teachers in many different academic fields.

During the past year, the Society of Architectural Historians and ARTstor launched the first use of Shared Shelf, called SAHARA (The Society of Architectural Historians Architecture Resources Archive www.saharaonline.org). SAHARA allows SAH members to upload their own images and metadata to their own shared online archive as well as to download the shared images for teaching and research. Commenting on the transformative nature of SAHARA, SAH Executive Director Pauline Saliga stated: "The leadership and members of the Society are excited about the potential of this user-contributed, shared online academic resource. Our expectation is that it will dramatically change the way we do research in the field of architectural history by providing vast amounts of data and thousands of images that can be used to provide comparative examples, test theories, and challenge our common wisdom about both world monuments and the ordinary buildings of our everyday lives."

Perspectives from Institutional Partners:

- ❖ **Clem Guthro, Director of the Libraries at Colby College** noted, "As a small college, we need to support users across the curriculum as simply as possible and without a lot of specialized staff to assist them. We believe that this platform will manage the complexity behind the scenes and let our small staff do what we do best — catalog content and serve users."
- ❖ "Since **Cornell** has been working on digital image management for a long time," **University Librarian Anne Kenney** noted, "we have tried a lot of approaches. The key for Cornell was the ability to marry our local need to support the curriculum with a single system that provides access to vetted resources, supports individual contributions, and allows us to broadly share images with our partner institutions and the world."
- ❖ For decision-makers at Harvard, where an infrastructure for image management and use for 21 different departments was implemented in the 1990s, the partnership was attractive because of the joint investment that will update the cataloging systems and leverage protocols enabling interoperation with authority files, repository and discovery environments. "Images are becoming ever more important in both teaching and research. As a community we have lacked good tools for their management and discovery." **Dale Flecker, Associate Director for Planning and Systems, Harvard University Library Office for Information Systems** noted. "Images present significant challenges. Having worked with ARTstor for years in this domain, we believe that combining forces and know-how offers the most promising approach to these challenges."
- ❖ **Mike Roy, Dean of Library and Information Services, Chief Information Officer and Librarian at Middlebury** added, "Even on our relatively small campus, we have many different systems for managing digital collections and none of these systems talk very well to each other or to the rest of the world. In tough budgetary times, that neither makes good fiscal sense nor allows our users to get the most out of the diverse image collections that we're building."
- ❖ At **NYU**, library staff anticipate that participation in the program will not only integrate collections (from the Institute of Fine Arts, the art history department downtown, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, and the libraries) but also will reduce infrastructure support costs. "Managing separate servers and different applications for each unit in order to provide image resources to our community is not practical, efficient or desirable. We can no longer expend time and resources in this manner. We need an enterprise solution," **Roddy Austin, Director of Information Technology and Media Services for the Division of Libraries**. "By creating Shared Shelf on a 'Software as a Service' model, ARTstor and the partnership will take on the infrastructure headaches that we require to be well managed, but don't want to manage ourselves."
- ❖ The **University of Illinois** Library and its College of Fine and Applied Arts are spearheading an effort focused on supporting the needs of scholars across campus whose work depends upon their ability to find and utilize high quality visual information in the context of research and learning. "The ARTstor Shared Shelf initiative provides Illinois scholars with access to unique local treasures and globally-renowned collections of visual resources in one flexible and powerful environment" comments **Beth Sandore, Associate University Librarian for Information Technology Planning and Policy and Associate Dean of Libraries**. "By working with ARTstor in partnership with colleagues at other institutions, we see the potential to emerge with a service that unites locally distributed image management functions in a scalable and standards-driven system, with the added benefit of the accumulated knowledge from our colleagues at other institutions and at ARTstor. We believe all the ingredients are present for a much stronger product to emerge from this collaboration."

- ✦ **Bill Walker, Dean of the Library at the University of Miami**, noted “For the past four years, University of Miami faculty have depended on ARTstor’s hosting program, which allows them to integrate their images with the rich ARTstor collection in the classroom. The availability of images through one central service gives students and faculty a “one-stop shopping” resource for research, teaching and learning across the curriculum. Additionally, hosting services, combined with ARTstor, have allowed Miami to make unique holdings, such as the digital assets from UM’s Cuban Heritage Collection, available to an international audience, and we are investing in Shared Shelf to make the University’s resources even more visible.”
- ✦ **Meg Bellinger, Director of Yale University’s Office of Digital Assets and Infrastructure**, noted that “A 2004 Mellon Foundation grant encouraged the libraries, archives, and museums on campus to further develop collaborative projects — across their traditional domains of practice — to better support teaching, research, and the preservation of collections. Bringing these groups together to support Shared Shelf is a natural next step. The initiative will allow us to build upon that collaborative spirit to encourage the crossing of disciplinary or operational boundaries.”

With input from a committee of current hosting institutions, as well as from the Shared Shelf partners, design and development of the platform is underway. The new Shared Shelf initiative anticipates a launch — as a fee-based service — by January 2011.

Updates on Shared Shelf are available by writing to ARTstor at sharedshelf@artstor.org. The partners and ARTstor will also report on progress and future directions throughout the year at library, scholarly meetings, and community fora.