

THE VISUAL RESOURCES ASSOCIATION

The Visual Resources Association is a professional organization devoted to the study of visual materials--their history, conservation, classification and use. The VRA includes over 700 members in twenty-one countries and represents slide and photograph curators, film and video librarians, media professionals, photo archivists, slide and microform producers, art historians and others concerned with visual materials.

The VRA publishes guides, monographs, and the quarterly, *Visual Resources Association Bulletin*, and sponsors *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, published by Gordon and Breach. *The Visual Resources Directory: Art Slide and Photograph Collections in the United States and Canada*, edited by Carla Freeman and Barbar Stevenson, is scheduled for publication by Libraries Unlimited in 1995.

VISUAL RESOURCES COLLECTIONS

Visual resources collections contain images in a variety of formats including microforms, clipping files, photographs, videotapes, films, laser disks, cd-roms, slides and digital files, although at present, slides and photographs predominate.

Visual resources collections are maintained by libraries, museums, government agencies, cultural heritage institutions, individual and corporate commercial producers, and university and college departments. Collections range in size from a few thousand items to hundreds of thousands. Perhaps as many as two-thirds are university collections, most of which are under the jurisdiction of academic departments of art, architecture, and art history.

Although the subject emphasis has been primarily on fine arts, architecture, and cultural artifacts, many collections contain a broad spectrum of information about people, places, and political, religious, and historic events irrespective of a particular work of art or artist.

Because so many of these collections fall outside the jurisdiction of libraries, they do not follow universally accepted cataloging standards, such as those provided for bibliographic materials found in AACR2. As these collections have become automated, they have used a variety of database systems. Some have been designed in-house, while others have used off-the-shelf commercial software.

As a result, many of the newest systems that employ a relational database rather than a flat file offer far more sophisticated search capacities than do bibliographic databases. A few collections, maintained by libraries, have attempted to use a MARC format, but since no MARC format was specifically designed to catalog art objects and images, and because AACR2, Chapter eight, as it now stands, does

not address the requirements of cataloging individual images, even these records vary from one institution to another.

THE VRA DATA STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROJECT

The VRA Data Standards Committee was established in 1993 and charged with advocating and promoting the use of standard descriptive practices in visual resources collections. To this end, in cooperation with the Getty Art History Information Program's Art Information Task Force, the committee's first project has been to review the AITF's *Categories for the Description of Art Objects* for its application to visual resources collections. To do this, the committee compiled a list of data elements used in image collections.

The Data Standards Committee's document includes a list of fields or data elements, a brief description of each field, the AITF category number equivalent, and the MARC tag equivalent (where possible). Each element includes an issues section covering field linkage, authority file linkage, controlled vocabularies, and descriptive conventions. The document is now being reviewed by specialists in a variety of fields, some outside the disciplines of art history and architecture. The committee hopes to have a final draft ready for publication by the end of 1995.

In addition to gathering, analyzing, disseminating and developing tools and resources that will advance the goal of standard descriptive practice in visual resources collections, the committee proposes as one of its major objectives, to establish liaisons and to cooperate with other similar interest groups. To this end, the VRA has endorsed the work of the [CIMI Consortium](#) and has contributed its data for use in [CIMI's model project](#).