

LSTA Grant Project Evaluation - Year 2 (of 2)

Project Title:

Percent for Art Statewide Digital Collection and Database

Main web page: <http://boundless.uoregon.edu/digcol/oac/index.html>

Evaluation prepared by Liz Paulus, Peer Reviewer

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Evaluation Summary

The goal of this grant is to increase access to the artworks and related documentation of the Oregon State Percent for Public Art program by creating a digital repository of the art program records. Since the late 1970s, the State of Oregon has required that state-funded building projects of construction budgets of over \$100,000 include funding for site-specific art. Art is chosen using a public review process. Oregon Arts Commission (OAC) staff coordinates the process and keep project records. These project records are unique and constitute the only full listing of the art works in the program. Prior to this grant, public access to the records for research or viewing was limited, available only by special appointment with agency staff in Salem.

During the past two years through the efforts of the staff on this project, available records have been reorganized, archivally processed, and digitized for online access through the University of Oregon's Digital Collections web site. There is still work to be done, but this project has already done much to preserve, make available, and promote the art of Oregon and its role in public spaces around the state. The project is in its final stages, and is on track to complete its goals by the end of the grant period with few exceptions.

To prepare for this report, I reviewed the existing project website and digital library elements, related web tools and sites, and interviewed project staff via telephone, including Jaye Anne Barlous, Project Librarian, and Mary Greci, Head, Metadata & Digital Library Services (MDLS).

To summarize, the original grant proposal, based on limited review of the original materials hosted at the Arts Commission (OAC), overestimated the number of art works and number of images needed to represent the 30 years of grant projects, offering numbers such as 10,000 images to represent approximately 2500 art works and related objects. The real numbers turned out to be more modest, with total images (as of January 2008) of just over 5200, and 1545 individual art works and related objects. Conversely, the grant underestimated the amount of supporting documentation as well as the need for archival processing and project reconciliation to fully represent the materials in the digital archive format. Even though it took more effort per individual project than originally estimated, the grant team has done a great job in bringing together all the elements to create an accessible, comprehensive, and high-quality archive. Their work, with the ongoing support of the University of Oregon's MDLS staff, will prove a strong foundation for the online presentation and archiving of future Percent for Art projects.

Highlights in the second and final year of the grant include processing of over 95% of the collection, including reconciling and compiling a list of projects as "missing in action" for further research; constant enhancements to various layers of metadata and supporting documentation; creation of multiple

access points for the collection for browsing by artist, subject, project locations, award year, controlled vocabulary, as well as advanced search options; creation of multiple access points through popular web tools and sites, including Wikipedia, MySpace, and search engine optimization; and creation of a map of projects across the state using custom Google Maps.

In the final months of the grant, there are still a few elements awaiting resolution, including completion of focus groups regarding web design elements; working with OAC and their contractor on the secondary interface for the collection to be shown on the OAC website; wrapping up final corrections and notes on projects still “missing in action”; website promotion across the state; and creation of a documentation suite for the project. Some of the responsibility for these rests outside the direct influence of the project team, and awaits action from other agencies. Details on selected objectives, activities, and results for Year 2 are listed below.

Selected Project Objectives, Activities and Results for Year 2

<i>Year 2 Objective</i>	<i>Activities and Results</i>
Current image and project processing (Numbers provided by Ms. Barlous, noted on website, and from 3rd Quarter grant reports. Activity continues and stats will change.)	Number of building projects processed: 184 Number of remaining projects to complete: 2 (plus a list of approximately 22 projects that are incomplete/unreconciled) Number of artists represented in database: 647 Individual Artworks/Objects Represented: 1545 . Number of images digitized and cataloged: 5224 .
Selection and processing of projects to be digitized	Ongoing; significant progress made in 2nd quarter in processing all projects in hand, and making time to go back and work with materials that were left behind in the first wave (items without documentation, projects without full archives, loose slides, newly discovered project binders, etc.) A full list of all projects as defined by OAC was assembled (something not available before) and a list of 40 “missing in action” projects was created. By January, this list has been whittled down to 22, and many loose materials have been matched to projects or used to enhance previously loaded objects. Project processing is 95% completed, with over 90% available via the Internet.
Development of the digital repository structure (including but not limited to creation of data dictionaries, file naming conventions, database schema, interface design)	Metadata for the collection has been significantly fleshed out since the Year 1 review, with a full complement of primary attributes for each object, plus constant enhancement of formal taxonomies. Most of the work was done earlier in the year, with over 900 AAT and LCSH fully searchable terms added to the database schema. The Percent for Art Digital Collection, a subset of the larger U of Oregon Digital Collections, shares a common interface with the rest of the collections in the digital library. As a result, there are some customizations that would be appropriate for Percent for Art that are not possible within the common interface (for example, a “Back to Collection” link to return the user back to the Collections’ home web

<i>Year 2 Objective</i>	<i>Activities and Results</i>
	<p>page). The project staff have compensated for this restriction by making sure that the common navigation tools (drop-down menus) are also mirrored in the web page layouts to encourage exploration by users that are unfamiliar with the U of O website design. The main web page and its related “about” pages are better and more clearly organized, and are easy to scan. The main page also presents an ever-changing image of items from the collection - this function works much better than before.</p> <p>In this reviewer’s last report, for Year 1, the concern was that the record structure needed a lot of work to make the ContentDM database (the backbone of Uoregon’s digital archive) work for the user; the project staff obviously worked that out and has records that are in the main readable and are clearly associated with the search performed. This looks much better, and works well. Metadata labels all make more sense than before.</p> <p>In addition, there seem to be some more features in ContentDM (upgrades?) that will work well for this collection, including the creation of “My Favorites”, the ability to select images in a list, then export them as a ready-made HTML page for saving to a local drive for future reference (linking to the digital archive). It is good to see this collection taking advantage of this feature in ContentDM.</p>
<p>Documenting procedures and processes</p>	<p>Through the first half of the grant year, documentation of collection processes and methodology was started and development is ongoing. However, in the third quarter, online publication of such documentation has been postponed in favor of completing processing of collection materials. This will be picked up after the digital collection is fully accessible.</p>
<p>User testing of the web design using focus groups.</p>	<p>Apparently during the first three quarters, the web interface was given some testing by students, however the planned focus group work slated for Year 2 has not been completed, according to Ms. Barlous. In an email, she stated: <i>“Focus groups are planned for the early/middle part of February. Questions and responses will be tallied via SurveyMonkey. I will draft the majority of the questions. The OAC will cull the participants from membership of selected, art-related listservs.”</i></p>
<p>Web site and search interfaces -- expanding access points via the Internet</p>	<p>The project staff has done some significant work in trying to get this project visible on the open web, using “Web 2.0” tools and techniques. The use of MySpace, Wikipedia, and Google search tools all enhance access and get the project out to a wider audience. Ms. Barlous reported in November that some simple searches of Google’s results with “Oregon Percent for Art”: 158 results, with OAC in the</p>

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	<p>1st and 2nd positions, the MySpace page as 3rd, U of O Percent for Art Digital as 4th and 5th, with Wikipedia as 6th. With a more general search “percent for Art’ oregon” the PFA Digital Archive is #3 behind OAC. The MySpace page is also nice, with a picture gallery that’s enticing. Ms. Barlous has also built a good “friends” list weighted with art museums and other digital art collections. The Wikipedia page is useful for getting PFA into a heavily indexed and high-use site, and a cursory look at the other sites listed shows that Oregon’s archive is unusual in its depth and quality of data available online. Lastly, as an addition to access points in the website, the staff added a Google Maps mashup showing already digitized projects as locations on a dynamic map. You can click on a link, and in the balloon find a link directly into the collection by location. Very powerful.</p>
<p>Work with OAC staff to create and implement project archive standards for the future</p>	<p>Staff has provided some guidelines to OAC for consideration some time ago, according to Mary Greci, but nothing formal has been presented. On the OAC website, this reviewer noted that OAC has standards for the 2008-2009 grant cycle that accept slides, or “in lieu of, not to be mixed with”, JPEG images of a fairly low resolution (“1024x786 pixels, and 72 dpi”). In this reviewer’s opinion, images of this resolution may not be a suitable replacement for slides, but perhaps a good adjunct (for web display only, if adequately photographed and processed before submittal). When this was mentioned to Mary Greci, she suggested that MDLS imaging staff would be able to offer any standards that might be useful for OAC’s consideration when the time arose.</p>

<i>Other Grant Elements</i>	
<p>Budget Narrative: Staffing</p>	<p>Budget request in Year 2 was increased to provide project with a full-time staff person at the rank of assistant librarian to manage increased processing and management requirements. Student workers continued to come and go, needing training and reorienting. The project benefited by the retention of a few workers for longer periods of time, including the most recent addition who is a former BFA student with extensive experience in art history and is able to make visual connections between images and artists’ work; this has been very helpful in the final clearing of miscellaneous materials, according to Ms. Barlous.</p>
<p>Budget Narrative: Travel</p>	<p>In my interviews and in the reports, I did not see an accounting of travel for doing collection promotion. I assume that the promotion of the collection has been on hold, perhaps in waiting for collaboration with OAC, as well as completion of the documentation and final evaluation/roundup of the project.</p>

Budget Narrative: Focus Group Evaluations and OAC web site	According to Ms. Barlous (1/28/2008), the focus groups have not been completed (see notes on page 3.) Ms. Barlous had no other comments to share except that nothing much has changed since the 2nd quarter report, but that OAC has met and hired a contractor for the web site design and it is expected that the situation will be resolved before the end of the grant period.
Support of Project after end of grant	Mary Greci confirmed that after the grant period is completed, University of Oregon MDLS is poised to take up ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the collection going forward. It is expected that the department's image collection specialist along with the digital projects librarian will be responsible for accepting materials from OAC for future online digital access and archiving of projects.

Project Impact

From what I've seen of this project, as a reference librarian, I would be proud to point my students and patrons to this resource to learn more about art, Oregon artists, architecture in the public sphere, and just to learn more about what you can see around the state if you look. It would have been helpful to hear or see more concrete feedback on what others think of the project, however with the delays in the focus groups and promotion, there seems to be little hard data to refer to. The site main web pages have certainly improved, apparently in response to feedback from various sources; I hope the same for the new OAC web interface. One note: this collection has already been previewed to a larger audience, when it was a featured collection for the month of December 2007 on the OCLC/ContentDM website.

Regarding OAC and their promotion of the archive: it remains to be seen how they will use this resource. Currently, there seems to be little connection between them, their website and the U of Oregon digital archive; in fact, there was not one mention of the project on their website that I could find, not even a press release about the grant. I found this really odd, and hope this reluctance to offer links (even if in just "beta" form) and information on the archive will dissipate as they resolve their path for their website interface. Once that hurdle has been cleared, it should be a boon to them and the associated art councils around the state. I look forward to seeing this site featured on the Oregon.gov and OSL web site as a great university/state agency collaboration using LSTA as the catalyst for innovation.

Suggestions for Improvement

During my review and interviews with the project managers, we had some good discussion about possible enhancements to the search interface and additional access points to the artwork. Some suggestions for improvement include:

- Helping patrons use ContentDM: term definitions and interface help**
 The data structure of an average record is much more clearly outlined and labeled than in Year 1, however, sometimes I still scratch my head a bit to puzzle out what some labels mean, or relate to. Example:
 Record - <http://boundless.uoregon.edu/u?/percent,3944> (Geological Quilt 2)

I found it by Browse > Medium > Ceramic Art. While in the record, I understand most of what's here and clickable, but when I get to the middle of the record I see "Artwork site". Is this the same as "Location"? It would help to know, perhaps in a Help file. (I know that there are many different labels and combinations of fields in a record; this is one that is pretty common, and it puzzled me.) The Browse terms (location, award year, etc.) all are very clear; the record is usually just as clear, however I would like to be able to connect the dots if necessary.

Another item that is hard to get used to is the compound object interface. What I'd like to see is perhaps a screenshot of an average compound object, that has multiple pages, and have the screen shot point out different parts, like how "Menu On/Off" works, or the drop-down menu with three options of Document, Page, and Page & Text. They don't act like you'd expect, but they are a significant type of object in this collection and I find that users may be turned away because it's too hard to figure out.

- **How to keep the Browse/Main webpage available: open in new window?**

Since PFA is part of a larger digital library with many collections, it can be hard to customize everything you'd like to have. One item I'd love to see in ContentDM is a "back to collection" button, where once you've opened a search, it could take you back to a default web page. They tell me that isn't an option right now. Another strategy to try/consider is this: for all your Browse webpages (ex: the page generated by this link -

<http://boundless.uoregon.edu/digcol/oac/toc.php?CISOROOT=/percent&db=percent&nicks=creator&title=Browse+by+Creator>) is it possible to make each of those HTML links on the page open in a new window? (As is, use a switch like "target=_blank"). This technique has a number of possibly negative outcomes (may conflict with popup blockers, or too many windows open), but it would keep the original Browse link page open for the user to return to. It's just a thought, a fairly low-tech one, but possibly useful when customization of ContentDM is not available.

- **Promotion: Librarians and k-12 school librarians/school media specialists -- do something for OLA/WLA and OEMA meetings this year**

School librarians and media specialists work with kids every day using electronic resources (through OSLIS and the State Library Database programs as well as their own local initiatives). If you do a promotion, even a poster at OLA or OEMA's meeting this spring, even if it's still "beta", you will have a jump start on the Fall semester for promotion to classes that involve art, civic engagement, and the like.

In conclusion, in last year's review I noted my strong interest in seeing project staff present their findings and expertise in presentations in any number of venues. From what they have told me about their project of the past year, their process and documentation for dealing with a complex archive of this type has much to offer to others interested in archival work in their own organizations, particularly with ContentDM. I hope that will still be part of the final outcome of this project; I look forward to seeing the documentation and any distilled learning that they choose to share.

Lastly, thank you again for the opportunity to comment and observe this project. As a life-long Oregonian who grew up in Marion County and saw the first Percent for Art projects come to life in my home town, and as a person committed to preserving our cultural history in the state, I really appreciate this project and wish it success and long life. If you have questions regarding this report, please do not hesitate to contact me at the number listed below.

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