



## Constructing a Virtual Space of Modern Museum Art for the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University

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### *Abstract:*

The main goal of this study is to find an appropriate method to implement the teaching of virtual museum art into the current fine art program at Kuwait University. The term “museum art” involves art exhibited through a museum context, which may also involve the course of Museology, which includes the training of gallery and museum personnel, involved in the process of education and interpretation. This proposal concerns itself with bringing a virtual space museum and its collections into the classroom as a temporary solution. This study suggests developing a network for museum of modern art using new technological means; yet, it also indicates/ includes selections of art history that preserve communities memories. Fifty-eight participants were involved in the study, and, through personal interviews they were given the opportunity to express their reactions regarding this proposal. Most participants expressed their approval of the teaching of modern virtual museum art while emphasizing the idea that a more comprehensive museum was needed and necessary for Kuwait. The virtual space of modern museum art will be explained further in my text. They accepted the teaching of a virtual space of modern museum art as a first step due to the absence of such a museum in Kuwait, and the education that could become a vital part of its program.

Results of this initial phase of the study provide insights as to how this initiative might be efficiently implemented at Kuwait University, while taking into account other attempts to introduce on-line museums in the fine art program, such as those found in Europe, Canada, and the United States in particular.

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### ***Introduction:***

As Kuwait neither has a comprehensive well - established public art museum documenting the visual history of Kuwait, and the cultural expressions of people in the gulf, nor aspects of the best of art and artifacts from Europe, and the Americas and elsewhere, this research proposal attempts to put forward one way in which this gap may be filled, albeit for awhile.

Appreciating art and defining its value to our culture and heritage for people of today is one of the main concerns for the majority of those who teach in the fine art program at Kuwait University. Inspiring art professors and students to hone their proficiency in order to comprehend the subject, and to convey their knowledge to young minds through the use of modern technology would give the opportunity to teach modern museum art virtually using electronic means, such as digital imaging and the Internet. As explained by the Canadian Heritage Information Network (2006), virtual space includes information and visuals resulted from navigating various websites that help persuading one's experience and intellectual improvements while preserving authenticity of information. This study also explores the potential for incorporating museology (museum studies) art courses into the department of art and designs the only fine art program at Kuwait University. Furthermore, the study discusses a practical method to integrate this kind of education into the college curriculum considering digital technology as the main agent, which would create an on-line virtual museum available for instructors and student access.

Although the focus of this study is teaching virtual space of modern museum art, aspects of Museology as well as having access to major galleries and museum collections through virtual reality at the college level by using on-line or digital images, I encountered issues and needs from students that make it important to develop and enhance museum studies as a fundamental component. Developing web sites dedicated for this course program is one. In this study, I attempt to show the relationship between the museum and its community, and

promote the importance of the museums educational role in society. Therefore, it is essential to first define museum and describe its nature before recommending appropriate methods to teach Museology and the nature of modern museum art collections used as a teaching tool in the program of fine arts and design.

Generally, a museum is a place of conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation of objects having scientific, historical, or artistic value. Each entails significant events that document human history and creation. It holds collections that are worthy of appreciation because of the information they contain and impart to our present knowledge as well as providing an opportunity for exploration, comprehensive understanding, and interpretation of the experience of other cultures and societies. Traces of progression of various civilizations from historical ages up to our present time are indeed a remarkable journey to explore, in order to be acquainted with these facts in only a matter of exploring places that housed the past and the present in one. Hence, a museum could be considered as a vital place that revives the past and helps to commemorate and reveal history as well as to connect museum visitors with their own lives and environment (The American Association of Museum, 2002).

At Kuwait University, the art and design program indicates museum art within its courses partially; yet, it does not explain the function of modern museum art while considering cultural boundaries, such as in an Islamic community. The challenge at this point is to promote the community's appreciation of modern museum art to the extent that involves visitors in an inspired diverse context using electronic means.

The primary role of a museum, as described in *Museum for a New Century* (1984), a report by the American Association of Museums (AAM), is to place education at the core of its public offerings, "museums have yet to realize their full potential as educational institutions" (p. 59). But, to improve public education, a museum needs to promote effective collaboration between other educational institutions and the private sector (par.1). Also, The AAM *Code of Ethics for Museums* notes that their common role is making a "unique

contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world." (par. 2). Similarly, Zeller (1989), a writer and specialist in the area, indicates that the purpose of inquiry in American art museums is to achieve public support through education. Zeller states that museums can provide various educational programs and entertaining activities that help to increase peoples knowledge of different civilizations. These programs and activities can be published to contribute to the educational growth of schools and other organizations in the community. Thus, people can benefit from collections and activities organized by museums by learning about their own heritage, as well as that of others. They can explore and understand their present life, which allows them to better understand their present.

These previous reviews raise a concern of how to apply valuable collaboration with various educational institutions, organizations and individuals in a country that lacks fundamental ground and recourses to enhance the teaching of modern museum art. Another challenge is to find a functional method to bring various items and artifacts physically closer to the community using new technology as a factor that reshapes modern society. This challenge encourages creative possibilities and options to apply solutions for future research and education in the visual arts. However, establishing a virtual space of modern museum art requires a practical and theoretical basis to achieve the highest learning and teaching standards in order to meet the demands of the digital age. The main question here is how will a virtual space of modern museum art respond to the need of its community?

The American Association of Museums, in its report *Excellence and Equity* (1992), **describes some of the common roles of a museum as follows:**

- 1 - It should consider education to be its primary task.
- 2 - It should involve the society's diverse perspectives.
- 3 - It should take an active role in addressing educational and public collaboration with various organizations.

More significant, beside the primary role of a museum, which is a place for artistic exploration and presentation; it is also a context for learning, teaching, and research where a museum explains the contexts of its displayed collections (The American Association of Museum, 1984). In *Museums and Schools as Partners: ERIC Digest*, Hicks (1986) points out that, although the school environment and the museum setting have similar objectives, that is to provide knowledge and information to students and visitors, they differ in that a museum context involves the students and visitors own ideas and life experiences in the learning process (par. 3). To elaborate this statement, Hicks believes that the learning process should not just rely on verbal communication, but also involve visual communication. Thus, a museum structure requires more than a building to store and exhibit collections, it requires a trained staff that can design an active learning environment that contributes to the expansion of the education of its community. However, there are some obstacles that might delay attempts to provide such an educational environment in some countries. Such is the case in Kuwait where there is a lack of proper existing structure for museum art to educate people, especially children. So, these questions arise: How can art instructors at Kuwait University provide appropriate ways to teach college students about museum visual culture? Would digital imagery and works of art available on line be sufficient to teach art students at Kuwait University about modern museum art? What are the alternatives for educating students, instructors, artists and people in Kuwait about modern museum art?

### ***Review of the Literature:***

#### ***Electronic Means in Museums:***

The area of digital culture and cyberspace technologies in museums has been explored to a large extent by other researchers in the field. Some of the more salient experts in the area will now be considered: Witcomb (1997), a lecturer at the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage Studies, Curtin University, Australia, argues that the role of a traditional museum is no longer exclusive for providing an

effective and valid connection between its objects and its visitors. To convey works of art and cultural objects, a museum should consider the potential of electronic technologies, which have changed the way many people in contemporary society view the world and evaluate their own social and cultural life. Since digital technologies impose the idea that a museum is part of the culture of its community, its collections should have a relationship with the present life of its people (p. 143). Witcomb adds that a museum should not merely preserve the traditions and heritage of nations, emphasizing the objects authenticity and originality, but should lead viewers to re-evaluate the museums contribution to society to improve the life of people in their community, including the museum staff. This could be achieved by incorporating modern technology into the museum, which exhibits its stored objects, in addition to reflecting the digital context in which the museum exists.

McLuhan (1967), working in the area of Canadian mass communications and talking about Canadian aboriginal culture, believed that the association of electronic technology with information can extend the boundaries of exhibiting native traditions through original objects. Further, digital technology can expand the function of museum practices to establish a conceptual basis for a new form of communication that forces interaction among various aspects of people's lives (pp. 12-13). Applying this point of view into the existing situation in Kuwait would raise a concern by people living in the country regarding the potential of digitizing museum collections of the past.

According to George Macdonald (1992), the director of the Canadian National Museum of Civilization, the core of a museums task is to provide information through its collections. He evaluates the different kinds of collections in a museum for their information value, not for their material value (p. 161). For Macdonald, a museum could provide an interactive learning environment for different people around the globe. Technology can play an important role in turning the museum from being a limited space in which to store and exhibit objects to being an active source of information accessible for all

people around the world. Today's technology can also provide a new and different medium for communicating information worldwide. One way in which we see this is where actual objects that may be fragile do not have to be exhibited. Instead, information about them via photographs and/or graphics, such as digital exhibitions developed on video and computers, can be substituted for them. For example, videos can be used to tell stories about objects or to expand interpretations that the objects by themselves cannot provide. Another example is the virtual museum, where the traditional museum is used as an "architectural symbol for virtual reality". (p. 148). A virtual museum according to another expert could be defined as a store for digital collections existing on the Internet. Within virtual museums, artifacts and information are organized digitally, including paintings, photographs, recordings, articles, transcripts and other items that utilize multi-media technology. Access to electronic technology can provide a means for anyone from anywhere to visit a museum that is available on the Internet. Once having this access, they can download or print copies of works of art exhibited on line Witcomb (1997),

### ***Museums' Information Technology:***

As Fernstorm & Bannon (1997) explain, two contributions to the area of information technology that includes the role of information technology in museum art, which has also become an essential part of the museums educational environment to improve the quality of service provided by museum professionals. The aim of using technology within museums is to expand the visitors experience by developing electronic access, such as web sites, that offer information through digital exhibitions, interactive multimedia, and network technology. The use of information technology in museum studies could be viewed from three angles: 1) as a way to identify museum collections, 2) as an electronic resource for visitors to view artifacts and to find information, and 3) as a network that enables access to the museum collections on the web. Yet, the relationship between technology and museums involves two educational perspectives within the implementation process.

First, the examination of the effect of technology on museum studies from the psychological standpoint, which helps to structure a base to design functional methods that involve different intellectual, physical, and emotional reactions from museum visitors. Second, the potential for developing a mixed media program that contains digital images, audio, multimedia and animation within network technology while considering the best technical function to improve the quality of services (p. 191-199). In this regard, technology should enhance the visitors' skills and knowledge to use computer technology to locate information rather than to just work with the computer as a technological tool. This means that technology and museums together should provide the means for visitors to comprehend the context they visit (p. 192). The question raised, however, is: Does the on-line museum that exhibits digital images exclude the social world of its community from its collections?

To develop the practical and educational content of an on-line art museum, a group of experts should be involved in the process. Among these experts are museum professionals, such as curators who present appropriate exhibitions of collections, architects and designers who plan spaces in the museum, other consultants, filmmakers or multimedia specialists. The contributions of this group could help to outline appropriate content for the on-line museum while taking into account possibilities to benefit from different interpretations, narratives, virtual reality, audio and a three-dimensional environment. Fernstorm and Bannon, (1997) suggested that experts consider the following points when designing an on-line museum. These suggestions may also be used as guidelines for Kuwait University in designing its own virtual space of modern museum art. **These points include but are not limited to:**

- Consider a storage space that requires certain display method, for increasing the number of objects and artifacts.
- Provide information that satisfies the visitor to select/choose an on-line museum with an impression/feeling of visiting a real museum.
- Provide data for researchers, educators, artists, students, children, and other people and communities.
- Provide a way to examine how the visitor experiences the network



- and navigation systems in order to provide better service and require an educational and practical method for operation and exploration
- Provide links to other on-line museum sites to offer visitors a way to compare objects between different museums and collections
  - Define the kind of experiences the visitors expect (a survey could be taken of Kuwaiti audiences targeted **(pp. 193-194)**).

### ***Implementations of Museum Electronic Services:***

As computer technology users have become more knowledgeable about advancements in modern technologies, they continue to examine the possibilities for providing the best qualities in their workspaces. A good example is the development in filmmaking where special effects are used along with multimedia and animation techniques. Although modern technology has become more sophisticated, using it to develop new systems has become simpler, so that everyone can use the computer, for example, to access the Internet and navigate through web browsers easily.

There have been recent attempts to implement electronic services for museum education in Europe<sup>(1)</sup>. Among these attempts that have gone beyond merely providing simple text through the Internet is the electronic Library Image Server for Europe (ELISE), which was established in Europe in 1993. This project provides electronic library images and contains links that enable the researcher to navigate various museums available on-line. The aim of this project is to provide information and images via the Internet that is accessible for all people at various times and places. It was a step forward to involve and serve other people beside those in academia and certain fields **(Eyre, 1997)**.

The ELISE project also recommends guidelines for system requirements designed by experts in order to meet the experiences and expectations of the on-line art museum users. These guidelines

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(1) For more examples and further readings refer to DMU-International Institution for Electronic Library Research, < [www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue5/ielr/](http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue5/ielr/) > , UKOLN-UK Office for Library and Information Networking, < [www.ukoln.ac.uk/](http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/) > .

could also be adopted as a framework for Kuwait University to create a website that contains its on-line museum art.

One of the requirements being considered by system designers is the making and the obtaining of data accessible for users around the globe in an easy and functional way. Eyre (1997) summarizes some important requirements for developing a system that provides access to museum information as follows:

- Make web browsers able to locate information anywhere and design web pages that enable searching and retrieving data from other sites around the world.
- Apply limits to access data, such as applying filters that prevent access locations that contain inappropriate contents.
- Provide experts to design a structure for documentation within practical forms.
- Design methods to refine a search.
- Apply copyright management to use information (p. 245).

Although the effort to digitize data and organize information on line has been enormous over the last few years, it has been difficult to outline certain methods or requirements to hold data that satisfy the users' needs. Nevertheless, it is essential that a compatible system for museums provides open universal access to various types of information from different places within a single user inquiry (pp. 243-252).

### ***Digital Display:***

Modern technology provides models for producing moving exhibitions on the Internet making it possible for children and adults to navigate and learn about art from on-line museums. Students in Kuwait, for example, could go on line and search for the web site of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and look at or for images of paintings by Monet or Buddhist sculptures, or, to another museum like the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Take for example the program of the J.Paul Getty Trust<sup>(2)</sup>, which provides information

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(2) For more information, < [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu) > .

about the visual arts serving the public and art professionals. The Getty web site includes a museum and a research institution that inspires and educates the public through programs including on-line research and exploration of extensive collections and products (see figures 1-7) (**The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006**). Another example is the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.<sup>(3)</sup>, one of the largest museum studies and research organizations, which holds various exhibitions and on-line activities for visitors to increase knowledge and experience about the history and culture of America (**Smithsonian, 2006**). However, one has to consider some problems, which might occur during the navigation process, such as the kind of facilities and options the software application system offers. For instance, programmers have to consider how to present large objects within a limited space on the Internet when it is difficult to fit the same object into a museum room, or how to show a work of art that is designed to be exhibited outside the museum where a different context is required. Thus, writers concerning this area, such as Kydd and MacKenzie (1997), have summarized the following problems that programmers and museum experts need to consider:

- The content of the web site needs to be redesigned consequently, so that the Internet users can have fast responses and downloads of information, especially images, in order to keep the users interest.
- There is limited control by web designers to display various contents to adjust appropriately on different individual users computer screens.
- High-quality images usually take a long time to download; therefore, web designers should provide an option for users to download these images without delaying a fast practical access to the desired website.
- Researchers and web users can query databases by using traditional standard HTML documents and more advanced flexible methods;

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(3) For more information, < [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu) >

however, any update of the database content will affect the website content (pp. 303-304).

The Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)<sup>(4)</sup> held meetings in March and of April 2000 to define the limitations of virtual museums in Canada. The main goal of these meetings was to explore the possibility of the virtual museum, and how the virtual museum might best be put together to meet the needs and interests of CHIN (Canadian Heritage Information Network, 2006).

From these previous insights, it is obvious that web designers are pertinent in the development of the Internet to provide facilities and options to keep up with various users' demands and technological improvements. It is always challenging for web designers and system programmers involved in designing a museum website to reconsider the latest updates that provide a more coherent and functional system to maintain the users interest and maintains enthusiasm in visiting an on-line museum. In short, web designers, system programmers, and museum professionals should work together to apply possible solutions and techniques of web technology to obtain the users attention to the best on-line quality service they can offer.

### ***Statement of the Problem:***

The current Fine Art Program at Kuwait University has not considered museum studies (Museology) as part of the curriculum. Possible reasons for this could be the lack of available experts in this field and the absence of "real" museums in the country as well as the limitation of the available Fine Art museums in the Gulf region in general. However, the only local museum is the Kuwait National Museum, which holds restricted collection that reflects Kuwaiti heritage. This collection is also not a comprehensive one, and, the museum is still under construction, putting in place a base to restore the collections which were significantly damaged during the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1991.

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(4) For more information, < [www.virtualmuseum.ca/English/index\\_flash.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/English/index_flash.html) >

The Scientific Museum is another place that provides limited information for visitors and students to learn about natural history and science. There are a few numbers of small art galleries in Kuwait that could only share small portion of information. The Museum of Modern Fine Art, established in 2001, is a place that accommodates physical works of art, such as sculpture, ceramics, mixed media, and paintings created by local artists. It also exhibits historical and cultural artifacts that reflect the heritage of Kuwaiti people. For those who prefer or appreciate more traditional historical periods, The Tariq Rajab Museum and Bait Al-Sadow are available. But these private museums do not offer guided tours of their collections, as they do not have that mandate for the staff to do so. The main problem with museum education, as it concerns Kuwait, is that it lacks effectual and interactive museum education programs for college students in Kuwait, in both public and private schools and colleges. It becomes apparent, then, that these so - called museums have limited educational opportunities for Kuwaitis to exchange ideas and discuss visual culture.

***Proposal:***

This brief study, proposes constructing a virtual space of modern museum art for the Fine Art program at Kuwait University in order to bring a different and necessary experience for art students within their learning environment. Having access to various on-line museums in their university would expose students and faculty through virtual reality to other parts of the world as well as the opportunity to reach out and interact with more than Kuwaiti art and artifacts. In addition, the study suggests that students in Kuwait learn about art through digital imaging that involves different ways of expression and interpretation, and about museums themselves, and how they function, through seeing specific museums through on-line channels of communication.

***Challenges:***

Some problematic issues might arise concerning the implementation of practical technical settings and appropriate educational

methods in teaching digital works of art as an alternative to a live museum environment. Questioning the role of information technology in museums to enhance the visitor experience is another aspect for programmers and designers to consider. Key questions that arise, however, are:

- 1 - How can a virtual space of modern museum art provide effective teaching and learning experiences for students whom might become future curators and educators?
- 2 - How can a virtual space of modern museum art educate the general visitor about various works of art without having a real museum context where they can interact physically with objects and collections of art?

***Objectives of the Study:***

The aim of this study is to introduce the concept and practice of cyberspace technologys ability to create virtual space of modern museum art for the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University. The following objectives should be seen as an alternative to the lack of a real comprehensive museum of this time. Further objectives attempt as well:

- 1 - To expose art students to the artistic and educational aspects of modern museum art through digital imaging.
- 2 - To observe the influence of teaching virtual space/on-line modern museum art on students in the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University.
- 3 - To achieve the highest learning and teaching standards and implementation method for teaching virtual space of modern museum art while using digital images as an alternative to a real physical museum.

***Significance of the Study:***

The study attempts to provide art students, with an essential educational aspect of the visual arts, especially modern museum art that provides intensive and extensive knowledge about various visual cultures and traditions of people from the past and present around the

globe. The aim is to develop a course, which should be offered in the Department of Art and Design at Kuwait University. The aim of the study would also enhance the art students' artistic skills and enforce their critical thinking, as they read and learn more about Museology (museum studies) that would expand their conceptions and intellectual contributions in their workspace. In addition, art educators might find new teaching methods through experiencing digital imaging through virtual space or on-line museums, and they could create new contexts to implement their artistic and educational ideas. One important part of a virtual space of modern museum art is that it could serve as a visual resource bank useful for the Fine Art Program and, as a requirement for gaining accreditation in a few years from now. Moreover, people in Kuwait could benefit from on-line museums by educating themselves. Nevertheless, the significance of this study can be summarized as follows:

- 1 - To examine experiencing virtual space of modern museum art through digital imaging.
- 2 - To add this course proposal to the growing departmental of Fine Art curricula at Kuwait University.

***Research Questions:***

Two main questions arise from this study:

- 1 - How can digital modern museum art exhibited through network OR through virtual space educate art students in Kuwait University?
- 2 - What are the appropriate approaches for teaching virtual space of modern museum art?

***Methodology:***

In this study, I used qualitative research by conducting interviews with available employees at the Kuwait National Museum during April of 2006. I examined the reactions of five museum professionals regarding the possible cooperation to construct a virtual space of modern museum art for the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University.

The study also considered the reactions of twenty-two art students and four professors currently involved in the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University during the Spring Semester of 2006. The interview questions addressed concerns regarding the participants' ability and desire to learn about modern museum art through computer technology, especially by using the Internet. The participants' reactions were analyzed based on two criteria: 1) the level of their satisfaction to use electronic means to learn about modern museum art, and 2) their ability to study, comprehend, and evaluate digital images of modern museum art exhibited on line. Reactions were observed during interviews with the participants in order to enrich the content of the study. The interview questions were designed to cover the following: a) required experiences to construct on-line/virtual space of modern museum art in Kuwait University, b) the appropriate use of information technology in or with modern museum art, and c) as a possible solution or alternative to teaching modern museum art using on-line/virtual space.

### ***Participants in the Study:***

The study included five employees working at the Kuwait National Museum, two personnel working at Tariq Rajab museum, one staff member from Bait Al Sadow, forty-seven art students currently involved in the Fine Art program at Kuwait University, and six art professors from the Department of Fine Art at Kuwait University. Three scholarship candidates in the Fine Art program also participated in this study. It is important to mention that these art students have not been introduced to museum art before; therefore, an important part of this study is to examine their willingness and ability or unwillingness to learn about museum art through digital imaging and virtual reality as fully comprehensive museums on other cultures and Kuwaits traditional and modern culture are not yet available.

### ***Data Analysis:***

Data gathered from the interviews were reviewed and evaluated using the following questions as bases:



- How will the participants perceive the idea of teaching modern museum art using virtual space?
- What are their impressions of new emerging skills that can be derived from implementing information technology for teaching modern museum art through digital imaging on the web?
- How different was it for the participants to explain and interpret meanings and relations of digital images from artworks in a real museum?

From the responses to these questions, and concerning the data, I will be able to develop a preliminary project for designing a system for using a virtual space of modern museum art while considering a variety of ideas and appropriate methods to teach art through digital images and multi media. Despite the fact that there is nothing like the real object, however, this proposal might help art students and professors at Kuwait University to understand and use new technology in enhancing their teaching performance and contents. In addition, the findings of this study could offer substantial resources and insights for developing other learning environments in teaching virtual space of modern museum art.

### ***Initial Findings:***

Discussions, for instance, conducted during March of 2006 with professors Adel Al Moumin and Omar Khattab who have taught for several years in the Architecture Department at Kuwait University and art professors Faridah Mohammed and Abdulmuhsen Al Sayegh who are currently teaching art courses within the Art Education Department at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, were indeed rewarding, and made the evaluation of information and resources easier concerning the construction of virtual space of modern museum art in the fine art curriculum. Through these responses, I have managed to provide an appropriate content to implementing a practical program, which proposes teaching modern museum art to Fine Art students at Kuwait University.

The findings also show that most of the participants felt uncertain about an appropriate method for teaching modern museum art using

the Internet. Apparent in this observation was their concern in finding a suitable teaching approach that would meet their abilities and demands in terms of using new technology and, on the other hand, their caution concerning the substitution of real museums with digital museums.

Disparity was indicated among the student participants regarding their level of knowledge about the art museum and digital technology. Ninety-two point six (92.6%) percent of the participants admitted their lack of information about museum studies in general, and 5.4% declared that they had some experience about the museum art gained from their travel to Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and France. To bridge this information gap, the art students agreed on the idea of using modern technology and the Internet in learning about modern museum art and being exposed to other cultures. Hesitations, however, are still perceptible among some art professors, questioning the students understanding of the importance of modern museum art without a previous preparation to introduce the students to the role of the real museum in its community. Two percent (2%) of the professional participants expressed their awareness and uncertainty regarding a possible practical implementation of the virtual space of modern museum art in the university, since the idea requires new skills and different teaching methods. They prefer to consider establishing a physical museum and have reservations that the Internet could substitute the context of a real museum despite the wealth of information it provides. They also suggested encouraging student exchange programs and providing summer courses or trips to visit museums in other countries. However, some of the main findings from this study are the following:

- 1 - The art professors indicated that there is a great need to develop a practical program to teach virtual museum art within the current Fine Art curriculum. They believe that it is important to prepare art students to experience live or real museum art before creating a usable software program that offers options for educators, visitors, and students to access the museum art electronically.

- 2 - There is a need to train or hire museum software designers, especially for museums. They would work closely with curators and art historians in galleries and museums. There are roles specific to museums and galleries.
- 3 - It is essential to interest art students in using information technology to locate information about museum art.
- 4 - Some of the participants who have advance experience in using the computer believe that the main concern about teaching virtual modern museum art to art students and Kuwaiti people is to reach or obtain the best result when searching for information, regardless the technology or the program used. This means that the virtual space of modern museum art could be an option for teaching art along with other options, such as information on CD-ROMs and catalogues, as well as the possibility of providing traveling exhibitions.
- 5 - Most of the participants expressed the need for teaching and learning methods to educate themselves about modern museum art. Also, they emphasized the need to teach museum visitors, especially students, sufficient exploration skills to enhance their Internet navigation experience in order to learn about works of art exhibited on line. This could be achieved through redesigning programs for professional development for the university community.

### ***Evaluation of the Findings:***

It is obvious that technology can provide intensive and extensive ways to explore museum objects, including materials in time periods, history, culture, etc., within an elaborate exploration of a digital exhibition (**Fernstorm & Bannon, 1997**). This kind of broad exploration is difficult to provide within the real physical space of the museum without the inclusion of new technology. On the other hand, it is impossible to substitute a real museum with an on-line/virtual space of museums to teach art because the experiences will be different in terms of the ability to access objects physically. Furthermore, psychologi-

cally, the effects are also different in terms of the distortion of colors, size, shape etc.

Although digital technology can provide an ever expanding opportunity for visitors to expand their exposure and knowledge about various ancient and contemporary cultures heritage, a single real museum cannot provide such experience by itself; hence, both technology and the art museum together can support each other to enhance the visitors experience about art and cultures without substituting each other. Rosalie McCrea, an Assistant Professor and art historian in the Department of Art and Design at Kuwait University recently stated:

The discussion about the role of museums in society is a good idea. Trying it in with the lack of trained museum/gallery personnel at Kuwaits museums is especially useful. Due to this lack, the Department of Art and Design can play a role that could involve the Internet usage of on-line museum collections of Western art/artifact where students would have access to major collections around the world; collections, which also should have relevance to Kuwaits historical, modern and contemporary culture/s. I am thinking particularly of museums known for its Oriental, near Eastern art housed in places such as London (the Victoria & Albert Museum) for instance, Oxford, Paris, Cairo, Moscow, and several cities in Germany and the United States. Acquiring a virtual reality museum would help in the process of teaching museology as a future course proposal within the Art and Design program. This could also target the lack of trained curators, education officers at Kuwaits leading museums at this time (**McCrea, Rosalie, Personal Interview. 30 April, 2006**).

Since the problem remains, in the absence of real museums in Kuwait, and in the lack of museum studies at Kuwait University and at other colleges in the city, it would be appropriate to speed up the potential of constructing a virtual space of modern museum art into the Fine Art curriculum within as short time as possible. As an art student currently involved in the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University pointed out:

I believe that there are numerous things that we could learn from a virtual museum. It is a unique and different way of teaching, which makes it more exciting. The kind of knowledge that occurs to me when considering learning about museum art through electronic means is the practical exploration of the Fine Arts. As well is the gaining of concepts and experiencing the various cultures and their history through their artistic productions stored within museums. Skills are the most important thing that comes after knowledge. We, as art students will gain an understanding of the history of anthropology, the evolution of museums in the wake of expanding civilization, and contemporary ethical questions surrounding anthropological theories. I am very excited about this step and I hope to learn and take advantage of the opportunity to gain as much skills, knowledge, and fun in this environment of visual virtual reality **(Dalal Al Awadhi, senior art student. Personal Interview. 30 April, 2006).**

In this statement, an art student discloses her awareness of the importance in teaching the subject and at the same time, her eagerness in achieving the appropriate learning method due to the lack of museum studies in Kuwait. I believe that this art students comment suggests a challenge to us on how to utilize information technology in the best way possible in order to teach modern museum art within a virtual space, and, accepting it as it is, because of limited resources concerning museum studies in Kuwait. The current Fine Art Program at Kuwait University is new and does not include adequate knowledge and skills in certain areas such as museum education or art criticism in order to cover sufficient experiences in the visual arts. Art Criticism as a course is being considered for introduction to the Fine Art curriculum. This raises the question: How could a prospective professional artist who has been taught to become a creative artist continue to produce and, perhaps, to educate people for future generations in the importance of art without having the ability of being exposed to various historical and contemporary cultural artistic productions? Certainly, this is relevant to our current Fine Art

Program, which lacks other essential course disciplines in the visual arts. In this regard, another art student stated:

...we can expand our thinking, especially because it is a new way of helping aspiring students to get a new outlook on art and how artists present their works. Yet, digital imaging provides an experience that is different from being within a real museum. But I think that it is the next best thing since we cannot go to real museums ourselves. Why cant we learn about museum art through digital images? One main point, however, is that digital imaging only gives us a distant view, but within a real life museum we feel the experience in a different way. Still, on- line/ virtual reality museum art is better than nothing; I think it is a positive step to learn a lot more by looking at digital images **(Hind Al Awadhi, senior art student. Personal Interview. 30 April, 2006).**

The most significant findings in this study were the perceptions perceivable of student participants who had reservations about such a course in terms of examining the values and traditions of other cultures through advance technology and access to the worldwide web generally. This viewpoint is influenced by strong cultural conflict and restrictions at the present time and that new technology may transcend visual information about a culture, which may not be acceptable to Kuwaiti religious society. In other words, some participants have reservations about historic and contemporary aspects of art practices and culture which the Internet can provide, but which may challenge designers for such a cause. In this regard, an art professor from a Western country, the United States in particular, who prefers not to reveal her identity, addressed her awareness towards exposing students living in an Islamic community to nude images. Her main concern was finding an appropriate instructional way to teach art students about figurative art that involves nudity without missing educational significances with regard to cultural restrictions.

Other participants are optimistic from the perspective that modern technology can be the means of integrating diverse foreign values and traditions within a culture and that on-line/virtual space of

modern museum art can contribute to improving a wide exposure. One should bear in mind, however, that some people might misuse, misunderstand, and misinterpret information that emerges from artifacts and other artistic productions. I believe that it is important to distinguish and appreciate various ethnic styles without necessarily accepting them. Exploring the authenticity and values of objects from different points of view could help to revive certain events and facts that have roots in one's culture, such as religion which brings these facts into question, as a means to protect native beliefs.

Other student participants addressed a concern regarding the limitations of virtual space of modern museum art, especially the interaction between the visitor and the objects. Since some of the participants have visited museums in Western countries, they have had the experience of interacting and respond visually and emotionally with the museum collections. These participants believe that it would be better to emphasize establishing a real museum although they are aware of the difficulties to start building such a museum with its unique collections. At the same time, their statement strongly points out the importance of the inclusion of museum studies into the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University as one step to introduce the visual arts to the community, including children. With the aid of new technology, such as computers in accessing on-line museums and digital images Kuwaiti people can learn about different artworks and cultural artifacts electronically, as an alternative to real museums. I believe that it is also beneficial that children have an idea about how museums function in order to experience its educational context. To achieve this goal, it is recommended that art teachers in public schools in Kuwait become computer literate and able to study more about museums themselves, and to access on-line/virtual space of modern museums art. This will also enable them to be well- informed with new trends in the visual arts. In return, we would have teachers who are skillful enough to educate their students about the subject effectively.

In conclusion, we can sum up the outcome of this study by stating that most of the participants seemed to agree that using information technology, especially the computer as a medium to explore modern

museum art as an alternative practical approach, is a worthwhile venture, which does not preclude the building or housing of art and artifacts in real museums. However, to an extent, they rejected the process of learning from a digital context only and in using the computer as an artistic instrument that substitutes exploring objects in a real museum. However, all the participants agreed that the inclusion of the on-line/virtual space of modern museum in the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University would be a good idea, and it is better than excluding it entirely from the curriculum, giving present circumstances.

***Recommendation for Further Research:***

This study was limited to the use of information technology in or with museum studies in Kuwait. It discussed the possibility of exhibiting museum collections within educational settings by using digital images and information via the Internet. In the light of the research questions addressed in this study, I suggest that further study should be conducted to examine the use of information technology in enhancing the teaching of the visual arts, especially in areas that are missing and not being taught in the Fine Art Program at Kuwait University. Such studies would include hypertext and hypermedia in art, multicultural arts, computer graphics, on-line research, and distance art and education. Still, this ought not to be seen as replacing research from a manuscript or a book. It is important to increase the quality of information and skills of art students to adapt to the advancements in new technology and their potential role in reinforcing the arts. In this regard, I suggest the following guidelines for experts in the field when constructing a museum art course at Kuwait University that supports the development of the art students' skills and interests:

- Enhancing critical thinking
- Teaching about various cultures through the visual arts
- Teaching art through a new technological setting
- Using the Internet to learn about museum art and to enhance art history
- Using the on-line museum art to support aesthetics



- Using digital technology to enhance artistic and research skills.

The proposed museum art course would provide students with an introduction to the role of the museum in its community. The course should also include slides, videotapes, and digital images that illustrate the standards (objective and subjective), which a work of art has to contain in order to be considered as a part of the Museums permanent collection. In addition, the course should provide assignments, projects, and activities about museums and their different functions. These activities must be designed to teach students how to observe, inquire, and interpret selected works of art from the museum collections. Valuable resources, such as the National Library of Canada, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. and the British Library, and Museum in London could permit access to collections of reputable museums around the world (**Joslyn Art Museum, 2006**).

Most important, the course should emphasize the use of computer technology, especially the Internet to develop the students skills and information acquired within the course syllabus. Art students should be prepared to be able to look at art in a digital setting, as a temporary alternative to a real museum associated with cultural activities.

### ***Conclusion:***

Museum art plays a vital role in providing wide range of information now and then for visitors and researchers of ancient and recent history. The museums mission of educating people around the globe will continue through artistic production, alongside with the most current development in information technology. Authorities in these two fields (museum studies and information technology) as a mixed activity should work together to be able to develop a feasible approach and an application system that would provide wide information for museum visitors and Internet users through an advance on-line/virtual space of museum context. It is practical to pursue the developments of educational systems of leading countries in this field, such as Europe (Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy in particular), Canada, and the United States, and from this continuous observation, developing an application system in teaching on-line/

virtual space of modern museum art at Kuwait University as an essential part of the Fine Art curriculum. Likewise, experiences and insights of experts in the field of information technology are imperative and should not be neglected to avoid further problems that might interfere with the management of this application system that facilitates access to information on-line.

Nevertheless, displaying an on-line/virtual space of museums within a functional application system is not an easy task while concerning the appropriate use of web technology. Preciseness of web site content should be taken into consideration by web designers and could be attained through constant consultation with museum professionals. Connecting experiences of traditional and virtual museum art, together, can build hybrid behaviors that can provide digital exhibition museum collections while enabling sensible options for Internet users to explore and encourage wide cultural arts. Furthermore, continuous efforts are needed to improve this new digital environment and its services, which is concurrent with the ongoing development of the Internet itself.

The increasing demands of people and the requirements of their workspaces impose reconsideration of the quality of presentations for digital services. In other words, the role of web technology and application system should always meet both the designers and the users expectations and should be continuously developed and improved.

Another concern is the fact that building a real physical museum requires certain conditions to come into sight. That includes, but is not limited to expensive materials, labor, and time. While, on the other hand, a virtual museum requires building a web site that takes less time and technical resources needs and access to the Internet.

Finally, it is obvious that the need to incorporate museum studies at Kuwait University has become a principal priority. Despite the absence of real museums in Kuwait that allow interaction with physical art works and cultural objects, it is possible to provide learners with digital exhibitions of various museum collections from around the world on web sites via the Internet. There is no doubt that exploring digital representations of art and artifacts through on-line/virtual

space of museums can never be a substitute for a real museum, but having access to these objects through digital images and exhibitions would be better than excluding teaching museum art from the Fine Art curriculum.

Museum studies are a valuable component of the visual arts. We need to teach art students how to educate themselves by using computers and images of art from on-line museums around the world. This would expand their limited exposure to art museums and their collections caused by the lack of art galleries in the country which showcases only its own culture and art.

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### *General Questions*

**Dr. Khaled AL-Najdi**

What is your understanding and expectations of a virtual space of modern museum art? Please explain.

How do you think that a virtual space educates people in Kuwait about modern museum art? Please explain.

What is the most challenging part to construct a virtual space of modern museum art? Please explain.

Would you like to use digital imagery to learn about modern museum art? Please explain.

Do you think that digital technology will help you understand modern museum art more than bring in a real museum? Please explain.

### *Educational Concerns*

Do you think that there are limitations of the current Fine Art Program at Kuwait University? Please explain.

Do you think that teaching modern museum art is a part of the Fine Art Program? And should it be?

Do you think that art instructors at Kuwait University are able to provide appropriate sufficient method to teach students about modern museum art electronically? Please explain.

How do you see/evaluate digital imagery as an alternative for collections in a real modern museum art? Please explain.

Do you think an online/virtual space of modern museum art could be an effective teaching and learning method? Please explain.

How different do you interpret meaning from online imagery than artwork exhibited in a real museum? Please explain/

What are the challenges that might support or distract constructing and implementing an online/virtual space of modern museum art at Kuwait University? Please explain.

Do you think constructing a virtual space of modern museum art could be a valuable and practical solution to teach students about museum art at the current art program at Kuwait University? Please explain.

***Cultural Concerns***

Do you think that cultural traditions could prevent or delay the process of constructing a virtual space of modern museum art? Please explain.

What other values might digital imagery of a virtual space of modern museum bring to you? Please explain.

What factors might influence the construction of a virtual space of modern museum art? Please explain.

***Technological concerns***

What technological skills do you need to acquire in order to learn about virtual space of modern museum art? Please explain.

How different do you see the quality of electronic images of modern museum art? Please explain.

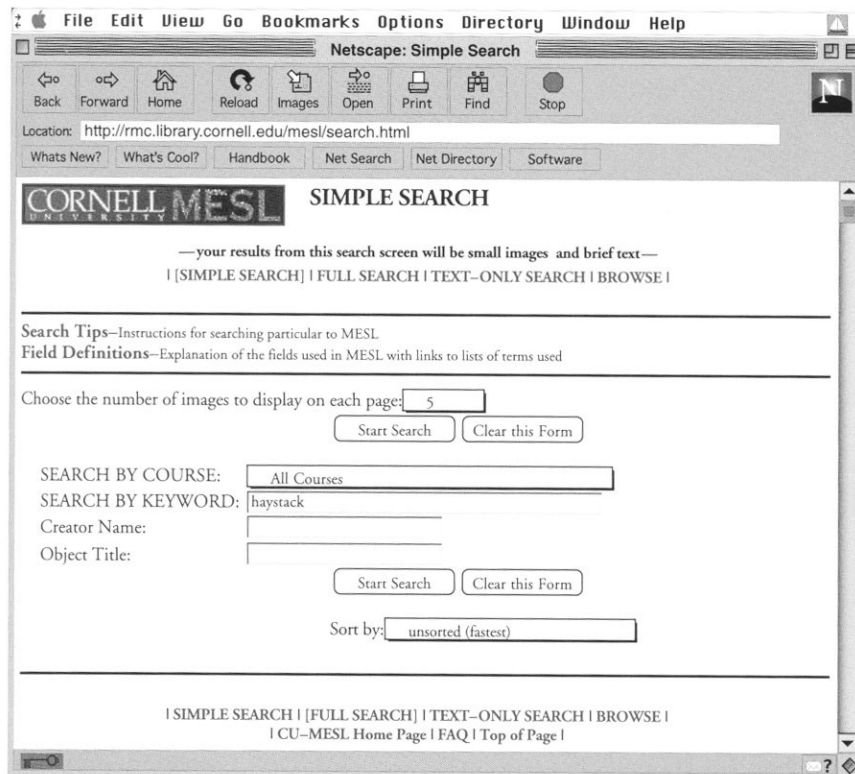
Do you think that instructors at Kuwait University should use technology to develop or enhance teaching modern museum art? Please explain.

Do you think that electronic means would change or influence the value of modern museum art? Please explain.

***Other Concerns***

What do you think about the idea of constructing an online/virtual space of modern museum art at Kuwait University?

Do you have any other recommendations?



**Figure 1**

Example of Query Screen - Cornell University MESL Site

Besser, H. (1998). Delivering Digital Images  
Cultural Gertage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Univcersities.

The J. Paul Gerry Trust. California:

The Getty information Institute, p. 75.



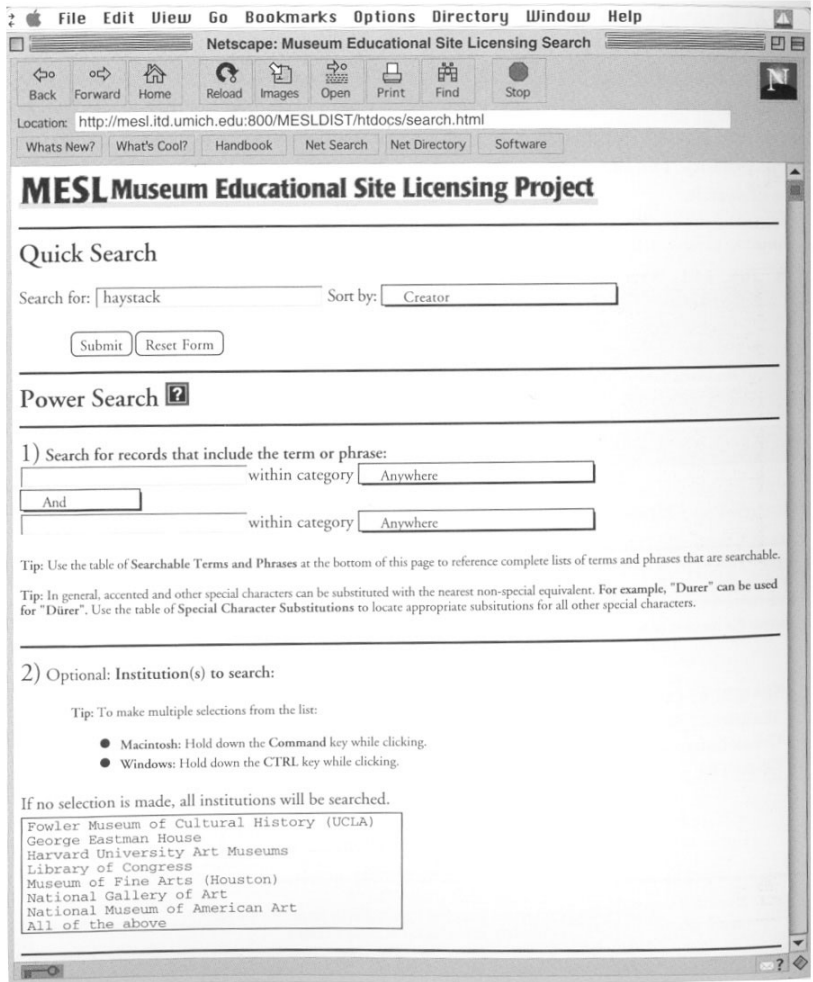


Figure 2

Example of Query Screen - University of Michigan MESL Site

Besser, G. (1998). Delivering Digital Images  
Cultural Heritage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Universities

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 76.

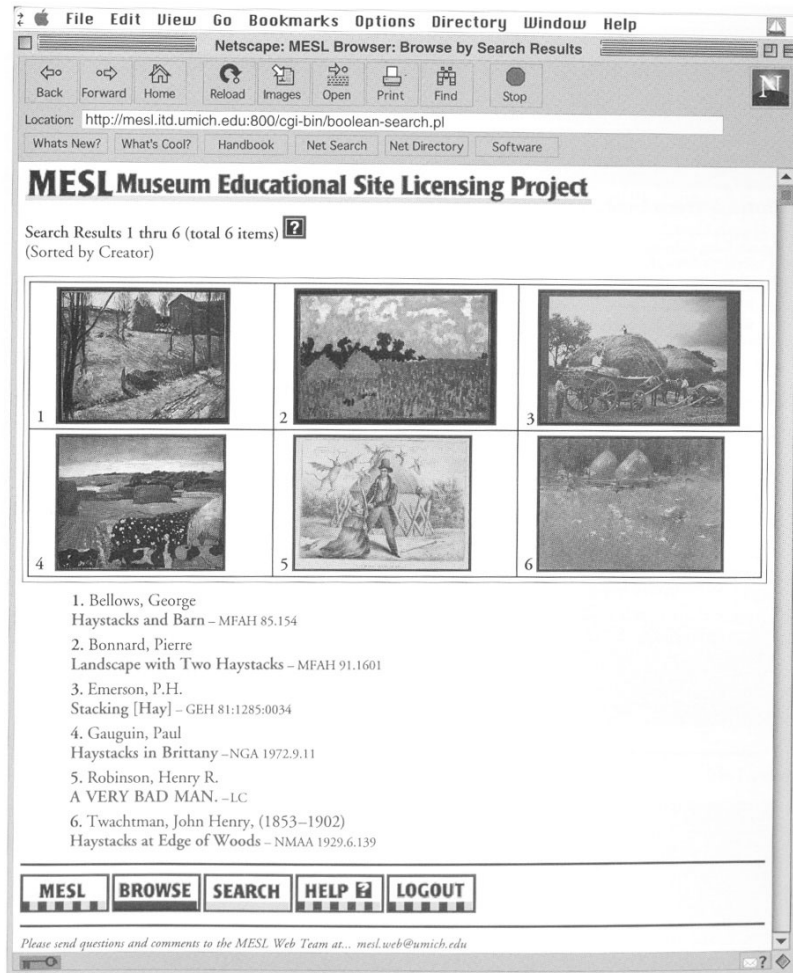


Figure 3

Example of Search Results Returned for "Haystack" - University of Michigan

Besser, H. (1998). Delivering Digital Images  
Cultural Heritage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Universities

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 77.

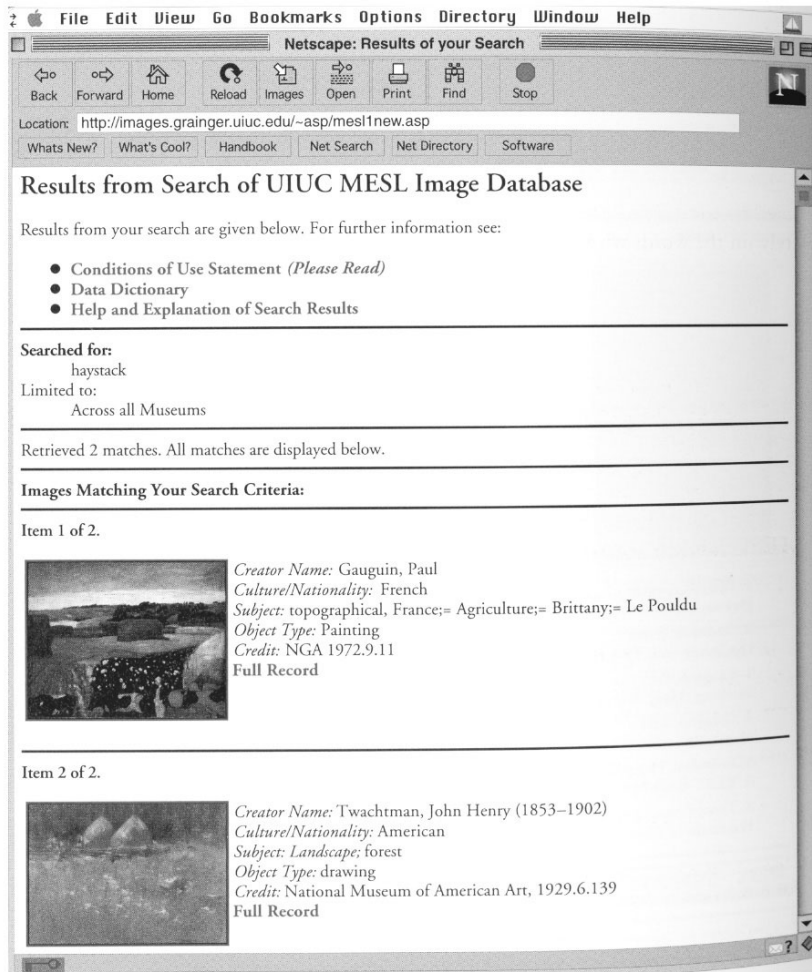


Figure 4

Example of Search Results Returned for "Haystack" - University of Illinois

Besser, H. (1998). Delivering Digital Images  
Cultural Heritage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Universities

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 79.

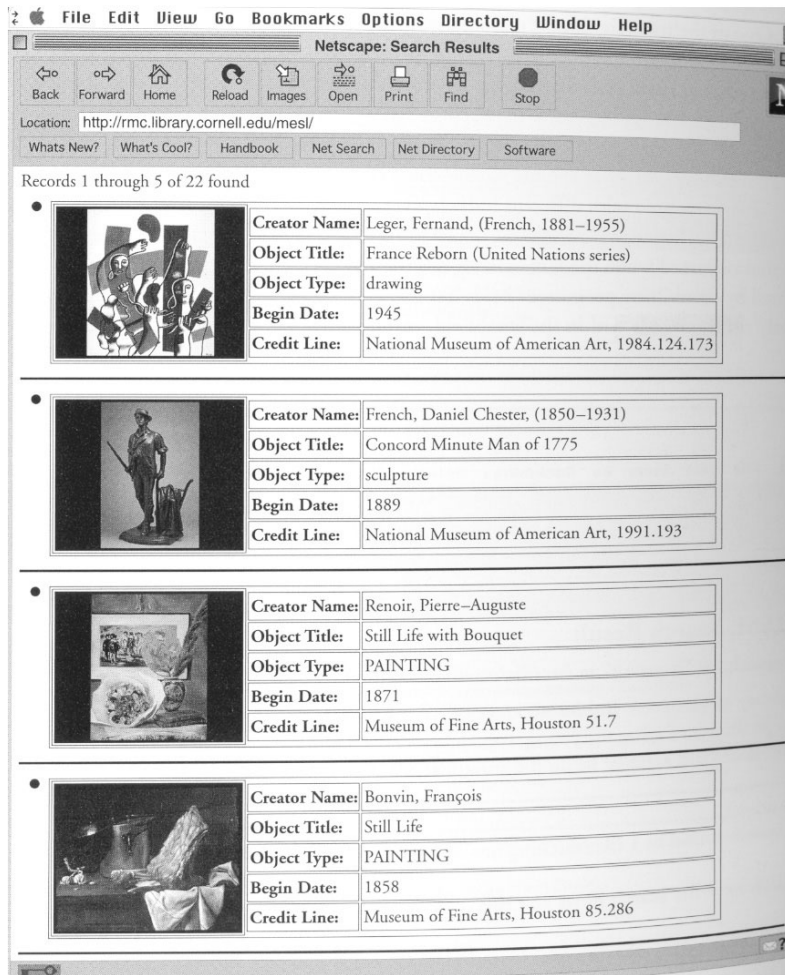


Figure 5

Example of Search REesults Teturned for "French Still Life" - Cornell University

Besser, H. (1998). Delivering Digital Images

Cultural Heritage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Universities

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 80.

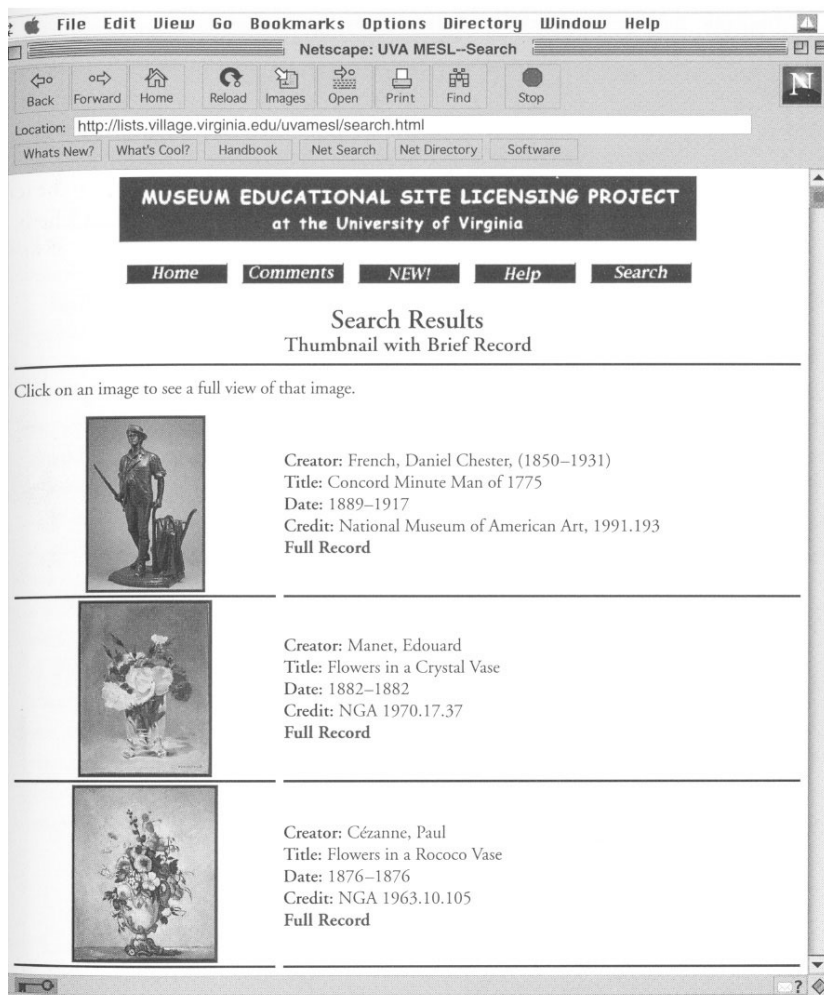


Figure 6

Example of Search Results Returned for "French Still Life" - Cornell University

Besser, H. (1998). Delivering Digital Images

Cultural Heritage Resources for Education.

MESL Implementation at the Universities

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 81.

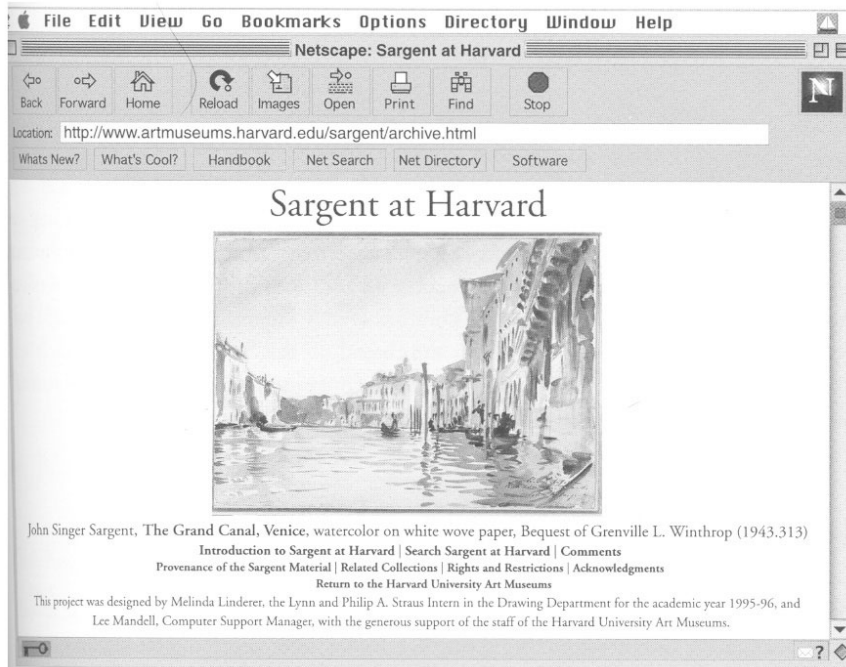


Figure 7

Sargent at Harvard Wdb sit home page

Stewart, M. (1998). Images Online

Perspective on the Museum Educational Site Licensing Project.

Experiments at the Harvard Art Museums: MESL as a Catalyst for Change.

The J. Paul Getty Trust. California:

The Getty Information Institute. p. 65.