

Differences in the subject analysis of
digitised art works (drawings, prints and posters)
and their originals

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S W E D E N

For many years, art librarians and museum experts, intermediaries between recorded and stored knowledge and their users, have been preoccupied with one problem and that is how to record, analyse, describe and store the recorded knowledge, so that it can be retrieved when requested by users. We will certainly all agree that there is a huge difference between an original drawing or a print and their reproductions which can be in the form of a photograph, a glass negative or a digital reproduction stored on CD or DVD. Regardless of the medium used in the reproduction of an original art work, clear distinction between an original and its reproduction must be made, both in the formal and subject description of the original and its reproduction.

Each art work presents an integral and inseparable unity of three elements: content, form and materials. In fact, without the unity of these three elements there is no art work, as well as there is no relevant description, formal and subject, if we do not take into account all three elements. As opposed to an art work, each textual work, regardless of the medium of presentation, remains the same both in content and in its artistic value. Literary works written by Shakespeare remain the same whether they are printed in book form or placed on CD, DVD, or if you read them from the distance, sitting by your computer, while there is an immense difference between the representation of an original drawing of *Madonna with sleeping Jesus* by Julije Klović and the reproduction of the same drawing on a photograph or on a CD.

Furthermore, we must not disregard the purpose of a reproduction. As museum experts or art librarians, we are obligated to reproduce an original art work, but if the purpose of this reproduction is the protection of the original, it is sufficient that its description contains call number, the technique used and when it was made. However, if the reproduced work is used in the creation of new work and has the elements of an independent work, that is when an original is patterned on a new work, such as postcards, often representing reproductions of paintings of many artists, in that case these reproduced paintings on postcards are subject, that is, the theme of these postcards, as special type of material and are parts of collections of many institutions and museums.

In art collections and museums, beside serving the purpose of protection of the original, reproductions also offer better information, which is especially apparent when new media and technologies of reproduction are used, when information is available from the distance, so that users, no matter in which part of the world they presently are, may retrieve information on how particular work looks like, as well as all other relevant data about the author of the work, when reproduction was made, the techniques used, and the subject represented. New technologies are of great help both to curators in managing the collections and users, because the initial information and the selection of the material are made by using reproductions protecting originals to be preserved for the future, and at the same time, information requested by users is retrieved faster, is more complete, and there is no need to travel sometimes hundreds of kilometers to find it.

When particular collection owns the original, then the cataloguing of the reproduction is not necessary, it suffices to add in the catalogued record information about all reproductions of the original work owned by a museum or a gallery. Subject cataloguing, that is, the selection of subject headings is done only on the basis of the original and they are selected following the principles defined for the subject cataloguing of visual materials, but the selection of subject headings depends also of the type of the collection or a museum as well as of the type of the material within a collection, so that the choice of the form heading *Drawings* will not be of use in the collection owning some ten thousand various drawings. However, an original may serve as a pattern for the new work. In the absence of having originals of great masters of painting like Michelangelo or Tizian, the manner of presenting representations of masterpieces beside the privileged ones on courts or in the churches and in monasteries, was by using prints and their copies so making them available to art lovers, but the masters of graphic arts, had not forgotten the painters who were the real creators of the masterpieces and the name of the master was always notified, then the name of the artisan who cut the plate, and the publisher who was responsible for the distribution. The artisan who did the cutting of the plate according to the pattern used, is the author of the sheet print which will evolve after impressing of the plate. The other two will not be left out and they were considered as the second and the third author. The same refers to

photograph. If a photographer shoots a particular art work, then he is the author of the photograph, and not the author of the original art work. Photography, the same as prints, through time, surpassed the phase from the medium used exclusively for reproduction purposes, to a respectable artistic expression still appreciated by many. New technologies with their incredible technical possibilities, offer great potential in dissemination of visual information, but digital medium takes on an impressive position in presenting artistic expressions, so that ink-jet is widely used in presenting modern artistic expression on prints.

Very often, in everyday work, we come across some absurd situations. When a photograph reproduces an art painting, reproduction is mistaken for the original, so that the painter is treated as the author of the reproduction. If, however, the reproduction was the representation of a three-dimensional object, then we had no levelling between the original and its reproduction. Finally, reproduction and the work reproduced have been totally levelled, and in the physical description of the reproduced work we may find information that the dimensions of the print 520x380mm which originated in 1922, became the size 15x9cm and was made in 1974. These data do not refer to print sheet, but to the postcard on which a print was reproduced. The description of physical elements relates to the reproduction, and not to the original. The physical description itself is important but should not replace the physical description of the work reproduced. An acknowledgment of the fact that a reproduced work is a special type of subject would help solving this confusion. Unfortunately, the same happens with the digitised material. The work reproduced on CD or DVD is catalogued as original including graphic techniques and the author of the original, with the addition of the publisher and the year of publishing which makes the whole situation even more absurd, and we have the situation in which a mediaeval master printer becomes the author of a CD made in 2005.

Modern technologies help us to provide information which reaches users in the fastest possible ways and over, not so long ago, unimaginable distances with greatly improved quality but we

should not mistake an original for its reproduction made for the purposes of protection and the better quality of information provided by digital reproduction, with the work originated on the pattern of the original such as postcards made by using particular painting and are considered as special type of collection material.