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Literature Review
Multimedia Arts Minor
April 29, 2010

THERE'S (really impressive) ART (on display) ON CAMPUS?

Every day of the year, art from both the Tufts University permanent art collection as well as temporary shows is on view and open to the public. Whether the viewer chooses to stroll through the Slater Concourse Gallery or to peruse the library walls to see some of the 150+ artworks on display there, art is accessible to the extent that it is hardly recognized as being the unique opportunity to view high caliber art that it is. Venues exist on campus solely for the displaying of art; this is most notably the Tufts University Art Gallery, located in the rear of the Aidekman Arts Center.

The Tufts University Art Gallery was founded in 1952 as a room in the basement of the Cohen Arts Center. Since then it has sprawled into a 4000 square foot exhibition space with a permanent collection displayed all over its 150 acre campus. The original context of the gallery, then called Gallery 11, was to display student and faculty work. Since its founding, the gallery presented all thesis exhibitions of the Master of Fine Arts candidates in the SMFA program, giving these artists their first professional gallery show. When these shows were not up, another large percentage of the shows on display were through classes in the Art History department. Since the 1980's, the gallery has expanded its range of exhibitions to include artists not affiliated with Tufts University. When the Aidekman Arts Center was built in 1991, the gallery finally had a publicly accessible venue on campus to display art and the caliber of art being shown was significantly enhanced.

Tufts University has its own art collection that is sometimes on display in the art gallery but is mostly displayed in several locations around the Medford and Downtown campuses. At this time there

is no map depicting where art is on campus, nor a description of what art is in which building. Thus members of the Tufts community are not aware that art is in their midst while visitors with an interest in seeing art have no way of knowing where to look. I hope to close this void by providing an interactive map of where art is on campus along with a walking tour for those interested in seeing all the art that Tufts has to offer. Furthermore, I would like to include a list of “highlights” of the permanent collection to showcase art from the permanent collection that is not readily on display for the general public (including work on display in the Gifford House, departmental offices, etc.)

BUT...WHAT'S THE POINT?

An art collection is a cultural gem that not all college campuses have the privilege of having. Art tells us a lot about our past, both individually and nationally. Viewers are mentally stimulated and engage with the art, whether they know it or not. Art galleries provide an escape from the world where the viewer can look at, interact with, and enjoy art. They are also a unique portal into the past. Artifacts that are on display in the Aidekman Arts Center are firsthand objects that existed during the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Students study in the library amidst dozens of artworks that they are not even aware exist. Visitors to the Tufts campus may be persuaded to send their children here knowing that in addition to academics and athletics, Tufts has pride in the arts, with an easily navigable map of all the locations on campus with art. Art should be accessible to everybody and with the Tufts art collection, it is. I just want to spread the word so that everybody can enjoy the art. By creating links to the permanent collection through the art gallery’s existing website, I am hoping to draw more traffic through the art gallery site to increase interest in visiting it. That way, visitors who come to see the gallery may also

opt to walk around the campus and see more art. This is a win-win situation for the visitors and for Tufts, as the viewers see more art, Tufts benefits from the visit and from the word-of-mouth publicity this is likely to garner.

IS THE WEB CONDUCIVE TO DISPLAYING ART?

Like a gallery space before a show is hung, creating a website for an art collection starts off as a white wall. There are so many ways that the developer can organize and design the site. The challenge is to draw in viewers; with the surge of more people using the internet and becoming more connected, publicity to a larger audience is key.

In North America alone, internet usage has increased 134% since 2000. As the web becomes accessible to a larger population, the importance of a navigable website increases. People can use the internet for anything from checking the news and weather to shopping and maintaining a blog. The trick to having people find and actually take the time to explore the Tufts University Art Gallery website is to make it catchy. Furthermore, it has to be enticing enough to keep the viewer looking at the website long enough to discover links to the permanent collection. As Jakob Nielson explains, "websites must be painfully clear about a company's purpose," and thus, it is important for me to design the website so that the viewer can easily find what they are looking for.

How is this done? Making an appealing site is not an easy feat. For any website, the developer needs to design a site that is easy to navigate without losing the institution's personality. A site can be done using software like Fireworks, DreamWeaver and Flash. Similarly, it can be built from scratch using HTML, Python, and Javascript to name a few. A template can be used as well. Once the design is established, the next important component is the color choice. Most modern monitors can

accommodate 16,384 different colors. But what colors to use? These are some of the important decisions that go into making a website; however, these choices often go unnoticed by the viewer.

What many viewers do not realize is how important color is for their overall experience with the website. A survey of different artistic institutions helps show that the color scheme has a direct affect on the viewer's perception of the museum or gallery space.

The Metropolitan Museum website employs a palette of calming, pastel colors (Figure 1). The museum itself is an old-fashioned, mammoth building with works of art spanning six continents and thousands of years. This is an overwhelming amount of art and thus, a pastel background helps the viewer stay focused so that he or she can navigate the somewhat confusing website. Like the museum itself, the Metropolitan website breaks their collection online down into categories. Within those categories are more categories until finally, the viewer locates whatever he or she was looking for. The soothing background colors do a good job of keeping with the sophisticated, classic air of the museum and its girth of artworks.



Figure 1. Main page for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the same way that the Metropolitan Museum of Art uses color to calm the viewers while they search through an enormously vast collection of art, the Museum of Modern Art's website reflects a more colorful, modern persona (Figure 2). The background, like the wall color of the entire museum, is white. This allows for constant contrast which, like in the physical museum, helps the art stand out. This gives the site a more contemporary look; this is very fitting as it is a museum for modern art. Thus, it is clear that museum spaces use color to portray their institutional personalities.

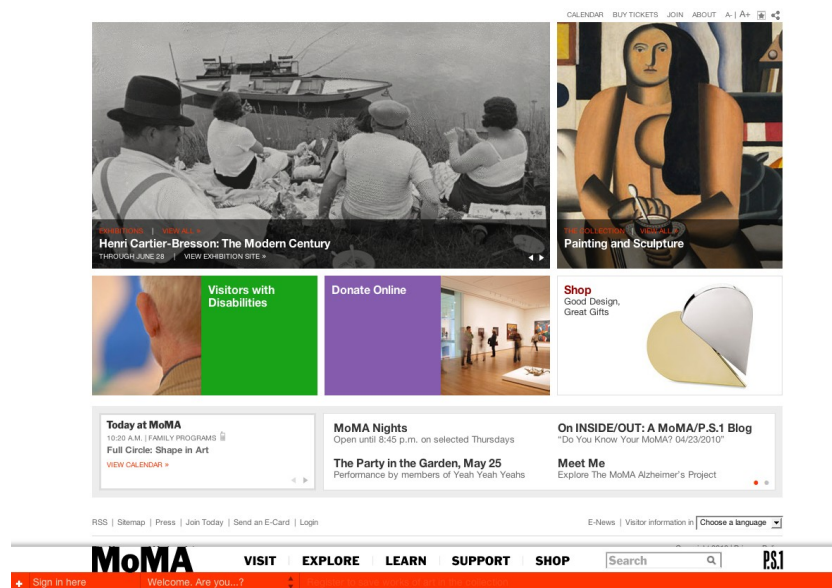


Figure 2. Main page for the Muesum of Modern Art, New York.

The Tufts University permanent art collection faces a larger challenge in displaying a personality. Unlike museums, the permanent collection is on display in several buildings and is periodically rotated. Thus, the website needs to be able to adapt to art is on display. For instance, the Albright-Knox gallery in Buffalo, New York prides itself on its vision to display contemporary and modern art. Like the Museum of Modern Art website, they employ a white background with colorful accents to invoke their modernist persona (Figure 3). They have a permanent collection, largely of

modern art, and showcase it periodically.

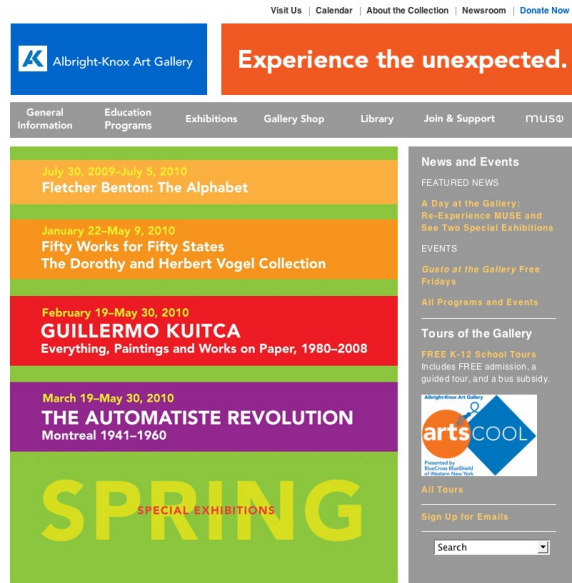


Figure 3. Main page for the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

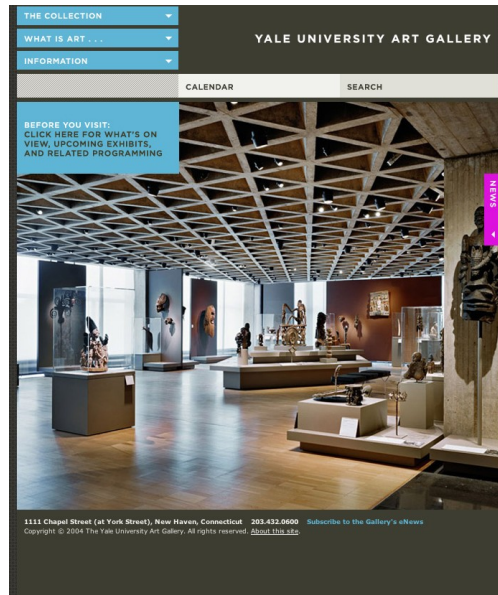


Figure 4. Main page for the Yale University Art Gallery

In contrast, the Yale University Art Gallery has a permanent art collection that recalls the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection. Their exhibitions represent work from all over the world and spanning centuries. Like the Metropolitan, their website uses color (Figure 4). Unlike the pastel tones

of the Metropolitan website, the Yale gallery uses brighter, more piercing color. The catchier palette draws the viewer in more but at times conflicts with the text and images on the page.

A general trend for university galleries was that if it had a substantial collection and wide variety of shows that they exhibited, they generally used pastel colors as their backgrounds and muted colored text, or a white background with earth-tone shades of text. This contrasts galleries with a more contemporary approach, which use white background and highly contrasting colored text.

Tufts University has a unique position with regards to displaying art. Unlike other museum and institutional spaces, Tufts has an art gallery and a permanent collection that is largely on display. Furthermore, the gallery programming includes two Museum of Fine Arts Master's Thesis shows a year and every summer has a juried show of local artists. Thus, the Tufts gallery is much more outreach and community oriented than many other galleries. When these shows are not on display however, the exhibitions typically consist of modern and contemporary art. The permanent collection is on display in buildings ranging from administrative offices to the music center. Such a wide variety in locations also serves as a hindrance to a uniform personality for art on campus.

Therefore, based on the stylistic analysis outlined above, the link to the permanent art collection should stem from the style of the Tufts University Art Gallery but be its own entity. Rather than have a white background with bright colors or a pastel background with earth tone colors, I want to display the art of the permanent collection with a black background, white text and select colors. For best legibility, complementary elements such as text and background should use complementary colors. I also think that white-on-black has a contemporary feel in its own right and that images will look nice on a black background. I also think this will help the viewer focus on the image.

For want of color, I will make all of the links have an image pop up when the viewer scrolls

over them. This will add an element of surprise to reflect the feeling of walking around campus and seeing art on campus when you'd least expect it. I think this scheme will keep the permanent collection section of the website separate but related to the rest of the website as well.

TELL ME ABOUT THE GALLERY! NO WAIT, I'LL GOOGLE IT

Websites are portals of information. However, if a website is not being used, it loses its sole purpose. In order to get hits, especially from people casually surfing the web, not looking for the Tufts University Art Gallery in particular, catchy keywords need to be implemented. According to a study from 2006 revealed that the most popular Web application of our participants was the Google search engine; over 15% of all page requests were sent to one of the national or international Google search sites, and 43% of all form submissions related to Google search. A Google search for “art gallery” brings up over 137 million pages. A more streamlined search for “art gallery Boston” brings up well over 4.5 million pages, this time including a list of local galleries situated on a map. I think an important step for the gallery is to make it onto that list; tourists with an interest in art are likely to do such a search and it would be ideal for them to see that Tufts has a gallery (and a good amount of art on campus) that they could visit during their trip.

Once the Tufts Art Gallery makes it to the search results, the website must be designed to keep the user there. On average, readers have time to read up to 28% of the words on a page before moving on; this means that the text on each page must be meaningful enough to be useful at about a quarter of its capacity. Similarly, the text should be targeted at different audiences depending on the area of the website; more scholarly writing can exist on a page more geared towards research (like an analysis of artwork) while more straightforward writing would be more useful for the general audience in

situations like the walking tour and directions to campus.

Images also have an important role on websites. For this project, it is important to have images of the artworks, as the site is geared towards drawing the audience in to see the work. Images are effective when they are used purposefully. If images are not part of the message, then don't use them. Rather than bombard the viewer with images from the permanent collection, I have designed the site to show only one piece of art at a time. In the interactive map section, once a building is clicked, there are links to images that are inside. If the user rolls over the link, the image pops up in the blank space next to the block of text. If the user clicks on the link, the image stays up in the same spot. If the user rolls over another image, the other image covers the previous image, thus maintaining one image on display at a time. Similarly, in the highlights section, only one piece can be seen at a time and the user must click a button to the right or left in order to see another image.

Other keywords alongside "art gallery" that finally bring the viewer to the Tufts gallery website as it stands are "university" and "Boston". I think if a search for "contemporary art in Boston" or "art in Boston" could bring the Tufts gallery website to the first result page, the site would have a much wider audience. Similarly, a search for any artist that exhibits at the gallery should list the gallery as one of the results. These are all keyword options that I am going to explore with this website.

Another way to expand the scope of the website would be to promote it via online ads. If websites like Boston.com and other Boston-based sites had a link to the website, several more people would easily find out about that gallery that otherwise would not have.

WILL THIS REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Ultimately, I think that a clear, interesting website will make people want to visit the gallery

and by extension, see the art on campus. If search results display a link to the gallery, especially broad searches like “contemporary art in Boston,” people will naturally make the Tufts gallery another stop on their itineraries.

A majority of Tufts students do not know that there is a breadth of art on campus. If they took the time to see it and reflect on it, this would expand their cultural horizons. The next step is to make the student body and the Tufts community at large aware that there is a truly great collection of artworks easily accessible to them. They need to know that there are several museum-caliber pieces in the library alone! By creating a walking tour of the art on campus the students could easily see art in places that they already frequent.

Many gallery visitors request to see the permanent collection. In a survey conducted by the gallery, fifty percent of the Tufts population were not aware that Tufts had a permanent art collection, nor that it was displayed all around the campus. I hope to have a map of all the buildings on campus with thumbnails of the works of art in each. That way, anybody at Tufts can easily see and know where permanent collection pieces are and it may even make people want to visit from off campus if they feel like they are coming to see more than just a single exhibition.

Thus, the gallery website will be able to draw more traffic onto the Tufts campus and provide Tufts members with an in-depth way to explore their cultural horizons.

Unpublished gallery document. "History of the Tufts Gallery"

HYPERLINK "http://www.princetonreview.com/TuftsUniversity.aspx"
<http://www.princetonreview.com/TuftsUniversity.aspx>

Kristen Heintz-Perkins, Tufts University Art Gallery History, unpublished document, 2009

HYPERLINK "http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats14.html"
<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats14.html>

HYPERLINK "http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_colors.asp"
http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_colors.asp

HYPERLINK "http://www.metmuseum.org/" <http://www.metmuseum.org/>

HYPERLINK "http://www.moma.org/" <http://www.moma.org/>

HYPERLINK "<http://www.albrightknox.org/geninfo.html>"<http://www.albrightknox.org/geninfo.html>
See the downloadable pdf "General Gallery info in English"

Tufts University Art Gallery Fall 2009 Visitor/Audience Survey
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/percent-text-read.html>

Harald Weinreich, Hartmut Obendorf, Eelco Herder, and Matthias Mayer: "Not Quite the Average: An Empirical Study of Web Use," in the ACM Transactions on the Web, vol. 2, no. 1 (February 2008), article #5.

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/pr.html>

http://universalusability.com/access_by_design/images/purpose.html

http://universalusability.com/access_by_design/color/introduction.html