

## *Core Categories for Visual Resources* **A Draft Proposed by the VRA Data Standards Committee<sup>1</sup>**

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### I. A Brief History of the Data Standards Committee and Its Work

In 1993, the Visual Resources Association established the Data Standards Committee (DSC) to meet the visual resources community's growing need to manage complex visual collections in a networked environment. Charged with promoting standards that facilitate the management, organization, and exchange of information, the committee's mission is threefold: (1) to identify, develop, and disseminate information that promotes standard descriptive practices, (2) to communicate visual resources interests to public agencies and commercial vendors that make policy or develop tools and resources applicable to visual collections, (3) to establish liaisons and cooperative exchanges with similar interest groups in the museum, library, and archival communities.

Beginning with a project designed to study cataloging practices in visual resources collections, the committee collected data elements from over sixty institutions in the United States and Canada. The individual lists of elements were compiled into a master list and subdivided into four sections: elements that describe the object depicted; elements that describe the image and its "physical container" (slide, photograph, digital image); elements that describe collection management data; and elements that are included in ancillary files such as artist authority files.

This master list of elements was compared to the Getty Information Institute's (formerly AHIP) *Categories for the Description of Works of Art* (CDWA) in order to take advantage of the substantial prior work it contains;<sup>2</sup> and where applicable, data elements from the master list were mapped to CDWA equivalents. The committee found that the CDWA was particularly strong on those elements used in the description of art objects. It was not entirely satisfactory for the description of images and, in particular, did not cover all of the elements needed for the description of architecture.

The committee developed a template, similar to the CDWA structure, to accommodate the descriptions of the elements in the master list. Each element includes a definition, a discussion of related issues (use of controlled vocabularies, implications for record structure, descriptive practice, etc.), and an equivalent MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) tag. This draft document of about thirty pages was sent to outside reviewers from the visual resources and related art information communities.<sup>3</sup> They were asked to provide comments and recommend a format for distribution to the visual resources

community. The creation of a minimal record was suggested, but this was later expanded to a more substantial "core" record by adopting the recent Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) model.<sup>4</sup>

### II. Description of the Core

The VRA core group of data categories has been developed for describing surrogate images of art and architecture in visual resources collections and for sharing that information electronically. The core categories represent a level between minimal and full description and suggest which data elements are recommended in order to describe an item in a visual resources collection in a shared environment. The core level of description may be distinguished, on one hand, from a minimal level, which would specify the fewest elements required to uniquely identify, locate, and account for an item in a visual resources collection; on the other hand, the core level is distinguished from a full or exhaustive level of description. The core level is more desirable; when possible, the inclusion of categories beyond the core should be considered. Thus, core categories may serve as a template for selecting the information visual resources collections would share from the total amount of documentation available.

The Data Standards Committee excluded many categories of information from this core. Not listed are such object categories as ownership/collecting history and related works as well as a whole host of collection management categories related to label production and slide circulation. The committee has tried to limit its efforts in order to present something that is both coherent and useful. We hope, therefore, that visual resources professionals, system vendors, and others working on data standards will consider this initial publication as a draft set of core categories that may be improved by suggestions from the relevant professional communities

### III. Outline of the Core Categories for Visual Resources

The core categories are mapped to the Getty Information Institute's CDWA. This Getty project developed and documented many of the data categories relevant to visual resources needs. We saw no reason to duplicate its efforts and therefore borrowed heavily from the CDWA for category definitions and terminology suggestions.<sup>5</sup> For a much more complete description of each CDWA category and its related subcategories, be sure to consult the CDWA itself. However, the DSC found some shortcomings in the CDWA with regard to surrogate images and categories for describing architecture and other site-specific works of art. We have had to adapt or redefine some of the CDWA categories to reflect the point of view of the visual resources community.

Each category has also been mapped to MARC in recognition of the importance of MARC as a potential standard for

visual resources collections, particularly those in libraries and archives. This should be helpful to collections considering MARC applications. We hope, too, that it will further the dialogue among those using MARC as they discuss which MARC field should contain what category of information. At the request of the DSC, the VRA Board petitioned the Library of Congress in June 1996 for representation on the USMARC Advisory Committee. This committee helps to make changes in the MARC record and could recommend changes to better accommodate visual resources.

#### IV. Using the Core Categories

The VRA core can serve as a guide for developing local databases and cataloging records. The core categories are not instructions for developing database systems or record structure, but they may be used to form a hinged or jointed structure that can be accommodated in local systems in a variety of ways. The committee has tried to keep the categories system neutral and independent of any specific configuration.

The VRA core categories are neither instructions for developing content nor cataloging rules. However, there are related issues such as the use of controlled vocabularies that are relevant to their development and use. The content of any database should reflect its primary users and the core categories should be used to structure this content, not stipulate it. Consequently, while the DSC found the terminology sections of the CDWA very useful and have included them in our draft core when appropriate, we have not specified content. However, the committee has come up against some content issues that it could not ignore entirely.

1. *Defining the object.* We have already noted that the core categories include both object and image information. However, what constitutes an art "object" is often difficult to determine. As the committee discussed how different types of objects could be accommodated by our proposed categories, it quickly became apparent how difficult it was to determine what constituted the relevant object for description. In describing a sixteenth-century engraving of St. Peter's, should St. Peter's or the engraving be considered the "object"? We concluded that this kind of content decision should be made at the local level and could not be answered in the formulation of the core categories.

2. *Specificity of terminology.* When these categories have been presented to small groups for testing, a frequent question is how to decide how specific a term should be used (e.g. prints vs. etchings vs. soft-ground etchings). Again, the content of the database should reflect its primary users and decisions concerning specificity of terms should be made at the local level.

3. *Categories and fields.* The committee has tried to avoid thinking of the categories as fields in a record. But we all must, at some point, do just that. These categories of information, when "fielded," will have specific characteristics and requirements. In some instances—CREATOR, NATIONALITY, and CULTURE for example—local requirements might dictate that only one of the three categories is used for any given record.

4. *Data content.* In wrestling with the core categories, the committee has often used specific examples as test cases. We are then, in some ways, delving into record structures and data content, areas for which we are not suggesting standards. We have discovered, however, some areas where "requirements" can be suggested. One typical requirement is repeatability, for we have discovered that many of these categories of information will require, at the level of specific content, more than one value (e.g., more than one subject term for a particular work of art). Obvious, too, is the importance of vocabulary and authority control and standards for data content are often implied or suggested in the terminology section of several of the categories.

#### V. This is a Draft for Visual Resources Professionals

This draft of the core categories has been developed for the visual resources community, i.e. for professionals who manage collections of surrogate images. Other data standards projects exist, each from a different point of view and for a different user group or institution. But as aptly stated in the *International Guidelines for Museum Object Information...*,<sup>6</sup> the term "data standards" is misleading since something is "not standard until widely used." With this in mind, the VRA core categories are intended for use by the visual resources community to advance the interests of this group in their continuing efforts toward truly consensus-based standards.

The Data Standards Committee is submitting this draft core to solicit comment from visual resources professionals. We plan to produce an enhanced set of categories at a later date and hope that it will have benefited from input from the visual resources community. The DSC wants to know whether this core is adequate for storing and sharing information on visual surrogates of works of art and architecture. Specifically, please consider the format of the core descriptions and compare it with that used in the CDWA; and compare these core categories against your own record structure and against other standards.

Please send your comments by January 15, 1997, to Dustin Wees, Chair, Data Standards Committee, Clark Art Institute, Box 8, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267; tel: 413-458-9545; fax: 413-458-2336; e-mail: [dwees@clark.williams.edu](mailto:dwees@clark.williams.edu). 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The current members of the Data Standards Committee are Betsey Buckheit, Sheila Hannah, Carol Jackman-Schuller, Benjamin Kessler, Elisa Lanzi, Linda McRae (chair 1993-1995), Margaret Webster, Dustin Wees (chair 1995-1997), and Lynda White. Past members are James Bower, Christine Bunting, Margaret Emmons, Marlene Gordon, Nancy Schuller, Maryly Snow, Susan Wallace, and Linda Tompkins-Baldwin.

<sup>2</sup>*Categories for the Description of Works of Art*, Getty Art History and Information Program (now Getty Information Institute), 1996, may be obtained free of charge in a hypertext version on two diskettes from Getty AHIP, 401 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1100, Santa Monica, California 90401-1455; tel: 310-395-1025; fax: 310-451-5570; e-mail: gii@getty.edu. It is also available in its entirety, including full cataloging examples, from the Information Institute's website <http://www.gii.getty.edu>. *Visual Resources*, XI, nos. 3-4, is devoted to the CDWA and contains a series of issue papers, a print version of the outline of the categories, their brief definitions, and the bibliography of controlled vocabulary sources. The hypertext version was also issued with *Visual Resources*, XI.

<sup>3</sup>We are extremely grateful to the many people who have helped the committee with its work. We would like to list here those who have been particularly supportive through their willingness to review our work: Matthew Barrett, Scott Bell, Sherman Clarke, Janice Eklund, Eileen Fry, Kody Janney, Roy McKeown, Charlotte Nolan, and Alfred Willis.

<sup>4</sup>For information on the Program for Cooperative Cataloging contact Ann Della Porta, Cooperative Cataloging Team Leader, Regional and Cooperative Cataloging Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540-4383; tel: 202-707-7920; e-mail: dellapor@mail.loc.gov.

<sup>5</sup>We have not reproduced the CDWA's bibliography. See Note 2 for sources of the complete CDWA, including the bibliography of controlled vocabulary sources.

<sup>6</sup>*International Guidelines for Museum Object Information: The CIDOC [International Committee for Documentation] Information Categories* was edited by a joint project team of the CIDOC Data and Terminology and the CIDOC Data Model Working Groups; published by the International Committee for the Documentation of the International Council of Museums; editors Alice Grant, Josephine Nieuwenhuis, and Toni Petersen, June, 1995. Print copies are available in the United States from Art & Architecture Thesaurus, 62 Stratton Road, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267; tel: 413-458-2151; fax: 413-458-3757; e-mail: aat@aat.getty.edu.

## The Core Categories

### Object Categories

#### 1. Object Type

*Definition:* The kind of object or work described (e.g., refectory table, altarpiece, portfolio, drawing, drinking vessel, temple, garden, palace, cathedral).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT (especially Objects facet), ACRL/RBMS Binding Terms, ACRL/RBMS Genre Terms, ACRL/RBMS Paper Terms, ACRL/RBMS Printing and Publishing Evidence, Base Merimee: Lexique, the British Archaeological Thesaurus, Glass Subject Index for the Visual Arts, ICOM Costume Terms, Index of Jewish Art, ISO 5127-3: Iconic Documents, ISO 5127-11: Audio-visual Documents, LC Descriptive Terms for Graphic Materials, Moving Image Materials, Revised Nomenclature, Reynies' Le Mobilier Domestique, and Tozzer Library Headings.

CDWA: Object/Work-Type.  
MARC: 654, 655.

#### 2. Techniques

*Definition:* The names of processes or techniques used in the creation of a work (e.g., drawing, sculpting, painting, impasto, gilding, burnishing, overpainting, frame construction, cantilever construction).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT (especially Processes and Techniques hierarchy), ACRL/RBMS Binding Terms, or the Index of Jewish Art.

CDWA: Materials and Techniques-Processes or Techniques-Name.  
MARC: 340.

#### 3. Materials

*Definition:* The types of materials of which an object is composed (e.g., oil paint, ink, graphite, chalk, laid paper, wood, canvas, burlap sacking, ink, marble, gut, fur, quarter-sawn lumber, cast iron).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT (especially Materials hierarchy), ACRL/RBMS Paper Terms, the British Archaeological Thesaurus, and Revised Nomenclature.

CDWA: Materials and Techniques-Materials-Name.  
MARC: 340.

#### 4. Dimensions

*Definition:* Information about the size, shape, and scale of a work of art, particularly its dimensions [e.g., 39.5 x 67.4 cm, 45 cm (diameter), 14 3/4 x 20 1/8 inches (plate mark)].

CDWA: Measurements-Dimensions.  
MARC: 340.

#### 5. Titles

*Definition:* The identifying phrases given to a work of art or architecture [e.g., Venus and Cupid, Noli me tangere, Portrait of Thomas Jefferson, Ceramic fruit bowl, Untitled, White House, Versailles, Petit Trianon (where Versaille is the Larger Entity Name), Winchester Cathedral, Expulsion (where Brancacci Chapel, S.M. del Carmine is the Larger Entity Name)].

*Terminology:* For titles of works of art, the name preferred by the repository should be used. Titles can also be object-type names with qualifying phrases.

CDWA: Titles or Names-Text.  
MARC: 245; variants: 242, 246, 247.

#### 6. Larger Entity Names

*Definition:* The identifying phrases given to the larger complex or entity of which a work of art or architecture is or was a part [e.g., the name of the altarpiece (Merode Altarpiece) when the center panel (Annunciation) is the title, the name of the palace (Versailles) when the garden structure (Petit Trianon) is the title, the name of the temple (formerly Parthenon) from which the sculptural group (Three Goddesses) was removed, the complex (Brancacci Chapel, S.M. del Carmine) in which the fresco (Tribute Money) was painted].

*Terminology:* Sources of names of architectural structures include Tozzer Library Headings, Canadiana Authorities, and LC Name Authorities. For titles of works of art, the name preferred by the repository should be used.

CDWA: Compare with: Original Context-Architectural-Building/ Site-Name and Related Works-Identification-Titles or Names.  
MARC: 773, 580.

#### 7. Dates

*Definition:* Any date or range of dates associated with the creation, design, or production of the work of art or its components (e.g., 1667, ca. 1210, 17th century, before 952 BCE, reign of Rameses II, 1821-1835).

*Terminology:* Dates can be recorded in two ways: as text (illustrated in the above examples), and as two integers indicating the beginning of a date span and the end of a date span (dates BCE can be stored as negative values). Rigidly controlled format is required to allow retrieval. The use of date guidelines is recommended, such as the AAT Date Guidelines or ISO 8601: Dates & Times.

CDWA: Creation-Date.

MARC: 260c.

## 8. Subjects

*Definition:* Indexing terms that characterize what the work depicts, what is depicted in it, or what concepts are expressed by the work. These include generic terms (e.g., woman, enclosed garden, sarcophagus lid, ceiling plaster), proper nouns and traditional iconographic terms (e.g., Three Graces; George Washington; Asa-yama Mountain, Honshu, Japan), and concepts (e.g., truth, sacrifice). This category also includes the use of codes which stand for subject terms (e.g., ICONCLASS notations).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT or LCSH. For iconographic themes, controlled vocabularies include ICONCLASS (the codes may be used to represent the subject terms), Garnier's Thesaurus iconographique, the Index of Jewish Art, and LC Thesaurus for Graphic Materials. For identified persons or groups, an authority file is recommended; vocabulary resources include Canadiana Authorities, LC Name Authorities, and ULAN. For identified geographic places, an authority file is recommended; vocabulary resources include TGN, BGN, Canadiana Authorities, LC Name Authorities, and LCSH.

CDWA: Subject Matter-Description-Indexing Terms and Subject Matter-Identification-Indexing Terms.

MARC: 65x.

## 9. Repository Name

*Definition:* The name of the repository that currently houses the work. If the work is lost, stolen, or destroyed, this category identifies the last known repository and states that the work has been lost, stolen, or destroyed, or that the current repository is unknown (e.g., Graphische Sammlung Albertina; location unknown, formerly Dan Fellows Platt Collection).

*Terminology:* The use of an authority file of persons and corporate bodies is recommended; vocabulary resources include Canadiana Authorities and LC Name Authorities.

CDWA: Current Location-Repository Name.

MARC: 535I1a.

## 10. Repository Place

*Definition:* The geographic place where the repository is currently located. If the work is lost, stolen, or destroyed, this category identifies its last known geographic location [e.g., Vienna (Austria), formerly New York (NY, USA)].

*Terminology:* The use of consistent geographic place names is recommended; vocabulary resources include BGN, Canadiana Authorities, TGN, LC Name Authorities, and LCSH.

CDWA: Current Location-Geographic Location.

MARC: 535I1b-c.

## 11. Repository Number

*Definition:* Any unique identifiers assigned to a work by the current or last known repository (e.g., H1/503/1913, 1967.776).

CDWA: Current Location-Repository Numbers.

MARC: 024.

## 12. Site

*Definition:* The geographic place where a building/structure or other site-specific work of art was found or originally placed (though now in a repository) or where it is currently located. For ephemeral works of art (e.g., performance art, environmental works) and for buildings/structures that have not survived, this category identifies its last known geographic location (e.g., Vienna, Austria; formerly New York, NY, USA).

*Terminology:* The use of consistent geographic place names is recommended; vocabulary resources include BGN, Canadiana Authorities, TGN, LC Name Authorities, and LCSH.

CDWA: None.

MARC: 245b; 752.

## 13. Notes

*Definition:* The Notes category (included in the core for its practical rather than its conceptual value) gives the cataloger a place for comments, interpretation, summarization, history of the work, explanation of the content of other categories, (e.g., justification of an attribution to a particular artist in the Creation category). In the Notes category, differing opinions or evidence may be weighed and evaluated; additions and reuses explained, etc.

CDWA: Remarks.

MARC: 5xx.

## Creator Categories

### 14. Creator

*Definition:* The names, appellations, or other identifying phrases assigned to an individual, group of people, or corporate body that played a role in the creation or production of the work. Includes variant spellings, pseudonyms, transliterations, nicknames, maiden names, married names, and alternate names (e.g., Christopher Wren, Kicking Bear, Limbourg Brothers, Master of the Dido Panels, McKim, Mead, and White, Venturi and Rauch). Repeatable for additional creators (e.g., Michelangelo and Raphael, etc., for St. Peter's Basilica).

*Terminology:* The use of consistent forms of personal and corporate names is recommended: See for example, Canadiana Authorities, LC Name Authorities, ULAN, and Yale British Artists.

*CDWA:* Creation-Creator-Identity-Names  
*MARC:* 1xx, 7xx

### 15. Nationality

*Definition:* The country or nation-state where the creator of the work was born or of which he or she is a citizen or member, the country in which a group that created the work operated, or the country with which the creation of the work has been associated if no creator is named (e.g., English, Japanese, Siense). Nationality and citizenship should be broadly interpreted; this is not a legalistic definition

*Terminology:* The use of an authority of geographic places is recommended; vocabulary resources include BGN, Canadiana Authorities, TGN, LC Name Authorities, and Tozzer Library Headings.

*CDWA:* Creation-Creator-Identity-Nationality/Culture/Race-Nationality/Citizenship.  
*MARC:* 650 or 651.

### 16. Culture

*Definition:* The cultural group most commonly associated with an individual who played a part in the creation of a work, or the name of the culture from which a work originates, if no creator is named (e.g., Phrygian, Aztec, Berber).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended; examples include the AAT Styles and Periods hierarchy and Tozzer Library Headings.

*CDWA:* Creation-Creator-Identity-Nationality/Culture/Race-Culture.  
*MARC:* 650.

## Surrogate Categories

### 17. View Description

*Definition:* Terms, phrases, and prose descriptions that characterize the type of view of the work provided by the image (e.g., view from below, raking light, sunset; detail of hand, interior, bird's-eye view, axonometric, plan).

*Terminology:* The use of a controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT (especially the Visual Works, Processes and Techniques, Attributes and Properties, and Components hierarchies).

*CDWA:* Related Visual Documentation-View and Related Visual Documentation-View-Indexing Terms.  
*MARC:* 245p; 520; 505, 655.

### 18. Image Type

*Definition:* The generic identification of the medium of the image (e.g., photograph, slide, CD-ROM, JPEG, TIF).

*Terminology:* The use of controlled vocabulary is recommended, such as the AAT, the ACRL/RBMS Genre Terms, ISO 5127-3: Iconic Documents, ISO 5127-11: Audio-visual Documents, Moving Image Materials, LC Descriptive Terms for Graphic Materials, or Revised Nomenclature.

*CDWA:* Related Visual Documentation-Image Type.  
*MARC:* 300, 245lh.

### 19. Image Owner

*Definition:* The identification of the repository, agency, or individual that owns the related image, including the name and location of the owner (e.g., Frick Art Reference Library (New York, NY, USA)).

*Terminology:* The use of consistent forms of personal and corporate names is recommended; see for example, Canadiana Authorities, LC Name Authorities, ULAN, and Yale British Artists. An authority of geographic places is recommended for the location of the owner; vocabulary resources include Canadiana Authorities, TGN, LC Name Authorities, and Tozzer Library Headings. Or use Symbols of American Libraries to assign NUC symbols. The NUC symbol is the authoritative-agency data element.

*CDWA:* Related Visual Documentation-Image Ownership-Owner's Name.  
*MARC:* 850, 53511a, 852la.

20. Owner Number

*Definition:* The unique number(s), codes, or other identification assigned to the image by the owner, including accession number or bar code (e.g., 009876, GR/20.tif).

*CDWA:* Related Visual Documentation-Image Ownership-Owner's Number.

*MARC:* 035, 099, 852lc.

21. Source

*Definition:* The name and location of the agency, individual, or repository from which the image may be obtained, including owner's numbers and a bibliographic citation in the case of copy photography (e.g., Alinari, Florence, Italy).

*CDWA:* Related Visual Documentation-Image Source-Name and Related Visual Documentation-Image Source-Number.

*MARC:* 541.