

Artwork Provenance & Accession Number Assignment

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Purpose

- To learn about the ownership of an artwork and how it came into a museum's collection, while also learning ways of searching.
 - Learn about the importance of provenance for individual artworks.
 - Learn about the importance of accession numbers to easily locate an artwork within a museum's collection.

Intended Audience

- College-level students in a beginning art history or museum studies course

What is Provenance?

- As defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA):
 - 1. The origin or source of something. - 2. Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection.
- As defined by the Philadelphia Museum of Art:
 - Provenance is an artwork's history of ownership. Information about the provenance of an individual work of art sheds light on its historical, social, and economic context, as well as its critical fortunes through time. Knowledge about individual collectors and their collections can provide insights into the history of taste and the habits of collectors, dealers, and the relationships between them.

What is an Accession Number?

- As defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA):
 - A number or code assigned to uniquely identify a group of records or materials acquired by a repository and used to link the materials to associated records.
- From MakerBot, citing The Metropolitan Museum of Art:
 - The Metropolitan Museum of Art assigns a unique accession number to each object it acquires. The first two or four digits of an accession number refer to the year that the object became part of the Metropolitan's collection. The Museum was founded in 1870 and for the first 100 years of its existence two digits were used. Thus, the first item accessioned into the Museum has the number 70.1 because it was accessioned in 1870.

Why are they important?

- Provenance

- Having a clear provenance helps collectors know that an artwork is authentic.
- If there is a gap in provenance, the work may have been looted or stolen.
- “Celebrity provenance” can aid in market value if a celebrity figure owned the piece at one time.
- If a work claims to be from 17th century, but the Provenance only dates back to 1900s, it may be inauthentic.

- Accession Number

- This “inventory number” helps to easily locate a piece within a museum’s collection.
- Usually consists of year object was accessioned at museum, donor number, and object number (but can vary at each institution).

Assignment Part 1

Log into Bénézit (or perform a general Internet search if there is no access to Bénézit) to locate the museum that holds each piece of artwork listed in the table on the worksheet. Find the museum's website and conduct a search for the same artwork's object record. Complete the table by filling in the following information: museum collection, accession number, provenance, and link to museum's object record.

Tutorial






Please watch the following 2:30 minute tutorial to aid in your provenance and accession number research:

<http://www.screencast.com/t/QPsrxQ3h>

Worksheet

Using the table provided on the worksheet, fill out the blank information for the 5 artworks listed.

Don't forget to use Bénézit to locate the museum collection which holds the artwork!

#	Artist	Title	Image	Museum Collection	Accession Number	Provenance	Link to Museum's Object Record
1	Pablo Picasso	<i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)</i>					
2	Alfred Stieglitz	<i>Georgia O'Keeffe - Neck</i>					
3	Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres	<i>Comtesse d'Haussonville</i>					
4	Andy Warhol	<i>Marilyn Diptych</i>					
5	Louis Comfort Tiffany	<i>A Wooded Landscape in Three Panels</i>					

Assignment Part 2

Once the table is complete, answer the following questions:

1. What was the process for finding provenance information for two (2) of the institutions?
2. Was this information easily accessible from the object record?
3. Were there any similarities to the provenance information for any of the exemplar artworks? (donors, owners, collections, bequests,)
4. Are the accession numbers similar for each institution or does their format vary?
5. Can you easily search on Google by accession number for an artwork or is other information needed?
6. Is it easy to find an artwork by accession number directly on the institution's website?
7. Do you think accession numbers are used mostly by the general public, researchers, or employees of the museum? Why?

Resources

- Provenance

- "Provenance." Society of American Archivists, n.d. Web. 14 June 2017. <<http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/provenance>>.
- "What Is Provenance and Why Is It Important?" Lofty Marketplace, n.d. Web. 14 June 2017. <<https://www.lofty.com/pages/what-is-provenance-and-why-is-it-important>>.Accession Number
- "What Is Provenance Research?" *Research : Provenance*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, n.d. Web. 14 June 2017. <<http://www.philamuseum.org/research/98-108.html>>.

- Accession Number

- "Accession Number." Society of American Archivists, n.d. Web. 14 June 2017. <<http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/accession-number>>.
- "Museum 101: “A” Is for Accession." *Campbell House Museum's Blog*. N.p., 23 Jan. 2012. Web. 14 June 2017. <<https://campbellhousemuseum.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/museum-101-accessioning/>>.
- Pettis, Bre. "Met Accession Numbers." *Digitizing the Metropolitan Museum - Accession Numbers*. MakerBot, 1 June 2012. Web. 14 June 2017. <<https://www.makerbot.com/media-center/2012/06/01/met-accession-numbers>>.