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### *Evaluation of Web Based Resources within the Art History Discipline*

The enduring and ever expanding popularity of the World Wide Web suggests a new avenue for conducting scholarly research; however this avenue is filled with dark alleys and dead ends for the nescient researcher. What exactly is implied by this statement? “In just a few years the web has become a vast storehouse of information, ideas, opinions, data, lies and self-promotion. It’s a resource that most writers can’t afford to ignore; at the same time, it’s an undifferentiated collection that readers must evaluate carefully. We need to distinguish between reliable and unreliable data, informed argument and unsupported opinion, unbiased research and self-serving advertisement.”<sup>1</sup> This quotation artfully suggests the dilemma a researcher faces in utilizing the web and its attendant resources for scholarly purposes. While the web is a virtual plethora of resources, the veracity of those resources must be carefully evaluated for their utility. It is the world of *caveat lector or let the reader beware*. The use of web resources by scholars within certain disciplines has slowly become an accepted practice; however such use requires the development of the necessary analytical skills to evaluate the quality of the resource. The humanities field has slowly addressed this concern; however other disciplines, such as the discipline of art history, have seemingly lagged behind. This paper analyzes the identity of the evaluation requirements for web resources within the discipline of art history.

#### *A Review of the Applicable Humanities Literature*

Prior to the advent of the web a scholar relied primarily on traditional print resources. Those resources retained an imprimatur of authority and reliability due to the filtering process that existed for publication. “[W]hen information is filtered – reviewed, authenticated, and evaluated – end users come to trust the source and accept an expert’s assessment that it is valid and authoritative. When it isn’t, end users must assess and evaluate the information themselves. And because the internet is a vast network of ever-growing, unfiltered information sources, this is particularly true in this medium.”<sup>2</sup> It is suggested that the print medium has three traditional methods of filtration: the source is (1) written or sponsored by the government or other reliable institution or organization, (2) authenticated by a group of acknowledged experts who review the submission for soundness and academic value in a peer review process, and (3) evaluated by experts, reviewers or subject specialists as part of a collection development exercise.<sup>3</sup> A resource which has been through any one of these filters is accepted as authoritative.<sup>4</sup> The filtration procedure is wholly absent from the web. “[A]nybody can put up a site, and increasingly anybody does . . . users don’t quite know what to make of the information retrieved from the Web. It can

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Leland, Evaluating Web Sites: A Guide for Writers available at <http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/evaluate.htm> (last visited, October 8, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> D. Scott Brandt, Evaluating Information on the Internet available at <http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/~techman/evaluate.htm> (last visited, October 11, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

be the deep truth, or it can be the ramblings of a nut”.<sup>5</sup> This ultimately summarizes the need for an evaluation schema to be used by any researcher of any discipline in evaluating web resources.

Librarians, information professionals and scholars within the humanities field have begun the arduous task of creating an evaluation schema for web resources with respect to their reliability. A review of the web site of almost any library associated with a research institution will most likely include a section advising patrons as to how to properly evaluate resources located on the web. A review of these sections as well as other literature available on the subject of evaluating web resources suggests four critical areas which should be evaluated prior to utilizing web information<sup>6</sup>. They are: (i) authority, (ii) objectivity, (iii) currency and (iv) coverage. Each of these categories is examined below in greater detail.

? *Authority*—Identity of the author or sponsor, as the case may be, is perhaps the most critical element in evaluating a source. Pages which are “signed” either by a comment in the html code viewed by “view source” or which link to the author’s or sponsor’s resume suggest a high degree of confidence, although the user must take the additional step of reviewing the information to ensure it supports the conclusion being drawn. A page which fails to identify the author or otherwise ‘buries’ the information suggests the user exercise caution before utilizing the information.

The qualifications of the author or sponsor are key. For maximum reliability and credibility the author should have the proper education, expertise or experience to be viewed as an authority or a trustworthy source on the relevant topic. Authority may also be evidenced by a degree in the particular subject, job experience, teaching or research experience or other significant experience with the relevant discipline. Although the presence of formal credentials is not an absolute requirement for acceptance, the source should evidence some indicia of expertise in the field of the topic.

There are other considerations which impact an ‘authority’ evaluation. Recognition of the author is a consideration, especially if the author or sponsor is a recognized authority on the topic. With regard to unknown authors, reference to such authors in a positive manner by another authority or the linking of the document to one which is clearly trustworthy is considered indicia of authority. Other evidence of authority includes (i) allusions to or displays of knowledge of related sources with proper attribution, (ii) a display of knowledge of theories, schools of thought, or techniques usually considered appropriate in the treatment of the subject, (iii) a discussion of the value and/or limitations of an approach where an author employs a new theory or technique as in the research, (iv) an acknowledgement of the use of a controversial approach, and (v) an explanation of

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<sup>5</sup> See Emily Hacker, [Choosing and Using Web Sites for Literacy: Instruction: Evaluation Resources and Strategies](http://www.gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2000/hacker.html) available at <http://www.gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2000/hacker.html> (quoting, J.Nielson, [Designing Web Usability](#) (2000)) (last visited October 11, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> See generally, Elizabeth E. Kirk, [Evaluating Information Found on the Internet](http://www.library.jhu.edu/elp/useit/evaluate/indes.html) (July 5, 2002) available at <http://www.library.jhu.edu/elp/useit/evaluate/indes.html> (last visited October 11, 2002); Brandt; Esther Grassian, [Thinking Critically about WWW Resources](http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical) (September 6, 2000) available at <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical> (last visited October 8, 2002); Hacker; M. Phillips, [Critical Evaluation of Resources](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Evaluation.html) (March 2001) available at <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Evaluation.html> (last visited October 11, 2002); Leland; Alastair Smith, [Criteria for Evaluation of Internet Information Resources](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~agsmith/evaln/) (March 2, 1997) available at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~agsmith/evaln/> (last visited October 19, 1999) (each of the the referenced sources discusses the suggested criteria for evaluation of an internet site for use as a reference site).

methodology and interpretation which permits duplication and/or verification all attest to the authority of the document.

? *Objectivity* involves a determination as to the existence or absence of bias in the document. Webpages created by organizations, particularly organizations which advocate a particular philosophy may evidence a bias. A user should attempt to determine the author's or sponsor's purpose in publishing the web site; as a particular agenda may lead an author to slant or interpret the information in a particular manner or omit critical information. The user should determine if an audience is benefited or harmed by the page. Resources which address all of an issue are typically unbiased. Users should remember that information is rarely neutral and documents typically are written and web sites published to advocate a particular point of view. The URL is an excellent source of this information to evaluate the potential presence of bias. The inclusion of .edu, .com, .gov, or .org may provide helpful information. Set forth below are the common interpretations of the meanings of .edu, .com, .org, etc.

Ending	Suggested Inference
.edu	Typically denotes association with an academic institution; however the inclusion of a tilde (~) generally suggests the web page of an individual associated with the institution whose work may or may not be verified or endorsed by the institution.
.com	Customarily denotes a commercial venture whose purpose is to sell a product or service.
.gov	Suggests a page sponsored by the federal government or an affiliate thereof.
.org	A non-profit group or organization which may advocate a particular philosophy.

? *Currency* refers to the timeliness of the information. With a printed document the date of publication is the best and primary indicator of the currency. A user should look for a clear indication of the date the information provided was gathered and a 'last updated' feature. While not all information is time sensitive, some is. Where the information is of a type which is time sensitive, it is critical that the information be updated in a timely manner. An evaluation of the links should be made. The links should be active and link directly to pages which have not moved.

Although not directly related to the concept of time, copyright is evaluated as a concept of currency. A user should determine if the information, including any images, are subject to copyright – or other limitations on the use of the information. A consideration of such limitations must be properly considered with the regard to the user's intended utilization of such information.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, is there an application of the *fair use doctrine* which permits the user to copy the information for the intended purpose? The concept of copyright and its application to materials on

<sup>7</sup> Kahle Brewster, *Public Access to Digital Material*, 7 D-Lib Magazine (October 2001) available at <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/october01/kahle/10kahle.html> (last viewed November 30, 2002).

the web is an evolving concept; however, it might be suggested that sponsors and authors who acknowledge and give proper attribution of copyrighted material suggest a degree of reliability.

? *Coverage, Subject Matter and Relevance* consider principles involving evaluation of the topic covered, how the coverage differs from that of the traditional print coverage and the comprehensiveness of the coverage. Web coverage of a topic often differs from that of the traditional print coverage with regard to the depth and the seriousness of the coverage. Evaluation of the source as the conveyor of fact or opinion is critical. Additionally, care should be given to ensure that the source addresses the researcher's focus. Consideration of the intended audience is the final consideration under this category. Is the article too technical, too clinical, or too elementary for the intended focus of the research?

In addition to the four preceding concepts, the humanities literature also suggests *Accuracy* is a critical component. The concept of accuracy requires that for information to be useful it must be reliable and errorless. Information which has been verified by an editor or some other fact checking process or which may be verified by a second source is traditionally accepted as reliable and errorless. In this manner the web is differentiated from traditional print resources as, web sources traditionally utilize neither editors nor fact checkers while traditional print sources do. The inclusion of a bibliography or footnotes to indicate other sources consulted by the author in preparing his research also serve to suggest reliability. Conversely, the inclusion of information which is either contradictory or 'too good to be true' serves the alternative purpose of suggesting that the information is unreliable. The concept of accuracy is applicable not only to the actual content of a resource; but also to information regarding the author, objectivity, currency and relevance of a site. Accordingly, the concept of accuracy is deemed to apply to each of the preceding four categories as well as the concept of "image" discussed below.

A review of the literature regarding the evaluation of web resources would not be complete without a consideration of the navigability of the particular page. This focus is typically considered separately from those previously discussed within this paper. Specifically, the concepts of accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency and coverage focus on the content of the web resource and the usability and utility of such content in scholarly research. The concept of navigability; however is equally important. Navigation focuses on the usability of the site and suggests that sites which contain excellent content must also be usable<sup>8</sup>. Evaluation of the usability of a web site considers factors such as: (i) is it always clear to the user where he is and how he can get to another part of the site, (ii) the reading level of the site, (iii) the accessibility to disabled users, (iv) is accessibility permitted with customarily available equipment and software such as Netscape or Explorer, and (v) is information arranged in a logical manner which is appropriate for the topic.

Boyd Collins applies similar evaluation criteria to a number of classic web sites in his article *WebWatch*<sup>9</sup>. In particular he evaluated The Perseus Project, the Classics and Mediterranean Archaeology Home Page, Electronic Resources for Classicists and Internet Resources for Classical Studies. His evaluations highlight comprehensiveness of material, audience, ease of use, inclusion of

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<sup>8</sup> See generally, Grassian (discussion of evaluation criteria for web based resources).

<sup>9</sup> Boyd R. Collins, *WebWatch*, 121 *Library Journal* 31 (1996).

dates and last update references, organization and authority. He also developed a list of ‘watchwords’. They are as set forth below<sup>10</sup>:

<i>Boyd Collins’ Watchwords</i>	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Word</i>
Content	Substance, depth, uniqueness, accuracy, currency
Authority	Institutional affiliation, developer credentials
Organization	Easily grasped, logical, clearly divided
Accessibility	Consistent, speedy availability, text-based alternatives

To this point, the literature discussed has focused on the humanities in general; however, the purpose of this paper is to discuss utilization of web resources within the discipline of art history. The applicability of the evaluation criteria developed for the humanities discipline in general is sufficient as a starting point; but art history is differentiated from humanities by the inclusion and the importance of the art image itself. This suggests an added importance on the navigability category. Images typically require memory and time to load. The size of the image is important, as postage stamp size pictures do little to permit actual examination of the art. Similarly, clarity of the picture and accuracy of the colors within the picture should be considered. Jeremy Rees’ statement emphasizing the critical importance of images to culture and museums serves to echo the unique nature and importance of the image.<sup>11</sup> Finally, accessibility of the image to the disabled reaffirms the importance of an evaluation of the concept of navigation.

### ***Methodology of Survey***

#### ***Theory:***

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of the web as a scholarly resource within the discipline of art history – or more succinctly to consider the question, if a student of art history is preparing an authoritative paper such as a master’s thesis or a dissertation, how would such user evaluate a resource located on the web? The first step in the analysis process involved an examination of the humanities discipline for specific information as to how a humanities scholar might evaluate a web resource. The first part of this paper summarizes the literature available with regard to evaluation of web sites within the humanities discipline. Next a consideration of how the art history discipline is distinguished from the humanities discipline was undertaken. Discussions with each of George Landow and Trish Cashen, professors of art history at Brown University and the Open University, respectively, influenced our approach. They are considered experts in the area of using computer technology for the humanities, and both scholars have published extensively in art history and computer applications for the discipline. Landow maintains the website *Victorian Web: An Overview* and Cashen is the web manager for the journal *Computers and the History of Art*. Also noteworthy was the strong focus on digitization and digital libraries, including the conference report “Digital Imagery for Works of Art,” “Art and Technology” by art historian Christopher Whitcombe, and “Creating Accessible Digital Imagery” about

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Evan Peters, *Exploring the Potential to Transform Scholarly Communication*, 28 *Educom Rev.* (1993) available at <http://www.educause.edu/awards/elite/97elite/er9.html> (last visited October 21, 2002).

photographic collections.<sup>12</sup> The conclusion was drawn that the art history discipline is distinguished from the humanities discipline in the following ways:

- the importance of the image<sup>13</sup>;
- the use of images<sup>14</sup>; and
- the accuracy of the image (in regards to the clarity of the image and the color or resolution of the image).

Taking into account discrete features which were determined to be unique to the art history field, a survey<sup>15</sup> was developed to evaluate web sites associated with art history. The survey was generated by taking criteria deemed '*material*' to the humanities field and adding and tweaking such criteria to address the unique concerns of the art history field. Specifically, each of the four areas of importance within the humanities field –authority, objectivity, currency and coverage were determined to be of similar consequence within the art history field<sup>16</sup>. Accordingly, the survey to evaluate art history sites was similarly constructed to those routinely used in the humanities field focusing on each of the above referenced areas using questions and criteria which were repeatedly referenced in the humanities literature. In order to address the unique nature of art history, an additional category, *Images*, was included within the survey. The questions/ criteria within the *Image* category address issues with respect to accuracy and usability of the image on the premise that these issues regarding images were of primary importance in the art history field.

### ***Survey:***

The survey consists of two parts; the first part was designed such that each of the five discrete areas was worth a maximum of twenty points. Each such area having four questions to answer, evaluate and to which points (on a scale of 0 to 5 with 5 being the most points a participant could award and 0 being the least) were assigned. This construction was implemented to suggest that no one area was more meaningful than any other. A perfect web site would have a maximum score of 100. Use of a numerical scale for evaluation of the criteria was intended to place a value upon each of the criteria. It was also thought that the use of a numerical value would permit a user to better evaluate the results and

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<sup>12</sup> See, Harvard University Art Museums, et. al. Digital Imagery for Works of Art, Conference Report available at <http://www.dli2.nsf.gov/mellon/report.html> (last visited November 27, 2002); Christopher Whitcombe, Art and Technology: A Brief History available at <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/arth-technology/arth-technology1.html> (last visited November 27, 2002); Clare L. Birdsey, Creating Accessible Digital Imagery 6 D-Lib Magazine (April 2000) available at <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april2000/birdsey/04birdsey.html> (last visited November 20, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> See generally, Birdsey (discussing the digitization of certain images from The Royal Photographic Society, including, image quality, indexing and database).

<sup>14</sup> See generally, V. Karvchyna and S. K. Hastings, Informational Value of Museum Web Sites available at [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue7\\_2/kravchyna](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue7_2/kravchyna) (last visited November 11, 2002) (49% of users of museum web sites indicated they visited for the purpose of seeking an image and 67% of respondents indicated visiting the page for an educational purpose.)

<sup>15</sup> A copy of the survey is attached to this paper as Appendix A.

<sup>16</sup> The decision to draw from the humanities resources was supported by correspondence with Trish Cashen, an art history professor at Open University with expertise in computer technology for the Journal of Computers and History of Art. Cashen suggested that, in her opinion, it was not possible to conduct art historical research solely via the internet; but that the internet was a permissible resource for locating humanities type information as well as determining the location and accessibility of particular art collections. She also suggested that an image and its corresponding text are inseparable.

make a thoughtful decision as to the utilization of information from a particular website. It was also determined that due to the many and varying purposes for which a scholar might utilize a web site; there was no 'threshold' number to indicate that a user should avoid utilization of a site. The second part of the survey consisted of three criteria and was constructed for the sole purpose of evaluating the criteria set forth in part one of the survey.

### ***Description of Web Pages:***

In order to accurately consider the appropriate basis for judging web resources a variety of web sites were selected to which the survey criteria were to be applied. The sites selected were intended to represent what, in the authors' opinions, represented an excellent site, an enticement site, a mediocre site and an unacceptable site. The range of the quality of sites was specifically selected to test the evaluation criteria of the survey.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the range in quality, sites were selected for a variety of additional reasons. Some sites were specifically selected because of past use by an author (e.g. *Victorian Web*) or an author's familiarity with the subject matter (e.g. *NouveauNet's Pre-Raphaelite Passion*) and, accordingly, such author's corresponding ability to critically judge the content of such site. Finally, each site was also select on the basis of the following four factors:

1. each website was required to contain a mixture of text and images due the premise, accepted by the authors, that, within the discipline of art history, text and image are interconnected; thus sites containing text-only/image-only sites, abstracting/indexing services or image databases were specifically rejected from consideration;
2. each site was selected with a view towards whether or not it would be attractive to an undergraduate population for research information (e.g., sites that students might put on the same level as information from books and articles and sites which include text and images thus projecting an impression of attractiveness and information);
3. each site was required to display a variety of image presentations, since it was believed the image, itself, was an integral component of web based research and unique to the field of art history; and
4. a cross section of creators (e.g., professor/university, art historian, personal homepage by web designer) due to the desire to evaluate perceived authority and a view that different types of authors lead to different levels of perceived authority.

Each of the sites selected for inclusion in the survey is described in greater detail below.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Pre-Raphaelite Passion from NouveauNet***

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<sup>17</sup> See generally, Sonja Cameron, Using WWW to teach History, Classics and Archaeology or: when is a bad website a good website? (May 2002) available at <http://hca.itsn.uk/> (last visited November 30, 2002) (The concept of comparing web sites was suggested in the Cameron paper. In such paper the suggestion is made that students gain valuable critical experience in comparing good and bad web sites).

<sup>18</sup> See, Appendix B, Figure 8 (a basic outline of each website surveyed).

The site is the property of *NouveaNet* under Valerie Criswell. Criswell is an internet consultant and independent web contractor through her own company Suresource. She provides a link to her homepage through *NouveauNet*. The homepage details her biographical information providing details regarding her family, occupation, hobbies and preferences. There is no visible evidence of an art history education or experience within the field. The inclusion of biographical information illustrates that the page is a personal website reflecting the author's interests. The website can also be seen as an advertisement of her web skills.

The particular portion of *NouveaNet* included within the survey<sup>19</sup> looks at the Victorian art movement of Pre-Raphaelitism. Headings within the site include *Artists' Biographies*, *Image Presentation by Subject*, *Tools*, and *Goodies*. The *Artists' Biographies* section includes nineteen artists with small pictures of the artists, brief text, and links to images of their works. It is an extensive list, but some of the artists included, such as John Waterhouse and Frederick Leighton, would not be labeled as Pre-Raphaelites by art historians. *Image Presentation by Subject* includes the areas Medieval and Arthurian and Nature, popular topics for Pre-Raphaelite artists and Victorian artists in general. The site information and site map create an interesting feature through *Tools*. Users are able to learn how the images were processed for the website and optimal viewing tools for viewing such image. This section also contains a list of other websites which such sites also focus on the Pre-Raphaelite movement and the Victorian era. The list combines other personal websites and university websites. The final section entitled *Goodies* offers an option to see the images in a slideshow format and to send them as postcards. This section also links to the author's biographical detail.

Overall, the author Criswell focuses on images. The frames include images slightly larger than thumbnail, which gives users clearer views of the paintings. These images then link to larger pictures with high resolution, making them viable for examination. Users can easily locate images through the subject categories under *Image Presentation by Subject*. Images are also available through the *Goodies* section as a slideshow or as e-mail postcards and through links within *Artists' Biographies*. In comparison, the text is brief. The aforementioned heading links are available on every page; however, the drop-down function does not always work easily, which makes navigation difficult. In comparison to other subject matter foci of *NouveaNet*, *Pre-Raphaelite Passion* is the most extensive and professional-looking section. Despite these positive attributes, the text is minimal, some of the links no longer work, and navigation can be difficult.

*NouveaNet's Pre-Raphaelite Passion* is primarily cited by other personal webpages, like *Cosmic Baseball Association* and *Maidens of Desire and Doom* through the section *Siren Songs* about mermaids. In turn, *Pre-Raphaelite Passion* cites *Cosmic Baseball Association*. In addition, it is also cited by the commercial site *Art Magick*, which sells images.<sup>20</sup> This connection seems appropriate considering *Pre-Raphaelite Passion's* strong focus on images. On-line directories also link to the website. For instance, the AOL directory describes the website as 'NouveaNet's research, commentary, and artful display of Pre-Raphaelite art.'<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, it is cited by two educational sites, *Encyclopedia Britannica* and a Pittsburg State University course pathfinder for "Arthurian Literature and Art: Victorian and Modern (which pathfinder also cites the *Victorian Web*).

<sup>19</sup> Note, only the *Pre-Raphaelite-Passion* portion of the *NouveaNet* was used for the purpose of this study.

<sup>20</sup> See, <http://www.artmagick.com/links.aspx> (last visited December 2, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See, <http://wwwsearch.co.uk> (last visited December 2, 2002).

### *The Victorian Web: An Overview*

*The Victorian Web: An Overview* is currently based at the University Scholars Program at the National University of Singapore, but it was originally developed through Brown University. More specifically, the resource was created by Dr. George Landow, a professor of art history and literature, to assist students in his courses at Brown University. Each page cites Landow as the primary authority, referring to him as a “Professor of English and Art History, Brown University.”<sup>22</sup> Landow designed and edited the entire site. He also made several of the links and authored multiple lexias throughout the web. In “The Perseus Project and Beyond: How Building a Digital Library Challenges the Humanities and Technology,” Gregory Crane, a professor of Classics at Tufts University, cites George Landow as one of the few humanities academics well versed in computer technology. Crane says Landow “did not encounter hypertext until he was a full professor and has now emerged a leading analyst of hypertext and literary theory.”<sup>23</sup> Using his intellectual expertise, he created the materials on individual authors and their works, as well as the material on Biblical typology. He also selected the external criticism and most of the visual images for which he created captions. Before it appeared on the internet, it was used in a series of other hypertext environments. During which other faculty and independent scholars contributed to its content, and Dr. Landow was directly assisted by an assemblage of doctoral students<sup>24</sup>. Thus, information was edited by multiple scholars before posting it to the internet. The current website is a translation of Brown University’s *Context 61*, a resource for one of Landow’s literature courses<sup>25</sup>. In turn, this developed from *Context 32*, an intermedia web providing contextual information for English 32, “Survey of English Literature from 1700 to the Present.”<sup>26</sup> The website’s authority is solidified by several factors: its primary creation and maintenance by Dr. George Landow, assistance of doctoral students, contributions by other scholars, and associations with Brown University and the National University of Singapore.

As its name indicates, *The Victorian Web: An Overview* covers a wide range of information about the Victorian period. It is a primary source of information about providing basic material about literature, art, science, religion, economics, philosophy, and history. History is subdivided into icons for political and social history. The general information is available through the icon *The Victorians*. It provides information about topics not applicable to other areas, such as *Description of Victorianism*, or areas of special interest, such as *What was Victorian taste, really?* which is also available through *Design*.<sup>27</sup> It also links to several other sources for information through *Related WWW Resources* and *Bibliography* icons<sup>28</sup>. The website also provides an interesting feature in that it also links to recent

<sup>22</sup> See, <http://65.107.211.206/misc/directions.html> (last visited December 2, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Crane, *The Perseus Project and Beyond: How Building a Digital Library Challenges the Humanities and Technology*, D-Lib Magazine (January 1998) available at <http://www.dlib.org/january98/01crane.html>. (last visited December 2, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Anthony S. Wohl, a history professor at Vassar College, contributed material on Victorian public health, race and class issues, and anti-Catholic prejudice in Victorian England. This information drew from his published and unpublished writings. Under Landow’s direction the doctoral students contributed significantly to the material. David Cody wrote many of the general materials and chose several of the original digitized images, Glenn Everett wrote some of the basic materials on Romantic and Victorian poets including timelines, and the following year Kathryn Stockton created several documents on feminism and literary theory.

<sup>25</sup> The website links users to one of the syllabi of the original literature courses on which it was based.

<sup>26</sup> *Context 32* was begun in Spring 1985 as part of Brown University’s Institute for Research in Information and Scholarship (IRIS) Intermedia project, which IBM, Apple Computers, the Annenberg/CPB Project, and other sources funded.

<sup>27</sup> The subheading of “Design” is available through the table of contents icon “Visual Arts”.

<sup>28</sup> The “Bibliography” icon is an accumulation of suggested readings found throughout the website.

books on Victorian topics, primarily on literature and art history. These books are also available in print medium, and thus, they have been filtered through established systems. Publishers include several reputable university presses like University of North Carolina University Press and Princeton University Press, as well as strong publishing houses like Routledge. The icon *Victorian Texts* includes digitized Victorian texts of criticism, poetry, and memoirs. The *Victorian Web* also addresses the issues critical to Victorian history and culture in contrast to Tom Flynn's complaint that many sites simply link to others sites.<sup>29</sup>

The homepage also makes links for credits, web awards, updates, and related courses visible in the upper left corner. The main feature of the homepage is a series of subject icons linking to description subheadings. The icons are blue with script writing, and this design is maintained throughout the site for easy recognition. They are available for navigating at the bottom of each page. In fact, the page heading "*The Victorian Web*, literature, history, & culture in the age of Victoria" is also in this color and can be seen at the top of every page.<sup>30</sup> The banner heading is grouped with a link to the homepage for George Landow. The subheadings include names of notable Victorian figures and thematic subjects. In addition, images are located throughout the site and evenly interspersed with text. Overall, the design is clean and navigable through repeated icons (despite some trouble linking through non-icons).

*The Victorian Web: An Overview* is cited by several university websites as an authoritative and credible source of information about Victorian literature, art, and history. For instance, it is listed in the College of St. Rose (Albany, New York) site on Victorian authors and Pittsburg State University's pathfinder for "Arthurian Literature and Art: Victorian and Modern." In addition, the University of Virginia Library lists it under its English subject guide, and the Mount Holyoke's course "History and Environmental Studies" lists the website in its online syllabus. The College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Maryland includes the *Victorian Web* as an example site for "Critical Approaches to the Web." Ohio State University Libraries' *net.Tutor* also uses *The Victorian Web: An Overview* as an example to evaluate author and publisher. The tutorial tells students to ask if the author/publisher of a site has "appropriate education, training, or experience to write with authority (credibility) on this topic?"<sup>31</sup> Next to an image of the website page "Credits: Who Created the Victorian Web?" the tutorial explains that the "*Victorian Web* was created by a professor at Brown University. By clicking on his name, you can view a page that provides more information about him."<sup>32</sup> Another sign of approval is its inclusion in the University of Glasgow's site for history, classics, and archeology.<sup>33</sup> The briefing paper is entitled "Using the WWW to Teach History, Classics, and Archeology, or: When is a Bad Website a Good Website" and it lists the *Victorian Web* as an approved site for history. Another interesting citation for the website is through the PBS channel and their show "The 1900 House" along with print materials.

### ***Postmodernism and Art History at Haberarts***

The creator of the website is John Haber, a geoscientists and web project manager. He offers links to his biographical information through the heading "Who am I," which describe his education and work experience. He has worked extensively as an editor, at publications like *The*

<sup>29</sup> Tom Flynn, *Dearth of Art History* 75 Art Review (July/August 2001).

<sup>30</sup> The page heading banner for the *Victorian Web* also includes an image of Queen Victoria.

<sup>31</sup> See, <http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les1/pg2.html>. (last visited December 2, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Id.

<sup>33</sup> Cameron.

*Columbia University Press, Elsevier Science Publishers, and Harper and Row.* He also details his knowledge of computer software and multimedia programs. He describes his site as “the most comprehensive review of contemporary art and art history available online”; however, he gives no indication of an art history education, which brings the validity of his statement into question.<sup>34</sup> In other sections of his site, Haber creates a strong personal tone with his biographical information, unlike the *Victorian Web*.

The site is the most comprehensive of the sites included in the survey in terms of time periods which range from sixteenth-century Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel to twentieth-century happenings artist John Cage. Thus, the subheading *Art review from around New York* is misleading in describing its coverage. Notwithstanding the main title, *Postmodernism and Art History*, postmodern theories form an important component of the website. Haber provides a special section entitled *Postmodern Ideas* looking at issues of feminism, politics, media and expression. Postmodernism is a complex issue in the humanities and is presented differently among these disciplines. Haber’s background in science and web management makes his explanation of this complex subject questionable.

The overall design of *Haberarts* is hectic with a staggering amount of graphics. The site appears to be a creative outlet for Haber’s personal skills in web design, as well as an expression of his personal interest in art. Haber describes the site as having 175 essays and over 4,500 links. Although his text is more extensive than that of *NouveauNet’s* they are not extended essays. He offers users various ways to search for information. Users can search the site by individual artists or critic or by period. In terms of searching an art period, he has created a swirling time line identified by text labels and images. This is a successful, entertaining graphic. Throughout the site, the anchors for the index searches and the author’s biographical information are repeated for easier maneuvering. In addition, he offers the section ‘My greatest hits’ concentrating on a few artists and movements.

John Haber’s site is primarily cited by commercial sites promoting an artist or selling an image. For instance, the site is cited by *Absolute Arts* for Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci and Jean Poyet.<sup>35</sup> In part, this is because the site focuses on current artists not discussed in other more traditional art history sites which concentrate on the traditional art history cannon. The commercial site *Leon Engelen Oil Paintings* is one such example.<sup>36</sup> A number of high school websites also link to *Haberarts*. For example, Adelaide High School lists recommends the site for an assignment on Baroque art and Shadle Park High School list recommends the site for information on Minimalism.<sup>37</sup> An unusual citation is for a course on computer arts at California State University at Stanislaus, and this citation may reflect John Haber’s skills as a web designer rather than a self proclaimed art critic.

### ***Tate Britain Gallery***

The museum was created in 1897 as the national museum of British art, but the website was created in 1998. As the product of a museum, the Tate is listed as the primary author. Except within

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<sup>34</sup> *Postmodernism and Art History* through *Haberarts* available at <http://www.haberarts.com/haber.html#knowl> (last visited November 22, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> *Absolute Arts* (commercial site) available at <http://www.absolutearts.com> (last visited December 1, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> *Leon Engelen Oil Paintings* available at <http://www.engelen.com/links/reviews.html> (last visited December 1, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Adelaide High School, Class assignment on Baroque Art available at <http://www.adelaidehs.sa.edu.au/ahsintranet/subjects/Arts/baroqueartA.htm> (last visited December 1, 2002).

the online journals, the *Tate Magazine* and *Art on the Net*, individual authors are not named; rather, they are collectively identified as the *Tate*. Text information is created by the various museum departments since the web information corresponds to their print catalogues.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as with many large museums, the Education Department is an integral part of the website creation and maintenance. As images are central to any museum, the *Tate* has created a committee to make the artwork available online through *Insight*. In addition to regular departmental staff, such committee includes an Imaging Coordinator, Content Manager and Content Editor. Their approach is different from the Getty, which attributes the web content to named individuals in the Web group as well as consultants and additional Getty staff.<sup>39</sup> In humanities and art history literature, the Getty is often held up as the model for educational and research tools on the web.

The primary scope of the website is the museum's collection, which includes British artwork from various time periods (1500 to the present). As an enticement site, the museum offers visitor information; however, it also details the researcher services available to scholars. This link helps scholars to plan research trips in advance. Trish Cashen<sup>40</sup> suggested that while the internet can be an education tool, its usefulness for scholarly research is limited to such "generic research."<sup>41</sup> Another necessary function of a museum website is to provide caption information about the works (e.g. artist, medium, date), which function the *Tate* readily supports. Museums are trusted authorities for these descriptors. Lauren Weingarden, a professor of art history and museum studies, explained that she primarily uses museum websites in class as visual tools. Yet, she also uses them in her own research to locate images relevant to her area; but, illustrating the importance of print within the discipline, she then orders the print catalogue rather than relying on the web source.<sup>42</sup> In addition, there is information about special events and exhibits. Past events, including conferences and lectures can also be assessed through web videos. These videos replicate attendance at the events and provide an innovative means for scholarly research.

The collections at the *Tate* can be searched by either artist or art work through an index or by gallery. Images are available through both options. George Landow was asked to critique the *Tate* due to his knowledge of art history and hypertext.<sup>43</sup> He noted that many of the *Tate's* images are small and not viable for study. Other images require multiple linking to see a larger version. At best the *Tate's* images are inconsistent. In *Art Review*, Tom Flynn commented on the failure of the Tate website to fully utilize images and graphics to create a dynamic site.<sup>44</sup> Selected images can be found through *Timelines* and *Icons*.

Many of the citations for the *Tate* are through print art journals and newspapers. Art journals include articles analyzing the museum's collection and exhibitions and citing image reproductions from

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<sup>38</sup> Flynn.

<sup>39</sup> See, J. Paul Getty Trust available at <http://www.getty.edu/about/website.html> (last visited December 2, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> See supra, footnote 16.

<sup>41</sup> Trish Cashen, Correspondence, December 2, 2002. "I'd say the usefulness of the Internet for art history research depends to a large extent on the subject you're researching. However, it can support serious research through generic means such as the ability to peruse other libraries' catalogues, contact specialist librarians and durations, locate and collaborate with other researchers, arrange research trips in advance (e.g. pre-arrange seeing books, painting, etc.). Also, one shouldn't underestimate the usefulness of the humanities citation indexes, bibliographies, thesauri, online reference works, etc. An example of this approach is available from the Open University's Library website: <http://library.open.ac.uk/bysubject/arts/artspdf/arthistory0901.pdf>") This approach is similar to the approach found in the tutorial offered by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Sloan Art Library. See also, supra footnote 16.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence with Lauren Weingarden, October 13, 2002 and November 30, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> George Landow, Correspondence, October 14, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Flynn.

the collection. In contrast, print newspaper articles convey information about current exhibits and events, either as an advertisement or as a critique. Of the selected websites, the *Tate* is the only site with significant print citation. The user must be wary of such citations; as many of the references are for the museum, not the website. In addition, to these sources, the museum is included in directories, such as established print directors and on-line directories such as *Yahoo*. The museum is also cited by commercial sites using images from the collection, such as *Popular Posters*.<sup>45</sup> The commercial citations are primarily for copyright reasons and references to the website, itself, are limited.

### ***Description of Test Group:***

The test group was composed of participants who were well versed in the discipline of art history. Thus, the participants are students, teachers and/or working in the field. Due to the presence of their scholarly connections, it was considered that such persons would be familiar with approaches to the discipline (knowledge of terms, presence of images, and presentation of materials). As a result, such persons would be better able to evaluate the usefulness of the chosen art history websites. It was also determined that a cross section of art historians at different levels of research would compose a more versatile and representative test group. Thus, participants fall into the categories of professors, graduate students, teaching assistants, and/or library workers. This sampling is not statistically significant because of the small size of the test group; however, the survey results provide an interesting view into the discipline of art history. Descriptions of the participants are included below. A total of seven persons were originally identified for participation in this exercise. Of the seven individuals who had agreed to participate only five persons completed the exercise.

#### Art History Professor (Participant 1)

Full-time professor at private university. Fifteen years of teaching experience with the field of art history. Area of study is Renaissance art, but professor teaches general survey and subject courses. Subject courses, including “Gothic Architecture,” “Nineteenth-century Art,” and “Twentieth-century Art,” cover material in all four of the websites utilized within the survey.

#### Current Art History Graduate Students

Participants in this category consist of students who have taken a broad range of undergraduate and graduate courses and now have specialized areas of research within the art history discipline. More specifically, they consist of: (1) a PhD student at the British University specializing in Nineteenth and Twentieth-century European art and who has work experience as an intern at Tate Britain in the maps gallery (Participant 2), (2) a PhD student at the British University specializing in Byzantine art with work experience as a teacher of undergraduates, interdisciplinary seminars and as research assistant (Participant 3), and (3) a MA student at American University specializing in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century European art with work experience as a research assistant and as a intern with various museums (Participant 4).

#### Past Graduate Student and Librarian (Participant 5)

Participant with library experience was included for contrast with art history-only participants. Participant earned MA in art history specializing in Nineteenth-century women artists. Participant is also a current MA in library science. Participant has work experience in art libraries and university archives.

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.popularposters.ocm/dbsystem/html/cat11049.html>. (Last visited November 20, 2002).

### ***Anticipated Results:***

Based upon the web sites selected and the practice of evaluating web resources within the humanities field it was anticipated that the surveys would support the conclusions set forth below.

<b><i>Web Site</i></b>	<b><i>Anticipated Ratings</i></b>
Victorian Web	Of all the test sites being evaluated, this was the site selected to reach 100 points. The site is authoritative, unbiased, current, relevant and provides accurate and usable images.
Tate	It was anticipated that this site would also rate well. It is authoritative, unbiased, current and relevant; however it was anticipated that the enticement and commercial aspects of the site as well as the poor usability and lack of consistency with regard to images would severely impact its score.
Haber Arts	It was anticipated that this site would score poorly due to its questionable authority and unquestionable bias. It was also anticipated that the <i>Image</i> component would be highly rated.
NouveauNet	It was anticipated that this site would rate low due to its questionable authority and clear bias as evidenced by the promotional elements. The <i>Image</i> component was expected to be highly rated. It was expected that this site would receive the lowest overall scores.

### ***Actual Results:***

As with any survey, certain results were expected while others were not. Higher ratings for both the *Tate* and the *Victorian Web* were anticipated, primarily because of their association with trusted authorities and the institutional resources of museums and universities. In general, *Tate* and *Victorian Web* scored higher than the other two sites (which sites were written by individuals with no readily apparent expertise in art history). When adding category averages, the *Tate* totaled 84.2 out of 100 and the *Victorian Web* scored 78.25. In contrast, it was expected that the *Victorian Web* would score higher than the *Tate* with the former's score being closer to the maximum 100 points. This result was anticipated since the *Victorian Web* was created specifically for educational purposes and developed out of Dr. Landow's supplement for courses at Brown University. One potential reason for the *Tate's* higher score was that the main bibliography of the *Victorian Web* site is outdated, reflecting its origins and Dr. Landow's earlier research.

In contrast to the function of *Victorian Web*, the *Tate* site functions primarily as an enticement site for visitors. As noted in "Informational Value of Museum Websites" by V. Kravchnya and S.K. Hastings, less than half of scholars (44%) use museum websites as for research sources.<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding this fact, the *Tate* does provide scholarly information through web videos of conferences and workshops with academics and professionals in art and art history. Related to this purpose, Kravchnya and Hasting's article found that 64% of scholars use the sites to find out about special events.<sup>47</sup> One could loosely surmise that art historians enjoy museum websites, but this use relates to

<sup>46</sup> Kravchnya.

<sup>47</sup> Id.

entertainment rather than research. Supporting this use, the survey found that 58% of scholars use the sites to search the collection and the same percentage visits the websites even if they do not visit the museum.<sup>48</sup>

It was also expected that the two sites created by individuals, *Haberarts* and *NouveauNet*, would not score as high as either the *Tate* or *Victorian Web*. This expectation proved to be true, with *Haberarts* scoring 52 and *NouveauNet* scoring 38.8.<sup>49</sup> Their scores are lower than those of the *Tate* and the *Victorian Web* in all categories. For instance, the *Haberarts* site is less objective in its approach to art, which fact is clearly reflected in a *Bias* score of 8.2.<sup>50</sup> The creator of the site does not adequately validate his sources. Both *Haberarts* and *NouveauNet* (5 of 20) received low *Bias* scores here because the sites express the author's individual interests and do not explain "research methods" or "provide equal treatment".<sup>51</sup> Although the *Bias* category reflected the anticipated results for the *Victorian Web* and *Tate* with higher scores, it is surmised that the scores for the *Victorian Web* would have been higher if participants had been aware of the alternative addresses for the site which such end with ".edu."<sup>52</sup> Although the *Tate* site focuses on its own collection, it was perceived to be objective because the information is presented in a straightforward manner. It was also expected that the two individual's sites would score lower in the authority category because there is no evidence of art history training. *Haberarts* scored 13 of 20 points and *NouveauNet* scored 6.<sup>53</sup> However, *Haberarts* scored slightly higher than expected. This can be attributed to the author's clear description of his education and work experience, despite a lack of art history education. In addition, the authors did not expect participants to give the site such overall scores. For example, Participant 2 gave the website its highest score with 65 of 100 points.<sup>54</sup> Looking at *NouveauNet*, it succeeded in being an attractive overview of one art movement, but its low score shows that it is not a viable resource for research.

Also surprising, were the difficulties several participants had in accessing *Victorian Web*. This seemed to be especially true of AOL users. The current URL which contains several numbers, led to access problems. Previous addresses were more descriptive and comprehensible to English speakers. Such URLs also included references to Brown University and author George Landow. Looking specifically at *Victorian Web* the variations among participants in the scores was surprising. Using the *Victorian Web* as an example, we see that Participant 4 scored *Victorian Web* as a 58 out of a 100 whereas Participants 2 and 3 rated *Haberarts* as 65 and 59 respectively.<sup>55</sup> This low evaluation of the *Victorian Web* was unexpected.

Looking at individual categories, it was not anticipated that the images on the *Tate* site would be rated so highly at 19.2 of 20. In correspondence with Dr. George Landow<sup>56</sup> he specifically

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<sup>48</sup> Id.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 1.

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 1.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix A and Appendix B, Figure 3.

<sup>52</sup> The given URL includes a series of numbers when accessed, but the site can also be linked to through addresses including the name of Brown University or George Landow. When the alternative addresses for *Victorian Web* are used, the address given for the survey appears.

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 2.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 7.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix B Figure 1.

<sup>56</sup> See supra, footnote 43.

noted (and criticized) the small size of the images.<sup>57</sup> This critical opinion of the site is reiterated in the 1998 article “Art on the Net”<sup>58</sup>. While some images have been enlarged and improved for study, it was generally felt the *Tate’s* scores were inflated. This category showed the only significant difference in scoring between *Victorian Web* and *Tate*. Not surprisingly, *NouveauNet* received its highest score for images at 13.2.<sup>59</sup> Criswell’s images are the strongest part of the website. In consulting with Lauren Weingarden, an art history professor and a founding member of the International Association of Word and Image Studies, she noted that strong images could be useful even if they come from a poor site. Such usage should be qualified, and the user should compensate for poor text with knowledge.

While the issue of images is unique to art history, the other categories are also important and deserve attention. For instance, the category of relevance resulted in expected scores with the aforementioned sites scoring significantly higher than either *NouveauNet* or *Haberarts*. The difference between *Victorian Web* and the *Tate* were inconsequential, especially considering the small sampling. In terms of currency, each website scored at least 20% with *NouveauNet* as the lowest and *Victorian Web* and *Tate* almost equal (16.25 and 16.8, respectively).<sup>60</sup> Their higher rankings are appropriate since they have greater resources with trained art historians and web designers. As noted, both *Victorian Web* and *Tate* were ranked with greater authority. The *Victorian Web* scored slightly higher at 17.75 out of 100 while the *Tate* scored 16.8; yet this difference is not statistically significant.<sup>61</sup>

Looking at participants’ backgrounds opinions resulted in discovery of interesting reactions to the sites. For instance, Participant 2 who interned at the *Tate* gave the site one of the lower scores (77 of 100).<sup>62</sup> This lower score was unexpected given the connection to the museum. Looking at the *Victorian Web*, Participant 4, and an MA student and past museum staffer/intern gave the site a surprisingly low score of 58.<sup>63</sup> Yet, the same participant, who admittedly does not use websites as scholarly resources, gave the *Tate* its highest score of 91.5 of 100.<sup>64</sup> This was unexpected since one of the site’s main functions is to entice visitors. Also intriguing is that Participant 1, the only experienced professor, was the most critical of sites, giving them the lowest scores overall.<sup>65</sup> Her experience teaching several distinct time periods may have been a factor.

In addition to numbered scoring, comments made by participants provide rich material. For example, Participant 4 found it difficult to evaluate the selected sites because they were outside her research area. This comment suggested a concern about undergraduates using websites as primary resources; although this concern may be unique to the art history discipline<sup>66</sup>. Since a doctoral student,

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<sup>57</sup> E-mail correspondence with Dr. George Landow, 14 October 2002.

<sup>58</sup> David Whittaker, *Art on the Net*, 20 Art Review (April 1998) (Despite Landow’s criticism, it can be assumed that the site has improved since Whittaker’s article since it was written in 1998, the same year the site was created.)

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix B, figure 6.

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 4.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 2.

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 7.

<sup>63</sup> Id.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix B, Figure 1.

<sup>65</sup> While other participants have teaching experience, Participant 1 is the only full-time professor. See, Appendix B, Figure 7 for her evaluations.

<sup>66</sup> “The flip-side of it is that the WWW also contains an even greater number of websites which deal with History . . . topics irresponsibly, which distort facts or misinterpret them, either willfully or through ignorance. Some students appear prone to citing the latter type of site in their essays rather than the former, and as a result, lecturers are justifiably hesitant to encourage students to treat the WWW as a potential resource for their studies in the first place. Often, it seems so much safer to simply

who has studied various time periods and theories/approaches for the discipline, was unsure about her evaluations, an undergraduate with less training may be less equipped to accurately judge the reliability of a site. Art history sites are especially prone to these dangers because of the interest amateurs take in art.

Also in this section, participants were asked how useful the designate survey criteria were in evaluating the art history sites and if any evaluating factors were omitted. This was asked both on a scale of 1 to 5 and as an open-ended question. On the numbered scale, the average answer for “how useful” was a 3.75 with a median of 4. Looking at possible omissions (5 meaning no factors were omitted); the average score was a 3.75 with a median of 4. While the numbered scores give an indication of the evaluation’s usefulness, the open-ended section of these questions helps to discern what issues are important to art historians and, in particular, art historians as web users. For instance, Participant 1 (a professor) felt the questions should be adjusted because her scores did not reflect her likes and dislikes. She felt that *NouveauNet* was more successful than *Haberarts* in creating an attractive overview and that *NouveauNet* had a higher quality of information than *Haberarts* (and was less “pretentious”). Yet the same participant also agreed that an author’s bibliographical information is essential in judging the authority of a site. Participant 4 appreciated the focus on images, stating that the text and image are “inseparable” for effective study and research. Three of the five respondents felt overall navigation was more important than stressed in the survey. Another participant combined navigation with attractiveness. It was surprising that participants focused on these issues so strongly for evaluating web sites for scholarly research, since it was anticipated that the criteria of authority and image would be of the greatest importance, perhaps even being a threshold requirement (especially images, as they are an issue unique to art history in its importance). One possible explanation for this result was that the participants might have approached the survey as general web users rather than art scholars. This emphasis could also be attributed to a failure to communicate that the survey was evaluating web resources for scholarly usefulness<sup>67</sup>. Other factors could have also influenced participants. The comment on overall attractiveness may be because pleasing aesthetics are an integral part of the discipline. One additional alternative conclusion may center on the unfamiliarity or the absence of the acceptance of web resources for a scholarly purpose within the discipline, and thus the absence and/or lack of experience or instruction regarding the need to evaluate the resource. Since the acceptance of utilization of web resources for a scholarly purpose appears to be limited, there may be an absence of understanding and/or education with regard to the need to properly evaluate such resource.

### **Conclusions:**

It is unclear as to whether or not the participants completely understood the purpose and concept of the survey. The original intent and design of the survey was to evaluate web resources for utilization within the context of scholarly research (e.g. use of web resources in a master’s paper or dissertation). The participants seemed easily distracted by concepts of entertainment, attractiveness and navigability. Such distraction is evidenced by the scores relating to the *Image* category for the *NouveauNet* and the *Tate*. While the images displayed on *NouveauNet* are attractive, the authority of such site was so absent as to call into question the use of any portion of the site’s materials. With regard to the *Tate*, while the site itself is authoritative, the size and the resolution of the images were inconsistent especially in light of the scores received which again suggests one of several possible conclusions – an

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tell them to keep away.” Sonja Cameron, Using the WWW to teach History Classics and Archaeology or: when is a bad website a good website? (May 2002) @<http://hca.itsn.ac.uk/> (November 30, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> Cf., The directions on the survey clearly indicated a scholarly purpose. See Appendix A.

absence of understanding of the purpose of the survey, an incorrect assessment of the importance of the image by the authors or an incomplete assessment of the images within the *Tate* by the authors.

There is an absence of literature in the area on the subject of evaluating and utilizing web sites within the discipline of art history. In the absence of any such literature it was determined that there was a degree of commonality between the disciplines of art history and humanities thus suggesting the humanities literature on the subject of evaluating and utilizing web resources was an acceptable starting point. Another topic of interest might be the analysis of why there is an absence of literature on the subject from an art history perspective. Specifically, the question—*are web sites considered an acceptable source of reference materials for an art history scholar?*—deserves investigation. The available literature regarding art images and art history or museums all centered on the digitization of images rather than an evaluation of the product. In the absence of any authoritative work, the discussion of the differences in the humanities and the art history disciplines were left to the discretion of the authors of this paper. A concerted effort was made to discuss this issue with scholars and students within the field of art history and to draw from unrelated literature within the field of art history concentrating on the digitization of images.

There is a general impression that the criteria selected to evaluate the resources were appropriate and the questions on target; however, the results suggested two additional primary concerns not directly addressed. The first of such concerns centers on the acceptability of web resources within the art history discipline and the second of such concerns on the understanding by those utilizing a web resource of the necessity to evaluate such source. The results of the survey seemingly concentrated on usability of a web site as a whole and suggested an incomplete understanding of the need to question the reliability of the information obtained on the web. The mere existence of the second concern, the necessity to evaluate web resources, seems to support the first concern (acceptance of web resources within the art history field) and may, in fact, provide a clue as to why web resources are not widely used or accepted within the discipline of art history at the present time. The suggestion is that presently, utilization within the discipline of art history for a scholarly purpose is severely limited to that of a visual aid within the confines of a class room and not as a reference tool. Also, the web resources which are accepted are again severely limited; the Getty Institute being defined as the model – anything less being deemed unacceptable. This is an apparent distinction between the disciplines of art history and the humanities - the humanities finding authoritative web resources acceptable reference sources within scholarly circles.

Authority is a threshold issue especially for humanities; however with regard to art history, it was suggested from the survey results that usability or representation (accurate) of the image is at least a second threshold requirement. The requirement of the usability of the image might in fact suggest why the participants placed so great an importance on navigability.

Overall, this survey or sampling, the available literature and interviews with experts helped to discern issues important to art historians. Such issues included the image, authority and usability. Although users can find numerous sites with art images, art history as a discipline, is still struggling with the utilization of the web as a research source. Accordingly, the development of evaluation criteria together with instruction on the necessity for evaluation is of critical importance for the discipline of art history.

**Appendix A**  
**Criteria for Evaluation of Web Sites**

**Part I:**

*Purpose: The chart set forth below is designed to evaluate web sites utilized for scholarly purposes.*

*Directions: For each web site indicated, please visit the web site and, based solely upon its content, assign each criterion a point value from 0 to 5. Assignment of a point value of 0 represents the lowest value which may be assigned the criteria and an assignment of a 5 to a particular criterion represents the highest value which may be assigned. A web site with a perfect score in each category will have a total score of 100.*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<a href="http://nouveau.net.com/prbpassion">http://nouveau.net.com/prbpassion</a>	<a href="http://65.107211.206/victov.htm">http://65.107211.206/victov.htm</a>	<a href="http://www.haberarts.com">http://www.haberarts.com</a>	<a href="http://www.tate.org.uk/home/default.htm">http://www.tate.org.uk/home/default.htm</a>
<b>Authority:</b>	The identity of the author or sponsor is clearly identified (not buried).				
	Site includes citations to relevant sources and/or a bibliography for the information provided.				
	Credentials and/or experience of the author are expressly stated or a hyper link to such information is expressly and clearly provided and site provides an express email link to author or sponsor.				
	Site is a 'reference site' not an 'enticement site' .				
	URL of the site ends in .org or .edu rather than .com.				

<b>Bias:</b>	Information is presented in an objective manner. All sides of an issue are provided equal treatment.				
	Site contains information which contradicts other sources.				
	Site contains an explanation of its research methods.				
<b>Currency:</b>	Site includes a “last date updated” feature explicitly stated.				
	The hyperlinks work (e.g. are they still active).				
	Site clearly and prominently displays a date of last revision and such revision is of a ‘recent’ nature.				
	Copyrighted information is clearly marked and contains a copyright date.				
<b>Relevance:</b>	Information adds to and supports your research purpose.				
	Site provides useful cross references to other information and/or other sites.				
	Information is comprehensive.				
	The intended audience of the site is appropriate for your desired purpose.				

<b>Images:</b>	Site contains accurate images.				
	Images are usable given considerations to features of size and colors.				
	Images are easily locatable and/or searchable.				
	Images load quickly.				
<b>Total</b>	*****				

**Part II.**

*Please answer the following questions.*

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (one being the lowest assignable point value and 5 being the highest) how helpful were the criteria used to evaluate the sites.

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2. . On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 represents that you believe no factors were omitted) in your opinion were any factors necessary to evaluate a web site omitted?

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If so, please describe the factors you believe were omitted.

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3. Please provide any other observations you have regarding the criteria and categories listed in Part I.

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## Appendix B

Figure 1.

# Total scores for each website

Categories added together for each site (based on 100 point scale)

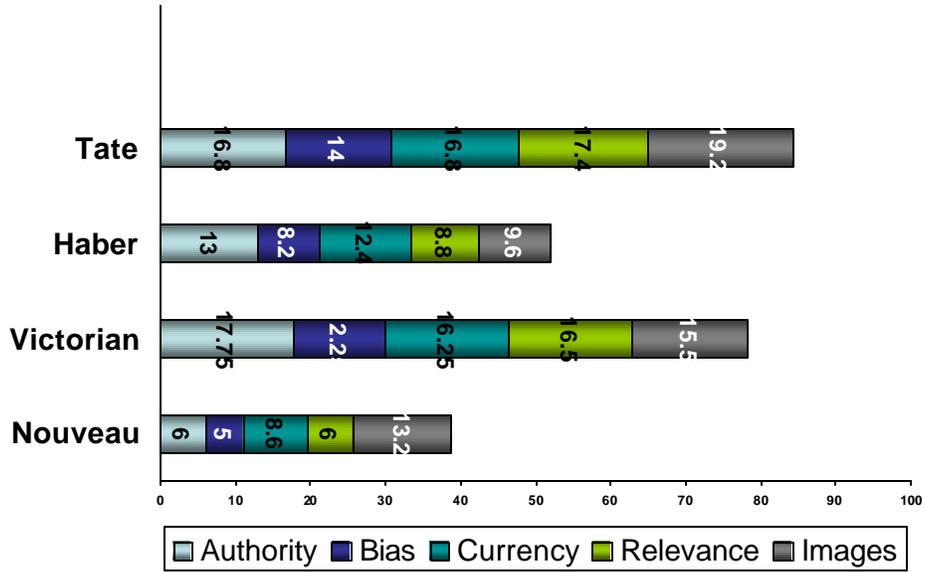


Figure 2.

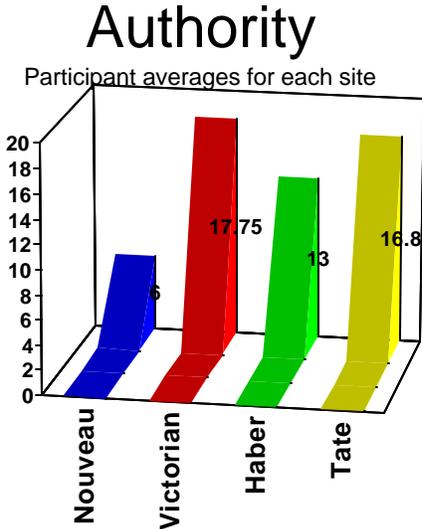


Figure 3.

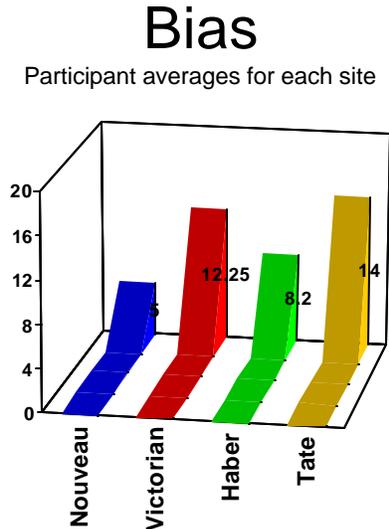


Figure 4.

# Currency

Participant averages for each site

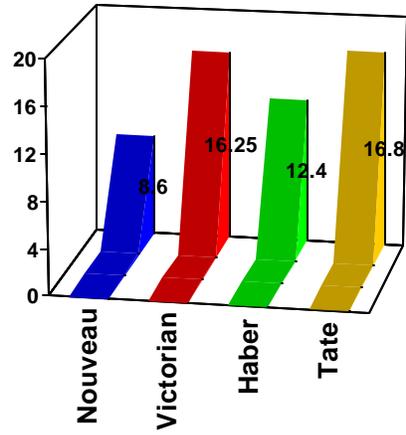


Figure 5.

# Relevance

Participant averages for each site

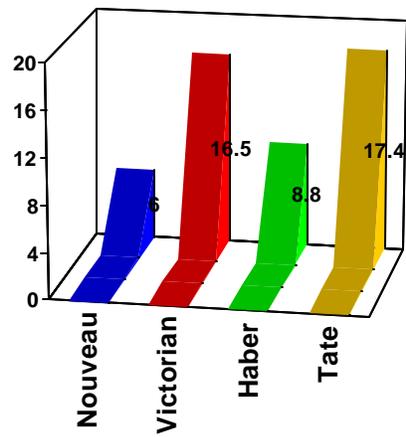


Figure 6.

# Images

Participant averages for each site

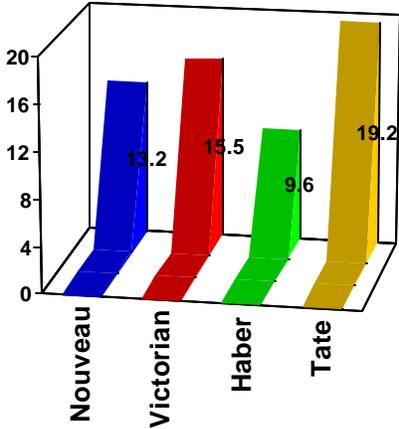
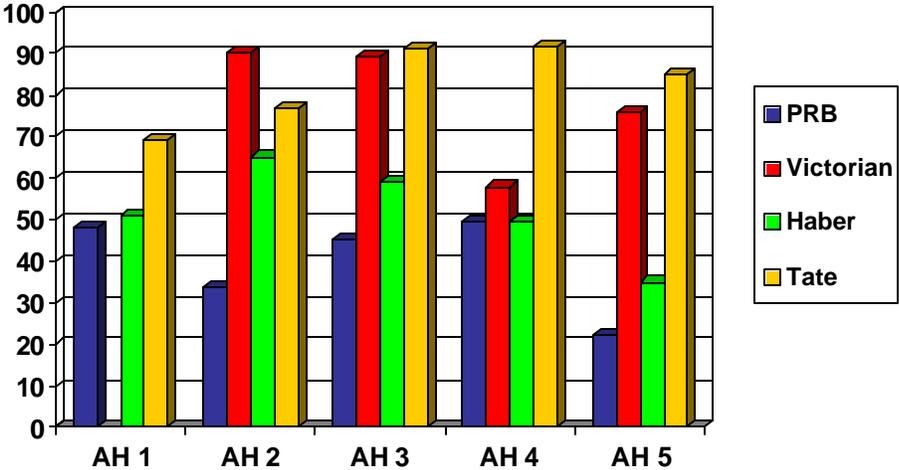


Figure 7.

# Total website scores by participant

AH=Art Historian



<b>Websites</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Design</b>	<b>References to Site</b>
<b>Victorian Web</b>	Dr. George Landow, English & Art History Prof., Brown U. & National U. of Singapore	Examination of Victorian period  Interdisciplinary	Extensive text Sizable images  Overall clean & navigable	Primarily university websites  *PBS, Evaluation tutorials
<b>Tate Britain Gallery</b>	Curators & Education Department	Museum collection & events  Visitor info.	Image & text mixture  *Several small images, not viable for study	<i>For Museum</i> -Print journals & newspapers -Directories -Commercial sites <i>Web: Art Review Journal</i>
<b>PR Passion of Nouveaunet</b>	Valerie Criswell, Internet consultant & independent web contractor  *No evident art history education	Pre-Raphaelite art	Brief text, stronger images Navigation difficulties  PRB section more extensive	Primarily personal sites  *Pittsburg State U. course citing <i>Victorian Web &amp; Encycl. Britannica</i>
<b>Postmodern and Art History of Haberarts</b>	John Haber, Geoscientist & Web project manager  *No evident art history education	Multiple periods  Title: <i>Gallery Reviews around NY</i> misleading	Busy design with graphics  *Many images too small	Primarily commercial sites  *High school course sites