

The Image Space

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'Doorway in Oman', 1996, oil painting by Tom Cross.
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.

Background

University College Falmouth is a specialist art, design, media, and performance higher education institution based in Cornwall. The College is part of the Combined Universities of Cornwall, which has a shared vision of developing higher education within Cornwall. Visual Resources is an important part of the Library and Information Service at University College Falmouth and this includes still and moving images. The Image Space developed out of an extensive slide collection, built up over many years but no longer being widely used as the technology had changed, slide equipment was no longer being supported, and students and staff were turning to the Internet for images without always finding what they wanted or being clear about the copyright status or implications of what they were using. The College secured funding for a JISC project to look at an institutional repository and out of this project emerged plans for a digital image database, 'The Image Space'. A small working group was set up to progress the project, and part way through, the College was also invited to join a group of institutions collaborating in the JISC-funded Look-Here! project.



'Massignano, Landscape in the Marche', 1956, oil painting by Tom Cross.
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.

Expectations

The challenges for the Image Space project were to find an appropriate digital assets management system, decide which collections would be prioritised, establish the criteria for selection, and what metadata schema would be used. The copyright status of each of the collections needed to be clarified and copyright licence permissions sought where required. Whilst University College Falmouth had a large slide collection covered by a blanket licence from the Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS), this did not give permission for the digitisation of these slides, so alternative collections had to be developed where copyright permission could be acquired on a collection by collection basis.

Approach

A project working group was convened by the Head of the Library and Information Service with the Image Collections Co-ordinator, Academic Liaison Librarian for Art and Design, Visual Resources Librarian, and a member of the Library Systems Team. The group started by drafting collection guidelines covering context, collections, stakeholders, and responsibility for the Image Space, collection guidelines, cataloguing and indexing of content, metadata, and access to the collections.



'The Cloister of San Agostino', 1962, pen and wash and gouache, by Tom Cross. Tom visited Italy regularly and painted scenes, buildings, and churches. Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.

Evaluations were carried out between different digital assets management systems including Luna Insight, Sharepoint, and open source software such as the Madison Digital Image Database (MDID). There was a preference for open source to allow flexibility, innovation, and development as well as on cost grounds. The project decided on MDID2, as it was a tried and tested, free open source product in widespread use in the United States. MDID2 enables users to search, create slideshows, share slideshows, upload personal images as well as images from other sources, so is a good central place to keep images for learning, teaching and research. Detailed work began on implementing the software, deciding on field elements, looking at how to upload images, agreeing on the interface to suit user needs, and setting permissions from copyright holders.

Having followed advice from the Visual Resources Association (VRA), the project decided to use VRA Core 4 as our metadata schema, and the Getty vocabularies for subject indexing, as these standards have been set up specifically for describing cultural objects, and are currently used successfully by many visual resources departments in American institutions. However, the Library of Congress subject headings, The Tate Glossary of terms, and our own local terms are also referred to if any suitable terms cannot be located using the controlled vocabularies.

Once the software and metadata had been chosen, specific collections were chosen to pilot the project with users. The first collection chosen was from the Courtauld Colour Slide Scheme as this was copyright cleared, relevant to learning, teaching, and research and included high quality images. The basic

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metadata that accompanied these images gave us a starting point to show the repository to a selection of key stakeholders consisting primarily of academics who had previously used the slide collection for teaching and research. The other collections chosen included the University College Falmouth final year degree shows and MA shows, whereby academic staff select work from each course which best represents that year, and a collection of works by artists and designers working in Cornwall. This part of the project presented real challenges in the area of copyright and forms were devised based on a template from the Visual Arts Data Service (VADS), to obtain copyright permission from all of the artists and designers as well as students.

Feedback from users following the pilot stage of the project was mainly positive with some recommendations on making the interface more visual, in line with the larger subscription databases subscribed to by University College Falmouth such as ARTstor and Bridgeman, with more interactive guides and tips.



'Taliesin', 1976, oil painting by Tom Cross. This constructivist style painting was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's house called 'Waterfalls.'
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.

One other area of development within the College was that of Archives and Special Collections and the archives of a former principal of the College and artist, Tom Cross, were offered to the College. Included within this was a collection of slide images of Tom Cross' paintings, and as the College was in touch with Pat Cross, his widow, the project asked for and were given permission to digitise the images, to add to the Image Space and also offer to VADS for hosting on their database so this collection became the primary one for the project. The collection covers all aspects of art history, particularly twentieth century movements in Cornwall, and shows Tom Cross's extensive work as an artist and is relevant to the arts sector. Offering this collection to VADS is a way of opening up this collection and archive to a wider audience.

The Image Space was launched at the College in the Autumn Term 2010 with drop-in sessions held at both Tremough Campus Learning Resources Centre and Woodlane, the specialist arts library. Work had been done prior to the events with selected academic staff targeted for their use of the former slide collection and their current academic programmes. These staff included

programme leaders and lecturers on fine art, foundation, MA 20th Century art and design, and 3D design.

The Look-Here! project led by VADS came at exactly the right time for the College. The College had identified what needed to happen with the slide collection but it gave the College the opportunity to see what other institutions and organisations were doing with their slide collections and digitisation programmes. It gave the opportunity to share good practice and also to learn from other experiences. The College became part of a community of practitioners in this area.



'From a Window, Urbino, Italy', 1983, gouache, by Tom Cross.
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Image Space developed out of a need to provide access to copyright cleared, high quality images for learning, teaching and research at University College Falmouth. The College now has a working digital image repository which has been launched to staff and students. This is included in information skills sessions with students as part of the image collections available to them. As a result of the launch key members of staff have indicated their interest in incorporating the Image Space into their teaching practice and members of Fine Art staff are looking to include this as part of their mandatory induction process with first year students. Since the launch in November 2010, and following a number of joint teaching sessions with the Academic Liaison Librarian for Art and Design, there has already been a steady increase of users of the database as evidenced by its usage statistics.

Recommendations:

- Be clear about the aims and objectives of the project and its relevance to the curriculum and where applicable to the wider arts higher education sector.
- To use the expertise that is already available from organisations such as the VRA and VADS especially when evaluating software, selecting metadata, and seeking copyright advice.

- Seek to understand user needs and why will they use these images.
- Involve others – key stakeholders, academics, students so that the collections are relevant.
- Understand who your metadata is for – the project had long discussions as to what should be included where and initially the first impressions of the repository were that it was too text based and not visual enough. The full metadata record may not be needed at first view.
- Can we widen the user field? Is the collection limited to certain subject areas in the arts, and will we be able to expand to other areas taking on board other subjects on the campus such as history and science?
- Allow development time, for example there is a new version of the MDID software due which will bring real enhancements to the repository, however time will be needed to explore all the possibilities and then to demonstrate the system to users.

Key Points

- Be clear about the aims and objectives of the project and its relevance to the curriculum.
- Develop criteria for selection, collection, and copyright guidelines.
- Establish user needs.
- Research the system and metadata standards.
- Network with other institutions for best practice and use all available resources such as the expertise from VADS.
- Allow development time.

References

Getty Vocabularies

<http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/index.html>

The Image Space

<http://library.falmouth.ac.uk/704/resources/collections/the-image-space/article.asp>

Library of Congress Authorities

<http://authorities.loc.gov>

MDID

<http://mdidnews.blogspot.com>

Tate Glossary

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary>

VADS

<http://www.vads.ac.uk>

VRA

<http://www.vraweb.org>

Contact

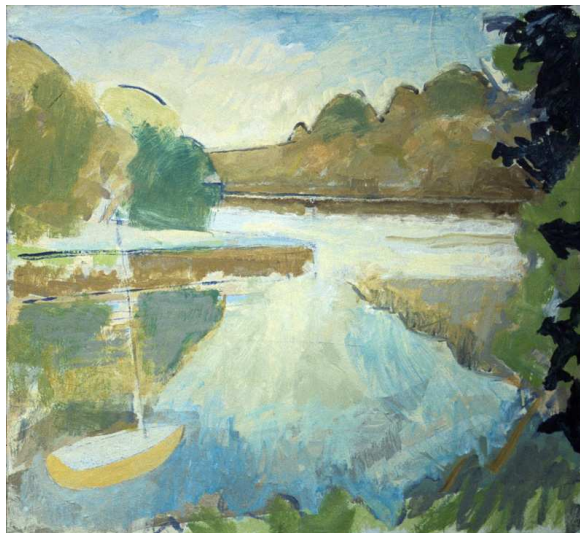
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'Blue Jug and Oysters', 1991, oil painting by Tom Cross. The jug became an important object in Tom's paintings and is still in his studio today.
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.



'Oyster Quay', 2005, oil painting by Tom Cross. One of Tom's later works featuring a view from the Helford River, Cornwall.
Tom Cross Archive, University College Falmouth.