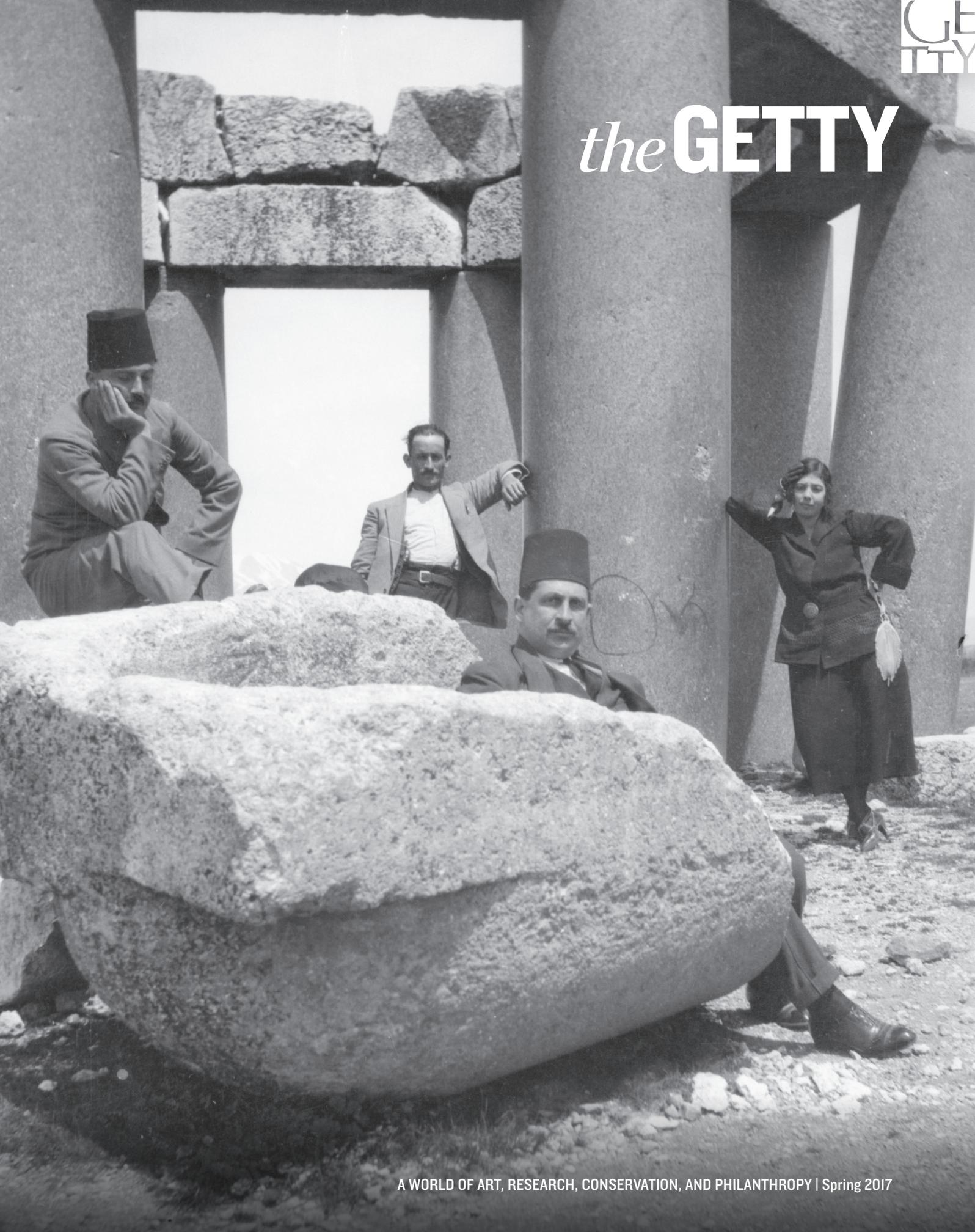
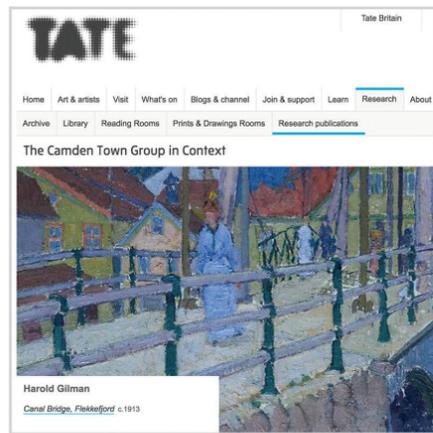
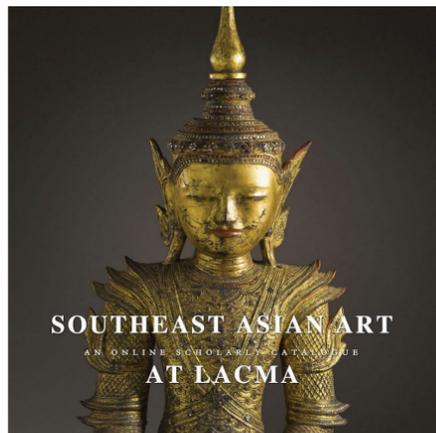
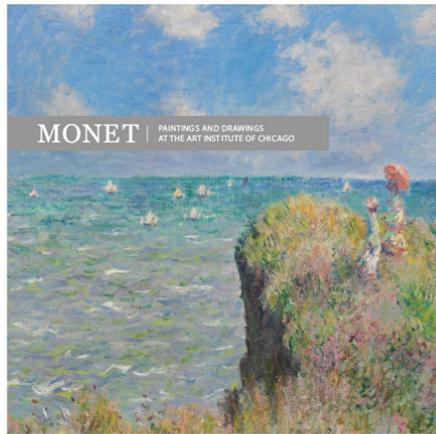


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Lessons in Online Publishing

Covers of the OSCI catalogues from (left to right, top to bottom): The Walker Art Center; Freer and Sackler Galleries; Art Institute of Chicago; SFMOMA; Seattle Art Museum; National Gallery of Art; LACMA; and Tate.

“The Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative has been visionary, inspiring the eight participating institutions to rethink their traditional publishing models and develop online catalogues that leverage the unique benefits of the digital era.”

– Douglas Druick, former president and Eloise W. Martin Director, Art Institute of Chicago

In 2009, the Getty Foundation launched an ambitious project that sought to change the way museum collection catalogues were created and disseminated. The Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative (OSCI) was developed to rethink the museum collection catalogue for the digital age and help museums work together to transition to online publishing, paving the way forward from pictures on a page to pixels on a screen.

Online catalogues, unlike their traditional printed counterparts, allow museums to easily update content without waiting years for a new print edition; engage a global audience with the latest scholarship; offer high-resolution images of artworks; and include enhanced conservation documentation. The Getty Foundation provided grants to eight museums to develop online catalogues: Art Institute of Chicago, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Seattle Art Museum, Tate, and Walker Art Center. The Foundation held convenings for the partner museums throughout, enabling curators, publishers, technologists, and other museum professionals to tackle problems and devise solutions together. These pioneering museums have each completed their own OSCI catalogue, distinctive in character and suited to the needs of their institution.

Today, eight years after the initial convening of OSCI partners, the participants have learned that online publishing is not business as usual, but requires rethinking long-held assumptions about research, writing, and publishing. While the impact of OSCI on art history and museum practice is just beginning to be measured, the initial results are encouraging and have spurred interest from institutions around the world who also seek a digital future for their collection catalogues.

The Foundation recently released an online final report for OSCI that shares the lessons learned and remaining challenges that the field faces to continue publishing collection catalogues digitally. Following is a summary of key takeaways.

lesson_01 Online Publishing is Authoritative

OSCI participants agreed that the goal of the initiative should be to produce catalogues that met all the expectations of sound museum scholarship found in printed publications, including rigorous research and assurance that the catalogue will be archived and preserved for the future.

“The means of production and display may have changed, but it’s a peer-reviewed scholarly catalogue with all that that implies,” said Judy Metro, editor-in-chief at the National Gallery of Art.

lesson_02 Choose Technology Wisely

Each museum had to carefully select the digital features that best suited their respective catalogues, among them image comparison tools, multi-media content, and custom lightboxes. Museums also had to take stock of their existing systems that could be put to use on a digital project, and assemble team members with the right expertise from the start of the projects.

lesson_03 *Rightsize the Project*

All the OSCI museums began with ambitious publishing projects, but most quickly realized that they needed to scale back the size in order to develop effective prototypes. However, this didn't mean that they couldn't be ambitious. The Monet catalogue created by the Art Institute of Chicago contains 2,300 images and four hundred thousand words—it would be 1,100 pages in print!

"Initially our OSCI project encompassed all of the Pulverer Collection of premodern Japanese illustrated books, but with over sixty thousand images to manage, we quickly realized the scope was too large," said Nancy Micklewright, head of public and scholarly engagement at the Freer and Sackler Galleries. "Sharpening our focus to a set of key works by Hokusai allowed us to use the publication as a pilot project and work out the technical challenges with a smaller data set."

lesson_04 *Make Sure Your Content is Ready*

While it isn't sexy and it takes time and effort, clean data is at the core of any online catalogue. Museums used tools such as controlled vocabularies (an established list of standardized terminology for use in indexing and retrieval of information) to prepare data for publication. They also had to identify any gaps in digital assets, including high-resolution images of objects and conservation photography.

lesson_05 *Intellectual Property is Manageable*

OSCI participants recognized from the start that copyright law and permissions would impact their scholarly catalogues—what would happen if online rights had to be renegotiated every five to ten years, as is the typical agreement? To simplify the permissions process, the General Counsel's Office of the J. Paul Getty Trust drafted a sample online scholarly catalogue license and made it available to the OSCI museums. The partners also benefited from

lesson_06 *Find Ways to Serve Multiple Audiences*

museums who have embraced open access—including the Getty, LACMA, the National Gallery, and others—and organizations such as the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, which is a leader in easing rights restrictions.

"Museums need to experiment with online publishing in order to disseminate information about their collections to the audiences of the future," said Mimi Gardner Gates, director emerita of the Seattle Art Museum. "Our audiences are changing and becoming more tech savvy. You're either with them or you're not."

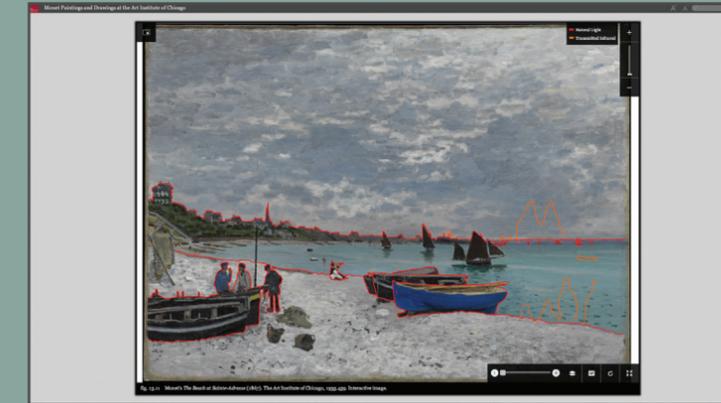
Through various forms of research, OSCI museums found that digital publications not only appealed to scholars, but general audiences were keenly interested in online resources about their collections. In response, several museums provided tools to refine the content in the publication. For example, the National Gallery of Art followed what they called the "Skim, Swim, Dive" approach, and structured each catalogue so that the reader can choose to read a short synopsis, explore additional information, or dig deeply into the scholarship.

lesson_07 *Design Matters*

Balancing the dynamic capabilities of an online publication with an intuitive user experience can be tricky, and OSCI participants found that it was important to have a designer involved early in the process. Designers integrated tools that would keep images front and center, so that the user didn't have to navigate back to them on another page. The Art Institute of Chicago ensured that a work of art is displayed throughout each catalogue entry, while LACMA created a lightbox feature for all images. Additionally, it was critical that the design was responsive to all devices, from cell phone screens to large desktop monitors.



Catalogue entry for *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse, 1867, Claude Monet*. From *Monet Paintings and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago*. Oil on canvas. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection.



Multilayered interactive image of the same Monet painting from *Monet Paintings and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago*.

lesson_08 *Get the Right People and Structure in Place*

Online publishing is more collaborative and less compartmentalized than the creation of a print catalogue. In response, OSCI museums closely integrated technology staff, designated project managers and leaders, identified the needs for outsourcing, and adjusted workflow as needed.

"This was a transformational initiative for us," said Robin Dowden, former director of technology and new media initiatives at the Walker Art Center. "It was not about superimposing something on the institution. It was about changing the way we work."

lesson_09 *Think Sustainably*

An online publication must be maintained, which requires both staff time and resources. Museums must develop a preservation strategy for their institution with the understanding that it will evolve over time. For example, the Seattle Art Museum has already added essays to its Chinese scrolls catalogue and SFMOMA has added a new work by Robert Rauschenberg that was acquired after the catalogue release. All of the OSCI museums recognize that online publications are not one-off boutique projects but part of building a long-term sustainable publishing platform.

Challenges and Looking Forward

While all of the museums successfully published their digital catalogues, there remains several challenges, including simply finding the catalogue online. If a catalogue is placed "deep" within a museum's website, it might escape the attention of a reader who is browsing the website casually and scanning for research material. It is important that museums employ search engine optimization (SEO), use keywords and metatags, and build new marketing pipelines suited for these digital publications.

Participants still anticipate growing pains as they shift from regarding online publications as one-off projects to ongoing publishing platforms. This will require continued buy-in from museum leadership. The good news is that all of the OSCI partners are already working on new catalogues.

As the museum field carries digital publishing forward, there will no doubt be more new tools, new approaches, and new challenges. Technology is ever-changing, and museums must continue to adapt to keep up and maintain relevance in this connected, digital world. What will not change is the contribution of the pioneering OSCI museums in developing important first steps and demonstrating that online catalogues were possible.

Learn more about OSCI by reading the full final report online: getty.edu/foundation/osci-report.