Making Pictures Identifiable in the Long Now: Is Embedding an Answer?

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Abstract: Obtaining sufficient preservation metadata is a challenge for archivists who bring any digital content into their collections. It is especially challenging when collections include digital images. While provenance and other descriptive information may be extractable from text files it is often not possible with digital image files, especially the essential information needed to understand the images at the item level. This poster presents for examination the research questions we have identified at the intersection between digital image creators and archivists.

Practitioners in the Visual Resources community are currently engaged in experimentation with embedding standards-based descriptive and administrative metadata into image files. The data is structured using metadata schemas that are interoperable and software independent.
This project addresses a long-standing problem for visual resource collections and digital image creators who want to share images. Losing the link between the image and its description frequently leads to unknown and orphan image files. The poster will describe the beginning stages of a Visual Resources community effort at embedding metadata into digital image files and will pose research questions to the archival community of how this endeavor may aid in long-term access and digital preservation. Feedback from Forum participants will inform the development of the framework for the project.

About the author:

Kari Smith earned her B.A. in International Relations from George Mason University and her M.S. in Information from the University of Michigan School of Information. She is head of the Visual Resource Collections and Media Services at the University of Michigan Department of the History of Art. With more than ten years of experience with digitization and metadata projects, Kari is leading the VRC through its ongoing transition from a predominantly slide library and image archives to a collection of digital image resources. She is responsible for managing this program in addition to addressing the daily operational needs of the department faculty as well as external users of the photographic distribution project and archival image materials. She engages with colleagues around the University and at peer institutions as well as through professional associations. Kari's research interests include intellectual and long-term access to cultural material especially through interoperable metadata of digital objects. She is a member of the VRA's Data Standards Committee, Embedded Metadata Subcommittee investigating the preservation implications of embedding rich metadata into image files.