

The Baltimore Museum of Art Digital Preservation Policy

(Approved by the BMA Board of Trustees, May 2016)

Purpose

The Baltimore Museum of Art's Digital Preservation Policy establishes a framework for long-term preservation and access to the Museum's digitized and born-digital assets. The Policy will also inform the development of detailed plans and procedures for implementing digital preservation activities. As a public museum, the BMA is charged with caring for and providing access to its art collection and the records that support it including a growing number of items in digital formats. These digital assets are an essential component of the overall institutional strategy and the BMA is dedicated to their preservation. Ensuring the integrity, accessibility, and usability of digital assets over time is recognized as an ongoing core business requirement that is critical to the BMA's future relevance as a cultural institution.

Mandate

The mandate for digital preservation at the BMA is linked to existing institutional responsibility and legal obligations:

1. The BMA's Strategic Plan (rev. 2015) contains a number of goals and priorities that imply the importance of digital preservation, including Goal I.8: "Build in-house expertise and resources for collecting, conserving, and presenting digital art," and Goal I.13: "Stay abreast of new digital tools for collections care and adopt those that will enhance the BMA's practices."
2. The BMA's Collections Management Policy outlines requirements for care and preservation of artwork.
3. The BMA Records Retention Schedule mandates the permanent retention of certain types of institutional records.
4. The policies and procedures of the Library and Archives Department, such as the Records Access Policy, call for providing access to digital records over their lifetime.

Principles

The goal of the BMA digital preservation program is to maintain the authenticity of the Museum's digital assets for long-term access. To the best of the BMA's ability, digital assets identified in this policy for preservation will be maintained in compliance with best practices of the digital preservation community and with national standards, such as the OAIS reference model and the requirements for a trusted digital repository. The program will strive to care for both born-digital and digitized material throughout the lifecycle of the digital asset, maintaining the intellectual property rights of creators and copyright holders.

The program will evolve along with current standards for metadata schema, interoperability, storage, technology, and expertise.

Objectives

The primary objective of digital preservation activities is the ability to meaningfully access digital content over time. The BMA will provide authenticity, discovery, and access to digital assets for current and future generations. This includes the following activities:

- Maintaining and developing sustainable processes and systems to capture, manage, and preserve digital assets for long-term access.
- Bit-level preservation of all digital assets, which means keeping the original files intact and which includes regular checks on the integrity of stored content.
- Providing authenticity and context for digital assets by creating administrative, technical, structural and descriptive metadata.
- Defining procedures for the preservation and availability of digital assets while maintaining intellectual property ownership and rights.
- Ensuring record authenticity and provenance through preservation and technical solutions that promote and maintain composition (especially for assets with multiple objects or files), lineage, fixity, and validity.
- Adapting preservation strategies in response to changes in technology. Where necessary, migrating assets into formats that are acceptable for long-term preservation and access.
- Complying with and contributing to the development of the standards and best practices of the digital preservation community.
- Supporting research and outreach with increased access to authenticated digital content through the creation and disbursement of digital surrogates.
- Providing tools that facilitate the discovery of online digital assets.
- Periodically reviewing technology and metadata standards to ensure best practices for the long term maintenance of digital assets.

Scope

The Digital Preservation Policy applies to all digital artwork in the collection for which the Museum is the primary custodian as well as digital records that have been determined by Museum policy to be valuable and worthy of long-term preservation. Particular emphasis will be given to assets that exist in digital form only. Over time, the scope of assets can be expected to change in response to evolving museum needs and developments in electronic publishing and communication.

The following types of materials are included under the Policy:

- Born-digital materials accessioned into the art collection or Archives.
- Born-digital institutional records identified for permanent retention in the BMA Records Retention Schedule.
- Digital master and service/access files produced by digitizing analog content.

Priorities for preservation action are assigned based on the relative significance of digital assets and the technical complexity of preserving and ensuring access to them.

The following types of materials are considered top priorities for preservation:

- Born-digital accessioned works of art in the BMA's collection.
- Digital assets created to preserve analog works of art in the BMA's collection, such as a digital surrogate of a videocassette.
- Born-digital institutional records critical for Museum operations, such as Board of Trustees minutes, accounting records, building records, and records related to ownership of works of art.

Challenges

The preservation of digital assets represents a significant challenge. The inherent instability and vulnerability of these materials affects the ways in which the BMA secures, manages, and preserves them including:

- **Technology:** Establishing and maintaining a digital program that is responsive to the rapid changes in technology used to capture, store, and make usable digital assets.
- **Costs:** The financial commitment necessary to ensure long-term viability of a preservation program, e.g. staffing, equipment, software, infrastructure, and other miscellaneous costs.
- **Scale and Complexity:** Rapid growth in the volume of digital assets to be preserved; maintaining and describing the complex relationships between the components of digital assets; ensuring that technical characteristics are captured in descriptions and that provenance is maintained; addressing the diversity of types of digital assets.
- **Maintenance:** Creating and sustaining development environments to experiment with new technology and procedures; ongoing monitoring of digital assets, software, hardware, policies and procedures.
- **Access:** Intellectual property and other rights-based constraints on providing access; adequately describing digital assets so that they are accessible; finding an appropriate user interface or building and supporting one to enable users to search and locate, and optimally retrieve digital assets.
- **Artistic Integrity:** Respecting the rights of artists and content creators in an evolving medium; considering both preservation mandates and the intentionally ephemeral nature of some time-based media.
- **Expertise:** Providing staff education and training to keep abreast of standards and technology; hiring and retaining staff with proficiency in both conservation and technology.
- **Collaboration:** Insuring the continued participation of stakeholders across several departments; consistently documenting digital preservation actions for future staff.

The BMA will continually work to mitigate these challenges through policy and technological development.

Roles and Responsibilities

The action and tasks of preserving digital assets requires collaboration among staff throughout the Museum. Key stakeholders include: Information Technology, Library and Archives, Curatorial Departments, Conservation, Registration, Image Services and Rights, and content creators. Responsibility for digital preservation activities will be shared by staff in the following positions: Librarian/Archivist, Registrar, Curator of Contemporary Art, Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs, Conservator, Chief Technology Officer, and Digital Asset Manager.

It is the responsibility of the BMA's administration and Board of Trustees to commit to supporting an environment in which digital preservation is regarded as a critically necessary endeavor. This support includes providing adequate managerial and financial commitment to develop a digital preservation program.

Policy Review Cycle

The BMA Digital Preservation Working Group will present a revised Policy for review by the Board of Trustees every three years. The current Policy will be accessible online.

On an ongoing basis, the program and procedures will be clearly and consistently documented and updated to reflect evolving technologies and changing needs of the BMA and digital asset users.

Access and Use

Every effort will be made to provide public access, online or by request, to legally available digital assets. Digital assets under copyright or other rights restriction will be reviewed for special permission and conditions for access. Preservation copies of digital artwork held in cold storage will not be accessible to the public.

Digitized and born-digital institutional records will be made available according to the BMA's Records Access Policy.

SAA Museum Archives Section Working Group Example

GLOSSARY

Definitions are drawn from the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's [NDSA Glossary](#) (2013), the University of Michigan Library's [Digital Preservation Glossary](#) (2013) and the [Yale University Library Digital Preservation Policy](#).

Authenticity, n. ~ A mechanical characteristic of any digital object that reflects the degree of trustworthiness in the object, in that the supportive metadata accompanying the object makes it clear that the possessed object is what it purports to be.

Born digital, adj. ~ A digital asset that has never had an analog form. They differ from documents, movies, and photographs that may have been scanned or converted to a digital format.

Digital Asset, n. ~ Digitally stored content owned by an individual or institution.

Digital object, n. ~ Any representation of information in a digital format. The term digital object encompasses many different formats including but not limited to emails, word processing files, images, audio files, and ephemera.

Digital preservation, n. ~ The maintenance and management of digital assets, including born-digital and digitized information or art objects, to ensure accessibility and long term use.

Digital repository, n. ~ The organization or department responsible for the intake and maintenance of digital assets.

Fixity, n. ~ The property of a digital file being fixed or unchanged.

Life Cycle, n. ~ The sequential or cyclical sequence of activities that digital assets undergo during their existence.

Metadata, n. ~ Information that describes significant aspects of a resource. Metadata allows for the preservation of a digital asset over time by ensuring the contextual, administrative, historical, and technical information about an asset is recorded.

SAA Museum Archive Section Working Group Example

References

Standards and Best Practice

Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems. (2012, June). Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS). <http://public.ccsds.org/publications/archive/650x0m2.pdf>

OCLC; The Center for Research Libraries; (2007, February). Trustworthy Repositories Audit & Certification: Criteria and Checklist. http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/d6/attachments/pages/trac_0.pdf

Megan Phillips, et al. National Digital Stewardship Alliance. The NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation: An Explanation and Uses. (2013, February).

http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/ndsa/working_groups/documents/NDSA_Levels_Archiving_2013.pdf

Yale University Library. Yale University Library Digital Preservation Policy.

<http://www.library.yale.edu/iac/DPC/final1.html>

Related Documents

The Baltimore Museum of Art Collection Management Policy

The Baltimore Museum of Art Records Access Policy

The Baltimore Museum of Art Record Management Policy

The Baltimore Museum of Art Record Retention Schedule

The Baltimore Museum of Art Rights and Reproductions Clearance Documents¹

¹ Under review.