



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 046-E
Meeting: 106. Art Libraries
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

The art trade and the access to its digital information in art libraries in Spain - an example: the library of the Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español (Madrid) and the Biblioteca General de Arte Museo Nacional de Arte de Cataluña (Barcelona)

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The art trade is one of the most outstanding aspects for the development, evolution and diffusion of the artistic works. The art auctions are essential for the development of this kind of commerce. The art auction history in Spain, specially in the cities of Madrid and Barcelona was presented in other work of ours at the VIII Jornadas de Bibliotecas de Arte en España y Portugal and it was titled "Información y documentación extramuros de las bibliotecas de arte: catálogos de subastas: interrelaciones y servicios".

The conservation, the cataloguing and the information retrieval contained in the art auction catalogues are at this moment a challenge. In this paper we want to expose the way we work in our art libraries, concerning the description of these special material, their archival, retrieval, just to preserve this information and, of course, to make easier the access to this important information to users, buyers and other colleagues.

INTRODUCTION

The trade is one of the oldest activities from the beginning of the civilization. The interest for the acquisition of art works and, for the art collection have always existed. The art trade is varied and it is possible to buy works of art in an art gallery, and this kind of trade was developed specially from the beginning of the XX century . It

is possible to buy an art creation directly from the artist studio as Rembrandt used to do. His house was a really an art gallery. But not only Rembrandt liked to sell his works to the collectors. Many other artists like to do the same, and nowadays, it is very usual to find a lot of web pages concerning the contemporary art creations. They offer to the potential buyers a big variety of pieces. We must remember that in the 1980s there were registered more than 200 auctioneers and now this number is increasing. The history of art auction is very old and we can find some evidence in the Herodotus's History. This author describes the annual auctions that Nubian women carried out in Babylon. Among the Romans this kind of art trade was very popular because it was very usual to sell the objects obtained after a battle. The soldiers used to show their loots under their lances, in Latin *sub hasta*. This Latin expression continued to be used in many other languages of the Mediterranean area, so we can notice that art auction is named in Portuguese *hasta*, in Italian *asta* and in Spanish *subasta*.

The art trade in Spain has ups and downs according to some special periods. But in any way, we cannot forget that almost all the art pieces conserved in our museums derived from the purchases carried out by our kings, and the nobles that obtained an important collection in very different ways.

At this moment the investor, due to the financial crisis, looks for other investment like buildings and other objects as works of art. This phenomenon can be checked if we observe the continuous growth of art galleries, auction galleries, international art fairs and new web sites concerning the art trade.

ART INFORMATION IN THE AUCTION CATALOGS

These catalogs are completely different from the catalogues of any art galleries. The information of an auction catalogue is varied and it differs according to the objects to be sold in an auction but they refer to any work of art that is sold at auction that are described in different ways. So, the auction catalogs can include

- A brief description concerning only the name of the author (including the date of birth and death), the title of the work of art, the medium, and the dimensions. If the name of the artist is unknown the work is described according to the period or by the school. It is very usual to read *attributed*, *circle*, *studio*.
- A more complete description that includes all data named before and also the school from which the work derived and some biographical data.
- Depending upon the value of the piece, the catalogue can include a full information about the history, the provenance, and all kind of references about the work of art. The piece to sell can be accompanied by a certificate done by the own artist, and in a very special occasion the seller according to the auctioneer publishes a pamphlet about the work.
- All catalogues include artist index.
- Every piece reproduced in the catalogues has its own price, and in some catalogs, we can find the reserve price is the minimum amount to sell the piece and also a recommended.
- The photographs have a special relevance in an auction catalog. In the 1970s all photographs were black and white. Nowadays all catalogs include photographs in full colour, but not all pieces are reproduced because the seller must pay for the illustration and the price is quite low.

DIFFERENT SUPPORTS FOR AUCTION CATALOGS

The printed catalogs are very common but now it is very usual to have also virtual catalogs, specially if the auction is virtual auction too. Auction galleries publish both, printed and virtual catalogs just with the scope to increase the selling, but both do not differ each other.

ACCESS TO THE CATALOGS

PRINTED CATALOGS

This type of catalogs are in many times more than a problem for art libraries, because if it is quite difficult to collect them.

- It is difficult to find these catalogs in a bookseller because they are sold just in the auction house.
- The price to take out a subscription is very expensive, specially because the edition is restricted to the clients of the auction house and to potential buyers.
- Many times auction catalogs are considered as an ephemeral material and once carried out the auction, the catalog is not considered of usefulness.
- Difficulty to find the catalogs in the second hand market, and if they are sold many of them are quite deteriorated and even incomplete.
- As the auction is widely extended, it is recommended to centre all efforts just in acquiring only the catalogs of the local auction houses.

VIRTUAL CATALOGS IN SPAIN

We can find a lot of this kind of catalogs just searching in Internet, although the ephemeral character of them is more remarked, because many auction houses maintain the catalogs till the auction takes place, and may be can exist an index of passed auctions. The information of the virtual is not uniform as in the printed.

- The virtual catalog does not include a name index, so we must consult it sequentially. There is information about the two previous auctions. www.consejodearte.com
- The virtual catalog offers the same information as a printed one. It has an artist index, includes all pictures in full colour and information related to the piece to be sold. It offers also the chance to print the full catalog. www.subastascastellana.com This auction gallery publish also a printed catalog but this one it not so complete as the virtual.
- Several auction houses publish virtual and printed catalogs. The structure of both are the same, but the access the archive is easier in the printed form because after the auction the catalog does not exists more longer and only remain a brief reference concerning the past auctions. www.ansorena.com www.artefinfo.es
- There are virtual catalogs that are a consequence of a holding of auction houses and all of them appears in the same web page. Every auction house has its own virtual catalog. There is also a historical information about the pieces not sold in past auctions, just to move the buyers. All the pieces are accompanied by a full colour picture. www.afinsa-subastas.com and www.anticuarios.com
- It is possible to find a lot of web pages concerning auction houses all over the world but we only want to describe the local auctions houses both in Madrid and Spain and specially those that trade exclusively with woks of art.

DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGING OF AUCTION CATALOGS

PRINTED CATALOGS

Due to the importance of the information of the auctions catalogs for scholars, dealers and art critics we try to describe and index this kind of material in an exhaustive way. They all are describe according to the ISBD just to achieve consistency in the treatment of this special material to facilitate the international exchange of bibliographic data. Our automated system works under a MARC format just to recognize and manipulate all the elements described. The auction catalogs can be described as a book or as a serial. In our libraries we describe them as a book because with a serial description we loose a valuable information about the pieces to be sold. So, in our library automated data base these catalogs are ever described as a monograph. The authorship ever is the name of the auction house, so we use the corporate authorship (T110) label. The tittle is completed with any information that distinguishes one auction from other like the date of the auction and some word that differs one catalog from other. In label T.440 we refer the number of the auction when it is possible. If the auction house has a web page and the URL is known, we use label T 856 to establish links between our catalog and the virtual catalog, to provide to user a complete information on line.

Regarding the classification and the indexing we do not do an exhaustive indexing because in every auction are sold about 300 pieces or more of different materials, paintings, ceramics, textiles, rugs, furniture, silver and plate, drawings, engravings, etchings, armour, arms, tapestries, bronzes, ethnical art, sculpture, fans, dolls, stamps. We only refer all these materials and the school of the work of art.

VIRTUAL CATALOGS

The biggest difficult task concerning virtual catalogs is their storage and conservation because because most of them are protected from copy. When it is possible to conserve and to obtain a digital copy, we archive them in a digital form in our computer, but frecuently we obtain a printed copy. Now, we are facing the problem of conservation of this new material. It is well know that the paper and the inks used by a laser printers suffer a great deterioration. And now, we do not really know how long this material will be on use because the material is under continuo degradation. Concerning cataloguing task we proceed as a printed catalogs.

FUTURE

The development of Internet has proved to be a dynamic and sometimes unpredictable process, as new technologies, new systems development and new programs devised. In this global world our libraries cannot be isolated.

- In the future, there will be more interconnection of computer library equipment not only with other collections or libraries, but also, with commercial information brokers. Our libraries at present, can provide information about many auction houses in Madrid and Barcelona to “Art price”, a data base that recopiled information about a lot of auctions. But if it is very extensive, it is not so exhaustive, because we have checked that most of Spanish auction houses are not included.

- Nowadays a bigger prevalence of the printed catalogs exists but in the future they will be replaced by a digital catalogs.
- The increase of auction catalogs goes further and we must assume the greater importance to the world of art of this information, so, we can do our best to make this information available to our users providing an exhaustive information.