



## *Guide to Research at Hirsch Library*

### **Objects in the Museum's Permanent Collection**

Before researching a work of art from the MFAH collection, the work should be viewed in the museum, if possible. The cultural context and descriptions of works in books and journals will be far more meaningful if you have taken advantage of this opportunity. Most good writing about art begins with careful inspections of the objects themselves, followed by informed library research. If the project includes the compiling of a bibliography, it will be most valuable if a full range of resources is consulted, including reference works, books, and journal articles. Listing on-line sources and survey books is usually much less informative.

To find articles in scholarly journals, use indexes such as *Art Abstracts* or, the *Bibliography of the History of Art*. Exhibition catalogs and books about the holdings of other museums may contain entries written about related objects that could also provide guidance and examples of how to write about art. To find books, use keywords in the on-line catalog. Once relevant titles are located, careful attention to how those items are cataloged will lead to similar books with those subject headings. Footnotes and bibliographies in books and articles can also lead to other sources. University libraries will usually offer further holdings on a subject, and the Electronic Resources Room in the library can be used to access their on-line catalogs.

Sylvan Barnet's, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, provides a useful description of the process of looking, reading, and writing. For footnote and bibliography formats, the appendix in Barnet is helpful, as is Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Term Papers*, which is available at the library's reference desk.

For additional assistance in your research, please contact the library staff.  
Call 713-639-7325 or e-mail [hirsch@mfa.org](mailto:hirsch@mfa.org).

For purposes of the bibliography listed below:

Resources that are annotated *Ref.* or *Reference* are accessible on the main floor of the library.

*Ready Reference* books are kept behind the information desk.

For other books, give the titles and call numbers to a member of the library staff, who will retrieve the books for you.

Books must be used in the library; they cannot be checked out.

Your assessment of the resources used in your research is always welcome.

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Listed below are three sets of resources that can be used in researching a work of art in the MFAH permanent collection.

#### **On-line Catalog of books at the Hirsch Library**

The on-line catalog may be searched using the artist's name, the medium and/or technique (*e.g.* painting, bronze casting, engraving), the historical period (*e.g.* Ancient, Renaissance, 19<sup>th</sup> Century), the country or city of origin, and the stylistic or artistic movement or tradition (*e.g.* "Baroque," "Salon Art," "Impressionism").

## **Ephemera and Artist Catalog Files**

*Ephemera files* contain newspaper clippings, articles, announcements, and notices. Files are organized by artists' names and searchable in the on-line catalog.

*Artist catalog files* are commercial exhibition catalogs of fewer than than fifty pages, not individually listed as books in the on-line catalog.

## **Reference books (available at reference desk)**

*The Dictionary of Art* for background on artists, styles, periods, media, or technique.

*MFAH Collection of Works of Art*. A guide to illustrations of objects in museum publications, indexed by artist, title, number, and location.

*Museum of Fine Arts Houston: A Guide to the Collection*, 1981. Entries on 351 objects in the permanent collection, indexed by artist and title.

*A Permanent Legacy: 150 Works from the Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, 1989.

*Masterworks of European Painting in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, 2000. A collection guide with bibliographical references.

*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: Visitor Guide*, 2000. A handbook to the museum, illustrated, with brief descriptive entries.

*Texas: 150 Works from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, 2000. Overview of Texas art based on a core collection in the Houston museum.

*Italian Paintings, 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Century, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, 1996. Discussion of early Italian art in the museum.

Catalogs for special collections in the MFAH, such as the Kress Collection, the Beck Collection, the Blaffer Collection, the Straus Collection, Bayou Bend, and the works by Frederic Remington

Museum of Fine Arts Houston *Bulletins*. Articles in this serial publication are also indexed in a separate notebook.

To determine whether a particular object is on view in the museum, please ask a library staff member.