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A New Movement to Scrap Copyright Fees for Scholarly Reproduction of Images? Hooray for the V & A!

By Sarah Blick, Kenyon College

A stunning change has occurred recently in connection with copyright fees which torment us all. After thoughtful consideration, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/resources/buying/index.html>) has decided to eliminate charges for reproducing images from its collection in scholarly or education publications, believing that such charges are counter to its central mission. Following this, the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced plans to drop its fees for reproductions of images used in scholarly publications with small print runs. As a start, two thousand images will be made available through <http://www.art.stor.org>, with plans to expand significantly. This initiative through ARTstor, entitled "Images for Academic Publishing" (IAP), will make such images available without charge by the Museum, via software on the ARTstor site. At first, the images will be available at the more than 700 institutions that now license ARTstor. But very soon, the Metropolitan Museum of Art staff will be extending this service to unaffiliated scholars, and those at institutions that do not license ARTstor.

This is welcome news. Even more promising, the Art Fund, which is a major source of monies for acquisitions for museums in the United Kingdom, will now require that once a museum accepts an acquisition grant from their fund, it must allow free reproduction of the image in scholarly books and journals. It is believed that this requirement may be made retroactive, covering more than 850,000 acquisitions made since 1903. Needless to say, if this goes forward, most image reproduction policies of museums in the UK will be transformed. This movement echoes the requirement instituted by the National Institutes of Health, a major funding source for scientific research granted by the U.S. government. In late 2004, it stipulated that any publication resulting from research supported, in whole or in part, with direct costs from NIH must be submitted electronically to the NIH National Library of Medicine's (NLM) PubMed Central (PMC). Scientists have lauded this policy decision because costs of scientific journals (published by for profit presses) have skyrocketed, making access to these findings ever scarcer.

Peregrinations, through its Photobank, has protested against the short-sighted policies of museums and libraries that charge exorbitant prices to reproduce images in scholarly venues. How many of us have had to truncate an argument or give up a scholarly project due to these outrageous prices? As I've written elsewhere, to escape the exorbitant costs, many art historians have turned to images in the public domain (usually culled from nineteenth-century books) or are using sketches. It seems strange that in the twenty-first century art historians should be reduced to using nineteenth-century standards to illustrate their publications!

Indeed, no one is making any money from this, even the museums themselves. One factor that led the Victoria and Albert Museum to make their now-historic decision

is that the costs of running a licensing program turned very little profit and kept scholars from researching and promoting the objects in their collection. I hope that more museums and cultural institutions will follow the lead of the V & A, the Met, and the Art Fund, transforming art-historical research by making reproduction of images easy and affordable, leading to better research and teaching across the board.



An article on the spiraling costs of art publishing due to image costs (December 2001)
<http://publishingtrends.com/copy/01/0112/0112stealthisimage.htm>

An earlier article from *Art Bulletin* detailing the problem (March 1997)
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0422/is_n1_v79/ai_20824290