

## DESIGNING A DIGITAL CATALOG RAISONNÉ: TOWARDS A RESEARCH/PRODUCTION METHODOLOGY BASED ON THE STUDY OF A QUEBEC MODERN ART CORPUS (BARBEAU, BORDUAS, RIOPELLE AND VAILLANCOURT)

The catalogue raisonné has become an essential tool for the market and for research in art history since the end of the 18th century. By preserving the widest and most complete possible documentary trace of an artist's work and of the historical context in which his work was produced, the catalogue raisonné is an authority in the field, an authority that can be monetized and also be the subject of litigation or disputes. The International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR)<sup>1</sup> database currently lists around 4,450 catalogues raisonnés internationally. Of this number, 4,100 are published catalogues while 350 are considered catalogues in preparation. Statistics on the territorial distribution of catalogues raisonnés around the world illustrate a certain reality of the art market, which is mainly concentrated in Europe<sup>2</sup> (2325) and the United States (475). Canada presents a very modest production with just about thirty catalogues listed, equal to Russia, but still above China and Mexico's production which have 15 and 20 catalogues respectively.

Focusing first on the emergence of this literary form that appeared in the mid-18th century, the research undertaken at the master's degree level in art history at UQAM by archivist and web developer René St-Pierre pays particular attention to the contemporary variations that the catalogue raisonné can take in the digital environment. In particular, he studied the process and the motivations that led to the design of catalogues raisonnés by four outstanding figures of Quebec modernity, namely the sculptor Armand Vaillancourt<sup>3</sup> and the painters Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-1960)<sup>4</sup>, Jean Paul Riopelle (1923- 2002)<sup>5</sup> and Marcel Barbeau (1925-2016)<sup>6</sup>. These catalogues raisonnés serve different uses and interests, depending on whether you are a collector, gallery owner, art dealer, expert appraiser or art historian. The actors of the art market will use it mainly to authenticate works and to document, for example, auction catalogues, while researchers and art historians will use it rather as an object of scientific study<sup>7</sup> allowing a better understanding of how the practice of an artist could evolve in space and time. For example, at the Heffel Auction House (<http://www.heffel.com>), Tania Poggione explains that putting a work of art up for sale requires rigorous verifications of its provenance. We will therefore seek to know the history of ownership, that is to say all the paths traveled by the work, from its leaving the workshop to the current owner. For the gallery owner Jean-Pierre Valentin

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<sup>1</sup> International Foundation for Art Research (n.d.). Catalogues Raisonné. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Tf9ZUh>

<sup>2</sup> The approximate distribution for the main European countries producing catalogues raisonnés is as follows: France (665), Italy (620), Germany (485), United Kingdom (265), Holland (145), Spain (145).

<sup>3</sup> IFAR (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2UAFI37>

<sup>4</sup> Borduas catalogue (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://borduas.concordia.ca>

<sup>5</sup> Published in December 2020, Volume 5 of Riopelle's catalogue raisonné (<https://bit.ly/2ICowmD>) echoes the exhibition held starting November 21, 2020 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts: Riopelle - À la rencontre des territoires nordiques et des cultures autochtones (<https://www.mbam.qc.ca/fr/expositions/riopelle/>).

<sup>6</sup> The Marcel-Barbeau Foundation website can be viewed at the following address: <https://marcelbarbeau.com>

<sup>7</sup> This is particularly the case for the catalogues of Paul-Émile Borduas and Marcel Barbeau, respectively produced by two art historians, namely François-Marc Gagnon and Ninon Gauthier respectively.

(<http://www.galerievalentin.com>), the art dealer must consult the person or organization morally or legally empowered to authenticate the works of an artist, and according to him, this demand for expertise sometimes reveals questionable business practices. As for Simon Blais (<https://www.galeriesimonblais.com>), also a gallery owner, the authentication of a work of art requires the use of a multi-level analysis grid. This grid also applies in certain more or less bizarre cases, such as the example of an important work found in an attic or by chance at flea markets. Finally for Alain Lacoursière (<http://www.alainlacoursiere.com>), ex-police officer specializing in investigations related to the art market, the expert who has the moral authority for authentication would be the person that was the most exposed to all the works of an artist. But in some cases, opposing opinions may be presented, thus paving the way for potential legal challenges.

This research is linked to catalogues located at the crossroads or at the convergence of the galleries and three heritage areas that are libraries, archives and museums (GLAMs). In order to exemplify this conception integrating documentary, archival and museum dimensions, the following list presents a chronological selection of catalogues that have been designed according to best practices in terms of access and formatting of content. The common objective of all these projects seems conditioned by a vision that their authors have of these works to be able to access, in one place, the most complete corpus of works, archives and dedicated documentary resources dedicated to a single artist.

<b>On-line</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Web address</b>
1998	<i>Online Picasso Project</i>	<a href="https://picasso.shsu.edu">https://picasso.shsu.edu</a>
2013	<i>The Estate of Barry Flanagan</i>	<a href="https://barryflanagan.com/estate">https://barryflanagan.com/estate</a>
2013	Robert Motherwell	<a href="https://www.dedalusfoundation.org/archives">https://www.dedalusfoundation.org/archives</a>
2014	<i>Clyfford Still Museum</i>	<a href="https://clyffordstillmuseum.org/archives">https://clyffordstillmuseum.org/archives</a>
2015	Joaquin Torres-Garcia	<a href="http://www.torresgarcia.com">http://www.torresgarcia.com</a>
2016	<i>Cranach Digital Archive</i>	<a href="http://lucascranach.org/home">http://lucascranach.org/home</a>
2016	Fitz Henry Lane	<a href="http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org">http://fitzhenrylaneonline.org</a>

René St-Pierre's research also aims to sensitize anyone interested in the design of this type of knowledge object in the context of digital humanities and the potential offered by information technologies, social networks and the new linked open data paradigm (Semantic Web). The interested public is wide: artists and their estates, gallery owners and art dealers, curators and museum curators, students of arts, art history, museology, information and archival science. The research is accompanied by a website (<http://archivart.ca/CAT-RAIS/>) preserving the trace, in the form of video capsules, of interviews carried out in the fall of 2019 with actors and stakeholders from the world of Quebec art that use, or have produced digital catalogues raisonnés.

Today, the digital catalogue raisonné is gradually becoming a source of authoritative value in the community of practitioners, researchers and art historians, but must nevertheless respect certain edition standards, academic and scholarly conventions, mainly inherited from the publishing tradition of printed catalogues. In doing so, the future looks very bright for research related to digital humanities. Examples of contemporary best practices involving the sharing of content and metadata from collections or catalogues of works include those of the Getty Research

Institute<sup>8</sup>, the National Gallery of Art<sup>9</sup> and the Rijksmuseum<sup>10</sup>. The case of the Rijksmuseum is particularly telling as it allows users to create their own personalized collection of works. Let us also mention the case of large-scale public initiatives such as those of the Digital Public Library of America (<https://dp.la>) or the Europeana project (<https://www.europeana.eu/fr>). These institutions are not only content indexers, but also champions of open and linked data, as they create metadata schemas that participating institutions must adhere to. Another inspiring initiative is the ResearchSpace project (<https://www.researchspace.org>), emanating from the British Museum and a presentation of which can be seen on YouTube<sup>11</sup>, which illustrates very effectively its objectives and scope. ResearchSpace is presented as open source software designed by a group of experts working in the field of cultural heritage and digital humanities.

Moreover, despite promising technological advances for the sharing and use of data contained in digital catalogues raisonnés (and by extension of those coming from catalogues of collections or exhibitions), we must not lose sight of the primary purpose of this object of knowledge which is that of the authentication of works for the art market. Thus, the design of a digital catalogue raisonné should always take into account, in its dimensions of collecting, processing and promoting data on works, the importance of research on provenance and authentication. In this sense, René St-Pierre supports the idea according to which the enrichment of the digital catalogue raisonné involves the integration of digital archives, or at the very least, of a classification plan making it possible to point out or dynamically link archives to the corpus of works, exhibitions and bibliography of an artist. For example, if there are correspondences detailing the formatting and running of an exhibition (including lists of works, price lists, contracts for loan or transport of works, etc.), the digital catalogue raisonné should make them accessible or at least mention them. This obviously cannot be done without taking into consideration respect for copyright and rights holders in these archives to be disseminated and enhanced. In the light of the discovery of new works, or by the simple passage of time along history, access to primary sources of information may be appreciated by researchers and historians interested in contextualizing, interpreting or making a historical rereading of certain events linked to an artist's career (exhibitions, sales, publications, etc.). Consequently, the catalogues situated at the crossroads or at the convergence of the three heritage areas of libraries, archives and museums will be all the richer and more relevant for research. For the interest of this new field of study, René St-Pierre militates in favour of greater openness and better access to these essential documents for research and the dissemination of knowledge in art history.

The complete dissertation can be downloaded from the UQAM institutional repository at the following address: <https://archipel.uqam.ca/15145/>

Contact : [info@archivart.ca](mailto:info@archivart.ca)

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<sup>8</sup> The Getty. (n.d.). *Open Content Program*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2UHexU6>

<sup>9</sup> National Gallery of art. (n.d.). NGA Images. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/38X15DL>

<sup>10</sup> Rijks Museum. (n.d.) *Rijks Studio*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio>

<sup>11</sup> ResearchSpace. (4th of August 2019). *ResearchSpace Overview*. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/MaAv0SE7wis>