

# Artlibraries.net in the Year of the Water Snake Towards a New Bibliographic Tool for Art History

*By Jan Simane*

*Lecture held at the ARLIS/NA Conference, Pasadena (California)  
28.4.2013*

According to the Chinese Five Element Astrology Calendar, 2013 is the Year of Water Snake. Although we normally associate with snakes rather danger or unpredictability, the Chinese horoscope lists many positive characteristics of the animal snake and the element water, which is the every sixty years returning combination of particular heavenly stems with so called earthly branches: the water snake stands for acumen, wisdom, logical mindset and creativity. Good and promising conditions for many issues to be settled in this year. However, before getting lost in astrology let me come back to more familiar spheres like western academic culture and to less mysterious doctrines like librarianship. I feel very honored to speak for the second time to the ARLIS/NA community, referring to the same and still open question of a future model for bibliographic information supply for the arts and art history. And I am talking here not so much due to a particular importance of my person but rather as representative of the committee of the international virtual catalogue artlibraries.net, which in its origin goes back to a German and in a second step European initiative, but which, in the course of its development, became a bridge to North American art libraries and to many dear colleagues and friends, some of them in the audience here.



**ALN Partners 2013**

A crucial year for the transatlantic relationship was 2010 when collaboration and exchange of expertise were intensified to a so far unknown extent. The background was the cessation of the International Bibliography of Art at the end of 2009 and the consequent so called crisis which has been transferred even to the whole discipline. This topic has been on the agenda of the ARLIS/NA conferences in Boston in 2010 as well as in the following year in Minneapolis and last year in Toronto, always moderated by Carole Ann Fabian and Kathleen Salomon, both members of the FAB initiative and still strongly involved in the related discussions and actions as we have seen before. For time restrictions I have to come very rapidly to the role which the catalogue network artlibraries.net is playing in this context and which significance it could have in future. Last year, at the ARLIS/NA conference in Toronto, Michael Rocke, member of the steering committee of artlibraries.net, gave a very concise but also comprehensive overview of the artlibraries.net project, from its origins to the current state and to future plans as well. In order to avoid repetitions I will try to focus on a few particular, more complementing aspects.

The first is the significance of an union library catalogue, or better to say a network of single catalogues that are unified virtually in one search process, for discipline specific bibliographic services. The interrelations as well as the differences between bibliographies and library catalogues have been recognized and analyzed already many decades ago. The similar nature of bibliographic records in catalogues, first and foremost of specialized libraries, and in systematic and analytic bibliographies is obvious, and library catalogues have always been used as source for bibliographies, such as the old BHA. The BHA and its follower IBA are perfect examples for the traditional, well-established bibliography format which is based on criteria like uniformity, continuity, standards, professional competence and intellectual control. Library catalogues, on the contrary, are more and more mutating to dynamic information clusters in which bibliographic description standards are combined, or 'enriched', with additional data like ToCs, publisher abstracts, reviews, recommendations, readers' ratings, images etc., derived from heterogeneous and sometimes uncontrolled sources. And while bibliographies usually collect their material in a selective and conceptual manner electronic catalogues can do this more and more in automatized procedures. Federated search tools and the so called discovery systems foster this development considerably.

Artlibraries.net is an example for a machine supported aggregation of bibliographic data derived from locally dispersed heterogeneous sources. However, the junction of bibliographic information is following a concept, although in a rather flexible manner, and the sources have been selected not by chance. And this is the second issue to be highlighted. In the last ten years the steering committee of ALN has spun a network of almost 100 electronic catalogues of art libraries in 14 countries and on three continents. However, the goal of this accumulation is not to offer an unifying gateway to the holdings of the participating libraries, but to create virtually a comprehensive aggregator of bibliographic data. Currently, there are about 12 Million records in the virtual data pool, referring not only to books but also to hundreds of thousands of journal articles, reviews, auction catalogues and special collections. Furthermore, additional sources like ART-guide, Google Books or Hathi Trust are optional targets in the search process. As a result, a federated search over so many different sources is merging bibliographic information which can be very comprehensive and which can include so far

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**Masters & pupils** : the artistic succession from Perugino to Manet, 1480-1880 / Gert-Rudolf Flick.  
Flick, Gert-Rudolf, 1943-

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**Publisher:** London : Hogarth Arts in association with Paul Holberton Pub., 2008.  
**Description:** vii, 392 p. : ill. (chiefly col.) ; 31 cm.  
**ISBN:** 9780955406324  
0955406323

**Bibliography:** Includes bibliographical references and index.  
**Contents:** Perugino -- Raphael -- Perino del Vaga -- Prospero Fontana -- Agostino Carracci -- Giovanni Lanfranco, Horace Le Blanc, Jacques Blanchard -- Louis Boullogne the Elder, Louis de Boullogne -- Louis Galloche, François Lemoigne -- Charles-Joseph Natoire -- Joseph-Marie Vien -- Jacques-Louis David -- Antoine-Jean Gros -- Thomas Couture -- Edouard Manet.  
**Local Notes:** Donated by Gert-Rudolf Flick.  
**Subjects:** Painting -- Study and teaching -- Europe -- History.  
Art -- Study and teaching -- Europe -- History.  
Artists -- Education -- Europe -- History.  
**Added Title:** The artistic succession from Perugino to Manet, 1480-1880.

**Summary**

This book is about a family tree: the line of descent that can be traced from Perugino in Italy in the fifteenth century to Edouard Manet in France in the nineteenth. It is not the usual kind of genealogy, of those connected by blood, more an 'apostolic succession', following the way in which art in Europe was taught, from one generation to the next, from 1480 to 1880. The book reveals how the nature and methods of artistic instruction changed over the centuries, from the guild system and the individual workshop to the academy and the establishment of state institutions dedicated to the purpose, as exemplified in France.

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**Masters & pupils : the artistic succession from Perugino to Manet 1480-1880**  
Flick, Gert-Rudolf. London, United Kingdom: Hogarth Arts, in association with P. Holberton, 2008.

**Indexing (details)** | Cite

**Author** Flick, Gert-Rudolf

**Title** Masters & pupils : the artistic succession from Perugino to **Manet** 1480-1880

**Publisher** Hogarth Arts, in association with P. Holberton; London

**Publication year** 2008

**Physical description** ill. (some col.), bibliogr., index p. viii, 392 p.

**Document type** Book

**Language** English

**Classification (English)** Pictorial arts, 1400-1800, Painting and drawing

**Classification (French)** Peinture et arts graphiques, 1400-1800, Peinture et dessin

**Subject (English)** Painting, Technique, Art education, France, Italy, 1400-1900, Painting, Technique, Art education, France, Italy, 1400-1900, Perugino (Pietro di Cristoforo Vannucci), ca.1450-1523, Raffaello Sanzio, 1483-1520, Perino del Vaga (Pietro Buonaccorsi), 1500/01-1547, Fontana, Prospero, 1512-1597, Carracci, Agostino, 1557-1602, Lanfranco, Giovanni, 1582-1647, Le Blanc, Horace, ca.1580-1637, Blanchard, Jacques, 1600-1638, Boullogne, Louis de, the younger, 1654-1733, Boullogne, Louis I, 1609-1674, Galloche, Louis, 1670-1761, Lemoigne, François, 1688-1737, Natoire, Charles Joseph, 1700-1777, Vien, Joseph Marie, 1716-1809, David, Jacques-Louis, 1748-1825, Gros, Antoine Jean, baron, 1771-1835, Couture, Thomas, 1815-1879, **Manet**, Edouard, 1832-1883

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References

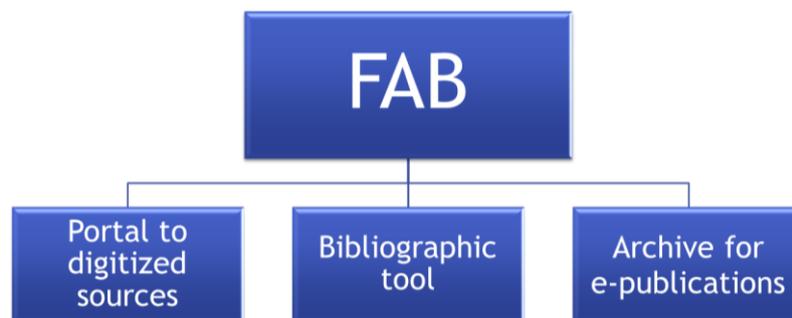
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uncommon formats like OA publications, digital collections, images and the like. In the former case the amalgamation of selected catalogues to one virtual source is an approach – with many shortcomings of course – to services traditionally covered by bibliographies. The latter case, on the other hand, makes evident that we are still lacking an appropriate bibliography format when publishing and the supply of information are leaving traditional paths. The concept of ALN has been facing these realities from a very early stage in its development on, but never considering itself to be an equivalent alternative to traditional bibliographies. And also when in 2010 exits from the crisis of art bibliography were discussed the virtual catalogue was not considered to be the solution. Not least, because its technical infrastructure has several disadvantages and a comfortable selective navigation over the long and confusing hit lists is not possible. However, in sight of its international network-concept it has been acknowledged that ALN could and should play a decisive role when future models for bibliographic tools were to be developed. Only one year later, in 2011, members of the meanwhile constituted task force ‘FAB’ together with the committee of ALN discussed the concept of the ‘umbrella’ under which single areas of responsibility should be unified to something like a ‘discovery environment’ for discipline specific information and sources. This was admittedly a



rather theoretical approach, lacking clarity about technical feasibility. Furthermore, a financial basis for such an ambitious project was missing. But these undeniable difficulties did not lead to resignation but stoked rather our creativity, to come back to the water snake.

The last issue I will focus on is the broad outline of a project which since the last week has also a name: *World Cat Art Discovery*. Bearing the previously mentioned fact in mind that selectively networked library catalogues can fulfill similar services like bibliographies and facing the reality that a good part of the artlibraries.net catalogues are part of the WorldCat data pool the starting point of developing a new model for a discipline related information retrieval was the consolidated architecture of the WorldCat, its international identity, its enormous amount of specific as well as additional sources and the evidence of its global significance in the near future just as in the long view. It is also not to underestimate how important and helpful the support of OCLC in developing our concept was. To come straight to the point: based on the experiences with a prototype for a group catalogue in WorldCat we are working on a new tool for discipline specific retrieval. Queries for bibliographical information will be satisfied with access to records of selected libraries mirroring – at least in part

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WorldCat is the world's largest library catalog, helping you find library materials online.

## WorldCat Artlibraries.net Group Catalogue (Prototype 2013)

– the concept of artlibraries.net. But in the same moment the retrieval – or better the discovery process – can be enriched with additional sources like bibliographical databases – here first and foremost for journal articles –, full-text repositories, image collections and the like. Already on this level the list of hits will be remarkably richer than in the current artlibraries.net environment. And the concern that such result list can become too long and therefore not manageable can be replied with the indication of the facets which allow a comfortable

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2.  **Staging empire : Napoleon, Ingres, and David**  
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post-selective navigation through the results. Furthermore, thinking outside the box of our discipline can be supported easily with a single mouse click passing the query concerned to the complete WorldCat data pool. It should be emphasized that this vision, which meanwhile seems to be in our reach, does not intend, as contemporarily considered, to transfer the complex network of library catalogues connected in artlibraries.net from the current architecture, based on the federated search protocol of the KVK, into a WorldCat environment, but to keep this cooperative network running and to develop concurrently the discovery tool. Of course, a long list of technical, operative, administrative and financial questions have to be answered in the next month. But we are thinking to have reason for optimism, since the concept of *WorldCat Art Discovery* grounds on promising conditions: technically speaking it is an integration into a strong, consolidated and future-proofed infrastructure. Reflecting the requirements of our discipline the solution will open the door to an enormous quantity of relevant data and sources which can be discovered quickly and with comfortable tools. Furthermore, the concept of *WorldCat Art Discovery* is by definition open for development regarding both the sources and the partners, and we gratefully acknowledge the high willingness of OCLC colleagues to co-operate and to support the project. Thus, the ten-years' experience of spinning an international and more and more global network of art libraries and the related persons, as happened in artlibraries.net, will not only go on but will probably be even intensified. This has a much higher importance than it appears at first sight. A broad international collaboration as well as substantial investments of knowledge, experience and creativity are indispensable when the initiative should lead to a successful outcome. We have good chances that this will happen in the year of the water snake.