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Exploring transactions: Art museums, access and the Web

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C. Wallis Barnicoat

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Abstract

This thesis examines the way in which art museums develop and use Web sites to promote greater access to their resources.

It does this by considering the type of transactions that occur between the museum and its visitors in the physical and virtual location. The thesis is based on an investigation of three San Francisco Bay Area art museums, (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art).

The thesis illustrates the attempts of art museums to adopt innovative approaches to the provision of access through the virtual environment of the World Wide Web.

The thesis concludes that art museums are unsure of their place in the technological foundations of the Internet. Furthermore, museums are unclear in their vision of the purpose of virtual environments. Unlike the world of education, which is familiar with the theory and practice of distance learning, and the world of private enterprise, which focuses, increasingly, on e-commerce, museums lack a singular, clear vision of how best to adapt the user-centric foundation of the Web to provide greater access to their resources. Not until art museums successfully evaluate the needs of their virtual visitors and create a transactional base that caters to those needs, will museums find their place in the Information Age.

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List of Abbreviations

BAM: University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

FAMSF: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

SFMOMA: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Web: World Wide Web

WWW: World Wide Web

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