

Letter from the Chairman and Executive Director

February 2007

In the Spring of 1988, Larry Qualls began working with galleries in New York City to photograph works in their shows. On average, he would take 5,000 photographs from thousands of shows a year. Every season, he would return. Through a partnership with him, the resulting archive – of over 100,000 images – is being digitized and made available through ARTstor. It shows the development not only of well-known artists such as Matthew Barney, John Currin, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Gerhard Richter, Kara Walker and hundreds of others – but also the context from which they emerge. As with many other collections available through ARTstor, digitization has made the photographic “product” of one person’s passion and unique eye widely available for academic work. Roughly 10,000 images (working back from the recent past) are now available in ARTstor, and we expect to launch additional batches of approximately 5,000 every three months for the next few years.

In February, we also will launch 940 Quick Time Virtual Reality panoramas of important architectural sites, produced by the Visual Media Center in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. These sites include Early Christian and Byzantine monuments such as the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna, Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Hagia Sophia; Medieval cathedrals from Amiens to York; French châteaux (such as those at Blois and Fontainebleau); numerous Renaissance and Baroque architectural monuments (such as Michelangelo’s New Sacristy and Bernini’s Four Rivers Fountain in Piazza Navona); and such modern masterpieces as Le Corbusier’s Church of Nôtre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, Rem Koolhaas’ Seattle Public Library, and many others. These three-dimensional panoramas allow students to understand architecture and site-specific sculpture in ways that still images do not permit. Working with Columbia faculty and staff, ARTstor will also be supporting new QTVR photography in Venice this summer.

These are merely two of the approximately 25 collections that we anticipate releasing over the course of this year. Some of these projects are the fruit of collaborations with individual photographers (as is the case with Larry Qualls) and academic institutions (such as Columbia), while others represent partnerships with museums (both those that collect art and those that focus on anthropological, archaeological or natural history collections), photo archives that were built to support publications, or faculty members who initially became photographers in the service of their own research but ended up creating archives of great value to the community. Each collection has a wonderful story behind it. But, even better than the stories are the extraordinary fruits of these efforts – representing a great diversity of sources, collecting strategies, and fields of study.

At the same time, teachers and scholars are finding new insights by having access to new evidence. Andrew Butterfield (teaching a seminar at the Institute of Fine Arts) wrote us concerning how our recent photography of Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise has changed his teaching: “[E]very day I find something new, some of it quite startling. The sense of revelation is so profound that I am designing the class around the photographs rather than around the bibliography.... None of the experts who wrote on the doors in the past, not Pope-Hennessy, not Krautheimer, not Gombrich, could see them, at least not in any meaningful detail. Because of the power of these photographs combined with the ARTstor technology, the average graduate student in one day can learn more about the Gates of Paradise than they could in months of reading.”

We are looking forward to making these and other collections available this year to the 730 institutions that are currently using ARTstor and those who will join us (both in the US and around the world). We also look forward to doing all that we can to integrate the work being done at various participating institutions (and by individual users) with our efforts to build collections, enhance searching, and provide tools. Nothing is static in the digital world – including both the passionate collection builders with whom we are collaborating, and the curious and voracious image “consumers” whom we are serving.

With all good wishes,
James Shulman, *Executive Director*
Neil Rudenstine, *Chairman*

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