

Letter from the Chairman and Executive Director

October 2006

As this newsletter is being prepared, ARTstor staff are preparing to load the 500,000th image into the digital library. For those scholars – in art, area studies, social history, sociology, environment history – who are using images as evidence (rather than as illustration), there is an endless need for images that span the richness of the physical and cultural world and all the objects therein, as they appear now and as they appeared in the past.

The internet dramatically diminishes the limiting role that physical shelf space has long played in defining what sources of information are available. Chris Anderson documents this new reality in *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*; for example he notes that a significant percentage of the book titles sold over the internet by Amazon aren't to be found even in the biggest Borders or Barnes and Noble store. The distribution capacity of the internet allows Amazon to reach out and provide access to the "niche" content that individuals really want but could not find in the old world of "greatest hits" and "best sellers." The long tail that contains the "off the beaten track" images needed for educational and scholarly work seems to us to be very long – and very filled with promise for expanding the possibilities of teaching and learning. Not only can canons be expanded, but opportunities for active learning – for students to find their own evidence, make their own comparisons, and support their own arguments with works that might not be "old standards" – are dramatically opened up.

Does that mean that "best sellers" aren't relevant to ARTstor? Not at all. For both teaching and research, access to the core cultural objects and monuments is still essential. Over the past few months, we have made significant progress in providing access to superior images of just such canonic, widely studied works. We have reached an important collaborative agreement with the Société des auteurs dans les arts graphiques et plastiques (ADAGP) that enables us to include thousands of works by artists such as Duchamp, Giacometti, Leger, Magritte, Vuillard and many other notable artists.

In addition, by working with renowned photographer Erich Lessing and Art Resource, we are able to add very large image files of the highest quality for thousands of important works of art and architecture, ranging from ancient near eastern and classical antiquities to European art from its origins to the modern era. Almost 300 of these works (such as Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*, Manet's *Olympia*, Masaccio's *Peter and the Tribute Money*.) are already "live" in ARTstor, with more than 10,000 more to be loaded in the coming months. A complete list of the images recently released can be found at www.artstor.org/info/collections/lessing_list.jsp; these well known works, derived from large format transparencies, should serve the "core" needs of teachers and researchers very well.

In addition to providing well known works, we have also sought to serve the long tail of "niche" interests that allow teachers to make detailed arguments about their very specific points. Of the almost 500,000 images in ARTstor, 46 percent have been included in someone's saved image group – meaning that it was relevant enough for them to want to return to study it or to share it (in the context of other images) with colleagues or students. This is a fairly significant data point considering we are still in the very early stage of usage of ARTstor at over 650 participating campuses; and yet over 200,000 of the images have been found, selected, and saved into someone's group of images. Such a list would quickly lead far beyond the well-known and the famous.

But the need for access to ever more images and ever more depth is clear. As described on pages four and five, we are adding a range of new collections. But we also continue to explore ways to expand dramatically our role from providing a curated library to also providing access to contributed collections as well. By organizing access to and distributing contributed collections, we believe that we will improve our capacity to connect the wide-ranging needs of image users with the endless diversity of the world's visual culture.

Besides our role in building and distributing collections, we want to help users find more efficiently what they are looking for among such an ever-growing reservoir of images. As part of this effort, we released a new "advanced search" function this summer that allows users to browse categories of images. This approach (through which one is able to select, say, "Fashion, Costume, Jewelry – 900-1600 – Central America + South America") allows an entirely different way to explore and navigate ARTstor's growing pool of content.

In this newsletter, you will read about some promising new aspects of ARTstor's software and services, but Anderson's *Long Tail* argument provides a powerful reminder that technology is not important for its own sake; our goal is to take advantage of the new technology to bring together those who care for objects and sites and those who want to use that potentially endless pool of content for diverse educational purposes. The tools and services are really just a small part of enabling the images to flow.

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

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