Straight from the Source: Providing Collections Access for Object Based Research

Caitlin R. Rumery, Registration and Collections Management Assistant, Denver Art Museum, opened up the session by introducing the topic of collections access for the purpose of object-based research, as well as introducing the panelists. She successfully set the stage for discussion of dedicated space for collections research and combining both physical and digital access opportunities.

First to speak was **Linda Endersby**, Registrar/Collections Manager, Museum of Art & Archaeology at the University of Missouri. Her institution houses a small to middle-size, wide-ranging collection of 16,000 objects. Linda pointed out that access has always been a priority for the museum, as it first started as a teaching collection. The museum's accessibility was compromised when the collection was forced to move off campus for renovations at its original site, formerly in the middle of the campus. This pushed the Museum of Art & Archaeology to put an even greater focus on collections accessibility, for both external and internal users. With the use of Argus.net collections management software, they were able to make their collections accessible online. This allowed professors to make lists to inform collections staff which objects they would like to use, and also allowed elementary school teachers to use the system to have their students create their own virtual museum exhibits. This also made it easier for internal staff to create lists of objects for multiple uses, such as research, PR, and exhibition planning. Linda emphasized the importance of thinking about not only the benefits to external users, but also those to internal staff when it comes to implementing collections accessibility.

Britt Scholnick, Associate Registrar and Collections Manager, CU Art Museum, University of Colorado, Boulder, spoke next about her museum's physical and digital access. At the CU Art Museum, they have a dedicated 'Collection Study Center.' This space is adjacent to the collections storage vault making for easy access to pieces for researchers, educators, and students. It also houses a collections-related library. The museum also uses Argus.net for digital access, which has similarly allowed much easier access by internal and external users. This semester, their portal has had 400 visitors, 88% of which are students. As access comes with greater handling and usage, Britt mentioned the importance of balancing safety with accessibility for objects and pieces.

Rachel Faust, Manager of the Artist Initiative, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, was the third and final speaker for this session. Before May 2016, SF MOMA did not have formal collections access programming. The museum now uses space in the offsite storage collections center as a place for research and teaching. There they have classroom space as well as a mock-up gallery that was originally built to use for renovation planning, but was repurposed as a learning space. SF MOMA additionally has access space at its downtown location such as a study room, library, and

conservation workroom. Rachel listed recommendations for other institutions to provide collections access including: senior staff and board support, multi-department collaboration, onboard participatory staff, and dedicated staff and spaces. She also emphasized the notion that good collections access equals good collections management.

Through the diverse examples and solutions discussed by the speakers, this session provided enlightening information on creating successful collections access for museums of varying size and discipline.

Submitted by Vanessa Delnavaz