THE CRANACH DIGITAL ARCHIVE
Project Summary, November 2009
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In October 2009, nine major museums in Europe and the United States began working together on a pilot project to establish methodologies for interdisciplinary collaborative research, sharing knowledge and providing access to art historical, technical and conservation information on paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder in the electronic environment. The project is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of a larger initiative to develop new kinds of research tools to facilitate transmission of art historical and conservation information across institutions and international boarders in order to advance scholarship and learning.

The Case for the Cranach Digital Archive

One of the greatest and most versatile artists of sixteenth-century Europe, Lucas Cranach the Elder served as court painter to three successive Saxon electors for almost five decades, demonstrating extraordinary artistic creativity. He invented numerous pictorial narratives and iconographies to reflect the new age of Humanism and Protestant theology, and established one of the most efficient and productive workshops of his time. Today, more than one thousand paintings by Cranach and his workshop are known, and they represent only a small fraction of the works originally produced.

Despite the best efforts of several generations of scholars to gain a deeper understanding of his art and to catalogue his widely dispersed oeuvre of paintings, drawings, and prints, Cranach still poses a considerable number of questions and challenges for further art historical research. There is strong support among the present community of Cranach scholars for the creation of a centralized, authoritative resource that would encourage the sharing and dissemination of research material in order to advance scholarship and learning, as well as to overcome the significant and well-known obstacles in the field of Cranach studies:

- The only existing catalogue raisonné (published by Max Friedländer and Jakob Rosenberg in 1932 and, in a slightly revised edition in 1978) lists approximately 1,000 paintings, but only 452 of them are illustrated. Reliable information about the oeuvre, let alone good photographic records of the works, many of which are housed in churches or private collections, has been extremely difficult to assemble, and many works remain undocumented.

- In recent decades, the systematic study of his materials and techniques has generated new insights about attribution, authenticity, dating, display, and function, as well as changes in appearance of his works; however, only a small fraction of the rich technical documentation concerning supports, underdrawing, materials, working processes, and conservation treatments has been published. It remains difficult for scholars to consider this rich and important body of material, much of which is housed in museums, despite strong interest in accessing these resources. In addition, a good deal more new material continues to be generated, much of it in digital form, yet there are no established mechanisms through which it can be easily and reliably shared.

- Recent improvements in both visible and infrared imaging technology now make it possible to capture and share high resolution images at an unprecedented level of clarity in the electronic environment: a particularly important consideration for Cranach scholarship, where comparison of micro details and close analysis of underdrawings are essential.

Given these considerations, it has become clear that an ever-growing digital repository of art historical and technological, conservation, and scientific information would be an especially appropriate resource for the study, understanding, and appreciation of this important artist.

Project Description

The 2-year project will address three primary goals:

1. Construct Technology Infrastructure: Implementation of an open source, web-based software model that builds upon the successful work done by the National Gallery, London (NG-L) for its Raphael Resource Project and the possible outcomes of the proposed Shared Infrastructure Initiative, currently in the planning stage under the leadership of the British Museum in conjunction with the Mellon Foundation's Museum and Art Conservation and Research in Information Technology grant programs.
2. Establish a Founding Corpus of Comprehensive Data: Compilation and digitisation of existing art historical, technical, and conservation documentation related to approximately 20 paintings by Lucas Cranach in partner institutions in order to test the model and establish the resource.
3. Expand the Visual Resource: Compilation or generation of a significant number of high quality, high resolution digital images (digital colour photographs and infrared reflectograms) and corresponding metadata on additional Cranach paintings in museums, private collections, and churches to further test and expand the resource.

Although the resource will be broadly accessible via the internet, the target group of users is envisaged to be museum and university-based art historians, historians, conservators, and scientists. The scope of the pilot project will be limited to a selection of 20 representative paintings from the eight partner institutions that have committed to contributing rich art historical, technical and conservation documentation. While some of these institutions already possess considerable material, in others, technical examinations need to be conducted and new high resolution images produced. A number of infrared reflectogram mosaics will also be generated within the pilot project phase.

In order to provide a critical mass of comparative visual material in the database (a stated requirement for participation from many of the partners) and to further test the model, the core body of data on the 20 paintings will be complemented with images and approved metadata of approximately 200 additional Cranach paintings. This collection will include most of the paintings in the partner institutions as well as paintings in other museums, collections and churches for which the organiser, Gunnar Heyenreich, is responsible. Readily available technical documentation would also be included (e.g. infrared reflectograms, X-radiographs, detail images). The contents of Ingo Sander's infrared reflectogram archive (images of approx. 80 paintings, largely already in digital form) have been generously offered to this project and will also be incorporated.

Beyond the Pilot Phase

In the long-term a critical mass of data is envisaged, from which new and more complex interrogations into matters such as attribution, technique, dating, and workshop practice could be explored in unprecedented depth. Such a resource might even form the prototype for an electronic catalogue raisonné using a collaborative, internet-based methodology. To this end, during the pilot phase, questions regarding levels of access and interpretation, editing, translation, and matters of dating and attribution will be explored. In the future, the systems employed will ideally allow direct uploading and updating of information by partners, importing

data from local collection management systems, linking and searching information on partner's websites, coupled with a robust suite of tools to allow the maximum possible utilization of high resolution images and data. We will continue to work with the National Gallery, London, the British Museum, and others in the Shared Infrastructure Initiative to realize these improvements.

Project Organisation

<u>Organisers</u>
• Stiftung museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf
• University of Applied Sciences, Cologne
    Prof. Dr. Gunnar Heydenreich

<u>Project partners</u>
• Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich
    Dr. Martin Schawe
• Doerner Institut, Munich
    Prof. Dr. Andreas Burmester
• J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
    Yvonne Szafran
• Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
    Dr. Karl Schütz
• Kunstmuseum Basel
    Dr. Bodo Brinkmann
• Metropolitan Museum, New York
    Dr. Maryan Ainsworth
• National Gallery, London
    Dr. Susan Foister
• Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie
    Dr. Stefan Kemperdick
• Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister
    Dr. Karin Kolb
• Prof. Dr. Dieter Koepplin, Basle
• Dr. Werner Schade, Berlin
• Prof. Dr. Ingo Sandner, Dresden
• Stiftung Preußischer Schlösser und Gärten, Berlin (associated partner)
    Dr. Samuel Wittwer
• Statens Museum for Kunst, Kopenhagen (associated partner)
    Dr. Jørgen Wadum