



The New York Public Library

MID-MANHATTAN LIBRARY
ART DEPARTMENT

HOW TO RESEARCH AN ART WORK

SEARCH STRATEGIES

1. In beginning your research for writing a paper about a work of art, first consult the LEO catalog to see if the Branch Libraries have a book about the artist.
2. If the artist's name does not appear in the LEO catalog it does not mean that the Library has no information on the artist. It simply means that there is not an entire book, also known as a monograph, on the particular artist. In this case, the next step is to search for more general books. The Subject Keyword option on the LEO catalog is usually the most useful. Be creative and inventive in your choice of terms. For example, *English portrait painting*, *English portrait painters*, *British portrait painting*, *Great Britain portrait painters*. Using each set of these terms yields varying results.
3. If you know which museum or collection owns the piece you are writing about, consulting their guides can be very helpful. Use the call number 708 to located museum guides on the shelves. New York museum guides are located in 708.1471. The description accompanying the work may be brief, but it will help you establish basic facts about the work: time period, movement, style, and country of origin.
4. Not every piece of art or artist has an entire body of criticism written about it. In many instances you will have to conduct your research using broader topics that match the medium, country, and approximate date of your work. For example, if you can find nothing written specifically about the painting *Pygmalion and Galatea* by Jean Léon Gérôme use Subject Keyword to search for books on such relevant topics as *19th Century French Painting*, or *French Academy Painting*. Again, be inventive, for example, *nineteenth century French painting* versus *19th century French painting*. Also be sensitive to the noun and adjective form of countries--*art, Sweden, art, Swedish*. **Due to the uniqueness of our cataloging you will obtain different results depending on which term you use.**
5. Using Subject Keyword is the most inclusive way to search. However, it does tend to recall titles that have little or no relation to your topic. If you find a title that appears particularly relevant use the *Related Works* option (available at the bottom of the LEO screen as RW=) to see the actual subject headings and perform a more precise search.
6. Periodical indexes can aid in finding articles in art magazines about the work you are researching. The four main art-related indexes are listed below. They can be searched by the name of the artist, the style, and in the case of Art Index, on CD-ROM by the title of the work. You can also sign up for the Internet and search some of the sites listed below.
7. The Mid-Manhattan Library has the advantage of having open stacks meaning you can go directly to an area in the shelves that contains books about your topic and browse for appropriate titles. For example, it may be productive to go directly to the section on French painting (759.4) and browse for books about your topic.
8. Remember to ask the art librarian for help.

DICTIONARIES & ENCYCLOPEDIAS

These sources are a good place to start to obtain general background information on an artist, movement, or technique. For example, a dictionary or encyclopedia will tell you that Jean Léon Gérôme is a 19th century French academic painter and sculptor. In many instances they also provide bibliographies that will lead you on to other relevant sources. They can also aid in focusing from broader concepts and ideas to more specific and concrete ones. The Art Department contains many art-related dictionaries and encyclopedias.

The dictionary of art. New York : Grove's Dictionaries, 1996. 34 vols.
(703 D) Special Collection

McGraw-Hill dictionary of art. McGraw-Hill, 1969. 5 vols.
(703 M) Closed Shelf.

ArtSpeak : a guide to contemporary ideas, movements, and buzzwords / Atkins, Robert. New York : Abbeville Press Publishers, 1990.

(700.9045 A) Closed shelf reference

Artspoke : a guide to modern ideas, movements, and buzzwords, 1848-1944 / Atkins, Robert. New York : Abbeville Press, 1993.

(709.034 A) Closed shelf reference

These two titles are useful for getting a quick overview of the who, what, and where of art movements.

PERIODICAL INDEXES

Periodical indexes can be excellent sources for locating pertinent articles on an artist or object you are researching. They are all in book format with the exception of Art Index. As each volume corresponds to a particular year's articles, you will need to consult several volumes. One further point to keep in mind is that if a citation exists that does not necessarily mean that we will have that particular book or subscribe to that particular magazine. However, it may be available at the Research Library.

RILA, International repertory of the literature of art. New York : College Art Association of America, 1975-1989.

(016.7 R) located on the index table. Book format.

RILA offers scholarly coverage of all aspects of Western art from Late Antiquity (4th Century) to the present. Consult the cumulative indexes to see if there is a relevant citation.

BHA : Bibliography of the history of art. Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy, France : Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Institut de l'information scientifique et technique ; Santa Monica, Calif. : J. Paul Getty Trust, Getty Art History Information Program, 1991- present.

(016.7 B) located on the index table. Book format.

BHA is the successor to RILA and therefore starts in 1989 when RILA ends and continues to the present. Like RILA, consult the cumulative indexes for relevant citations.

Artbibliographies modern. Santa Barbara, Calif. : ABC-CLIO, c1971-

(016.709 A) located on the index table. Book format.

This index covers all major artists and movements from the 18th through the 20th centuries.

The Art index : a cumulative author and subject index to a selected list of fine arts periodicals. New York, Wilson, 1930-1st- 1929/30-

(016.7 A) located on the index table. Book format starting in 1929. CD-ROM format starting at 1984. Indexes all forms and periods of art. Coverage includes major domestic and foreign art periodicals. In print format the index covers 1929 to the present. The CD-ROM version begins coverage in 1984 but offers enhanced searching capabilities such as the option to search by the title of a work.

CRITICISM

Not every work of art has an entire body of criticism written about it. The following works may or may not have an entry on the specific work you are writing about.

What is a masterpiece? / Clark, Kenneth. New York, Thames and Hudson, 1979.

(701.18 C)

The English critic, historian, and museum curator discusses what constitutes a masterpiece.

The interpretation of art : essays on the art criticism of John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and Herbert Read / Fishman, Solomon. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1963

(701.18 F)

Examines the aesthetic theories of five major critics of the visual arts.

Nineteenth-century theories of art. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1987.

(701.1809 N)

A collection of writings by late eighteenth early nineteenth century artists and critics.

Criticizing the critics / English, John Wesley. New York : Hastings House, 1979.

(700.973 E)

Gives interesting insight into the workings of criticism and critical writing.

Art history's history / Minor, Vernon Hyde. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1994.

(707.2 M)

A brief and readable book that traces the history of art criticism and theory.

To locate more works of criticism use the following subject headings in the LEO catalog:

Art criticism, Art appreciation, Art – Historiography, Aesthetics, Painting – Appreciation.

VERTICAL FILE

The Art Collection has individual files on several thousand visual artists including biographical information and reproductions of artwork. The files contain:

- catalogs of gallery shows
- smaller catalogs of museum exhibitions
- exhibition announcements
- some obituaries and other magazine and newspaper clippings

All artists in the files are in the visual design fields and include painters, graphic artists, illustrators, printmakers, cartoonists, sculptors, photographers, video artists, fashion designers, craftspeople, architects, interior designers, garden designers, art dealers, art critics, and art historians. All periods and nationalities are represented; however, the collection emphasizes contemporary artists, especially those working or showing their work in New York City. The quantity of material in each file varies greatly ranging from a few items to a substantial amount. The artists' files are for use in the library only. Ask the art librarian to see a file.

Please note that the list of artists we have files on is also available on the NYPL web site at:

http://www.nypl.org/branch/central_units/mm/art/art.html

RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

The following is a brief selection of websites dedicated to the history of art.

The Mother of All Art History Links Pages

<http://www.umich.edu/~hartspc/histart/mother/>

Art History Resources on the Web

<http://witcombe.bcpw.sbc.edu/ARTHLinks.html>

Art History Research Centre

<http://art-history.concordia.ca/AHRC/>

PartheNet: Combined Internet Resources for Students of Art History

<http://home.mtholyoke.edu/~klconner/parthenet.html>

WWW Virtual Library: Art History

<http://www.hart.bbk.ac.uk/VirtualLibrary.html>

RESEARCH AND WRITING TOOLS

These titles provide in depth information about conducting research on an art-related topic and writing the actual paper.

[The world's master paintings : from the early Renaissance to the present day : a comprehensive listing of works by 1,300 painters and a complete guide to their locations worldwide.](#) London ; New York : Routledge, 1992. (750.74 W) Closed Shelf Reference

This resource lists the works of 1,300 painters and serves as a guide to their locations.

[Art information : research methods and resources](#) / Jones, Lois Swan. Dubuque, Iowa : Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1990. (707.2 J)

An exhaustive and invaluable guide to any student conducting research in the field of art history.

[A short guide to writing about art](#) / Barnet, Sylvan. Boston : Little, Brown, 1997 Fifth ed. (808.0667 S)

A short and useful guide about the specifics of writing about art.

[Art information and the internet : how to find it, how to use it](#) / Jones, Lois Swan. Phoenix, Ariz. : Oryx Press, 1999. (025.067 J)

The place to start for guidance on navigating the world of art on the Internet.

RESOURCES FOR REPRODUCTIONS & CRITIQUES

The following list of books was selected because they provide reproductions of a wide range of art works accompanied by commentary concerning that particular work of art.

Icons of art : the 20th century. Munich ; New York : Prestel, c1997.

(709.04 I)

A chronological treatment of major art works of the last 100 years from Europe and North America. Provides quality reproductions and a one page summary of the artist and his/her work. An index at the back gives dimensions, dates and locations for each work.

Modern painting : the impressionists-- and the avant-garde of the twentieth century / Zuffi, Stefano. Hauppauge, N.Y. : Barron's, 1998.

(759.05 Z)

Arranged chronologically by artistic period with several reproductions for every artist accompanied by brief but pertinent information about the artist and each work.

Artists : from Michelangelo to Maya Lin / Ergas, G. Aimee. New York : UXL, 1995.

(927 E) Closed Shelf Reference

A good starting point for obtaining background information on a wide range of artists including, architects, sculptors, and photographers.

International dictionary of art and artists. Chicago : St. James Press], c1990. 2 v.

(703 I) Closed Shelf Reference

The first volume *Artists* contains entries on artists from the 13th to the 20th that providing an overview of the artist's career and work, a bibliography, and a critical essay discussing historical and critical aspects of the artist's work. The second volume *Art* discusses a particular work of the artist.

Contemporary artists. Chicago : St. James Press, 1996 Fourth Ed.

(927 C) Closed Shelf Reference

Offers comprehensive profiles of over 800 artists that include biographical data, a list of individual exhibitions, collections that include works by the artist, a bibliography, and a critical essay.

Contemporary masterworks. Chicago : St. James Press, 1991

(709.045 C) Closed Shelf Reference

Contains entries on 450 individual works or art, architecture, photography, and design. Includes bibliographical data.

Greatest works of art of Western civilization / Hoving, Thomas. New York : Artisan, 1997.

(708.13 H)

Beautiful color reproductions are accompanied by one-page descriptions of works chosen by the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The following subject headings in the LEO Catalog may also be useful:

Art, [nationality] e.g., American, French, Chinese
Art, [country] e.g., United States, France, Puerto Rico
Art, [geographic location] e.g., Latin America, Europe
Art, [style] e.g., Baroque, Greek, Modern, Abstract
Art – Dictionaries
Art, Modern, 20th century – Dictionaries
Art, Modern, 20th century – Themes, motives
Artists – [country]
Artists – Dictionaries
Artists – Biography

Painters, [country]
Painting, [style]
Painting, European – Catalogs
Painting, Modern – 19th century
Painting, Modern – 19th century