

**ART IN THE WEB.  
AN ADVANCED INFORMATION WORKSTATION AS A  
TOOL FOR ART RESEARCH IN THE KONINKLIJKE  
BIBLIOTHEEK, THE HAGUE**

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**Abstract:** The quality of the future library will be measured not only in terms of its collections, but also in terms of the diversity and efficiency of its electronic services. Therefore, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague is building an Advanced Information Workstation for the humanities. With this multimedia workstation users can easily locate and consult sources on the local network (OPAC, CD-ROMs, databases on several collections) and services and databases on national and international networks. Facilities for downloading and processing information will also be offered. In this paper the relevance of this multimedia workstation for art research will be discussed.

A few years from now, in 1998, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague will be celebrating its bicentenary. A memorable occasion, calling for extensive festivities and, of course, for reflections on the history of this illustrious institution. This is bound to evoke comment from those who extol the past, with many a reminiscence about the good old days when the eminent, select and companionable 'old KB' still occupied its stately mansion in the most distinguished and elegant avenue of The Hague. This is how F. Springer, one-time law student, now a famous author, remembers the atmosphere in the old building:

During my law studies, when my oil stove provided inadequate heat for my Leiden cubby-hole, I spent many wintry afternoons in that venerable reading room. And my heart is filled with affection when I think of the soft, soothing glow shed by its green lampshades, and the unspoken, but all the more tangible bond between the patrons. We were friends, a fraternity, even though we did not actually know each other. Quick shoppers, who merely dropped in for a brief check, were considered rude intruders into our sanctuary. A deep sigh from a fellow student was all it took to divert attention from Roman law,

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and to set my imagination flying. Was this sigh caused by a truly poignant piece of writing, or by problems on the home front: Concern and alarm arose when some member of the fraternity did not show up on two consecutive days. Two whole days! Something terrible must have happened! Imagine the feeling of relief throughout the room when after three days he returned, fit as a fiddle, by the look of him. Thank God, we were all together again.

Since 1982 the KB has been accommodated in snow-white, streamlined, purpose-built premises close to The Hague Central Station. As Springer observed. 'The KB, too, has not escaped democratisation, which struck hard and early.' And he goes on to bemoan the fact that 'to have to survive in the computer age with two left hands is not exactly what I would call fun.' Poor Springer, how lost he will feel in the KB of the future. But perhaps he won't. For what will unsuspecting visitors find there in a few years' time? Impressive consoles everywhere, with celestial blue screens, which will enable them to reach the world as easily as if they were reaching for the breakfast things in their own kitchens. And by that time we, librarians of the future, will have shed our dusty image once and for all. The blue screens have sealed our fate. Thanks to the electronic highway we now enjoy full media interest. Our status has even been appreciably boosted: which of us has not felt the glance of unconcealed admiration of less fortunate friends and acquaintances when we have casually offered to look up something for them at the other end of the world? But such is the super-fast pace of current technological change that the day be fast approaching when foreheads will be tapped if you can't instantaneously hop to Honolulu or browse in Bratislava.

'The Electronic Age represents the greatest challenge ever faced by librarians', according to the caption of a recent article. For, to quote the heading of another article, 'As publishing goes electronic, will Gutenberg survive?' Speculating about the libraries of the future seems to be a never-ending pastime. But one thing is clear: if we want to ride the information highway of the future, we shall have to grant our patrons fast, efficient and cheap access to all manner of information, be it printed or electronic. It is the task of the KB as national library to develop initiatives for improving service and information supply in the Netherlands. One of the most ambitious projects resulting from this task is the development of the Advanced Information Workstation for the Humanities (AIW). AIW is an integrated workstation, designed to help researchers to locate, read, and process electronic information. This information can be accessed through the Local Area Network of the KB (with its Online Public Access Catalogue, CD-ROMs, and information server *Alexicon*), but the data can also be obtained from Wide Area Networks, such as document delivery services, online retrieval systems, FTP-archives, and Gopher/World Wide Web documents. AIW will allow researchers to

perform complex searches for electronic or printed information, even if they have no experience in navigating the networks. Sitting in the same chair a researcher can search for - and copy - references to publications in any available Online Public Access Catalogue or CD-ROM, order books on loan from another library, order xerox copies of articles from a document delivery service, check citations, copy illustrations from image databases, etc. As considerable growth of electronic publishing is expected within a couple of years, facilities for researchers becoming desk top publishers will be developed as well.

October 1994 saw the completion of a pilot project to design and build a prototype of the multimedia workstation. This prototype has given the first impulse to realising the following goals:

- integration of the protocols of all networks the KB can access;
- making all the relevant information on these networks accessible in a user-friendly way;
- offering various possibilities for processing the data found.

In order to make it possible to study in detail the problems encountered in cataloguing electronic information and making it accessible, the pilot project focused on a single field on enquiry: modern art history. Several art historians (university lecturers, researchers, librarians) were invited to test the AIW prototype, thus providing essential feedback on the special needs of scholars for modern information systems.

And so, for the past year, we in the KB have regularly scoured the Internet for a year, trawling for nuggets of art history information worthy of being incorporated into AIW-catalogue. Initially this involved a lot of toing and froing: from one Internet site to another, from one institution to another, and back again. Sometimes we felt worn out, giddy and disorientated, as if we'd been riding on a merry-go-round. At other times we were on the point of falling asleep, while waiting endless for a promising picture. The end result of all our searching was a curious medley of the most heterogeneous unstructured items: pictures of paintings by Kandinsky, a bibliography of architects in the Bay area, a safety-at-work manual for artists, digitalized exhibition catalogues, university study programmes. One gets the impression that any self-respecting institution is obliged to come up with its own gopher or WWW page. Even though the finds were at times somewhat disappointing, the miraculous new technology with its absolutely fabulous possibilities nevertheless drew shouts of joy, and we proudly showed brilliant pictures and exciting library catalogues to passing colleagues. But nowadays we are experienced networkers: quick and competent, we crawl

from one web to another, from Virtual Tourist to Fine Art Forum, from festivals to body art, from electronic cafe to imperial palace, from Singapore to Split. All this can be done through services that try to create order out of chaos, like Yahoo, ArtSource or World Wide Arts Resources. In a few words: they lump together everything connected with art, established connections, and make a rough classification based on the different kinds of art, on which the user can subsequently log in. But however helpful such services may be, a more sophisticated classification will soon be needed, for resources on the Internet are multiplying like white mice. Consequently, during the AIW pilot project a catalogue of Internet files was drawn up, which included full bibliographic descriptions of selected electronic art-related resources. These references, which contain codes of our national classification system, together with selected keywords, are made according to the Dutch standard cataloguing rules. With these references it will be much easier for researchers to find relevant information (bibliographic or full-text) on the Internet.

Providing access to electronic files outside the KB itself is only one aspect of AIW. The AIW has a number of other searching facilities; the search screen offers all kinds of search procedures. The 'geographical route' leads a user to any known catalogue or database that is available online. You can consult the OPAC in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, but also of other libraries in the Netherlands and abroad. A special section is created for bio- and bibliographical works of reference; this way, a patron can get access to specialised databases maintained at the KB and other Dutch libraries as well as connect to databases and hosts all over the world. For an art historian this means that she can consult not only important online bibliographies in the field of the history of the book, maintained at the KB, but also the Art Index via Dialog, the Avery Index to architectural Periodicals, Art Bibliographies Modern, and Scipio via RLIN. Another group of services the AIW allows direct access to, are document delivery services, such as the Dutch Union Catalogue and Uncover, from which you can order articles from journals. If a user has no idea where to look for a specific information system, he can take the 'systematical route'. By choosing fields from our classification system or by using controlled keywords he can find information about relevant databases in the catalogue of the AIW, and set up connections immediately.

Besides the searching facilities, the AIW will offer several applications for word, image, video and sound processing as well. These applications will be integrated as much as possible: if a user had found a file, an appropriate processor will be activated and the file will be displayed automatically. But it will also be possible to activate an application without automatic start up procedures. A user will be

allowed to upload any file he has been working on at home or at work, adjust it, and take the result of a day's of a day's work at the KB home on a diskette (or send it to his own private email address).

One of the main tasks since the completion of the prototype in October 1994 has been the refinement of the AIW-catalogue of online catalogues and databases, which can be anywhere in Cyberspace, Resources offered by organizations like Dialog, RLIN, OCLC and Pica need special treatment, as it will not provide information about the contents only. There are various procedures for accessing their online databases. Some of the problems a library has to tackle are: how to provide accounts for these services to our patrons? How to control the use of these databases? How will a researcher find the relevant database for his enquiries, quickly and cheaply?

Besides building this catalogue, attention has been paid as well to the navigation from the references in those databases to the corresponding full text documents or images, in electronic or printed format. A patron using the AIW will be advised how to download the full text information or how to order it.

In a few years time, we will have established a workstation that integrates the complete flow of information for art historians and other scholars. By that time it will be 1998, the bicentenary of the KB. The IFLA conference in Amsterdam in that same year may open up possibilities for organising a pre-conference meeting of the IFLA Art Libraries Section. On that occasion we hope to be able to show you the final result of our AIW-project.

Let us end by returning to Spinger and his reminiscences about the old KB, which he concludes with a story that might occur in any library, anywhere, at any time.

On that dull and dreary afternoon, after a familiar KB-lady and an equally familiar, ever cheery dust-coated gentleman had disappeared behind the mysterious, sound-proofing door, this very door got stuck. Instead of closing quickly and silently as it should have done, it remained half open. Unprecedented! And suddenly, from the semi-dark opening a scream resounded through the reading room. A scream, not of fear, but of pleasant surprise - as if someone was unexpectedly caught and tickled. A scream immediately followed by the sensual laugh of a man and a triumphant "At last", before - agonizingly slowly - the door closed. And this raised the question that has haunted me ever since: had he *at last* found that one untraceable book, or had he at last found *her*?

Whatever the answer to that question may be, in the libraries of the future the chances of finding an untraceable book as well as of finding one another will have been considerably enhanced thanks to the electronic highway.

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