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Digital Curation Reflection

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My team's goal was to digitally upload and catalog 19th-century Japanese prints collected by the University of New Hampshire's Art and Art History department into JSTOR. This was just a small step in a larger project of cataloging the 2,000 other works of art stored by the Art Department. This project required us to engage with the materials in a way that balanced historical scholarship with modern digital technologies. From the initial stages of selecting, photographing, and color grading the prints, to the final stages of uploading and cataloging them into JSTOR. Our project provided a practical application of key concepts from Digital Humanities learned throughout the semester while allowing me to gain firsthand experience in curating and presenting historical artifacts within a digital platform.

The project began with the process of gathering and selecting the prints. Each member of the team selected an artist, who were then given five unique prints to catalog from that artist. My artist was Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. When then took these prints and brought them into a photo lab with a camera rigged overhead. For me, this stage was easier to understand because I have experience in both photography and color grading. We paid close attention to image quality, taking all of the photos of our prints in RAW. This is a photo file format that is completely uncompressed and unprocessed, essential for creating accurate photos of our prints. Once these photos were taken, they were uploaded and subsequently color graded in Adobe Photoshop.

All of the steps leading up to this point are under the Digital Humanities umbrella of

digitization. This refers not only to the process of converting physical materials into digital form, but also to how digital technologies can enhance our understanding of historical objects by making them more accessible and analyzable. The prints we worked with presented unique challenges due to their age and condition, which meant we needed to handle the images carefully to avoid damage during scanning and photography.



Previous Photos of Prints (The Left) Our Photos (Right)

Now, the Art Department had taken photos of these prints before, however the quality and color were not accurate. This time around our goal was to digitize these photos as accurately as possible. This part of the project was both creative and technical. It required us to think critically about the quality and

accuracy of our images. Color grading involved adjusting the images to preserve the original hues and tones of the prints while also enhancing clarity and visibility.

The next step in the project was uploading the images to JSTOR and cataloging them. This was perhaps the most straightforward phase. It required detailed metadata entry and classification of each print. Our team worked together to ensure that the information we included would make each print easy to find, contextualize, and analyze. I contributed to this aspect by focusing on inputting descriptive metadata in order to make the prints searchable and organized. This phase highlighted the importance of in the digital humanities, as it is crucial for making digital objects accessible and discoverable. Without thorough and accurate metadata, even the

most carefully digitized works can remain hidden and underutilized. In addition to metadata, we also considered the broader implications of data curation; organizing and maintaining digital objects in a way that facilitates their ongoing use and relevance. The concept of digital preservation also came into play here, as our color adjustments were not just about enhancing the aesthetics but ensuring the long-term preservation of the artwork's appearance for future digital use.

While the project was ultimately successful, it was not without its challenges. One of the most significant obstacles we encountered was the difficulty of maintaining consistency in color grading across all 35 prints. Additionally, working with historical prints posed challenges in terms of preserving their original details while minimizing the effects of digital manipulation. These issues were particularly important because they underscored the ethical considerations of digital curation. Digital curators must navigate the tension between enhancing accessibility and preserving the integrity of the original material. This was a recurring theme throughout our project and one that I found particularly thought-provoking.

For me, this project reinforced the importance of both technical skills, such as photography and metadata creation, and critical thinking about the role of digital technology in cultural preservation. I learned how much effort goes into maintaining the balance between accuracy, accessibility, and ethical responsibility when working with digital representations of historical artifacts. Furthermore, the project allowed me to engage directly with digital humanities concepts such as digitization, metadata, digital preservation, and curation, which have broadened my perspective on the potential and limitations of digital methods in the study of cultural history.