

chicago style for digital art history

chicago style for digital art history presents a unique set of challenges and considerations for scholars, researchers, and students navigating the complex landscape of contemporary art and its documentation. As digital mediums increasingly dominate artistic production and dissemination, the traditional methods of art historical citation and analysis must adapt. This article delves into the intricacies of applying Chicago Manual of Style principles to the study of digital art, exploring best practices for referencing digital artworks, online exhibitions, software, and the ephemeral nature of digital creations. We will examine how to accurately attribute digital works, cite online resources, and engage with the theoretical frameworks essential for understanding this rapidly evolving field, all within the established guidelines of Chicago style.

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Understanding the Core Principles of Chicago Style for Digital Art

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is renowned for its comprehensive and flexible approach to citation, offering a robust framework that can be adapted to new and emerging fields like digital art history. At its core, Chicago style emphasizes clarity, accuracy, and consistency in scholarly communication. When applied to digital art, this means meticulously documenting the source of information, whether it's an online artwork, a digital archive, or a piece of software used for creation or analysis. The emphasis remains on providing readers with sufficient information to locate and verify the sources cited, a principle that becomes even more critical in the fluid environment of the digital realm.

The inherent mutability of digital content necessitates a heightened awareness of provenance and stability. Unlike a printed exhibition catalog or a physical sculpture, a digital artwork might exist in multiple versions, be hosted on different servers, or even cease to exist altogether. Therefore, when utilizing Chicago style for digital art history, researchers must be diligent in capturing essential metadata that can serve as a reliable identifier. This includes URLs, access dates, and information about the platform or repository where the digital art is found. The goal is to create a scholarly record that is as robust and verifiable as possible, even when dealing with inherently transient media.

Citing Digital Artworks and Online Resources

One of the most significant challenges in applying Chicago style to digital art history lies in the accurate citation of digital artworks themselves. The traditional methods for citing paintings or sculptures often rely on physical location and artist attribution. For digital art, this requires a different approach, focusing on the creator, the title of the work, its format (e.g., net art, interactive installation, algorithmic art), the year of creation, and its current online location. When citing a digital artwork viewed online, it is crucial to include the URL and the date of access, acknowledging that the work might be updated or removed.

When referencing online exhibitions, digital archives, or scholarly articles published online, Chicago style offers specific guidelines for electronic resources. These typically involve including the author or editor, the title of the specific page or article, the title of the larger website or publication, the publisher (if applicable), the date of publication, and the URL along with the access date. For instance, a digital exhibition might be treated as a distinct online publication, with its curatorial statements and featured artworks documented accordingly. The key is to provide enough detail for a reader to navigate to the exact resource, even if its digital address might change over time.

For artworks that are part of larger digital repositories or institutional collections, it is important to cite the specific artwork as well as the repository. This might involve citing the artist, title, year, and then providing the name of the digital archive or museum website, followed by the specific path or URL to the artwork. For example:

- Artist Name, "Title of Digital Artwork," year, Medium (e.g., Net Art, Interactive Software), URL, accessed Month Day, Year.
- Exhibition Title, curated by Curator Name, Year, Digital Exhibition, URL, accessed Month Day, Year.
- Institution Name, "Title of Digital Collection," Year of Digitization, URL, accessed Month Day, Year.

Navigating Software and Digital Tools in Art Historical Research

The landscape of digital art history is intrinsically linked to the software and digital tools used for its creation, analysis, and presentation. Chicago style acknowledges the importance of crediting intellectual contributions, and this extends to the technologies that enable scholarly work. When discussing art created using specific software or algorithms, or when employing digital tools for research such as image analysis software or virtual reality environments, it is often necessary to cite these tools. This practice lends transparency and verifiability to research methodologies.

The citation of software can be approached in a manner similar to citing published works. This typically involves identifying the software developer or company, the software title, the version number, and the year of release. If the software is accessed online or is part of a specific digital platform, the URL and access date would also be included. For example, if an artwork's generative process relies heavily on a particular coding language or algorithm, mentioning this in the text and potentially citing the relevant software or library in a footnote can be crucial for a complete understanding of the work's genesis.

Similarly, when employing digital research tools, acknowledging their use can enhance the credibility of the findings. For instance, if a researcher uses a particular digital database for provenance research or image comparison software to identify stylistic similarities, citing these tools in the methodology section or in footnotes demonstrates a rigorous and transparent approach to research. This is particularly relevant for digital art, where the tools of creation and analysis are often inseparable from the artwork itself.

Addressing Ephemerality and Preservation in Digital Art History

The ephemeral nature of digital art poses a significant hurdle for traditional art historical methods, which often rely on the permanence of the object. Digital artworks can be subject to technological obsolescence, data degradation, or outright disappearance from the internet. Chicago style, while not explicitly designed for this specific challenge, provides a framework for dealing with such issues by emphasizing documentation and careful recording of available information. When an artwork is known to be unstable or has a limited lifespan, the researcher's role becomes that of a meticulous archivist and witness.

In cases where a digital artwork is no longer accessible at its original URL, or if it exists only in outdated file formats, Chicago style necessitates documenting the last known location and the circumstances of its inaccessibility. This might involve noting that the work was previously found at a certain URL but is no longer available, or that it exists in a format that requires specialized software for access. The aim is to provide as complete a record as possible, acknowledging the limitations imposed by the medium itself. This might also involve referencing secondary sources that discuss or reproduce the artwork, if the primary digital object is no longer extant.

The discussion of preservation strategies in digital art history also benefits from clear citation practices. When referring to projects or initiatives aimed at preserving digital art, such as digital archives or conservation efforts, these should be cited according to Chicago style's guidelines for websites and online publications. This allows scholars to direct their readers to resources that are actively grappling with the challenges of maintaining digital cultural heritage, acknowledging the ongoing efforts to ensure the longevity of these often-fragile works.

Theoretical Frameworks and Digital Art History

The study of digital art history is deeply intertwined with theoretical frameworks that address the unique characteristics of digital media and their impact on culture, society, and artistic practice. Chicago style, with its emphasis on clear argumentation and thorough sourcing, supports the integration of these theoretical underpinnings into scholarly discourse. When engaging with theories of media, post-structuralism, or theories of the network, it is essential to cite the seminal texts and critical essays that inform the analysis.

When citing theoretical works, whether they are physical books or online scholarly articles, Chicago style provides detailed guidelines for ensuring that the reader can easily access and verify the sources. This includes precise bibliographic information for books and complete citation details for journal articles, including volume, issue, page numbers, and DOI or URL. For theoretical texts that are foundational to digital art history, such as those by theorists of digital culture, new media art, or algorithmic aesthetics, meticulous citation is paramount for establishing the intellectual lineage of the argument.

The discourse surrounding digital art history often involves interdisciplinary references. It might draw upon theories from computer science, philosophy, sociology, or media studies. Chicago style's adaptability allows for the incorporation of sources from a wide range of academic disciplines. When citing these sources, the researcher must ensure that the citation format is consistent, whether it's a book chapter, a conference paper published online, or a blog post by a prominent theorist. The overarching goal remains to provide the reader with the tools to explore the theoretical underpinnings of the research.

Best Practices for Footnotes and Bibliographies

The practical application of Chicago style for digital art history hinges on the effective use of footnotes and bibliographies. Footnotes are crucial for providing detailed citation information for specific digital artworks, online resources, software, or theoretical texts that are referenced within the main body of the text. They offer a way to convey precise details without disrupting the flow of the narrative, which is particularly helpful when dealing with complex digital information.

When creating a bibliography for a digital art history project, the same principles of accuracy and completeness apply. The bibliography should include all sources cited in the footnotes, organized alphabetically by the author's last name or by title if no author is listed. For digital resources, this means including URLs and access dates consistently. It is also advisable to include information about the format of the digital work where relevant, such as "Net Art" or "Interactive Software," to provide additional context.

A key best practice is to maintain a consistent citation style throughout the entire document. If a digital artwork is cited in a footnote, the corresponding entry in the bibliography should mirror the level of detail. For example:

- Footnote Example: 1. Jane Doe, "Ephemeral Echoes," 2022, Net Art, <http://www.janedoe.art/ephemeral-echoes>, accessed October 26, 2023.
- Bibliography Example: Doe, Jane. "Ephemeral Echoes." 2022. Net Art. <http://www.janedoe.art/ephemeral-echoes>. Accessed October 26, 2023.

Adhering to these practices ensures that the scholarly work on digital art history is both rigorous and accessible, contributing to a robust and well-documented field.

FAQ

Q: How does Chicago style handle the citation of online-only digital art exhibitions?

A: When citing online-only digital art exhibitions using Chicago style, treat them as you would any online publication. Include the title of the exhibition, the name of the curator(s) if known, the year of publication or display, the name of the hosting platform or institution, and the full URL. Crucially, also include the date of access, as online content is subject to change or removal.

Q: What information should be included when citing software used to create digital art in Chicago style?

A: When citing software used in the creation of digital art, follow guidelines for citing published works. Include the name of the software developer or company, the full title of the software, the version number, and the year of release. If the software was accessed online or is part of a specific platform, include the URL and access date.

Q: How do I cite a digital artwork that is no longer accessible at its original URL?

A: If a digital artwork is no longer accessible at its original URL, document this situation in your citation. Provide the last known URL and the date you attempted to access it, noting that it is no longer available. You may also want to cite any reliable secondary sources that discuss or reproduce the artwork, if available.

Q: What are the key differences in citing a physical artwork versus a digital artwork in Chicago style?

A: The primary difference lies in the nature of the medium. For physical artworks, citations often focus on the artist, title, year, medium, dimensions, and museum/collection location. For digital artworks, while artist, title, and year are constant, the focus shifts to the digital format, the URL, and the access date due to the online and potentially ephemeral nature of the work.

Q: Is it necessary to cite algorithmic processes when discussing digital art that uses them?

A: Yes, it is often necessary to cite algorithmic processes, especially if they are integral to the artwork's creation or conceptual framework. This can involve citing the specific algorithms, programming languages, or software libraries used. This practice lends transparency to the artist's methodology and allows scholars to investigate the technical underpinnings of the work.

Q: How should one address the issue of multiple versions of a digital artwork in Chicago style citations?

A: When dealing with multiple versions of a digital artwork, be as specific as possible in your citation. If a particular version is being discussed, try to identify it by a version number, date, or specific URL that points to that iteration. If it is unclear which version is being referenced by a URL, acknowledge this ambiguity in your citation or text.

Q: When researching digital art history, how does Chicago style accommodate references to online scholarly articles and

blog posts?

A: Chicago style provides guidelines for citing various online publications. For scholarly articles, include author, article title, journal title, volume, issue, year, page numbers (if applicable), and DOI or URL with access date. For blog posts, cite the author, post title, blog name, publication date, and URL with access date. The key is to provide sufficient information for retrieval.

Q: What are the considerations for citing digital archives or repositories that house digital art?

A: When citing a digital archive or repository, you typically cite the specific artwork within that archive. Start with the artist, title, and year of the artwork, then provide the name of the digital archive or institution, and finally the URL to the artwork within that repository, along with the access date. This ensures the reader can locate the specific item.

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