

Online Encounters with Museum Antiquities

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Supplementary Image Gallery on AJA Online

Museums are primary sites of exchange between diverse publics and disciplinary experts—places where audiences encounter both ancient objects and the results of specialists' art historical and archaeological research, and where experts can interact with nonspecialists. Over the last 40 years, museums' roles have expanded from collection stewardship to a public service mission, including facilitation of public access to and engagement with museum resources. Such access has been partially undertaken online: museums have long delivered communication and content digitally to existing audiences and sought to reach nonlocal ones.¹

Beginning in the winter of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shook the globe, and museums worldwide closed to visitors and staff. Physical inaccessibility gave their digital apparatuses a sudden, outsized importance: seeking to maintain public access to their intellectual and collections resources, museums scrambled to go remote, relying on existing digital infrastructures, accelerating in-process digital projects, and trying new online behaviors. Here, we survey ways museums have recently brought their ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern resources to online audiences, in both long-term projects and pandemic efforts. Focusing on virtual galleries, digitized collections, and social media activities, we offer a critical museum studies perspective as we highlight notable digital practices, challenges, and opportunities. Access beyond the disciplinary community inevitably involves equity; thus, we pay particular attention to nonspecialist audience engagement online.

VIRTUAL ACCESS TO GALLERIES AND EXHIBITIONS

Inside museums' walls, most visitors experience ancient collections through permanent and special exhibitions. Online, exhibitions enter audiences' spaces either as virtual simulations of physical galleries or born-digital formats that translate exhibit components to online interfaces.

Virtual galleries are presented through institution-specific interfaces or in collaboration with virtual asset platforms. Many museums have partnered with Google Arts & Culture to offer Google Street View tours. This format

American Journal of Archaeology
Volume 125, Number 1
January 2021
Pages 165–75
DOI: 10.3764/aja.125.1.0165

www.ajaonline.org

¹ Our gratitude to Bridget Clerkin, Suzanne Davis, Christina Difabio, Geoff Emberling, Shannon Ness, Alison Rittershaus, and Josephine Shaya for thoughtful comments on a draft of this essay, and to Judith Barr (with Nicole Budrovich and David Saunders), Kristen Collins, Zoë Evans, Lynley McAlpine, and Howard Tsai for suggestions, discussions, and answers to queries. Thanks to the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology, University of Michigan, for financial support for image licensing fees. Additional figures can be found with this review on AJA Online (www.ajaonline.org).

shows gallery space and organization more than it enables close examination of objects or labels (the platform does not support high-resolution images of objects or external links to additional information). It may thus be useful for remote viewing of museum architecture (online fig. 1)² or previsit planning, for example allowing visitors to identify best routes for mobility access in three virtual dimensions. Other interfaces let a virtual visitor digitally “step closer” to objects and labels; for example, all gallery texts are available as popups in the comprehensive virtual tour of Madrid’s Museo Arqueológico Nacional, which uses an institution-specific interface.³ Other virtual formats augment gallery views with additional multimedia; for example, clicking on “hot spots” in the Matterport virtual galleries of the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (Cambridge, Mass.) reveals additional information in embedded multimedia: didactic texts, audio tour entries, videos, and digital 3D models (fig. 1).⁴ While most affective elements of an in-person visit are unavailable online, these virtual galleries let an online visitor explore a visual experience of curatorial juxtapositions and architectural space from predetermined viewing locations. Such virtual galleries offer remotely accessible records of museum displays and reify the physical museum as an authoritative context for art and artifacts.⁵

Less flashy, cheaper, and more flexible than virtual gallery models, filmed guided tours offer the comfort of a personal touch and familiar format in a time of physical distancing; a good example is the pandemic series *Le Passeggiate del Direttore* (*The Director’s Walks*) from the Museo Egizio (Turin): museum director Christian Greco companionably guides viewers through gallery displays in 10-minute videos.⁶

But must virtual tours simulate physical visits? Other formats dispense partially or fully with the gallery conceit. Some virtual tours take advantage of the online setting, adding slideshow-like content to virtual galleries. A virtual reality tour of the Great Altar of Zeus, produced by Berlin’s Pergamonmuseum for the

Google Arts & Culture mobile app, occasionally transports the viewer out of the virtual space to integrate drawings and photographs, much like the Matterport “hot spots,” all accompanied by an audio commentary.⁷

Special exhibitions are frequently offered as embedded multimedia presentations or dedicated websites. In the online version (a Digital production) of the 2020 exhibition “Gods in Color: Polychromy in Antiquity” (Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt), scrolling shifts graphics into place, causes colors to awaken, and punctuates the narrative with headings. Clicking reveals additional captions, high-resolution images, and short videos. An effective interactive graphic type allows color reconstructions and investigative imaging to be compared with photographs of extant sculptures by clicking and dragging the border between images back and forth like a curtain (fig. 2).⁸ Rather than attempting a gallery experience, in this format an exhibition is an explorable, linear narrative just like many other online narratives (e.g., journalism); Google Arts & Culture “Stories” offer a similar, more compact format. Alternatively, dedicated websites create entire digital spaces for temporary shows. The special exhibition websites of the University of Michigan’s Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (Ann Arbor, Mich.) are strong models.⁹ Each website stands alone as a record of the exhibition, with gallery texts, object lists, installation shots, and supplemental resources (videos, press, and interactives). If we take seriously the knowledge-producing work of exhibitions and the role of galleries as sites of public learning—and if we want to, accordingly, revisit and research them—such online records of arguments, object assemblages, and gallery arrangements are invaluable. Moreover, they archive the show as it appeared to nonspecialists: by contrast, most exhibition catalogues omit installation views, thus excluding in-person experiences of the show.

ANCIENT OBJECTS MADE DIGITAL

Digitization no longer provokes predictions of decreased attendance or anxieties about digital authenticity or the degraded aura of originals. Remote access

² See AJA Online for additional, online-only figures.

³ The Museo Arqueológico Nacional model and virtual tour, “MAN Virtual,” www.manvirtual.es/, were produced in collaboration with Samsung. Thanks to Kennedy Johnson and Bailey Franzoi for noting this model.

⁴ Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East 2020.

⁵ McTavish 2006.

⁶ E.g., Museo Egizio 2020.

⁷ Pergamonmuseum n.d. We viewed this tour in the Google Arts & Culture app using a Casemate Virtual Reality Viewer V.2.0 (thanks to Cathy Person and Dawn Johnson) and an Android smartphone.

⁸ Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung 2020. Thanks to Dylan Rogers for the suggestion.

⁹ Kelsey Museum of Archaeology n.d.



FIG. 1. Screenshot of a gallery in the Matterport virtual model of the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East, Cambridge, Mass., showing additional features for learning about the Coffin of Mut-iy-iy (Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East 1902.50.10, acq. 1902; Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East 2020; model under CC BY 4.0 license; courtesy Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East).

to holdings, typically through searchable online databases, is now an imperative, expected certainly of large museums and increasingly of small ones. Digitization undoubtedly broadens access to museums' collections by making information and digital images available remotely, even for objects not on display. Access enables a range of user behaviors, including research, educational, and creative uses. Online databases provide more than individual object records: they allow connections between objects, people, and places to be drawn publicly.¹⁰

Digitization involves laudable long-term financial and labor commitments. Public-facing databases are not merely internal catalogues tossed online. They necessitate technological expertise, digital infrastructure, and intensive data cleaning (and sometimes digitization of paper records). They also require thoughtful user experience design to be effective public portals. Nonspecialists benefit from accessible entry points

¹⁰ They thus facilitate collaborative digital humanities projects with specific community- or public-facing presentations; see, e.g., Phillips 2011, 277–96; Belzic et al. 2020.

(e.g., suggested browsing categories or preselected collection highlights) and conceptual accessibility (e.g., definitions of specialist terms).¹¹ Online collections records increasingly incorporate links to term definitions¹² and contextual information;¹³ the Brooklyn Museum uses a travel coffee mug as a visual scale, aiding comprehensibility by bringing a familiar object to an unfamiliar one (online fig. 2, middle right).¹⁴ Fuller provenance histories are also increasingly part of online object records, reflecting the growing place

¹¹ Srinivasan et al. 2009; Whitelaw 2015.

¹² E.g., the British Museum website defines “East Greek” at www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/x13817.

¹³ The Metropolitan Museum of Art website links collection database entries to relevant Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History essays; e.g., for the online database entry for a Parthian-period alabaster statuette from Mesopotamia (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 86.16.3, acq. 1886), go to www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322114, scroll down to “Timeline of Art History,” and click to reach a link to the essay “Mesopotamia, 1–500 A.D.” (<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/05/wam.html>).

¹⁴ Brooklyn Museum n.d.

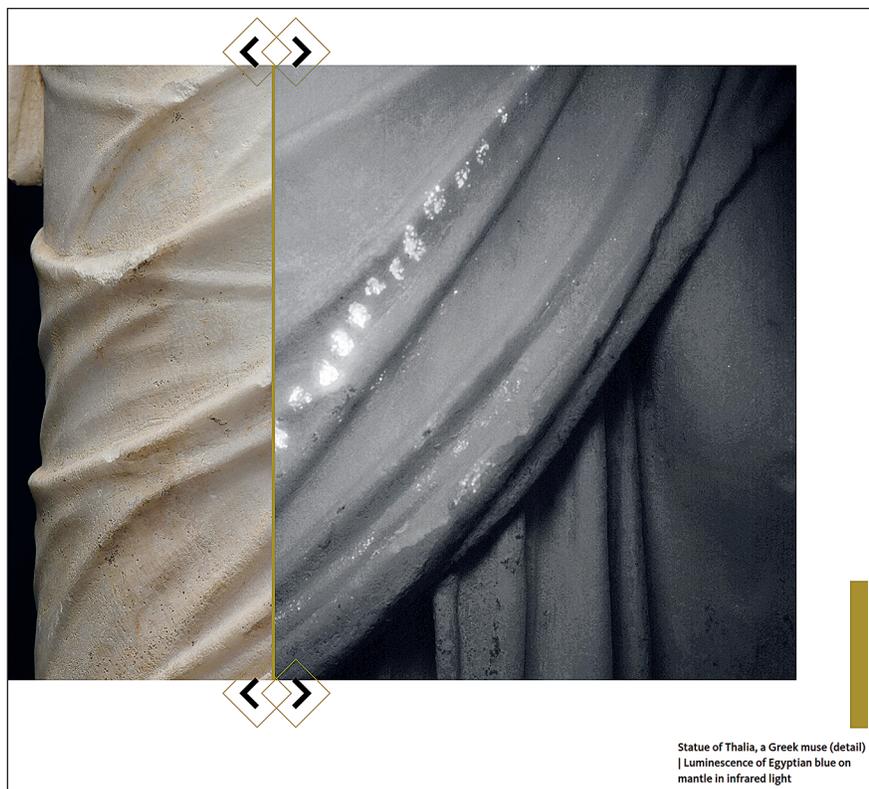


FIG. 2. Screenshot of interactive graphic from the *Gods in Color* Digital, showing photographed detail of the Statue of Thalia (Frankfurt am Main, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung 160, acq. 1908) juxtaposed with an infrared luminescence photograph (Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung 2020; courtesy Digital® Gods in Color, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung).

of provenance research and of fully imagined object biographies—and the need for public education on the topic. Ongoing provenance projects at the Getty Research Institute and J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles) are populating the Getty’s online collections database with robust provenance histories, which then digitally connect objects through shared owners and sellers (online fig. 3).¹⁵

Objects, not just records, are targets for digitization. Beyond 2D photography, digital 3D models produced through range-based modeling (e.g., laser scanning) or image-based modeling (e.g., photogrammetry) permit virtual exploration of individual objects; open access allows further creative engagement. Museums often choose Sketchfab to host models: the easy-to-use

platform supports major 3D file formats, allows embedding on other sites, and enables download or purchase of models.¹⁶ Discovery of models can be hindered by their lack of integration into most museums’ online object records; the Cleveland Museum of Art’s interface is a rare exception (online fig. 4).¹⁷ In the Sketchfab interface, objects usually float against a default dark ground (fig. 3).¹⁸ In others, background images, annotations, and audio narration can be added (per subscription tiers).¹⁹ Digital representations of artifacts experienced in such a visual void are easily

¹⁶ Thingiverse and MyMiniFactory are platform options for models aimed at 3D printing audiences.

¹⁷ E.g., Cleveland Museum of Art n.d.(a). (Cleveland Museum of Art 1970.16, acq. 1970).

¹⁸ See *Sketchfab*, “Buste de Tranquillina,” <https://skfb.ly/6nLBu>.

¹⁹ E.g., “Las Varas Bowl 1,” *Howard Tsai*, www.howardtsai.com/3d-artifacts/las-varas-bowl-1.

¹⁵ J. Paul Getty Museum n.d. These online record components complement other Getty digital resources, such as the Getty Provenance Index and open access publications.

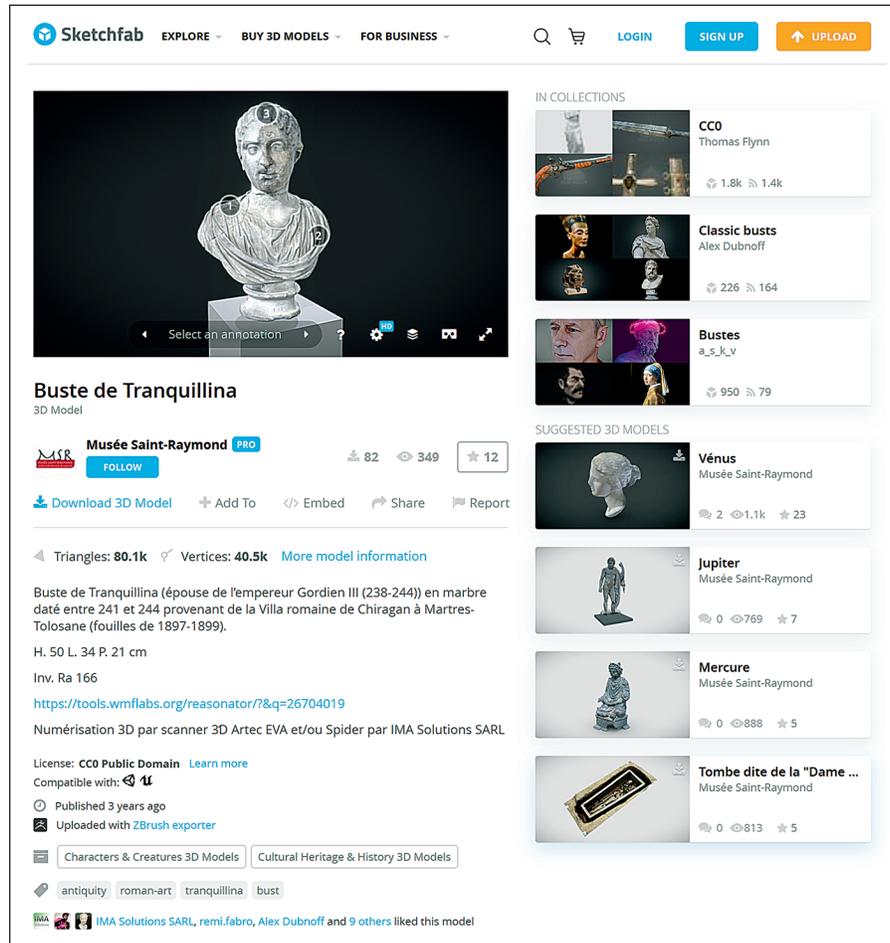


FIG. 3. Screenshot of Sketchfab page for digital 3D model of the “Buste de Tranquillina” (Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond Ra 166, excavated 1897–1899 at the Roman villa of Chiragan, Martres-Tolosane, France). Note the black ground and the annotations (digital 3D model under CC0 dedication; screenshot courtesy Sketchfab).

disconnected from contexts (archaeological and museological) and people, both ancient and modern.²⁰ With many models produced in ad hoc projects rather than in systematic initiatives, accompanying object information is often uneven. Basic identifying (“tombstone”) information or interpretive information is sometimes present in a caption field but is rarely integral to the viewing experience.²¹ Decontextualization can be mitigated with systematic inclusion of object

information, especially accession numbers as perpetual, unique identifiers (links to collections records can be unstable). Digital data standards encourage inclusion of models’ raw data, metadata, and process history; best practices should also include tombstone information, particularly for audiences who discover the models while browsing on the hosting platforms.

Open access (OA) provides free use, modification, and content sharing. For museums, OA has largely meant relinquishing rights to digital representations (including commercial use); OA can also be applied to data and metadata. Terms (e.g., attribution) are commonly expressed through Creative Commons licenses or, when unrestricted, CC0 dedications.²² Lacking

²⁰ On the absence of humans in digital models, see Thompson 2017, 165–71.

²¹ Tombstone information on a museum label includes such details as an object name or title, creator/culture, date/period, place made/provenience, media/material, dimensions, credit line, and an accession number.

²² Open Knowledge Foundation 2015; Kapsalis 2016.

living artists as copyright holders, antiquities are obvious OA candidates, requiring only institutional permission. OA initiatives also frequently frame audiences as “makers” or “prosumers” (producer-consumers) with invitations to modify (“remix”) models in creative projects (online fig. 5).

Several critiques of otherwise laudable democratizing goals of bulk digitization and OA initiatives are important. Offline inequalities persist online; despite “free” access, disparities remain, not only in language but also in digital infrastructure and digital literacy.

OA can also reinforce problematic canons by making works already engaged in traditional, exclusionary hierarchies of value most accessible.²³ When only images of the most canonical objects can be reproduced freely, their proliferation perpetuates traditional perspectives, narratives, and values in both scholarship and the public sphere. Uneven bulk digitization efforts can also promote outdated canons: long-valued objects with fuller entries (or digital images) attract more use, at the expense of understudied or unphotographed objects with narrative-shifting potential. Expanding what and who counts in antiquity (and in the present) requires strategic choices: inclusion of less elite, more quotidian, more “peripheral,” or unknown objects in digitization and OA projects can counter implicit canons. In this spirit, the *Digital Casts* project at the National Gallery of Denmark (Statens Museum for Kunst [SMK], Copenhagen) explicitly included a portrait of an African man, the so-called bust of Memnon, among seven OA digital 3D models of plaster casts of ancient sculptures, to point out the collection’s Eurocentric bias.²⁴

Digitization and OA amplify unsettled questions of cultural property ownership and profit. Archaeological scholarship understands digital 3D models as representations rather than as “true surrogates” that stand in for the real thing. Created by human interpretations and technological processes, they are authentic to themselves as digital objects with independent realities.²⁵ This potential ontological independence places them in an unsettled international intellectual property rights landscape for digital records and representations. Mathilde Pavis and Andrea Wallace warn of unintended legal consequences of OA digiti-

zation required in the 2018 Sarr-Savoy Report (“On The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage”): such requirements deny source communities the option of consenting (or not) to digitization and may inadvertently—against the spirit of the report—retain for France the “potential right to digitize, commercialize, and control access (even by mandating ‘open access’) to another community’s digital cultural heritage.”²⁶

Contemporary artists have also critiqued digital cultural heritage ownership.²⁷ Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles framed their 2015 intervention, *The Other Nefertiti* (the “Nefertiti Hack”), as a call to converse about the “colonial notion of possession”: they secretly scanned the bust of Nefertiti in Berlin’s Neues Museum and “leaked” the bust’s 3D model digital dataset.²⁸ Morehshin Allahyari’s *Material Speculation: ISIS* series (2015–2016) comprised 3D-printed models of 12 statues from Hatra and Nineveh destroyed by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), each embedded with a USB drive and memory card containing images and research files (fig. 4). Pivoting from heritage destruction to control, her 2019 lecture-performance, *Physical Tactics for Digital Colonialism*, explicates “digital colonialism,” her “framework for critically examining the tendency for information technologies to be deployed in ways that reproduce colonial power relations,” with especial regard to proprietary control over digital heritage by Western technology companies (CyArk; Google Arts & Culture) within the rhetoric of global heritage preservation.²⁹ These works critique neocolonial alienation of digital representations of cultural heritage objects and sites from source communities by museums and corporations, as well as inequitable access to original objects and digital infrastructure between the Global North and Global South. They question which stakeholders make decisions about digital representation and profit, a salient question if calls for museums to be participatory (below) are taken seriously.

²³ Prescott and Hughes 2018.

²⁴ Kaslov 2017.

²⁵ Rabinowitz 2015; Garstki 2017.

²⁶ Pavis and Wallace 2019, 117, 121. See also Thompson 2017, 172–75.

²⁷ Thompson 2017, 2018; Elias 2019.

²⁸ Al-Badri and Nelles 2015. It is contested whether the “leaked” dataset was produced by this act of clandestine scanning (Elias 2019, 690).

²⁹ Allahyari 2020.



FIG. 4. Morehshin Allahyari, *King Uthal* from the series *Material Speculation: ISIS*, 2015, 3D-printed plastic and electronics components, 30.5 × 10.2 × 8.9 cm (image courtesy M. Allahyari).

MUSEUM ANTIQUITIES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA WILD

Social media's capacities to make museums participatory and democratic have been hailed and critiqued since the rise of Web 2.0 more than 15 years ago. Online dialogue between museums and audiences promised to support shifts, both real and desired, in institutional foci from collections to visitors through broader participatory social dialogue and the sharing of museums' authority with their publics.³⁰ Social interactions in physical museums have maintained priority over digital ones, but the COVID-19 crisis has put museums' roles as physical spaces of gathering and encounter on a hiatus that will persist long beyond reopenings. Museum social media activity is thus worth examining within the frame of participatory engagement.

³⁰ Sánchez Laws 2015, 14–46.

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts that promoted events and new blog entries, highlighted special exhibitions, and, especially, shared collections objects were mainstays of museum social media activity even before the pandemic. Often themed with tags like #OnThisDay, #aturday,³¹ or celebratory months or days (e.g., #Pride), such posts mix edification and playfulness. This activity intensified when pandemic closures moved social interaction online: an International Council of Museums (ICOM) survey found that nearly 50% of responding institutions increased or began social media activity after lockdown.³² The energetic work of information technology, communication, education, and curatorial teams must be applauded, particularly as many are working more for less, with fewer resources and intense job insecurity. Museums worldwide participated in lockdown-themed hashtag campaigns, like #MuseumFromHome. Some campaigns encourage posts of collection deep cuts: the Yorkshire Museum (York) offers a weekly Twitter #CuratorBattle on themes like “dullest object.” Others prompt public submissions: museums picked up #TussenKunstEnQuarantaine³³ to solicit homebound recreations of art; hashtags such as #IsolationCreations used by the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) offered collection-inspired offline activities.³⁴ Many museums produced educational word searches, games, and online database scavenger hunts³⁵; Chicago's Oriental Institute themed its weekly digital educational offerings (e.g., “Week 9: Art and Artists in the Ancient World”).³⁶ The Cleveland Museum of Art focused on remote workers by offering their ArtLens for Slack app.³⁷

Events went digital, too. Museums offered casual events (e.g., happy hours) with museum experts on Facebook Live, Instagram Live, and Zoom, fielding audience questions on topics from collections to careers; they posted lecture recordings, produced new videos, and repromoted existing videos.³⁸ They shifted

³¹ Posts of cats on Saturdays.

³² International Council of Museums 2020.

³³ Started by Instagram account Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine (@tussenkunstenquarantaine).

³⁴ See also art activities like Walters Art Museum 2020.

³⁵ E.g., scavenger hunts created by curator Laure Marest: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (@mfaboston), Instagram, www.instagram.com/p/B_PjzfpHcY0/?igshid=128y7ydney1m86.

³⁶ Oriental Institute 2020.

³⁷ Cleveland Museum of Art 2020.

³⁸ E.g., Lehmann and Saad 2019.

in-gallery programs online, such as “The Digital Daily Dig” from the Penn Museum (Philadelphia), in which museum affiliates narrate three-minute slideshows that spotlight single objects from the collections.³⁹ These video offerings personalize research and demonstrate process, much like “backstage” blog posts.⁴⁰ Videos seem especially effective for presenting individual expert and stakeholder voices from both within and without the museum and making multivocality specific and comprehensible.⁴¹ Removed from museums, images of artifacts and archival materials on social media platforms enter a wild digital polyphony of other museums, personalities and friends, and platforms and brands. The result can be disruptively decontextualizing, as artifacts can appear as images shorn of cultural and critical contexts: an ancient pot becomes “merely” decorative. But recontextualization is also exciting, resulting in juxtapositions beyond institutional control.⁴² But these new settings prompt basic questions: What are museums’ goals in sharing ancient objects online? Are the objects meant to teach? Do museums want to tease users off social networking sites and into museum-specific spaces, digital or physical? Do they want to prompt conversation outside the museum? How will museums hear these conversations? Do they want to hear them?

Ana Luisa Sánchez Laws identifies four types of public engagement facilitated by museum social media: access (i.e., accessible collection databases or sharing of objects via social media); communication and consultation (i.e., blogs and online forums); reflection and provision (i.e., digital places for community-derived and -selected materials); and structural involvement (i.e., community- or external individual-curated exhibitions).⁴³ Most museum social media initiatives outlined above facilitate access and communication or consultation, often effectively bringing

microdoses of delight and deeply researched information into audiences’ lives. But they rarely approach the final two types of engagement: social networking platforms make noninstitutional interactions visible, but rarely is audience-generated content integrated back into museum knowledge.⁴⁴ (Is a reply or retweet from a museum account “dialogue”?) Part of this apparent unidirectionality likely arises from the structure of institutional accounts: to whom is the layperson speaking? Museum social media may foster conversation between strangers, but rarely facilitates institutional incorporation of stakeholder voices. A 2018 exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum, “Outcasts: Prejudice and Persecution in the Medieval World,” offered an exception from the field of medieval art. Cocurators Kristen Collins and Bryan C. Keene invited feedback on the exhibit concept and texts on the Getty blog and Tumblr during exhibition development, actively responding to online comments; this feedback informed their research, framing, and subsequent projects.⁴⁵ More typical of “reflection and provision” are collections platforms that allow online audiences to contribute tags or make and share publicly their own object sets.⁴⁶ After signing in with a Facebook account, audiences can share such sets on Baltimore’s Walters Art Museum website or contribute tags. The Brooklyn Museum’s online records incorporate both audience-submitted tags and answers to visitor questions (see online fig. 2, bottom left). Though unconnected to its database, the Cleveland Museum of Art’s “Visitor Art Gallery” pandemic initiative brings audience-created art to the museum’s website, rather than merely collating submissions using tags on Twitter or Instagram.⁴⁷

In early June 2020, institutional voices flooded social media. Responding to widespread protests over the murder of George Floyd, many museums posted in support of Black Lives Matter, declaring commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such social media statements should be understood both as corporate activist branding⁴⁸ and sector-wide soul-searching. Public responses were varied; statements by some antiquities-holding museums like the British Museum

³⁹ Penn Museum n.d. The Penn Museum has been offering an extensive digital programming slate during the pandemic.

⁴⁰ Sánchez Laws 2015, 89–93.

⁴¹ E.g., videos for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston’s 2019 special exhibition “Ancient Nubia Now” (www.mfa.org/exhibitions/nubia).

⁴² Museum collections also entered the lived, if virtual, spaces of online audiences through the popular Nintendo Switch game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. The Getty adapted an online tool to import collections images from institutions using the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) into the game (Getty 2020).

⁴³ Sánchez Laws 2015, 7.

⁴⁴ Walker 2014, 227.

⁴⁵ Collins and Keene 2017.

⁴⁶ The Amsterdam Rijksmuseum’s Pinterest-inspired “Rijksstudio” is a prominent non-antiquities example (Axelsson 2018).

⁴⁷ Cleveland Museum of Art n.d.(b).

⁴⁸ Leong 2013.

(London) were met on Twitter with derision over restitution practices.⁴⁹

These solidarity statements exist alongside accounts such as Change the Museum (@changethemuseum) on Instagram, which posts museum employees' stories anonymously, and Art + Museum Transparency (@AMTransparency) on Twitter, which crowdsources information about museum sector salary disparities, and thus belie systemic institutional commitments by cataloguing inequities in museum workplaces.

Some museums' digital programming explored throughlines between contemporary uprising and racism in collecting and academic practices,⁵⁰ but little changed in museums' social media sharing of ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern collections content. An ethos attentive to historical and current social inequity can be brought to such activities by giving attention to source communities, circumstances of acquisition, and continued homogeneity among the discipline's authorized knowledge producers. A willingness to educate the public and listen to stakeholder communities on these issues—even to the detriment of institutional claims to authority and ownership—is necessary. For example, an ongoing #ConnectingCollections initiative (primarily on Instagram) is “directed at bridging institutions with object collections from the ancient world . . . to explore various shared themes, artifact types, and histories.”⁵¹ In response to a fieldwork theme, participating museums posted historical excavation photographs and artifacts (fig. 5). The posts rightly assert the contributions of fieldwork to knowledge of the past; laudably, #ConnectingCollections insistently contextualizes museum objects as connected to sites, engaged in institutional histories, and with lives beyond museums' walls. But further opportunities remain to interrogate publicly the colonial and imperial contexts and legacies of this fieldwork

⁴⁹ E.g., responses collated in a thread by the British Museum Twitter account led by Dan Hicks (@BrutishMuseum): “Hundreds of people are reacting to today's British Museum's #BlackLivesMatter statement by retweeting asking for this to lead to meaningful action on African restitution,” Tweet, 5 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/BrutishMuseum/status/1269395976097325057>.

⁵⁰ E.g., Zuberi 2020.

⁵¹ E.g., Oriental Institute (@theorientalinstitute), 27 May 2020, “Introducing #ConnectingCollections, an initiative directed at bridging institutions. . .” Instagram. www.instagram.com/p/CAs8itcHCua/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.



FIG. 5. Screenshot of Instagram post on an Android phone (Oriental Institute [@theorientalinstitute] 2020).

and spotlight source communities and workers whose labor produced this knowledge.

FUTURES FOR MUSEUM DIGITAL ACCESS

Can we connect ancient collections online not just to each other, but also to people and communities? The pandemic collapsed local and distant audiences into diverse but completely remote audiences, and showed that online connections, even when not ideal, offer ways to bridge physical distance. It remains to be seen how the online landscape shifts after museums reopen, in the face of this intensification of digital activity, widespread layoffs, sharply constrained finances, and yet to be negotiated new norms of public life. We hope the future landscape includes some of the following features.

Increased Attention to Heritage Community Stakeholders

While museums alone cannot solve all global digital divides, initiatives that address heritage community stakeholders in their own languages can help counter such heritage alienation as discussed above. The Penn Museum's Digital Daily Dig already includes videos in Arabic and Spanish;⁵² collaborative partnerships, such as the Egypt's Dispersed Heritage project⁵³ offer creative and cocreative ways to center these communities. Prioritizing remote stakeholder communities will help enact museums' stated commitments to access and social justice.

Public Visibility for Interconnections

The confluence of a pandemic and social uprising has made the deeply interconnected and inequitable character of our world impossible to ignore. Critical attention to core disciplinary principles in ancient art and archaeology, especially to full object histories from provenience through provenance, and to contexts, both archaeological and of knowledge production, can also illuminate interconnections and inequities of the past and present. Increasing digital opportunities to encounter objects' multiple contexts by employing extensive linking further anchors ancient objects in time and space; digital resources and narratives that explore the reach of such themes between antiquity and the present can resonate for nonspecialists, offering meaningful ways to connect ancient objects to contemporary life.

Continued Responsiveness to Audience Priorities

Museums responded to audience queries in digital spaces by offering, for example, synchronous events with live Q&As. More digital space for structured dialogue and interplay between audience interest and museum or disciplinary priorities can only strengthen the public role of museums and public humanistic scholarship.

Innovations made out of pandemic necessity will remain critical for museums even after this health crisis has passed, not least because standalone, digital

resources have proved valuable in connecting remote, diverse publics to antiquity, if in different ways than physical galleries do. We hope that our review of current practices will help curators, archaeologists, and ancient art historians think through opportunities to evolve digital public engagement in the long term.

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⁵² Penn Museum n.d.

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