



Association of Art Museum Directors

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AAMD's upcoming Annual Meeting, to be held June 5 – 8 in Raleigh/Durham, NC will focus on innovation—and innovation was on my mind as I spent last weekend sorting through my old photos and videos and uploading them to the popular photo sharing site Flickr. Flickr originally launched in February 2004 as a photo sharing and chat site, an early kind of social networking system. Initially I thought the community aspects of Flickr would dissolve when it was acquired by Yahoo!, but I was wrong: Flickr has become a rich content-sharing site not only for those of us who think our children are cute, but also for museums, libraries, and archives. If there is one indicator of the strength of visual material in our culture, it can be found in Flickr, which now has more than 33 million individual visits per day. That's nearly as many people as visit AAMD member museums annually.

In 2008, Flickr created the Flickr Commons as a forum for institutions to share their rich photographic collections with the emerging Web 2.0 audience. Viewing some of the images through The Flickr Commons project provided a spring board for my thinking about AAMD. What if AAMD museums could collectively converge in the Web 2.0 environment to provide collection access to new, and in some cases, unknown audiences? A concerted investment by AAMD member museums in a common platform like the Flickr Commons could transform the way in which the Association and its member museums present themselves to a wider public. The focus would be on a system that shares images, but also provides that crucial "social networking" function, supporting direct interaction by and with online audiences.

To be clear, the real issue is not about the Flickr Commons specifically, but instead the opportunity to think across a range of platforms for collective ways to expand visual literacy. The Brooklyn Museum and the Smithsonian, among a few others, are already part of the Flickr Commons. Innovative, member-driven projects such as Art Babble have been groundbreaking and very successful. And many member museums have internet-accessible collections databases, making some or all of their works of art available online. But until we move collectively in one direction, the impact of the efforts of any individual museum or small group efforts will still seem fractured. Meanwhile, opportunity awaits for AAMD's members collectively to develop a common digital platform to share content with millions of viewers in the Web 2.0 world.

For our June meeting in Raleigh/Durham, we are lining up an inspiring set of speakers and sessions: Jeff DeGraff, a top rated Professor of Management and Organizations at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan will lead a workshop for members, and a panel discussion on Innovation and Entrepreneurship with entrepreneurs from the business and academic worlds focusing on new business models for the 21st century is also being planned. Robert Stevens, CTO of Best Buy and Founder of the Geek Squad will also address the members. In all these discussions and presentations, I hope some collective thinking emerges about how AAMD and its members can collectively participate in Web 2.0 before 3.0 arrives.

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