Research Guide
Steps for Researching Artworks in The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art


2. Search the collections online from the museum's website, nelson-atkins.org/collections located under the Heading Art | Collections. This valuable resource may include label copy, size, medium, museum location and other information.

3. Search the library's collection of books, auction catalogs and more in the online catalog libraryonesearch.nelson-atkins.org

4. Search the library's databases at libraryonesearch.nelson-atkins.org. The databases include a comprehensive art encyclopedia, article citations, full text articles, auction sales results and much more. Subscription databases are available from the library's public computers.

5. Library staff is happy to help you research further. Please contact the reference staff at the Spencer Art Reference Library at 816.751.1216 or via the Museum's website at: nelson-atkins.org/library

1. Guanyin of the Southern Sea, 34-1
2. Ferryman by Tony Cragg, 2001.26.1
3. Spencer Art Reference Library Reading Room
4. Public Access Computer terminals in Spencer Art Reference Library Reading Room
5. Spencer Library Reference desk
Visual Description These resources offer guidance on analyzing your artwork and writing about it.

   Call No: READING ROOM N 7477 .A28 2004

   Call No: READING ROOM N 7476 .B372 2008

   Online version: http://www.writingaboutart.org/.
   Print version: Call No: READING ROOM N 7476 .M86 2009

   (See Chapter 2: “Using Visual Information: What to Look For and How to Describe What You See,” pp. 33-65, including “Questions to Ask Before Writing about a Work of Art,” inside cover and pp. 64-65.)
   Call No: READING ROOM N 7476 .S29 2002

   Call No: READING ROOM N 7477 .T39 1981

   (See Chapter 2: “Intelligent Seeing;” Description and Analysis of Form,” pp. 25-58; and Chapter 4: “The Museum as Context: Display and Representation,” pp. 91-113.)
   Call No: READING ROOM N 7476 .T824 2002

   Call No. Stacks N 7430.5 .Z36 2002

• Search the collections online from the museum’s website, nelson-atkins.org/collections located under the Heading Art | Collections. This valuable resource may include label copy, size, medium, museum location and other information

Museum Website Search the museum’s collections online to get further information about the artwork including the artist’s name, title, date, purchase information, accession number and the label copy for each art object reproduced on the Museum’s website. It also notes if the artwork is currently on view, and in which gallery nelson-atkins.org/collections
Browse the Museum’s Mobile Guide You can access the mobile guide on a mobile phone using nelson-atkins.org/mobileguide or via a desktop computer using nelson-atkins.org/desktopguide. You can search the collections either by tour stop number (noted on the label in the galleries) or by browsing the collections. When you find an artwork you are interested in, you can either listen to the tour, or read the text by clicking on the Read button.

Museum Collections Database While most of the museum’s collection is searchable from the website’s collection search portal in some cases there may be additional information including exhibition history, provenance information and citations available to reference staff. Library reference staff is happy to search the full database for you.

Search To search in LibraryOneSearch, use keywords such as the artist’s name, title of a book, author, subject or artistic time period and search Everything in the Spencer Library. Use the Advanced Search option to combine several of your search terms and narrow your query results. Artists’ names can be entered either with the first name or the last name first. Ex: “Edgar Degas” or “Degas, Edgar.”

Browse After your search results are retrieved they will display next to the column Refine My Results. You are able to review all of your query results or further refine your results using subjects, authors, dates from the Refine My Results column. You can also search using subject headings allowing you to browse Nelson-Atkins publications, including museum handbooks, museum catalogs, exhibition catalogs and museum bulletins.

Museum Handbooks These publications begin in 1933 and will be especially helpful to you. These publications include images of the artwork in the collection, the artist’s name, title, medium and accession numbers for each piece.


This volume includes color thumbnail images of the artwork.

Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K3 W5 2008

* For earlier editions of museum handbooks, please see library staff.

Major Collection Catalogs The Museum has published several catalogs about the Museum’s collections. These books include essays about the works of art, a bibliography and the provenance for art objects. Below is a listing of the catalogs that are available.


Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1991 no. 12
  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1989 no. 1

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 2007 no. 3 v. 1-2

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 2007 no. 4

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 2005 no. 1

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1988 no. 15

  Call No: N7342 .N45 2011

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1996 no. 8

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1996 no. 12

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 2008 no. 3

  Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K31 1980 no .3
The Nelson-Atkins Museum Bulletin Index (1956-1983) Bulletins can be searched from an electronic file available on the Public Access computers in the Library Reading Room in the SARL Programs folder. The index can be searched by using the “Find” function on the upper right hand side of the Home ribbon, or by browsing the alphabetical list.


Call No: READING ROOM N 582 .K3 A21 1956-1983

Museum Exhibition Catalogs If you find that your object was included in an exhibition, it may be included in an exhibition catalog in the library’s collection. Not all exhibitions have an accompanying exhibition catalog, but many do.

The library subscribes to many databases and makes freely accessible databases available through the online catalog’s Focused Article Search. Library databases are accessible from the public computers in the Spencer Art Reference Reading Room.

Oxford Art Online http://www.oxfordartonline.com This database is only available in the library and includes these reference works: Benezit Dictionary of Artists, Grove Art Online, The Oxford Companion to Western Art, Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, and The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms. Search Oxford Art Online to find general information, including the artist’s biography, definitions of terms, etc.

Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | Metropolitan Museum of Art This freely available resource can help you develop a contextual framework for your object. In addition to a timeline, the Heilbrunn site includes thematic essays, geographical maps and suggested readings to further your research @ http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/

Articles and Citations For indexing, citations and full-text articles from printed or online journal articles you’ll use the library’s LibraryOneSearch | Focused Article Search @ libraryoneresearch.nelson-atkins.org

Searching the Focused Article Search will expand your search to include databases like Art Abstracts, Art Index Retrospective, JSTOR and Bibliography of the History of Art and many more.
The library staff can assist you with developing an efficient search strategy tailored to your specific request or assignment. Library staff can also help with concept formulation, searching strategies, finding visual images, using specialized art historical information sources, specialized online services and primary sources.

- The Reading Room is in the Bloch Building, Level 2.
- Contact us by phone at 816.751.1216.
- Current Library hours and a web reference assistance form are available from the library website at nelson-atkins.org/library
- The online catalog may be searched 24 hours a day at libraryonesearch.nelson-atkins.org

• Contact the staff of the Spencer Art Reference Library at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art for further assistance with your project.