Copyright Assessment in the Trenches: Workflow, Tools, Metadata, and more

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Copyright Assessment in the Trenches:

Workflow, Tools, Metadata, and More

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Abstract—Assessing copyright varies from institution to institution along with the specific workflow and end-user notices. This article looks at tools used in art libraries in a range of contexts along with pragmatic perspectives on copyright evaluation from a museum art library, a public research library, a university copyright advisory office, and a public university. Pain points for determining copyright presented by various formats, ownership issues, and digitization are addressed through cases encountered by the authors. Helpful tools and workflow strategies for moving forward, including widely available charts and resources, as well as software for copyright determination, are shared. Finally, the authors describe how different institutions are handling rights metadata.

[This article is an expansion of a panel presentation given at the ARLIS/NA conference held in New York, New York, in February 2018.]

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

On February 28, 2018, four panelists and one moderator discussed copyright in the trenches at the annual Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) conference
in New York. The panel was moderated by Deborah Kempe, chief, Collections Management & Access, Frick Art Reference Library at The Frick Collection. The panelists were Greg Cram, associate director of Copyright and Information Policy, The New York Public Library; Megan De Armond, assistant metadata librarian for digital resources, Frick Art Reference Library at The Frick Collection; Rina Elster Pantalony, director of Copyright Advisory Services, Columbia University; and Victoria Pilato, digital projects librarian, Stony Brook University. This article provides a glimpse into the actual practice of copyright assessment from different types of libraries located in the New York area.

There is no simple “how to” copyright manual; every institution faces varying challenges even with a shared mission of wide access. Cultural heritage institutions—whether libraries, archives, or museums offering scholarly resources to the public—are making sensible and progressive decisions and rely on tools that push the envelope for greater access. The authors of this article hope to inspire and build confidence by sharing a few experiences and newly developing approaches to copyright assessment.

Copyright literacy has increased in importance and relevance in many libraries, archives, and museums. At a museum or library, one might be assessing at collection level versus an art object or item level, whereas in an archive, one might be assessing at collection level, box level, folder, or file level. Librarians may be involved with creating digital collections with items that are clearly in the US public domain, but it is important to provide resources for assessing items published after 1923 that have limited accessibility. The goal of this article is to broaden interpretation and access while giving readers resources to reference.

**STARTING COPYRIGHT ASSESSMENT: FOUR APPROACHES**

Depending on one’s role in a cultural heritage institution, the amount of time that can be dedicated to copyright research can be extensive and daunting. Decisions rely not only on copyright statute, but accession agreements, acquisition agreements, and terms and conditions for materials acquired as gifts. Those terms and agreements can modify access, which needs to be examined broadly and holistically.

The New York Public Library (NYPL) has a large collection of archival materials that includes published and unpublished works. There are over fifty-five million objects in the collection in myriad formats. When items are selected for digitization, the first step for the Copyright and Information Policy team is to gather information on the collection: descriptions of the collection, acquisition agreements related to the collection, and subsequent agreements that might be relevant to NYPL’s use of the collection items. NYPL may have agreed to certain restrictions on the use of an item or may have been granted permission to use an item. This initial review helps NYPL understand the issues related to use of the collection and helps the staff develop a plan to address them.

After the initial review, staff will determine the copyright status of the items selected for digitization. The difficulty in determining the status of archival collections is that information is often missing that would help lead to a conclusive decision. For example, for certain time periods, knowing the publication status of an item is essential to making a status determination, but this is often difficult to ascertain. Armed
with NYPL’s review of any agreements related to the collection and knowledge of the copyright status of the items, the risks associated with making use of the digitized items are analyzed. NYPL’s mission is to expand access to its collections balanced against the risks of any potential copyright infringement. A set of determinations is created to demonstrate how NYPL can make the digitized items available to its users.

For copyright assessment at The Frick Art Reference Library (FARL), staff relies heavily on the use of Durationator, a copyright determination software and research system. Much of FARL’s collection is international, and this tool has helped determine copyright status on items published in other countries prior to 1924, as well as items 1924 and later for US and foreign works. During the initial use of the software, it would take days or even weeks to return a ten-to-twenty-page report. This was problematic when seeking a relatively quick answer and explanation. FARL staff have been working directly with one of the founders and creators, Elizabeth Townsend-Gard, who took time to listen and review specifics of FARL workflow and needs. Durationator rolls out new tools for FARL staff to test, such as the Foreign Quick Search Tool, for which the user answers three or four questions about an item:

1. Explanation of relevant law (view/hide)
2. Country of first publication
3. Author known or unknown/anonymous
4. If known, author death year. If unknown, year of first publication

The software then gives an indication of the laws for which the work qualifies and if further research on a renewal record is needed. Or, if it is in copyright, when it will no longer be in copyright and when the work is eligible for US Copyright Law Code 108(h) or 104A.

At the end of 2017, the head of acquisitions at the Frick Art Reference Library requested research on the copyright status on an important, rare Russian item: the catalog for a retrospective exhibition of the Russian Soviet poet and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky (Figure 1). It may not appear significant at first glance, and it seems austere when compared with other exhibition catalogs from the 1920s and 1930s. However, it is the most thorough and detailed list of Mayakovsky’s artworks, compiled by the artist himself just a few months before his death. It is a unique document of the history of the Russian avant-garde. The catalog dates from 1930, and it was published in Moscow. There are no illustrations within it and no copyright notice. A ticket was submitted to Durationator with the result of no known copyright, so digitization could be completed. It is now available to all remote users of the library through the digitized copy: http://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b1422273~S1.

The digital collections at Stony Brook University (SBU) Libraries consist of various materials from many departments/communities. Examples include Asian and Asian American Studies, Special Collections, Health Sciences, and Alumni Relations. General assessment of these materials starts by seeking publication dates and creator information, including birth and death dates. Since there is not a lawyer on campus to help with library copyright assessment, copyright tools are used, including the flow-
charts in the Berkeley Law book Is It in the Public Domain? Handbook for Evaluating the Copyright Status of a Work Created in the U.S. between 1923–1977. After a copyright determination is made, if that is possible, staff use the US Copyright Law Code 107 (Fair Use) and 108(h) to decide if the libraries can make a copy and how accessible that copy or copies can be. Other considerations include privacy rights and non-Western traditions that are not considered in US Copyright Law.

An interesting assessment and determination were made for a non-traditional oral history project from the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at SBU. The collection consists primarily of student work in the form of summaries of inter-

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views, not the actual recordings of the interviews themselves. For the digital projects librarian, assessment starts with research. Learning about interviewee rights was crucial as interviewees hold the rights to their own stories. The summaries, which sometimes include transcript clips of the interviews, are created by the students, which gives them rights as well. It was determined that the students remained the creators of the material; the interviewees were added to the creator field if there were transcripts of the interview and/or a short recording of the interview in the PowerPoint presentation the students created. If there was not a transcript or recording, then the interviewee was made a contributor to the work. When intellectual property is considered, interviewees retain rights to their stories, regardless of transcripts or recordings. To formalize this, all interviewees sign a release form stating that either the student projects could be made available publicly, or available only to the Stony Brook University community. The works in this collection were determined to be In Copyright – For Educational Use.

Another example is a collection of papers donated by a former physician, currently an SBU professor emeritus and also the donor of funds to the digitization project. The assessments include reviewing correspondence written by the physician, versus letters written to him, which SBU Libraries cannot make accessible without permission since the writers of those letters hold the copyright. Other work involved going through roughly 15,000 letters searching for patient names, phone numbers, addresses, and other personal information. Even though the letters are copyrighted by the donor, it is illegal to reveal personal information to the public.

As a preliminary exercise in developing a rights metadata system, Columbia University Libraries reviewed a collection and mapped these materials against rights in copyright. The first step involved examining how the works were described in the metadata and discovering that description metadata does not always speak to a “work” protected by copyright. For example, a description such as “works born digital” found in a library record could not be mapped to the copyright field information. “Works born digital,” whether accessioned or ingested in collections in that format, can be a hodgepodge of materials digitized or developed into a digital format. When copyright fields are examined, section 102 of the US Copyright statute is normally a starting point. Multiple copyright-protected works found within “works born digital” require an in-depth assessment to understand the scope of individual rights. A pain point is finding the intersection between description metadata and rights metadata in complex materials such as audio-visual and time-based media.

Columbia University Libraries references the rights cataloging checklist from the Guggenheim Museum to assist in their rights cataloging process. Starting more than eighteen years ago, the Guggenheim undertook a rights assessment of its collection that allowed it to determine what licenses and rights it actually held in relation to the objects in its collection. As part of this process, Maria Pallante, the Guggenheim’s

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then director of licensing, developed a checklist (Figure 2) to assist in the rights cataloging process.³

**PUBLIC DOMAIN: UNITED STATES AND FOREIGN WORKS**

One of the first steps of assessment is examining the collection to be digitized and determining rights status of those items. Verifying public domain comes into play at this point. Commonly thought to end at 1923, there are actually works published through 1989 in the United States that are currently in the public domain. There are tools and methods to help decide if items comply with the law. Over the last five years, there has been a shift in practices led by the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) that allow users to make new and interesting use of those works.

When users are armed with copyright information about collections, they can determine how they may use those collections. For example, in 2016 NYPL released approximately 180,000 high resolution images of items it believed to be in the public domain. The images included rights statements that described NYPL’s copyright status determination. Artist Alan Ammann found two high resolution images (Figures 3a and 3b) and used them to create new expressions and insights for these items. One of these creations, *Vaporwave* (Figure 4), appeared in the Bowersock Gallery booth of the 2016 Boston International Fine Arts Show and is now in a private collection. Ammann contacted NYPL and thanked them for providing both the images and the information necessary for him to create his art.

Unfortunately, determining the copyright status of items in NYPL’s collections is not always easy, and it does not always lead to a conclusive result. There are approxi-

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mately two million digital assets in NYPL’s rights database. For about two-thirds of the items, NYPL has been able to make conclusive copyright status determinations. That means that despite NYPL’s best efforts, conclusive determinations could not be made for a full one-third of the digitized assets.

Although determining the status of works is not always easy, there is good news for the public domain. For the first time in twenty years, the temporal line separating the
Public domain from works protected by copyright advanced one year forward in 2019 for works published in the United States. That means works published in 1923 entered the public domain on January 1, 2019. Unless Congress extends the duration of copyright protection again, the public domain will advance each subsequent year; in 2020, works published in 1924 will enter the public domain. The 1998 freeze on public domain for a period of twenty years has ended.4

Public Domain is in reference to law in the United States. When foreign laws apply to the materials at issue, it may require consultation with foreign law experts, research of potential terms of use for the materials, and engagement in risk assessments before making these works accessible in an online environment.

COPYRIGHT METADATA
Intellectual property rights metadata and digital rights management are important. In general, cultural heritage institutions are scholarly and educational, but they also may

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be commercial. As these institutions digitize and make more assets available online, it is important for users to understand why the item is available and how it may be used and/or re-used. An employee who is making copyright assessments of materials needs to include notations on how these decisions were reached. In addition, with future migrations of this content into digital libraries and repositories such as the DPLA, the material will be discoverable and accessible to users who may not be aware of certain conditions of use if they are made available only on the collection web pages of the original institutions. In a 2015 letter, Ann D. Thornton, vice provost and university librarian, Columbia University Libraries, emphasized the importance of copyright metadata: “As stewards of these collections, we make these works available for educational and scholarly purposes, lawfully and responsibly, as an essential part of our mis-

Figure 4. Alan Ammann, *Vaporwave*, oil on canvas, 60 × 60 in. (152.4 × 152.4 cm). Private collection. © 2016 Alan Ammann. Used with permission. Originally appeared in the Bowersock Gallery booth of the 2016 Boston International Fine Arts show. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.
sion.” She continued for visual works specifically: “Within the context of scholarly communications, there is an integral expectation that visual works will carry source information, provenance, and author attribution.”

**DOCUMENTATION OF RESEARCH/DUE DILIGENCE**

Although finding time to research copyright information for digital projects is difficult, this due diligence is critical. Documenting the research is particularly important if the institution is challenged in the future. There have been attempts over the years to develop documentation and research standards related to copyright assessments; this issue has led to many debates within the context of potential legislative amendments to address orphan works and within the context of litigation. How to document rights information, where to find the information within an institution, and the level of accuracy and detail necessary both at the collection and object level are still works in progress. Publications exist to provide a base level of guidance, such as those published by the World Intellectual Property Organization. PREMIS: Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata offers some standardization for this work, but no full standardization for rights metadata exists.

**COMMUNICATION WITH THE END-USER AND RIGHTSSTATEMENTS.ORG**

Once copyright status has been determined for collections, it is essential to communicate that information using standardized rights information. The end-user eventually will learn what standardized rights statements mean by seeing them repeatedly. Libraries and archives have not always communicated the copyright information with users in a consistent way. The DPLA aggregates metadata from millions of digital items made available by cultural heritage institutions. This aggregation has many ben-

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fits, but the problem of inconsistency in communicating copyright information has become painfully apparent. Within DPLA’s corpus of metadata, cultural heritage institutions were using over one hundred thousand unique rights statements. To remedy this problem, DPLA and Europeana formed a group to recommend a solution. After a release of a white paper in 2015, Rightsstatements.org was formed. There has been an increase in institutions using Rightsstatements.org statements in the records of their digital assets. DPLA has reported that 12 percent of records in its corpus now use a standardized rights statement and expects that number to grow significantly over time.

In addition to rights statements, which are generally public, rights metadata is just as important. This information is usually internal. Both Columbia University Libraries and NYPL have rights databases. This is where the copyright assessment research information is added along with other information pertinent to access, including publishing status, donor agreements, acquisitions data, general rights holder data, and other descriptions that alert the employees of these libraries how to use these assets.

The Frick Art Reference Library has begun to implement rights statements in its item metadata. Staff noted that catalogers were not using the MARC 542 field (Figure 5) for this information. The Frick Art Reference Library is adding rights statements (Figure 6) to uploaded book items in its collection on the Internet Archive. In addition, the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC) (of which the Frick Art Reference Library is one of three contributing libraries along with the Museum of Modern Art library and the Brooklyn Museum library) recently added a rights statement (Figure 7) to its Web Archiving Wiki, https://sites.google.com/site/nyarc3/web-archiving/terms-of-use-statement.

Stony Brook University Libraries started implementing Rightsstatements.org statements (Figure 8) in 2016 for their digital collections. Three rights fields are utilized for each item: the rights statement, the rights statement URI, and other rights metadata. In addition to utilizing Rightsstatements.org statements, a terms-of-use page is created for each digital collection in place of one terms-of-use page for all digital collections. This

Figure 6. Frick Art Reference Library on the Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/frick-31072002164368.

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page explains the determination made for the rights statements chosen as well as any donor information. It also includes a suggested citation if applicable. Each record in the public-facing digital repository utilizes Rightsstatements.org. Some of the information available in the terms-of-use page could be useful to aggregators. Decisions need to be made and workflows established about how rights metadata could be used in the Dublin Core and MARC schema in addition to the terms-of-use page.

Columbia University Libraries currently are engaged in grant-funded work to research and develop a rights metadata system that would provide data concerning the status and copyright ownership information related to publicly accessible digital materials. This initiative is fueling efforts to build an outward-facing system that would provide patrons and the public with facts about the copyright status and ownership information of materials. Assessments would be based on Columbia University Libraries’ reasonable efforts. Standards developed by Rightsstatements.org are being implemented on materials in public collections. Creative Commons licenses are encouraged in cases in which Columbia University is the copyright owner or when it provides Columbia scholars with the capacity to upload their own scholarship to Academic Commons, Columbia University’s institutional repository. These licenses provide audiences and patrons with a clearer understanding of the terms and conditions of reuse.13

In addition, Columbia University Libraries’ grant-funded work is fueling the research and development of an internal rights metadata system that will inform Columbia librarians and faculty whether and how they may reproduce and distribute materials. This includes the development of rights metadata related to art and architectural works, photographs, oral histories, and audiovisual materials. Initially, it is expected that the system will provide a good understanding of the data necessary to make all access decisions, including copyright status, licenses and permissions, contractual limitations found in gift agreements, and permissions required due to privacy or publicity rights. The system is envisioned as providing the base data that will allow librarians and faculty to better assess rights, fair use, and the need for permissions. A future iteration,


based on heuristic modeling, will offer a certain level of automation in providing access to materials.

**CALCULATING RISKS**

Different cultural heritage institutions have varying comfort levels with the amount of risk they are willing to take in making their digital collections public. At NYPL the priority is to lean towards making material accessible, and then face risk. This is possible by being confident with the use of items, understanding copyright law, and knowing that due diligence work was completed. If there is no risk, the library would not exist. Part of sharing information and communicating to the public is taking risks.
The Frick Art Reference Library does not determine copyright for illustrations within book items because it is too time consuming. The majority of texts selected for digitization fall outside of the realm of concern. Risks are taken at Stony Brook University Libraries when deciding to make material accessible online, with or without firm knowledge of the copyright status. Because the university is a large, state-run educational institution, US Copyright Law Fair Use exemptions can be applied to many of these collections and to some of the individual items making up the collections. However, less risk is taken when working with researchers who request that items be digitized, or that born-digital items be reused. For example, a patron may request help with using images in a dissertation that possibly could be published commercially. Permissions are sought if a final determination cannot be made for copy and reuse.

CONCLUSION
Copyright discussions will continue and evolve with updates to the law. The goal is for readers to feel empowered to make decisions. The resource list, discussion, and specific cases in this article are meant as an aid for colleagues in making decisions at their institutions and to promote the importance of copyright assessment, due diligence, and rights metadata. The authors’ hope is that more items will become accessible with the proper language to foster use and reuse.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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This article is not intended to give legal advice. It provides insight about how four employees with different levels of copyright experience handle assessing copyright at each of their institutions. Please see the Resources List provided at the end of this article.

APPENDIX A: SELECTED LIST OF RESOURCES
FOR COPYRIGHT ASSESSMENT

TOOLS
- Copyright.gov, Registration Portal [https://copyright.gov/registration/](https://copyright.gov/registration/)
- Creative Commons Search [https://search.creativecommons.org/](https://search.creativecommons.org/)
- CopyrightX – 12 week course through Harvard and Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society [http://copyx.org/](http://copyx.org/)
- Durationator [https://www.durationator.com/](https://www.durationator.com/)
- Peter Hirtle – Copyright Chart [https://web.archive.org/web/20180227034625/https://copyright.cornell.edu/publicdomain](https://web.archive.org/web/20180227034625/https://copyright.cornell.edu/publicdomain)

**Rights Statements, Licenses**
- Creative Commons Licenses [https://web.archive.org/web/20180227035125/https://creativecommons.org/](https://web.archive.org/web/20180227035125/https://creativecommons.org/)
108H DISCUSSIONS, DOCUMENTS


ARTICLES, BOOKS, TEXTS

- Penn State Article, discussion/critique of RightsStatements.org https://perma.cc/XC5H-AFLK
- Nancy Sims Article, February 2017 https://perma.cc/5AJ4-CSKS
- Chris Needham, Understanding Copyfraud: Public Domain Images and False Claims of Copyright https://doi.org/10.1086/694241
- Feasibility Study on the Creation of a Virtual Center for Copyright Education for Professionals in Libraries, Archives, and Museums https://copyright.columbia.edu/content/dam/copyright/Policy%20Docs/Copyright%20Education%20Center%20Feasibility%20Study%20Report-1-1.pdf

OTHER PROJECTS, RESOURCES

- IFLA Statement on Copyright Education and Copyright Literacy https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/clm/statements/ifla-statement-on-copyright-literacy.pdf
Website for Copyright Information https://web.archive.org/web/20180203210140/https://copyrightcortex.org/
- ALA CopyTalk Webinars http://www.al.org/advocacy/pp/pub/copytalk

WORKFLOW DOCUMENTATION
- Frick Art Reference Library Digitize on Demand https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uXbgdhLegnKzOimmnLp_R5d12kKcn9AHQ2auVUia8cQ/edit?usp=sharing