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Digital Strategy in the Art Museum

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As technology becomes an increasingly large part of the way we understand, interact, and relate to the world around us, the question of how digital interpretive media should be used in museums has become a topic of debate.

This study aims to investigate how technology is being used in the setting of the art museum, with a focus on the impact of digital interpretive media on the way we understand, interact, and relate to the world around us, the question of how digital interpretive media should be used in museums has become a topic of debate.

### Aim of the Study

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### Research Questions

What motivates an art museum’s digital strategy?
- What kind of technologies are used in gallery spaces?
- Why do museums opt to use certain technologies over others?

### Methods

The following museums were included in the study:
- Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, WA
- Tacoma Art Museum in Tacoma, WA
- Portland Art Museum in Portland, OR
- Hallie Ford Museum of Art in Salem, OR
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, CA
- The de Young (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) in San Francisco, CA
- Cantors Arts Center in Stanford, CA

### Common Digital Interpretive Technologies: Video, Audio guides, and Touch Screen Interfaces

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### Challenges with Digital Integration

Museums face many challenges when introducing technology into gallery spaces, including:
- **Limited time and man-power**: Digital integration is time-consuming and requires technical expertise that smaller museums may not be able to dedicate.
- **Limited physical space**: Museums in historic buildings might have low ceilings that make it hard to include video or screens, or they may lack consistent WiFi, making it difficult to include technology across all galleries.
- **Limited capital**: These features are costly to develop, which forces museums to pick and choose where they integrate digital content.

Additionally, ideological debates about how art objects should be presented complicate how an institution structures their digital strategy.

### Preliminary Findings

After completing this study, I observed the following patterns:
- **Common tools**: Featured in the section to the left, many museums in the study utilized similar platforms and formats to present digital content.
- **Common limitations**: As outlined above, many museums had similar issues when incorporating technology into the gallery for the first time.
- **A collaborative effort**: Over and over, respondents described how the process of digital integration had brought museum departments together that otherwise would never have been in conversation.
- **Hierarchy of digital integration**: Perhaps unsurprisingly, across the board, temporary exhibitions featured more technology.

### Future Work

Based on my work thus far, I suggest that the following attributes would contribute to the success of a interpretive technology utilized in an art museum:
- **Scalability**: Museums can increase intellectual access by allowing visitors to select the level of detail they wish to receive about a work, creating a customizable, scalable experience.
- **Providing the device**: While mobile application can be extremely effective, providing visitors the device they need to access content ensures everyone can engage with the material.
- **Consideration of the collection as a whole**: Rather than focus on individual pieces in a way that doesn’t consider their relation to other pieces and the entire collection, I suggest a tool that situates the work within the museum.