VAN EyCK
Online cultural database

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VAN EyCK is an acronym of the phrase ‘Visual Arts Network for the Exchange of Cultural Knowledge’, and is the name used for an online cultural service that was introduced by the VAN EyCK Foundation.

An initiative of The Netherlands Institute of Art History (RKD, The Hague), and the Witt Library (London), the VAN EyCK project was originally a European Commission project, funded by the following programmes:

• Telematics for Libraries programme
• Ten-telecom programme

BSL played a major role in both phases of the programme, first developing a prototype and later developing the final system. We were also responsible for running and maintaining the system online over a long period. A fourth partner (IDC Publishers) contributed their highly specialised marketing and commercial know-how in the field of art collections and publishing.

The VAN EyCK Foundation awarded the contract for the further development and promotion of the VAN EyCK service to BSL and IDC. Important customer contacts have been established over the years, including the Christies auction house and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York).

Cultural service
VAN EyCK provides access to a virtual museum of still images and catalogue records: a vast range of art objects and artists from different time periods and genres, as well as different art institutes. The original database contained over 300,000 records and images, enabling users to answer questions such as:

• “Which landscape artists were active in Amsterdam during the second half of the 17th century?”
• “Where can I find reproductions of the work of…?”
• “Which artists created images that included cats?”

The answers appear in just a few seconds, and can include thumbnails and detailed images as well as extensive descriptions for the artists, objects, and images found. Users can browse through the results, downloading data as XML documents for viewing later, or viewing and saving images on their own computer.

Unique
Every museum, library and gallery that manages its own digital collection describes and catalogues their collections in different ways. Each has their own system of keywords and descriptive fields, and some make use of classification systems such as the international ICONCLASS system to catalogue their works. Others use their own keywords and classification systems.

The main goal of the VAN EyCK research and development work we carried out with our project partners was to develop the technology that could place any number of art collections and catalogues online within a single interface.

And the project has been a great success. VAN EyCK is a truly innovative product, representing a unique online cultural solution. The online service that was developed not only integrates the catalogues of multiple institutes, but also supports access to multi-lingual data. This means that a single language VAN EyCK query can be used to search for information and content with English, Dutch, German or French descriptions, offering instant access to any number of European art collections via a user-friendly web site.

Easy to use
VAN EyCK was designed with ease-of-use in mind. In spite of the often complex technology which BSL used to meet our development goals, the whole interface has been designed so that users will need virtually no instruction.

A whole range of search interfaces are available, varying from straightforward but powerful web pages which can be used to search for artist or object titles, to more complex pages that can be used to search through the history and background of each artist and object stored online. As a result, users can perform searches such as “Find artists with a surname like Sluyters born in Utrecht” or “Find religious art produced in Amsterdam before 1850” with just a few mouse-clicks. More experienced users can combine a wide number of search characteristics to identify works of art based on the type of material used, the owner history, or even the dimensions or shape of each object.
Established in 1992, the Bright Side of Life (BSL) is a dynamic and innovative software house located in Breukelen. Our engineers design and develop advanced Web 2.0, OS X and Windows applications, often using Oracle, Sybase and MySQL, and intelligent search and classification technology from Autonomy and Exalead. We also develop applications for mobile platforms such as the iPhone/iPad and Android.

BSL is synonymous with “flexibility and innovation”, working with the latest development technologies. This has established BSL in the rapidly changing world of Web 2.0 design and application development. You can rely on BSL to quickly deliver web or workstation solutions to meet your specifications, on the platform of your choice.

We are also a supplier of advanced solutions for the management, online retrieval, publication and distribution of multimedia assets - including digital images, video, audio, illustrations, brochures (PDFs) and MS Office documents. Our unique and flexible FRS digital asset management technology can provide you and your users with secure, fast access to almost any type of digital information.

Searching using VAN EyCK

In total, VAN EyCK supports searches on more than 60 different attributes, all of which are automatically derived and translated from the underlying source data by the advanced software.

If users are familiar with the catalogue used by a particular institute they can use their “native” keywords and descriptions. For those that are unfamiliar with the sources, or who wish to search through multiple collections simultaneously, they can make use of the many universal descriptions supported by VAN EyCK, including ICONCLASS, Dublin Core, and our own VAN EyCK thesaurus (“Umbrella”). This “Umbrella” thesaurus interprets the underlying descriptions, automatically creating categories such as “Religious images”, “Fantasy”, or “Eating and drinking” without the need for anyone to edit or modify the source data!

This flexibility means that VAN EyCK is suitable for casual users and art specialists alike, with the majority of searches taking just a few seconds.

More information?

We would be pleased to arrange an appointment with you, so that you can find out more about BSL and the services we offer. If you prefer, we can arrange a demonstration focusing on your specific requirements.

Send an e-mail to sales@brightside.nl to contact us or call (+31) (0)346 552700. You can also visit our web site for more information about BSL, our products and services, and to download our brochures. There is a complete English language web site available.

Technology

VAN EyCK is about art, but the key to its success is the innovative high technology used by our web designers and developers.