Harvard Art Museums Resources for Students

Reading Curatorial Files, Harvard Art Museums 3rd floor

A curatorial file contains records pertaining to an object in the Museums’ permanent collections. This includes administrative material, including loan and reproduction requests, research queries, technical and conservation reports, and published material related to the object. For some of the more well-known or popular objects, this material can be quite voluminous. For others, it might be minimal or even nonexistent. Though these files are helpful for locating specific published materials about the objects, they also serve as a record of the objects’ administrative histories at the Museums, so they are also useful for understanding aspects of the objects’ “lives” separate from their role in scholarly publications.

Curatorial files can be viewed by appointment on weekdays from 10am to 4pm. Please email the relevant division one week in advance or earlier to request an appointment. Please try to give one or two concrete windows of time during which you can come see the files.

You will need the object number for the work in order to request its files. If you do not already know this number, look up the online record for the work by navigating to the “Browse Our Collections” tab at harvardartmuseums.org, clicking on “All Artwork,” and searching for the work. Click on its picture and scroll down; the number will be listed under “Identification and Creation.”

To find out which division a work belongs to, view the object record as above. Scroll down; the relevant division will be listed under “Acquisition and Rights” and then under “Division.”

Division of Asian and Mediterranean Art: am_asianmediterranean@harvard.edu
Division of European and American Art: am_europeanamerican@harvard.edu
Division of Modern and Contemporary Art: am_moderncontemporary@harvard.edu

Curatorial files are located either in the 3rd floor curatorial offices in the museums building at 32 Quincy Street, or at the Somerville Research Facility on Inner Belt Road. The staff of the relevant collections will be able to tell you where the files are located (or if they do not exist).