

Art Bibliographies Modern (ABM)

<http://csa1.co.uk/factsheets/artbm-set-c.php>

Introduction

Art Bibliographies Modern provides full abstracts of journal articles, books, essays, exhibition catalogues, PhD dissertations and exhibition reviews on modern and contemporary arts, dating from the late 19th Century onwards. Currently ABM contains over 276,000 records, of material published between 1974 and 2002 and is updated 6 times a year.

Subject coverage is very wide ranging and much broader than its title suggests, covering fashion and photography as well as modern movements and trends in art such as installation works, performance art, computer and electronic art, together with traditional media such as illustration, sculpture and painting.

Major areas of coverage include:-

Art history; art theory; body art; calligraphy; cartoons and caricatures; ceramic and glass art; computer and electronic art; conservation and restoration; costume; crafts; design; drawing; ethnic and tribal art; fashion; fibre arts; folk art; forgeries; graffiti; graphic design; iconography; installation art; interior decoration; illustration; jewellery; museums and galleries; music and art; painting; performance art; philosophy and art; photography; pottery; print making; religion and art; sculpture; society and art; symbolism; textiles; theatre arts; typography; woodwork; video art.

ABM is of value to undergraduate students following wide-ranging degree courses in the field of Art and Design. It is particularly useful for tracing articles on contemporary artists and photographers where books have yet to be written. Postgraduates and academic staff find it a very useful research tool.

Content

Although there are other abstracting and indexes in the field of art and design, such as DAAI, Art Abstracts and Art Index Retrospective, ABM is among the best in its field - for the depth of coverage of modern art, the diversity of material indexed and the quality of the abstracts given. It is one of the first databases that we encourage our fine art and photography students to use. DAAI, as its title suggests, is design and applied arts focused; Art Abstracts and its complementary publication Art Index Retrospective, primarily index art periodicals; and the Bibliography of the History of Art covers a much broader time span from late Antiquity to the present.

Access

Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA) which hosts ABM, supports 5 mirror sites around the world, so searching is fast and results are returned quickly. I have never known the database to be down. Access can be via username and password or by IP address, and the database can be remotely accessed using ATHENS authentication system.

Entering the database can be confusing as the web address takes you to CSA's Internet Database Service (IDS) front page, providing access to more than 50 databases published by CSA and its publishing partners. ABM forms part of the Arts and Humanities Database set. From the front page, it is necessary to select Arts and Humanities and the type of search you wish to do i.e. quick or advanced and then the database(s) that you wish to search. Although this allows for cross searching of databases, it is of limited use, if, like the Arts Institute you only subscribe to one or two of CSA's databases. However, it is possible, to set up a link straight into the database, though in our case this seemed somewhat complicated and time-consuming, We have had very few problems accessing ABM. However, when we have needed assistance the help desks (telephone/email) for either technical or content support have been excellent with prompt responses, even if an enquiry has to be sent to the States!

Searching the Database

It is very easy to get extremely good results from a quick search on ABM. However, the small search box, (almost hidden on the left of the screen), coupled with the complexity of the number of search options being offered, i.e. quick, advanced, browse indexes and thesaurus search, makes this database quite daunting, particularly to first year undergraduates and the less IT literate members of staff. In some ways I feel ABM is uncertain whether it is just aiming at experienced searchers or not. For example the instruction to "find eg conserv*" assumes an understanding of wildcards. Whereas immediately below that, the search boxes "as phrase", "all the words" "any of the words" are self-explanatory and require no knowledge of Boolean.

Despite criticising the layout of the screen, when one does start searching however, the framed structure of the page is really good. With the search options always visible on the left, it is lovely to be able to see your results to the right and be able to change keywords immediately without having to scroll up and down pages to do so.

When showing the Foundation course staff how to use this database in an information skills session, a brief explanation of what was meant by the differing terms such as "Boolean Operators" and "Proximity Search" had all of them using the advanced search features confidently within a short space of time. They left, knowing that there were excellent 'help' features on the screen to support them, when researching on their own.

Results

A search on ABM produces brief results just for Author, Title and Source. These are very easy to scroll through and the link to view the full record is easy to use. The full record contains very detailed bibliographic records under 20 different fields entered under each descriptor field e.g. TI for title and AU for Author. Again, particularly for those searching bibliographic databases for the first time, this can be quite hard to get to grips with. However, I have found that first year undergraduates soon become familiar with codes for the areas most useful to them, namely author, article title, journal and abstract. The abstract given is succinct but detailed enough to make it easy to determine if an article would be relevant.

One of the best features of ABM is the cross-referenced, hyper linked entries. Links (highlighted in blue) from the subject / artist field, take you straight to the entries for that keyword. This saves having to carry out new searches on keywords that you have found during a search. Undergraduates found this very useful especially when learning how to search using key words.

Results can be saved, printed or emailed or searches saved. It is also possible to set up a saved alerting service, which is used to automatically used to search selected databases for new content. This has proved very useful to researchers looking at contemporary topics.

Additional Features

In addition to tracing bibliographic records, ABM also links to web resources, evaluated by ABM's editors benefiting both students and lecturers by providing good quality web resources, without having to search separately for them. Of particular use is the focus on images of art works, which ABM has selected and indexed. Collections include those of the Tate Galleries and Guggenheim Museum. ABM also allows for linking to web opacs and to electronic journal collections.

Summary

ABM is one of the most important bibliographic databases for modern art. Users do benefit from being shown how to use this database in order to make the most of its very comprehensive searching capabilities, though an understanding of advanced searching techniques is not vital. Good search results can be obtained from doing a very simple quick keyword search. With its cross-referencing facilities and reviewed web resources, it is an ideal place for undergraduates to start learning about using databases for their essay research. In addition it is a key resource for academic staff undertaking in-depth research for their PhDs.