

Abstract

In this essay, I discuss two online manifestations of exhibition reprises as memory devices: the microsite and the online catalogue raisonné. For the most part, as currently conceived, these two online forms of remembering exhibitions embody two very different mentalities. Microsites habitually are generated at the time of an exhibition and are born digital; catalogue raisonnés are generated much later and often rely on analogue precedents for design. In addition to promoting the digitally conceived catalogue raisonné, I urge the dual strategy of maintaining active links to historic microsites and the retroactive creation of new ones as vehicles for rewriting the exhibition history canon. My primary examples are drawn from the Centre Georges Pompidou. ●

Resumo

Neste ensaio, é apresentada uma reflexão em torno de duas manifestações *online* de evocação de exposições, concebidas como dispositivos de memória: o *microsite* e o catálogo *raisonné online*. De um modo geral, estas duas formas de recordar exposições têm naturezas muito diferentes: os *microsites* são habitualmente gerados durante o processo de organização e abertura da exposição ao público, e são desde logo concebidos numa forma digital; os catálogos *raisonnés* são gerados muito mais tarde, e muitas vezes dependem de precedentes analógicos na sua conceção e organização. Recorrendo a exemplos relacionados com a atividade expositiva do Centro Georges Pompidou, este artigo argumenta a favor da criação de catálogos *raisonnés* de exposições em formato digital, e defende que quer a manutenção de *links* ativos para *microsites* de exposições, quer a criação retroativa de novos *links*, são instrumentos essenciais para se reescrever o cânone da História das Exposições. ●

keywords

EXHIBITION MICROSITES
CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ
ELLES@CENTREPOMPIDOU
RESTITUTION

palavras-chave

MICROSITES DE EXPOSIÇÕES
CATÁLOGO RAISONNÉ
ELLES@CENTREPOMPIDOU
RESTITUIÇÃO

REMEMBERING EXHIBITIONS ONLINE MICROSITES AND CATALOGUES RAISONNÉS

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This essay discusses two online manifestations of exhibition reprises as memory devices: the microsite and the online catalogue raisonné (Greenberg, 2009, 1 & 6). With the first, I want to extend past discussions of exhibition microsites to include their historic value as exhibition and digital artifacts as well as the implications of their increasingly precarious fate. The second phenomenon entails the more recent appearance of online catalogue raisonné projects that record the exhibition history of a given institution or museum. For the most part, as currently conceived, these two online devices for remembering exhibitions embody two very different mentalities, resulting in distorted exhibition histories. My primary examples are drawn from the Centre Georges Pompidou.

Microsites and the catalogue raisonné

Exhibition microsites are digitally born, designed to be easily accessible and multi-purpose. They usually appear contemporaneously with an exhibition, often as a stand-alone web feature. Microsites contain a variety of information related to an exhibition's theme, contents, artists, layout, design, curatorial and installation processes, or programming. Microsites are a vehicle to bring this information, increasingly in various media, together and, at the same time, reach wider and different audiences, both during and after an exhibition run. While not usually conceived as a memory device, the microsite, if preserved, becomes one.

By contrast, catalogues raisonnés are retrospective, archival endeavors, constructed after the event for consultation by significantly fewer users. A catalogue raisonné of exhibitions comprises information about a series of exhibitions rather than just a single one and is as much about institutional history as exhibition history.

Online catalogues raisonnés are a recent development but almost as soon as museums launched websites a wide range of information about the institution and its exhibitions was put online. The exhibition tab on the home page of many museums often consists of three temporal sub-categories: current, future, and past. At its most basic, the past exhibitions section lists exhibitions by title and date. Some are more elaborate and include a description with a few images of the exhibition's contents or installation photos. 'Past exhibitions' listings serve as precursors and, at best, prototypes for online exhibition catalogues raisonnés.

The online exhibition catalogue raisonné is a fuller reprise than the briefer listing, replete with as much information as possible. Ideally, for each entry, the catalogue raisonné reproduces all documents associated with an exhibition, including those with sound and movement, features impossible to incorporate except by notation in an analogue version. Unlike microsites which generate new material, the primary activity of any catalogue raisonné is to collate existing data.

Because the catalogue raisonné emerged long before the digital era, there is a tendency to use analogue principles of construction, interface, storage, and dissemination, even when the platform is digital. Unless carefully rethought from the moment of its inception, the online catalogue raisonné risks minimizing the extraordinary potential that digital technologies offer for revisioning what an archive might be and how it can be used. Far into the future, the online exhibition catalogue raisonné will determine the ways past exhibitions are remembered.

A number of theorists point to the dangers of repeating past approaches to archival material when using newer media. In her book, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, art historian Griselda Pollock states: "Archives matter. What is included shapes forever what we think we were and hence what we might become" (Pollock 2007, 13). New media theorist Lev Manovich worries that "...digital [art] repositories may be amplifying the already exist[ing] biases and filters of modern cultural canons" (Manovich 2017, 742). He goes on to say: "The question humanists have been asking is about canon, and how to make canons in their field more representative" (ibid., 760). Visual technologies expert and media historian Sean Cubitt reminds us that archives are an ethical category, "...that the ethical obligation to archive – is itself a political one" (Cubitt 2017, 489).

To summarize: the instruments and ideologies of past and present manifestations of online exhibition presence are key determinants to what is remembered. How, then, do our premises and practices for online exhibition documentation impact exhibition studies, exhibition histories, institutional histories, and national and global histories? And how can we develop approaches that result in fuller, more equitable exhibition histories, forms and formats that allow us to remember exhibitions and their histories differently?

The 1990's: the emergence of curatorial studies and online exhibition documentation

Let me begin by establishing some historical context for the current interest in on-line catalogues raisonnés of exhibitions and the problems this format can pose. By the 1990s, two seemingly unrelated developments emerged that directed the future course of what is now known as exhibition studies. The first was the development of graduate curatorial programmes: the second was the invention of the internet. Unlike museum studies that preceded them, curatorial programmes, are focused on exhibitions rather than collections and oriented to the curation of contemporary art. The shift away from preparing curators to manage museum collections paralleled the growing dominance of exhibitions in the art world and the advent of event culture generally.

Despite the emphasis within curatorial programmes on making exhibitions, there was the realization that very little was known about the exhibition histories that explicitly or implicitly informed contemporary exhibition practices. An ever-growing number of research publications emerged to fill the gap. It is not until the advent of online exhibition catalogue raisonné projects that the disciplines of art history and curatorial studies collaborate on joint research projects.

At the same time as a greater interest in past exhibitions was developing so too were developments in the forward-looking digital realm. Both the possibilities of digitalizing exhibition materials and documents, and disseminating them altered dramatically with the invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. Lee's revolutionary approaches to programming – bottom-up and accessibility-free – resulted in a range of digital producers and products that have transformed societies world-wide. Yet, despite the importance and ubiquity of increasingly user-friendly software programmes and the increased use of the web in multiple areas of the art world, the full application of digital technologies in exhibition history is the exception rather than the rule. None of the major exhibition history texts is available in e-book form. The situation for academic journals is marginally better. Print publishers' resistance to expanding into the digital realm can be explained by the learning curve, the resources required, and possible copyright infringement. In the museum world, resistance to the digital takes the form of museums creating online features, including catalogue raisonnés, with an analogue mentality.

Microsites: an early example

That said, a few museums did embrace the digital early on. Some of the earliest and most innovative digital museum ventures are exhibition microsites. The Centre

Georges Pompidou's 1997 exhibition, *Présentation des oeuvres récupérées après la Seconde Guerre mondiale confiées à la charge du Musée national d'art moderne* [A Presentation of Artworks Recovered After the Second World War in the Care of the Musée d'art moderne], is an early, paradigmatic example of a microsite documenting an exhibition (<http://www.cnac-gp.fr/musee/mnr/index.htm>) (Fig. 1). Technically, the thirty-eight artworks included were owned by the Musées Nationaux de Récupération (MNR) but, as the exhibition title suggests, were in the care of the Pompidou. As I argued in 2008 (Greenberg 2008, 160-162), Didier Schulmann, then curator of collections at the Pompidou, used the exhibition as an opportunity to pursue research on the unclaimed works as well as to rethink the presentation mode of restitution exhibitions, both in the museum and, rather unprecedentedly, on the web. The online presentation of the artworks in the exhibition and related research findings allowed viewers and possible claimants the opportunity to access the contents long after the exhibition closed. I return to a detailed discussion of this microsite because of its early sophistication, its establishment of site architecture and navigation features still in use for remembering exhibitions online, and its fate with regard to remembering exhibitions when institutions create a catalogue raisonné.

The elaborate website for the MNR exhibition included sections on the individual works, relevant texts, a chronology, press reviews and a full set of installation photographs. There are a number of notable elements to such comprehensive coverage. In 1997, at the time of the exhibition, the web itself was relatively new and most art museums, even the Pompidou despite its embrace of contemporaneity, were hesitant to allocate such extensive resources to online presentations and research. Schulmann's project was complex, effectively tack-

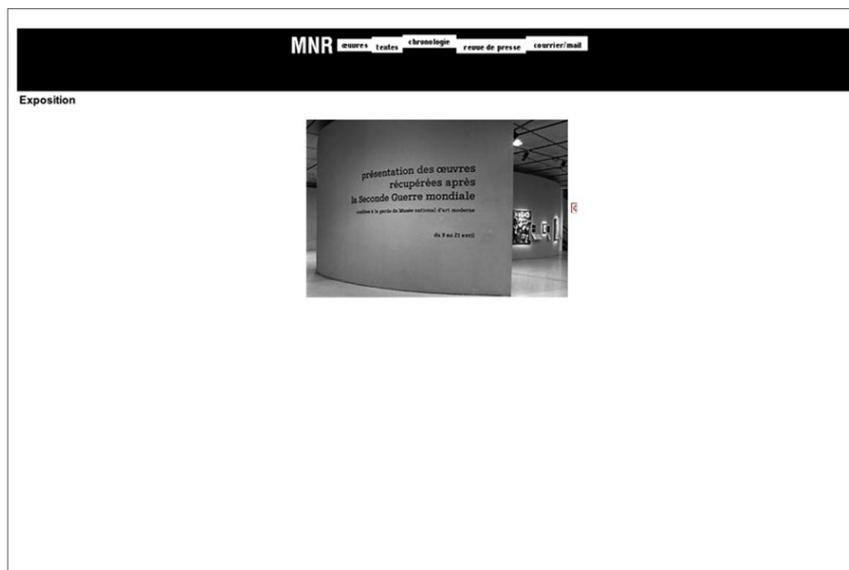


Fig. 1 – Webpage from *Présentation des oeuvres récupérées après la Seconde Guerre mondiale et confiées et confiées à la charge du musée d'art moderne*, (<http://www.cnac-gp.fr/musee/mnr/index.htm>, no longer accessible).

ling the tensions between documenting artworks, tracing provenance, updating research, and recording exhibitions simultaneously.

As such, the MNR exhibition microsite is an early and, at the time, rare example of both recording the appearance of an entire temporary exhibition online and programming hyper-links to images of and detailed information about an artwork. In 1997, accessible installation images were an anomaly, both within the Centre Pompidou online archives and those of other museums. As mentioned earlier, the standard methodology was to document exhibitions with descriptive text material and/or images of included artworks and/or occasional installation images. On the MNR microsite, a separate screen was used for each installation photograph thereby underscoring the importance of each of these images in an era when installation photographs first were becoming accessible to the public. The primary navigation path through the installation photographs gave a sense of the sequential unfolding of the designed spaces of the on-site exhibition. The single, small photographs, each in the centre of its screen with arrows to the right and to the left indicating the link to the next image in the sequence, either forward or back, prompted lingering or directional movement. The result was a clear sense of the various spaces of the exhibition, especially the atypical curved walls in the painting sections. The feel of visitor determined movement in the on-site exhibition is captured by the hyper-links controlled by the pace of the user.

The 1997 installation photographs were black and white. At the time, this was the house style of the Centre Pompidou when documenting exhibitions. The black and white palette also echoed installation photos of art looted by the Nazis displayed at the Jeu de Paume in 1942, (thereby) cuing viewers to the time frame of the crime. The use of the 1942 photograph of what is known as the “salle des Martyrs”, the room at the Jeu de Paume where “degenerate” art stolen in France by the Nazis was displayed, both on the exhibition catalogue cover and as the key image on the MNR web site, demonstrated the difference between Nazi denigration and post-war French reverential presentations of modernist, avant-garde art, particularly as Fernand Léger’s *Femme en rouge et vert*, 1914, figured in both displays.

The inclusion of the 1942 photograph in analogue and digital documentation of the 1997 exhibition is both a didactic device and an early example of a remembering exhibition mentality. The installation photographs past and present on the microsite also conveyed an understanding that the exhibition was primarily a research exhibition rather than the standard museum exhibition privileging the aesthetic qualities of the art work on display. Photographs of the backs of the paintings with markings related to provenance and extended labels were evident in the installation photographs.

The second navigation pathway, clicking on individual paintings in the installation shots, resulted in the appearance of a large, coloured image of the art work accompanied by standard catalogue information and, when known, extensive

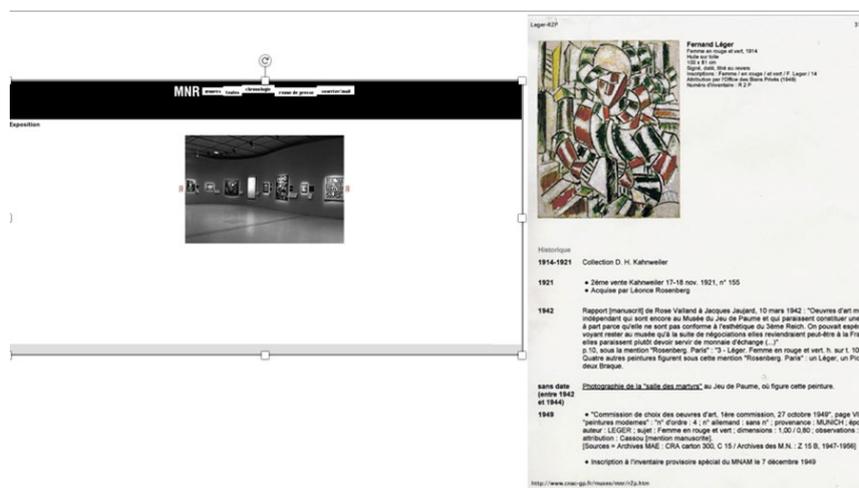


Fig. 2 – Left : webpage showing black and white installation view of *Présentation des œuvres récupérées après la Seconde Guerre mondiale et confiées et confiées à la charge du musée d'art moderne* with Fernand Léger's *Femme en rouge et vert*, 1914 ; Right : webpage with coloured image of and research data on the Léger painting.

notations on provenance which could be updated (Fig. 2). Restitutions of individual works – the goal of the exhibition – were noted as they occurred. Four works were restituted during the exhibition, others years after. The open-ended, pre-Wiki microsite to update research differs from those at the time and serves as an example of how such sites continue to function to advance research long after an exhibition terminates (ibid. 160–162).

Unfortunately, given its historic importance for the history of online exhibition documentation generally and its position as the first major example of second wave restitution exhibitions specifically (Greenberg 2010, 106) the MNR microsite has disappeared from easy access on the web. Initially, and for years after the exhibition, the microsite was housed on the MNR website and accessible through the Pompidou site (www.centrepompidou.fr/musee/mnr/index.htm). Today, the microsite in its entirety has disappeared from both the MNR and Pompidou sites. To complicate matters, as of 2017, there is no tab for past exhibitions on the Pompidou site. A Google search by exhibition title, however, does turn up a link to the digitalized, quite comprehensive press dossier (<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/16/20/162019290558fd1ac7d3a4cddb0d0bf2/normal.pdf>) but not the installation photos that record the content of the exhibition visually or the navigation system of the microsite, so the inventiveness and relevance of the exhibition's online manifestation is currently lost.

The difficulty accessing the microsite is particularly strange for two reasons. As mentioned above, the microsite under discussion was designed as an open-ended research site, regularly updated when new information about a looted artwork was found or the work was restituted. When last consulted in 2013, more works than not remained unclaimed and, since then, the Government of France pledged to improve its record with regard to restituting art stolen in WWII (Noce 2013).

The second reason for the microsite's absence is equally perplexing. Beginning in 2010, the Centre Pompidou engaged in an online Wiki project remembering all its

exhibitions between 1997 and 2017. The director of the Pompidou online exhibition history catalogue raisonné is Didier Schulmann, since 2011 Chef de service of the Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Pompidou Centre, and, as noted, curator of the 1997 restitution exhibition and microsite under discussion. When searched in July 2019, the Pompidou online catalogue raisonné was no longer accessible, perhaps for the reasons cited in what follows. The descriptions below were written when the catalogue raisonné was available for consultation.

Catalogues raisonnés and missing microsities

Although the microsite is excluded, the exhibition of MNR works *does* figure in the Pompidou catalogue raisonné. On the difficult to navigate timeline, however, the exhibition's title is so truncated that no one could possibly infer its contents. It appears as *Presentations des oeuvres*, a title so generic that it could refer to the presentation of any kind of work (<http://histoiredesexpos.hypotheses.org/presentation/catalogue-raisonne-des-expositions>). Nor can the exhibition be easily found through keywords: misleadingly, the exhibition is categorized as an architectural exhibition. An unfortunate result of such misclassification is that the associated links in the entry are irrelevant as they connect to architectural exhibitions.

Not only is the MNR exhibition difficult to find if one does not have the full title and the information about its typology wrong, the entry is incomplete. The catalogue produced for the exhibition, which exists in English and French versions, was not digitalized or even mentioned. As I have stated, the microsite is entirely absent. Jurisdictional issues as a possible reason for the disappearance of the microsite could not have been an issue as accurate forms of linking and site maintenance had been established in the past.

The Pompidou catalogue raisonné, is a Wiki, a collaborative effort between the museum and young researchers at various universities. It is uneven and inaccurate due to the absence of careful oversight by expert editors and an inadequate conceptual framework for what material should be included. Insufficient funds, personnel, and vision render the project less than exemplary with regard to the inclusion of digital material.

The loss of the microsite is compounded by the reorganization of the institutional websites of both institutions associated with it. In 2013, the MNR site was redesigned and renamed Site Rose-Valland to honour the role Valland played in saving looted art both during and after WWII (<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/mnr/MnR-liens.htm>).

The most recent retooling of the Pompidou site occurred in 2017 to commemorate the museum's fortieth anniversary (<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en>). In both revamps, the institutions dropped the link to a previous landmark project in their digital histories. The disappearance of the MNR microsite raises the question of what gets remembered in the longer term and how in the still-young field of exhibition histories and in the even younger category of online exhibition records. Additionally, the loss of the MNR microsite makes it harder to place more recent microsite exhibition history projects, such as the admirable “Primeira Exposição de Artes Plásticas da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1957” documenting the first Gulbenkian Artes Plásticas exhibition, that utilize similar site architecture and navigation features into historical context (<http://expo1957.fcsh.unl.pt/FCTProject/faces/Index.xhtml>).

Other Pompidou microsities have been better preserved, though, again, not in the online Pompidou catalogue raisonné project. The microsite, developed in conjunction with *Elles*, 2009, the institution's first collective exhibition of work by women artists (over 500 works), may not be included in the catalogue raisonné entry for the exhibition (http://catalogueexpositions.referata.com/wiki/Elles@centrepompidou#Public_et_m.C3.A9diation) but it is accessible through a Google search that leads to another Pompidou web page, an event page for the exhibition (<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/ccBLAM/r7Gk7od>).

Unfortunately, on this web page, the presentation of the microsite is skewed. Instead of being one design element, albeit the largest, among many on the original homepage, the short video publicizing the exhibition is featured with a large, screen shot positioned prominently. The far more extensive, interactive microsite appears only as a link, in minuscule type, positioned off to the side where it is misleadingly labeled *fresques* (timeline) (Fig. 3).

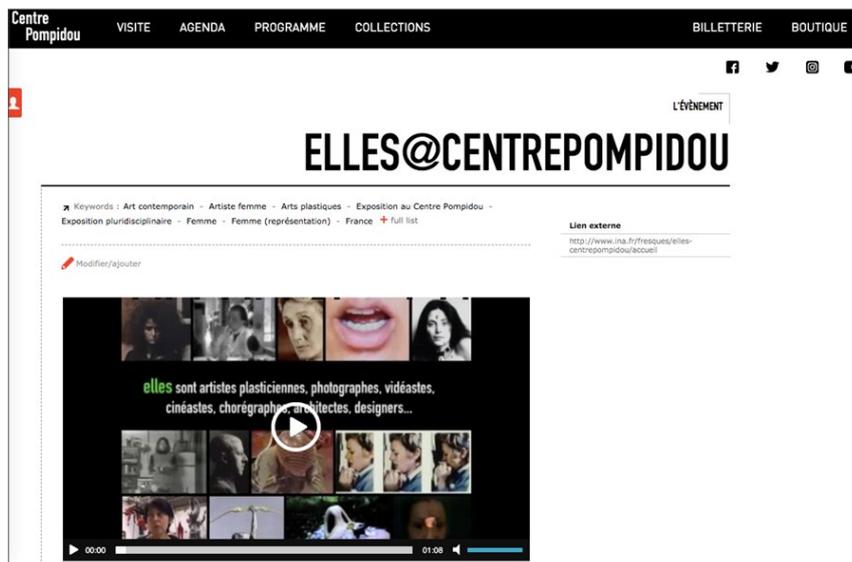


Fig. 3 – *elles@centrepompidou* evenement, original microsite homepage now defunct.

As initially conceived by the curator Camille Morineau, the *elles* microsite functioned as a document of the exhibition, an online catalogue, a history of women's art, and a history of feminism, predominantly in France. A key feature was embedding the publicity video as an element on the home page of the microsite. The single layer that included publicity and research was conceived to entice users to explore the various elements of the exhibition further.

As I wrote in 2015:

The *elles* site is designed to be [...] wide-ranging and to serve as an online searchable archive long after the exhibition. Its organization is multi-partite, resulting in a web-like structure with overlaps and interweavings. These encourage exploration of individual artworks and the seven exhibition themes. In addition to focussed and thematic sections, three additional navigational categories – the interactive plan of the exhibition, the chronological fresco and a blog – provide other forms of exhibition-related information. Aesthetically, the number of elements on the homepage – background colours of sage, mustard, grey and black, as well as black, white and yellow text – echo the variety of the content while helping to distinguish one element from another.

[...] Notably, the [Pompidou] collaborated with the National Audiovisual Institute (INA) to produce fifty artist interviews and include archival audiovisual material that appears in all sections of the site. Individual works and artists are documented, both in and of themselves and in relation to other works and artists in the exhibition and the relevant exhibition theme.

The exhibition itself is documented with an interactive colour-coded floorplan [...]. Clicking on [a colour] brings up thumbnail sheets of images of [artists'] works in each thematic section that, again, can be clicked individually for information about the work and artist and are linked to related works in the [same] thematic section or elsewhere in the exhibition [...] the omnipresent linking models the need to consider an artwork in multiple contexts (thematic, media, chronological, etc.) – urging visitors [...] not to rely on standard or singular categorization models.

Another major feature of the site is the general multi-media “chronological fresco,” or timeline that situates artworks in relation to other feminist events (films, books, [political] demonstrations, legislation, etc.) [...], the “chronological fresco” asserts the need to consider art made by women as part of a larger history of women's creativity and political change. The layering of the information permitted by digitization models [both the richness of the subject and] the active process of learning more through further investigation. (Greenberg 2015, 481-482)

After the exhibition ended, INA redesigned the *elles* microsite and it is to this latter version that the Google entry *evenement elles@centrepompidou* links (Fig. 4). Most of the features of the first version, including the publicity video, have been included, though reconfigured. Unfortunately, again, the microsite is mislabeled as

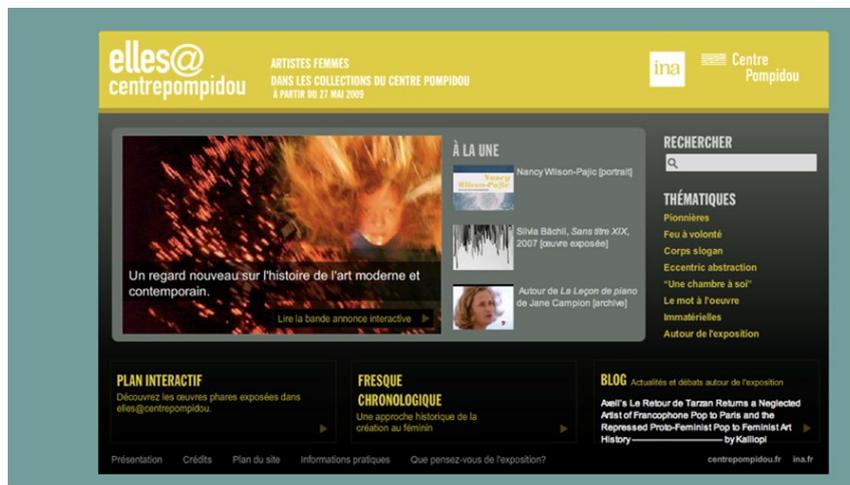


Fig. 4 – *elles@centrepompidou*, new version of homepage.

fresque chronologique (timeline) and it is only by entering the modified microsite that its fullness is apparent. While the Pompidou catalogue raisonné entry contains much valuable information, the absence of the microsite reduces the importance of this pioneering exhibition and its revolutionary use of digital technologies. The result is an erroneous rewriting of art and exhibition histories.

Digital conceptions of the catalogue raisonné

The design of the Pompidou online catalogue raisonné is based on an analogue model, specifically the card catalogue, hence, its inability to incorporate digital manifestations. By contrast, the exhibition catalogue raisonné of the Museum of Modern Art, New York uses a different methodology. With its open space and floating text and images, it looks digital. It is designed to be accessible as it is the last hyperlink under *Exhibitions and Events* on the museum's homepage, not, as with the Pompidou project, hidden away under "research" without a hyperlink. MOMA's catalogue raisonné can be scrolled, hyperlinked and, as stated, continuously updated (<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history>) (Fig. 5).

Wherever possible an exhibition is introduced with an installation photograph as well as text data. Instead of a difficult to navigate, diagrammatic, banner timeline, the exhibitions are visually grouped by year and scrollable. The catalogue raisonné is also searchable by title, type, and curator. When I searched for Connie Butler, an important feminist curator and Chief Curator of Drawings, MOMA, 2006-13, 22 exhibitions with which she was involved appeared.

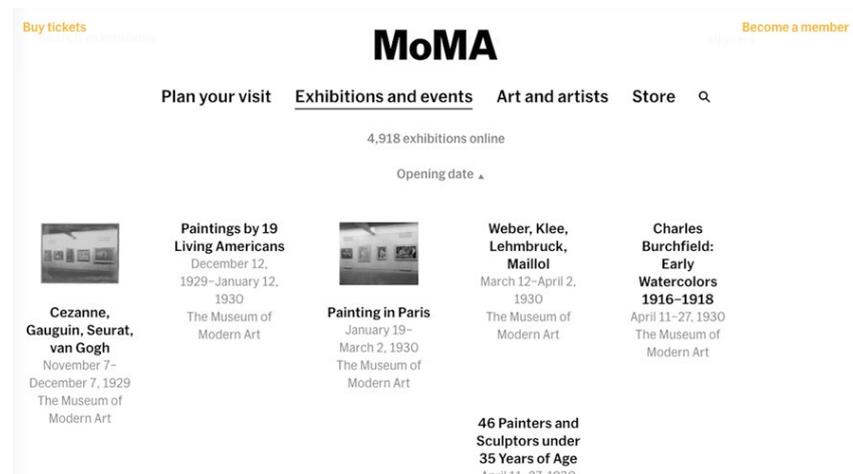


Fig. 5 – MOMA online Exhibition History, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history>.

Despite the advantages of including events from all of MOMA's departments, the search categories do need massaging. A search for "feminist", turns up a number of exhibitions but also film series and performance programmes. A search for "women" turns up many more entries, some of which could easily have appeared under the feminist section. Surprisingly, neither *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*, 2011, or *Designing Modern Women 1890-1990*, 2014, are classified as feminist despite the fact that both exhibitions are outgrowths of "Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art", a cross-departmental project begun in 2010 to increase the visibility of women artists at the museum.

For the photography exhibition, artists are listed and cross-referenced with links to other MOMA exhibitions in which they appear. A full set of coloured installation photographs is posted (<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1038?locale=en>). For *Designing Modern Women*, a video tour of the exhibition and the press release are included (<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1369?locale=en>). Is the material in the entries uneven? Could more, such as press reviews and attendance statistics, be added? Definitely. Wisely, especially for its earlier exhibitions, MOMA has decided to focus on digitalizing its in-house exhibition documents, especially its vast archive of installation photographs, and making them accessible and searchable. When digital material exists, it is incorporated.

Retrospective microsities

As MOMA rarely developed microsities for its landmark exhibitions, preserving them is not an issue. This does not preclude the possibility of MOMA retroactively creating microsities for key exhibitions, especially those related to issues of identity politics. Much in the same way that the Gulbenkian Artes Plásticas microsite draws attention to key exhibitions related to a country's patrimony and to exhibitions

outside main geographic centres, retrospective microsites created in conjunction with catalogues raisonnés can draw attention to important exhibitions outside the canon. In addition to maintaining links to past exhibition microsites, making retroactive ones is a practice all those making online exhibition catalogues raisonnés should consider. Doing so, can be an effective way of rewriting the exhibition canon. But only, if the microsite is easily accessible, widely disseminated and linked to the catalogue raisonné. ●

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