

chicago style footnotes for online art resources

The Chicago Manual of Style is a widely respected authority on citation practices, and understanding how to correctly implement Chicago style footnotes for online art resources is crucial for academic integrity and clear communication. This guide delves into the nuances of citing digital art assets, from museum websites and online exhibition catalogs to digital archives and artist portfolios. We will explore the fundamental components of a Chicago style footnote, including author, title, publication information, and crucially, stable URLs and access dates. Mastering these elements ensures that your readers can easily locate and verify the sources you have consulted, a vital step in any scholarly or professional exploration of art. Furthermore, we will address common challenges and offer practical solutions for citing ephemeral digital content and interactive online artworks, providing a comprehensive resource for art historians, critics, curators, and students alike.

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Understanding Chicago Style Footnotes

Chicago style, particularly its Notes and Bibliography system, emphasizes the clear and precise attribution of sources. This system is favored in many humanities disciplines, including art history, for its readability and flexibility. Footnotes, appearing at the bottom of the page, provide immediate access to source information without disrupting the flow of the main text. For online art resources, this means adapting traditional citation methods to the dynamic and often unpagemoninated nature of the internet. The goal is to provide enough information for a reader to find the exact digital item being referenced, mirroring the precision required when citing a physical object or published work.

The core principle behind Chicago style footnotes is to give credit where credit is due and to allow for verification. When dealing with online resources, the challenge often lies in identifying stable and persistent identifiers. Unlike print materials, web pages can change, move, or disappear entirely. Therefore, employing best practices for capturing and presenting online source information is paramount. This involves careful attention to detail in extracting bibliographic data and presenting it in a standardized format, ensuring that your citations are both accurate and enduring.

Key Components of a Chicago Style Footnote for Online Art Resources

Constructing a Chicago style footnote for an online art resource requires assembling several critical pieces of information. These components work together to form a complete and informative citation. While variations exist depending on the specific type of online resource, a general template can be followed. The primary goal is always to provide enough detail for retrieval.

Author or Creator

The first element is typically the author or creator of the content. For art resources, this could be an individual artist, a curator, an art critic, an institution, or even a contributing essayist. If no specific author is listed, the name of the organization responsible for the website or content often serves as the author. It is important to ascertain the most appropriate entity to credit as the author. For instance, if an essay is published on a museum's website, the essayist is usually credited as the author, followed by the museum as the publisher.

Title of the Work

Next, the specific title of the online art resource must be included. This could be the title of a digital artwork, an exhibition name, an essay title, a blog post, or a descriptive label for an image. Titles should be enclosed in quotation marks if they represent a part of a larger work (like an essay or a specific artwork within a collection) or italicized if they represent a standalone publication (like an online book or a virtual exhibition). Consistency in applying these conventions is key.

Title of the Website or Platform

If the online resource is part of a larger website or platform, the name of that site should be provided, often in italics. This helps contextualize the specific content within its broader digital environment. For example, an artwork might be found on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website, in which case, "*Metropolitan Museum of Art*" would be the italicized title of the platform.

Publication Information (or equivalent)

For online resources, traditional publication information like publisher and date can be tricky. Instead, focus on identifying the date of publication or last update, if available. This is crucial for establishing the currency of the information. If no specific publication date can be found, the date the content was accessed is a vital substitute. Some websites also provide information about the organization that maintains the site, which can serve as a proxy for publisher information.

URL and Access Date

The most critical element for online resources is the stable URL (Uniform Resource Locator) that allows readers to access the content directly. It is best practice to use the direct link to the specific page or resource. Immediately following the URL, the date on which you accessed the material must be provided, typically in the format "accessed [Month Day, Year]". This is because online content is subject to change or removal, and the access date anchors your citation to the specific version you consulted.

Citing Digital Museum Collections

Museum websites are invaluable repositories of information about artworks, often providing high-resolution images, descriptive text, provenance, and exhibition histories. When citing an artwork found in a digital museum collection, several specific details are important to capture for your Chicago style footnotes.

Individual Artwork Entries

For an individual artwork, the footnote should begin with the artist's name, followed by the title of the artwork in quotation marks. Then, identify it as being from the specific museum's collection. Include the accession number if available, as this is a unique identifier for the object within the museum's holdings. Conclude with the museum's website address and the access date. For example: Vincent van Gogh, "The Starry Night," Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 1941.158, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436532> (accessed October 26, 2023).

General Collection Pages or Overviews

If you are referencing a general overview of a collection or a page that doesn't feature a single specific artwork prominently, the citation will be more general. Start with the name of the museum as the author, followed by the title of the webpage (e.g., "Collection"). Include the museum's website address and the access date. This is useful when discussing the scope or organization of a digital collection rather than a singular piece.

Citing Online Exhibition Catalogs and Essays

Online exhibition catalogs and essays offer scholarly interpretations and contextual information that can be essential for art historical research. Citing these digital resources accurately requires careful attention to distinguishing between the catalog as a whole and individual contributions within it.

Full Online Exhibition Catalogs

When citing an entire online exhibition catalog, treat it much like a book. Start with the exhibition

organizer (often the museum or gallery) as the author. Follow with the title of the exhibition catalog in italics. Include publication information such as the city and name of the organizing institution and the year of publication. Then, provide the URL and the access date. For instance: Tate, Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrored Rooms, exhibition catalog, Tate Publishing, 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrored-rooms/exhibition-guide> (accessed October 26, 2023).

Individual Essays within Online Catalogs

If you are referencing a specific essay within an online exhibition catalog, the citation will be more detailed. Begin with the author of the essay, followed by the title of the essay in quotation marks. Then, indicate that it is an essay within a larger work, followed by the title of the exhibition catalog in italics. Include the organizer and publication details for the catalog, and finally, the URL and access date. Example: Griselda Pollock, "In the Museum, in the Gallery, in the Studio: Kusama's Feminist Spaces," in Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrored Rooms, exhibition catalog, Tate Publishing, 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrored-rooms/exhibition-guide/essay-pollock> (accessed October 26, 2023).

Citing Online Artist Portfolios and Personal Websites

Artist websites and online portfolios are increasingly important for understanding an artist's practice, their statements, and their body of work. Citing these can be straightforward, but it's essential to identify the artist as the author and any specific works or statements as distinct elements.

Artist's Official Website

When referencing the artist's main website, the artist's name serves as the author. The title of the website can be the artist's name followed by "website" or simply the artist's name if it functions as the primary identifier. Include the URL and the access date. For example: Kara Walker, website, <http://www.karawalker.com/> (accessed October 26, 2023). This is useful for general information about the artist's career or their overarching artistic concerns.

Specific Works or Projects on an Artist's Website

If you are referring to a particular artwork, series, or project featured on an artist's website, the citation becomes more specific. Begin with the artist's name, followed by the title of the specific work or project in quotation marks. Then, mention that it is from the artist's website, followed by the URL and access date. For instance: Jeff Koons, "Balloon Dog (Orange)," <https://www.jeffkoons.com/artwork/balloon-dog-orange> (accessed October 26, 2023). This allows readers to pinpoint the exact digital representation of the artwork.

Citing Digital Archives and Databases

Digital archives and art databases provide access to a vast array of resources, including digitized historical documents, exhibition records, and art historical scholarship. Properly citing these sources ensures that your research can be traced back to the specific datasets or archival materials you utilized.

Entries within an Art Database

When citing a specific entry from a specialized art database (e.g., Getty Research Institute's ARTISTproject), start with the author or institution that created the database entry, if distinct from the database name. Then, provide the title of the specific entry (often an artwork, artist biography, or document title) in quotation marks. Follow with the name of the database in italics, the publisher (if different from the database creator), and the year of publication or update. Finally, include the URL and access date. Example: "A Brief History of Performance Art," MoMA Learning, Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/histories-of-performance-art/ (accessed October 26, 2023).

Archival Documents

For digitized archival documents, such as letters or exhibition flyers, the citation should reflect the document's original nature and its location within the digital archive. Begin with the author and title of the document (or a description if no title exists), followed by the name of the archive or collection in italics, the institution housing the archive, and the URL for the digitized version, along with the access date. For instance: Duchamp, Marcel, letter to Jean Crotti, April 12, 1917, Jean Crotti Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives, <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/object/111784> (accessed October 26, 2023).

Handling Specific Online Art Resource Challenges

The fluid nature of the internet presents unique challenges when it comes to citation. Chicago style offers guidance on how to navigate these complexities, ensuring that your citations remain as robust as possible.

Ephemeral or Constantly Changing Content

Some online art resources, like live-streamed performances or interactive digital installations, may be ephemeral or change continuously. In such cases, focus on capturing the most relevant details available at the time of access. This might include the title of the event, the name of the platform or artist, the date of the live stream or interaction, and a descriptive note about the nature of the content. The URL and access date are still crucial, but an emphasis on the date and nature of the experience is vital.

Multimedia Content (Videos, Audio)

When citing online videos (e.g., artist interviews, documentaries, or recorded performances) or audio files, follow similar principles. Identify the creator or speaker, the title of the video or audio in quotation marks, the platform or website where it is hosted (in italics), the publisher (if applicable), the date of upload or publication, and the URL with the access date. For example: "Marina Abramović on 'The Artist Is Present'," interviewed by Charlie Rose, March 29, 2010, video, <https://www.charlierose.com/videos/21582> (accessed October 26, 2023).

Interactive and Generative Art

Citing interactive or generative digital art requires a descriptive approach. You may need to describe the artwork's title, the artist, its nature as an interactive or generative piece, and the platform or technology used to experience it. Provide the URL for the interactive experience and the access date. If there are specific instructions for interacting with the piece that are essential for understanding it, these can be briefly noted in the footnote or parenthetically. The goal is to convey the essence of the experience and where it can be accessed.

Frequently Asked Questions About Chicago Style Footnotes for Online Art Resources

Q: What is the most important element when citing an online art resource in Chicago style?

A: The most crucial element is the stable URL, which allows your reader to locate the exact resource you are referencing, along with the access date to indicate when you viewed it, as online content can change or disappear.

Q: How do I cite an image found on a museum's website that doesn't list an individual artist or title?

A: If an individual artist or title is not specified, attribute the image to the museum as the author. Use a descriptive title for the image (e.g., "Terracotta Army figure") in quotation marks, followed by the museum's name in italics (or as the publisher), the URL, and the access date.

Q: What if the online resource has no publication date listed?

A: If no publication or last updated date is available, prioritize providing a clear and stable URL and the precise access date. The access date becomes essential in such cases to anchor your citation to a specific point in time.

Q: Should I use the URL that appears in my browser's address bar or a permalink if available?

A: Always use a permalink or a stable URL if one is provided by the website. Permalinks are designed to remain constant, making them more reliable for citation purposes than dynamically generated URLs that might change.

Q: How do I cite an online artwork that is no longer accessible at its original URL?

A: If an online artwork is no longer accessible, you should still cite it with the information you have, including the original URL and access date. You may also add a note indicating that the resource is no longer available. If an archived version exists (e.g., on the Wayback Machine), you can include that URL as well.

Q: What is the difference between citing an online exhibition catalog as a whole versus an essay within it?

A: When citing the entire catalog, you treat it like a book, with the catalog title in italics. When citing a specific essay, you cite the essay title in quotation marks first, followed by its inclusion within the italicized catalog title.

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