

Part I

The collection I have selected to begin cataloguing for this assignment is of family paintings in my apartment. We have a number of gouache paintings by me, a series of illustrations by my mother-in-law, and two oils on wood by my maternal grandfather. The works are important to me for a variety of fairly obvious reasons: my works are my own, and as ridiculous as they are, I am proud of them in a way. My grandfather's paintings are charming, and are one way I can connect to a grandparent who died when I was two years old. My mother-in-law's works are also wonderful, are by an individual for whom I have great affection, and are cover illustrations for a musical cast recording that my wife recorded and released earlier this year.

As for the human record, I can hardly say, but they are lovely pieces, and may be viewed in the future as illustrative of the work of certain types of people near the turn of the millennium. That value is more likely to be recognized -- and the paintings are more likely to survive to gain that recognition -- if metadata is associated with them now, when they are still in the possession of people who know or can find out about them.

Part II: Metadata Wish List

1. **Artist.** Though I would enjoy the paintings in our apartment regardless of who painted them, their specific value is largely associative. My grandfather's adorable painting of two owls is about as lovely as art can be, yet in the interest of not cluttering up one's home, the average thrift store shopper might well pass it by; but for me it is more than cute or

wonderful, it is a little glimpse of one side of a complicated man whom I wish I had had a chance to know. Similarly, in the unlikely event that I should someday become a ridiculously wealthy art collector, it will be important to know that the funny thing I paid a million dollars for is a Miró. We can certainly enjoy art for its aesthetic value, but the ability to contextualize it within a body of work lets us understand something more about the mind behind it, which lends added meaning to the image.

2. **Title or descriptive phrase.** Not traditionally as important to a painting as to a book or film -- you can oftener communicate your point by saying “you know, the painting of the owls in the hallway,” than by “oh, you know, that book about World War II by that guy” -- paintings still often settle into titles, if only informally and descriptively.
3. **Support and media.** These facts are interesting to know in and of themselves, providing a little glimpse of the artist’s skills and habits. They are also of greater value in a world where I might very well digitize these paintings and put them online for other family members to enjoy. Without the physical clues of lustre, texture, and brushstrokes, it is much harder to recognize the techniques behind a painting.
4. **Dimensions.** The abstraction of digital (and even print) surrogates mentioned above goes double for a painting’s physical dimensions. With art so often scaled to fit on computer screens and book covers, we may imagine a painting is a certain size and be very surprised to find that it is quite another. The Mona Lisa is rather famous now for being nowhere near as big as people imagine it is. This may not be the world’s greatest travesty, but it is certainly preferable to have some sense of the physical reality of works of art.
5. **Year of creation.** This is helpful for placing a work within the life of the artist, within history, and -- especially with these family works -- the life of the viewer and the larger

family.

6. **Provenance.** In some ways it is adequate to know that “Little Grandpa’s owl picture” is just that, but in the life of a family or culture, it may be useful (or even just nice) to know where the picture has been. It meant something to me this past Easter when my cousin, three years my senior, came over and recognized the picture from his early childhood at our grandfather’s house. Sometimes the places a picture hung and the people who saw it are as important as the picture itself.
7. **Availability of digital surrogates.** In my case this is only particularly important for interested friends and family, but is helpful to know if there are digital surrogates available, and if so, where to go for them. This could save the trouble (and the wear on the art) of repeatedly needing to rescan.
8. **Use/purpose.** One of the paintings I am cataloguing was made and used for an album cover, and while that is currently the main association with the image, the cover could change in a second printing following a popular run of the musical with a more famous logo, and in a hundred years our descendants casually picking up the picture may not be aware of their ancestor’s musicals.
9. **Subjects.** If I were to make my art catalogue public, and if it were to become networked with other art collections, subject headings could be an important point of access. Somebody who knows she wants to find paintings of Ms. Pac-Man may not know to look at my pictures, so tagging that as a subject might be a great help.
10. **Notes.** The utility of notes would seem to go without saying -- “painted in Latham, NY for studio art class” and “drawn for *The Wrong Box* but not used” are sensible things to record, but do not need their own special fields. This would also be a fine place to record any stories related by family members regarding the works.

Part III

For a structural standard for my metadata records I have chosen VRA Core. Developed according to its website “for the description of works of visual culture as well as the images that document them,” VRA Core is built for just this purpose. It has appropriate fields, designed with these kinds of materials in mind, with which to describe the paintings. Additional standards that I will use are:

- **Library of Congress Authorities.** LC is strong in the kinds of subjects that I will need to describe the content of the paintings, as well as a strong base of artists’ names, even including one of the three represented here.
- **AACR2.** For artists not represented in LC, I will create headings for them on the basis of the AACR2, which in form should mirror LC’s.

Part IV

Mapping My “Wish List” to VRA Core

Wished For Field	VRA Core Element
Artist	<agentSet>
Title or descriptive phrase	<titleSet>
Support and media	<materialSet>
Dimensions	<measurementsSet>
Year of creation	<dateSet>
Provenance	<descriptionSet>
Availability of digital surrogates	<relationSet>
Use/purpose	<relationSet>
Subjects	<subjectSet>
Notes	<descriptionSet>