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Moreno, Paola, Dominique Allart, Annick Delfosse, and Laure Fagnart, eds. EpistolART project, Artistic Correspondences in the Renaissance.

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One of the most fruitful applications of digital methods for early modern studies has been the digitalization and reinterpretation of epistolary correspondence. Examples of this include Oxford's Early Modern Letters Online (emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk); the Medici Archive Project's BIA (bia.medici.org) and MIA (mia.medici.org) platforms; Harvard's Visualizing Historical Networks (histecon.fas.harvard.edu/visualizing); the BorGal project (borgal.eu); Tudor Networks (tudornetworks.net); Carnegie Mellon's Six Degrees of Francis Bacon (sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com); and Stanford's Mapping the Republic of Letters (republicofletters.stanford.edu). EpistolART fits perfectly into this strand of successful digital research.

The project aims to meticulously record, revise, and scrutinize correspondence pertaining to the arts and artists between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its overarching goals encompass the facilitation of collective introspection concerning a range of conceptual focal points: the epistolary artifact, the significance of networks as indicative of cultural entities, and discourse analysis. The research conducted within this project delves into the intricacies of epistolography, the interconnections between artistic endeavours and literary pursuits during the Renaissance, the socio-cultural characteristics and experiences of artists, as well as the application of digital humanities methodologies. From the content and design of the website and its related database, it is clear that the intended audience is the research community—specialists in the field of early modern art and history but not necessarily experts in digital methods or specific technologies. Users are not expected to contribute to the content but only to make use of it for their personal research interests.

The first iteration and main endeavour of this project is the online “re-edition” of Gaye's *Carteggio di Artisti* (1839–1840), which addresses its primary flaws: Gaye's work has some shortcomings from a philological standpoint, and important details related to paleography and codicology have been omitted. In light of these issues, the EpistolART project aims to emphasize the methodological significance of going back to the original sources. This methodological focus is the key strength of the project in terms of its usefulness in scholarly

work: the revision of Gaye's *Carteggio* serves as an example of a rigorous methodological approach that can be adopted and adapted to other foundational (yet flawed) texts for early modern studies, demonstrating the potential of the digital to reframe our understanding of historical sources. The reconstruction of the *Carteggio* by identifying, digitizing, and aggregating the primary sources first edited by Gaye is an enormous effort that requires outstanding knowledge, skills, and expertise that only an interdisciplinary team of collaborators can bring. As such, this project should also be considered as a model for collaborative research. The other strength outlined in the "Presentation" section is the ability to examine the corpus transversally, enabling multidisciplinary research; thanks to the way in which the database is set up, users can submit a wide range of queries, guiding their search according to chronological, typological, codicological, lexical, and contextual parameters. The significant corpus of 900 letters allows for research that is rich both in breadth and depth.

When assessing the interface design, usability, and accessibility of the project, we need to make a distinction between the website and the database. The website presents a clear design, with helpful guiding tools such as tabs at the top and a landing page offering key information on the project, the team, and related activities. The "Staff" section has a neat layout that is easy to navigate, although it could be clearer what each role entails in the project. In the "News" section we see the same neat layout, with helpful descriptions for each activity and publication. The project seems to list all publications by members of the project, but it is unclear whether they stem from research done on and through the digitized corpus of the project. Key information about the collection (and corpus) at the core of the project could have been placed in a more prominent position. A lot of the information about the corpus is found under "Research guide" in the database section, which is not the most immediate or intuitive place for the user; it would have been helpful to read about the corpus in the "Presentation" section. All web pages are available in French, English, and Italian, making the site and database more widely accessible. However, other accessibility standards have been overlooked: alt text for images and illustrations is not provided, there is not always high contrast between objects and background, and not all headings follow an outline hierarchy.

The database is rich and carefully constructed and presented. Its structure allows for a multitude of search options: by metadata, allowing users to query the database by person or institution, by place, and by date; and by lexical

research, making it possible to directly query the text of the semi-diplomatic edition. Each letter presents some key information as metadata, a summary box, a material description box, and a commentary box; users are then presented with the option of clicking on the transcription (when available) and the digital reproduction, or a PDF version of the transcription without the philological notes. The digital reproductions are of extremely high quality, and there is a helpful zoom-in function on the image.

The website does not include the project's documentation, which might reflect the project's target user. It would be advisable, however, to include the documentation on the website, or to refer to where the documentation can be found (for example, a link to the GitHub repository). The website also does not provide any information about the protocols and processes governing the database, but it does list a series of its objectives; it states that the primary objective for each letter is to provide "a semi-diplomatic critical edition, accompanied by a genetic-type philological apparatus; a high-quality photographic reproduction of the original manuscript; precise metadata; [and] detailed codicological and paleographical information." Under the "Editing criteria" tab, there is mention of a transcription protocol, but, unfortunately, the hyperlink to the protocol does not work. Because there is no documentation available on the website—and there does not seem to be a scholarly publication dedicated to the project's more technical aspects—it has been difficult to assess the technical elements of EpistolART. Based solely on information available through the website, it is not clear whether the project has encoded the text; there is no sign or clear indication of a markup language being used for the transcriptions. There is also no clear element in the database that makes the corpus interoperable: the project does not seem to use controlled vocabularies for the text, such as the Getty ULAN (getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/ulan), or interoperable frameworks for the digital reproductions of the documents, such as IIIF (iiif.io). The use of standards is also not made clear; the metadata does not seem to follow Dublin Core (dublincore.org) or other widely used standards for structuring metadata. Ensuring that the project is interoperable and up to date with widely used standards would tap into further research potential, connecting such an outstanding corpus to a broader network of documents and projects.

The website does not clarify how to reuse the metadata and data produced by the project, and the project itself does not seem to have followed standard licencing protocols (e.g., Creative Commons). The only clear guidelines on

licencing, copyright, and reuse are written on top of the digital reproduction of the individual documents from the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivo General de Simancas, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Biblioteca Oliveriana, Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, British Library, Fondation Custodia, Newberry Library, and Morgan Library. One would assume that these institutions were in fact in charge of the digitization, although this is not specified. It is unclear whether the lack of information for other institutions is due to the lack of clarity in their intellectual property rights (IPR) policies, or because the digital reproductions were carried out by members of the team. None of the images are available to download in any format.

Overall, EpistolART is an outstanding example of a successful collaboration between experts in early modern studies and an excellent model for reinterpreting and reassessing primary sources through digital methods. A more transparent presentation of the documentation and a more rigorous adherence to existing standards and practices in the digital humanities would make this project even more relevant.

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