

In the Artist's Words

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Abstract—This article is based on the premise that, with using an artist's words, it is possible to represent and retrieve knowledge, and consequently the information, present in a work of art. For this analysis, the authors selected works by artists in the Digital Library of Artistic Production (BDPA). The BDPA is an image database that aims to be a specific and efficient resource for cataloging, indexing, displaying, and retrieving photographic records of artworks and theoretical reflections about them. The article concludes that this method of analysis makes it possible to improve both the accuracy and relevance of indexing for researchers, being one of the best ways to explore the meanings in the works they study.

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INTRODUCTION

In the visual arts, access to the growing volume of data and information made available on the web as a result of digitization projects of textual documents, images, and three-dimensional objects has come with challenges of adequate representation and retrieval to meet the information needs of both researchers and the public. This article starts from the premise that in this domain, using the words of an artist, it is possible to identify, represent, and retrieve knowledge and information present in a work of art. This is because the artist's discourse is elaborated using terms recognized by their peers, constituting

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what Felber,¹ Cabré,² and Rey³ call *domain terminology*. This terminology would thus constitute a reference for the indexing of works of art and their images.

To corroborate this premise, the authors selected works by artists linked to the School of Communications and Arts (ECA) of the University of São Paulo (USP) for a terminological analysis. These artists are teachers, students, and alumni, both undergraduate and graduate, whose works constitute the Digital Library of Artistic Production (BDPA).⁴

THE DIGITAL LIBRARY OF ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

The BDPA is an image database for cataloging, indexing, exhibition, and retrieval of works of artistic production. The BDPA includes photographic records of artworks, dissertations, and theses of the visual poetics area of concentration of the postgraduate program in visual arts at University of São Paulo, as well as artists' reflections on theory, teaching, and learning of art. The works included are primarily artists' books, drawings, prints, and photographs—the latter being original photographic works, not reproductions of other works or objects. The theoretical works include reflective texts on styles and techniques including painting, sculpture, engraving, installations, conceptual art, objects, videos, and photography, illustrated with photographs of the works analyzed.

The cataloging and display of images for inclusion in the BDPA were addressed using the Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO) cataloging standard, the VRA Core metadata standard, and the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), which is a set of open standards to provide description and visualization of high-quality images over the web.⁵ Even incorporating image analysis techniques, the image indexing process requires more than the indexer's eye and presents an important challenge: how to identify the subjects of the artworks and choose the appropriate terms to describe them.

In any area of knowledge, communication between specialists occurs through texts prepared with specialized terms that represent the structured knowledge built there. Currently, the growing interdisciplinarity between different areas of knowledge leads to the creation of neologisms—that is, the proposition of new or old terms with new meanings,⁶ which accentuates the need for the indexer to appropriate the words and terms used by the specialist.

1. Helmut Felber, *Manuel de terminologie* (Paris: UNESCO, 1987), 1.

2. Maria Teresa Cabré, "La terminología hoy: Concepciones, tendencias y aplicaciones," *Ciência da Informação* 24, no. 3 (September/December 1995): 289–98.

3. Alan Rey, *La terminologie: Noms et notions*, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 1992), 18.

4. BDPA is the acronym for the name in Portuguese: Biblioteca Digital da Produção Artística, <https://bdpa.eca.usp.br/>.

5. Francisco Carlos Paletta, Marina Macambyra, Sarah Lorenzon Ferreira, and Vânia Mara Alves Lima, "Digital Library of the Artistic Production of ECA/USP," in *IFLA WLIC*, Athens, 2019 (IFLA Library, 2019), <http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/2489/>; Vânia Mara Alves Lima and Marina Macambyra, "The VRA Core in a Digital Library of Artistic Production," *VRA Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2023), <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/236/237>.

6. Guy Rondeau, *Introduction à la terminologie* (Chicoutimi: Gaétan Morin, 1984), 60.

METHODOLOGY

This case study explores the possibility of examining an artist's words to identify the visual arts terms used by the artist when referring to their own work. The analysis of the terms and definitions allows for an understanding of the concepts, making the indexing more precise and relevant. Furthermore, incorporating the artist's words into a controlled vocabulary improves it. Here the authors propose the analysis of the works of art and their images for purposes of representation and retrieval in the BDPA, using the artist's discourse as a terminological corpus for the collection and selection of indexing terms.

As a methodological procedure, the first step involved searching international databases of academic journals in the areas of information science and the arts to identify articles about the process of indexing works of art and their images as well as reports on users' practical experiences with image databases, focusing in particular on contemporary art.⁷ Secondly, the authors selected works whose BDPA records include images and the artists' reflective writing on the works. The clarity of the texts and the quality of the images were priority criteria in the selection of artists.

To identify the concepts and terms in the artist's discourse, the authors adopted the technique of documentary reading,⁸ widely used by librarians. In this method, only the parts of theses and dissertations considered most relevant to the understanding of a document are read, including the introduction, the segments in which the author discusses the works, and the conclusion. Complementing the documentary reading, the authors collected and selected terms and their definitions that belong to the visual arts domain, as well as candidate terms to be included in this terminology—that is, terms that represent new concepts in the domain that arose from the artist's research work.

Finally, the authors performed a pre-test, indexing works of art and their images using the terms collected and observing the definitions identified in the *corpus*. Subsequently, these definitions should substantiate the relationships among the terms to be inserted in the controlled vocabulary used for indexing.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF IMAGES OF CONTEMPORARY WORKS OF ART

The analysis of the content of art images is a complex task. The greatest difficulty lies in the nature of visual language. Images can contain rich information, but they are

7. María de Carmen Agustín Lacruz, "Análisis documental de contenido de la imagen artística: Fundamentos y aplicación a la producción retratística de Francisco de Goya" (Thesis, Universidad de Zaragoza, 2004), <https://zaguan.unizar.es/record/1913?ln=es>; Patricia Harpring, *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies: Terminology for Art, Architecture and other Cultural Works* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/intro_controlled_vocab/context.html; Joan E. Beaudoin, "Visual Materials and Online Access: Issues Concerning Content Representation," *Art Documentation* 26, no. 2 (2007): 24–28, doi.org/10.1086/adx.26.2.27949466; Sara Shatford Layne, "Subject Access to Art Images," in *Introduction to Art Image Access: Issues, Tools, Standards, Strategies*, ed. Murtha Baca (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/intro_aia/index.html; Gérard Régimbeau, "Thématique des œuvres plastiques contemporaines et indexation documentaire" (Thesis, Université de Toulouse-Le-Mirail, 1996), <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00746503>.

8. Mariângela Spotti Lopes Fujita, "A leitura documentária na perspectiva de suas variáveis: Leitor-texto-contexto," *DataGramZero* 5, no. 4 (2004): Aoi, <https://brapci.inf.br/index.php/res/v/6568>.

not self-explanatory. They do not tell one what they are about, and “they do not have the self-referential function characteristic of verbal language.”⁹ Analyzing the retrieval of content represented in images of artworks is an important operation that should be performed whenever the profile of the institution and the demands of users justify the cost and effort.¹⁰ Currently, important image databases such as the GrandPalaisRmnPhoto, JSTOR’s image collections (formerly known as Artstor), Bridgeman Images, and Joconde (an online repository of collections in various French museums) already offer this possibility of textually indexed image search.¹¹

This practice, however, still needs to be more widespread and improved among institutions and professionals in the area. Joan Beaudoin¹² points out the lack of subject indexing and the lack of use of standardized vocabularies and classification schemes to be among the main obstacles to access to visual materials. Klavans, LaPlante, and Golbeck¹³ found that metadata attributed by curators to artistic objects is rarely useful for the non-specialized public that searches for digital images on the web. Gérard Régimbeau¹⁴ attributes difficulties in information retrieval in art collections to traditional indexing based on the artist’s name and the title and time period of the work, among other reasons.

In the field of library science, text indexing seeks to represent concepts, paradigms, theories, and applications in specific terms of the knowledge domain to which they belong. On the other hand, in the subject indexing of images of works of art, two complementary strategies are possible: the analysis of the image itself, carried out by the professional responsible for indexing, and the search in textual sources to collect terms. For works of art and their images, it happens that the very concept of subject matter requires explanations and imposes decisions to be made in the indexing process.

Sara Shatford Layne¹⁵ identifies two dimensions in the indexing of art images: what the work shows most obviously (the OF dimension) and what the work is about (the ABOUT dimension). An image is never a generic description. It is always an image of something—for example a church, never “religious buildings.” A work can be of something and *about* something else, as is the case with the miniature *The Destruction of Jerusalem* by Master Boucicaut. Although it is ABOUT the first century CE siege of the

9. Francisco Javier García Marco and María del Carmen Agustín Lacruz, “El análisis de contenido de las reproducciones fotográficas de obras artísticas,” in Félix Del Valle Gastaminza, *Manual de documentación fotográfica* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, [1990s]), 140.

10. García Marco and Agustín Lacruz, “El Análisis”; Gérard Régimbeau, “L’image d’art entre analyse critique et analyse documentaire,” *Documentaliste: Sciences de l’information* 44, no. 2 (2007): 130–37.

11. Agence Photo brings together images from collections of several French museums (<https://www.photo.rmn.fr/>). JSTOR (<https://www.jstor.org/>) and Bridgeman (<https://www.bridgemanimages.us/>) bring collections of archives, libraries, and museums for specialists, teachers and students. Joconde is a collective catalog of French museums (<https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/>).

12. Beaudoin, “Visual Materials and Online Access,” 24.

13. Judith L. Klavans, Rebecca Laplante, and Jennifer Golbeck, “Subject Matter Categorization of Tags Applied to Digital Images from Art Museums,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 65, no. 1 (2014): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22950>.

14. Gérard Régimbeau, “Accès Thématisques aux Oeuvres d’Art Contemporaines dans les Banques de Données,” *Documentaliste: Sciences de l’Information* 35, no. 1, (1998): 15–23.

15. Layne, “Subject Access to Art Images.”

city by the Romans, it shows characters and scenarios from France in the fifteenth century. Layne asks:

When determination of about-ness requires highly subjective judgment, should that determination be included in providing subject access to art images? Should the inclusion of about-ness in subject analysis be limited to works of art that are clearly allegorical or symbolic in nature?¹⁶

In the same vein, Beaudoin notes:

Like Magritte's pipe, cultural objects and their visual surrogates have a multiplicity of subject concepts associated with them. The painting is not a pipe, as Magritte informs us with his added text *ceci n'est pas une pipe*, yet "pipe" certainly is one of the terms that an indexer would choose for the subject of this work.¹⁷

Despite their age, the aforementioned references are still relevant, as they point to one of the most pertinent issues in the analysis of art images: the conflict between what we see—the object that is clearly portrayed in the image—and the message that the creator wanted to convey.

In the CDWA (Categories for the Description of Works of Art, a set of guidelines developed to describe works of art, architecture, and other works),¹⁸ the subject is analyzed according to Erwin Panofsky's method.¹⁹ This happens within three levels:

- 1) Description: the generic elements depicted in the image;
- 2) Identification: the name(s) of the subject(s) depicted in the work, whether mythological, fictional, religious, a historical narrative, or non-narrative content in the form of names, places, or things; and
- 3) Interpretation: meaning or represented theme.²⁰

The indexing method proposed by Agustín Lacruz²¹ includes an iconological analysis with the same three levels derived from Panofsky's model and a faceted analysis in which personality, matter, energy, space, and time are identified. The use of Panofsky's

16. Layne, "Subject Access to Art Images," 7.

17. Joan E. Beaudoin, "Visual Materials and Online Access," 26.

18. CDWA: *Categories for the Description of Works of Art*, https://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/cdwa/.

19. Erwin Panofsky was a German-Jewish art historian best known for his studies in iconography. In his book *Studies in Iconology*, Panofsky outlines his idea of three levels of art-historical understanding: primary or natural subject matter (the perception of the work's pure form); secondary or conventional subject matter (iconography) (adds cultural and iconographic knowledge); and tertiary or intrinsic meaning or content (iconology) (takes into account personal, technical, and cultural history into the understanding of a work). Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

20. Patricia Harpring, "The Language of Images: Enhancing Access to Images by Applying Metadata Schemas and Structure Vocabularies," in *Introduction to Art Image Access: Issues, Tools, Standards, Strategies*, ed. Murtha Baca (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), 23.

21. Marco and Lacruz, "El Análisis."

model, which has been widely disseminated in the literature, has been questioned due to the risk involved in simplifying and bringing to the field of documentary analysis a theoretical model designed for another area: art history.²² The advent of automatic indexing and “social tagging” technologies, which have the potential to bring advances in information retrieval from large image collections, also poses questions. However, automatic indexing, understood as the indexing of subjects carried out by a machine, in which all human intellectual processes are replaced by techniques based on computational linguistics and statistics,²³ has not yet achieved relevant results for retrieving images of works of art, judging by the limited number of academic articles found on the subject. The technique of social tagging, in which the terms for retrieval are indicated by the database users themselves, has already been the subject of experimental projects by art museums, as Mara West reports in a 2017 article.²⁴

Klavans, LaPlante, and Golbeck²⁵ analyzed experiences with folksonomy or social indexing in art collections by researchers and institutions that yielded positive results. In their study, they explored the relationship between art images and the public's perception of them. The authors analyzed 2,909 tags attributed to a set of one hundred images of figurative paintings. They found that users most often applied tags that described the types of people and things shown in images. Tags tended to reflect specific, identifiable characteristics of people, things, events, places, or periods. Tagging by the end user is not very different than what a professional indexer would do, although the use of terms assigned by users requires occasional interventions for accuracy and efficiency. The authors consider user-applied tags a valid addition to the metadata of many collections, as they offer multiple additional access points to the images.

Despite Christensen's²⁶ concerns about the use of Panofsky's theoretical model, the authors believe that Layne's²⁷ proposal remains valid as a way of organizing the indexer's work in contexts where the analysis is feasible and necessary. These various approaches have in common the idea that the subject of an image can be both what is visibly represented in it, and it can have content that requires an effort of interpretation to come to light under the form of terms recoverable in a catalog.

In the everyday practice of indexing, even the recognition of the OF dimension, using Layne's terminology,²⁸ can be problematic. Cultural, educational, and training differences intervene in the indexer's recognition of objects, scenes, animals, people, and actions.²⁹ Even paintings such as *Caipira picando fumo* by Almeida Júnior, or *La vuelta del*

22. Hans Dam Christensen, “Rethinking Image Indexing?” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 68, no. 7 (July 2017): 4, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/asi.23812>.

23. Koralijka Golub, “Automated Subject Indexing: An Overview,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 59, no. 8 (2021), 702–19, DOI: [10.1080/01639374.2021.2012311](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2021.2012311).

24. Mara West, “A Review of Subject Indexing and Social Tagging Projects in Art Museums” (Master's paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017), https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/masters_papers/tt44pr2ox?locale=en.

25. Klavans, Laplante, and Golbeck, “Subject Matter Categorization of Tags.”

26. Christensen, “Rethinking Image Indexing,” 2.

27. Layne, “Subject Access to Images.”

28. Layne, “Subject Access to Images.”

29. Wanda Klenczon and Paweł Rygiel, “Librarian Cornered by Images, or How to Index Visual Resources,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2014): 47–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2013.848123>.

malón by Ángel Della Valle, may be unknown to some indexers, although they are figurative works in which, at first glance, it is possible to recognize most of the elements.³⁰ The analysis of the ABOUT dimension will require, in most cases, knowledge of art history, technique, composition, and more.

When it comes to contemporary or abstract works, the difficulties increase considerably. The indexing of abstract (or non-figurative) works usually ends up being restricted, at best, to terms that describe forms, colors, and other formal elements of the work, since the description at the connotative level is often arbitrary. An alternative would be to search for textual references from researchers or artists themselves, as in the case of Russian artist Kazimir Malevich, whose interest in aerial photography and its representation in his work could provide clues to the choice of terms for indexing his works.³¹

Régimbeau cites the Corbis image bank³² as an example of indexing images of abstract works that is not limited to shapes and colors but that also uses connotative terms such as simplicity, intensity, and repetition. Similarly, Agence Photo RMN has an album entitled “Colors and Shapes” with works from various periods and styles, abstract or figurative, that have in common the use of certain colors or shapes, such as circles, lines, spirals, and labyrinths.³³ At first glance, the method of indexing may seem excessively naive or useless to indexers unaccustomed to the field of art. But research questions that involve locating a certain untitled work that has a blue circle crossed by red stripes, of an artist whose name the researcher does not remember, or interest in artists who have worked on certain forms are not rare demands on image collections.

Gérard Régimbeau analyzed the Joconde and Vidéomuseum databases, understanding “thème” in its broadest sense. It includes “not only the genre, the subject, the motif, the iconography, the form, the symbol, the latent or manifest sense, the image ‘of’ or ‘about,’ but all at the same time.”³⁴ In the Joconde database, Régimbeau, who defends the need to adopt a thematic indexing model better adapted to twentieth-century art, points out difficulties in recovering records of contemporary art for its iconography, exemplified with the *Mud Drawing* series by Richard Long, which is not indexed with terms such as “mud” or “mud drawing,” but only as “non-figurative representation,” a very generic descriptor that retrieves more than two thousand documents.

An examination of the records of other contemporary works in the database confirms Régimbeau’s criticisms. In Picasso’s *Femme assise sur un banc*, despite the title and the fact that the figure has a female form, the descriptor “woman” was not used. The problem may be the inconsistency of details added to records, not the indexing method. In other similar works, the figures represented were indexed as subjects. For example, in the paintings *Fleur de Lotus* and *Fleur de Lys* by Robert Tatin, terms such as “woman,”

30. Almeida Júnior, *Country Boy Chopping Tobacco (Caipira picando fumo)*, 1893, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/caipira-picando-fumo/6wGSIEmiROgbPQ?hl=en>; Ángel Della Valle, *The Return of the Indian Raid (La vuelta del malón)*, 1892, <https://www.bellasartes.gob.ar/en/collection/work/6297>.

31. Régimbeau, “L’image d’art.”

32. Régimbeau, “L’image d’art.”

33. Corbis today is part of Getty Images: <https://www.gettyimages.com.br/>; Agence Photo RMF: <https://www.photo.rmn.fr/>.

34. Régimbeau, “Thématique des œuvres plastiques contemporaines,” 17.

“couple,” and “flower” were present in the record, although the figures are no more evident than they are in Picasso’s work.

For Régimbeau, “The indexing of the subject should be based on the knowledge of the works of its author, supported by the purposes of the artist or external textual documents.”³⁵ Indexing art images, therefore, requires research work on art history—techniques, artists, and historical, geographical, and chronological modifiers. Vanda de Fátima Fulgência de Oliveira notes that the concepts attributed to indexing are subject to the reading of the indexers and their ideology, culture, and subjectivity.³⁶

Dialogue with academic researchers, who do not always limit their image searches to what is represented in them, is fundamental to developing and improving the methods of organizing iconographic digital collections.³⁷ In this sense, searching the academic texts of the artists themselves for terms to index their works can be a useful path.

THE ARTIST'S WORDS AND INDEXING

For the analysis of the terminology of the artists’ texts, theses, and dissertations, the authors selected the following artists: Ana Tavares, Carmela Gross, Carlos Fajardo, Dora Longo Bahia, Evandro Carlos Jardim, Geraldo Dias, Henrique de Oliveira, Yiftah Peled, Norma Grinberg, and Regina Silveira. In cases where the artist did not provide a definition of a term used, the authors decided to consider the definition found either in relevant controlled vocabularies or in a thesaurus or dictionary.

ANA TAVARES

Sculptor Ana Tavares explains her work in her thesis:

This doctoral research had its origin in the reflections contained in the work *Those in Flight* (Figure 1), made in 1991 . . . since then the artistic work has expanded, seeking to deepen the concepts inherent to that initial proposal. . . . However, this expansion was only possible to the extent that it began to observe, in the context of contemporary life, analogous situations to those that were being proposed in the works carried out until then. Among them, the most relevant to the research refer to the *condition of passage* of the contemporary individual and the *transit* that characterizes his context. . . . The study and understanding of the theoretical approaches that analyze the transformations in contemporary life and man as a *being* of passage began to illuminate the discussions intrinsic to the works and their references in the field of art. In addition, the notion of relocating the observer became the main production strategy and fundamental resource to discuss the observer-passenger space-time within the art system.³⁸

35. Régimbeau, “Thématique des œuvres plastiques contemporaines,” 21.

36. Vanda de Fátima Fulgência de Oliveira, “O pesquisador de palavras e o pesquisador de imagens: Reflexões sobre a organização de bancos de dados de imagens em artes,” *ETD – Educação Temática Digital* 6, no.1 (December 2004): 16, <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/etd/article/view/998/1013>.

37. Anna Dahlgren and Karin Hansson, “What an Image Is,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 40, no. 1 (2021): 21–32, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/714147>.

38. Ana Maria Tavares, “Armadilhas para os sentidos: Uma experiência no espaço-tempo da arte” (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 2000), 2.

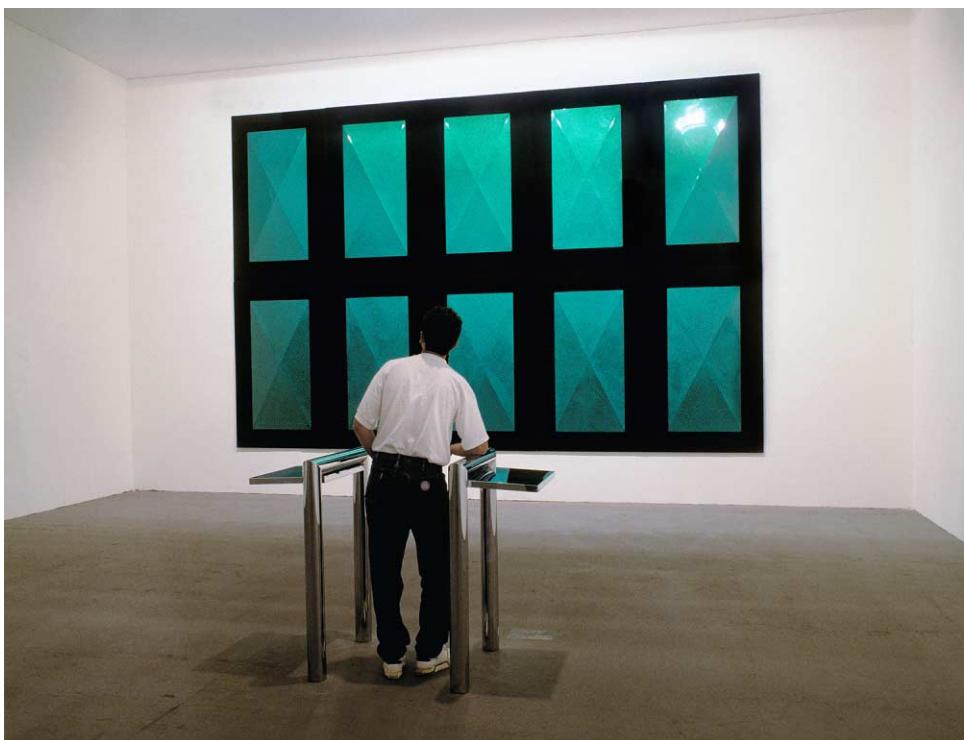


Figure 1. Ana Maria Tavares. *Alguns Pássaro (Those in Flight)* and *Tapetes (Mats)* 1991. Photograph © Eduardo Brandão. Used with the artist's permission. Available on the artist's website: <http://anamariatavares.com.br/front/obras/detail/91/title>. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

Despite the complexity of the text, it is possible to identify the terms “passage,” “transit,” “space,” and “time,” which the artist herself highlights in her text, in addition to the “spectator-work relationship,” a concept implicit in the last sentence in the “observer-passenger” expression.

CARMELA GROSS

In her artistic project similar to a master’s thesis *Project for the Construction of a Sky*, Carmela Gross presents discussions on drawing through drawing itself, a technique used in her work. For the author, drawing as metalanguage is the central issue of the work. In addition, she explains that “The starting point is the representation of a real landscape through the observation drawing; at the same time, this representation is proposed as a constructive plan.”³⁹ In the series of observation drawings in which she sought to portray the variations in the appearance of the sky, Carmela added elements that, in her view, transformed the drawings into projects or construction plans, among them an orthogonal mesh.

39. Maria do Carmo Gross Nietzsche, “Projeto para construção de um céu” (PhD diss, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1981), 8.

From that, one can find the indexing terms “sky,” “metalanguage,” “landscape,” “project,” “orthogonal mesh,” and “observation drawing,” the latter understood not as a technique but as the theme of the work.⁴⁰

CARLOS FAJARDO

In his thesis, Carlos Fajardo analyzes in detail all his work executed so far, detailing the origins and evolution of each stage of his work. Below are some passages in which the question of the subject of the works appears sufficiently clear to be a source of terms for indexing:

The passage from figuration to the production of works that discuss their own materiality is a fundamental issue in my work.⁴¹

Materiality refers to all intentional occurrences on the surface of a work of art that modify it, giving it a new skin.⁴²

In eliminating the narrative in the previous works, two issues of the greatest interest arise for me: the variation of material and emptiness. From now on, they will always present the concern with new plastic relations in the use of new materials and, what is more important, in exploring the *spaces between*.⁴³

I recognize, then, that at least one subject is present in all of them and that, perhaps, this is what gives them unity and permanence: the treatment of the surface.⁴⁴

From these statements, it is possible to extract the terms “materiality,” “space,” “emptiness,” “spaces between,” and “surface treatment” to identify the ABOUT dimension. They are terms linked to processes and ideas that only the artist himself or, perhaps, a scholar of his work could make explicit. For many of the artist's works analyzed in the thesis, even the identification of the OF dimension, in addition to requiring information outside the work itself, will be limited to terms linked to physical support and forms, such as “spheres,” “panels,” or “cubic construction of bricks.”

DORA LONGO BAHIA

In her doctorate studies, Dora Longo Bahia continues inquiring about the contemporary art and artists initiated in her master's research.

From the Countryside to the City is a reflection on the status of contemporary works and artists. It deals with the comparison between the paths of young artists Marcelo do Campo (1951–?) and Marcelo Cidade (1979–?). Through the investigation and reproduction of work by both, it explores fundamental questions for

40. Some of the drawings included in the dissertation can be seen on the artist's personal website, available at <https://carmelagross.com/portfolio/projeto-para-a-construcao-de-um-ceu/>.

41. Carlos Fajardo, “Poéticas visuais: A profundidade e a superfície” (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1988), 12.

42. Fajardo, “Poéticas visuais,” 23.

43. Fajardo, “Poéticas visuais,” 37.

44. Fajardo, “Poéticas visuais,” 58.

art: what is the nature of the contemporary author, what is the importance of the context of production of the work for its interpretation, and what are the limits between the work of art, documentation, citation, falsification, and plagiarism? *From the Countryside to the City* is a book-object. Conceived as a text-image, it proposes an art experience disguised as a narrative. In its graphic presentation, as in its textual content, it exposes a reflection on the relationship between the artist and the university, closing the gap between practice and theory and between artistic practice and its academic investigation. It intends to respond, thus, to the requirements of the visual poetics area.⁴⁵

The artist herself indicated the keywords “art,” “politics,” “authorship,” “documentation,” and “plagiarism.” In this case, it is interesting to note that the thesis is presented in a book-object format, thus being both a work and a verbal and academic discourse on art. The artist’s keywords were not used in the indexing of the thesis carried out by the librarians, possibly because they are very generic terms for thesis searches. However, if one thinks about the description of an artistic object in the context of a catalog of art images, and seeking a little more specificity, the author’s indications can give rise to interesting descriptors such as “status of the work,” “status of the artist,” “context of production,” “interpretation,” “documentation of the work,” “citation,” “authorship,” and “plagiarism.”

EVANDRO CARLOS JARDIM

The Evandro Carlos Jardim dissertation *Processes of Metal Engraving* consists of a series of engravings gathered on planks, with the purpose of showing the typical procedures of the metal engraving techniques. The most important aspect of the work is the recording of these processes, not the creation of a completed work. In the words of the author, “The print run is often interrupted and the image transfigured. We rarely consider it in its final stage. Work is almost always open for modification.”⁴⁶ Thus, the engravings are described by the artist as “first *morsura*,” “second *morsura*,” “stages of the figure’s evolution,” etc. The choice of terms for indexing that explain this process of the engravings is, therefore, fundamental.

GERALDO SOUZA DIAS

Babel, a thesis by Geraldo Souza Dias, includes an installation and an artist’s book inspired by the biblical myth of the tower of Babel, according to the artist himself. It also refers to themes such as globalization, cultural diversity, and ambition, but Dias emphasizes the relationship between writing and painting, image and word. This is a very common theme in art, both as an explicit discussion and in the use of words and text as an element of visual works, but there is not a well-established descriptor to represent it. Getty’s *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* includes the term “letter pictures” for works that

45. Dora Longo Bahia, “Do campo à cidade” (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 2010), 12, <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/27/27159/tde-04112010-144546/publico/457984.pdf>.

46. Evandro Carlos Jardim, “Processos da gravura em metal” (PhD Diss., Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1980), 2.

use letters or words as structural elements. In EBSCO's Art Full Text database, the term "words in art" appear as a broader term than "letter pictures."⁴⁷ Dias cites the neologism "*escritema*," coined by Wilcon Jóia Pereira,⁴⁸ to define writing as the theme of plastic artists.

HENRIQUE DE SOUZA OLIVEIRA

In his dissertation "Tapumes: Reports of a Pictorial Experience in Three Dimensions," Henrique de Souza Oliveira discusses a set of installations made with boards and plywood chips extracted from discarded construction materials. "The work with siding can also be credited to the observation of the urban landscape made from the point of view of modern painting,"⁴⁹ which "seeks to explore a poetics of material wear, doing the reverse of decomposition, that is, reconstructing the layers that detached."⁵⁰ He continues: "As it did not seem possible to lead the work to a practice capable of acting plastically in its material structure, its development ended up being displaced to the relationship of the work with its surroundings."⁵¹ Therefore, possible descriptors for the dimension OF the work *Tapumes* would be "urban landscape," "material wear," and "work-surrounding relation."

The artist says the following about the installation *Tapumes* held at Centro Cultural São Paulo in 2006:

The idea of an interior of the body made of materials from the street ceased to be a casual appearance and became a controlled reference within the process of elaboration of the work. The very dealing with chance, a factor inherent to the choice of material (the discarded wood), from a certain moment on started to suggest to me mimetic possibilities—some plates collected from the streets detach their layers that, like skins, were superimposed on each other.⁵²

"Body," "skin," and "organic matter" would be viable terms to indicate the ABOUT of this work, while "anthropomorphic figure" would describe the dimension OF because the form of the work resembles the human figure. And since the artist uses materials taken from the city's construction sites, "construction site" could be a descriptor, not so much for the origin of the material but for what the images evoke.

YIFTAH PELED

The text of Yiftah Peled's thesis is presented in separate notebooks and packed in a book-shaped box. The notebooks, which analyze various works on topics such as the interaction of the public with performers, the mediation between museum visitors and art, and

47. Geraldo Souza Dias, "Babel" (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 2007).

48. Wilcon Jóia Pereira, *Writing and Figurality in Contemporary Plastic Arts* (Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of Assisi, 1976).

49. Henrique de Souza Oliveira, "Tapumes" (PhD. diss, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 2007), 21.

50. Oliveira, "Tapumes," 27.

51. Oliveira, "Tapumes," 34.

52. Oliveira, "Tapumes," 59.

the dynamics of exchange between artist and visitors, can be read in any order the reader wants. The box also contains inserts with the author's art projects, which can be inserted (in the words of the artist) in the reading of the work. Part of the work was a performance held in the ECA/USP Library, with the collaboration of employees and users, and the resulting physical object is considered an artist's book. Peled explains:

Crossed by concepts of performativity, participation and performance, the methodology notebook of this work/study, in addition to addressing the structure of the thesis, presents propositions of the transversal theme of the study: Dynamics and Exchanges Between States of Performance (DTEEP).⁵³

“Performing” and “performativity” are concepts linked to the universe of performance art that would fit the description of the work. The idea of public participation in the realization of the works, linked to the concept of relational art,⁵⁴ is common in contemporary art, but there is still no adequate term to use for information retrieval in catalogs and databases.

NORMA GRINBERG

In her doctoral thesis, sculptor Norma Grinberg describes the creative process and background of the monumental sculpture *Place with Arc* (Figure 2), installed in front of the central building of the ECA/USP. The artist did not provide any keywords but in the abstract points out the central theme of the work, the arc: “*Place with Arc* makes a poetic reading of the concrete element arc, as well as the abstract element arc.”⁵⁵ The term appears in the controlled vocabulary developed by the libraries of the University of São Paulo (USP Vocabulary) and appears as an indexed term for the thesis.

It is also possible to index the sculpture and its images using “arc” as the dimension OF, since the form is easily identifiable in the work. The dimension ABOUT, which requires interpretation, can be inferred from the author's words in a later article:

But I saw in the arc an even greater conceptual amplitude, linked to the questions of contemporary visual poetics when addressing the notions of interval and passage; discussing issues such as fullness and emptiness, the inside and the outside; presenting oneself as a frame that circumscribes a reality or a reference point in space.⁵⁶

According to the artist, *Place with Arc* is “above all, publicly asking questions that led to its conception—the passage, the interval, the space inside and the space outside—a

53. Yiftah Peled, “DTEEP: Dinâmicas e trocas entre estados de performance” (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 2015), 6, <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/27/27159/tde-14022014-112246/pt-br.php>.

54. Luana Haptman Cardoso de Oliveira and Amélia Siegel Corrêa, “A arte relacional e a participação do público: Aproximações poéticas do período de 1960–70 com a 27ª Bienal de São Paulo,” *Mediações: Revista de ciências sociais* 21, no. 2 (2016): 254–78, 2016, DOI: 10.5433/2176-6665.2016v21n2p254.

55. Norma Grinberg, “Lugar com arco” (Thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1999), 4, <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/27/27131/tde-24042019-151030/pt-br.php>.

56. Grinberg, “Lugar com arco,” 141.



Figure 2. Norma Grinberg. *Place with Arc*. Photograph by Marina Macambyra. Used with the artist's permission. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

kind of sphinx posted before the walker.”⁵⁷ Ideas (or themes) such as “interval,” “passage,” “full and empty,” “inside and outside,” “space inside,” and “space outside,” which arise throughout the text of the thesis, can potentially be terms that explain what the work is ABOUT.

In her master’s thesis, the artist discusses the installation *Humanoids*, presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art of USP, and other works with a similar theme. The summary contains clues to identify the subjects of the work:

This dissertation focuses on diverse works of my current theme: the relationship between the human in his habitat and the objects created and used by him. . . . The work arose from the rereading of the mythological demigod men of Archaic Greece. More specifically, those of the votive monolithic figures of the Cyclades Islands (3200 BC). These figures have always seduced me by their visual characteristics and their supposed magical-religious purposes. I then created monolithic figurative elements that I called humanoids.⁵⁸

“Habitat,” “architectural spaces,” “mythological beings,” “monolithic figures,” and “votive figures” are indexing terms that can be used for the OF dimension. In this case,

⁵⁷ Norma Grinberg, “Lugar com arco: Decifra-me ou devoro-te,” *ARS (São Paulo)* 1, no. 1 (2003): 142–43, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-53202003000100011>.

⁵⁸ Norma Grinberg, “Humanóides transmutações da forma e da matéria” (PhD diss, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1994), 1.

an indexer who did not have access to the artist's text or a solid knowledge of art would probably not be able to identify these terms just by viewing the images of the installation. As for the dimension ABOUT, "relationship between human being and habitat" and "relationship between human being and technology" are interesting options.

REGINA SILVEIRA

Anamorfas (Figure 3), Regina Silveira's master's dissertation, consists of a series of engravings, preparatory drawings for the engravings, and an artist's book. Completed in 1980, it was the first practical work of art presented in the visual arts graduate program at ECA/USP.

The drawings and engravings represent easily recognizable subjects, such as "glasses," "scissors," "hammers" and others, which makes indexing in the OF dimension simple. The ABOUT descriptors can be found using terms that are explicit in the introduction: "drawing," "perspective," "anamorphosis," etc.:

Anamorphs is a study of the appearances represented by projective codes. It deals with the problem of distortions of images drawn in perspective, when, by an arbitrary graphic action, the norms that condition this system of representation are contradicted. . . . Referred to a group of objects of use, *Anamorphs* is presented by a series of visual comparisons between photographic images and deformed drawings; in these comparisons, the first term is always the photograph of an object, shown as a perceptually "normal" figure, a kind of good model for the various deformations drawn.⁵⁹

Within the illusionist tradition, I make special mention of that particularity most directly linked to my work, anamorphoses, types of anti-naturalist studies initiated during Mannerism and practiced by painters and theorists of perspective, especially between the 16th and 17th centuries.⁶⁰

INDEXING PRACTICES FOR THE BDPA

In the BDPA there are three ways to record subjects, all retrievable by search: in the Subject field of the VRA Core metadata set, in the Tags field of the Omeka platform, and in annotations made in the image record itself, using IIIF. After indexing about one hundred works by five different artists, and after analyzing the texts of the ten artists mentioned in this work, the following practices were established:

- In the Subject field, enter the descriptors identified by the image analysis performed by the indexer, restricted to the OF dimension. These include descriptors extracted from the artists' texts, provided that they are included in the controlled vocabularies of the USP or the Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT).

⁵⁹ Regina Silveira, "Anamorfas: Texto descritivo e apresentação" (PhD diss., Escola de Comunicações e Artes, 1980), 1.

⁶⁰ Silveira, "Anamorfas," 6.

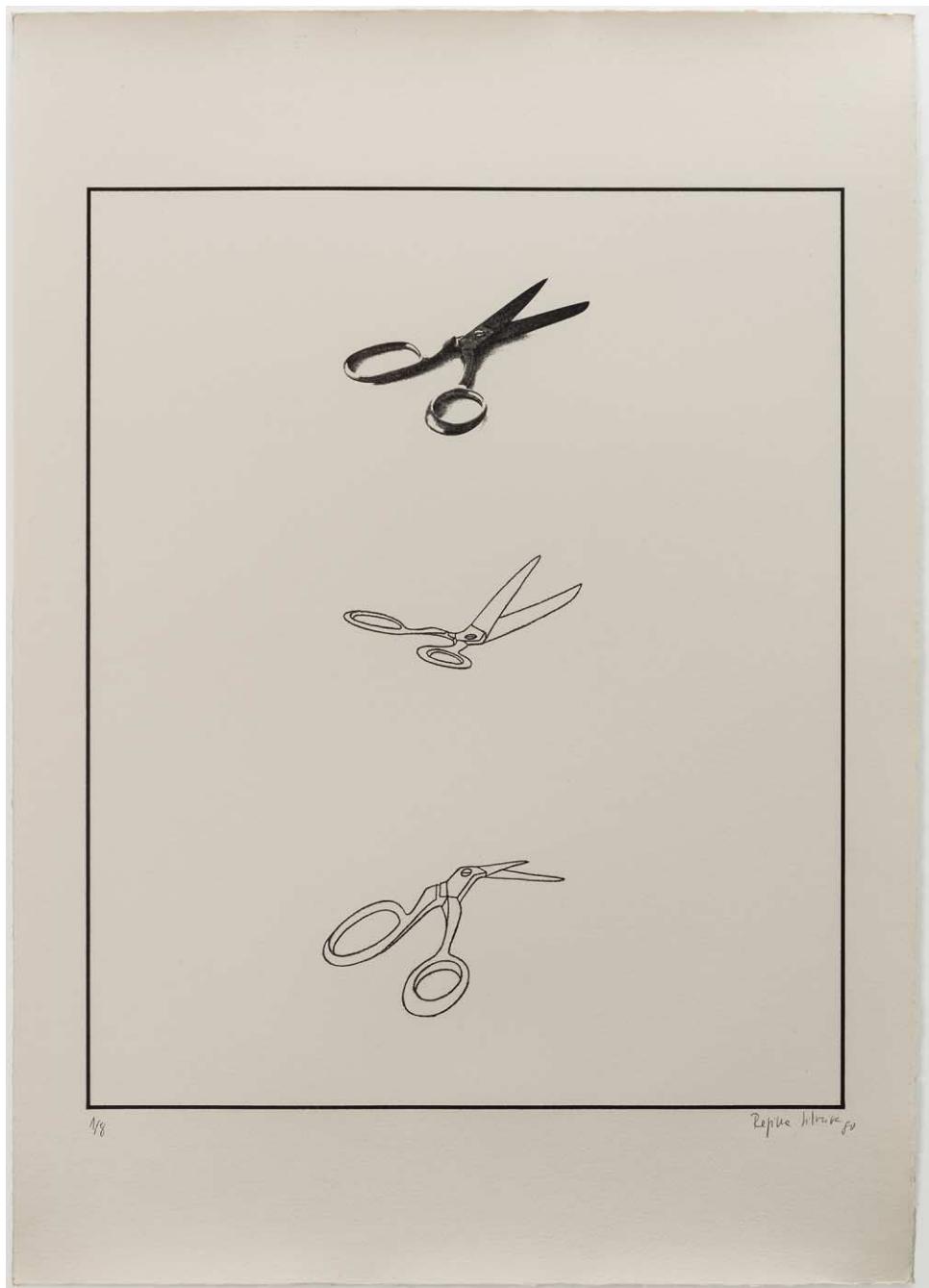


Figure 3. Regina Silveira, *Anamorfá*. 1980. Used with the artist's permission. Available on the artist's website: <https://reginasilveira.com/ANAMORFAS>.

- In the Tags field, register the terms, extracted from the texts of the artists, that are not in the mentioned controlled vocabularies or that do not comply with the policies for their inclusion in these instruments.
- Annotate in the image record itself with additional explanations that can be understood by non-expert users.

The materials and techniques employed by the artist, important data for information retrieval and emphasized in the discourse of most of the artists analyzed, are recorded in the VRA Core fields Material and Technique. Thus, there is no need to use subject descriptors to describe these elements.

In most of the cases analyzed, the artists did not indicate keywords for their thesis or dissertation, although it is possible to identify in the text concepts appropriate to both the representation of the academic work as a whole and the works analyzed. It is difficult to know for sure to what this absence is due, but the lack of understanding of the keyword concept and its applicability to works of art by the authors is a possibility. In any case, the terms used are usually restricted to academic texts. When adopted by indexers, the practice of searching for thematic descriptors in the authors' text—and their consequent standardization—can shed light on the relationships between works by different artists, help in the dissemination and understanding of new concepts, and foster a rapport between artists and the library, with benefit for both parties.

It is important to highlight that many artists present in the BDPA collection have solid careers and a strong presence on the internet, with some considered the most important Brazilian artists today. However, their relationship with the university and academic research, as well as possible thematic or academic connections with other artists (such as the relationship between advisor and student, for example), is not always clearly displayed on their websites, in galleries or elsewhere. Thus, the BDPA has the potential to enrich the understanding of artistic research in the academic environment. For artists at the beginning of their careers, the BDPA can be fundamental in promoting their work.

CONCLUSION

In explaining their work, the artists analyzed are not simply answering the questions as an indexer would do: "What is this about, what is the subject of this work, what terms should I use for this content to be located in a system?" Instead, they are referring to their thinking, worldview, and ideas about art, as well as their motivations, intentions and concerns. It is, therefore, an effort of reflection and organization of thought. It is also important for those interested in studying the work of these artists or Brazilian contemporary art in general. The indexer's incorporation of this direct discourse to images of works in a digital library makes the described information more accessible to various audiences. The analysis of the texts of artists selected for this work led to the findings discussed below.

One of the most important advantages of doing this analysis is the possibility of gaining associations of concepts with works that typically only the artist—or perhaps a specialist—could make. Using the terminology of Sara Shatford Layne, most artists' terms

can be associated with the ABOUT dimension,⁶¹ which tends to pose the greatest difficulties for indexers without specific training in art.

Many of the terms extracted from the artists' texts, such as "passage," "metalinguage," "urban landscape," "body," and "arc," do not differ from the subjects that are normally used in the indexing process, and they are included in the USP and/or AAT vocabularies. Others have less precise or more abstract meanings, such as "space between," "work-surrounding relation," "production context," and "materiality." In general, these are terms assimilable to the notion of theme, and they are more difficult to incorporate into a controlled vocabulary.

Some terms used by artists are quite specific, such as "full and empty," or they are very technical, such as "*morsura*." At first glance, these terms may seem to be of little use for retrieving information. However, they often refer to important descriptors of an artwork's meaning or the process of its creation. The terms will be identified, standardized, and registered in the database to make them suitable for search operations. The BDPA database is made up of artists who developed academic work at the same institution, so there may be overlap in concepts and terms used. For this same reason, a certain complexity in concepts and terms is expected. The research and standardization work should contribute to the identification of common themes as well as to the dissemination of contemporary art concepts to the general public.

In applying these types of subject terms, the greatest difficulties are the understanding of artists' ideas and text, which is not always accessible to non-specialists; the time required for the analysis process; and the adaptation of concepts to both local and widely used controlled vocabularies. Some artists, such as Regina Silveira and Ana Tavares, present clear and organized texts, although they are not always easily understood by the public. Others, such as Carlos Fajardo, are not always clear to which work or works they are referring in their writing, making it difficult to index specific works. The complications encountered in understanding these texts made the process of identifying terms time consuming.

The real usefulness of these terms for information retrieval needs to be verified by large-scale tests. One possibility is that researchers, seeing images and finding terms associated with them, can discover new access points that they had not imagined. Then, through these terms, they can locate relevant works by other artists that may have a thematic or academic relationship with the image originally retrieved.

Indexing contemporary works of art and their images from the authors' own writings is a complex task that requires time, at least some familiarity with the literature of the area, and access to the artists' texts. The difficulties involved in applying this method on a large scale, in large collections managed by small teams, are many, but they should not prevent the improvement in the quality of image indexing of works of art. In the context of BDPA—a relatively small and specialized collection located in an institution that brings together professionals with experience in processing art images—this is feasible and desirable.

61. Layne, "Subject Access to Art Images."

In Régimbeau's precise diagnosis, one finds a possible explanation for the practice of avoiding the analysis of the subjects of works of art:

A set of economic arguments (lack of time, lack of personnel, restricted to the most urgent, stick to basic information), value judgments (these works are worth less for the message than for the talent of the author) and *a priori* opinions (it is the use, the indexer has no competence in this domain) meet to justify a practice that has ideological foundations (boundaries between reason and imagination, reading information opposed to reading evasion).⁶²

Using the words of artists is an effective way to better represent the meanings contained in their artworks, and this indexing yields a greater number of relevant search results for researchers as well as the general public.

62. Régimbeau, "Thématique des œuvres plastiques contemporaines," 353.