Although exhibition catalogues represent a substantial share of museum publications, a special place is reserved for volumes about permanent collections. Both large and small museums very often produce at least one publication about their collection as a basic reference tool and a highly effective means of circulating visual content and passing on knowledge. Museums take differing approaches to this task, depending on their public, their resources and their mission. Be it a modest guidebook or a handsome illustrated volume (perhaps with a CD-ROM or DVD supplement), it is chiefly through a publication describing its collection that a museum sketches its self-portrait.

French museums – from solo operations to large networks

France seems to exemplify the various publishing options open to museums. Basic works – guides, whole-collection catalogues and newsletters – are sometimes published by the museums themselves, whether they are big or small and whether or not they have a publishing section. For instance, Musée de la marine de Loire, Châteauneuf-sur-Loire (2003), by Catherine Dupraz, the museum’s former curator, offers a brief maritime history of the Loire via the collections of Châteauneuf’s Loire Nautical Museum. This guide to the collection is the only book it publishes, but the contemporary graphic design and high standards of printing do credit to this small museum devoted to maritime heritage in the heart of the Loire Valley, which is on UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites. The museum also publishes a quarterly Petit Journal (newsletter), which is delivered for free to the inhabitants of Châteauneuf-sur-Loire...

Richly illustrated books or albums and studies of permanent collections either take an academic approach or provide an overview of the collection for specialists or the general public. They may be published in house, when the museum concerned functions as a publisher in its own right.

> As part of its remit to share knowledge and education in the fields of natural science and the humanities, the National Museum of Natural History of Paris, which was founded in 1793, has been publishing academic books through Les Éditions du Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle since 1802. Les Éditions scientifiques publishes three specialist journals and six series of monographs either on its own or in association with other scientific institutions (e.g. Zoosystema, which focuses mainly on research into its collections and is published in English). A good example of a brief guide which provides the lay reader with scientific information is À la découverte de la Grande Galerie de l’Évolution (Éditions du Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle, Paris, 1994).

> Except for conference proceedings, almost all the books published by the Musée d’Orsay deal with its collections from the period which saw the advent of the poster, the small-format brochure and the illustrated art book as we now know it, as a result of developments in techniques for printing illustrations (engraving, photo-engraving, heliogravure etc.) The Musée d’Orsay has also set up an annual award for the publication of an outstanding work of research into art between 1848 and 1914. Vu à Orsay (2006), a bilingual (French/English) joint publication by the Musée d’Orsay and Panini Books, reveals the museum as seen by contemporary photographers.

> Les Éditions du Centre Pompidou, which publishes around fifty titles a year, is highly respected amongst contemporary art publishers. It publishes three types of book: reference works; contributions to the field of ideas; and popular studies of 20th and 21st-century art. Nouveaux médias, Installations : la collection du Centre Pompidou, edited by Christine van Assche, which was published in November 2006, presents the history of the Centre Pompidou’s magnetic (video) tape, digital images and multimedia installations collection, which was started in 1977 and is now one of the largest in the world.

> When a museum opts to work with a publishing house (be it an art publisher, a specialist, a general publisher or a big publishing house) it is a sign that it sets store by the high standards of printing and precise targeting of content, readership and circulation it can be sure of getting when it entrusts a professional art book publisher with its collection’s image. The main focus of Musée du Louvre Éditions’ publishing schedule of around fifty titles per year is on disseminating knowledge widely amongst the French and foreign general public, and it has a deliberate policy of producing joint publications in association with other publishers from both the public and private sectors.

> In France, museum networks have centralised publishing services for a long time and are now stepping up this side of their activities to meet...
Museum of Macao

The Museum of Macao opened its doors to the public on 18 April 1998. Temporary exhibits have been organized through the years in cooperation with local and foreign entities, museums, associations, artists, etc. and catalogues are published to accompany shows and also give more details to visitors. Catalogues are published in three languages: Chinese, Portuguese and English, and illustrated with the works exhibited. The main themes are the history and ancient crafts of Macao, calligraphy and Chinese painting, musical instruments, historical documents and works of art – all of which constitute the Museum of Macao’s permanent collections.

Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of Chile

The cultural value of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chile University’s Arts Faculty – given its historical role, universally acknowledged contribution to national contemporary art and role as custodian of artistic heritage – is one aspect of the museum’s overall museum strategy, which comprises several programmes grounded in relevance to the university and social and cultural realities. With this in mind, the museum strives to promote various forms of social interaction and prides itself on its constant re-evaluation of existing bodies of knowledge.

One of its fundamental missions as a university institution is to present the content of exhibitions in publications which explain its significance. Support from artists, designers, cultural institutions and businesses has enabled the museum to publish books about its history and collections. The most outstanding of its recent publications in this category are Primera mirada (1999), Arte contemporáneo chileno: desde el otro sitio / lugar (2005), 2005 Refundación MAC (2005) and Memoria MAC 1998 – 2005 (2006).

The Museum of New Mexico Press

Founded in 1951, the Museum of New Mexico Press is an award-winning publisher of finely designed and crafted books that reflect the collections of the Museum of New Mexico and explore cultures of the Southwestern United States of America and beyond. The Museum of New Mexico Press has won numerous awards including the Association of American Museums’ Publications Design Award in 2005 (for Images in the Heavens, Patterns on the Earth: The I Ching) and again in 2006 (for Passions in Art of the University of Chile)

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