

Co-authors:

Susan Douglas, PhD

Assistant Professor

University of Guelph

E-mail: sdouglas@uoguelph.ca

Melanie Hayes MA, JD candidate

Queen's University of Belfast

Email: mhayes15@qub.ac.uk

Title: Giving Diligence its Due: Accessing Digital Images in Repatriation Efforts

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Abstract:

An increasing volume of images is being available online, but barriers such as digital locks, proprietary interests, monopoly of information, software design issues, and narrow scope of information uploaded to image databases maintain structures that have impeded restitution efforts in the real world.

Images of art in the digital environment support cultural heritage. Institutions are developing complex solutions relevant in the network environment to further repatriation initiatives. These solutions facilitate discovery, opening avenues for research into the ethics of ownership that cross the physical/digital divide. There have been calls for strengthening the potential for use of pertinent information in order to protect and recover cultural heritage through increased visibility. However, some museums still limit access to images.

We will examine these issues referencing museums of art and anthropology and case studies specific to the First Nations and Métis peoples of Canada with an emphasis on cases dating from 2000 to 2017. In 2002, Dr Ruth Philips, then director of the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, called for a database that would "reach beyond the walls of the building into First Nations communities and link them with each other and with museum and academic research partners."

Today, a combination of concerns over permissions and monopolization of information is limiting the potential of shared visual information about art. This maintains the status quo in repatriation of cultural material and limits further research into the Indigenous peoples and cultures of North, South and

Central America (“Turtle Island”).

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Select publications:

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