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An ABC of Painters

Lynette L. Risse
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

"An ABC of Painters" is an alphabet book of painters who lived from the 1300s through the 1700s, written for the purpose of introducing children and adults to the painters and their paintings. Each alphabet letter introduces a different artist including facts about his life and information about one of his paintings. The text is written for the comprehension of eight to twelve year old children. The words and painting work together to give a full picture of the different artists and their lives and works. The book is designed to help children become interested in reading and in learning about painters and painting. There is little information about artists written especially for children, even though art history has become more important in school curriculum. This research project fills at least part of that void.

An ABC of Painters

A Graduate Research Project
Submitted to the
Division of Library Science
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Masters of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Lynette L. Risse
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This Research Paper by: Lynette L. Risse

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has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Barbara R. Safford

April 4, 2001
Date Approved

[Signature]
Graduate Faculty Reader

Loretta Kuse

April 22, 2001
Date Approved

[Signature]
Graduate Faculty Reader

Rick Traw

April 26, 2001
Date Approved

[Signature]
Head, Department of Curriculum
and Instruction

ABSTRACT

An ABC of Painters is an alphabet book of painters who lived from the 1300s through the 1700s, written for the purpose of introducing children and adults to the painters and their paintings. Each alphabet letter introduces a different artist including facts about his life and information about one of his paintings. The text is written for the comprehension of eight to twelve year old children. The words and painting work together to give a full picture of the different artists and their lives and works. The book is designed to help children become interested in reading and in learning about painters and painting. There is little information about artists written especially for children, even though art history has become more important in school curriculum. This research project fills at least part of that void.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"He knows all about art but doesn't know what he likes."

James Thurber

Background: Art History and Aesthetics in Elementary Curriculum

In our sophisticated world children are exposed to **art** in their everyday lives, yet their understanding of **art** is often influenced by what their parents think and what they see in the media and in advertisements.

For many, it is less intuitively obvious that one needs **aesthetics** to understand art. But that belief - that the philosophy of art is implicated in an understanding of art - is the primary reason for teaching it in schools. (Parsons, 1994, p. 34)

In the late 20s and early 30s, when this researcher's mother went to school in a one room school house in rural Iowa, works of art were on display and the meaning of the artwork was discussed (C. E. Risse, personal communication, February 1, 1999). Over the last thirty years, art, especially art history has lost its importance, due mainly to the mistaken belief that young children have little or no understanding of time and therefore can have no interest or understanding of history, art or otherwise (Gagnon, 1989 p. 173).

Art history seems to be missing in the elementary school curriculum in most parts of the United States (Martin, 1991

p. 39). It is not surprising that in recent years the recommendation has been to wait for the introduction of history in the art curriculum until the upper grades (Erickson, 1994 p. 71). This affects the way people perceive art and the history of art even though art history is a means to enhance the quality of life, a discipline of discovery and although even young children can learn to see and describe works of art (Martin, 1991 p. 39 & 40).

Until very recently elementary school art programs have consisted of the making of art objects in the tradition of studio art rather than looking at art for understanding and appreciation. Since the early 1980s there has been an expansion in the art curriculum that includes looking at works of art in order to achieve greater insight, but these efforts are probably not yet common in the schools (Stewig, 1994 p. 309). Social studies texts from different publishers and different grade levels show works of art appearing with infrequency and rarely with the title or artist listed, and no information connecting the artwork with the text is provided.

With the introduction of America 2000: An Education Strategy (Alexander, 1991) it became apparent that the arts were of low priority and were woefully left out; only with later legislation were the arts included, with the passage of the Goals 2000: Education America Act (The Senate and the House of Representatives, 1996). Art is more than something to hang on the wall, as the National Standards for Arts Education (1994) establishes. The arts are a way of "describing, defining and deepening human experience.... People create art...to express the otherwise inexpressible..."

They connect each generation to those who have gone before..." (p. 5).

Ideas about visual literacy could have wide application at the elementary level. Teachers interested in having children look with more care at illustrations in books, to evoke more sophisticated responses to what they see, could develop visual literacy programs. (Stewig, 1994, p. 309)

National Art Standards

The National Standards for Arts Education (1994) include the following in the list of students' abilities,

They should be able to develop and present basic analysis of works of art from structural, historical, and cultural perspectives, and from combinations of those perspectives....(p. 19)

They should have an informed acquaintance with exemplary works of art from a variety of cultures and historical periods....(p. 19)

These standards apply to grade levels from kindergarten through fourth grade and include:

- a. know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures;
- b. identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places;
- c. demonstrate how history, culture and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art. (p. 34)

The standards for fifth through eighth grade address the ability to:

- d. know and compare the characteristics of artwork in various eras and cultures;
- e. describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts;
- f. analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art. (p.50)

"..Discipline-based Art Education-aesthetics, criticism, history and production-overlap." (Fehr, 1994, p. 53).

Aesthetics and art history both view artworks in the context in which the works of art were created, thus they are interconnected by their ability to view art in different periods in time and different styles. (Parson, 1994 p. 33).

Art history provides not only information about specific artists, which leads to the understanding that develops into aesthetic judgment and appreciation, but it also supplies general information about the times and culture in which the artist lived.

Availability of Supporting Materials

A knowledge base of information about art history and artists is part of the foundation of aesthetic appreciation, and appropriate materials to support the knowledge base are essential.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of aesthetics and cultural/historical significance of art in the elementary curriculum; yet there seems little change in the art books that are available for children and educators. This researcher examined major sources to discover the amount of

art material for children that is available. Included in the examination were the Rod Library Youth Collection at the University of Northern Iowa; The Winsor, Massachusetts, School Library, whose catalog is available on the web; Children's Catalog (Price & Yaakov, 1996) and Children's Books in Print (1998). The examination was conducted using keywords/subjects, **Painting**, **Artist**, **Art**, **Art History**, **Art Appreciation**, and **Aesthetics**. The table below shows the number of books found under the listed subjects from each of the four different sources used.

Table 1 illustrates the findings:

Table 1	Painting	Artist	Art	Art History	Art Appreciation	Aesthetics
UNI Rod Library Youth Collection	26	125	73	2	2	0
Winsor School	535	11	1889*	28	12	5
Children's Catalog	10	0	1	0	0	0
Children's Books in Print Subject	0	0	145	0	34	0

*There were not really 1889 different books on art in the Winsor School library. This researcher found that one book could be listed any number of times under that broad heading of **Art**. One book chosen at random was listed eight times.

In a search of UNI's Rod Library Collection it was discovered that of 5000 hits using the term **Art**, only 73 of them could be found in the Youth Collection. The term **Artist** was used by this researcher with the results of 1162 items in the whole of the library and 125 available in the Youth Collection; **Painting** was also used as a search term yielding 26 children's books out of a total of 720 in the library collection as a whole. Using the phrase **Art History**, there were only two items. **Art Appreciation** yielded only two items, and there were no books in the Youth Collection on **Aesthetics** although there were 393 items in the whole of UNI's

collection.

The Winsor School, (<http://207.252.42.51/TLCScripts?interpac.dll?SearchForm?Directions=1>) which is an all girls private school in Boston, Massachusetts, has an online library catalog that has an extensive collection of art books yet there were only five books under the heading **Aesthetics** and only 11 books covering **Artist**. Beneath the heading, **Art Appreciation** there were 12 titles. **Art History** revealed 28 books including commercial art history, ceramics art history and folk art history. The term **Painting** revealed 535 books. There appear to be many subject headings that apply only to one individual book, such as the book Aesthetics and History (Berenson, 1948) which appeared under the heading **Art History**.

This researcher found a total of 22 items in the 1998 Children's Catalog, a standard core collection of elementary school libraries. **Painting** (Historical and Geographic Treatment) was the largest category, with ten items and there was only one title under the **Art** category, with nothing under the topic of **Artist**, **Art Appreciation**, or **Aesthetics**.

This researcher looked at Children's Books in Print Subject Guide 1998, which is a listing of all children's books that at this time were still available in print. The subject guide lists all the different subject headings in alphabetical order in contrast to the title guide which lists the titles of all books in print in alphabetical order. There was no **Aesthetics** nor **Art History** listed and **Art Appreciation** was listed as **Art Criticism** with 34 titles there; they overlapped with the **Art** listing which makes the number inaccurate. **Art** and **Art Criticism** both have the title Place

in **Art** by Clare Gorerty and under the headings of **Artist** and **Art Criticism** there was the Faith Ringgold book entitled Talking to Faith Ringgold; there were three titles by Mike Venezia; Jackson Pollock, Michelangelo, and Paul Klee. Under the heading **Art** there were 145 entries but only 81 were what this researcher would consider fine art; some of the titles that this researcher excluded under the heading **Art** were, Building a Doodle and Fun with Tattoo Art.

There is in America a tendency to dumb down art. This is the general problem. It is manifest, first, in our passion for popular, rather than fine art. Next, it is manifest in our predilection for enhancing the status of virtually anything by calling it art. Finally and in schools specifically, the dumbing down of art is manifest by the way pseudart is peddled to teachers as art. (Swanger, 1993, p. 52)

Alphabet Books

Older children may find that remarkable beauty and more visually sophisticated images in some alphabet books can be helpful in focusing on the aesthetics of an image and allowing that aesthetics vision to remain coherent with other aspects of children's literature that might be unfocused (Rostankowski, 1994).

Alphabet books may offer a child a purity of aesthetic experience unencumbered by the complexity of specific realms of knowledge in life, or even the complexity of a story. (Rostankowski, 1994, p. 125)

The alphabet book can open the mind of its readers to aesthetic education while creating an atmosphere of instruction and pleasure on various levels of awareness; this

is dependent on the book and the maturity of the child. The different creative responses to so simple an undertaking makes the journey one that is well worth exploring (Rostankowski, 1994).

Description of Problem

There is little information about artists written especially for children, even though art history has become more important in school curriculum.

Project Questions

1. Is it possible to create a book about artists for children?
2. Would an alphabet book be an appropriate format?
3. What elements about artists should be included?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to provide access for children to information on a variety of artists (their works and their lives) by creating an alphabet book of famous painters and their works.

Definition

Aesthetics - "This includes being able to interpret artwork meaningfully and to respond to them relevantly, to place them in context, to understand their kinds, to value some for relevant reasons, to discuss them in a critical way." (Parsons, 1994, p. 35).

Assumptions

The information provided on the subject of art and art history will expand and enrich both children's knowledge and aesthetic appreciation. It is possible to introduce children to an appreciation of artists and painting. Learning about artists enhances appreciation. A children's book can be used as a vehicle for art appreciation.

Limitations

For the purpose of this paper the artists that are to be discussed, will be limited to painters. The specific painters are to be limited to a time frame of having been born no earlier than 1100 and died no later than 1899.

The audience for the information will consist of children of all ages.

Significance

A book such as this will provide information about a variety of different artists that cover seven hundred years of art, spanning nine different periods that include: the Medieval period, the Renaissance (beginning in the early 1300s), Baroque (started in the 1600s and lasted until 1750), Dutch Masters (1600s), Rococo (early 1700s), Neoclassicism (end of the 1700s), Romanticism (early 1800s), Realism (late 1840s) and early Impressionism; beginning in the middle 1800s. (World Book, 1996). This allows for the readers to gain more information than they could from books that are about one artist or the art from one particular art period.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Literature Review

The research that was found included three categories which became apparent as the focus of this literature review developed. These three categories are: art history, art education and aesthetics.

Art history.

Art history provides for young children the growth of their interests in the world around them and opens a doorway to the expansion of their horizons beyond their own world and into their imaginations (Gagnon, 1989 p.175). The art history experience is demonstrated in children's literature with books such as: Grandfather's Journey (Say, 1993), Pink and Say (Pollaco, 1994), and The Keeping Quilt (Pollaco, 1988); these books give their readers a glimpse into the past through the words and the pictures that make up the story.

Two of the scholars that contributed to Crabtree's chapter in Historical Literature propose that a developmentally appropriate approach to the study of history and literature is suitable for young children. "History and literature" Phenix wrote, "...are essentially concertizing presentations of human experience and are therefore best suited as a basis for social studies. These forms of symbolizing enlarge the unanalyzed whole, from which as he grows older abstractions can be developed" (Gagnon, 1998, p. 177).

Bettelheim wrote...the presently taught curriculum in the social sciences in the early grades is a disservice to the students and a shame for the education system. (Gagnon, 1989, p.176)

With these statements it becomes apparent that what is needed is the groundwork in history to allow children to grow in their understanding of the past and the present.

Art education.

Erickson (1986) studied whether children and young people could express historical interpretation of art works by presenting photographs of six western and non-western works of art to 815 students in art classes. This population included 225 elementary children. Students were asked four questions about the different art works. Answers were audio-taped and analyzed. Findings provided evidence that elementary children are capable of responding to art in historical terms.

Day (1969) studied art history and its ability to provide positive impetus for art activities at the junior high level along with whether they would gain as much intellectual understanding of art history in an art history-activity integrated program as in a traditional lecture art history program. The population consisted of 112 eighth grade students from San Jose, California. Cubism, as practiced from 1907-1920, was the particular area of art history that was chosen for this experiment. Students in the experimental group engaged in studio art activities related to the study of Cubism. They investigated the concept of simultaneity with painting materials as they studied the analytical phase.

Discussion of composition, perspective, and color was encouraged throughout the six weeks of the experiment. The students who experienced the integrated unit of studying Cubism performed significantly better on the specially prepared test than did the students who studied Cubism in the traditional lecture method. The results show that traditional art history integrated with art activities can provide positive impetus for the studio art program.

Jerry Smoke (1976) analyzed models for aesthetic inquiry by Eaker, Kaelin, and Mittler and concluded that they could enable teachers to help students develop their own aesthetic understanding and allow them to relate that meaning to their own life experiences.

Stewig (1994) studied first graders' oral response to visual works of art. This study's population consisted of 60 first grade students; it consisted of one 35 minute lesson each week for a whole school year. Some of the terms that the children were expected to understand included "visual elements" and "compositional principles." The findings from this research indicate that exposure to art and the history behind that art results in an increase in first graders' language development.

Aesthetics.

If art educators use the term of aesthetic literacy in answering the questions: what is reasonable for people to know if they are to understand art and what is the school's role in this (Parsons, 1990) then they need to step back and look at what the schools are doing, and what they understand about the term aesthetic literacy.

It should be easy to integrate aesthetics into art classes so that students would be unaware of the transition (Parsons, 1994 p. 44). No one doubts that the content of our understanding of art as we grow up is dependent on the art that we encounter and the cultural context in which we encounter it (p. 37). When looking at art "the interpretive concepts that we are most interested in are fundamental and complexly networked. They have to do with what we think artworks are, how we respond to them, what we learn from them" (Parsons, 1990, p. 137).

...that leads to aesthetic maturity. The overlap occurs because presumably when people make art they attempt to produce the sorts of things that they understand art to be. (Parsons, 1994, p. 36)

Procedures

Many books have been written for children on the subject of art history, but most of them cover only one artist or one specific art period. Some incorporate sophisticated humor that goes over the heads of lower elementary children while others have inaccurate information. The purpose of this project is to provide access for children to information on a variety of artists, their works and their lives, by creating an alphabet book of famous painters and their works. Procedures for selection of the 26 painters were developed. These included: identifying 26 painters each of whose names begin with a different letter of the alphabet; researching their lives and works of art; setting parameters for information to be included; locating portraits of each painter; selecting paintings that represent each painter;

writing a biography for each painter; designing the alphabet book and preparing a mock-up of the book.

This researcher used the Groves Dictionary of Art (1996) as the source for selecting the 26 painters from the time period of the 1100s through the 1800s for use in her project. The criteria for selection included that at least one painting by the respective painter was reproduced in the Groves Dictionary of Art (1996). If two or more artists fit all the above criteria they were narrowed down through looking at the body of work each of the artists have accumulated during their respective life times, and by evaluating the quality of the work as a whole along with looking at the contributions each made to their respective periods. An example might be the two artists: Manet and Monet were both leaders of the Impressionist movement; assuming that they both fit all the above criteria then this researcher would choose Monet, based on his unique style of painting. Manet's style on the other hand has a similar appearance and feeling to the works of Renoir. Based on these requirements for eligibility one painter was selected to represent each letter of the alphabet. A portrait of and a painting by each of the painters was selected. A brief biography/historical sketch will be included for each painter.

CHAPTER THREE

The Project

See Accompanying Book

An ABC of Painters

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary

An ABC of Painters is a collection of pictures and text designed to introduce art and artists of different periods to children and adults.

The alphabet letters that appear on the pages of the book and on the cover were created. A book of copyright free alphabets had been purchased for that purpose but it was discovered that there was no complete alphabet in the book. An entire alphabet was created from one of the designs in the book. Each letter was created and analyzed for its design quality. The alphabet was shown to a second party for input on the letters, positive and negative space. Although the letters are completed there are still aspects of some of the letters that could use improvement in terms of the positive and negative space.

The second stage of the project was the initial selection of painters. The Art Gallery CD Rom (Microsoft, 1993) was used as a beginning tool. Art Gallery (Turner, 1996) had painters for every letter of the alphabet except the **X**, while two or three painters were preliminarily chosen for letters that have several important painters. The Groves Dictionary of Art (Turner, 1996) was used to find an **X** painter that fit into the time frame that was chosen. There were three **Xs** that were painters and Xia Gui was selected. There had to be a preliminary selection of painters to prove that there were painters for every letter of the alphabet and this had to be done before the project could continue.

After the project was approved the research began with The Groves Dictionary of Art (Turner, 1996). Painters who were identified from the Art Gallery CD Rom (Microsoft, 1993) were checked in the The Groves Dictionary of Art (Turner, 1996) to make sure that they fit the criteria and to select those painters from the alphabet letters which had a number of choices. This selection was developmental as it became apparent that in some cases no painting could be found or that what was appropriate were available only in black and white; others had unsuitable subject matter including nudity, drunkenness, and killing, and some had no pictures available. Many of the problems were with letters that had few painters to begin with such as **O**, **J** and **Q** These were chosen primarily from the availability of a painting and even now the letter "Y" has only a black and white image. A different picture was discussed but after searching the Internet it was found that no other picture had the same appeal and the idea was abandoned.

The selection of the specific paintings was somewhat unusual. It may not have been stated before but the selection of the paintings went hand in hand with the text because the text was strongly based on the paintings. The first painting selected was Goya's *Don Manuel Osorio de Manrique Zuniga* which is a painting of a child. This became the focus of the search and paintings of children were desired. It was not long before it became apparent that children were not always the focus the painters. Paintings were then chosen for their uniqueness, such as the landscape by Chong Son which is a painted fan. Others were chosen because they were so well known, such as van Eyck's *Wedding Portrait* and Rembrandt's

Night Watch. Still others were selected because there was information available about the specific painting.

The page set-up and the lettering changed and evolved through the process. The letters were created for this book and initially appeared only in the upper left hand corner of the left page. During the information gathering period a template was created as an organizational tool. It was discovered early on that the template information, which included date of birth, date of death and facts about their lives was either boring or couldn't be written to the audience. This meant that the whole idea of the book had to be rethought. It was decided that the body of the page was to relate to the painting that was to be featured on the opposite page and the information from the template was to appear in a second boxed letter that would be placed in the bottom right hand corner. The letter was resized and lightened so that the information that was placed in that space would show clearly. A third letter was placed on the right hand page in approximately the same place as the first letter and was resized between the two letters from the opposite page with the shade matching the light tone of the fact box letter on the facing page.

The pictures that were selected were scanned and resized based on the format of the page and the shape of the picture. Two of the paintings were so large that they would not fit on the scanner bed in one piece so they are scanned in sections. Then the sections were pieced back together to create one apparently seamless picture.

Early on it was discovered that a number of the painters had self-portraits and it was decided that a self-portrait

would add to the quality of the book. It would make a connection between the painting, the artist and the reader by allowing the reader to see what the artist saw in himself. Ten of the painters still have no self-portrait. The idea of removing self-portraits was debated and the page format was changed to fit the spacing of the pages. Later it was decided that the loss of the self-portraits hurt the book and it was determined that self-portraits must appear in each section. For the purpose of the project only, substitutions were made. Portraits of other people by other painters were to be substituted and in the process of searching for those portraits two possible self-portraits were found and a portrait of someone else by one of the artists was also found. There is a note placed on the verso of the book that states this information; it is noted on the individual pages and it is clearly stated in the bibliography that the painting is not a self-portrait. Before publication of this book, more work attempting to identify actual self portraits would be undertaken.

During the searching process an initial mistake became apparent, Xia Gui was born in 1195 which did not fit in the time frame that was originally set. There was Xu Wei 1521-1595 who fit the time frame but in a continued search it was found that he was a drunk and that he killed his wife, hardly the kind of model that is appropriate for children. The last **X** was Xu Biehong 1895-1953 was from the twentieth century and that was definitely not in the time frame that had been set at the start of the project. This would introduce the area of Impressionism and other art periods which had been originally eliminated. Xia Gui was chosen in the end and this worked out

because Michelangelo was originally the represent the letter M. However, in searching for a painting by him, all examples contained nudity, including the figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It was decided that such nudity would not be appropriate for the age group for which the book was targeted. If Michelangelo couldn't be used then who would replace him? In looking at many of the possibilities Simone Martini, born in 1284 fit perfectly into the space between Xia Gui, born in 1195 and van Eyck, born in 1395. Martini bridged that large time gap as well as filling the slot left by Michelangelo and permitting the inclusion of Xia Gui.

At the end of the process a number of things came up that needed to be dealt with including a time line, end papers, title page, and verso. The time line had been suggested earlier but it was dropped because of the design problem. At the end it was strongly suggested that there be a time line, and at this time the design worked well. The page setup includes a line that separated the painters name and dates of birth and death from the information about the painting and this made a perfect setting for the new time line. It was decided that a table of contents would be included listing the painters and the years of their birth and death. The information on the time line is general information that covers important historical figures including writers, composers, political people, religious people and explorers. It allows the reader to ask the question, what else happened during this painter's life time? Then as a final touch the self-portraits were miniaturized to one inch in height and placed across the center of the pages separating the time line from the table of contents.

End papers were created using the alphabet that appears throughout the book. It was lightened, half the letters were darkened ever so slightly and they were arranged into a checkerboard pattern that is very subtle. The title page is also a variation on the end papers with light, dark and even reversal on some of the letters. The verso contains a copyright date, information that discusses not copying any information without the author's consent and a disclaimer that states that some of the painters that appear to be self-portraits may not be and that they are distinguished by the fact that they are listed as a portrait and not a self-portrait. The very last thing is probably one of the first things that was completed and that is the cover. The cover was the first thing that was done with the alphabet when it was created. It makes a perfect frame for the title and it is the start of a continuity that runs throughout the book.

Conclusions

One of the hardest things was the written text in that the information that was used changed from the information about the painter to information about the painting. Part of the reason was the vocabulary was too difficult for the audience. This technical information was placed in a box in the corner and a description of the painting became predominant. Even with this change it was difficult to write about art and its related subjects in a simplistic vocabulary.

AppleWorks (1999) word processing and drawing programs were used in the creation of the pages for this project. This initially seemed a good idea. The written part would be in

word processing and the pages with pictures would use drawing. One of the good things about the drawing program is that it has a master page which allows one to place an item on the master page that will appear on all the pages. This allowed for the line that appears across the top of each page to be placed there and the writer did not have to measure every thing out as it was always in the same place in every page. Using word processing was more difficult because the master page was not available. After creating the time line in drawing it became apparent that this was the way to compose the text pages. The line was placed on the master page and boxes were placed in two of the corners, upper left and lower right as a guide aligning the letters. These boxes were removed after the letters were transplanted onto the new pages. The same thing was done with the appendix and bibliography which worked well because with word processing it was hard to get the columns to fill in the proper way.

Another thing that was not thought of in the initial process was that the pages of text started on the left hand page and that meant that the title page would fall on the front of the first page and there would be no verso or that there would be two title pages. This was the solution.

The last thing to be worked out was what to do with the pictures that did not fit the pages very well. One possibility was that all the pictures should line up along the bottom of the page; another is that it would be better if those pictures were moved up on the page.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are many different areas of study that could be

researched in the area of painting, an alphabet book of contemporary painters, painters from one period such as the Renaissance or the Impressionists, and painters from a region such as Chinese or the Dutch Masters

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