

Exercise 03 -- Thesaurus Review: *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*

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The Getty Research Institute

The *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* provides a controlled vocabulary for items related to “art, architecture, and material culture” (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000).

<http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/index.html>

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Purpose

The *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* contains standardized vocabulary that can be used to describe “art, architecture, and material culture” (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000). The terms included in the thesaurus contain the names of artistic styles and movements, as well as materials used in works. The names of different types of pieces of art or examples of architecture have been standardized as well. The thesaurus is useful for museums, archives, and other institutions that want to describe works of art with a standard vocabulary (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000).

Scope

“The AAT is a structured vocabulary currently containing around 131,000 terms and other information about concepts” (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000). The preferred term is written in American English and has been labeled. The *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* has also been translated into Spanish. Translations to Chinese, German, and Dutch are being created. Terms from other languages such as French and Italian are included under the preferred term that they relate to along with spelling variations, vernacular terms, and terms that are no longer in use. The thesaurus covers a large time span from BCE until the present. The vocabulary covers works of art from around the world (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000).

Relationships

Terms with the same meaning are listed under the preferred term. Each term is labeled according to its language or dialect. Some terms are noted as being alternate spellings or no longer used. When a user clicks on a preferred term, in a list of search results, the full record for that term is displayed including a chart that shows where that term fits in the “hierarchy” of terms (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000). According to the explanation at the website, some terms fall into more than one “facet” or hierarchy (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000).

U (Used for)

It appears that in this thesaurus the “Use” is included as part of the “Scope Note.”

BT (Broader Term) and NT (Narrower Term) Example: Altarpieces

Instead of labeling terms as narrower or broader this thesaurus gives a listing of the full hierarchy with the currently selected preferred term at the bottom. To find broad terms a user would look above the current term. I do not believe that more specific terms are listed. The following example for the term “altarpieces” was copied from the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*:

Hierarchical Position:

Objects Facet

.... Visual and Verbal Communication (Hierarchy Name) (G)

..... Visual Works (Hierarchy Name) (G)

..... <visual works (Guide Term)> (G)

..... <visual works by function> (G)

..... <religious visual works> (G)

..... altarpieces (G)

(J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000)

SN (Scope Note) Example: Carpenter Gothic

The following example for the term “Carpenter Gothic” was copied from the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*:

Note: Refers to the movement in the Gothic Revival period in architecture characterized by the use of

Gothic forms in domestic buildings primarily in the United States Northeast and Midwest during the mid-19th century and by the use of the scroll saw in construction. The style reveals an awkward attempt at imitation and implementation of original Gothic proportions and ornamentation such as turrets, spires, and pointed arches, with no sense of logical spatial relationship to the house.

(J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000)

RT (Related Term)

According to the examples and instructions that explain the results obtained from the online search using the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* some related terms are listed. The example in the instructions shows these terms under a header labeled “Related Terms” (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000). None of the words that I entered into the search box had a list of related terms associated with it.

Authority

The Getty Vocabulary Program in Los Angeles, California, part of The Getty Research Institute, maintains the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*. Universities and organization in several other countries have provided terms in other languages (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000).

Usefulness

This thesaurus could be useful in constructing web indexes. Websites on art related topics could be cataloged using the specialized vocabulary to describe their subject matter. If a website consisted mostly of images or only images the terms from this thesaurus could still convey the website’s contents to a user. The preferred terms could be used to describe images of famous buildings by architecture style or materials used.

Conclusion

The *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* is very user friendly. It has a box where a user can enter search terms to find the preferred word that he or she needs. The website will return a list of possible terms with a brief explanation of what they are related to. The upper levels of the hierarchy can be browsed. The instructions and examples given on the website are clear and helpful. I would recommend this thesaurus to people cataloging art related items.

References

J. Paul Getty Trust. (2000). Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online. Retrieved from:

<http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/index.html>