Organizing serendipity

Knowledge discovery with Arkyves 2.0
ARKIVES is a ‘collection of collections’ from museums, libraries, and research institutes, all sharing one feature ...
Translating Iconclass into more languages

There are projects underway to translate Iconclass into more languages. You can contact the coordinators for more information, or if you would like to volunteer help.

Iconclass as Linked open Data

for more information on using this site as an API, and how to retrieve texts

Whether you need to index your own collection of pictures or texts, or want to have indexed theirs, this is the place to start.

You can do simple and sophisticated keyword searches, browse the Iconclass schedules, and study how others have used Iconclass to describe hundreds of thousands of objects. The pictures that accompany Iconclass are not an intrinsic part of the Iconclass system, but merely serve as samples to illustrate the possible use of the system.

For more information about the Iconclass Classification System see www.iconclass.nl

... they all use the standard classification for cultural content, ICONCLASS, for their subject access

These are sample images from the RkDimages database that have been described using ICONCLASS. Refresh this page to load another set of random samples.
Sections and Collections
Arkyves is now subdivided in the sections shown on the right. These are developing organically from the datasets we are able to include. Sections like Paintings or Photography allow searching across datasets imported from, for example, the Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands Institute for Art History, and the Getty Research Institute. Sections can also originate as cataloguing or research projects, like Alchemy, Emblem Books or Metamorphoses.

Collections are all available as filters to limit searches to specific datasets.

Click to return to the Home page from where you can select a specific section or ‘All content’
The Arkyves user interface has been completely reconstructed. You can search the separate sections individually. So you could select, for example, the Crucifixion scenes from Books of Hours in a query that is limited to the section Medieval Manuscripts.

Search results can be modified with the help of filters from a set of Types, such as Emblem Book or Manuscript Illumination. Search results can also be limited to one or more of the collections that are aggregated in Arkyves and listed on the previous page.

A search is performed or repeated by clicking the Search button.
A search filter that you use for one section can easily be kept and then reused for another one. Shown here is the search for reptiles in Medieval Manuscripts and the same search in Emblem Books. It only takes two clicks to repeat a search for a very different set of images.
The same filter can also be used to search the complete database. Clicking on the **All content** link at the top of the screen and then repeating the search will retrieve records from the whole database. You may repeat the same query or modify it with additional filters.
The purpose of a simple search
Consulting the Arkyves database in a research context can have various types of questions as point of departure.
• Does Arkyves contain information about the specific work of art that I am studying
• Does it contain comparable images that can shed light on the imagery I am interested in?
• Does Arkyves contain texts and images that can help me contextualize my object of study?
While the final purpose of your queries and the scope of your research may diverge widely, searching the database will very often start in the same way – with a simple word search.*
For obvious reasons the way you formulate your question will influence the search results. When you use the exact same words as the original cataloguer and select a specific section you will get a very precise result. For instance, if you are familiar with Holbein’s *Dance of Death* design of Death visiting a doctor, and then search with the words “death doctor urine” while also limiting your search to the *Prints* section, you will retrieve a copy of the print from the Rijksmuseum and a print with a related theme by Philips Galle – even if the original captions are in Dutch.

* One of the functions still under development for Arkyves is a reverse image search, where you will start your searching with an image rather than with words.
Taking a hint
Searching with less will find you more…
So, when you reduce your query to *death* and *doctor* you will find 19 prints; but if you then repeat the question for **All content**, the tally rises to 439 items.
As you can see, the searches not only produce a set of results in the shape of a thumbnail gallery. They also produce helpful hints shown to the left of the gallery. We shall look at them in more detail below, but first we shall simply take the hint and repeat our search, but now for these concepts:

**31F3 dance of Death:**
Death together with one or more human beings

**49G1 physician, doctor**
Recall and precision

Taking the hint from the first set of results and switching to a more precise query – the Iconclass concepts for doctor and dance of Death – we now retrieve 11 items from the database, half of which are based on Holbein’s design. Zooming in on one of these also provides additional context as it gives us the text of Luke IV:23 – Medice, cura te ipsum - which the Holbein design refers to.

If available, additional images – e.g. facsimiles of text pages - are provided for the same item.
Combining sources
A man sleeping on the ground, resting his head on his arm, an empty scabbard in front of him; another soldier-like man with two swords, and a man with a slit throat wearing a monk’s habit lying on his back.
This print, signed by Lucas van Leyden’s ‘L’ and dated 1508, is found with a rather simple word search, even if we pretend not to know the story about Mohammed’s servant killing the hermit Sergius with the sword of his master who had fallen asleep from too much wine. Searching for sleeping soldier monk and sword will do the trick. Then, exploring the suggestions made by the system, and shifting to a search for the Iconclass concepts Mohammed and sleeping on the ground, we also retrieve a page from a 1639 edition of the 14th century book by John Mandeville that was the source of the Sergius story represented by Lucas van Leyden.
From a simple search to a voyage of discovery
To find what you are looking for … obviously, that is what you should expect a database system to deliver. And Arkyves delivers.
However, to actually help you discover new information that could be relevant to your research, or even give you new insights – that might well be beyond what you expect from a database.
Of course, Arkyves will not actually do your research for you, but it is able to associatively point you in directions you may not have thought of before you started your search.
To demonstrate this we use a simple keyword search as our starting point.
Alcohol will perhaps not be the most obvious word to start an iconographic query, but it will help us to show the sophisticated functionalities we want to explain.

**The sort option**
Your first option is to rearrange the thumbnail gallery resulting from this search on the word ‘alcohol’ that produced well over 2,500 hits. By default results are sorted in random order, but with one click you can sort them in a different order, for example *by date*. This will cause the oldest material in Arkyves, medieval manuscript illuminations, to be shown at the top of the thumbnail gallery. Various sort options are available for you to try out.
One of the medieval hits we find with the word ‘alcohol’ is this miniature of a monk who has a delirious vision of the devil in the shape of lions and a bear. The monk will be saved by the virgin Mary, as his story tells one of the Miracles de Notre Dame.

Unmiraculous but noteworthy is the fact that we retrieve this item with the word “alcohol” while the record actually contains the Iconclass concept “31B521 drunkard” and the phrase “drunken monk”. The word “alcohol” was not used in the metadata.
Thematic suggestions

The second option you have to make more of your search results is to explore the suggestions from the lists offered to the left of the thumbnail gallery. These lists gather themes that are in one way or another related to the word we used to start our search – alcohol. These themes are all taken from the Iconclass classification system, and ordered in compliance with the main categories of this system.

System category 4 “Society, Civilization, Culture”, for example, contains concepts like “glass of wine”, “wine as alcoholic drink”, but also “drinking” and “grape”.

Among the abstract ideas and concepts somehow related to (co-occurring with) “alcohol” we find “wealth, opulence” but also “intemperance” and “mockery”.

From category 3 “Human Being, Man in General” originate concepts like “drunkenness”, “drunkard” but also “drunken brawl”.

All of those concept suggest fruitful venues for further exploration of the database, but in a highly associative manner.
Using the suggestions

When you want to further explore the database with the help of the suggested themes and topics, you can simply tick the box to the left of the concept definition. You can click on the text of the definition, which will then show the concept’s broader terms. Shown here are the broader terms (the Path through the hierarchy) of 31B521 drunkard. These broader terms are also provided with tick boxes, so you can easily broaden the scope of a search or increase its precision. The effect is shown here in these screenshots. In the first one the concept drunkenness is about to be selected as a filter. In the second one the search for this concept has been executed, with almost 700 images of “drunkenness” as a result.
Multilingual iconographic metadata

This screenshot shows further aspects of the new Arkyves interface and functionality.

Switching between Iconclass languages
You may notice that the text of the suggestions derived from the Iconclass system is now in Italian. The text of the Iconclass system can be switched on the fly. Do note that not all translations are completed yet. Iconclass is available in English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese in its entirety. The other languages only have partial Iconclass systems. Their schedules are shown in a mixture of the translation and the original English.

Furthermore you can see how the concept “drunkenness” (ubriachezza) has now been combined in a Boolean “AND” query with “vomitare” to retrieve a rather mawkish set of warnings against the consequences of alcohol abuse.

Items from the search results can be kept as “Saved Items” by simply ticking the box below a thumbnail.
Adding concepts to your search

One of the more striking examples of a moralizing lesson warning against alcohol abuse uses the image of a stag that has tripped over a log. A key concept this image aims to convey is that of **Intemperance**, exemplified by the excessively intoxicated animal.

To shift the focus of your search to this concept – found by association – simply ticking the box and then clicking the Search button suffices.

The original source button will take you to the website of the partner institution.

The parent button will call forth all the items we have of a composite object, such as a book.
The website of the partner institution

All the illustrations from the ‘parent’ i.e. Freitag’s *Mythologia Ethica*, (Plantin 1579)
Playing with the associated concepts

Having added the concept “Intemperance” to the active query for “drunkenness” finds us 12 records, not surprisingly from moralizing emblems and proverbs.

The selected concepts are shown at the top of the left hand menu.

Concepts that are also found in this more limited set of 12 results are shown immediately below this.

Simultaneously, concepts you have clicked on while looking around the search results, are stored on a special Clipboard so you can keep track of what you have searched for and you can easily come back and use them again in new combinations.
Continue your voyage of discovery

If you now want to shift your focus and follow the path of “Intemperance” – as directed by what you have found earlier – you can simply put the concept “drunkenness” on hold. To this end you can click open a small window that also offers the more default Boolean conditions: Must have = AND Include = OR Exclude = NOT

So, having put “drunkenness” on hold and having clicked the Search button again, the query is repeated but now only for the concept “Intemperance” – which so far has been identified in 86 objects in the database.

In only a few associative steps then, we have moved from a simple word search on “alcohol” to a high end query for the specific concept “Intemperance”.

[Image of a search interface with results and options for refining search with Boolean conditions]
The context of a concept

When a concept is moved to the special Clipboard a small arrow is added. If you click that the Iconclass Tree Browser – containing the complete schedules of the classification – is opened at the location of the selected concept.

Needless to say your search could also have started with browsing the Iconclass tree – but for obvious reasons it is much easier to let the Arkyves system guide you from a simple word search to a journey of discovery by organizing serendipity for you …