

# THE RICHARD DIEBENKORN FOUNDATION

USING COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE TO PRODUCE AN AMBITIOUS CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ.



*Seawall*, by Richard Diebenkorn. Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.  
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The Richard Diebenkorn Foundation, in Berkeley, California, is working on a project jointly sponsored by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, to compile a catalogue raisonné of the paintings and works on paper by American artist Richard Diebenkorn. Among the most well-known painters in America, Diebenkorn (1922-1993) is particularly associated with the West Coast art scene, and is regarded as an American master and world-class modern artist. The final 2,000-page catalogue will include four volumes presenting 5,300 unique artworks, and will feature over 5,000 color illustrations. Since the early 1990s, when this project began, the Foundation has been conducting a search for all of Diebenkorn's unique works. All the information necessary for the catalogue has been collected and managed using The Museum System (TMS) from Gallery Systems, a partnership that began 21 years ago.

**"TMS gave us insight into how larger, world-renowned institutions set up their workflow, and every time we have followed these industry standards, it has been to our benefit."**

- RICHARD GRANT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
THE RICHARD DIEBENKORN FOUNDATION



## THE RICHARD DIEBENKORN FOUNDATION OVERVIEW

- 4500 works on paper
- 650 oil paintings
- Three-dimensional objects
- Audio and visual recordings and correspondence



## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Efficient searches across many fields of data
- Time saved with ability to focus on work, not software
- Minimized data entry and error
- Flexible, bug-free software due to large user group
- Up-to-date data that can be reused for various projects
- SQL Server data accessible with 3rd party software (e.g. Crystal Reports)



## PRODUCTS

- The Museum System (TMS)

## CHALLENGES

In 1993, when the estate of Richard Diebenkorn embarked on this project, they didn't foresee its magnitude. The search for all works made by the artist, including paintings, works on paper and three-dimensional objects, as well as correspondence, audio and video recordings, and any other relevant documentation, involved contacting people from around the globe who had acquired items from the artist. Then they needed to take high-resolution photographs of the works. With extremely high standards for the color-accuracy of reproductions and thoroughness of research, Richard Grant, the Foundation's Executive Director and son-in-law of the late artist, quickly realized they needed a collection management solution in place that would be around for the long run to help them collect, edit and manage the works and all related information. "We wanted a reliable collections management system that was used by clients of substantial size and importance and one that was configurable but required no customization," says Richard. Another requirement of the software was its ability to integrate data and images.

## SOLUTION

Richard found what he was looking for on a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1994, where he was introduced to Gallery Systems' CEO, Jay Hoffman, and saw TMS first hand. "Jay was willing to take the interim database I had created in ACCESS and do the conversion and installation for us," says Richard. "The software met all of our requirements so we could get started immediately."

## OUTCOMES

As the fifth-ever user of TMS, The Foundation has a great deal of experience with the software, and staff have never regretted their initial decision. "Many people are willing to make a decision around software that costs them an enormous amount of staff time in the end, thinking that TMS is too expensive. In fact, we could have paid significantly more for this product and still saved a great deal of money," says Richard.



*Untitled (Albuquerque)*, by Richard Diebenkorn. Private Collection.  
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An early benefit of TMS was its help in shaping the way the Foundation catalogued its data, and in establishing data consistency. As Richard explains: “TMS gave us insight into how larger, world-renowned institutions set up their workflow, and every time we have followed these industry standards, it has been to our benefit.”

Andrea Liguori, Managing Director at the Foundation, continues, “Because TMS is so beautifully formatted, we were able to dive right in and create our database without having to worry about building the structure.”

The configurability and easy searching TMS affords is another area the Foundation has seen as a benefit. “If I want to focus on a particular field across 200 records, or maybe search a subset by owner, it’s very quick and easy to do,” says Andrea.

Ten years ago, the Foundation decided to use an integrated Crystal Report to create catalogue entries where images and object data could be displayed and formatted in a fashion similar to how they will appear in the final product. Any changes made to the database are reflected in this report, and it allows staff to see what each entry of the catalogue raisonné will look like before it goes to the book designer. It also gives them the opportunity to properly format and scrub the data before publication. “I’ve known colleagues who have only been able to see their catalogue pages once they were typeset and proofed, but we have much more control,” says Richard.

“I’m always proud to tell a colleague that we use TMS for our catalogue raisonné,” says Andrea. “TMS makes me feel confident that we have a system that is reliable, which we don’t have to worry about. It has made my job a lot easier.”

Along with watching their catalogue raisonné project develop, the Foundation has also had a front-row view of the product’s growth. “TMS is used by so many major museums. Meeting the needs of those museums, as

Gallery Systems has done, has made the product more flexible and we, as a smaller organization, have been the beneficiaries.” says Richard.

Richard has also been witness to the technical support offered by Gallery Systems along the way. “If I leave a desperate call on a Sunday evening with Gallery Systems, I’m likely to get a call back from the technical support group very quickly. That has been consistent throughout our 21-year relationship. All the staff have been enormously helpful,” he says.

Once the catalogue raisonné is printed next year, the Foundation doesn’t intend to slow down. Their next project will be cataloguing and publishing the artist’s etchings and lithographs, as well as cataloguing over 200 boxes of archives, books and letters donated by the artist’s wife, Phyllis Diebenkorn. “We want all projects married together in TMS,” says Richard. The Foundation will continue to be busy for a long time, and there is no doubt that Gallery Systems will be along for the ride, helping them realize their goals.



Richard and Phyllis Diebenkorn in front of their house on Edith St., Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1951. Photograph by Nellie Gilman Fryer. © The Richard Diebenkorn Foundation, Berkeley, Calif.