



Editorial

Digital Transformations

The Rijksmuseum's print collection holds a remarkably large number of works involving Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this influential and fascinating narrative poem from Classical Antiquity was by far the most translated, reviewed and illustrated literary work in the whole of Europe. At a time of sudden and turbulent changes, it was comforting to see that change visualized in pictures. Things are no different in this day and age.

The digital transformation of heritage institutions has been a widely discussed topic in the museum world for decades. What impact does the increasing digitization of artworks and the ubiquitous technology have in the interaction with the public and in object-oriented research? And how does the digitization of museum processes change the way museum staff interact with the objects?

When the coronavirus struck in the spring and autumn of 2020 and most of the Rijksmuseum's staff were asked to work from home and online, it was an excellent way to test the efforts of recent years in practice. Can the Rijksmuseum's mission – to link people with art and history – survive if a pandemic means that this link has suddenly become digital only? And how has the coronavirus crisis affected the way object-based research is approached in the museum?

For more than a decade now, the Rijksmuseum has been investing in mass digitization, sharing this digitized collection with the public through its Open Data policy, so it was not as if the museum had to start working with digital from scratch. The museum hopes to complete the 2D digitization of the entire collection of objects by 2021. And the phased digitization of the object documentation, the special library collections and the acquisition archives is high on the wish list for the near future. More and more museum processes have become digital in recent years, ranging from collection management to security. This considerable volume of preliminary work and previous digital experiences have made the switch to working from home as opposed to on-site much easier. The research into the collection, its support through open information and data services and the general museum administration were able to build on the efforts made in recent years.

However, the lockdowns significantly speeded up the move to working digitally. Curators used the digitized collections even more intensely than before when writing collection catalogues. Conservators rely heavily on their data-intensive technical preliminary research. Information specialists made a wholesale shift to digital public information services, reaching out to new audiences. And many researchers have only now discovered the Rijksmuseum Research Library's digital collection. Their public scan-on-request service allows scans to be requested from the general library collection and many more people started to use Rijksmuseum's open data services.

It is probably still too early to make a final evaluation as to whether the coronavirus pandemic has proved to be a curse or a blessing for the research services and object-based research at the Rijksmuseum. But it is clear that the museum has benefited from the added value of its many years' investment in digitization. It has succeeded in tapping into new internal and external target user groups, furthering digital research and modernizing information services.

The pandemic is undoubtedly changing the future of object-oriented research in the museum for members of staff, visitors and researchers. The shift towards a hybrid research process has finally become a reality – physical and on-the-spot research combined with digital and online research. And, more than ever before, people are working together, rather than going it alone. What a wonderful basis for the digital metamorphosis of research in the museum. *Omnia mutantur, nihil interit* (everything changes, nothing perishes), to quote Pythagoras in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.