Some Things to Consider Before You Begin ...

*Searching for images can be challenging.*

Text-based works often have enough structured information available in each record to increase their “findability” but images sometimes do not have more than the title and artist’s name included in a record.

*Every image database is unique.*

Many image databases, such as the Academy of Art University’s LUNA, offer a single access point to various collections from different sources. As a result, you may not find the same amount or type of information (also known as metadata) in an image catalog record.

*We all can view the same image differently.*

Visual literacy is the ability to interpret and communicate information visually. Each person constructs the meaning of an image based on his or her personal experiences and knowledge. When searching for images, it may help to think about a physical representation in an image rather than an emotional response it may elicit.
Tips for Successful Image Searching

- Try a search with just one or two keywords to start, then work on refining your search by putting terms together with AND or OR.

- Refer to writings on your research topic for subject terms to use as possible keywords. Keeping a list of these terms can help immensely over the course of your research as you work with different image databases and come to understand the vocabularies and types of metadata associated with each.

- Image databases often have international contributors. Be sure to try variant spellings, such as colour instead of color, or Köln instead of Cologne.

- If you are not having much luck with specific terms, try using an asterisk (*) as a wildcard to find multiple forms of a word (such as bicycl* to find bicycle, bicycles, bicycling, bicyclist, or bicyclists).

- Most important: Get creative with your search strategies, and don’t get stuck on one in particular! Leaving your comfort zone will lead to more discoveries, especially as you progress in your research and explore different image collections and databases.

A Quick Exercise

If you do not have a topic in mind yet but would like to practice now, try searching the Academy of Art University’s LUNA image database for the images at the top of this handout. (For future reference, the titles and artists are listed at the bottom of this page.)

If you have questions about image searching or comments about this handout, please contact Sean Briscoe, Visual Resources Librarian, at (415) 618-3761 or sbriscoe@academyart.edu.