Monday, April 02, 2012

The search for a(n archival) media icon

Harold McClellan, ca. 1975 / unidentified photographer. Eleanor Dickinson papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art was recently awarded funding by the Council on Library and Information Resources' "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" program for a three–year processing project entitled, "Uncovering Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art." As we kicked off the project this January, my first task as project archivist was to find a thumbnail–sized image in the collections that would represent the project as a whole—an image that conveys postmodern art and media in the archives.

It had been awhile since I had looked closely at these collections, so I had to jog my memory as to what they contain. The existing collection records weren't much help, but of course, that wasn't a coincidence. Rather, it's why we got the grant, to process and describe these collections, to un–hide the media in them, and to develop approaches to making audiovisual media in manuscript collections more findable.

So, I headed to the stacks with my list in hand: 12 collections, all rich with documentation of contemporary art movements like environmental art, time–based media art, conceptual art, kinetic art, and all full of obsolete audiovisual media.

I first consulted the Eleanor Dickinson papers. Dickinson is a San Francisco–based artist with a long career in painting, writing, educating, and advocacy. She made ample use of video and sound recordings to create shows and documentaries around issues for working artists, particularly women artists, and artists' models. I was familiar with some of the video from her project, "Artist Models of San Francisco" (1977–1981) because we had it preserved recently. I revisited some of that footage and was delighted all over again by its unique point of view, its remarkable personalities, and the way it captures the spirit of its time and place. I found some wonderful video stills and other photos of the artist, but nothing that captures our project as a whole.

On to Jan Butterfield, a California author whose work covered some of the hottest topics of her time, from performance and conceptual art to environmental art and beyond. Her major published writing centers on artists working in ephemeral sculptural media such as Robert Irwin, James Turrell, and Larry Bell, among others.

In my role as audiovisual archivist, Butterfield's papers are mostly known to me for the hundreds of taped interviews and lectures of contemporary artists

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Liza Kirwin: Artists in Their Studios: Images from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art

Eleanor Dickinson at the Hugh Triton Gallery, ca. 1967 / unidentified photographer. Eleanor Dickinson papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

(recordings which are rather glossed over in the existing collection description in our catalog, something I look forward to rectifying), but I had never looked at her photographs. To my surprise, the first box I opened contained a beautiful collection of black and white prints of the San Francisco Beat writers taken by photographers close to the Beat scene. I made a mental note to linger over these images of my literary heroes later. For now, I had to stay focused on my task. I pored over reams of slides in Butterfield's papers and found some extraordinary images. I took note of a few, but they were so specific to a single artist's vision that they didn't seem quite right.

I should have known I'd hit pay dirt with the Exhibition Records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art. During the gallery's brief but auspicious time span, 1965 to 1970, curator Elayne Varian staged seminal shows involving early video, performance, and conceptual artists.

Not long after beginning to work my way through the messy exhibition files, I came across a set of artists' files, in which I found a photo I thought could speak for all the artists who found themselves in an age of consciousness–altering technologies, and all the possibilities for expression that came along with them.

The image shows Les Levine's live, multi–channel television sculpture *Iris*. The photograph depicts the artist's reflection in a man–sized tower of monitors, standing behind a video camera, videotaping his sculpture as it "watches" him back. The image was taken with a fish–eye lens, creating a visual pun on the fishbowl effect of late 20th century media culture, which the sculpture itself is eloquent in expressing.

In some ways, it isn't the most exciting or high–quality photograph. It's only a still frame from the low–resolution video whose production it depicts. But that fits as well, I think. Artists of Levine's generation, like generations before them, challenged notions of what art was, but they did so using the new technologies of their era, and they produced work that could sometimes be more mind–grabbing in concept than eye–grabbing in appearance.

Conceptually, I think the image of Levine's *Iris* stands in well for the intersecting concepts that our project is designed to reveal in the Archives' collections: media, art, technology, experimentation, and ephemerality.

My task was successful, after a few false starts, but for me the real take–away of my search is how excited I am to work with these collections, to get to know them, and to make them more accessible to researchers. I can't wait to get started.

Explore more:

- About the Project "Uncovering Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art"
- Technical Documentation for Archivists

Images from James Turrell's installation *Heavy Water*, 1991. Jan Butterfield papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Liza Kirwin: Lists: To-dos, Illustrated Inventories, Collected Thoughts, and Other Artists' Enumerations from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art

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Megan McShea is the audiovisual archivist and CLIR project archivist at the Archives of American Art.

Les Levine takes a picture of his television sculpture *Iris* as *Iris* takes a picture of him, 1968?. Exhibition records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Posted by Megan McShea on Monday, April 02, 2012 at 07:00 AM in Audiovisual Material | Permalink ShareThis

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Comments

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Hahaha the pic of the grandfather is very fun

Posted by: Ann | Thursday, April 12, 2012 at 09:27 PM

Great photo :)

Posted by: mario | Friday, April 13, 2012 at 11:44 AM

Nice article Megan, I checked out Jan Butterfield, she has some great work.

Posted by: Aliosha Kasin | Saturday, April 14, 2012 at 11:14 AM

I got a kick out of the picture of gramps in the long-johns!

Posted by: Sammy | Tuesday, April 24, 2012 at 12:18 AM

For some reason, that old man with the mask freaks me out. Big time... Come to think about it, he reminds me of the characters from A Clockwork Orange!

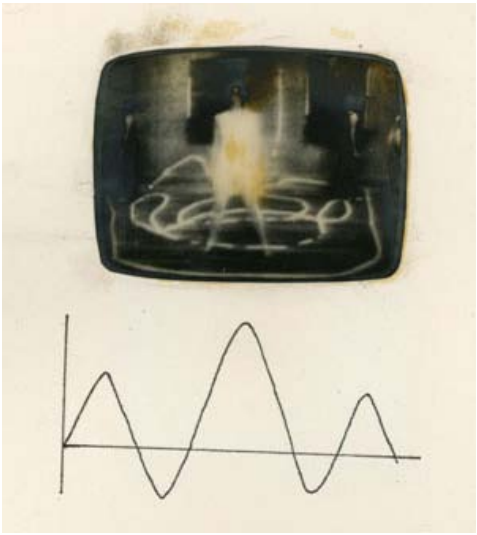
Posted by: Mark | Wednesday, May 09, 2012 at 08:30 AM

The comments to this entry are closed.

Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art

A project funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources "Hidden Collections" grant program

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Detail from artist book based on the *Triadic Tapes*, 1976. Paul Ryan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art was awarded $222,700 from the Council on Library and Information Resources "Hidden Collections" grant program for "*Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art.*" For this three-year project, beginning in January 2012, staff will process twelve archival collections that are rich in audiovisual material and produce web-accessible EAD (Encoded Archival Description) finding aids. Funds will support an audiovisual archivist, graduate interns and a symposium.

The media in these collections document a period of contemporary American art when ephemeral and dynamic new visual art forms were emerging in studios, art communities, galleries, and art spaces across the country. The collections contain films, video and sound recordings created as a record of art, artists, exhibitions, and events; and those that are works of art in and of themselves–sound art, video art, outtakes, or elements of multimedia productions. In some instances, performance, documentation, and video art are intertwined in one recording. In many instances, this archival documentation may be the only remaining evidence of the artwork.

The Jan Butterfield papers contain nearly 200 audio interviews and lectures by such seminal 20th century artists as Robert Irwin, Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Sam Francis, Philip Guston, David Hockney, and Judy Chicago, as well as performance and video art from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Paul Ryan papers contain rare documentation of the 1969 exhibition "TV as a Creative Medium" at the Howard Wise Gallery, the first exhibition in the United States devoted to video art with notable participants Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider.

Among the papers of Eleanor Dickenson are video interviews with artists, models, art historians, and art critics. The records of the Finch College Museum of Art include a video of artist Lynda Benglis installing her works, and interviews of artists Mel Bochner and Hans Richter, and art dealers Leo Castelli and Betty Parsons, among others. As primary sources, these collections offer unique opportunities for discovery and revelation. They enrich our understanding of art world events and the lives of key participants providing firsthand accounts of seminal moments in American art history. They help us to see aspects of contemporary art in new and different ways.

These audiovisual materials represent truly rare archival resources that uniquely document the recent history of contemporary art in America, but few details of this rich content are reflected in the accession-level records currently available to Archives users. Lack of adequate and consistent description of archival media is a chronic problem for mixed-media manuscript collections due to gaps in current archival standards and best practices. Another goal of the project therefore is to develop benchmarks and guidelines for an archival approach to processing and describing archival collections with audiovisual content.

Watch this web page for announcements and progress reports, and for technical documentation, such as guidelines, procedures and tools created during the project. A symposium is planned for Year 3 and opportunities are available for graduate archival media studies interns to assist with the project.

For further information about this project, contact:

Project Director Barbara Aikens aikensb@si.edu
AV Archivist Megan McShea mcsheam@si.edu

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Eisenlord, William J.
Mosler, Henry
Catlin, George
Smith, Leon Polk
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Carnegie Institute. Museum of Art
Storrs, John Henry Bradley

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Paul Ryan papers, 1943-2008 (mixed media; 25.5 linear feet)

Robert Wiegand papers and video art, 1953-1994 (mixed media; 7.5 linear feet)

Fletcher Benton papers, 1965-2003 (mixed media; 6.8 linear feet)

Gene Davis papers, 1925-1992 (mixed media; 20.3 linear feet)

Eleanor Dickinson papers, 1951-2003 (mixed media; 22.5 linear feet)

Esta Nesbitt papers, 1942-1979 (mixed media; 7 linear feet)

Jan Butterfield papers, 1959-1999 (mixed media; 15.3 linear feet)

Burt Chernow papers, circa 1930-1977 (mixed media; 21.3 linear feet)

Fidel Danieli papers, circa 1940s-1996 (mixed media; 5.6 linear feet)

KPFK "Art Scene" interviews by Marion Gore, 1962-1964 (sound tape reels; 1.4 linear feet)

State of the Arts videotape collection, Lawrence P. Fraiberg Productions, 1970-1980 (video cassettes; 2 linear feet)

Exhibition Records of the Contemporary Wing of the Finch College Museum of Art, 1964-1975 (mixed media; 19.2 linear feet)

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Description Expo 2012

2012 Description Expo

By Jennifer Meehan

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ArchiveGrid, OCLC Research

After the subscription-free beta version of ArchiveGrid launched last year, its searchable index of online archival collection descriptions - imported from WorldCat and harvested directly from contributor websites - grew by nearly 25 percent to 1.7 million. In addition to MARC and EAD, descriptions in HTML, PDF, and Word formats are also harvested and included in ArchiveGrid, giving greater exposure to those collections. As the index count continues to rise, ArchiveGrid will also take on an emerging "sandbox" role as OCLC Research experiments with new tools that enhance discovery and access to institutions' archival and special collections materials for a broader range of researchers.

A few tools in our sandbox include:

- A "rough and ready" finding aids project to make non-electronic collection descriptions discoverable in ArchiveGrid. This is being tested as a method to enable institutions to scan their paper finding aids, upload them into ArchiveGrid, and use optical character recognition software to index them.
- Linked data using VIAF and Wikipedia. Using a set of trial records, the aim of this project is to enhance collection descriptions with additional information from Wikipedia and related sources. This will allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of key terms within collection descriptions and pave the way for more collaboration between linked data and archival description in the future.
- The ArchiveGrid blog, launched in January as a way to highlight collections, disseminate information and news specific to the archival industry, and to inform readers of OCLC Research projects and activities related to ArchiveGrid.
- Changes to the ArchiveGrid interface, including additional parameters for users to narrow their search results, will advance discovery and access beyond its current capacities.

Explore ArchiveGrid at http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/.

Archives Project at the American Museum of Natural History

The American Museum of Natural History is currently in the process of cataloging collection-level records for its archival holdings held in the Library and Science Departments. Through the funding of two separate grants, the Council for Library and Information Resource's (CLIR) Hidden Collections program and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) (which includes a comprehensive museum-wide risk assessment program), descriptive information for close to 3,300 archival collections was gathered in less than two years. The CLIR grant also funded the production of twenty-one full finding aids for the AMNH Library.

To publish this large volume of data, the Library is using tools such as MarcEdit and Archivists' Toolkit for batch processing MARC records and EAD-encoded finding aids. Repurposing the descriptive data captured in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets allows for flexibility and control in converting metadata and provides a base for use with the Risk Assessment database. For importing full finding aids written in MS Word, we use a spreadsheet template to create an EAD-encoded container list for import into Archivists' Toolkit. This time-saving solution was adopted and modified from the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections (PACSCL) team. Full documentation is in process with drafts available on the project's website at http://images.library.amnh.org/hiddencollections/process/.

Leveraging open-source tools and repurposing spreadsheet data has allowed us to identify, describe and publish a substantial amount of collections in a relatively short period without the usual barriers of time, money and extensive programming or cataloging expertise. We now have a basic understanding of all our archival collections throughout the museum and a data infrastructure in place from which to build these records more fully.

Explore the American Museum of Natural History Archives project at http://images.library.amnh.org/hiddencollections/process/.

Disruptive Components: Reimagining Archival Access Systems at the Princeton University Library

Elizabeth Yakel has written that the recreation of traditional analog finding aids in online environments "inhibits creative use of networked information and the emergence of new digital representational forms for the representation of primary sources." It is not only the evolution of finding aids that is impeded, she argues, but access to archival content itself.

This submission describes Princeton University's Archival Description Working Group's attempt to respond to these issues. Building on descriptive data created by dozens of staff involved with aggressive processing and data conversion projects over the last seven years, the group developed, in collaboration with library digital initiatives staff, a new web application for delivering finding aids (available at http://findingaidsbeta.princeton.edu)

Features of the new access system include:

- Direct access to EAD components from search results
- Faceting and browsing options from search results
- Delivery of images directly from the finding aid interface
- Contents lists that are sortable by title, date, or physical location in the collection
- Enhanced topic features, based on linked data principles
- Support for delivery of EAC-CPF records
- Better options for users to contact the library and connect with each other, including an "Ask a Question" (for reference requests) and a commenting feature for users wishing to request an enhancement to the description or discuss the content of the collection within the finding aid itself or share information within their own social networks
- A more modular display of the finding aids, including 'Component Records' at each level of description that are intended to meet DACS Single-Level minimum requirements.
- Aeon integration, including requesting without leaving the interface (after authentication)
- Plans for indexing and delivering more than 700,000 EAD components in Primo, the University Library's new discovery layer system.

Credits: The implementation team includes: Maureen Callahan, John Delaney, Shaun Ellis, Regine Heberlien, Dan Santamaria, Jon Stroop, and Don Thornbury. Please contact Dan Santamaria (dsantam@princeton.edu) with any questions.

Explore the Princeton University archival access system at http://findingaidsbeta.princeton.edu.

Doris Duke Timeline, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University

The Doris Duke timeline is a web portal page that provides a collections overview, a chronological index, and selected digital media of materials held by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University. It is the product of collaboration between archivists and developers, who combined the tag libraries of the Encoded Archival Description and Encoded Archival Context standards to represent a rich array of collection descriptions, dates, and resources related to Doris Duke as a research topic.

Archival finding aids are effective at presenting the arrangement of a collection, but less useful for research inquiries. The project team asked, what if we feature people and their lives as an entry point to our collections? A model for our work was the Social Networks and Archival Context (SNAC) project, which appeared in the 2011 SAA Description Expo. We wanted to take the kind of "person page" that appears in SNAC and extend it with media, and a detailed, interactive timeline.

The team researched the EAD and EAC standards as means for representing the rich body of information assembled by archival staff from over a dozen archival collections related to Doris Duke, noted philanthropist

and daughter of the university's founder. Archivists produced a hybrid EAC/EAD document, while team of developers adapted it for the WWW using the Django web framework. The team made use of a freely-available timeline tool, TimelineJS (http://timeline.verite.co/).

Following this pilot project, work continues on additional person pages for notable figures that feature in Duke's special collections. We see this approach as potentially helping to steer researchers who use web search engines to our collections.

Explore the Doris Duke timeline at http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/collections/people/dorisduke/.

See also this blog post by Doris Duke Archivist, Mary Samouelian:
http://blogs.library.duke.edu/rubenstein/2012/06/06/the-doris-duke-collection-reimagined/

Field Book Project, Smithsonian Institution

The Field Book Project

The Field Book Project is developing a Registry for accessing catalog records and digitially imaged content from primary source materials related to biodiversity field research. Field books are the original records of scientific research and discovery. Typical field books might include scientific data on species, habitats, and environments. They can also take the form of journals and diaries which provide a more personal perspective on field work including accounts of travels, people encountered, and daily events.

The Field Book Project has developed an innovative cataloging approach which capitalizes on the strengths of three metadata schemas from museums, libraries and archives to form one integrated solution. From the museum community, Natural Collections Description supports collection level description, similar to an archives finding aid, with the added value of natural history specific metadata elements. From the library community, Metadata Object Description Schema enables more granular access at the item level within a framework that was at once simpler than MARC and designed to crosswalk with MARC. Finally, Encoded Archival Context ensures consistency of names for persons, organizations, and expeditions while also capturing contextual information on those entities and their relationships to each other.

Over 5,000 field books from over 450 Smithsonian collections have been cataloged as part of the Field Book Project and will be made available through an online Field Book Registry. Once online, this Registry will be extended to accept content from other natural history collections in archives and museums throughout the world.

The Field Book Project is based at the Smithsonian Institution with support from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Hidden Collections Program, the National Park Service Save America's Treasures program, and from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

Explore the Field Book Project through our website (http://www.mnh.si.edu/rc/fieldbooks/), blog (http://nmnh.typepad.com/fieldbooks/), flickr sets (http://www.mnh.si.edu/rc/fieldbooks/flickr.html), and follow us on twitter (http://twitter.com/fieldbookproj).

Finding Aid Conversion Program, Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives

The Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA) has developed an in-house finding aid conversion tool to produce Encoded Archival Description finding aids. The program allows for the generation of individual EAD finding aids, as well as batch generation of up to 20 finding aids at a time. SIA adopted the EAD standard in 2009. Between August 2010 and September 2011, SIA generated over 4,000 finding aids that launched on the Archives' new website in September 2011. This number represents over 80% of its total holdings.

The program incorporates data from three primary files: 1) word processing documents including historical notes, descriptive entries, chronologies, series descriptions and box/folder lists; 2) text files taken from MARC bibliographic records including use/accession restrictions, volume calculations, and index terms; and 3) text files taken from SIA's Collections Management System including record creator, title, and dates. The program requires minimal manual tagging of word processing documents to parse out sections of EAD code.

SIA is also contributing its EAD content to the Social Networks and Archival Context Project (SNAC) and ArchiveGrid, and is currently developing ways to further enhance these finding aids with links to digitized materials such as PDF documents of entire folders and fieldbooks, archived websites, as well as images and

image galleries.

SIA continues to generate new EAD finding aids (approximately 200 per year).

Explore the Smithsonian Institution Archives finding aids at http://siarchives.si.edu/collections.

Large-Scale Digitization at the Triangle Research Libraries Network

As part of the grant project, "Content, Context, & Capacity: a Collaborative Large-Scale Digitization Project on the Long Civil Rights Movement in North Carolina" the Triangle Research Libraries Network -- composed of the university libraries at Duke, North Carolina Central, North Carolina State, and UNC-Chapel Hill -- has developed three systems for linking digital content directly from finding aids. These systems pull existing metadata from the EAD finding aids to automatically supply minimal description for each digital object, and use identifiers at the component-level to link scans to a given container (i.e., a folder).

The four partners are collaboratively digitizing 38 archival collections. Digital objects inherit basic descriptive metadata -- such as the folder title, series name, and collection title -- from their parent finding aid through automated processes. Each of the three partner institutions hosting digital content has developed their own publication platform that links digital content directly from the finding aids. All finding aids and digital content are available not only through individual institutions' websites, but also through the shared Search TRLN interface.

For detailed descriptions of the different systems for linking finding aids to digital content at the TRLN partner institutions, see the project webpage on Digital Access.

Marcel Breuer Digital Archive, Syracuse University Library

Syracuse University Library recently launched the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive. The website (http://breuer.syr.edu) represents a collaborative effort headed by the Library to digitize over 30,000 drawings, photographs, letters, and other materials related to the early career of Marcel Breuer, one of the most influential architects and furniture designers of the twentieth century. The project unites resources from several international partner institutions, including the Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich, Harvard University, the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, the University of East Anglia, and the Vitra Design Museum.

Rich metadata allows for easy searching and enables researchers to make connections across media and among geographically dispersed materials. High-quality, zoomable images permit even the faintest pencil sketch to be examined in detail, while project descriptions and biographies provide context for the individual objects and for Breuer's career. Syracuse University Library created a custom PHP/MySQL based database application that consolidates metadata and JPEG2000 images from SU's collections and those of partner institutions. This web application generates METS (Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard) XML objects for use in a web portal, drawing upon the California Digital Library's open source eXtensible Text Framework (XTF).

The creation of the website and digitization of archival materials created prior to 1955 were funded by a 2009 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Library is currently working to secure funding for the second phase of the project, which will allow the remainder of Breuer's papers to be digitized.

Explore the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive at http://breuer.syr.edu.

Nordic: The Norwegian-American Digital Catalog

In July 2010, Luther College (Decorah, Iowa), in partnership with Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, received a basic processing grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to fund a project designed to make available and accessible materials documenting the Norwegian-American experience.

The project, titled "Journeys to America," has resulted in the catalog Nordic (Norwegian-American Digital Catalog): a single searchable catalog of archival materials held at Luther College and Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum. Collectively, the two organizations have approximately 2500 feet of materials that document the history and culture of emigrants from Norway to the United States and their descendants, with additional emphasis on the origins of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, west of the Mississippi River, and the founding of Luther College, the first Norwegian-American college.

Nordic (http://nordic.luther.edu) went live in May 2012 and holds over 1,000 collections. It contains finding aids created and published with the software Archon and includes box inventories describing materials down to the folder level.

It is hoped that other Norwegian-American repositories may join the catalog in order to create a comprehensive, one-stop resource for students, genealogists, and researchers from around the world. The end result is intended to add to the breadth of scholarship in the field of Norwegian-American studies and improve scholarship in emigration studies as a whole.

Explore Nordic: The Norwegian-American Digital Catalog at: http://nordic.luther.edu

Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art, Archives of American Art

The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, was recently awarded a grant from the CLIR (Council on Library and Information Resources) Hidden Collections program for *"Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art."*

The collections targeted for this project contain large amounts of audiovisual media that document a period of contemporary American art when ephemeral and dynamic new visual art forms were emerging in studios, art communities, galleries, and art spaces across the country. The collections contain films, video and sound recordings created as a record of art, artists, exhibitions, and events; and those that are works of art in and of themselves–sound art, video art, outtakes, or elements of multimedia productions. In many instances, this archival documentation may be the only remaining evidence of the artwork.

Lack of adequate and consistent description of audiovidual media is a chronic national problem for mixed-media manuscript collections. A primary goal of the CLIR project is to develop benchmarks and guidelines for implementing an archival approach to processing and describing archival collections with audiovisual content – one that more closely aligns with workflows and practices most commonly associated with arranging and describing document-based archival collections v. item level description.

Prior to receiving the grant, AAA's AV Archivist Megan McShea processed three collections containing large amounts of audiovisual media. This pilot project tested the feasibility and effectiveness of integrating audiovisual processing and description into AAA's established workflows and standards for processing manuscript collections. The resulting finding aids are found on AAA's website: Colette Roberts Papers and Interviews with Artists; Brooklyn Museum Interviews of Artists; and Bruce Bassett Papers relating to Jacques Lipchitz

A complete list of collections targeted for processing and more information can be found on the Archives of American Art's website or contact project director Barbara Aikens (aikensb@si.edu) or AV archivist Megan McShea (mcsheam@si.edu).

Still from "Face-off," a video artwork by Robert and Ingrid Wiegand, 1979. Robert Wiegand Papers and Video Art, 1953-1994. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation

Established in 1994 to preserve the testimonies of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust, the USC Shoah Foundation maintains one of the largest video digital libraries in the world: nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages and from 56 countries. Its mission is to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry —and the suffering they cause—through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies. The Foundation has developed a thesaurus, indexing software, and public applications to facilitate use by the general public, scholars, students and educators.

Indexing is applied at two levels—bibliographic data describes the interviewee's biographical experience in brief and video indexing provides access points throughout the interview which is divided into 1 minute segments for that purpose. Each testimony offers unique insight into the recollections and perceptions of pre-genocide, genocide, and post-genocide experience as revealed by the interviewee.

Although the stories told are charged with emotion, the indexing itself strives to be neutral by focusing attention on time, places, events, people, population movements, activities, organizations, political movements, religious affiliations, culture, and social practices.

As the result of cooperative agreements with like-minded organizations, the scope of the collection will soon be expanded to include interviews from the Rwandan Tutsi Genocide (Kigali Memorial Centre) and the Armenian Genocide (Armenian Film Foundation).

For more information about the USC Shoah Foundation go to http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/.

The Visual History Archive (VHA) is a subscription application offering access to the entire collection at institutions around the world. For information about partnership sites see http://dornsife.usc.edu/vhi/testimoniesaroundtheworld/.

The Visual History Archive Online (VHA Online) at http://vhaonline.usc.edu/ is available to the general public. All data found in the VHA is searchable, but only approximately 1100 English-language testimonies can be viewed from this site at the present time.

Explore the Visual History Archive at: http://vhaonline.usc.edu/

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Technical Documentation for "Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art"

A project funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources "Hidden Collections" grant program

For more information, see also the project overview page.

PROJECT PLAN

A primary goal of this project is the development of guidelines and methodologies for processing media-rich mixed manuscript collections according to an archival approach, rather than the item-level approach to media typically taken by archives. Guidelines for taking a broader, more comprehensive approach to processing mixed collections are currently scarce and underdeveloped, possibly because existing standards and guidelines for processing archival media were developed by media-specific units for whom item-level cataloging is the norm. Manuscript repositories with mixed-media collections who wish to use standard archival approaches to processing and description have been left to develop practices for audiovisual components on their own. As a result, much audiovisual media is left hidden, misidentified and poorly described, resulting in a large media backlog in most manuscript repositories.

Archivists continue to debate the level of specificity most appropriate for describing media in EAD finding aids. Some have begun to advocate that a broader, more archival approach might better serve both researchers AND our limited resources. Recently on the EAD ListServ, a well-known notable archivist stated, "My experience does not convince me that the logistical issues are any different for collections whose contents are heterogeneous than for those with more diverse content. Is the increased emphasis on recording physical characteristics in media-rich collections essential for discovery and access?...Is that what our researchers require?" Perhaps this was a rally for a MPLP (More Product, Less Process) approach to processing and describing archival media?

AAA believes that it is important to enable the effective, complete, and accurate description of the entire collection before individual items are digitized and cataloged. Collection and series-level archival description, which provides more efficient and context-rich description, is better suited to processing this material in a manuscript repository, ensuring it does not become relegated to a special-format backlog. Once access is facilitated through EAD finding aids with consistent terminology and encoding, users can better assess their own need to access material at the item-level. Research demand will then aid in prioritization for reformatting. This approach is innovative, efficient, and supports current MPLP methodologies being developed across the country for archival collections consisting primarily of documents.

AAA will develop processing guidelines that address specific issues related to media items and media groups within mixed media collections, such as risk assessment and content sampling, while addressing the overall processing needs of the entire collection at the same time. Actual processing times will be estimated, tracked, and recorded-information currently lacking in the field. This project will also create and share guidelines for describing media-rich collections according to EAD and DACS (Describing Archives: A Content Standard) - only roughly considered in existing published standards and guidelines.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

The technical approach for each step of the project is outlined below with specific reference to media-specific processing procedures, criteria, guidelines, and benchmarks that will be developed to support the implementation of an archival approach to processing audiovisual media.

The procedures, workflows, and guidelines developed under this project will be incorporated into the Archives' general processing procedures, to be used by all processing staff at AAA, thereby increasing our capacity to sustain this work in the future. We also plan to make the guidelines, procedures, benchmarks, and tools available to other interested repositories through professional conferences and committee meetings, relevant listserv postings, and the Archives' website. A key goal of this project is to provide tools that can enable all archivists, not just media specialists, to successfully improve physical and intellectual access to archival audiovisual media in the course of processing manuscript collections, according to measurable standards.

Processing Surveys and Proposal

Each collection will be surveyed to identify extent, formats of materials, physical condition of records, any pre-existing arrangement, and possible archival series. Based on the survey, the archivist will propose a processing plan for each collection to the project manager. In addition to a proposed arrangement, the survey and plan will incorporate a specific assessment of the media in the collection, including the existing level of intellectual access to their content. Any media requiring intervention in order to be adequately described

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according to criteria developed for the description of audiovisual materials (see "description" below), will be noted along with a supporting plan; i.e. inspection, re-housing, playback, and reformatting for access.

Tools to be developed:

- Adopt and document measurable survey standards for conducting preservation risk-assessments of audiovisual media in collections based on the physical condition ratings used in the widely adopted "Mellon Survey Tool."
- Develop similar survey standards and ratings for evaluating and documenting levels of intellectual access to media records in collections and collections comprised entirely of media. Begin with the intellectual access rating used by AAA for its collections-wide survey adopted from the Mellon Survey Tool, but develop criteria that more accurately addresses access issues inherent in audiovisual media.
- Define and codify various levels of processing for media in collections that reflect AAA's defined levels of processing for traditional archival collections: 1: Accession-level; 2: Minimal-level; 3: Intermediate-level; 4: Full.
- Define and document procedures for the stabilization of media items within collections based on the level of processing approved for that collection. Such procedures may include re-housing, magnetic media and film inspections, playback of media, and reformatting for access or for preservation when necessary. Define acceptable base-lines for preservation work to be completed for media within collections. Define the criteria and planning implications of using those procedures in a processing plan.
- Define and document acceptable minimal and base-line levels of intellectual access to media within processed collections.

Arrangement, Preservation, and EAD Description

Collections will be arranged according to standard archival practices, according to the context of creation, function, and intellectual content of all records, including audiovisual media. All of the collections in this project will be processed to levels between intermediate and full. Interventions that have been identified as necessary to improve the physical and intellectual access to the audiovisual records will be implemented as specified in the processing proposal.

Collections will be described in DACS-compliant EAD finding aids. Finding aids will include all core descriptive elements for archival audiovisual media (to be determined) at the collection level, the series level, and the folder or item level. Tools and other guidelines will be made available on AAA's website via a special project page.

Tools to be developed:

- Develop and document procedures and data collection tools for visual inspection of magnetic media and motion picture film.
- Develop and document procedures for improvement of the physical condition of media objects, including re-housing and seating in archival containers.
- Develop and document DACS-compliant EAD encoding guidelines for the description of audiovisual materials in collections. Develop criteria for which core elements should be included for each of the four levels of processing described above, and create a sample encoding guide for each element.
- Document the time taken for all media-specific processing procedures, and for completing processing of media-rich collections at the varying levels of existing physical condition, physical access, and intellectual access, according to the level of processing.
- Over time these measurements will provide benchmarks for collection management of media-rich archival collections, and allow us (and other archivists) to more accurately estimate processing times for future projects.
- Explore the use of Archivist's Toolkit in the encoding of EAD finding aids. Archivist's Toolkit may be better equipped to describe items when needed, and to provide descriptive metadata for future linking to digitized audiovisual media.

Sharing Collection Information

Each finding aid will be reviewed and approved by the project manager and deployed to AAA's website and web directories for harvesting by OCLC/RLG Archives Grid and the Smithsonian's Collections Search Center. The finding aids are searchable on all of these websites to varying degrees. Collection-level MARC records will be enhanced and updated based on information in the finding aids, and these enhanced records will be contributed to the Smithsonian's SIRIS bibliographic database and OCLC's WorldCat.

Archivist's Toolkit, currently in the process of being adopted to enable a consortia or federated search vehicle for all of the Smithsonian's archival units, will likely be incorporated into our workflow during the course of the project. A shared database of SI-wide EAD finding aids will increase discoverability and access to these collections.

Each collection will be announced on our website and highlighted on the Archives of American Art Blog, with guest bloggers and graduate interns invited to highlight the research interest in the collections.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT, CONTACT:

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