



37th Annual Conference
Indianapolis, Indiana, April 16-21, 2009

Session/Meeting Name: Where Libraries and Archives Converge: Artists Files
Date, Time: April 20, 2009, 10:15-11:45am

Moderators: Jon Evans
Recorder: Elizabeth Ehrnst

Presenters: Kraig Binkowski, Yale Center for British Art
Francine Snyder, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Samantha Deutch, Frick Art Collection and Frick Art Reference Library
Sally McKay, Getty Research Institute, and Barbara Rominski, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Abstract: Artist files, which contain unique combinations of materials and ephemera such as pamphlets, correspondence, and postcards, are collected and held in many art research libraries. These files contain resources that document well established artists as well as lesser known artists who are poorly documented elsewhere. When accessible, artist files have the potential to be among the most valued and heavily used resources in art research facilities. However, the uniqueness of the material, limited cataloging staff, and lack of technical or administrative support have traditionally limited the ability for libraries to make artist files readily accessible. This session will explore several questions regarding artist files at this juncture: Does the electronic age allow artist files to play a new role in libraries and if so why are they not more accessible than ever? How are researchers using artist files? In a time when libraries are focusing their budgets on online resources produced by vendors instead of on printed resources, this session discuss three examples of institutions providing improved access to artist files found in libraries.

Session notes: Jon Evans introduced the session by acknowledging the session organizers, thanking the session sponsor, Richard Minsky, and providing an argument for reevaluating the significance of artist files as they relate to institutional missions and the goal of providing access to unique perspectives and materials in art historical scholarship.

Kraig Binkowski reviewed various definitions and concepts of artist files and suggested that they are perhaps better defined by what they represent, valuable and obscure information, rather than by physical format. The following questions were explored in detail. What are artist files? How are they used? What is their significance? Mr. Binkowski concluded with examples of recent projects and publications that highlight an increased attention on ephemeral and artist file materials and elevate their importance as primary resources.

Francine Snyder began by providing a brief history of the artist files collection at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum and explaining the institution's attempts to provided access to their offsite artist files through the use of finding aids and MARC records. Ms. Snyder detailed the process of developing an artist files digitization project and addressed issues such as defining project goals, reducing labor intensive workflows and providing access to copyrighted materials. After a live online demonstration of the project, Ms. Snyder identified some of the project hurdles, which included barriers to discovery of the digital viewer, lack of linking to OPAC, limited time and workflow adjustments. The project target

date for launch is summer 2009 and the museum will continue to release digitized materials as they are completed.

Samantha Deutch gave an overview of the development of the Archives Directory for the History of Collecting created by the Center for the History of Collecting in America at the Frick Art Reference Library. The database of dealer and collector archives includes artist files and serves to chronicle the history of collecting for use by an international audience. Through a live online demonstration she presented the directory's user interface and explored functionality such as browsing, searching, help pages, and user record contribution features. Persistent linking between the directory and contributing repository OPACs was demonstrated in an example of a thoroughly developed artist file record. Ms. Deutch concluded by stating that the keys to the success and sustainability of the directory will be through user contributions.

Sally McKay and Barbara Rominski reported on the development of the ARLIS/NA Artist Files Working Group and the creation of a web-based directory for institutional holdings of artist files. The directory database, which is in beta testing, was modeled after the L.A. as Subject Database (<http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/arc/lasubject/index.html>), a database of archival collections in the Los Angeles region that has been successful in promoting lesser known ephemeral materials. The presenters reviewed some of the bureaucratic and technical hurdles encountered in creating the database as well as their experiences using open the source software MediaWiki and TikiWiki. The web-based submission form was demoed and the directory glossary and FAQ page were presented and explained in detail. After reviewing a collection record and the record editing process, the presenters discussed beta testing progression and plans for future revisions and applications such as blogs and aesthetic changes to the interface. The directory target date for launch is June 2009.

Questions:

Q: Will ARLIS/NA Artist Files Working Group broaden scope to look at treatment of additional forms of ephemera?

Jon Evans: Ephemera may be a narrower term than artist files. Gallery and commercial files considered within artist files.

Q for Francine Snyder: Solomon R. Guggenheim artist files are now closed to additions. How would you adopt your model to institutions still adding to their artist files?

Francine Snyder: Easy to add on to the end. The system will allow you add but it is manual. Automation could be considered for future application.

Q: Is anyone capturing born digital content and how is that handled?

Jon Evans: The Artist Files Working Group is considering this issue. Referred to a pilot project coming up focusing on collecting and preserving born digital materials. Barbara Rominski brings up the issue of higher redundancy in electronic media and questions how to address it.

Q: How do photographs fit into the definition of artist files?

Barbara Rominski states that photographs are considered materials that would be found within artist files and that collections that are predominately comprised of photographic materials could also be added to the Artist Files Working Group directory.

Q: What happens to card files? Will they be transferred to digital format?

Barbara Rominski: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art does not have card file or comprehensive electronic files. This is something the Artist Files Working Group could add to documents on managing and developing collections. Audience member: Some institutions add artist level record in OPAC.

Q: Has anyone done an object analysis of the value of artist files?

Sally McKay: A survey could be posted on Artist Files Working Group directory.

Q for Samantha Deutch: When will Archives Directory for the History of Collecting go live?

Samantha: August 2009. Live in-library beta test in May.

