The Ar(t)chive: The Intersection of Artists and Archives Through Collaborations

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Jessica Rozler, Independent Scholar
An artist walks into an archive...
Archive as Cabinet of Curiosities
Art as Comment on the Archive
Art as Integral Part of the Archive

Black and white hands reaching across a pink triangle
What is an Artist-Archival Collaboration?

While artists have used archival materials as inspiration for years, today more archives are fostering relationships with artists via collaborations.

Examples of types of collaborations include (but are not limited to):

• Artist-in-residency programs
• Exhibitions
• An artist using materials from an archive for inspiration
• An artist incorporating archival materials into his/her work
• Art students using their university archives to create work for class projects
The Institutions

- The Baring Archive (London)
- Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh)
- The Glasgow School of Art (Scotland)
- Lesbian Herstory Archives (Brooklyn, NY)
- London School of Economics (LSE)
- National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh)
- The Providence Athenaeum (Providence, RI)
- The State Library of Queensland (Australia)
- The Stirling University Archives (Scotland)
- University of North Carolina Greensboro
• *A Secret History*, by Australian artist Mel Robson

• Ceramics with prints of archival materials, including a handwritten diary entries

• Exhibited as part of *Sufferance*, a collaboration with the State Library of Queensland
• **My Word Is My Bond**, by art student Brian Webb

• Created as part of a collaboration of the Baring Archive (now owned by ING) and the Graduate School of CCW

• Used a 1933 Argentinian bearer bond as inspiration

• Webb’s piece explores the evolution of graphic design through printing techniques used in the financial sector.
My Word is my Bond #1
Brian Webb
Inkjet on paper
24 x 24 cm
2010
My Word is my Bond #3
Brian Webb
Inkjet on paper
24 x 24 cm
2010
- *Words out of Place* by Catriona Taylor

- Created as part of a residency at the National Library of Scotland

- The artist used the library’s collection of maps, rare books and letters to create her work.

- Exploring “sense of place” in literary and biographical writing.

*Poetry Slate Path*
Catriona Taylor
2008
Ruin of Croft
Catriona Taylor
2008
What are the benefits and drawbacks to artist/archive collaborations?

- What concerns do archivists when planning for collaborations with artists?
- How are collaborations between artists and archives funded?
- How is working with artists different from working with scholarly patrons?
- How are issues of copyright addressed during artist and archival collaborations?
- Do these types of collaborations increase viewership/awareness of the archive?
- What types of art results from these collaborations and how is it exhibited?
- Can artists add to the dialog about what an archive means and what it represents?
Graph 1:
Access to the Archive: Case Study Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Received Additional/Grant Funding?</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Did the interaction involve archival instruction?</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Were finding aids an issue?</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was lack of browsing an issue?</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, did artists enjoy the interaction?</td>
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Graph 2:
Access to the Archive: Follow-up

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Chart 3:
Art from the Archive: Case Study Analysis

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Some of Our Findings

• Artists and scholarly patrons have different needs and have to be treated differently accordingly.

• Lack of browsing in the archive and finding aids = challenges for some artists

• Many students had never used—or even heard of—an archive before collaborating with one.

• Generally, both the archivists and artists in the case studies enjoyed collaborating.

• Artist collaborations raise the profile of archival institutions but not necessarily the viewership.
A Summary of Our Recommendations

• Archivists and librarians must be aware of the needs of artists and be prepared to spend the extra time navigating the organization of information within archive and manuscript collections.

• Archives should actively encourage artists to question their archives in such a way that both can learn from the process.

• Consider documenting the creation of the work that is created in the archive. Surprisingly few of the institutions had created websites or blogs around the projects.

• For archives at colleges and universities, consider collaborating with art professors, who can create projects that involve students using the archive and manuscript collections.

• Include a physical exhibition of the work that results from a collaboration.


Slide 6: Muller, U. (2012) *Black and white hands reaching across a pink triangle* for Herstory Inventory


Slide 10-12: All images from “The Currency of Art, A Collaboration Between the Baring Archive and The Graduate School of CCW, Bright3”, from *Journal of the Society of Archivists* (Buchanan, 2012).

Slide 13-14: Taylor, C (2008). *Poetry's Slate Path* and *Ruin of Croft*

Retrieved from [http://www.catrionataylor.co.uk/photo_3439251.html](http://www.catrionataylor.co.uk/photo_3439251.html)

Slide 20: