Introduction

Who are we?
MacEwan University offers more than 65 programs, consisting of undergraduate degrees, certificates, diplomas, and degree-transfer programming. The Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications is dedicated to the visual and performing arts, offering diploma programs in Fine Art, Design Studies, Arts and Cultural Management, Theatre Arts and Production along with the Bachelor of Communication Studies and the Bachelor of Music in Jazz and Contemporary Popular Music programs.

Why collect artists’ books in the digital age?
To bring awareness to the artist’s book genre and the importance of a book, for “the death of the book is resisted and denied at least as much as it is feared” (Pearson, 2012, p.12).

Our objectives
• To collect non-conventional books “distinguished by the fact that they are provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation, and literature all come together” (Philippot, as cited in Burkhart, 2006, p. 248).
• To have a collection that is:
  o Broad in scope, while adhering to the definition of an artist’s book.
  o Representative of history.
  o Consisting of a wide range of examples, different types of narrative, and different formats.
  o International in scope, including unlimited and limited editions.
  o To make acquisitions as quickly as possible, in the 2014 budget year.
• To purchase inexpensive items.

Literature Review
Key elements in collecting artists’ books include:
• Tying the collection to the curriculum (Kulp, 2005).
• Including a variety of formats in the collection (Wilson, 2005).
• Restricting access to the collection (Bury, 2007; Chemero, Seigel, & Wilson, 2005).
• Creating information-rich catalogue records (Farman, 2007; Kulp, 2005).
• Including artists’ books in a collection development policy (Bury, 2007; Wilson, 2002).

Methods
Two key factors allowed library staff to purchase artists’ books in a timely manner, with few restrictions:
• Internal: The budgeting process changed at MacEwan from that of program-based allocations to a consolidated, centralized collections budget. This proved to be a favourable environment for experimental collecting. Without the restrictions of program-based allocations, library staff were free to collect any items that were individually worth less than $400.

Program based allocations ➜ Consolidated centralized collections budget
• External: During the collecting period, the higher price of oil in commodity-rich Alberta put no major restrictions on the library’s budgeting process.

Site visits
Two artists’ books collections in Alberta were examined:
• Paul D. Fleck Library & Archives, The Banff Centre
• Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, University of Alberta

Collection assessment
A careful assessment of the existing collection at MacEwan University was undertaken. The following collections were surveyed, with the graph indicating the number of items found within each collection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All of these titles were reassigned to the artists’ books collection.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Library Liaison to the Fine Art and Design Studies programs: Examine reviews of artists’ books, paying close attention to reputation, location, and affiliation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemplated purchasing a variety of formats, materials, and techniques.</td>
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<td>Considered cost, aesthetic value, and craftsmanship.</td>
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<td>Supplemented with facsimiles.</td>
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Acquisitions
Purchases were made from:
• Used books vendors: AbeBooks and Amazon.ca.
• Galleries: 23 Sandy Gallery (Portland, OR) and the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, DC).

Cataloguing and processing
All titles are catalogued and searchable by the subject heading, "artists’ books." Most of the titles are not labeled, nor are they barcoded, for preservation and aesthetic purposes.

Results
There are approximately 200 titles in the collection.

Artists represented

A major focus in selecting titles was to purchase books reviewed by Johanna Drucker. These are artists’ books that represent:

- democratic multiple rare and/or artistic object code and its variations
- visual form
- verbal exploration
- book as sequence narrative and non-narrative agent of social change
- conceptual space (performance and exhibition)

There are variety in format

- Ellis, Elsi Vassalad. There goes the Neighborhood
- Matsunaga, Kyoko. The interruption
- Nettles, Bea. Working Class: Card Deck

New titles purchased from Amazon.ca
- Celmins, Vija. The stars = Al-Nujum.
- Olafur Eliassen. Olafur Eliassen: Never Too tired of looking at Each Other - Only the Mountain and I.

Promotion and use of the collection
Patrons access the books by request, appointment, or by visiting the reference/research desk.

- Information literacy sessions have taught students how to find and use the collection, e.g. in a Design Studies class. Students appreciated handling the real items.

Conclusion
Major concerns:
• Space: The cabinets and book shelves are nearly full.
• Accessibility: Some books are stored in boxes and not available for physical browsing.
• Growth: It may be possible to exchange materials with other libraries in the province.

Future work:
• Acquisitions will be made by attending book fairs and galleries. A collection policy may be written, or a section on artists’ books may be included in the main collection policy.
• Staff will seek entry into the Canadian Directory of Artists’ Books.

References