
The introduction to Margot Note’s Managing Image Collections: A Practical Guide is nearly poetic. Opening with an account of the creation of the first permanent photograph in 1826 and her experience seeing the object in person after studying its digital surrogate online, the reader is squarely placed in the arena of this book: photographs from inception to digitization. Clearly a lover of photography and its history, Note’s passion for the subject carries the reader through a broad examination of image collection custodianship from understanding photographic processes to the role of images in modern scholarship, appraisal, metadata, and foundations for digitization projects. In libraries and archives, images are everywhere, and if they’re not already the subject of digitization projects, it is just a matter of time. Practitioners or students of photography may welcome the challenges that images bring, but for librarians or archivists with backgrounds in traditional textual resources, the issues involved in managing photographs can be overwhelming.

After acquainting the reader with the evolution of photography, Note presents a crash course in digitization basics. Not a step-by-step guide, this chapter would equip a novice with the necessary vocabulary and concepts. Note often addresses the big picture, a helpful perspective in a time of digitization frenzy, asking the reader to consider the motives for these projects. Her recommendations for digitization are general enough to give this text a long shelf life; as opposed to a detailed technical overview, she tackles issues such as in-house vs. outsourcing, collaboration, documentation, and other topics with broad, timeless relevance.

Note’s strengths are in providing framework for conceptualizing collections and identifying best practices. Her insight into decontextualized photographs and collection appraisal are particularly good. She prepares the reader to approach project planning equipped to make decisions about objectives, staffing, costs, and technology.

One particular section seems superfluous, while expansion of others would be welcome. Though understanding the changing role of images in society and scholarship can be useful, extended discussion of visual literacy and postmodernism, while pleasant to read, falls outside the “practical” parameters of the book. The issue of born-digital collections, which many intuitions are generating at a rapid rate, could have used more examination. Also, discussion of metadata concepts would have benefitted from more examples of their application.

Cited and referenced works were thoughtfully chosen and artfully applied. The appendices are quite useful, especially “Digital Project Consideration” which would be an excellent guide when writing grant proposals for imaging projects. Note’s “Further Reading” list is well selected and would be a reliable resource for collection development in the area of photography.

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