



ArlisANZ

Arts Libraries Society of Australia and New Zealand

ArlisANZ Travel Scholarship: 2019	
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Society position [if any]	Treasurer: ArlisANZ New Zealand Chapter
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Art Archives in New York: A Travel Report

On March 22nd 2019, I attended a symposium on art archives in New York with the generous support of ARLIS/ANZ and my own organisation, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (AAG), where I am Librarian/ Archivist at the E H McCormick Research Library. The Symposium was organised by the Swiss non-profit organisation Hauser and Wirth, which is dedicated to art historical scholarship and the preservation and accessibility of artists' archives, and was titled *The Rapidly Changing Landscape of Archive Stewardship in Contemporary Art*.

Visits

In the days leading up to the Symposium I arranged meetings with art archivists at a number of art archive repositories to take a look at their facilities. I visited with a focus on reading rooms, internships, exhibitions, whether they hold special collections as well as institutional archives, the art as archives/ archives as art question, access (online and physical), finding aids and digitisation. I also hoped to understand the bigger picture of art archive repositories in such a large and complex city.

I held meetings with and visited the libraries/ archives of: the Assistant Archivist at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); the Associate Librarian of the major art library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met); the solo librarian and the archivist associated with a Met sub-library; the Archives Manager of New York University's special collection at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT); the Archives Manager of the Library and Archives at the Whitney Museum of Art and the Archives Manager/ Programmes Coordinator of the Asia Art Archive in America.

As much as one can generalise across institutions of varying sizes and across different sectors, the trends I observed are as follows:

- most art libraries are separated from art archive repositories within the same institution;
- art archives in institutions only hold institutional archives with the addition of a few special collections that are directly related to the museum (FIT is the exception);
- accessioning, arrangement and description of institutional archives can take a long time (e.g. MoMA's exhibition records are closed to researchers for 15 years while all information is gathered and sensitive material identified);
- curators and other Museum staff prepare their own exhibition records for archiving (with MoMA using Preservica (<https://preservica.com/>) for this);
- all report an increase in interest in archives both from researchers for consultation and subsequent reproductions, and from curators, internal and external, wanting to loan material for exhibition;
- The Museum System (TMS) (<https://www.go2cit.nl/en/products-and-services/the-museum-system/>) is the most commonly used collection management system and Archivists' Toolkit (<http://www.archiviststoolkit.org/>) or its newer iteration ArchivesSpace (<https://archivespace.org/>) are the preferred archive cataloguing systems;
- TMS is used to track the activities associated with archive items such as loans and reproductions but is not used for cataloguing;
- digitisation projects are ongoing, expensive, sometimes done in-house and sometimes funded externally;
- access to collections for researchers is limited, for example reading rooms typically made available spaces for 1-4 researchers at any one time, and all were by appointment only ranging from a 24 hour to up to three months wait time;

- online finding aids are provided (e.g. FIT's <http://fitnyc.libguides.com/sparc/findingaids>)
- microfilms are still used in some libraries;
- hard copy artist/ designer files have been discontinued or are not growing and there are no born-digital files such as we have here at AAG;
- Scala in Italy is used for reproduction requests from the art (and sometimes the institutional archive) collection;
- visitor programmes are an important part of the function of the archives, and are primarily for funding and promotional purposes;
- internships are many (at least three a year for most archives) and varied (some paid some unpaid, and usually partially organised by another department of the museum or university)

I found that archivists were, in general, not involved in curating exhibitions of their own holdings nor were they grappling with how to deal with collection works that sit between art and archives collections.

All the colleagues that I met were gracious, helpful and friendly and I am very grateful for the way they were generous with their introductions, time and knowledge. In particular I would like to acknowledge the help of Julie Lê from the Met's Costume Institute Library, whom those of you who attended the ARLIS/ANZ Canberra conference will remember.

Symposium

Attending the Hauser and Wirth symposium helped me to understand the landscape for art archives in New York. Whereas in New Zealand, with the notable exception of the Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena at the University of Otago, art archive repositories are to be found in public art museums, in the US, four 'players' are involved: academia, museums, artist foundations and independent archivists. From my observation the different sectors have their own audiences and financial models. In general, public money does not fund collections nor are the public a key target audience. In New Zealand, and at AAG as an example, the majority of funding comes from the city's rate payers and the institutional mission means that our library is open to all, 6 days a week (1-5pm) with seating for 12-13 people. Our special collections can in most cases be accessed immediately if they are on site, or by arrangement if stored offsite.

The Symposium featured panels of art archivists including Kate Haw, Director, Smithsonian Archives of American Art; Francine Snyder, Director of Archives and Scholarship, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; Marvin Taylor, Head, Special Collections and Fales Library, New York University and Timothy Young, Curator, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. It was immensely exciting to be in a room with 100-150 people all doing the same job as me when in the whole of our country there are just a handful of us.

The day was organised into four sections: *Defining the Field: What is at Stake in the Care of Artist Archives? How Archive Management Preserves and Expands Artist Legacy, Produces Knowledge, and Creates History*; *The Fine Line: Process Document or Art?*; and *Approaches to Accessibility: Assessing Capacities* (see <http://www.hauserwirthinstitute.org/programs/>). Three speakers gave roughly 20-minute presentations on the topic and this was followed by a panel debate and questions from the floor.

There were experts from all four areas mentioned above and while it is difficult to provide a summary of all that took place there were some particular take-aways for me.

- the suggestion that as archivists we could be proactive in helping young artists learn how to archive their own work;
- the idea of partnering an artist and their archive with a *local* repository in order to maintain the context for that archive as opposed to the depositing of all archives at the large city-based institutions;
- that it is acceptable for there to be a length of time before an archive is made available ('do it once, do it right');
- before anything else one should digitise one's audio-visual collection e.g. floppy discs;
- that the social history aspect of art archives can't be under-estimated e.g. there is a special collections at the Fales Library, NYU entirely devoted to the Downtown art scene that is heavily used by researchers and for display;
- it is interesting to note the difference between the foundations that do 'a deep dive' with a single artist versus the academic repositories that value speed and quick access;
- that artists would be well-advised to 'keep all' as we don't know what will be useful – though at the time that this is taken in by a repository there are arguments for and against this;
- versos, marginalia, inserts and handwriting are all revealing in their own way;
- private sector archivists are either unpaid (archiving their friends' archives) or paid (e.g. working for artists' estates) and one of the key decisions they make or recommend is which repository a particular archive is most suited to;
- that the market 'can't be the only way of determining art archiving';
- it can be challenging working with a living artist who has already 'handed over' his/ her archive as they may be constantly 'mining' it and adding to it;
- we should consider the multiplicity of values concerning art archives e.g. financial, cultural, research and aesthetic;
- the importance of all involved (artists, donors, funders, archivists) having the same understanding of what constitutes an 'archive' – visits are good for this;
- archivists may need to build their own systems for storing and preserving digital art ephemera;
- and finally, no donation is free with one speaker estimating processing (both by archivists and conservators) to average out as 16 hours per linear foot for a well-organised archive and 50 hours per linear foot for a photographic archive

Having the visits as well as attending the Symposium made for a fascinating, stimulating, thought-provoking and motivating experience. Coupled with the fact that this took place in what I now consider to be the most exciting place I've ever been, made for a once-in-a-lifetime trip that I am truly grateful for. Thank you ARLIS/ANZ I was happy to represent our countries and hope this report gives you a small taste of the art archiving scene in the Big Apple.

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