

## ***Handbook of art and design librarianship, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.***

### **Part II: Materials and collection management**

#### **Chapter 11. Art documentation: exhibition catalogues and beyond**

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##### **Introduction**

The literature of the practice, theory and history of art and design has been in constant evolution since Leon Battista Alberti wrote *De Pictura* in 1435 (and *Della Pittura* in 1436), almost contemporaneously with the invention of the printing press ca. 1440. A growing range of publications establishing new ways of documenting the work of artists (and designers) would follow this theoretical treatise: biographies, catalogues, journals, etc. This literature is still evolving, in recent years influenced by new digital tools and methods, and it is central to art and design librarianship, its resources and practice.

Art catalogues are arguably the main form of art documentation today, and a cornerstone of the bibliography of the subject. Widely published by museums, public and commercial galleries, academic and commercial publishers, among others, still primarily in print form, their history can be traced to the first collection catalogues published in the 17th century, and group and solo exhibition catalogues that appear in the 18th century.

This chapter explores the present and potential future of the art catalogue and related formats, their role in the documentation of art, and their management and use in art and design libraries. Exhibition catalogues, collection catalogues, catalogues raisonnés, sales catalogues and art ephemera are primary and secondary source materials, in published form, documenting artworks and their history, particularly their public presentation in exhibitions and museums. Original unpublished primary sources (archives), or purely visual documentation are discussed elsewhere in this handbook and not included here. Other types of literature are not covered either, like the monograph in general, the periodical, or artists' publications (the latter also examined in a dedicated chapter). For a short overview of the history of the art book, see: Holman, V. The art book. In: Ford, S. (ed.) (2001) *Information sources in art, art history and design*. Munchen: K.G. Saur. The general bibliographies of the literature of art by Arntzen and Rainwater (Arntzen, E. and Rainwater, R. (1980) *Guide to the Literature of Art History*. Chicago: ALA), and its supplement (Marmor, M. and Ross, A. (2004) *Guide to the Literature of Art History 2*. Chicago: ALA); and by Freitag (Freitag, W. (1997) *Art books: a basic bibliography of monographs on artists*. 2nd ed. New York: Garland) are dated but still useful.

Exhibition catalogues, alongside special formats like recurrent exhibition documentation (biennials, triennials, etc.), auction and sales catalogues, and scholarly collection catalogues and catalogues raisonnés, present a number of common characteristics and their management in library collections often requires specialist knowledge, as they can be challenging to acquire, demand expert cataloguing, etc. Art ephemera (invitations, posters, lists of works, press releases, etc.) are another important if underrated resource collected by libraries as a complementary source of information on exhibitions and artworks. These materials and their management, from collection development to facilitating access and use, are the focus of the following pages.

##### **1. The exhibition catalogue**

Originally lists of artists and titles of works with dates, additional content has been added to exhibition catalogues over time: images (from drawings to photographs), descriptions and analysis of the works, critical essays, chronologies, biographies of the artists, bibliographies, indexes, etc. In the 20th century, particularly from the 1950s, there is an overlap with the role of the specialist monograph, but the main purpose of the exhibition catalogue remains to record an exhibition and the artworks it presented. A wide range of catalogues is published, group and solo artists, single work and retrospectives, with different target audiences (collectors, scholars, general public), sizes, prices, etc. Often published by the institution that hosts the exhibition, it can also be published or distributed by a commercial publisher.

Modern catalogues are often described as published to 'accompany' or 'on the occasion' of an exhibition. Post-1960s experimentation with the format of the catalogue has become a recurrent theme, both in term of its content, its material qualities as a printed object and in its relation to the exhibition and its audiences. This sometimes results in its hybridisation, questioning of the binary nature of the relation between documentation and artwork (see, for instance, *The consistency of shadows: exhibition catalogs as autonomous works of art* (Chicago: SAIC, 2003), both for its content and as an object). As the art world continues to expand, and the number of public and private galleries and museums, and of exhibitions, grows ever larger, the production of catalogues has followed the same pattern, and a majority of exhibitions publish some sort of catalogue or accompanying publication.

The main art bibliographies covering catalogues, and library collection catalogues (in print) are now very dated and of historical interest only. However, the online catalogues of major art libraries and specialist collections, and union and other cooperative catalogues (like Art Discovery <http://artdiscovery.net/> or WorldCat <https://www.worldcat.org/>) are excellent sources of information on exhibition and other catalogues, both current and past publications. Listings, particularly online LibGuides dedicated to this subject, can also offer useful information (see <https://community.libguides.com/>).

### ***Collection development and management of exhibition catalogues***

Given the importance of this material, collecting exhibition catalogues at a research level is a must for many art and design libraries, but this presents a number of challenges. Before tackling practicalities, it is important that the reasons for collecting this type of material are identified, and that collecting remit and scope are defined. This information should be part of the library's collection development policy to guide acquisitions staff in their work on this area, and to better inform users and their expectations of the service. Adequate funding with a dedicated allocation within the acquisitions budget is also required. For a research collection, a level of funding similar to that dedicated to monographs or periodicals would be reasonable as a general indication.

Whether the collecting scope is comprehensive or selective (for instance, on a geographical or subject basis, according to medium, etc.), selection and acquisition are time consuming, as information is not always readily available. Coverage by bibliographic data suppliers and alert systems is limited, and other sources are partial and multiple: publisher and distributor catalogues, gallery websites, art magazines, art event listings, etc. While true comprehensive collecting of this material is practically impossible, specialisation and cooperation between libraries can improve overall availability of resources (this remains a goal, as it was when Anthony Burton wrote forty years ago: 'complete global coverage ... [or] comprehensive national collections ... [are] no yet achieved. Nor do the existing means of bibliographic control catch up'. In: Pacey, P. (ed.) (1977) *Art library manual*. London: Bowker; p.74.)

Art specialist library suppliers are able to provide a relatively large, international selection of standing orders and/or approval plans available for major galleries, museums and recurrent exhibitions, in principle the best way of acquiring material of this kind: e.g. Arts Bibliographic, UK <http://www.artsbib.com>, Worldwide, USA <http://www.worldwide-artbooks.com>, Shamansky, USA <http://www.artbooks.com>). Regular review of standing orders lists and the criteria for approval plans is important. Specialists also offer substantial lists of new and recent catalogues in stock. Due to the small print runs of most catalogues, and their limited distribution (particularly for foreign or smaller institutions), it is essential to acquire this material as it gets published. Language/country specialists (e.g. Casalini, Italy <http://www.casalini.it>), and generalist suppliers (Dawson, Erasmus, Ingram, ProQuest Books, etc.) can be used to supplement art specialists.

Another significant method of acquisition for exhibition catalogues are publication exchanges, particularly for museum or other libraries associated with a programme of contemporary art publications. This is a relatively time consuming method, but well suited to this type of material and sometimes more successful than direct acquisition. Direct purchases, finally, are the last resort method to acquire this material, either by post/online or in person (not only by library staff but by academics, curators, etc. on their behalf) and second-hand and specialist booksellers can sometimes help to fill gaps retrospectively. Use of local agents (researchers, dealers, etc. For a particularly interesting example, see: Kember, P. et al., Asia Art Archive, *Art Libraries Journal*, V. 39, no. 2, Jan. 2014, pp. 5-9), although an option to few libraries, provide a way to achieve in-depth acquisitions in areas poorly covered by library suppliers, or for rare material. Donations can also be very helpful to fill gaps in the collection, both for current and retrospective collection development.

Cataloguing exhibition catalogues is familiar territory for anyone that has experience of this type of work in an art and design library, but requires specialist training, language skills and subject knowledge. Local guidelines for cataloguing this type of material should be produced to achieve consistency in the application to these materials of the international standards (RDA/AACR2, MARC21, DDC, LCSH, etc.)

Good selection of access points and subject indexing are important elements in creating catalogue records that facilitate access and use of exhibition catalogue collections. Consistent use of MARC21 fields 100 (Main Entry - Personal Name), 110 (Main Entry - Corporate Name) and 111 (Main Entry - Meeting Name), are essential to this, including use of authority files (for instance, LC Authorities and local files), as are 600 (Subject Added Entry - Personal Name), 610 (Subject Added Entry - Corporate Name), 611 (Subject Added Entry - Meeting Name) and 650 (Subject Added Entry - Topical Term). Consistent use of notes fields (500, 504, 505, etc.) is also critical.

Due to the international and multilingual nature of this material, there are a number of language related cataloguing issues. Creating parallel, alternative, etc. title field (246) entries when appropriate for these, will improve left anchored title search retrieval. Libraries collecting Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, or other non-roman script language material, and with significant use by speakers of these languages, may consider the creation of multiscript MARC21 records to allow direct search and retrieval in the original script.

There are a number of excellent sources of information on cataloguing this material. The ARLIS/UK & Ireland Cataloguing and Classification Committee published a revised edition in 2013 of their *Art exhibition documentation in libraries: cataloguing guidelines*. ARLIS/NA has made available online *Cataloging Exhibition Publications: Best Practices*, a series of four pdf documents providing guidance and detailed examples (*Title & Statement of Responsibility*; *Name & Title Access Points*; *Notes*; and *Subjects*). Available at: <https://www.arlisna.org/publications/arlis-na-research-reports/147-cataloging-exhibition-publications-best-practices>). RDA implementation has been covered by guidance published

by the British Library (Special topics in RDA: Exhibition and art catalogues: <https://www.bl.uk/bibliographic/pdfs/rda-exhibitions-and-art-catalogues-201412.pdf>) and the Library of Congress (RDA Refresher Training at LC: Special Topics 'Art catalogs': [www.loc.gov/aba/rda/sourcarte/special\\_topics\\_art\\_catalogs.ppt](http://www.loc.gov/aba/rda/sourcarte/special_topics_art_catalogs.ppt) and RDA Refresher Training at LC: Special Topics 'Art catalogs flowchart': [www.loc.gov/aba/rda/source/special\\_topics\\_art\\_catalogs\\_flowchart.doc](http://www.loc.gov/aba/rda/source/special_topics_art_catalogs_flowchart.doc)).

Preservation issues are also a consideration in the lifecycle of these materials. More substantial catalogues are often treated like standard books and kept on open shelves, although in many cases for reference use only. Occasionally rare or fragile material (e.g. small scale catalogues, experimental formats) are kept in pamphlet boxes or other protective housing, or in closed access, sometimes as part of special collections (regular reviews of the collections and transfer of individual items as required are advisable). Often this material becomes rare or irreplaceable over time, sometimes fairly quickly, while at the same time may be in high demand. As with other library materials, balancing preservation needs to allow long term access with current demand and accessibility must be carefully considered. Protecting their original material qualities when possible, avoiding non-reversible interventions like (re-)binding, covering, etc. should be another consideration, to allow users a fuller understanding of the print object, its use in exhibitions, etc., particularly in cases where the artist has been involved in its creation (see, Grandal Montero, G., Hirata Tanaka, A. and Foden-Lenahan, E. (2013) Defending the aesthetic: the conservation of an artist's book. *Art Libraries Journal*, 38 (1). pp. 32-37.)

### ***Biennial, triennial and other recurrent exhibitions***

There are currently more than a hundred biennial and other recurrent exhibitions of contemporary art. Exhibition catalogues are the main source of information for these important events, and the most authoritative. Venice Biennale, for instance, has published print catalogues for all its editions since 1895, but this is not always the case for smaller ones or those with limited resources. Online sources in the form of websites are universal, often including podcasts and videocasts, and digital versions (usually pdf files) of catalogues, programmes, press releases, etc. As with other digital resources, long term access is problematic, with content for previous editions often not being maintained after the event.

Collecting biennial related material at a research level presents a number of challenges, as library suppliers are only able to provide a relatively limited coverage via standing orders and/or approval plans. In some cases, acquiring print documentation is only possible via direct visits.

Both 'biennial' and 'biennale' (an Italian word, but widely used in English to refer to biennial exhibitions) should be used in catalogue records to maximise keyword retrieval. For the same reason, use of anglicised as well as vernacular forms of the name of the biennial, individual edition title (or subtitle, parallel title, alternative title, etc.) and location name is recommended in all cases, using notes fields when necessary.

For an overview of this material in a library context see: Grandal Montero, G. (2012) Biennialization? What biennialization?: the documentation of biennials and other recurrent exhibitions. *Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 37 no. 1, pp. 13-23.

Other types of recurrent exhibitions that often produce catalogues are annual exhibitions (including those related to art prizes) and art fair catalogues.

## **2. Specialist formats: collection catalogues and catalogues raisonnés; sales and auction catalogues**

These catalogues present marked differences with the exhibition catalogue and also between themselves. The oldest type of catalogue, collection catalogues have been produced since the 17th century and are still published today, although they have become relatively rare over the last three decades, superseded in part by online collection databases. They belong to a scholarly research tradition, as the catalogue raisonné, and are related to museums and the role of the curator, providing technical information, history and exhibition details, bibliographic references, etc. for the artworks in a collection. Some collection catalogues cover the entire holdings of an institution (often in multi-volume sets, including appendices, etc.), others are dedicated to specific subsets or groupings of works by type, period, etc.

### ***Catalogues raisonnés***

A standard art reference publication, providing a systematic list of the totality of an artist's work, or that in a given medium or period, the catalogue raisonné traces its origins to the 18th century. Essential as a scholarly tool for academic researchers, it is also a source of authoritative provenance and authentication information for dealers and collectors, with an apparatus that includes titles, technical details (medium, size, etc.), dates, history (including provenance and current ownership information), exhibition details, bibliography and images. *The Art catalogue index (A.C.I.): catalogues raisonnés & critical catalogues of artists 1780-2008*, compiled by Noelle Corboz and Cécile de Pebeyre under the direction of Marc Blondeau and Thierry Meaudre (Geneva: Blondeau Fine Art Services, 2009) lists ca. 1,500 catalogues raisonnés of some 900 artists born between 1780 and the late 20th century.

Online catalogues raisonnés are a fast growing publishing model, with numerous projects currently completed or in progress, and it is possible that they will overtake print ones in the future. However, in this transitional environment, where traditional scholarship methods developed by and for a print culture need to be adapted to respond to the challenges of digital media, alongside new benefits and possibilities they also raise a number of concerns, from preservation, versioning and historiographic record issues to image quality or legal ones (copyright, licensing, etc.). *The Art Libraries Journal* has dedicated a special issue to survey this topic (V.40 no.2 Special Issue: Catalogues raisonnés, collection catalogues and the future of artwork documentation, April 2015), in collaboration with the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (<http://www.catalogueraisonne.org>).

### ***Sales catalogues***

Sales catalogues can be found as far back as the beginning of the 17th century, and comprise art dealers' catalogues, public sales catalogues and auction house catalogues. A critical tool for those researching art markets, collections and collecting, and the history and provenance of artworks, they describe each of the items for sale, often in detail (including technical information, provenance, condition, etc.). Sales catalogues in print can be purchased individually or by subscription (to all or specific series published by each auction house). In recent years these are also available as pdf files or in other digital formats on the website of all major houses (Sotheby's, Christie's, Bonhams, Phillips, etc.), free of charge. The commercial database *Art Sales Catalogues Online (1600-1900)*, based on Fritz Lugt's *Répertoire des Catalogues de Ventes Publiques*, includes digital facsimiles of ca. 24,000 historical sales catalogues.

Due to the very large volume (thousands) of catalogues published, their cost, and the range of objects, subjects, periods, etc. covered, only some libraries develop systematic collections of this material. A clear scope and inclusion in the collection development policy is important in those cases. Traditionally only catalogued at series level, and sometimes not at all (relying instead on handlists of holdings, or simply on collocation as a discrete reference collection), individual item records have become more common in recent years, and these are recommended for large or specialist collections.

### **3. Other forms of printed documentation: ephemera**

Art ephemera (sometimes referred to as artist files, vertical files, information files, etc.) consist of small scale printed material related to artists and their work, made for specific, limited uses (usually to announce an event – e.g. an exhibition, and intended to be discarded afterwards), freely or inexpensively distributed. A wide range of formats and types of document can be considered as such: invitation cards, press releases, artists' statements, CVs, listings, programmes, maps and plans, flyers, stickers, leaflets, posters, etc. Ephemera collections may sometimes also include newspaper and magazine clippings, small catalogues, pamphlets and other less ephemeral publications. In addition to artists and other individuals (curators, collectors, etc.), they relate to artworks, events (exhibitions, prizes, fairs, etc.) and institutions (galleries, foundations, public agencies, etc.) Art publisher catalogues, art distributor catalogues, publication catalogues from galleries and museums and art book fair catalogues are a specific type of material that can sometimes be also included in ephemera collections (historical sets of these are likely to be rare and of research value).

Collected as primary sources of information (images and historical data), in many cases the sole existing ones for lesser known individuals or institutions, they are also valuable as artefacts, for their material qualities, and often used as such in exhibitions. They share some characteristics with archival materials, but ephemera are not unique in principle (they can be individually addressed). Artists' ephemera, created by an artist, form a special category often considered part of an artistic practice, as distributed artworks.

Traditionally received by post, sometimes collected locally by staff and others, production and distribution have been declining for some time, replaced by online digital alternatives (email, website, etc.) Often relatively difficult to discover and access, normally arranged in personal or institutional files, but not catalogued at individual item level (for practical reasons), art ephemera have relied on collection level descriptions, finding aids, listings, spreadsheets, etc., and, at best, file level catalogue records, created by using generic templates. The ARLIS/NA project *Artist Files Revealed* provides cataloguing guidelines ([https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/artist\\_files\\_revealed.pdf](https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/artist_files_revealed.pdf)) and compiled an online directory of collection-level descriptions for a range of institutions.

Digitisation has been seen for some time as the ideal way forward in providing access to these collections, not least with the prospect of OCR allowing full text search and thus partially compensating for the lack of individual item catalogue records. The twin obstacles of lack of resources and copyright restrictions have combined to thwart this development, but recent projects, based around in-house digitisation and enlightened fair use and 'take down' policies, show future potential. For an overview of recent projects involving art ephemera see the *Art Libraries Journal*, V.41 no.2 Special Issue: Art Ephemera (April 2016).

### **4. Websites and other digital-born material; digitisation**

It is almost universal today for exhibitions to have some online presence, typically a webpage or website, but the range of forms of digital-born documentation related to exhibitions and collections is enormous, from digital publications and databases to emails and RSS feeds. Sometimes this online content complements that in the printed publication, or it may be the only documentation available. Giving access and preserving for long term use this ever growing amount of digital materials has been one of the most pressing issues for art and design libraries over the past two decades.

National libraries (British Library, Library of Congress, etc.) have been active collecting websites for some time, working under the umbrella of the International Internet Preservation Consortium (IIPC). There has been also engagement from research and specialist libraries, bringing both diversity and expertise to the effort, particularly through collaborative projects. An example of this is NYARC (New York Art Resources Consortium) and its web archiving programme, which includes online auction house catalogues among many other materials (see their web archiving FAQs: <http://www.nyarc.org/content/faq-web-archiving>). The sheer size of potentially relevant material, however, added to the very fast pace of technological change, copyright-related restrictions, and also differences in institutional priorities or availability of technical and other resources, have contributed to a lack of widespread progress.

A range of important projects emerging in the last few years are attempting to rethink, and in some cases, re-invent, the documentation of art and artworks for a digital environment. In addition to the examples mentioned in the previous sections, the Getty Foundation's Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative (OSCI), launched in 2009 to create new models for the publication of museum collection catalogues in the online environment, is of note: eight museums participating in the grant programme have published pioneering online catalogues (reports on the project are available: <http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/osci/>).

### ***Digitisation***

Over the last decades an ever larger number of digitisation projects have been carried out by individual institutions (academic libraries, museums, etc.) or as part of collaborative projects. Much of this material is now available online to all, including important historical catalogues (for example, the Royal Academy of Arts Winter Exhibition catalogues, the Ashmolean collection catalogues, complete collections of the exhibition catalogues published by museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Guggenheim, etc.). The Getty Research Portal provides free online access to an extensive collection of more than 100,000 digitized art history texts from a range of institutions, including many art catalogues (see <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/portal/index.html> for more information on the portal). Digital collections and digitisation are discussed more fully in chapters 7 and 8 of this handbook.

As art documentation is continuously re-assessed in light of digital media developments and the online information environment, changes and transformations are taking place albeit less fundamental and at a slower pace than in other subject areas. Art catalogues can be seen as a case study in the singularity of art and design librarianship, and particularly, the importance of printed publications as key resources in the field for the foreseeable future: as we have seen, exhibition catalogues are still produced predominantly in print, as are many catalogues raisonnés and sale catalogues, and some collection catalogues. Printed art ephemera are also widely produced and circulated. However, change does take place: online catalogues raisonnés are addressing the challenges of transferring the scholarly

methods developed by a print culture to a digital one, and are a growing trend in art publishing, as are online collection catalogues. A huge and growing range of digital-born material is being produced to document and disseminate information about artworks and exhibitions, and much historical print content is in the process of being digitised, creating large online collections of digital facsimiles. This is a complex and rich environment where a mix of print and online resources seems likely to stay with us for much longer than may have been anticipated, in contrast with other subject areas and standard information management practices.