

## Project Identification

**Student:** Moriah Amit

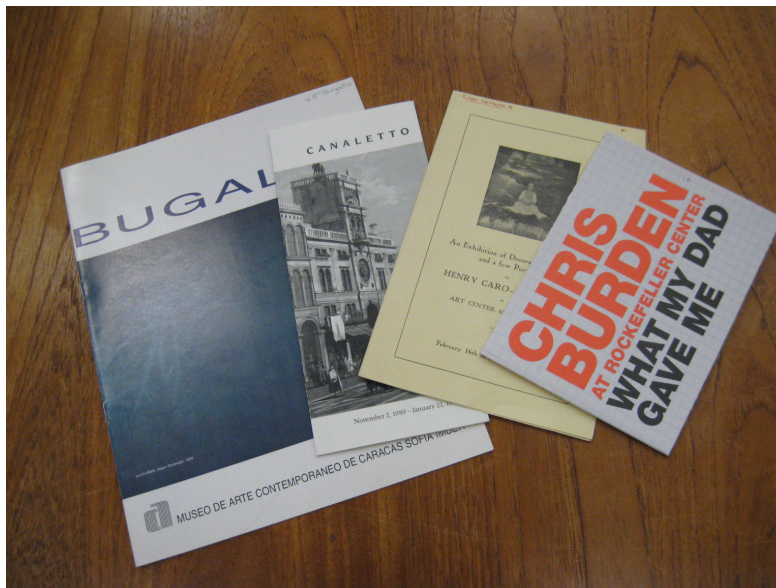
**Course:** LIS 698 Practicum

**Instructor:** Dr. Tula Giannini

**Site Location:** The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Thomas J. Watson Library & Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library

**Site Supervisor:** Holly Phillips, Assistant Manager for Acquisitions

**Project Title:** The Management of Artist Files in Art Libraries



### Project Abstract:

Artist files have always been an integral part of art library collections, housing the miscellaneous ephemera that defy integration into traditional cataloging and storage schemes. Yet, for their entire existence, they have been accorded the lowest priority among library collections and, consequently, have been largely neglected by library staff and unknown to researchers. Recently, art libraries, including those in the Metropolitan Museum, have begun to take measures to make their artist files more manageable and discoverable. However, the future of artist files is tenuous at best, as the art library community has yet to conform to a common set of standards for handling them and is reluctant to make a strong case for their protection in the face of administrative pressure to downsize, continually low usage levels, and competition posed by the growth of electronic resources and arts publishing.

## Literature Review

Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), Artist Files Working Group. (2009). *Artist files revealed: Documentation and access*. Retrieved July 24, 2010, from [http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/artist\\_files\\_revealed.pdf](http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/artist_files_revealed.pdf)

This online publication is the long-anticipated professional cataloging handbook for artist files. It establishes a broad definition of artist files, provides instructions for creating local OPAC-ready MARC records, and strongly encourages cultural institutions to publicize and describe their artist file collections in ARLIS/NA's other landmark contribution to this area, the Artist Files Online Directory. Recognizing that institutions face widely varying user needs, technological capabilities, and staffing levels, the Artist Files Working Group devised two MARC templates for artist files, a minimal one that contains the essential elements and an expanded one that allows for more detailed description. This publication thoroughly defines each prescribed field and helpfully includes a sample record for each template containing concrete examples of how to populate the fields.

Boese, K.C. (2006). Art ephemera: Relics of the past, or treasures for posterity? *Art Documentation: Bulletin of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 25 (1): 34-37.

This article is unique in that it provides a snapshot of contemporary practices in artist file management by comparing the ways in which several different art libraries collect, organize, store, and catalog their collections, a model for my project research. In addition, Boese offers many logical and feasible recommendations regarding art ephemera access, collection

development, and preservation. One exception is Boese's advisement against creating MARC records for artist files directly in a local OPAC due to variations in the quality of work of the volunteers who tend to be delegated this task. Instead, Boese proposes the development of a sparse provisional spreadsheet that could be displayed as a list on the library's website and then gradually converted into MARC records by experienced staff. A library that adopted such a strategy would likely never complete the conversion, as libraries are perpetually understaffed.

Cooke, J. (2006). Finding lost relations: Identifying our ephemera files. *Art Libraries Journal*, 31 (4): 33-41.

Cooke makes a strong case for the value of art ephemera as a unique resource for understanding the history and practice of modern art and the imperative to make these materials more readily accessible for research and curation. Interestingly, she offers two relatively simple steps to make artist files more visible and discoverable. The first and most obvious is to incorporate these materials into library catalogs at the file-level, with the main entry listed as the name of the artist or institution followed by a generic genre term, such as "Artists' file, Pamphlet file, or Ephemera file." The second is to create a comprehensive online directory of artist files by institution, based on the then nascent ARLIS/NA's Artist Files Revealed: Online Directory, and/or a biographical index on artists that included links to artist files holdings, like the Women Artists' Archives National Directory, but on a universal scale. Since this article was published, much progress has been made on both fronts, but many institutions,

including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, still have significant art ephemera collections that remain uncataloged and, therefore, unknown.

Lambert, J. A. (2008). Immortalizing the mayfly: Permanent ephemera: An illusion or a (virtual) reality? *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 9 (1): 142-155.

One of the major assertions of this article is that libraries should create or retain specialized in-house cataloging standards for ephemera, rather than adopting pre-existing bibliographic standards, like MARC, or uniting to develop an international set of standards for ephemera. Lambert acknowledges that creating such silo catalogs will hinder cross-searchability both within an individual library's OPAC and across institutions, but suggests that it is both impractical and undesirable to do otherwise. While I disagree, Lambert raises important questions about the constraints of applying MARC to non-book materials and astutely points out that libraries should come to a consensus on the thesauri and minimum fields required to catalog ephemera.

Obradovic, K. (2008). Souping up the engine: Making the most of the catalogue at The University of Auckland Library. *The Electronic Library*, 26 (5): 619-629.

Seeking to offer a more relevant and robust, but still user-friendly, alternative to Google and Amazon.com, The University of Auckland Library system embarked on a mission to improve and expand its Voyager OPAC. Part of the project documented by this article was the addition of previously uncataloged collections, including the Fine Arts Library's artists' and galleries'

files, to Voyager. There were two stated goals for this initiative: to make these resources as easy to find as books and to allow the library to keep track of their circulation for security and statistical purposes. The article takes you through the library's cataloging process step-by-step, even providing a sample MARC record, so that it can easily be duplicated by other libraries seeking to catalog their artist files. Obradovic shows how much of the cataloging can be automated by converting existing artist and gallery lists into MARC records and creating a standardized MARC template for artist files that populates most of the required fields. Most importantly, Obradovic provides a timeline for the entire process, illustrating how quickly it can be achieved, and a chart of artist files usage per year, demonstrating the exponential increase in their usage following their incorporation into the library's OPAC.

Yamada, L. (2006). What should I do with paper ephemera? Looking after ephemera in a library. *Art Libraries Journal*, 31(4): 14-20.

Yamada provides practical advice for the housing, storage, handling and preservation of paper ephemera collections. These collections are especially challenging to manage because their contents come in a variety of sizes and formats, are often printed on cheap, highly acidic paper (e.g. newspaper clippings), and are already significantly deteriorated and/or damaged due to decades of improper storage and handling. Most, if not all, of Yamada's tips will be familiar to those who have studied paper preservation in library or archival contexts. Nevertheless, this article is useful in dealing with artist files because it guides one through all of the unusual scenarios that tend to crop up frequently in

these collections, such as the storage of oversized unbound items. Surprisingly, Yamada recommends storing ephemeral items of office paper size or less in hanging files in filing cabinets, a common practice for artist files since their origins. However, she does add preservation-minded caveats, cautioning against overfilling folders and advising that we house fragile and damaged items in individual archival envelopes or polyester sleeves.

### **Nature of the Work**

I contributed to the completion of artist files projects in the Metropolitan Museum's Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library and Thomas J. Watson Library. Both projects shared two chief objectives: to free up space in the department's file cabinets for higher priority files and to improve access to important non-ephemeral materials that have until now been hidden in the artist files. Correspondingly, both projects were comprised of two parts: weeding and online catalog searching.

In the Photography Library's weeding phase, I sorted through each folder and removed the following items: duplicate ephemera (such as multiple copies of an announcement) and booklet-like items (such as exhibition catalogs and whole periodicals). Concurrently, I maintained a list of all bulky gallery or dealer-issued items, such as artist's promotional packets and CDs/DVDs. Ultimately, the duplicate materials will be transferred to Watson, sold, or exchanged. The bulky items will remain in the folders for future review and disposition by a curator. The booklet-like items will move on to the second phase of the project. In the

searching phase, I searched for each booklet-like item in Watsonline, the Metropolitan Museum's union library catalog, and noted whether it was already held in the Photography Library, the Watson Library, the museum's offsite storage facility, or another library in the museum. I also noted any unusual findings in the search (e.g. a given copy is missing). This search will help the Photography Library's associate librarian make her decisions about which catalogs and periodicals the Photography Library will retain and catalog, and, thus, make findable in Watsonline.

I followed a slightly different process in the Watson Library project. For instance, when I sorted through the folders, I only pulled booklet-like items (in particular, gallery/exhibition catalogs), so that they could ultimately be cataloged and made discoverable on Watsonline. Additionally, I used OCLC's First Search rather than Watsonline to search for the pulled items. This allowed me to not only see whether a given item had already been cataloged by Watson Library (i.e. was a duplicate), but also whether the item had been cataloged by any institution. Then, I sorted the catalogs into three piles: already held in Watson (to be discarded), cataloged by another institution (to be copy cataloged), not found (to be originally cataloged). Thus, I was able to perform an additional step in preparing the non-duplicates to be cataloged.

## **Digital Component**

Although the Metropolitan Museum's website hosts 3 digital collections with a running total of 486 titles available in full-text, nearly 100 online databases, and an artworks database (200,000 objects and counting) that is steadily growing toward encompassing the entirety of the museum's permanent collections, my practicum did not touch upon the development or maintenance of these digital resources. In fact, my projects dealt exclusively with print resources. However, since almost every aspect of my treatment of these print resources was mediated in the electronic realm, whether on the web, in the OPAC, or in Millennium (the museum's internal library database), in some sense, I maintained a constant foothold in the digital world. My artist file work involved identifying and preparing currently off-the-grid items for cataloging, so that they could gain a digital presence or marker in the form of OPAC and WorldCat records. This was an especially gratifying part of my practicum, as it seems we are heading toward a common perception (in the West at least) that things do not exist, or at least do not matter, unless they can be located online. Of course, as more materials are digitized, we run a similar risk of privileging those items and simultaneously rendering undigitized materials invisible, strictly as a result of the disparity in ease of access. Perhaps, art libraries should first strive to make all of their holdings discoverable, before they take on the infinitely more daunting and problematic task of digitizing their collections.

## **Sampling of Project Research**

### **Interview of Librarian in the Metropolitan Museum's Watson Library**

**Q: Over what period did Watson collect material for the artist files?**

A: From at least 1930 (possibly earlier) until June 2009.

**Q: Why did Watson decide to stop collecting material for the artist files?**

A: Multiple reasons: The artist files were underutilized; researchers who consulted artist files often found them not useful or that expected items were missing; due to the explosion of arts publishing and electronic resources, the information is often duplicated elsewhere in the museum's collections; did not seem to justify allocation of additional funds, space, and staff time in economic downturn.

**Q: How were materials acquired for artist files?**

A: The museum used to subscribe to a clipping service; other materials were randomly acquired by volunteers.

**Q: What formats were collected?**

A: only paper; no audiovisual media or born-digital items.

**Q: What is the collection's scope?**

A: Ephemeral materials on individual artists (not limited by genre, time, or geography, but excluding well-known artists due to wealth of other resources available on them); used to maintain subject and institutional files of similar nature, but these were entirely removed (either donated or discarded) 5-7 years ago for some of the same reasons that Watson stopped adding to artist files. In

addition, subject files were too random and general in nature to be of much scholarly value.

**Q: How is the collection weeded?**

A: Weeding has never been done systematically across the collection. Librarians have occasionally weeded selected files, such as those of well-known artists.

**Q: How are the artist files organized?**

A: Alphabetically, in individual artist and group folders.

**Q: How many items warrant the creation of an individual artist folder?**

A: A substantial amount, approximately more than 8.

**Q: What kinds of access tools are available?**

A: The artist files are searchable by artist name in the library's OPAC, Watsonline.

**Q: When, by whom, and how were the catalog records created?**

A: Watson Library's catalogers converted the existing card catalog files into electronic bibliographic records using a local template in 2004.

**Q: Are these catalog records discoverable in online union catalogs?**

A: They were migrated into WorldCat in 2007; the interviewee intends to look into placing the Metropolitan Museum on ARLIS/NA's Online Directory of Artist Files.

**Q: What is the purpose of the recently initiated (May 2010) intern project of pulling exhibition/gallery catalogs from the artist files and determining whether they have been cataloged by Watson or any other institution?**

A: Eventually, these catalogs will face one of three possible fates. If they have been cataloged by Watson, then they are duplicates of an existing holding and

will be discarded. If they are cataloged by another institution, they will be copy cataloged and placed in Watson's stacks. If they have never been cataloged, they will be originally cataloged and placed in Watson's stacks. Watson's past practice was to classify any item less than 30 pages long as ephemera and to place it in the artist files. The interviewee and others realized that there are many items less than 30 pages long, especially exhibition/gallery catalogs, which are really more substantial and potentially more valuable resources than traditional ephemera. Thus, the primary goal of this project is to catalog these items so that they will be more easily discoverable. The secondary goal is to reduce the amount of space that the artist files occupy.

**Q: How are exhibition/gallery catalogs to be distinguished from other artist ephemera?**

A: The item should have an institutional identity, contain a significant amount of text and/or images, and be printed on more than a single sheet of paper (unless in a folded brochure-style format). The presence of a checklist is a definite signifier of a catalog.

**Q: How are fragile items stored?**

A: They are bound.

**Q: Has Watson undertaken any re-housing or reformatting initiatives in the artist files?**

A: Over the last 10-20 years, volunteers have periodically been charged with splitting the contents of overfilled folders into multiple new folders and photocopying periodical clippings, but they never completed the entire collection.

**Q: Are there any future plans to re-house, reformat, or digitize items?**

A: The pulled exhibition/gallery catalogs will either be bound or placed in archival envelopes and shelved in Watson's stacks. There are no reformatting or digitization plans for the artist files.

**Q: Who uses the artist files and how often are they used?**

A: Historically, they have been almost exclusively used by the museum's curators and are among the most rarely used items in the library. Since they were cataloged, a greater proportion of their users are from the public. The frequency of their usage had increased slightly immediately after they were cataloged, but it always remained at a low level and has since begun to decline. Artist files were officially requested from Watson's circulation desk 86 times in 2007/2008, 72 times in 2008/2009, and 68 times in 2009/2010. These numbers do not account for ad-hoc requests, so the total is likely slightly higher. Artist file circulation statistics were not kept prior to 2007/2008.

**Q: What are the library's borrowing, retrieval, handling, and reproduction policies concerning artist files?**

A: Artist files are non-circulating, must be retrieved by library staff in reasonable quantities (~ 3 at a time and no more than 10 in a day), must be viewed at the table opposite the reference desk for security reasons, and have no special reproduction policies.

## **Analysis & Evaluation**

### **Research Methods**

In order to compare practices across the Metropolitan Museum, I interviewed a professional librarian in each of three of its libraries with substantial artist file collections: The Thomas J. Watson Library (Watson), The Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library (Photography), and the Robert Goldwater Library (Goldwater). To provide an external perspective, I interviewed a professional librarian at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). During all four interviews, I asked an identical set of questions and took brief notes on the responses (for an approximate recreation of one interview, see "Sample of Research" section). In two instances, I asked a few follow-up questions for clarification in person and via e-mail. In addition, I made sure to note my personal observations of the contents, arrangement, and storage conditions of each collection and to document these aspects photographically. Likewise, I incorporated my first-hand knowledge of the maintenance and cataloging endeavors currently taking place in Photography and Watson. Finally, I conducted a series of sample searches in Watsonline, Dadabase (MOMA's OPAC), and OCLC's WorldCat in order to test how easy it is to find each library's artist files and to compare the levels of description used in each library's catalog records.

### **What are artist files?**

Artist files (also commonly referred to as "vertical files" or "art ephemera") are collections of mostly small, ephemeral, and unbound items pertaining to

individual artists, artist groups, art institutions, and/or broad visual art subjects. They are the kinds of materials that are difficult to catalog and shelve, the odds and ends or miscellany of the art library world. Artist files encompass many types of published and unpublished materials, most commonly including exhibition announcements, invitations, press releases, institutional publications, clippings and whole serials, commercial gallery/exhibition catalogs, art reproductions, resumes/artist biographies, artist statements, correspondence, and original manuscripts. Although largely consisting of paper, artist files may also contain small quantities of photographic negatives and prints, slides, audiovisual media, and digital files. Most art libraries maintain artist files in some shape or form, but they vary widely in the ways they collect, organize, catalog, preserve, and provide access to these collections.

### **Who uses artist files?**

As with other museum library materials, artist files are predominantly used by a museum's curators. In departmental libraries, the files tend to be used almost exclusively by curators within the department. Once artist files are placed in a library's online catalog, they have seen an increase in usage by employees outside of the department, including curators from other departments and museum educators, and by people outside of the museum, especially graduate students and professionals from local museums, galleries, and auction houses. Nevertheless, curators remain the primary users of artist files in all the libraries I examined.

## **Functions and Significance**

Artist files offer a fascinating and potentially fruitful avenue for researching the history of art production, curation, and criticism. They contain many unique and rare primary and secondary sources and no two collections are identical. Artist files are especially vital for researching the careers of more recent, local, and lesser known artists, as well as the early careers of well-known contemporary ones, for which there may be little to no documentation in standard art resources, like monographs and periodicals. According to ARLIS/NA's Artist Files Working Group, "researchers rely on artist files to establish chronologies, flesh out exhibition histories, review stylistic developments, and assess the critical reception of artists over time" (2009, p. 2). In addition, materials from artist files are frequently used in museum exhibitions, both as sources of background information and as items for display, as attested by the librarians in Photography and MOMA. When featured in exhibitions, they set artworks in a historical context and provide vivid snapshots of crucial events in an artist's career.

## **Collection Development**

In most art libraries, artist file materials have been collected continuously since the founding of the library. Artist file materials are typically not actively sought, but rather accumulate passively and haphazardly through informal donation. Due to their high profiles, major art museums, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, have always been and continue

to be magnets for large quantities of ephemeral materials sent from museums, galleries, auction houses, and artists throughout the country and around the world. Thus, in this case, collection development can be characterized almost exclusively as the selection of items from incoming mail and the weeding of files.

The only exception to the passive practice of collecting artist files was once periodical clippings, which had either been derived from a subscription-based clipping service (Watson) or from volunteers' sporadic and idiosyncratic efforts to comb through popular serials for art-related articles. The emergence of vast electronic full-text periodical databases in the last 10-15 years, however, has rendered clipping files an antiquated and largely redundant medium for accessing articles. All of the librarians I interviewed said that they no longer add clippings to the artist files, although only one (from Goldwater) has actually weeded clippings. Personally, I do not see the value in keeping clippings, except from obscure publications, as electronic database searches achieve a similar collocation of articles by name/subject.

Although artist files tend to be quite similar in content, the libraries I examined did differ in their selection criteria, justly necessitated by differences in their overall missions. For instance, Photography and MOMA are the only ones to include audiovisual and photographic media, such as DVDs and slides, in their artist files. In terms of scope, MOMA is the only one that maintains three separate sets of artist files: individual artist files, artist pairs/group files, and subject files on art institutions and topics. Watson used to maintain sets of institutional and topical files, but these were discarded about 5-7 years. In

Goldwater, folders on artists, institutions, and, occasionally, individual exhibitions or publications are intermixed. Departmental libraries, like Goldwater and Photography, tend to focus their artist files on artists represented in their department's curatorial collections, while institutional libraries, like Watson and MOMA, do not apply these restrictions.

Although weeding artist files is an especially long and tedious process, it should be considered an integral part of their maintenance. In some libraries, like MOMA and Watson, these collections have been weeded sporadically over decades in an unsystematic fashion. It is precisely this kind of neglect that has caused artist files to explode into large, unwieldy collections that are subsequently singled out for taking up too much space and lacking utility. In others, like Goldwater and Photography, weeding was put off for as long as possible, but at least it has finally been undertaken recently as a time-limited comprehensive endeavor. Rightly, the common targets of both libraries' weeding strategies are duplicates and out of scope items. Watson is unique in that it has purged its files of most well-known artists, based on the sound reasoning that these artists are well-documented in a myriad of other sources; a similar policy does not make as much sense for the other libraries. Photography has taken the additional measure of reconsidering the value of the bulky items it has stored in its artist files, most of which will likely be discarded. Watson and MOMA, which are facing even more dire space crunches, should strongly consider emulating that move.

## **Description**

Artist files are often referred to as the "hidden treasures" of art libraries because they have traditionally received little to no cataloging. For decades, knowledgeable reference librarians were the key to learning of their existence; beyond that, patrons had to consult the files themselves to find out whether the library had ephemeral materials on a given artist. The exceptions were a few major museum libraries, like MOMA and Watson, which had incorporated artist file records into their card catalogs from the beginning. Nevertheless, even those frontrunners were not consistent in converting their artist file card catalog entries into OPAC records with the rest of their collections in the late 1970's and early 1980's; MOMA was one of those pioneers, but Watson did not follow suit until 2004, more than two decades later.

Within the past decade, the art library community came to a consensus that artist files would continue to languish in obscurity unless individual libraries made the contents of their holdings discoverable online. Thus, over the past several years, we have witnessed art libraries of all sizes add at least minimal collection-level records to their OPAC on each artist, institution, and topic represented in their files. Although this is a fairly standard practice now, there are still many smaller libraries that lack the resources and administrative will to take on such a labor-intensive project, such as Photography (although it plans to do so in the near future). We have also recently seen a substantial push to migrate OPAC records into larger union catalogs, especially OCLC's WorldCat (e.g. Watson did so in 2007), so that they can achieve a wider visibility. ARLIS/NA's

Artist Files Online Directory is a commendable effort to centralize artist file information across institutions. Unfortunately, it does not appear to have gained widespread traction in the art library community yet, as there only 24 participating institutions worldwide thus far, not including such major institutions as the Metropolitan Museum or MOMA.

In an ideal world, all art libraries would be able to catalog their artist files as thoroughly as they catalog most other materials. Instead, the vast majority of libraries create MARC records from a simple local template based on the minimal core standards for collection-level records established by the Library of Congress BIBCO Program for Cooperative Cataloging (see <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/bibco/corecoll.html>) to "provide access to a made-up collection of materials on a specific subject" (Ford, 2007, p. 133). These templates can be quickly and easily populated by the volunteers and interns who complete the bulk of this work. One of the most common shortcuts is the use of a generic content notes (e.g. Watson's 520 summary field = "The folder may include clippings, announcements, small exhibition catalogs, and other ephemeral items"). Only a few libraries with very small artist file collections, such as Goldwater (1660 files), actually create content notes that list each and every item within a folder. Understandably, libraries that have artist files numbering in the tens of thousands (e.g. MOMA at ~50,000 and Watson at ~ 30,000) cannot afford to do so. However, more thorough description would allow libraries to manage artist file circulation and maintenance more effectively. Nevertheless, the value of the most basic collection-level cataloging initiatives should not be

underestimated, as they, at the very least, point researchers to the existence of potentially relevant documents that they would otherwise never find.

Another step that is being taken to remedy the deficiency in intellectual access to these materials is the separation of more substantial scholarly resources, especially exhibition and gallery catalogs, for item-level cataloging. In the past, art libraries typically set a page threshold for delineating ephemera from non-ephemera regardless of content; for example, at Goldwater and Watson, anything less than 30 pages long was deemed ephemera and usually relegated to the artist files (although all three Met libraries acknowledged that these kinds of materials have been shifted back and forth between the artist files and the stacks over the years). In recent years, the wisdom of this criterion has been reevaluated, as the demand for catalogs of all lengths in art research has become palpable, even if not statistically measurable. All four of the libraries I examined had cataloged these items (MOMA for most of their existence and Goldwater starting in 2008) or were in the process of pulling these items for cataloging (one of my internship responsibilities at Watson and Photography).

All four differed in which factors they used to determine an item was eligible for cataloging. Goldwater was unique in that it searched each item in its artist files in OCLC and only cataloged those for which there was an existing catalog record (i.e. only performed copy cataloging). MOMA had the strictest criteria, requiring that an item contain both a checklist and an essay to be cataloged. In contrast, Watson and Photography would agree that a checklist and an essay were definite indicators of non-ephemera, but not the only ones. I was

instructed to make inherently subjective judgments based on the number of pages (generally more than one) and the presence of substantial amounts of text or images, an obvious title, and/or an institutional identity. I favor this last approach, as it will allow for a greater quantity and variety of previously hidden materials to be brought to light. Although there is no concrete data available to measure whether these catalogs are being used more frequently after they are cataloged, one of the librarians I interviewed attested anecdotally to a noticeable increase in inquiries, "in particular for interlibrary loan requests for scarce items not available in most museum or academic libraries" (L. Harris, personal communication, July 23, 2010). In addition to their benefits to user access, these projects have also aided art libraries in their weeding initiatives, since they have yielded a substantial number of duplicates (i.e. catalogs already present in the stacks) and out of scope items which can be then be discarded in an appropriate manner.

### **Storage & Preservation**

Artist files usually continue to be stored as they were when these collections were first developed, in manila legal-size folders arranged alphabetically inside standard office file cabinets. This practice may be user-friendly and allow libraries to maximize space and incur minimal expenses as their collections grow, but it is not ideal from a preservation perspective. There are three major threats to the long-term survival of artist files posed by these storage conditions: the lack of strict control and monitoring of environmental

conditions in office spaces, the use of non-archival quality folders to house the files, and physical neglect (e.g. overfilling folders and not ensuring folders maintain an upright position). MOMA is a rare anomaly in that it stores the folders on shelves in their stacks; while this means they are kept in a climate-controlled environment, it also makes physical access more difficult and likely contributes to greater physical damage, as the folders have more room to bend. The other chief variation is in the use of bulk or group folders (e.g. lesser known "B" artists sharing a single folder). Photography and Watson use individual and group folders and, therefore, at some point in the past, had to determine how to arrange concurrent individual and group folders in the alphabetic sequence and how many items would warrant the creation of an individual artist folder. Over time, these decisions have not been consistently upheld, which has led to jumbled ordering of folders, duplication of materials, and overfilled group folders. In contrast, MOMA and Goldwater accord each artist represented in the collection their own folder. The latter option seems easier to handle both from a user and library staff perspective and, therefore, preferable, despite a slightly higher cost in terms of the extra folders and space required.

There are several relatively easy and cheap methods for reducing the preservation threats to artist files that do not require a complete overhaul of the traditional storage model. One is simple housekeeping measures, like the weeding endeavors described above and the splitting of overfilled folders into multiple smaller folders, which Watson volunteers have been doing, albeit haphazardly, for the past 10-20 years. A second, already observed in Watson, is

the use of vertical file dividers to support folders in an upright position and prevent overcrowding. A third, slightly more expensive and labor-intensive, is the re-housing of the files in archival-quality folders, but such a task could be done in tandem with the currently popular weeding and catalog-pulling projects. A fourth is to isolate, re-house, and/or reformat fragile or unusual materials. MOMA is unique in that it has an entirely separate set of "special collections" artist files comprised of fragile and oversized materials that it treats more carefully and consistently than the other sets. Libraries that do not have the resources or the volume of "special collections" materials to warrant such a measure can take smaller steps such as placing fragile and damaged documents in mylar sleeves or binding, storing oversized materials separately, and photocopying clippings, each of which has already been accomplished to some degree at one or more of the libraries I examined. The final and most drastic option is to digitize entire artist file collections, but few art libraries have the capacity or will to allocate the requisite financial and human resources to such a project anytime in the near future. In 1986, MOMA became one of the few libraries to microfilm its artist files, the contemporary equivalent of digitization. Unsurprisingly, of those I interviewed, only the librarian at MOMA took the idea of digitizing her library's artist files seriously, but cautioned that it would be dependent on the library winning a major grant. Unfortunately, funding may not be MOMA's only hurdle to digitization; the artist files are likely to contain a substantial quantity of proprietary information, which would force the library to face the major roadblock that is copyright research.

## **Physical Access & Security**

As art libraries are typically closed stacks, the access policies for artist files do not differ substantially from those applied to all other materials. Folders, like books, must be retrieved by library staff. Similarly, some libraries impose a limit on how many folders a patron can request at one time or over the course of one day, but this is usually comparable to the paging limits imposed for books. The only exception is that folders are not permitted to circulate even amongst museum curators, who are usually granted borrowing privileges for most other types of materials. The overall lack of distinction in access policies is curious given the special handling and security concerns associated with artist files. Due to their slight, flimsy nature and the fact that most libraries do not keep an itemized inventory of their contents, artist files are especially vulnerable to mishandling and theft. While it would be difficult to find evidence for physical damage due to patron mishandling, all the librarians I interviewed have noticed that items have gone missing. While access to artist files should not be made onerous for patrons and library staff alike, other art libraries should follow Watson's lead and require patrons to view artist files at the table opposite the reference desk, where their actions can be discretely monitored.

## **The Future of Artist Files**

While some art libraries have allocated significant resources into maintaining and cataloging their artist files in recent years, there is little evidence

to suggest that these efforts are paying off in the form of greater demand. Many librarians have predicted that requests for artist file folders will increase after they are cataloged; unfortunately, through my literature review and interviews, I only found one with the data to back up this assertion (See Obradovic, 2008, p. 624). The main problem is that many libraries only maintain a running tally of the total number of items requested and have no way to determine usage numbers within material types. Although three of the four librarians I interviewed concurred that these files are among the least utilized resources in their respective libraries, only one of these, Watson's, could point me to concrete statistics on how often their library's artist files are requested and they do not paint a hopeful picture.

Watson's circulation desk receives an average of 75 artist file requests per year (or about 6 per month) in the last 3 years, and the numbers have been in steady decline, totaling 20%, over this period. In Goldwater and Photography, I got the impression that the numbers were even more dismal, estimated as a few, perhaps 3-5, per month. The Photography librarian was not even sure whether the department's curators knew of the artist files' existence. The exception was MOMA, for which an estimated five patrons per week requested one or more artist files. This difference is likely related to MOMA's more current focus, as many of its artist files are the sole or most comprehensive source of information on their subjects.

As Rominski aptly points out, "because of their ephemeral contents and sheer bulk as developed over time, [artist files] are often relegated, in terms of maintenance and cataloging priorities, to second or even class status within a

library's hierarchy of collections" (2007, p. 136). Now, they face a very real possibility of elimination. All of the librarians I interviewed speculated that their libraries might discard their artist files sometime in the near future, although none offered a more specific timeframe. Watson already took the preliminary step of ceasing to add new items to the files beginning in June 2009, while both Goldwater and Photography significantly decreased their selection volume in the last year. One major threat to artist files is the recent explosion of electronic databases and arts publishing. It will become increasingly difficult for librarians to justify the need for these files as more of the information they contain is duplicated in other more conveniently accessible and easily manageable sources. Furthermore, as contemporary art ephemera are increasingly produced in digital form, art libraries are loath to take on the additional costs and challenges of archiving websites and e-mails. Simultaneously, most art libraries are downsizing and experiencing nearly crippling space and budget shortages, forcing them to reassess the value of maintaining their lesser used print resources.

All of the librarians I spoke with still see an important role for artist files in their libraries, as demonstrated in their recent or ongoing attempts to bring order and visibility to their collections. They are understandably reluctant to advocate for the protection of artist files in the current economic climate, but, without their support, these collections do not stand a chance against administrators eager to make cuts. Librarians have the potential to build a strong case for keeping the artist files if they maintain comprehensive statistics on requests and relevant

reference inquiries, compile documentation of their use in recent publications, conferences/seminars, and exhibitions, and promote their recent weeding and cataloging accomplishments. Ultimately, art librarians, especially those dealing with substantial contemporary collections, have the imperative to preserve these irreplaceable records of art history.

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## Journal

Date	Time	Hours	Description
June 29	10:00 – 12:30		<p>I have been waiting for this day since my interview in March and I am so excited to finally start my internship at the Met. I met with the internship coordinator, Holly Phillips, who was incredibly welcoming and appreciative. She introduced me to the staff, volunteers, and interns in Watson Library's Cataloging and Acquisitions departments. Everyone seems really nice and I am looking forward to working with the other 7 interns. Since I am starting a month later than most of the other summer interns, Holly is clearly struggling to fit me into the schedule and find projects for me, so it looks like things will be in flux for a little while, but I don't mind. Looking at the tentative schedule, I am happy to learn that I will be working with two different supervisors every morning and afternoon (a total of 5 supervisors each week), and therefore will get to experience a range of departments and activities. Holly gave me a tour of the various places in Watson in which there are computers available for intern use. I was surprised to learn that a whole intern wing, known as the Scholar's Court, was recently built added to the first stacks level. It is very nicely furnished, but it is also kind of desolate and heavily air-conditioned, so I don't know how often I will use it. Holly gave me a thorough orientation to Watsonline, Watson's OPAC, including the different search options, how to sort results, and how to modify a search. She then introduced me to one of the Acquisitions projects I will be working on for the duration of the internship project. Watson recently received a large donation of books and periodicals from an art history professor, known as the Rosenblum Gift. Using Watsonline, I will search for a given item from this donation and determine whether it is already a holding of Watson or one of the museum's other libraries and, if so, whether it is currently available. I will then place the book into one of the following categories: found (i.e. available at Watson), other library (i.e. available at another Met library), checked out/missing, in process/on order, out of scope and not found. I will also check each book's title page for an inscription and flag those which have one with a bookmark. Ultimately, the books that are</p>

			<p>found or obviously out of scope will be sold to raise money for Watson's Acquisitions budget. Those that are not found will, for the most part, be added to Watson's collection. The other categories will be reviewed more carefully and their fates will be determined on a case-by-case basis, but most of them will also be added to Watson's collection. There are several shelves of books to go through, but with several interns working on it, we should get through it by the end of the summer.</p>
	1:30 – 5:00	6	<p>This afternoon I met with John, head of Watson's cataloging division, who I will work with for two shifts per week. He gave me a brief orientation to Millennium, Watson's internal ILS system, and more specifically, to its cataloging and circulation interfaces. I am happy to get the opportunity to familiarize myself with an ILS system that is different from the one I use at my other library job at Leo Baeck Institute (Aleph) and that is used widely in the art/museum library world. Unfortunately, Millennium seems less intuitive and more finicky than Aleph and it already froze or produced error messages several times this afternoon. I guess it will just take some time to get used to it. John introduced me to one of the Cataloging projects I will be working on for the duration of the internship. The Ancient Near East Department (ANE) has checked out many books from Watson for long periods of time and Watson has recently decided to permanently transfer these to the custody of ANE. Therefore, I will find a given book's bibliographic record and determine its current holding location (based on barcode, book plate, handwritten id #, etc.). If it is an ANE copy, I will only add a barcode, if necessary, and return it to the shelf. If it is a Watson copy, I will enter a barcode, if necessary, change the location to ANE, and add an action note stating that it was transferred from the stacks in the item record; then, I will check the book in through circulation, so that the status reads "available." If ANE already has a copy of the given book, then I will return it to Watson. This seems like a very tedious process, but I guess it will help the museum get a better handle on where its books are actually held.</p>
June 30	10:00 – 12:30		<p>This morning, I met Laura, a librarian in the museum's Photography Library who I will meet with once per week. She introduced me to the ongoing artist files</p>

			<p>project (already up to the letter "M") which I will be working on for the duration of the summer. There are two parts of the project, weeding (sorting through the files for duplicates, bulky items, and booklet-sized items to be cataloged individually) and Watsonline searching for the items pulled for potential cataloging. For more details, refer to "Nature of the Work" section. Laura was pleased to learn that I was already acquainted with searching in Watsonline and had little to add in terms of search strategy. This morning, I mostly dealt with the weeding part of the project and I am really enjoying it. I love photography and this affords me the opportunity to see a diversity of photographic subjects and styles and learn about obscure photographers.</p>
	1:30 – 5:00	6	<p>I am supposed to spend an hour between 12 and 2 shelving books for Circulation today, but my supervisor was not available to train me. My Wednesday afternoon supervisor was also not available to train me yet. Neither one will be available until the third week of my internship, so I will be working on Acquisitions projects for Holly during those times. I am a little disappointed that I will miss out on some variety in my schedule for a while, but I understand that these librarians have a lot on their plate now. Holly introduced me to the second major Acquisitions project of the summer, which involves searching the items in vendor catalogs in Watsonline. Holly explained that the department has a primary vendor, but then also likes to browse through supplementary vendor catalogs to ensure that they do not miss important new arts publications. For each title I search, I will note whether it is an available holding in Watson or another Met library, a later edition of an available holding, on order, in process, checked out, or missing. This will help Holly decide which items to purchase, along with other factors, like price, authority, language and relevance.</p>
July 2	10:00 – 12:30		<p>This morning is my regularly scheduled Acquisitions shift. Holly said I could choose to split up the morning between searching the vendor catalogs and searching the donations, but it is essentially the same activity, so I stuck with the vendor catalogs. I am finding that is easier to use the keyword search than the title search, because the title search is sometimes too precise and the keyword search is the only option</p>

			that allows you to sort the results by date. If I don't get a matching result from a keyword search, then I try an author search. Holly warned me that the catalog can be tricky and might require multiple attempts to find a specific book, and, so far, I have found that to be true several times. If the author search is unsuccessful, then I mark it as not found. Holly also suggested searching by ISBN #, but I have found that it is too easy to make a mistake typing out such a long sequence of numbers. Instead, I sometimes use the ISBN # to verify that a result matches the vendor catalog item.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	This afternoon I learned about and started my second major Cataloging project. Watson had developed its own classification system (known as MMA #'s), but it has recently decided to switch over to the Library of Congress system for the sake of conformity to art library standards and ease of location. Therefore, all of its books need to be reclassified and relabeled with their new call numbers. In the easier cases, the appropriate Library of Congress call # already appears in an item's bibliographic record and only needs to be copied and pasted into the item record with the publication year or Q for oversized books added to the end when necessary. Sometimes, the LC # can also be quickly located in the bib. record of a duplicate copy of the book. For the more complicated cases, I learned how to do a remote Z39.50 search for bib. records in the catalogs of the Library of Congress, OCLC, Getty, NYARC, and NYPL. If I find an exact match and the record contains a LC #, I can copy and paste it into the book's item record. Either way, it is a pretty straightforward process. The only questions I had were related to when to add a volume # to the call # of a multi-volume work, which is determined on a case-by-case basis depending on how it was cataloged. It's interesting to notice that there are variant local practices even in something seemingly fixed as assigning LC #'s. For instance, at Leo Baeck, oversize books have a call #. beginning with Q, while at Watson, their call # ends with Q. I think the Leo Baeck way is actually more conducive to proper shelving.
July 6	10:00 –		Holly is on vacation this week, so she instructed me to work on the Rosenblum donation and vendor

	12:30		catalog projects during my three weekly Acquisitions shifts. This morning I worked on searching the Rosenblum donation.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	I am in Cataloging this afternoon and John informed me that my fellow intern, Megan, and I were assigned to initiate the dreaded task of string measuring the empty space in the stacks, which will be divided up amongst the interns for the duration of the week. This is typically done annually in order to measure the library's growth and growth potential. This year, it is especially important to take stock of the space because many books were recently shifted from the stacks to offsite storage. Unfortunately, it is not the most exciting activity, with one person measuring the empty space with a 2 ft. long string and the other person tallying every 2 ft. mark. At the end of each shelf, we calculated the total in feet and converted it to inches. Luckily, I was not alone and the time went faster than I expected.
July 7	10:00 – 12:30		This morning I got very lost trying to find the Photography Library. I should have paid more attention when I was lead there last week, but there are so many different elevators, and each one takes you to a different place. After asking multiple employees, security guards, and the information desk and receiving different information from each, I finally went back to Watson and one of the librarians offered to lead me there. I was quite embarrassed to show up there a half hour later than expected, but I explained the situation and Laura laughed and was sympathetic. I definitely know how to get there now. I spent the rest of the morning on the artist files project, both the searching and weeding parts. I really wish I could do this more than once per week, as it is my favorite assignment by far.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	I worked on searching the vendor catalogs for Holly.
July 9	10:00 – 1:00		I worked on searching the Rosenblum donation from 10 to 12. Nancy, who sits at the front desk of the library's Cataloging and Acquisitions department, had to go cover the reference desk for another librarian from 12 to 1, so she asked me to answer the phones during that time. I was happy to do it and was able to work on searching the vendor catalogs during that hour.
	2:00 –	6	I returned to the Ancient Near East Department for

	5:00		more of the barcoding and transferring project. It has been two weeks since the last time, so I needed a refresher. Luckily, I was paired with an intern who had more recent experience and was able to answer my questions. I caught on fairly quickly and had fewer issues with Millennium this time around.
July 13	10:00 – 12:30		Holly returned from vacation and seemed very pleased with the progress the interns had made in her absence. I asked Holly if I could spend more time in the Photography Library because I enjoyed dealing with the artist files and she was amenable to arranging that when it was convenient for Laura and I wasn't needed elsewhere. I also informed her that I noticed I was the only intern not scheduled for a weekly shift in the Nolen library and asked her if she could arrange for me to at least get one shift there, so that I could learn about another museum library that is supposed to be quite different from Watson. She said that she would work on it. As luck would have it, my Tuesday morning supervisor was still unavailable and Laura was, so I got my wish and was able to spend the morning sorting through photography ephemera.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	This afternoon, I had my second dose of the reclassification project and finally learned how to print out the new LC call # labels and label the books. Printing out labels in Millennium is a much more complex process than one would expect (you have to click print at least four different times!) and I am sure I will need someone to guide me through it next time.
July 14	10:00 – 12:30		This is happily my second shift in the Photography Library this week. Since I had pulled so many catalogs last time, I spent this morning searching for them in Watsonline and marking their holding location when found.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Holly assigned me a special task to compare prices across bookselling websites for an expensive, rare set of periodicals that she sought to purchase for Watson. I searched in AddAll and Abebooks and took notes on all the listings for complete sets. These notes included such details as price, condition, and facsimile vs. original. When I was finished, Holly explained how she makes her purchasing decisions and used my notes to settle on an original set in good condition that was about 300 dollars cheaper than price listed in the vendor catalog she had initially consulted. It was interesting to hear her elucidate her

		<p>thought process and how she weighed the various factors to come to a decision. Until 3, I continued searching the Rosenblum donation. At 3, my last supervisor, Linda, was finally ready to train me. I was excited to learn that I would be working on artist files in Watson as well. Linda oriented me to the nature and purpose of the project, which was similar, but not identical to that of the Photography Library. For more details, refer to the "Nature of the Work" section. We went through a few folders so that she could be clear I understood how she defined catalogs (which were the only items to be pulled for item-level cataloging). We both agreed that there was a fine line between ephemera and catalogs and that I would have to use my best judgment based on criteria like the number of pages, the amount of text, and the presence or absence of a checklist. Linda showed me that the simplest way to search for these catalogs was to enter the artist's last name and a word from the gallery's name into the keyword box and enter the publication year, if present, in the year box. So far, I am finding a high rate of success with this method and I may try a similar approach with my other OPAC searching projects.</p>
July 16	10:00 – 12:30	<p>Holly granted my second request and I was excited to finally get a chance to visit the Nolen Library. Naomi, Nolen's head librarian, was very generous with her time and expertise, devoting more than an hour of her time to giving me a thorough tour and overview of the library's facilities, collections, and services and answering all of my questions. I quickly learned that Nolen is a very different library than Watson. Nolen is essentially the museum's education library and its primary users are teachers, families with young children (for the educational programming), and museum docents, while Watson is the museum's scholarly library and primarily serves museum curators and college and graduate students. As one would expect from its primary users, Nolen's collection largely consists of general non-scholarly and children's art monographs. To a lesser extent, it collects books, periodicals, and teacher kits on arts education, educational videos and DVDS, and popular arts periodicals. Nolen is unique in that it is the museum's only open stacks library, where patrons are free to browse the entire collection, creating a</p>

			<p>more welcoming, relaxed environment than Watson. Of course, Nolen can afford to do this because its collection is much smaller than Watson's and does not contain any particularly rare, fragile, or valuable materials. Another major difference between Nolen and Watson is the staffing levels. Nolen surprisingly has only one full-time librarian, assisted by a few part-time staff members and volunteers. That means there is no division of labor in Nolen. On a daily basis, Naomi is responsible for reference, cataloging, collection development, programming, etc., an impressive feat of multi-tasking. Luckily, Naomi has some relief from manning the reference desk, as all the librarians in both libraries participate in a rotational schedule of two-hour shifts at Watson's reference and registration desks and Nolen's reference desk. The only area in which Nolen is lacking is outreach. I think it would get much more use if people knew it existed. Some suggestions are the creation of an e-mail listserv and a blog to publicize its events, classes, new acquisitions, etc., but I understand that the staffing shortages make these sorts of activities difficult to maintain.</p>
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Ancient Near East project.
July 20	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Watson artist file project (pulling catalogs and searching in First Search).
	1:30 – 5:00	6	<p>The reclassification project (moving from MMA #'s to LC #'s) is also taking place in the Medieval Library. My fellow intern Katie and I spent the afternoon alternating between retrieving books that needed to be reclassified, reclassifying and barcoding the books (the only deviation from the Watson process, as those tend to already have barcodes), affixing the new call number labels on the books, and shelving them in LC # order. We worked well as a team and only ran into some minor printing issues, but those were resolved.</p>
July 21	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Photography artist file project. Laura, the librarian overseeing this project, agreed to participate in an interview for my practicum project. The interview took about 30 minutes and was very informative.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Watson artist file project. Linda, the librarian overseeing this project, agreed to participate in an interview for my practicum project. The interview took about 45 minutes and was surprisingly even

			more in-depth than my interview with Laura. I greatly appreciated Linda's candor.
July 23	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Rosenblum donation project.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Ancient Near East project.
July 27	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Watson artist file project.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued reclassification in Medieval Library.
July 28	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Photography artist file project.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Watson artist file project. I created a new pile for materials that are only available in electronic format from Watson. I asked Linda a set of follow-up questions regarding the Watson's artist files (~ 15 minutes), which occurred to me after last week's interview. I interviewed Ross, the head of the Robert Goldwater Library (the museum's library on the art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Ross was kind enough to give me a brief history and tour of the library, in addition to answering my questions. In total, I spent about an hour talking to Ross.
July 30	10:00 – 12:30		Since the Rosenblum donation project has been completed, Holly asked me to sort a set of monographs and periodicals sent to the museum's director as gifts. My first assignment was to remove all auction catalogs and periodicals and place them in pre-existing piles. My second assignment was to search for the remainder of items (namely books and exhibition catalogs) in Watsonline and follow a process similar to the one I had used to sort the Rosenblum donation. The only difference was that all items with existing museum holdings, regardless of their location or their current status, were shelved together. Items that were not found were shelved in a different location. This assignment is done on a monthly basis and allows the catalogers to deal with one type of material at a time.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	The ANE project is largely completed, but there is still some final clean-up work to do. This afternoon, my fellow intern and I went through a section of books and checked to see whether they had been

			transferred to the Ancient Near East department, as was intended. The vast majority of books showed Ancient Near East as their location in the item record and they were simply reshelfed. Those books which still showed Watson as their location were placed in a question pile for future review by John, Watson's head of cataloging. The only exceptions were Watson copies that had existing duplicates in ANE; these were to be returned to Watson.
August 3	10:00 – 12:30		Continued Watson artist file project.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Medieval reclassification project.
August 4	10:00 – 12:30		I managed to complete the Photography artist file project, which was very gratifying.
	1:30 – 5:00	6	Continued Watson artist file project. I only made it up to "D," but at least I made a dent. I made sure Linda knew where I had started and finished and the contents of each pile before I left. I am shocked by how fast these six weeks have gone. I will be sad to leave such a welcoming and supportive environment where I have had consistently positive relationships with both my supervisors and fellow interns. I am especially indebted to Holly for looking out for me and doing her best to mold my internship to my interests. While I may not have enjoyed every assignment, I am grateful to have experienced a range of library activities and to have had many opportunities to work with artist files, my favorite aspect. I was lucky to have supervisors who explained the reasoning behind all of my assignments, and, thereby, learned a great deal about how behind-the-scenes decisions are made regarding purchasing, selection of materials from donations, weeding, and cataloging and classification. Perhaps most importantly, I learned that I am well-suited to working in a museum library environment.
August 6	10:00 – 12:30		TBD: Acquisitions
	1:30 – 5:00	6	TBD: Cataloging
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>108</b>	

