

The Handbook of Art and Design Librarianship, 2nd edition edited by Paul Glassman and Judy Dyki, London, Facet Publishing, 2017, xx + 343 pp., £64.95 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1-78330-200-0

What is particular about art and design librarianship? As the editors assert, these are ‘some of the most beautiful collections and imaginative patrons on the planet’ (xx). They have a user profile whose interests make the activity of connecting them with resources and knowledge ‘the kind of process that makes art librarianship interesting,’ as Clive Philpott makes clear in his foreword (xvii). There’s the obvious point that the study of both the history and the practice of art and design practice relies heavily on image technologies (Kohl, cited by Molly Schoen (53)). And in fact Rachel Ivy Clarke draws specific parallels between the business of librarians and of designers, looking at librarianship through a design lens rather than as a social science discipline, on the basis of the distinction that science is about *what is* while design is about *what could (or should) be*, arguing for the place of design thinking in the work of design librarians.

This book addresses the range of roles, collections and practices of the art and design library of today, primarily, but not exclusively, in higher education. Archivists in that sector are especially likely to find themselves working alongside librarians, and to be able to benefit from understanding something of their practices; indeed their work may well intersect and co-ordinate with those practices, or may use similar terminology, but with different inflections. Some terminology is unfamiliar to a non-librarian, such as ‘roving reference’, ‘embedded librarian model’ and ‘beta spaces’ – all the better to broaden our minds. The relationship between libraries and archives is a rich and nuanced one, but the developments of the digital revolution have affected the two professions differently. The work of special collections librarians is still closely allied to that of the archivist or museum curator but librarians working with ‘non-rare’ books and other non-unique resources have seen their roles, and their working environments, transformed. Consequently, the book comprises mostly new essays which were not in the first edition, because the role of librarians has changed from being the ‘keeper of collections to being an active creator and research colleague’ (211). User expectations have changed enormously – there are fewer staff, especially qualified ones and especially on the frontline; and automation has increased, including in cataloguing, with a concomitant loss of expertise. A clear theme through this volume is the pressure to do more, with less. As Stephanie Kays puts it, ‘With the expectations on... librarians continuing to rise, the pressure on them to ‘do it all’ can leave some with a feeling of uncertainty about how to prioritise and manage time, how to measure progress, or how to define success’ (25).

The book makes clear its roots in traditional library practices, mapping these into the new information environment, with Barbara Opar arguing that changes to the role of the librarian are ‘more evolutionary than revolutionary’ (23). The effect of the book is a clear assertion of the role of libraries and their staff, not just as service providers but as educators, helping to develop information literacy, using technology in a reflective, tailored and nuanced way. Indeed, the emphasis on teaching and learning may be particularly useful to archivists in terms of articulating our own objectives and potential contribution to these areas.

Writing about new technologies is an ever-present challenge when the terrain is changing under our feet. Strategies for marketing, websites and social media are very much in the moment and easily become out of date, yet it would be inappropriate for these themes not to be touched on. More conceptually, there is discussion of the impact of the loss of traditional library formats such as slides, a growing area of interest from both art and design practitioners and historians.

Molly Schoen's chapter makes clear that the 'resource' in visual resource centres is now primarily technology (rather than books or information), because it is the high cost and high value element which students need for their practice and studies. This tendency is balanced by Schoen's suggestion that the increasing turn to the materiality of analogue forms means that 'a second coming of slides is not entirely implausible. Nostalgia and the desire for tangible objects run strong in the digital age' (59). Nevertheless, the general direction of travel is that as less space needed for collections, the library becomes more about communal and community spaces and their functions – 'the library as place... a destination for users seeking an environment conducive to study, contemplation and the exchange of information' (261).

The book is grouped helpfully into thematic sections such as 'roles and responsibilities', 'knowledge creation' and 'the physical environment;' chapters are short and punchy, comprising practical guidance and case studies alongside the more discursive contributions, an approach which highlights the importance of knowing not only what to do, but why, and indeed of reflecting whether such a course is appropriate. Chapters cover practical aspects such as the management and structure of art and design libraries, or the planning and development of library spaces, alongside more discursive chapters about the role of the librarian in education and knowledge creation in collaboration with teaching staff, and in the creation of 'active learning environments' and of information literacy (or even metaliteracy, as Leo Appleton discusses). A recurring theme is the collaborative nature of library work – what Kays calls the 'consortial environment' (28), and indeed, the book strongly asserts the contribution of the librarian to 'scholarly communication' (i.e. the journals and books through which scholarship is exchanged), and sets the profession in context in relation to, for example, current conditions in the publishing sector and their impact on library acquisitions.

The inclusion of separate chapters discussing different aspects of the same subject gives a rounded view – for example, a chapter on digital art history and the role of the librarian is complemented by one on the development of digital collections. Several thoughtful chapters discuss aspects of special collections in the modern library context, and the ongoing relevance of such analogue forms even as the rest of the library becomes less oriented towards physical collections. Alongside rare books and manuscripts, these touch on artists' books, an important and distinctive part of the art and design collection, as well as maps, artworks and art materials - orientations as to the current state of these specialisms. As well as setting out what, for the non-specialist user, are helpful definitions of the term 'special collections', together these chapters offer more in the way of reflection, analysis and speculation as to the place and significance of special collections in the art and design library. Sandra Ludig Brooke's chapter on art historical pedagogy and special collections is an excellent reflection on the value of 'slow scholarship', which can be a 'hard sell' under current conditions (157). Nevertheless, she asserts the ongoing importance of special collections of all kinds for 'communicating art's materiality' and 'embodying the contingencies of history' (160), and nicely articulates the 'moments of estrangement, puzzlement and being off balance' (162) that constitute the space from which knowledge and learning can be developed: a quality which many archivists will recognise from their own work with researchers and learners.

That said, archivists may be disappointed by the representation of archives, which are often such a rich part of the special collections offer. Archives are primarily discussed in a practical chapter covering their management and use, which seems an inadequate way to represent a distinct profession, with its own extensive literature. I suspect that few archivists would find satisfactory the definition of archives as 'often comprising rare books and manuscripts and also a range of other formats (ephemera, rare periodicals, artists publications, zines and so on' (75).

This is not in any way to suggest that only ‘proper’ archivists can look after archives: simply that one chapter cannot hope to adequately depict the range of archive work and the suggestion that it can is problematic. There is almost no reference to archival theory, or to relevant publications which specifically address the art and design archive. In the US context, archives may be a distinct pathway through an information studies qualification in a library school, whereas in the UK it tends to be a separate course. Nevertheless, given that in both countries many libraries employ archivists to work with their archive collections, this seems best left separate, or addressed in a different way, reflecting on the relationships between these different kinds of collections and advising on the different bodies of knowledge to refer to in managing these materials. If conservators are mentioned as specialists to whom relevant work and questions should be referred, the same respect should be accorded to archivists. Later in the volume, Alyssa Carver’s chapter addresses archives more appropriately as a specialist activity, usefully sharing the insight that ‘the answer to every archival question accommodates ambiguity and may often be ‘it depends’’ (129). This seems far more usefully to signal what is distinctive about archives, even within the library environment.

All kinds of interesting facts pique one’s curiosity along the way: including that the number of visual resources staff working in museums has increased by 20% since 2007. On that coverage representation of both the North American and British communities enriches its discourse, and although some chapters discuss local contexts not directly relevant for UK audiences, they share good practice for mutual benefit. Altogether, the book is not only a valuable reference point but also a convincing assertion of the agility and adaptability of our library colleagues, and especially of the importance of standing up for specialism in a world where such values often feel under threat.

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