

RULE NO 5: THE LIBRARY IS A GROWING ORGANISM

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TRANSCRIPT FOR "CURATING & COLLECTING"

- It's the perennial question of there's so much, you have to make decisions, and decisions means you can't take everything, and if you can't take everything, then you're not taking some things.
- The role of the curator is like this notion of collection development and appraisal and choice as to like what is ultimately a part of the collections or not, and I think that's not just the curator's choice of choosing what gets put into the collection, like there is also choice on the other side of that relationship as well.
- So I'm making 50,000 choices, but the number we actually bring in is maybe 6 or 7,000, we can't keep everything. We don't have the money, space, time or intelligence, even if we kept it all the quantity is too massive to organize.
- Much of the 19th century and 20th century was not just recorded on paper but on other formats as well. So photographs, books, papers, photos, audio recordings, home movies, film.
- There's stuff that's worth collecting that we haven't collected just 'cause it's seemed impossible to collect, if not just too hard to collect.
- We have to be thinking before we can steward a collection and responsibly bring it in, whether there would be the resources to appropriately handle the materials.
- I have the levels of support to be idealistic about what I'm doing as a selector. I have the flexibility to take chances and even make mistakes.
- One of the things I think is really important is we're not about bulk, we don't need to grow in terms of size, it's quality, not quantity.
- Quality artistically is more nebulous and controversial and sometimes changes over time, so the same work, there are many documented examples of this in music history where new work, when it was new, wasn't really, didn't really connect with an audience it took decades or sometimes centuries for it to find its

audience, so that's part of me trying to predict the future. Like, nobody can really do that, but you try your best.

- Because somebody in 20 years will be like, "Who bought this?" Right? There's always gonna be that. But then, hopefully, there'll always be like, "Oh right, yeah, they got that and then that led to this 'cause it connected to that."

- It's always about sort of wanting to take a very thoughtful approach to what we're collecting and to how we're making it available.

- Thinking about uniqueness, does this material exist or is it held in another repository? Is it commercially available? What voice is it lending to the broader conversation and is that a voice that we're really seeking to amplify? 'Cause when I think about the function of silences in collections, it's usually, what's the gap, what's missing? And oftentimes, those things are missing because of racism, hetero-patriarchy, ableism, because of oppressive structures in our world that influence collecting work in terms of who and what are present in like the historical record. When we acquire a hard drive from an artist, how do you grapple with moving forward?

- We say, "Hey, we want everyone to have access to it and everyone to use it," but then, well, wait a minute, you know, whose material is this really? What kind of agency do they have in deciding how it gets shared?

- How people narrate their lives now is no longer necessarily written in their journals or written in physical letters sent to people. How they curate their own lives through their Instagram, how is a library, how is a repository meant to preserve those?

- I've had to become savvy about business models and how to negotiate with vendors about what we're going to pay. We have a whole variety of purchasing models.

- A lot of thinking about collecting electronic stuff is trying to imagine what's it mean to collect it.

- What's the tolerance level for lease only? It disappears as soon as we stop paying, and purchasing with perpetual access rights.

- To have the file forever, to have perpetual rights to something, and then how does that work? Like, where does the file live? And if the formats change, who changes them? All those kinds of questions.

- When I started, it really was title level selection and curating with your specific institution in mind. And increasingly, I'm trying to figure out how resource sharing is going to work as a collective. How do you bump collection development to a network level?
- There is this responsibility to get the most value out of every cent you spend, and one part of that value is, the more people who can access things, the more value you got out of it. It's hard in some ways because it's very fundamentally what libraries do, it's also very sort of fundamentally not business-minded decision-making. And we're kind of trying to do both in some way.
- Open access is a really big deal and how we transition scholarly content from commercial to open is currently under discussion.
- You have to think of a special collection as a tree. Trees go out from they're root, and if you cut them in half, you see the rings right? And the role of the curator is that you can always tell the different curators because sometimes there's more rain, right? So the ring is there's a bigger gap, right? Sometimes it's dry, so the rings are narrower, but the rings are always growing and the tree is always growing. Now we can morph sometimes and we can leave our mark and you can kind of say, oh, that band is X person, and that band was Y person. But the whole point is you're adding to a whole that will continue, existed before you and will continue after.