

**Archives of American Art  
from A to Z**

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I wish to thank Takeshi Mizutani and the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, for organizing this event and facilitating an international dialogue on art-related archives. I am honored to be able to speak with you today about the Archives of American Art. I also deeply grateful to Dr. Taisuke Edamura for translating my words into Japanese. The aim of this talk is to provide a high-level view, of the types of evidence available at the Archives, with a special emphasis on the material that may be consulted online.

**NEW SLIDE**

The Archives of American Art is part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. We collect, preserve and make available primary sources documenting the history of the visual arts in the United States. We seek records, routine and unusual, whose stories and meanings are rich and complex, that have inherent value as originals, and that both reflect and challenge conventional ideas about art. By broadly collecting the papers and other primary records of artists, dealers, critics, collectors, arts organizations and galleries, the Archives preserves the intertwined networks of the art world.

Since 2005, two major grants from the Terra Foundation have transformed the Archives for the 21st century. With Terra's support for digitization, we now have 150 entire collections available online, that's nearly 2 million digital images. Terra has put the Archives on your desktops, as a "virtual reading room," accelerating discovery and forming a foundation for new methods of digital art history and for new critical readings of primary sources.

The Archives of American Art holds more primary sources by artists than any other repository in the world.

I could talk about the 1 million, 9 hundred and 41 thousand, 4 hundred and 85 files on our website, but I only have 50 minutes, so I've limited it to just 26—in an A to Z outline of the many kinds of evidence available to you, with the hope of sparking your curiosity.

For the Archives, the alphabet offers a ready framework, and hopefully you can follow along without checking the time. When I get to "V" I'll be almost done.

I'm using primary sources as illustrations throughout, the words may not necessarily be readable on the screen, but I'm happy to provide copies of anything that you see, or send you the link to materials online.

### **A is for Autobiography**

- Among the papers of artists at the AAA there are thousands of autobiographical writings, ranging from brief narratives to extensive life stories, many unpublished.
- Many artists *had* truly fascinating lives, and a first-person account ensured that a record, in their own words, would remain, providing a context for the artist's work to be understood in the fullness of his or her experience.
- Painter Elihu Vedder is an artist who should be better known, and I'll wager that few art historians have actually read Vedder's colorful autobiography, *The Digressions of V*, published in 1910.

It is a spirited life story of more than 500 pages, which Vedder wrote "for his own fun and for that of his friends." Interestingly, Vedder considered an A to Z scheme for the book, but abandoned it in favor of a more free-wheeling, roughly chronological arrangement.

- There is lightness to Vedder's literary style, and he admitted, a good dose of "good old-fashioned vanity," but also more than a few professional regrets.
- Vedder's personal papers in the Archives include thousands of pages of notes and drafts—Vedder's digressions on his digressions.
- One could look at all of the unpublished pieces of autobiographies in the Archives— the paper remnants of unrealized plans and dead-end digressions—to rediscover these artists as writers and the challenges they faced in trying to publish or even to give shape to their life stories.

### **B is for Biography**

- I have to say that typically artists write about themselves, but when they do write biographies, these tend to also be about themselves.
- A case in point is Nancy Douglas Bowditch's biography of her father painter George de Forest Brush, *The Joyous Painter*, a well-written and vivid account of his life, but also of hers.

- Nancy was a painter, a theatrical set designer, and Brush's eldest daughter. She was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1880 in Paris. Along with her siblings Mary, Jane, Thea, Gerome, Tribbie, and Georgia, she often modeled for her father.
- He taught her how to paint.
- Nancy began working on the biography in 1946, five years after her father died and worked away at it for more than 2 decades.
- She wrote to everyone who knew him, gathering information, piecing together her own memories, and finally publishing *The Joyous Painter* in 1970.
- Bowditch donated to the Archives her draft writings, but also all of her correspondence with friends and acquaintances concerning the biography, along with the Brush family letters and photographs.
- The papers reveal not only his daughter's search for herself, but tangential information about Brush's circle including his neighbors, painter Abbott Handerson Thayer, author Mark Twain, and others.

### **C is for Contacts**

The art business involves a network of professional services.

In the late 1940s, painter Philip Evergood glued and taped together scraps of paper and business cards to create this ready reference of services available near his New York City studio, including picture framers, art dealers, galleries, an art critic, and a camera store.

Presumably, Evergood added new contacts as needed. It is easy to imagine, from the pinhole at the top of this well-worn list, that Evergood tacked it up in his studio and referred to it often.

Just about every collection in the Archives reveals social networks in the art world. Letters sent and received, address books, collected business cards, and other scraps. We provide the paper remnants of relationships for the art historian to reconnect.

### **D is for Diaries**

- For the historian, a good diary is the next best thing to being there. Fresh, intimate, and direct, diaries are more reliable than memoirs—that are written long after the events described—and less constrained by the conventions of letter writing.

- There are thousands of diaries in the Archives, and while many are fairly dull—Charles Green Shaw, for instance, kept a daily record of his exercise routine—
- There are exceptions. One of the best belonged to an obscure, second-generation Hudson River School painter named Jervis McEntee.
- McEntee is all but forgotten today, but at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he was at the center of the New York art world. He lived in the Tenth Street Studio building and was a member of the Century Club and the National Academy of Design, in the 1890s this was the American art establishment, composed of the old guard fighting a defensive, and ultimately futile battle, against the encroachment of European modernism.
- McEntee’s diary is an insider’s account of the battle.
- He knew every artist of note in the city and—best of all—he was an incurable namedropper.
- McEntee’s diaries are available online with a complete fully-searchable transcription. In this flexible form one could use digital tools to mine the text for the frequency of words or phrases in context, or to map McEntee’s social world.
- You may have heard of the “Transcription Center” at the Smithsonian. It’s an online platform where we upload digitized documents for the crowd to transcribe. And miraculously there are people all over the globe—from New Zealand to Newfoundland—who are transcribing our handwritten historical documents into searchable text.
- With more and more primary sources being digitized and transcribed every day; this is an exciting time to turn to the Archives with new questions.

### **E is for Eulogies**

- Death.
- It is perhaps the only certainty in life. For those experiencing the death of a friend, loved one, or an admired figure, words are often inadequate to give voice to the intense emotions involved.
- Yet, the Archives holds countless examples of people attempting to respond in words.

- This is Romare Bearden’s eulogy for his friend Carl Holty.
- Holty was a bit older than Bearden. They both showed at the Kootz Gallery, and, in 1969, they co-authored the book *The Painter’s Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting*.
- In this eulogy, Bearden wrote, and I quote, “He once told me that a true artist should never have any fear of death, because it comes as a repose after a life of the hardest and most frustrating kind of labor.”
- The death of an artist evokes powerful emotions in the living, even as it crystallizes the deceased’s contributions to the art world.

### **F is for financial record**

The Archives holds a wealth of financial documentation.

Among the records of art galleries—and we have quite few, including André Emmerich, Leo Castelli, OK Harris, Holly Soloman, Zabriskie, Betty Parsons, and others—the records of the Jacques Seligman Gallery is one of our largest and most heavily mined collections, particularly for provenance research and it is all available online thanks to support from both the Terra Foundation and the Kress Foundation.

Established in Paris in 1880, with a branch opening in New York City in 1904, Jacques Seligmann & Co., was one of the most prominent dealers in antiquities and Renaissance art, and took a leading role in promoting contemporary European and American painting. Jacques Seligmann’s son, Germain, grew up in the family business and by 1920 was a partner (along with his father) and president of their New York office. Germain divided his time between Paris and New York until 1939, when the company headquarters moved to New York, and he established his legal residence there.

Gallery records have their own idiosyncrasies. One often needs to be immersed in them to crack the code, or to understand how one ledger, stock book, or sub-series of invoices relates to another. For the diligent scholar, they are a goldmine and some of the most innovative detective work in art history today involves extracting large data sets from gallery records to map art markets over time and space.

I am showing a Consular invoice from the Seligman records. These government documents concern works of art exported to the United States (or other countries) by Jacques Seligmann & Co., between 1920 and 1953, and there are thousands of pages. They are particularly useful for provenance research because they provide so many details about specific works of art, including a physical description, the date of the work, from whom it was acquired, assessed market value, and framing and shipping

information. This one page holds details about works of art by Seurat, Manet, Delacroix, Degas, Picasso, and Renoir, to be shipped from Paris to New York, via La Havre on September 30, 1936.

As many of you know, in the 1990s, museums in the U.S. and Europe began a closer examination of the provenance paths of works in their collections with special emphasis on works that may have been illegally confiscated and/or sold during the World War II era. The records of the Seligman gallery—that are available online in their entirety—are a key source for researchers seeking to resolve open ownership issues or to learn more about the journey of an object through time.

### **G is for Grant Application**

- This is a form of evidence that you might not think of, but a grant application can be an extraordinary find.
  - A grant application gives you solid biographical details and the artist's written proposal for what he or she hopes to accomplish and while it may not happen as planned, the grant application fixes desire—it is the desire to be funded, but also the desire to create something. The application provides a rare statement of intent.
  - I'm showing you John Bernard Flannagan's application for a Guggenheim Fellowship from 1940.
  - By all accounts, Flannagan had a tragic life. His father died when he was very young, he was separated from his mother and placed in an orphanage, he had a life of poverty, alcoholism, depression, broken relationships, and debilitating physical injuries.
  - Though he began as a painter, he found his calling in stone and direct carving. He had an intuitive feel for freeing the form from the rock.
  - In 1932, he received a Guggenheim fellowship to carve stone in Ireland. His *Sleeping Cat*, pictured here is one of his works from that period.
  - In 1939, he was hit by a car and subsequently endured four major brain operations. His grave condition following the accident depleted all of his resources but he also had to abandon stone cutting. He just wasn't physically able to do it. It was hoped that a second Guggenheim fellowship would support

a new direction. In 1940, he applied to “write and publish a definitive and articulate statement, a well-defined philosophical approach to working in the graphic arts... and to work in casting metals and ceramics.”

- He did not receive a second Guggenheim. Two years later, destitute and debilitated, he committed suicide on January 6, 1942. Later that year Dorothy Miller organized a memorial retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.
- The 1940 grant application outlined a new direction, but it’s unlikely that a second fellowship would have turned his life around. Failed grant applications are the history of things that didn’t happen.

### **H is for Handwriting**

My colleague Mary Savig recently organized an exhibition called *The Art of Handwriting*, where she asked leading authorities to look at an artists’ handwriting and consider if, or how it relates to their art.

She began with the premise that every handwritten message conveys the sensibility of the writer at the moment of interplay between hand, eye, mind, pen, and paper.

One of the items in that exhibition was Marcel Duchamp’s letter to his sister Suzanne from 1916.

Mary asked Anne Collins Goodyear, the Co-Director of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, to comment and Anne noted that this is the first time Duchamp used the term “readymade” to designate the transformation of everyday objects into art. She wrote, “He emphasizes the term with slanting quotation marks and encircles the word *crise* (“crisis”), suggesting the threat to tradition that his innovation represented.”

A few months ago, this letter was subject of an article in the *New Yorker* magazine, celebrating the centennial of the readymade.

Through a close reading of handwriting, the distinctive marks made by artists spark new ways of understanding the visual through the verbal.

One could look not only the content of an artists’ writings, but *how* he or she puts words on a page to expose a deeper layer of meaning about an artists’ signature style.

Princeton Architectural Press has just published *The Art of Handwriting* as a book, titled *Pen to Paper* that will be available this summer.

### **I is for illustrated letters**

For many artists, words were not enough; they added drawings, caricatures, watercolors, and collage.

In a letter to her parents, Mimi Gross colorfully combines the verbal and the visual to describe a market day in Novi Pazar, a town in Southwest Serbia. She writes, “Thousands of farmers are here, with horses & wooden saddles and sheep, chickens, goats, carts, bags, baskets, rugs, woolen suits, skull caps, cloths around heads,...raggedy scrawny kids, patched-up old men, toothless, braided, hump-backed, 8 meter-wide pantaloons, embroidery threads, cow & sheep cheese, 3 meter high ice-cream cones (in a row), HOT HOT sun and skies.”

She and her then husband Red Grooms sat sipping lemonade and Turkish coffee under an umbrella taking in the scene. They also explored medieval monasteries.

Travel tends to sharpen our observations and to heighten our awareness of the extraordinary qualities of everyday life.

This illustrated letter, like Mimi Gross’s paintings and 3-D constructions, captures the lively spectacle of street life. In the letter, the street scene is on the diagonal, dynamically leading the reader into the activity, with a vibrant rhythm of color and striking spots of red. The energetic triad of red, blue, and yellow makes it seem as if everything is happening all at once, the present of the street scene and the past of Byzantine fresco is happening at same time and indeed Mimi drew inspiration from the past for her art in the present.

Illustrated letters have the power to transport us to another place and time—to recreate the sights and sounds, and they also reveal countless clues about the varied artistic temperaments of the authors.

### **J is for Journal**

There is a significant difference between a journal and a diary, though the words are often used interchangeably. A diary is more of a chronicle of events in real time—where did you go, what did you do, and so on. A journal, on the other hand, is a more about personal reflections—who you are, what you feel, and how you can improve your life.

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was a great journal writer. Born into immense wealth, she was a sculptor, art patron, and founder of the Whitney Museum of American Art, but what you might not know is that she was also a writer. She wrote several novels, numerous plays, and short stories, in the early 1940s she took a professional writing class at Columbia University, and then there are her journals and autobiographical writings.

If you read her early journals you will find a young girl who was desperate to be loved for herself and not her wealth.

I have to say, it is often hard to identify with her misery. In her journal of January 1896 she wrote, “Riches make for more unhappiness than all the poverty in the world,” this was just 8 months before she wed Harry Payne Whitney, whose family was almost as rich and socially prominent as the Vanderbilts. They were married at the Vanderbilt’s summer cottage, The Breakers, in Newport, RI.

In 1890, when she was 15, she traveled to Paris with her family and entourage, where she visited numerous museums and the newly opened Eiffel Tower and tried her first “gin lime” (also known as a gimlet). In her journal, Whitney confessed that she had not wanted to visit the famous Louvre, writing, quote “I DID NOT MUCH LIKE THE IDEA OF GOING TO THE LOUVRE, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE STUPID FOR ME, BUT INDEED IT WAS NOT; NO FAR FROM THAT; I ENJOYED IT VERY MUCH.”

Thirty-eight years later, she founded the Whitney Studio Club that would become the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Gertrude had an extraordinary life and she was a serious sculptor, but almost everything written about her would lead you to believe that she abandoned her writing when she turned to sculpture, but that’s not the case.

If one looks at the breadth of her papers, it is clear that writing was a constant creative outlet, one that she pursued from her childhood until her death, and it was her principle creative activity in the last years of her life.

**K is a hard letter, I’m using Keepsake because it’s a type of evidence that poses problems for digitization.**

We don’t typically talk about it, but there are quite a few **objects** in the Archives. Though we say that we don’t collect objects, we have the odd charms, lockets of hair, eyeglasses, pressed flowers, textiles, palettes, brushes, etching plates, paint boxes, and for artist Robert Smithson, we have a snakehead in a jar.

In 1979 Robert Smithson’s widow Nancy Holt donated the bulk of her husband’s papers and her own papers to the Archives of American Art. It is one of our most heavily used collections. We are expecting additions to the collection, so I’m sorry to say, it is not yet available online.

In the past two decades, Smithson’s art—and if you think about it, there’s not much of it—and his more plentiful writings, published and unpublished, have spawned an art-historical industry. There have been 11 PhD dissertations with the name Robert

Smithson **in the title**, not to mention an avalanche of articles, books, anthologies, symposia, and other productions. In fact, it is rare **not** to have someone in our manuscript reading room in Washington, DC, working on Smithson, and researchers often give a stifled shriek when they encounter the snakehead.

Smithson is best known for his monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty*, the snake-like structure that he completed in 1970, on the bed of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Smithson acknowledged that it was inspired, in part, by the Great Serpent Mound, a snake-like Pre-Columbian Indian monument in Ohio. When he was a boy he collected live snakes and specimens.

And what can we make of this snakehead in a jar? Is the Smithson's "rosebud," as in the movie *Citizen Kane* the object of the sled called "rosebud," that reveals something of the protagonist's true identity beyond his life's accomplishments? I don't know, but it was an important enough talisman to be included in his papers and with that I invite you to take a seat in our manuscript reading room with the other Smithson scholars, and consider it.

**For L, I thought of letters, of course, or lyrics (Thomas Hart Benton wrote Lyrics), or lectures (we have the typescripts of Erwin Panofsky's lectures), but I'm partial to lists.**

- The Archives of American Art counts hundreds of thousands of lists in its collections,
- including to-do lists, membership lists, lists of paintings sold, lists of books to read, lists of appointments, lists of supplies to get and places to see, and lists of people who are "in."
- The form is ubiquitous.
- Whether dashed off as a quick reminder or carefully constructed as a comprehensive inventory, lists give insight into the list maker's personal habits and enrich our understanding of individual biographies. They may reveal the process by which decisions are made or show the distillation of an argument to its essential points.
- Every exhibition generates a list or multiple lists. Many are historically important, throwing a flood of light on a moment, movement, or event;

- In 1912, American painter Walt Kuhn asked Picasso to recommend European artists for the 1913 Armory Show, the first international exhibition of Modern art in the United States. This list is Picasso's recommendations, including Marcel Duchamp—name spelled out phonetically—whose *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) caused an uproar at the exhibition, there is Fernand Léger, and Juan Gris, among others. The Europeans stole the show, overshadowing their American counterparts. What is most odd is that Picasso's collaborator Braque is penciled in, perhaps as an afterthought.
- Though it doesn't look like much, this list reveals the behind-the-scenes organization of a landmark exhibition.

### **M is Memoir**

As I mentioned, memoirs are not as reliable as diaries that are written in the moment, but memoirs are valuable as the distillation of memories and they often focus on a life-changing event, such is the case with Horace Pippin's memoir of his service in WWI.

In the fall of 1917, Horace Pippin, then a 29 year old ironworker, enlisted in the New York National Guard and shipped out to fight in World War I in France. Later he cited this wartime experience as the catalyst that (quote) "brought out all of all the art in me..."

In his illustrated memoir in the Archives, Pippin wrote (quote) "I made some seens of France, something like 100 of them yet at last I had to burn them up, but I can never forget suffering, and I will never forget sunset, that is when you could see it, so I came home with all of it in my mind and I paint from it today."

Pippin's first oil paintings were visual expressions of his combat experiences, and his wartime experience in France was a creative touchstone for the rest of life. The Archives has four versions Pippin's WWI memoir.

Three appear to be earlier drafts with this illustrated version as the final iteration. Pippin may have considered publishing his first-person narrative of his time as a soldier, and though it is a moving account of the misery of life in the trenches, he found his truer more fluid expression in painting.

With memoirs the larger question is what why did the author write it and who is the intended audience. Clearly for Pippin, his WWI experience profoundly shaped his artistic career and his four versions of the story represent his struggle to articulate and preserve this transformative episode.

### **N is for Notebook**

One of the earliest gifts to the Archives of American Art was Martin Johnson Heade's hummingbird notebook, donated by Robert McIntyre in 1955; just one year after the Archives was founded. McIntyre was the director of the Macbeth Gallery and Heade's first biographer.

On August 12, 1863, while the Civil War raged, the *Boston Transcript*, reported that Martin Johnson Heade quote "the artist so well known for his landscapes, is about to visit Brazil, to paint those winged jewels, the hummingbirds, in all their variety of life as found beneath the tropics." The newspaper also reported Heade's grand plan to quote "prepare in London a large and elegant album on these wonderful little creatures, got up in the highest style of art."

Our "hummingbird notebook" is thought to be Heade's handwritten introduction to his proposed album. Heade's feeling for the little birds ran deep, he wrote quote "From early boyhood I have been almost a mono maniac on hummingbirds."

He admired Audubon, not only for his passion for the tiny iridescent creatures, but because Audubon sought to represent North American hummingbirds in their natural habitats. Heade, using his skill as a landscape painter, planned to place the little Brazilian birds in their native setting.

It was a good idea, but Heade had some serious competition in the bird book market. Just three years earlier, John Gould, the British ornithologist, had completed his masterwork exclusively on hummingbirds, in five folio volumes, with 360 hand-colored lithographic plates. Gould had not traveled to the hummingbird haven of South America, nor had he studied the creatures in the wild. Heade set out to fill this niche.

Heade's hummingbird introduction begins with a sure, elegant hand, and while he only mentions Gould by name once, Heade copied the same lengthy quotes from other hummingbird enthusiasts that appeared in Gould's introduction. Toward the end of the document, when Heade finally pens his own opinion about a contested scientific question, regarding the form and function of hummingbird beaks, he is less sure of himself. His writing falls apart in a tangle of crossed out edits.

Perhaps it was writing this introduction, heavily indebted to Gould that made Heade realize his limitations as an amateur ornithologist. He was trying to follow models set by Audubon and Gould, gorgeous weighty volumes with color lithographs, but when that project failed, Heade found his niche in the art world. He became known as a painter of hummingbirds with orchids and other flowers, prompting a critic to write in 1871, quote, "there are quite simply no other paintings like these known in America or elsewhere." Heade's love of hummingbirds endured, through a creative expression that was uniquely his own.

## **O is for Oral History**

If you ever want to know Lee Krasner's opinion on the Federal Art Project; or how A. Hyatt Mayor landed a job in the print department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; or the meaning of Claes Oldenburg's dreams—the clues, if not the answers, are in their oral history interviews, in their own words.

The Archives has produced more than 2,200 oral history interviews, and many of the transcripts available online.

The program began in 1958. It seemed a logical step for an organization committed to gathering and preserving documentation on the visual arts in the United States. At that time there were a number of living artists whose memories stretched back to the early days of the 20th century and several who had participated in the Armory Show of 1913. Their spoken reminiscences and observations would be of obvious benefit to present and future art historians.

Today these interviews preserve the memory of the American art world. They chronicle the great diversity of the American art scene, augmenting and refining our perception of individual artists and their social worlds. The intimacy of the one-on-one conversation offers a candor and immediacy that brings history to life. As firsthand accounts, they are central to our understanding how invention, originality, and identity shape new understandings of ourselves and both clarify and complicate the history of art.

As wonderful as oral histories are, in my opinion, they are the most suspect forms of evidence because people can choose to say whatever they want. Memory can be tricky and highly selective. Artists recall the past while representing themselves in the present relative to the interview session, and these interviews are created with the knowledge that the transcript will be in the public domain.

New scholarship is taking a critical look at these interviews, to question the artists' construction of identity over time, to take into account the vicissitudes of memory, and to understand these interviews are a product of a particular exchange between two individuals, who may even have opposing agendas.

## **P is for Photography**

The Archives of American Art holds millions of photographs and just about every photographic process from daguerreotypes to digital files. We have exceedingly rare photographs by well-known photographers such as Stieglitz, Steichen, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Man Ray, Bernice Abbott, and others.

I'm showing you here a photograph by Lewis Hine.

In the early 20th century, the stop-time medium of photography provided the perfect means of picturing the rapid, radical changes of modern life. Photographers such as Hine not only documented the unfolding drama of the new, but the subjects they chose and the aesthetic decisions they made, informed modern attitudes about work, leisure, child welfare, urban development, and civil rights.

They changed the way we see ourselves.

In 1905 Hine photographed the maelstrom of humanity at Ellis Island, where millions of immigrants were numbered, tagged, interrogated, and often detained on their way to a new world. Hine's seemingly straightforward impressions belie the difficulties he encountered.

We have a group of Hine's photographs and letters from him among the papers of art critic Elizabeth McCausland, because McCausland was writing about Hine.

In 1938 Hine, explained the process of making this image in a letter to McCausland, (quote) "Now, suppose we are elbowing our way thro the mob at Ellis (Island) trying to stop the surge of bewildered beings oozing through the corridors, up the stairs and all over the place, eager to get it all over and be on their way. Here is a small group that seems to have possibilities so we stop 'em and explain in pantomime that it would be lovely if they would only stick around just a moment. The rest of the human tide swirls around, often not too considerate of either the camera or us."

Hine carried a 5 x 7 box-type camera, dry-plate negatives, a rickety wooden tripod, and a flashlamp, into which he measured enough explosive powder to light the scene (and routinely singe his hair). By the time he had planted his camera, he continued, "...most of the group were either silly or stony or weeping with hysteria because the bystanders had been busy pelting them with advice and comments, and the climax came when you raised the flash-pan aloft over them and they waited, rigidly, for the blast."

On the back of this photograph, titled the *Joys and Sorrows of Ellis Island*, he wrote quote: "A group of Slavic Immigrants register many shades of emotion. The baby salutes his new home." By giving faces and feelings to the foreigners, Hine humanized the "huddled masses." His Ellis Island photographs documented the greatest migration in history, but they also captured, with compassion and candor, an emergent American culture of many nations.

What is great about the millions of photographs in the Archives of American Art is that so many of them are in a rich archival context that gives meaning and nuance to our understanding of the image.

## Q is for Questionnaire

Like grant applications, questionnaires can be a gold mine for researchers.

In the late 1960s, in preparation for his book *Federal Support for the Visual Arts*, art historian Francis V. O'Connor sent questionnaires to artists who had participated in the New Deal art programs. And while the artists, then in the late 1960s, had to recall events from 30 years earlier, their answers continue to be useful to historians today.

Many of the artists provided lengthy and poignant replies. Sculptor Eugenie Gershoy, for instance, wrote, "The Federal Art Project literally opened up a world of new opportunity. It was possible to... experiment without restriction, and to have one's work seen, appreciated, and used. There was a sense of relation to a public, and very important—a stimulating, invigorating feeling among artists that made those years a glorious, thrilling, experience."

With collections like O'Connor's one also has the obvious advantage of exploring how artists working in different media and geographic locations, responded to the same questions.

### **R is for Reviews**

- Fairfield Porter is best remembered as a painter, but he was also one of the most articulate art critics of his generation.
- Porter's writings and correspondence provide a detailed chronicle of his life in the American art world from his undergraduate days at Harvard to the year of his death in 1975.
- His papers, which are all available online, include his notes and some of his draft reviews, such as the one shown here, for a De Kooning exhibition, at the Martha Jackson Gallery in 1955.
- It was Elaine de Kooning, Willem's wife, who got Porter his first job as an art critic. She had been a reviewer for *Artnews* and when she left the magazine, she recommended Porter as her replacement and he jump at the chance, because he always thought he would be good at it, in fact, he thought he'd be better than anybody.
- In an interview for the Archives OH program Porter, explained: "The reason I was good, was that I would try as much as possible, when looking at something that I had to review, to cease to exist myself and simply identify with this, so that I could say something about it. But that wasn't simply my own idea. I learned that because I was told to do that (not in those words) by my editors."

- They gave him a year at *Artnews* and he stayed for seven and later wrote for *The Nation*.
- For Porter the best criticism was accurate description, but his writings are, of course, so much more than that.
- In this brief review [for de Kooning's fourth one-person show], Porter connects De Kooning to Delacroix and Ingres, and defused complaints that De Kooning's *Women* are monstrous by comparing *Two Women in the Country* to the palette of "a garden of tulips." Porter ends, "Here is that shock or surprise that is so often the sign of original creation."
- For Porter the writing renewed his painting, not just the writing but looking at things. He would think about something that he was writing about and think about why an artist was doing something or other, and then he would look at his own painting and question what he was doing, or if he could do it differently.
- It would be worthwhile looking at Porter's paintings from the 1950s in relation to the reviews he wrote to discern the crosspollination of ideas from his writing to his art.

### **S is for Statements**

S could have been short stories, which we have in abundance, but we have more artists statements than short stories.

In a nutshell, an artist statement is brief paragraph meant to inform an audience and elicit a deeper appreciation and understanding of a body of work.

Today's MFA programs teach students how to write an effective artist's statement. There are books and blogs devoted to the topic, workshops, websites, services for hire, seminars on YouTube, and even a pretty hilarious online "artists' statement generator," where you can generate your own artist statement for free, and if you don't like it, click a button and generate another one.

We may think of the artist's statement as a phenomenon of the 1980s when understaffed galleries, made the artists responsible for text, but the form has been around for as long as artists have been explaining themselves.

Jackson Pollock was not known for his writing. He barely wrote anything, but what is remarkable is that this artist's statement exists among his papers.

According to Helen Harrison, who is the director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, this statement is exceedingly rare and for Pollock curiously poetic.

It reads: *Technic is the result of need - new needs demand new technics - total control - denial of the accident - states of order - organic intensity - energy and motion made visible - memories arrested in space, human needs and motives - acceptance - Jackson Pollock*

He wrote this meditation on his aims, on good, deckle-edge paper and signed it, as if for display, but no one knows why, or how it got pasted to a photograph by Hans Namuth.

We think it was written in 1950—that's the date of the painting behind Jackson. The Catalogue raisonné puts it at around 1950 because that is when Hans Namuth had filmed Pollock painting, and Pollock was asked to supply a narration. However this text was not used in the film.

This statement could be seen as a written intervention of sorts.

In 1950, Pollock was getting a lot of attention. That year there was an article about him in the *New Yorker*, and a year earlier there was an article *about* him in *Life* magazine that was still in the air.

People were focusing *so* much attention on Pollock's technique of poured paint, that his intention was getting lost.

This statement addresses **what** his paintings are about, not **how** they are done. It's not about any specific painting, but it makes the case for content rather than form.

Pollock's wife, Lee Krasner was involved in shaping his public pronouncements and written statements. And because of Lee's close involvement, it's impossible to know if part of all of the statement was suggested or supplied by her.

There are thousands of artists' statements at the AAA and often multiple statements from the same artist, because an artist's statement is a living document that should change as the work develops. Most artists have to write them. Most artists hate writing them. The artist's statement has become part biography, part-self mythology, part-experimentation, or intervention. One could look at the statements from artists over several decades. What changes what remains the same?

### **T is for tax records**

The Archives has quite a few tax records, and they provide a good summary of activities, as well as income and expenses.

In 1954 Elaine de Kooning itemized her and her husband's studio costs in preparation for filing their joint tax return for 1953, listing their modest income and expenses, including studio rent, models, heat, telephone, etc.

While the claim indicated a loss of \$1,987 that year, the de Koonings were undeniably on their way to financial success. Willem exhibited his *Woman* series (six fiercely abstract paintings of women) at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1953. This was his third one-person show in New York and yielded a net profit of \$6,202.76.

He was also in demand as a lecturer and juror. Both of the de Koonings had studios in New York City and summer studios in East Hampton, made modest contributions to eight charities, and even had enough income (and good sense) to buy back a painting that Willem had sold to painter and writer John Graham in 1944 for \$50—claiming a capital loss of \$450 after its purchase. They supported fellow artists—Gandy Brodie, Milton Resnick, Giorgio Spaventa, and Alfred Leslie—by hiring them as models, listed here a studio expenses. And while Elaine was not considered her husband's equal as a painter, she was beginning to be singled out as a significant Abstract Expressionist and continued to develop her reputation as a respected art critic.

Personal income tax records and related notes can be quite useful.

### **U is for Unidentified**

“U” is a tough one, but I thought I'd introduce the idea of the unidentified item. We have millions of them online. There is a vast universe yet to be to be discovered, because so much of what we have is unknown.

I'm showing you a photograph that I used in the book *Artists in their Studios* and it's really puzzling to me, because I think I *should* be able to identify those around the table, there are lots of clues. This is from the papers of painter Carl Holty. There is Carl Holty on the left, an unidentified woman, Miró, and two others having tea in a studio. It could be 1940, based on Holty and Miró's approximate ages in photo, but it's tough to tell.

The photographer is unknown, but presumably the person taking the photograph was also at the table. He or she has stepped away, and this is the photographer's teacup. The three men in suits seem to be the visitors, to the studio of the more casual, bearded man, staring straight at the camera. Is this his studio? But who is he? Where is the studio? Are they in New York? They could be in Paris. Holty lived in Paris from 1930 to 1935. Who is the woman and who is this elegant man, he's a somebody, an art dealer, a critic perhaps?

In 1947 Miro came to the United States to paint a mural for a hotel in Cincinnati. He worked on the mural for 9 months in Carl Holty's studio in New York, but this is not Holty's studio

I am embarrassed to say how many hours I have wasted searching images online, chasing down possibilities, and always drawing a blank. I've asked lots of knowledgeable people. No one knows.

If Holty were alive, he could probably tell me in an instant. It really only takes a generation for information to be lost, maybe irretrievably lost, when the identifying information, or when metadata becomes disconnected from the thing.

If anyone can identify the unidentified tea party guests, I will give you a prize!

### **V is for Verso**

This is the flip side, when we have lots of information about a photograph written on the back, that's the best—

I've always thought that someone should write a book about what is written on the backs of photographs. There is an image on the front, but then your assumptions could be completely overturned by turning it over—the way you see the photograph is changed by the words on the back.

This is a snapshot of Fritz Dreisbach an artist, scientist, and hippie hero of the American studio glass movement. The image alone tells a story, but on the verso Dreisbach wrote a note to Fran Merritt, who was the director of the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, ME, about how he got to blow glass in at a workshop in the summer of 1971.

That workshop was the beginning of the Pilchuck Glass School founded by artist Dale Chihuly and patrons Anne and John Hauberg in Stanwood, WA, north of Seattle. Chihuly modeled Pilchuck after Haystack. The interconnections between Dreisbach, Chihuly, Fran Merritt, Haystack and the beginnings of Pilchuck are bound up in this one annotated snapshot, with Dreisbach writing, "I think I'll be doing it again next summer."

### **W is for works of art**

The Archives of American Art does not collect—or we try our best not to collect—finished works of art. We acquire sketches, sketchbooks, doodles, and all forms of preliminary works of art, preferably identified as "preliminary" by the artist when the material is donated. These preliminary works are typically part of an artists' papers and are kept together in that context.

They show the working process—the visual thinking—of an artist. And I'm showing here one of Peter Blume's studies for his painting *Tasso's Oak* from about 1957. Bob Cozzolino recently organized a major Peter Blume exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and borrowed about 50 preliminary works from Blume's papers, which are all available online.

What I find most intriguing about these preliminary works of art is how their cultural capital changes with time. What is deemed "preliminary" or a "work print" or "inconsequential" in the 1960s, is 30 or 40 years later a work of art coveted by museums.

This is certainly the case with conceptual art, performance art, or site-specific works of art of the 1960s and 70s, photographs, videos, written plans and the like that were once considered archival documentation are now treated as works of art in and of themselves. It is a shifting scale that we are always navigating.

### **X is for Xerography**

X is again a hard one.

But in the late 1960s when photocopy machines appeared, artists rushed to experiment with the new media.

Foremost among them was Esta Nesbitt. In 1970 she contacted Xerox Corporation about creating experimental art using Xerox machines in their New York City office.

During Nesbitt's time at Xerox, she experimented with many different copying machines, materials, and techniques to create what came to be known as xerographic artworks.

And this is one of her notebooks for her experiments with xerox.

There are hundreds of thousands of pages of artists' notes—notes on their experiments, ideas, materials, plans, studies, that attempt, again and again to capture in words their process—and these notes are purely the practical need to remember—a photocopy if you will of the mind at a moment.

### **Y is for Yearbook**

Dedication

Small seed pod...  
Wrought asunder by the  
probing wind finer,  
scatters its life upon

the rich loam and in death  
is born anew

Bill Wiley  
Editor

This is William T. Wiley's high school yearbook from 1956.

In 1956 Wiley was a senior and the editor of the yearbook and the faculty member most involved with the yearbook was James McGrath, Wiley's art teacher. McGrath had a profound effect on Wiley and to this day they have a close relationship.

You would think that today's teenagers, who live online a "digital natives," would not be interested in something as old-school as a printed yearbook, yet yearbooks have endured. In the U.S., every year there are hundreds of thousands of yearbooks published and purchased. And here's why, a yearbook is a lasting, physical artifact that students can pass around to their friends to mark up and personalize with notes, shared memories, and teen-age good byes, and that's something that can't be replicated in the digital world.

Signing a yearbook is part of the ritual of letting go of high school attachments and looking forward to the open possibilities of the future.

I met James McGrath in 2009 when he traveled with Wiley to DC for Wiley's retrospective exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. McGrath subsequently sent me this yearbook along with other papers documenting his tender relationship with his student over five decades. This is Mr. McGrath's copy of the yearbook. In it Wiley wrote, with uninhibited sweetness:

Mr. Grath, (Mr. underlined with the sun beaming, next to the salutation) "To you the round rock, smooooth [the word written with extra "o"s] and round you laid the base of this which I have helped and am so glad. I see the clear blue ring eyes of you laughing and crying on the pages and I laugh and cry too, but my feet and head are high because I have left something of myself."

Wiley has always charted his own course, his own journey, in the art world and he credits his high school teacher for helping him find his way.

In an interview of the Archives OH program in 1997, conducted just weeks before Wiley's his 60th birthday, he mentions his high school art teacher 23 times.

What impressed the impressionable Wiley was that McGrath's approach was very inclusive. As Wiley said, "There just wasn't anything ruled out as a potential art voice or

poetry, dance, music.” Moreover, he credited McGrath with instilling in him “spiritual values and a connection with the land.”

As a graduation gift McGrath gave Wiley a sketchbook and urged him to draw and write and according to Wiley that was when writing and narrative structure became a real component of his art.

## Z is for Zine

The Archives holds lots of Zines, we just didn’t catalogue them as Zines because we aren’t hip enough to use the word. You can find them among “printed materials,” but they are all over the place.

"Zine" is short for fanzine. They are typically a cheaply-made, cheaply-priced publication, often in black and white, often produced as a photocopy and bound with staples.

Most zines revolve around a music scene of some sort, but others are dedicated to art, poetry, cartoons, or short stories.

This is issue number 1, of the *Infiltrator*. The *Infiltrator*, if not the first, was one of the first zines for new wave and punk music in the Washington, D.C. area; operating from 1978-1981, the *Infiltrator* covered hundreds of local & international bands.

A zine is an underground communication for a particular tribe. It’s the material evidence of a community of inters and this particular zine shows the interconnections among artist and musicians in DC in the late 1970s.

And significant for this conference, the first issue of the *Infiltrator* included an article on a DC band of musicians and painters called The Urban Verbs.

This particular zine shows the interconnected of the music and art scene in DC in the late 1970s. Zines prescribe a community of interest. They are written and produced by fans creating their own niche. It is an underground communication for a particular tribe. Zines are the material evidence of a community of interest.

This is from the papers of Kevin Macdonald a DC painter who on the staff and also included are staff tips, including “Try to remember to take a pad and pencil to any musical event or potential happening (including social, political, artsy).”

I

## Conclusion]

Z is the last letter and I have a few last words

We began with “A” and the autobiography of Elihu Vedder. In *The Digressions of V*, Vedder wrote quote “Life stories are like flies, once buzzing with life, now fixed in amber.”

We believe that words are more certain, concrete, and fixed than the visual as a form of expression but writing can be ambiguous, words are unstable, meanings shift.

Our enterprise is to recover meaning as it was written and make it relevant in the present, to extract the fly from the amber and make it buzz again. We hope that the Archives of American Art provides a good context for new readings and that the interplay of the visual and the verbal charts a new and seemingly limitless area of study.

Thank you.

Brief biography:

Liza Kirwin is the Deputy Director of the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, where she oversees staff responsible for acquisitions, exhibitions, public programs, digital resources, reference services, archival processing, and publications, including the Archives of American Art Journal.

She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland, College Park.

She is the author of *More Than Words: Illustrated Letters from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art*; *Artists in Their Studios: Images from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art*; *With Love: Artists' Letters and Illustrated Notes*; and in 2012 she was awarded the Smithsonian Secretary's Research Prize for her exhibition catalogue *Lists: To-dos, Illustrated Inventories, Collected Thoughts, and Other Artists' Enumerations*.