

editorial

This special issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* is dedicated to art ephemera. Traditional art ephemera (sometimes referred to in libraries as artist files, vertical files, information files, etc.) consist of small scale printed material related to artists and their work, made for specific, limited uses (usually to announce an event – e.g. an exhibition, and intended to be discarded afterwards), freely or inexpensively distributed. A wide range of formats and types of documentation can be considered as such: invitation cards, press releases, artists' statements, CVs, listings, programmes, maps and plans, flyers, stickers, leaflets, posters, etc. Collected as primary sources of information (images and historical data), in many cases the sole existing ones for lesser known individuals or institutions, they are also valued as artefacts, often used in exhibitions for their material qualities, with artists' ephemera forming a special category, as distributed artworks.¹

It's now ten years since the publication of our vol. 31, no. 4 (2006), focused on 'Ephemera as a research resource', and much has changed since. However, many of the challenges in dealing with this material remain, starting with its definition: the concept of "art ephemera", although now well established,² can be criticised as being too narrow, as Nik Pollard argues in his article "'Back in the night": reflections, after forty years, on the nature, uses and value of visual ephemera' (p. 88). There has been some progress in the areas of acquisition and, particularly, management and access, but the difficulties are still many. Often hidden and/or relatively difficult to access, normally arranged in files and not catalogued at item level, art ephemera have relied on collection level descriptions, finding aids and listings (some of these now available online) and, at best, file level catalogue records (template based). Initiatives like Artist Files Revealed, a project of ARLIS/NA Artists Files Special Interest Group, have contributed to raise the profile of these collections and to share best practice. Anne H. Simmons, Co-coordinator of the group, discusses its role and future plans as part of her viewpoint article on the subject (p. 72).

Traditionally received by post, production and distribution of print ephemera have been declining for some time, replaced by online digital alternatives, although Vicky Falconer presents in her article some interesting new data that implies that this decline may have been exaggerated, and any predictions of demise premature (p. 97). However, it is dealing with the ever growing amount of digital-born material that has proven one of the most pressing issues for the sector over the past decade. The concept itself of digital art ephemera (or art e-ephemera) is a debatable one, and there is no current definition, let alone consensus over its usefulness as such. Some paper documents (invitations, press releases, CVs) have direct or partial electronic equivalents; others do not (stickers, posters), and there are also

1. Note that this editorial includes updated versions of definitions and other material originally published in "Resources Online: Art Ephemera / e-ephemera," *ARLIS News-sheet*, no. 220 (November–December 2012): 3–4.

2. For a general discussion of art ephemera, particularly in the context of contemporary art, see *Extra art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera, 1960–1999* (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 2001), catalogue of the seminal exhibition curated by Steven Leiber, and the more recent *Please Come to the Show* (London: Occasional Papers, 2014), curated by David Senior in 2013.

entirely new kinds of digital documents (tweets, RSS feeds). The range of digital material that could be of potential interest for art researchers and practitioners include: websites, emails, digital artworks, database records, online discussion lists, online adverts, RSS, blogs, tweets, Instagram postings, online videos... and all kinds of other computer files and software, and possibly even files and software for other electronic devices. Because of this enormous range, the very fast pace of technological change, the sheer size of potentially relevant material, different copyright provisions, etc., the challenge of collecting, providing access and preserving them is enormous. The development of best practices for collecting born-digital content relating to art and artists, including a definition of the notion of e-ephemera (if valid and relevant), is still in its early stages, although we are glad to include two articles in this issue that report on initiatives in New Zealand (see Catherine Hammond's article, p. 107) and USA (see article by Sumitra Duncan and Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, p. 116) showing significant progress and, coincidentally, the need for collaboration and large, ambitious projects, to do so.

Digitization has been seen for some time as the way forward to provide access to print collections (ongoing or legacy), and potentially to allow integration between management of digital-born and traditional ephemera. The twin obstacles of lack of resources and copyright restrictions have combined to date to make this a dream in most cases, although new in-house digitization tools, changes in copyright law and enlightened fair use and "take down" policies, give some hope for the future. However, there is still much need for both leadership and greater collaboration in the way art libraries respond to the challenge of managing their collections of print ephemera and, more acutely, digital-born material and digitization.

This issue is dedicated to those that started in the 1970s the slow and ongoing process of preserving art ephemera and raising our understanding of it, pioneering art librarians like Nik Pollard, Judith Hoffberg, Beth Houghton and Philip Pacey, but also dealers like Steven Leiber, Jon Hendricks and Barbara Moore. Backworks, Bound & Unbound, the Basement and, more recently, Specific Object or Alden Projects, have played a crucial role in the re-evaluation of this material and in its physical preservation for future use. The *ALJ* included an article on ephemera (on the John Johnson Collection at the Bodleian Library) on its first issue of spring 1976,³ and both Houghton and Pacey contributed articles on ephemera and art libraries to a mini-issue published in 1980.⁴ Judith Hoffberg wrote 'Ephemera in the art collection', possibly the earliest piece on the subject [*Library Trends*, vol.23 no.3 (Jan. 1975): 483–493]. However, the most significant of these attempts to understand and realize the potential of this material was Nik Pollard's 'Arty choke: acquisition and ephemera' [vol.2 no.4 (winter 1977): 4–15].

To mark the 40th anniversary (1976–2016) of the *ALJ*, the editors are commissioning a series of new articles responding to a selection of those published in the first issues of the Journal. For this special issue, Alice Harvey, in conversation with Kerry Watson, discusses key ideas put forward in Nik Pollard's 'Arty choke', assessing their relevance in relation to current art ephemera collections in UK libraries (p. 78). As mentioned above, Nik, now retired, has contributed a new text where he makes the case for a broad definition of ephemera and for art libraries to collect and make accessible comprehensive collections of

3. John Feather, "The Sanctuary of Printing: John Johnson and his Collection," *Art Libraries Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 23–32.

4. Beth Houghton, "The Documentation of Contemporary Art," *Art Libraries Journal* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 12–25; Philip Pacey, "Ephemera and Art Libraries: Archive or Lucky Dip?" *Art Libraries Journal* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 26–39.

designed visual artefacts (p. 88). We would be happy to see other contributions to the Journal by retired members of the profession.

We are delighted to announce that this series also coincides with a project to digitise the complete back catalogue of four decades of the *ALJ*, all of 160 issues. The archive will be made available online by Cambridge University Press by July 2016, as part of our new publishing arrangements. ARLIS UK & Ireland personal members will have free access to it, and institutional members/subscribers will be able to acquire access in perpetuity as a one-off purchase.

Finally, I would like to thank Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, Arnaud Desjardin and David Senior for their advice; Maja Wismer, guest editor of issue no. 27 of magazine *OnCurating*, dedicated to ephemera and published in conjunction with the exhibition *They Printed It! Invitation cards, press releases, inserts and other forms of artistic (self-)marketing*,⁵ for a friendly exchange of information; and, of course, to all contributors, in particular artist Mark Pawson, for bringing a practitioner's perspective and some actual artwork into the Journal, and Nik Pollard, for being willing to look back 40 years and for his inspirational love for the stuff.

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5. *OnCurating*, no. 27 (January 2016), <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-27.html>. *They Printed It! Invitation cards, press releases, inserts and other forms of artistic (self-)marketing* takes place at Kunsthalle Zurich, November 21, 2015– February 7, 2016 and includes several symposia on the topic (see <http://www.kunsthallezurich.ch/en/they-printed-it>). Interest in art ephemera in continental Europe includes other current examples (e.g. La patrimonialisation des éphémères (PatrimEph), <http://www.sciences-patrimoine.org/index.php/patrimeph.html>).