

Art library collections at research universities: IDBEA in collection development

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Academic research libraries that build and steward collections in support of art research are always developing and executing strategies for their physical and virtual spaces, preservation, and access. NYU Libraries' Institute of Fine Arts Library welcomes readers of a wide range of expertise, subject focus, and languages and works to make the library collections easier to discover and use in more creative ways in the pursuit of research, teaching, and learning. This work raises the question, whom do librarians turn to when they are responsible for subject areas or languages they may not know?

This article concerns collection development at NYU Libraries' Institute of Fine Arts Library focusing on the African American and Black Diaspora, Asian, and Latin American & Caribbean art collections as distinct collections within a larger art library setting. In addition, it provides ways libraries can implement collection development policies that prioritize materials by underrepresented groups and offer community engagement with partners focused on inclusion, diversity, belonging, equity, and accessibility.

Introduction

In 1936, when founding director Walter W.S. Cook was looking for a new home for the graduate program at The Institute of Fine Arts (IFA), he envisioned the personal libraries of several professors installed in a new facility. The program's research collection was humble in size at its two former locations, and it wasn't until 1959 that the program realized the possibilities of the Institute as a research center with the move to the James B. Duke House, where the mansion's rooms became subject-focused libraries. Over time these rooms have become reading rooms, and library materials are no longer divided among these spaces but have been moved to stacks on floors above and off-site storage (Fig. 1).

Today, the library is administered through the NYU Libraries and has grown its holdings to over 210,000 volumes and over 400 periodical titles comprising two libraries, the Stephen Chan Library of Fine Arts and the Conservation Center Library. The library supports the research and curricular needs of the program's graduate students and faculty for the study of art history, archaeology, and art conservation.

The IFA Library acquires works from a variety of sources, such as bookstores, book fairs, book distributors, conferences, and donations pertaining to art history. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages, and the library carefully considers its options when selecting an acquisition method. Nevertheless, the collection doesn't stand on its own. It is part of a 10-branch library system. The Elmer Holmes Bobst Library serves as NYU's flagship library and holds an art history collection supplementing the IFA Library.

Developing a collection for the arts in a large research university presents certain challenging issues for librarians: managing multiple library locations, preventing unnecessary duplication, acquiring non-traditional material, and working with non-academic publishers. Right now, NYU art librarians and library



Fig. 1. James B. Duke House. Photograph courtesy NYU/Institute of Fine Arts.

staff are navigating these challenges while working together to strengthen collections of the NYU Libraries.¹

Through these acquisition methods, the library recognizes that collection gaps persist for several reasons. Historically, subject areas did not go beyond the specialties of IFA faculty's teaching needs. Although the IFA Library collects relevant materials in many languages, there is a lack of emphasis on those not spoken or read by library staff, even when the materials are within scope. In addition, the collections did not circulate before 2020, so the library does not have circulation statistics or other data to rely on.

Since 2020, new library staff have been working toward a layered goal of collection development that includes closing gaps, refining collecting areas, and implementing new strategies to continue successfully growing collections. This work must be performed with intent to build collections that are diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. Although there is some degree of space dictating aspects of content that remains from the original organization of the library collections, there is an additional layer of difficulty with a lack of language expertise. The Asian collection materials, primarily comprising East Asian subject areas and in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, have not been evaluated or weeded extensively because library staff lacks the language skills to make informed determinations.

Methodology and Philosophy - IFA Library's Approach to IDBEA

Foundation of IDBEA in Libraries and the Past

The NYU Libraries website states, 'The Libraries' core strategic priority is a commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging, Equity, and Accessibility (IDBEA) in all that we do.' NYU Libraries has integrated IDBEA into the core of the libraries' mission and values statements.² Key to the ongoing work with the collections is the libraries' belief in 'building, preserving, interpreting, and providing access to rich and diverse collections.'

One example of how this is implemented is through the NYU Libraries' IDBEA in Collections Working Group. This volunteer group's main activities took place from October 2019 to August 2021, and they were charged with researching and proposing processes, initiatives, and recommendations designed to help the NYU Libraries assess and increase the collections' diversity. Some outcomes of this group's work were best practices for making collection development decisions, updating approval plan profiles, and revising collection policy statements. These outcomes also helped lay the groundwork for the decisions made locally at the IFA Library.

The American Libraries Associations' Library Bill of Rights, Article I notes, 'Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest,

1. See Giana Ricci and Lori Salmon, "Challenges and opportunities for collaborative collection development," *Art Libraries Journal*, Volume 47, Issue 3 (June 21, 2022): 67–74, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1017/alj.2022.10>.

2. "Our Strategic Priorities: IDBEA - Introduction," NYU Libraries, New York University, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://library.nyu.edu/about/general/values/idbea/>.

information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.³ Library workers are expected to maintain a diverse collection that reflects a wide variety of audiences, but let's not be disillusioned regarding how hard that can be when budgets have been cut in recent years and staff have been permanently reduced while the prices of library resources have increased.

In 'Random Ramblings – Have Recent Trends in Collection Development Unfairly Penalized Foreign Literature Research?' Bob Holley notes, 'The major shift in collection development budgets over the last fifty years has been from monographs to serials and databases.' He also states, 'Some of the larger universities still provide adequate support for foreign literature studies though there is evidence that even the largest libraries do not provide the comprehensive coverage that they did fifty years ago.'⁴ NYU Libraries has followed similar trends, and this decision has supplemented the IFA Library budget because serial and book acquisitions are limited. Users of IFA Library have the benefits of a specialized art library and a large university research library.⁵

IFA in the Present

The IFA Library created a new programmatic workflow for collection development in 2021. In addition to our regular collections policies and workflows, each academic year, the library staff selects a theme or subject area to focus on. These areas allow us to expand our collections in underrepresented artist groups and subjects. A portion of our general books fund, to be determined by the library head, is allocated to this endeavor. Books purchased with these funds are to be designated by a special 500 note in their MARC records at the point of cataloging. IDBEA themes selected:

- 2021: African American artists
- 2022: Women artists
- 2023: Accessibilities
- 2024: Queer art
- 2025: Latin American & Caribbean art

Our collection focuses are not limited to these themes. Rather, they serve to complement our general approaches to closing collection gaps in specific areas and are integrated into our regular collecting workflows.

Outside of these collecting themes, librarians particularly focused on enriching our collections in African American and Black Diaspora art, Asian art, and Latin American & Caribbean art. These three subject areas were selected for several reasons. After evaluating current holdings, staff determined that there were large gaps in these three areas. There were far fewer materials in these areas and insufficient holdings on current scholarship to support our students and faculty in general. In addition, new faculty members have joined the Institute of Fine Arts over the past several years with specific research interests and teaching needs in these areas.

Through approaches to enriching these collections, library staff focused on the need for collaboration. Staff recognized they were more likely to have successful outcomes by working with students and faculty, specialty groups in the art research community, and art library colleagues at other institutions. This need is also reflected in successful collection development work from other institutions. Commenting on their work, Julianne Gilland, Melissa Guy, and Theresa Polk wrote, 'Collaborations with other departments across our own campus have been instrumental in helping us build our collections in ways that actively represent and support the diversity of Latin American history and culture.'⁶ Integrating expertise from key stakeholders can only improve these projects' outcomes.

IFA Library physically sits within the school of the Institute of Fine Arts, but being a part of a larger academic library enables the IFA community to connect the services of NYU Libraries' Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and Collection Development departments for further support. Through the ILL department, researchers can request materials through various consortia including, the NYU Libraries Consortium, EZBorrow, the Manhattan Research Library Initiative, and OCLC

3. "Library Bill of Rights," American Libraries Association, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.

4. Bob Holley, "Random Ramblings – Have Recent Trends in Collection Development Unfairly Penalized Foreign Literature Research?" *Against the Grain*, Volume 29, Issue 2 (April 2017): 51, accessed July 25, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7763>.

5. New York University is designated as a R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity. See "New York University," Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/institution/new-york-university/>.

6. Julianne Gilland, Melissa Guy, and Theresa E. Polk, "Collections as Collaborators: Documenting and Facilitating Inclusion, Social Justice and Cultural Agency at the Benson Latin American Collection" in *Latin American Collection Concepts : Essays on Libraries, Collaborations and New*

Shares. As Bob Holley points out, 'Resource sharing through interlibrary loan (ILL) requires successful prior discovery. That is, the faculty member or doctoral student must have identified the materials that they need.'⁷ That is why IFA librarians, through Research and Research Services, Collection Development, User Experience, and Knowledge Access and Resource Management Services, work closely together to make materials accessible in the library catalog and provide research consultations and instruction. Alternatively, when appropriate, IFA librarians worked on their own or in conjunction with the Collection Development Department and book vendors to supply materials to fill collection gaps at the IFA Library or in other NYU Libraries branches.

African American and Black Diaspora art

As noted, the first IDBEA theme was African-American artists, which came out of conversations after library members together read the book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, a 2014 memoir by Equal Justice Initiative founder and NYU faculty member Bryan Stevenson for the university's reading program called NYU Reads. Also during this time, the IFA faculty's search for Black diaspora and African American art and visual culture was underway.

Through the IDBEA discussion, library staff conducted close readings on specific topics during staff meetings, compiled a bibliography for keystone acquisitions, and made it a priority in their day-to-day work to better understand collection development and collection management workflows, such as which books to prioritize in cataloging and what not to send off-site, as well as reference work with consultations, instruction, and research guides.

IFA librarians initiated conversations with NYU Libraries' Society, Culture, and Global Perspectives librarians to better understand researchers' collection needs. These area studies librarians work closely with colleagues in the field from other academic libraries, international book vendors in their designated areas of study, and the Library of Congress Cooperative Acquisitions Program.⁸ Through these conversations, IFA librarians hope to produce concise guidelines to determine what art resources are more suitable for the IFA Library collection instead of the NYU Libraries' flagship while highlighting works by artists, art critics, art historians, archaeologists, and conservators who prioritize underrepresented groups.

Asian art

Although most of the individual libraries were combined to create the main collection, the Asian library collection still exists on its own in a separate reading room. These materials are primarily East Asian materials in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Materials on South Asia are included in the main collections.

Currently, no staff on-site at the IFA Library have Chinese, Japanese, or Korean language or reading skills. This makes reviewing the current collection and making decisions for new acquisitions difficult. This difficulty is certainly not new, for Yasuko Makino similar documented circumstances in 1987.⁹

This collection sees heavy use by faculty members and many students. One of IFA's groups established by students and faculty is The China Project Workshop, organizing eight programs annually. Although there is a large demand for resources supporting art historical research in China and East Asia, the collections are not sufficient. Students approached library staff, asking questions about gaps in the collection. The students collaborated with faculty members to create lists of books, periodicals, and databases that would be especially useful for their research that the library did not already have access to.

Library staff proposed an in-person meeting to discuss these requests further with the students. These conversations proved fruitful in many ways. Students were able to discover some materials the library already had access to that were previously unknown to them. Library staff were able to learn more about topics and research areas in Asian art that were either not represented or minimally represented in library collections. One student recommended a vendor they had worked with that could provide more materials in the future.

This interaction led to librarians' next phase in reviewing the vendors the IFA had used for materials for the Asian Reading Room section (Fig. 2). The vendor the student recommended had worked with the IFA for many years, and librarians discussed the library's needs further via Zoom. The IFA Library is interested in

Approaches, ed. Gayle Ann Williams, and Jana Lee Krentz (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2019), 78.

7. Bob Holley, "Random Ramblings," 50.

8. "Cooperative Acquisitions Program" Overseas Offices, Library of Congress, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/>.

9. Yasuko Makino, "East Asian Art Materials: Toward Solving Problems Of Collection Development And Management," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 6, no. 3 (1987): 104, accessed July 24, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27947773>.



Fig. 2. Asian Reading Room, Stephen Chan Library for the Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Photograph courtesy of Annalise Welte.

pursuing more approval plans that can provide more materials in areas in which the collection is lacking, especially if library staff lack the language skills needed. A key element IFA Library is pursuing is the purchase of MARC records from these vendors. In this case, the vendor had not provided them but was interested in learning more to pursue providing them in the future.

It was important to discuss these subject areas with other art library specialists. IFA librarians began meeting with art librarians focusing on Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language art publications in January 2024. In conversations with colleagues from the Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we were able to discuss staffing, language expertise, workflows, and vendors. This valuable collaboration helped library staff re-evaluate the priorities and questions they had in order to choose how to continue developing collections and closing gaps.

Latin American & Caribbean art

For many years, IFA had a deep engagement with Latin American art of all historical periods and students have participated in a variety of activities in the field (Fig. 3). In 2012, the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) began a partnership with IFA that helped foster increased understanding and recognition of Latin American art around the world. A gift from ISLAA enabled Edward Sullivan, the IFA's Helen Gould Sheppard Professor of Art History, to invite



Fig. 3. Latin American Forum: Documenting the Americas, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (March 29, 2023). Photograph courtesy of N.L. Roberts, NYU/Institute of Fine Arts.

distinguished scholars in the field and support the purchase of key library acquisitions.¹⁰ However, library funding for this partnership has ended, and the IFA Library is looking at other opportunities to continue this work.

A collaborative approach for IFA Library resources would broaden the scholarly output from researchers near and far accessing materials with the help of like-minded art libraries. It is also an opportunity for art libraries from academic, museum, and research settings to share resources for digital projects and host events that are open to and may be attended by the general public on their collection strengths so that library users, whether they are students, faculty, curators, independent researchers, or museum goers, can participate in exploratory and interdisciplinary conversations.

In the article 'Latin American Art Resources North of the Border: An Overview of the Collections of the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC),' local art museum libraries demonstrate how collection building is greater than the sum of its parts.¹¹ The partnership among the Frick Art Reference Library, Brooklyn Museum Library, and Museum of Modern Art Library allowed for distinct collections with little to no duplication. These libraries' strengths were found in resource sharing and inclusive metadata through their cataloging practices, giving researchers free and open access to materials through digital projects and physical collections that reflect a global perspective.

As previously mentioned, the IFA Library's IDBEA theme for 2025 is Latin American & Caribbean art. There will be ample opportunities for collaboration in the future. NYU Libraries recently filled a role for librarian for Latin American, Caribbean, Spanish and Portuguese Studies, providing more potential for collaborations across departments.

Goals for the Future

Library staff continue to develop goals for the future of the IFA Library collections. These solutions must be collaborative in nature, work for our spaces and staffing, and support our infrastructure of IDBEA policies. The IFA Library staff have been interested in and inspired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Thomas J. Watson Library's 2021 project to assess, expand, and promote access to the library's collection of publications by and about Black, Indigenous, and people of color artists. The Watson Library Artist Indexes are an important example of what libraries can create as an outcome of this work.¹²

10. Amy Lucker, "News from the IFA Library - The Institute of Fine Arts Library receives major gift of Spanish art resources," Institute of Fine Arts Annual Report 2011-2012, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, accessed on July 30, 2024, https://ifa.nyu.edu/pdfs/publications/ifa_annual_2012.pdf.

11. Deborah Kempe, Deirdre E. Lawrence, and Milan R. Hughston, "Latin American Art Resources North of the Border: An Overview of the Collections of the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC)," *Art Libraries Journal* 37, no. 4 (2012): 5-14, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307472200017673>.

12. Helice Koffler, "Expanding the Collection," *In Circulation*,

In addition to collection development, IFA Library needs this support for collection maintenance in the weeding and off-siting of our current Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections. For this endeavor, librarians have contacted IFA faculty to provide support and expertise in identifying collection materials that are less within scope or would fall into the other criteria library staff have identified for sending materials off-site. Off-siting is a key step in collection development that cannot be overlooked in our library.

IFA librarians would like to consider similar avenues for paid specialized graduate student worker positions to gain experience as bibliographers in their area of expertise and in an art research setting or potential grant funded projects for library professionals in the near future. The IFA Library was a recipient of the NYU Libraries' IDBEA Project Fund 2024-2025. The fund's goal is to help NYU Libraries' staff engage in activities or learning opportunities that will further the libraries' IDBEA goals. This grant will allow the library to begin this work and hire a graduate student worker with language expertise to serve as the first bibliographer of the Asian art collection. Ideally, this would be a fully funded full-time staff position, but this grant allows staff to begin the work and determine the best way to move forward and propose ways to grow the position in the future.

IFA librarians also recognize that staff are retiring or moving on to new opportunities, taking with them subject matter expertise and institutional knowledge they have accumulated over their professional careers. Taking an optimistic approach to such adversity, IFA Library is considering partnerships with neighboring art libraries in the New York Metropolitan area. Many art libraries use consortia for various services and projects, and in New York City specifically, where staff is limited and real estate is expensive, it's time to reevaluate how libraries can use their resources more efficiently through such partnerships post-COVID-19 pandemic.¹³

Conclusion

In principle, there are many avenues one can take into consideration when discussing IDBEA work. However, conceptual frameworks are meaningless unless prioritizations are concrete and long-lasting. These are just a few approaches IFA Library staff have used in collections to make library resources accessible to its users. By identifying these three collection areas library staff have been able to begin the work of evaluating current workflows, finding areas to collaborate with others, and adjust with creative new approaches to continue advancing our work and close collection gaps.

IFA Librarians will continue to speak with colleagues at NYU Libraries and externally with art, area studies, and specialized research librarians as well as researchers in the field. The IFA Library staff will press on with community engagement, with IDBEA threaded throughout their work (Fig. 4). The most successful outcomes occur when we integrate IDBEA-focused elements into each aspect of the work accomplished in the library rather than viewing it as separate. Unquestionably, the IFA Library will keep expanding its collection holdings with unique and distinct materials that 'contain knowledge created by and about a wide array of people and cultures—and authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences.'¹⁴

Thomas J. Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 13, 2022, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2022/4/library-neh-grant-introduction>.

13. NYU Libraries' Head of the Institute of Fine Arts Library, Lori Salmon, participated on the OCLC advisory board for 'Operationalizing the Art Research Collective Collection.' The report explores opportunities for collaboration between art, academic, and independent research libraries. See Dennis Massie, Chela Scott Weber, Mercy Procaccini, and Brian Lavoie, "Sustaining Art Research Collections: Case Studies in Collaboration," OCLC Research Report (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2023), accessed July 31, 2024, <https://library.oclc.org/digital/collection/p267701co1127/id/18699>.

14. "Our Strategic Priorities: IDBEA - Our Collections," NYU Libraries, New York University, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://library.nyu.edu/about/general/values/idbea/>.



Fig. 4. 2024 Institute of Fine Arts Orientation, New York University. Photograph courtesy of N.L. Roberts, NYU/Institute of Fine Arts.

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