April 2013

Future or Fate: The slide collection of the Robert A. Deshon and Karl J. Schlachter Library

Jennifer H. Krivickas
University of Cincinnati, DAAP Library, krivicjh@UCMAIL.UC.EDU

Elizabeth Meyer
University of Cincinnati, DAAP Library, meyeret@UCMAIL.UC.EDU

Follow this and additional works at: https://online.vraweb.org/vrab

Future or Fate: The slide collection of the Robert A. Deshon and Karl J. Schlachter Library

Abstract

The fossilization of the DAAP Library slide collection paired with new knowledge of the fact that the college was no longer equipping classrooms with slide projectors; confirmation of the retirement of two faculty members who we *thought* still valued the collection; and the rising value of 'real estate' within our library, forced us to consider the future or fate of it. Not wanting to make any rash decisions, but rather, decisions based on knowledge and understanding of the state of the collection and user feedback, we decided to take a proactive approach and launch an assessment of the slide collection and gather feedback from our user community about it.

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Jennifer H. Krivickas is Head of the Robert A. Deshon and Karl J. Schlachter Library for Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (The DAAP Library) at the University of Cincinnati. Elizabeth Meyer is the Visual Resources Librarian at the DAAP Library.

Christopher Campbell, DAAP School of Architecture and Interior Design, Graduate Assistant; Linda Huang, DAAP School of Art, Art History Graduate Assistant; and Alex Walp, M.F.A., DAAP School of Art also contributed to the content of this article.

Our slide collection is typical in that it comprises 35mm photographic slides and is a part of a larger library, the Robert A. Deshon and Karl J. Schlachter Library for Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (The DAAP Library) at the University of Cincinnati. Like many other institutions, our slide collection, contains slides depicting art, architecture, and cultural objects, and has been used for the study, teaching, and documentation of art history, architectural history, and visual culture and is estimated to contain over 150,000 35mm slides. Before 1996, (the year the slide collection was moved into the DAAP Library), it stood alone within the College of Design, Architecture, and Art (DAA) and its purpose was to support the curriculum of DAA and to a lesser extent, the University of Cincinnati College of Arts and Sciences (A&S). Back in the slide collection's heyday, over 10,000 slides circulated annually and so its staff, one slide curator and several student assistants, were kept very busy circulating and building the collection which comprised copy-stand photography of images in books, some original photography, contributions from faculty and outside donors, and some stock imagery depicting art, architecture, and cultural objects.

As mentioned above, before 1996, over 10,000 slides circulated annually, however, just four years after its transfer to the DAAP Library, only 200 slides circulated annually and in 2005, usage dropped even more dramatically. We trace the 2005-drop to the fact that the *ARTstor* image database became available for licensing in 2004. As most visual resource professionals know, *ARTstor* continues to grow and dominate the academic image environment as it combines finding, organizing, and presenting high-resolution, copyright protected images in one, integrated software environment. Furthermore, while we cannot claim causation with certainty, we can also point out the obvious correlation between the sharp decline of the use of our slide collection and the availability and affordability of images via the Internet as well as the ease and inexpensive nature of digital photography and image editing and viewing software. Regardless of causation, the fact is our statistics indicate that usage of our slide collection has been on the decline since 2000, took a nosedive in 2005, and has been almost completely inactive since 2009.

The fossilization of the DAAP Library slide collection paired with new knowledge of the fact that the college was no longer equipping classrooms with slide projectors; confirmation of the retirement of two faculty members who we *thought* still valued the collection; and the rising value of 'real estate' within our library, forced us to consider the future or fate of it. Not wanting to make any rash decisions, but rather, decisions based on knowledge and understanding of the state of the collection and user feedback, we decided to take a proactive approach and launch an assessment of the slide collection and gather feedback from our user community about it.

So in the summer of 2011, the DAAP Library Visual Resource Librarian, Elizabeth Meyer, and I planned (and had a graduate student assistant perform) a mini-slide collection analysis. This assessment started with a sample size of 99 randomly selected slides and was shortly thereafter expanded to a sample size of 500 slides, which included and built upon the original sample of 99 slides. We decided that gaining an understanding of the below four factors would help us decide the future or fate of our slide collection:

1. Whether or not images from our collection were already available digitally (in *Artstor*);
2. The physical condition of slides;
3. The level of quality and completeness of the descriptive documentation of the slides;
4. The quality of slide content (image quality).

Our mini-analysis confirmed that the overall physical condition of our slide collection is good as is the overall image quality. However, we also confirmed that which we suspected: Nearly 100% of the slides analyzed, descriptive documentation, particularly source information, is incomplete, thereby making digitization impossible. In addition, Alex Walp, M.F.A., the graduate student assistant who performed the mini-analysis, also tested (at sample groups of 200, 300, and 400 slides from the 500 total slides), how constant the percentages were in terms of number of images available digitally via *Artstor*. He found that once the sample size grew to over 200 slides, the percentage of images available digitally in *Artstor* stabilized at around 34%. Based on the data generated from our sample, we postulate that around one third of the images in our slide collection are currently available in *ARTstor* and a small percentage were found in *the DAAP Library Digital Image Teaching Collection* (the DITC is a collection of 5800 images digitized by Elizabeth Meyer to support DAAP curriculum), via Luna. We did not investigate whether or not images from our slide collection were available via *Google Images* or any other freely available or subscription-based image repository.

Not being completely convinced that we should any take action based on the findings from this analysis of a relatively small sample of our collection, we decided to embark upon a robust assessment of the slide collection, so from October 2011 to March 2012, two different graduate student assistants, Christopher Campbell of the DAAP School of Architecture and Interior Design, and Linda Huang of the DAAP School of Art, were assigned to the task. Over the course of five months, Christopher and Linda assessed just over 17,000 slides (roughly 10% of our entire slide collection). We studied the same four criteria as we did for the mini-analysis: Physical condition, documentation, image quality, and the availability of digital version in *ARTstor* (and our own in-house collection hosted by Luna Insight, the DAAP Image Teaching Collection) additionally, took inventory of duplicate slides.

Findings

Their assessment produced the following findings:

1. 26% available digitally in *ARTstor* (+ .02% available digitally in *DAAP Library Image Teaching Collection*);
2. .75% in poor physical condition;
3. 14% duplicate slides;
4. 100% incomplete descriptive documentation (source information lacking).

Next steps

After having successfully completed a small- and large-scale analysis of our slide collection, we were contented by the knowledge that we could not digitize the collection based solely on the fact that in every instance, source information was lacking. However, this fact alone didn't completely satisfy our desire for justification to keep the collection onsite or decommission and deaccession it once and for all. After all, our research told us that only 26% of the images in our slide collection were available digitally in *Artstor*, and the physical condition and image quality was deemed good. Alas, we crunched and considered the facts some more, and came to the understanding that action could not be taken based on these facts alone. If anything, the numbers and facts gleaned from the analysis left us feeling wishy-*washier* about what to do. Phooey.

My co-author and I discussed (read: complained about) our adventure in collection analysis and our rather jejune findings amongst ourselves, with our University of Cincinnati Library Faculty colleagues and administrators, and with the DAAP Library Faculty Committee members. We set out to discover trends insofar as slide collections are concerned. We raised the issue of the future or fate of our slide collection at several college faculty and departmental meetings. Turns out our chatter, unlike our small- and large-scale analysis, yielded very clear information upon which action could be based! What we discovered and confirmed was that the college no longer equips classrooms with slide projectors and those that happen to still remain in classrooms are not being serviced (which is to say, the college is no longer fixing those that are broken or purchasing new lamps for existing projectors); Nostalgic attachments and fond memories of the slide collection, slides, and projectors, remain; nonetheless, the faculty of the College no longer utilize or value the slide collection as a research or teaching tool. Due to institutional regulations, a creative afterlife is not a possibility. Therefore, we ultimately decided to deaccession the slide collection—cabinets and all—as dictated by University policy.

DAAP Library Slide Collection Analysis:

Distillation of remarks by graduate assistant, Linda Huang

For this project, I went through part of the slides collection in the DAAP Library. The slides I worked on include paintings and sculptures of Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Denmark, Cuba, Czechoslovakia and Britain, British Photography, French and German architecture. I counted the number of slides in drawer, duplicates, bad-quality slides, and the number of slides found in ARTstor and Luna. This slides project allowed me to survey the diverse forms of arts in the world history of art. I encountered a number of interesting artists and pieces of work that I would like to further explore in the future. Elizabeth and I discussed the possible ways for recycling and reusing the duplicated slides for students teaching and community art projects.

DAAP Library Slide Collection Analysis:
Distillation of remarks by graduate assistant, Christopher Campbell

As a graduate assistant in the DAAP Library, I worked specifically on reviewing slides specifically from the French painting section. I learned a number of new things from this process:

1. The library once had many French painting slides, but, because most of these French artists are famous or common to study, I was able to remove roughly 4/5 of the slides in each drawer. I typically had no problem finding the artist and/or painting on ARTstor or LUNA.

2. I noticed a number of times that some paintings had been renamed on ARTstor – my approach to using the search engine on this database changed the more I used it. At times some names of paintings would be in the French as opposed to the English translation labeled on the slide. Other times, the French on the slide had to be translated to find the English title on ARTstor.

3. If the title of the painting did not work, I oftentimes used the year the painting was produced + the artist's name – usually this was a surefire way to find the painting on the databases.

4. Some questions arose when I was looking specifically at Monet paintings. His water lilies for instance, or the cathedral series, posed problems. It was often difficult to tell which shades of the painting were available on the database matched with which of those from the series I was looking at on the slide. More often than not I would remove a number of these slides, but it did remind me that I was essentially cutting knowledge, available resources, etc. Could I have become one of the reasons why some of Monet's paintings are becoming lost to the public? (Probably not, but it's interesting to think about!)

5. Also seeing the large French painting section made me realize, in comparison to the slides of other countries, other art forms, how much these artists in France have produced over history.

Overall (and even though sometimes I would leave with sore eyes), the slide assessment experience was enlightening because I was able to become more familiar with French painting (names of artists, names of paintings, variations of paintings, a closer look at a particular artist's oeuvre – I, for instance, gained a huge appreciation for Henri Rousseau! - And also with the way a library goes about with its management of the collection.