
Thomas J. Watson Library

Collection Development Policy

The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10028
metmuseum.org

I. MISSION

The Thomas J. Watson Library is the central research library of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The primary mission of the library is to support the research activities of the Museum staff. In addition, the library serves an international community of scholars, including museum, academic and commercial art professionals and college and graduate students. To this end its goal is to provide among the most comprehensive collections of printed, manuscript, and electronic materials on the history of art in the world.

II. DEFINITION OF THE COLLECTION

The library's holdings reflect the Museum's encyclopedic collections, with particular emphasis on European and American art, including decorative arts, and with substantial holdings in art of the ancient world, Asia, Islamic countries, and the Americas; fashion and costume; arms and armor; and musical instruments. For that reason the library reflects the encyclopedic chronological and geographical scope of the Museum's collections, from the proto-historic to the present across all cultures.

Building on a broad base of materials collected since 1880, which includes holdings in the humanities, the library now focuses more specifically on collecting publications to support research on the history of art. The library collects in support of present and future scholarly needs.

III. COLLECTING GUIDELINES

Subject scope

The library's holdings reflect the Museum's encyclopedic collections of art in all media across all curatorial departments.

The following topics are collected comprehensively:

American art (Colonial era to present), including painting from colonial portraits through early twentieth-century paintings, sculpture, stained glass, and architectural elements, decorative art objects of silver, gold, glass and ceramics, and domestic architecture and furnishings Ancient Near Eastern art and archeology, centered on Mesopotamia and extending west to the Mediterranean and east Central Asia, from the eighth millennium B.C. through the seventh century A.D.

Arms and armor, comprising European, American and non-European (Islamic, Near Eastern and Asian) arms, armor and weapons including firearms with an emphasis on outstanding design and decoration over purely military or technical interest

Asian art, from the fourth millennium to the present, including painting, prints, calligraphy, sculptures, metalwork, ceramics, lacquers, works of decorative art, and textiles from East Asia, South Asia, the Himalayan kingdoms and Southeast Asia

Drawings and Prints, primarily from Europe and the Americas, including drawings and prints of architecture and ornamental design, costume plates, and printed ephemera such as posters, handbills, trade cards, advertisements and baseball cards

Egyptian art and archeology, from the Paleolithic to the Roman period



European painting, sculpture, decorative arts, and graphic arts: Paintings from the 13th through 19th centuries, with strengths in seventeenth-century Dutch painting, El Greco and Goya, and French painting between neo-Classicism and post-impressionism; sculpture and decorative arts from the fifteenth through early twentieth centuries, including woodwork and furniture, ceramics and glass, metalwork and jewelry, horological and mathematical instruments, and tapestries and textiles

Greek and Roman art and archeology, from the Neolithic period through A.D. 312, covering Greece and Italy extending to the Greek colonies and the Roman Empire, and pre-Greek art of Greece and pre-Roman art of Italy, executed in marble, limestone, terracotta, bronze, gold, silver, and glass, as well as such rarer substances as ivory and bone, iron, lead, amber, and wood

Islamic art, embracing sacred and secular arts from the seventh to the nineteenth century from as far westward as Spain and Morocco and as far eastward as Central Asia and India

Medieval and Byzantine art: sculpture, stained glass, architectural elements, works in ivory, gold, silver and other metals, textiles; garden and landscape arts

Musical instruments, worldwide from about 300 B.C to the present

Modern and contemporary art, painting, sculpture, design and decorative arts worldwide since 1900

Photography, worldwide from its invention to the present, primarily fine art photography but including other genres such as landscape and documentary photography

Publications on all areas of the decorative arts and design are collected, including ceramics, glass, furniture, jewelry, metalwork, textiles and woodwork. Contemporary art publications are collected intensively on a global scale including those from commercial art galleries. Archaeological publications are collected as they relate to objects in the Museum.

The following subjects are collected selectively: art law; museology and museum studies; stage and theatre design; gardens and garden history; advertising design; folk art; and conservation. Publications on architecture are collected when they include discussion of the decorative programs in painting and sculpture or when they aid in research on the history of decorative art and interior design. Two specific topics on architecture are collected extensively: Frank Lloyd Wright and museum architecture. The library collects general literature on object conservation for all art media, periods and cultures as it pertains to the museum's collection, with a particular emphasis on conservation as it pertains to library collections. The library does not collect largely technical literature on object conservation.

Subjects that pertain to the collecting or creation of art are routinely added to the collection. Titles in complementary research areas such as social history, biography, literature, performing arts and religion are added on a highly selective basis. Items of a purely scientific nature are generally not added. The library collects materials on numismatics when the focus is on iconography. The library collects costume as it relates to iconography, style or interdisciplinary approaches to the study of objects in the Museum's collection. It does not actively collect books dealing with fashion, which are the responsibility of the museum's Irene Lewisohn Library in the Costume Institute.

Languages and Translations

The library collects publications in all languages reflecting the international nature and encyclopedic scope of the Museum's collection. The majority of the material is in Western European languages. Asian subject matter is also collected in Chinese, Japanese or Korean languages.

The library collects exhibition catalogs from multiple venues in various languages. English language publications are preferred where editions are published simultaneously in several languages. Acquisition will not be delayed, however, when a foreign language edition is published before an English language edition.

Imprint

The library collects in-print publications extensively. In addition, antiquarian materials are actively collected.

New Editions, Reprints and Facsimiles

New editions are acquired when they reflect significant changes and additions.

The library will acquire reprints when the title is new to the collection or when acquiring a reprint effectively preserves the physical condition of the library's original. Modern facsimiles are acquired selectively in direct consultation with curatorial staff.

Gifts

Gifts to the collection are added using the same criteria with regard to their scholarly value as purchased materials.

Gifts are accepted with the understanding that the library has complete discretion over the option to retain. The library does not rely extensively on exchange programs to acquire materials.

Multiple copies

In most instances the library acquires only one copy of any given publication. The library acquires at least three copies of publications issued by the Museum or substantially about works of art in the Museum's collection. Additional copies may be added where heavy Watson Library use is anticipated. Surplus gift copies of selected titles may be added to the catalog on behalf of departmental libraries.

IV. COLLECTIONS

Monographs

The library makes every effort to acquire all current monographic titles that fall within the parameters of its collecting scope. Books are selected for their scholarly content. Catalogues raisonnés and corpora; collection catalogs of both public and private collections; and exhibition catalogs from museums, art galleries, foundations and other venues are all collected comprehensively. Collected essays and festschriften, and the proceedings of congresses and symposia are acquired if the general scope of the work falls within the library's collecting parameters. Unpublished dissertations are acquired when they directly relate to the current research of Museum staff.

Periodicals

The library subscribes to journals in both print and electronic format, both current subscriptions and archived content: online only when it is on a trusted platform; print and online when the online option seems stable, is IP authenticated, yet is not on a trusted platform; and print only if no electronic version is available or the online option requires a password or is unstable.

The library collects scholarly serial publications from other art related institutions. With few exceptions, the library does not collect museum annual reports that are predominantly financial reports or calendars of events. The library subscribes to selected related interdisciplinary journals.

Auction and Sales Catalogs

The library acquires through gift, purchase or download auction catalogs from all major market auction houses worldwide, and to selected secondary market arts auction houses. In addition the library acquires through gifts individual sales catalogs from other auction houses. No comparable effort is made to be comprehensive for these houses. Retrospective catalogs are also selectively purchased to support specific provenance research and new fields of research; to supply missing holdings; or when the individual catalog contents warrant. Auction catalogs collected include all areas covered by the Museum's curatorial departments. The library makes every effort to include sales results for all current sales catalogs.

Reference Collection

Reference materials, both art specific works and those of a more general character yet required for the study of art, are selected in accordance with the greater collection development policy. For reasons of currency, access and functionality, electronic format is preferred where available. Print materials are made available on open shelves in the Reference and Reading rooms. Additional copies of most Metropolitan Museum of Art publications are also made available in the reference collection.

Reference works are selected according to format and content based on their anticipated frequency and nature of use, and the breadth of their audience. More specialized works are kept in the general collection.

While the most current or recently published material has priority over retrospective material, retrospective collections are maintained when they provide unique reference value or represent the most authoritative source. Superseded editions may be withdrawn or transferred to the general collection.

Art-specific reference sources include those relating to the artist (biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias of artists; dictionaries of artists' signatures and monograms, hallmarks and makers' marks); art literature (periodical indexes, bibliographies); the study of art (dictionaries of art terms, techniques, materials, iconography, symbols, attributes); and the art market (directories of museums, galleries, art professionals; exhibition records of museums; compendia of auction/sale results).

General reference resources may include foreign language dictionaries; atlases and gazetteers (historical and current); travel guides that include monuments, floor plans and/or detailed descriptions of museums; biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias; resources on monuments, important buildings, churches; resources on emblems, heraldry, genealogy; and resources on religion, mythology, literature, performing arts broadly defined.

Special Collections

The library actively collects rare books and periodicals, and other antiquarian materials. Most of these are acquired through the generous funding provided by donors including the Friends of the Thomas J. Watson Library. Special emphasis is given to collecting artists' monographs, exhibition catalogs, artists' manuals, art journals, artists' books, artists' publications, trade catalogs, and publications on world expositions, book arts, paper arts, printing and design.

The artists' publications study collection supports research and scholarship on these important publications. Artists' publications comprises artists' books, zines, bookworks, artist magazines, pamphlets, and related publications. The collection, which is international in scope, includes artist's files, reference books, dealer catalogs, pricelists, journals, and all forms of artists' publishing. Books are acquired through gift and purchase.

The Watson Library regularly identifies unique or rare items and collections of materials in its holdings for digitization. These items and collections have intrinsic art historical research and/or artifactual value, are generally free of copyright restrictions, and are not already accessible elsewhere in digitized form.

The library will collect an antiquarian title that is also freely available on the Web or is already available in the library through subscription digital collections if the original item: differs critically from its Web counterpart, such as manuscript annotations (for example, prices and buyers names in an auction catalog); has a significance apart from its contents, such as an association copy; or is specifically needed in the print version, as for an exhibition.

Artist and Ephemeral Files

The Artist File, currently suspended, contains ephemeral information on more than 20,000 artists. Included are articles from selected newspapers and magazines, as well as exhibition invitations, pamphlets and small catalogs. Mailings are received internationally from various sources including other museums, galleries and artists, and the majority of these are retained if they are of a professional level. The library maintains a file of ephemera relative to the Museum's history, including individual exhibition files (chronological) and departmental files.

Archives

The Thomas J. Watson Library does not seek to acquire unique or rare archival material. In the past, the library's archival collections have usually been acquired through gifts.

V. FORMATS

Digital Monographs

The decision to acquire a monograph title in print or digital format is made on an 'individual title' basis subject to a selector's judgment and familiarity with the publishing landscape. All criteria normally applied to selecting print titles apply equally to digital publications. Additional criteria applied to selecting in digital format may include the quality, timeliness relative to the print, digital file format, and (where applicable) availability on a trusted platform. In most instances the library will order either the digital or print format as appropriate, electing to make a title available in both formats on a case-by-case basis. Titles with an anticipated high-volume of usage should be purchased in digital format

when available. The decision to prefer the print format is made when a title does not satisfy enough selection criteria to warrant acquiring the title in digital format.

Digital monographs may be acquired as a single purchase, as part of a collection, or as they are triggered through a demand driven acquisitions (DDA) plan.

Electronic resources

The library provides comprehensive access to both free and subscription electronic resources available online. Electronic resources are added based on scholarly value, anticipated widespread use, and cost per use. The availability of existing print resources is also considered when selecting these resources.

Electronic resources collected may include:

- Auction sale and provenance research tools
- Indexes to periodical literature and other bibliographic material
- Biographical and genealogical resources
- Dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference works
- Collections of full-text electronic books
- Full-text journals and newspaper databases
- Image databases

Criteria to consider when selecting electronic resources:

- Relevance of subject covered to the library's intended audience
- Resource meets a perceived patron need and fills a gap in the library's collection
- Resource is requested/suggested by a museum staff member (e.g. curator) or a museum department
- Cost of resource and ability to sustain this continued cost
- Balancing cost of resource with the niche content it provides and its relevance to the library's patrons
- Uniqueness of content
- Significant lack of duplication with other electronic resources
- Scope and depth of coverage
- Relative completeness of content and frequency of updates
- Well-designed interface and intuitive functionality
- Value-added accessibility over corresponding print resource(s)
- Availability of IP-address authentication versus login-access
- Resource can be accessed remotely – i.e. outside the Museum's IP range.
- Ability to print, save, and email results
- Responsive vendor customer service and technical support, as well as useful Help guides
- Vendor's reputation and their ability to keep abreast of industry standards and trends for e-resources
- Favorable product reviews from review sources and/or other subscribers
- Vendor provides usage statistics

In certain instances the library will collect non-core electronic resources highly selectively. Non-core electronic resources collected may include:

- Non-art historical resources
- General reference resources
- Resources that specifically fit the research needs of a department and are not likely to be widely used across the museum

Criteria for selecting non-core electronic resources should be balanced with those for core electronic resources and can include:

- Resource is not available at other New York City area libraries, including libraries and societies that allow access to their resources via individual paid memberships
- Feedback from museum staff
- Cost of resource balanced against anticipated use within the museum

Additional criteria in the case of a resource specific to a museum department include:

- Ability of said department to pay for part or all of the resource
- Assessing what other Watson Library resources currently serve said department’s research needs

Given the financial, instructional and maintenance implications required to provide electronic resources, subscriptions are reviewed periodically to insure they continue to meet the original selection guidelines and expectations. Criteria for canceling a subscription electronic resource include:

- Usage statistics are consistently low, and remain low, in spite of efforts to market the resource
- Considerable increase in cost of resource, especially without any corresponding increase in content or improved functionality
- Significant access issues
- Outdated interface and lack of functionality
- Duplicate content is found in other electronic resources
- A better resource becomes available, with a superior interface, more affordable cost, and other key improvements
- Severe and repeated vendor problems

Microforms

While the library prefers print or digital publications, it acquires microforms if the publications are not available in any other format.

Offprints

Offprints are generally not collected from publications owned by the Watson Library, with the exception of articles written or edited by MMA staff, or devoted entirely to objects in the MMA collection. Offprints from publications not held by the library are added highly selectively.

Other formats

DVDs as stand-alone works are collected highly selectively, although they are routinely added to the collection when they accompany a print publication. Other computer disc and video formats are generally not collected. The library does not actively collect audiovisual materials, slides, photographic collections, original prints or other works of art.

VI. RELATION TO OTHER LIBRARY RESOURCES

Other Collections in the Museum

As the research library of record for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Thomas J. Watson Library supports research for all of the departments of the museum. The Watson Library actively collaborates with other libraries in the Museum to collect in selected subjects and cultures: the Robert Goldwater Library for materials on pre-twentieth century indigenous art from sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, pre-contact Americas, and Native American art; the Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library for materials on fashion and costume; and the Nolen Library in the Uris Center for Education for works on art education and books on art for children. These and other departmental libraries in the Museum complement the holdings of the Watson Library and may make added copies of shared titles available to museum staff and visiting researchers.

Other Collections in the New York Metropolitan Area

New York City is also rich in other research libraries that both complement and supplement the library’s resources, including the New York Public Library, New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, Frick Art Research Library, Morgan Library and Museum, Museum of Modern Art Library Brooklyn Museum Library and those of other museums. In addition to libraries in the New York metropolitan area, Watson Library offers Interlibrary Services whereby materials can be borrowed from other libraries for Museum research staff.

VII. WITHDRAWAL

Decisions to withdraw specific items, like decisions to acquire new titles, are made within the context of the total collection policy, in order to maintain overall integrity of the collection. The importance of art historiography as a research focus obliges the library to retain superseded editions of art historical texts.

After review print volumes of journals and selected reference titles will be withdrawn once a comparable electronic version is available on a trusted platform. Heavily illustrated journals will be retained in print editions and housed on-site. Print editions of reference works superseded by electronic continuing resource or later editions will be retained only if the work provides demonstrated historical or historiographic value.

VIII: REPLACEMENT AND DESIDERATA

Before printed material which has been lost or damaged is considered for replacement, a thorough search is done in the library and in the Museum's departments. The criteria to be considered for replacement include long-term value and demand; alternative coverage of the topic in the existing collection; and availability in an electronic version, whether in a digital collection, a freely available version, or as an e-book. Where appropriate the library will consider a preservation digital version. Replacement copies are ordered for books when conservation is determined not to be appropriate. Desiderata are acquired when found during routine searching of out-of-print dealers' catalogs or when a researcher requests the title.