

Artifacts 2020 x New Directions in Art Librarianship + Archives Conference Notes

June 27, 2020

Tongva resources

Artist Iris Yirei Hu: Lessons from Wise Woman

<https://irisyireihu.com/Lessons-from-Wise-Woman-1>

Embroidered poem written by artist in dedication to Julia reads:

*Grandmother Oak Tree
rests among her children
her shadow cradles us
as father sun gazes on*

*There is so much to grieve
Wise Woman once said
for those who cannot mourn
she holds your heart and weeps*

*When the spirit falls
I learn to weave a basket
Loving Heart Woman
Her wrinkled hands, a prayer*

*Running Fast Woman unearths
the dust of tomorrow
she calls the butterfly to dance
Her magnum opus*

You Are on Tongva Land: Mercedes Dorame, Angela R. Riley & Wendy Teeter

Artist Mercedes Dorame, a member of the tribe of Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California, joins Angela Riley, director of UCLA's Native Nations Law and Policy Center, and Wendy Teeter, Fowler Museum archaeology curator, to discuss repatriation and land ownership in indigenous communities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hfvYhbtBrk>

In early June, Seeding Sovereignty was invited to participate in the Two Spirit Contingent of the LA Pride Parade and were welcomed onto Tongva territory by queer Indigenous elders.

This video was made with support from our relatives and allies, who came with love from not only our 2S/LGBTQIA+ community, but from across so-called California and greater Turtle Island.

Storytellers: Indigenous LA Pride - Tongva Land

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyBQCdq2QMI>

“Welcome to Tongvaland” Navajo tribute to the Tongva peoples

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2cb1UpDMBs>

L. Frank Manriques (Tongva/Ajachmem) oral history

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyIEeFtrODO>

**Panel 1: Independent Publishing and the Academic Library
(introduction by Amanda Lorge)**

No Time (presentation by Marco Kane Braunschweiler)

- Series of quotations:

Akram Zaatari: "What is a photograph? This is an essential question that still seeks an answer. A photograph cannot be reduced to paper, emulsion and silver particles. A photograph is the shortest statement that one can spend time with and can try to understand and reflect upon over and over. It cannot only be made with emulsion and paper. The photography institutions in most cases failed to see photography as a type of recording that could trigger a set of emotions in very unpredictable ways. A photograph is still enigmatic even when we know everything about it. It will still be able to surprise us, to make us cry, over generations. When we are able to consider every recording that is capable of reproducing emotions as photographs, then we should be able to consider film, performance and any act of leaving a trace as photography."

Ta-Nehisi Coates

you still have to find some sort of mission [...] even within the chaos with no assurance that you will see any sort of victory within our lifetime

Samuel Delany, Dhalgren

[... the artist who gives his all to life, to living within some sort of perfected ideal. Sometime in his past he has discovered he is . . . let us say, a poet: that certain situations, certain convergences of situations—usually too complicated for him to understand wholly, as they propitiously juxtapose conscious will with unconscious passion—they something-between-cause-and-effect allow a poem. He dedicates himself to living, according to his concepts, the civilized life in which poetry exists because it is part of civilization.

Suzy Halajian, ArtCabinet

Ideas around how art could respond to a particular moment were constantly being discussed— to what degree could art address a time marked by unrest all around the Arab world, and as that turmoil reached out elsewhere to many other points? Also, how could art work to unpack a politics of protest and violence? Should it even attempt to take up these concerns? I was personally grappling with these questions. It was never my central concern whether contemporary art could dialogue with the current sociopolitical moment of a specific region on the brink of continued unrest with an ongoing refugee crisis, or how cultural production could respond to such politically charged times. My pursuit was and still is to interrogate where and when art making should begin. To think about this some more, I turned to artistic and activist works by filmmakers and citizen journalists during times of protest, and I inquired into other experimental forms of moving image works from the same period that also engage with notions of contestation and resistance.

Some of these questions I had during this time are more clearly articulated by Doa Aly, a Cairo-based artist I've been in conversation with on past projects. Aly effectively questions art's purpose in times of duress as she

contemplates the difference between the artist and the human self in her text, “No Time for Art?” It was written in 2011 during a moment of anger after the 18 days of revolution in Cairo, which resulted in the Egyptian President Mubarak stepping down and handing over power to the military after nearly three decades of rule. In it, Aly asks, “What do we do now? Do we keep doing what we used to do? Where do ‘we’ end and our art begin?” She concludes by stating that it’s particularly dangerous to abandon art during times of upheaval; it’s precisely when creativity must be employed, and in fact, “no time is no time for art.”

Bernice Johnson Reagan’s Coalition Politics: Turning the Century

But most of the things that you do, if you do them right, are for people who live long after you are long forgotten. That will only happen if you give it away. Whatever it is that you know, give it away like that, because they’re gonna die when you die, give or take a few days. Give it away that way (up and down). And what I’m talking about is being very concerned with the world you live in, the condition you find yourself in, and be able to do the kind of analysis that says that what you believe in is worthwhile for human beings in general, and in the future, and do everything you can to throw yourself into the next century.

“Everyday ain’t like that, and what really counts is not what you try to do this weekend, but take what this weekend has meant—try to digest it. And first thing, Monday, Tuesday morning at work, before twenty-four hours go around, apply it. And then do it everyday you get up and find yourself alive. Thank you.

- Objects have history, power.

Tolstoy College: archives + research processes (presentation by Julie Niemi)

- Tolstoy College: process and why of getting to that material
- Concept of publishing and circulation of the book, but also how it can be a way of community building. Selection of people, locations, etc.

- Bard College — moments in institutional histories... where is there an openness and critically look at them and change them?
- Asking new questions about how to live and what to live for— students putting pressure on those colonialist histories of colleges
- Saidya Hartman informed the work (omissions and gaps in the archive). WG Sebald, as well.
- 68-85 Tolstoy (activists against gentrification issues in buffalo) — mutual aid groups, collective gardens, gay and lesbian studies/identities.
- Pressure from students/faculty to have a “Berkeley of the East” (cyclical perspective)
- Work in process: working with artists on the exhibition, original community members, and others... collaborative process and continual learning process. Next steps: exhibition at the University of Buffalo next year.

Distribution versus inclusion (presentation by Dianne Weinthal)

- Objective today: amplify relevant projects
- Uncertainty in this current moment of COVID, but BIPOC artists and makers have always experienced precarity from white supremacist structures
- Printed Matter promoting and amplifying new initiative: anti-racist PDFs. Free download .
- Recent examples of photobooks: Chris Graves, independent book maker. Prolific and beautiful work. Chrisgravesproject.com
 - RANDOMIZER
 - Monolith additions
- Art book fairs are sites where librarians can interact directly with distributors and publishers. Lowers the barrier for entry. Now more than ever, librarians can reach out to independent publishers easily via social media
 - Establish relationship
 - Let publishers know how they acquire new materials
- Diversify what libraries are looking at... buy directly from the publisher whenever possible!
- If it's sold out, just ask. Could be more books not listed
- Intentional curation
- BKABF 2020 - support black artists
- Interaction, acquisition, curation

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-ucBx5neDtz9UAe5fJtMOtVJERcl3whZmSIEtaAbkw/edit?usp=sharing>

Resources on slide 29:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-ucBx5neDtz9UAe5fJtMOtVJERcl3whZmSIEtaAbkw/edit?usp=sharing> Brooklyn Art Book Fair (virtual — happening now!):

<https://bkabf.info/> Virtual Assembly book fair (from back in April):

<https://virtual-assembly.com/>

Question and answer session from panel 1:

- Imagination and activism.... believing in a better future and world.
 - How do you stay motivated?
- Q: How to self publish?
 - Look at other books/small presses for inspiration
 - Self publish, be happy is one resource(becoming institutionalized)
 - Talk to other publishers... Brooklyn art book fair— virtual assembly.
 - “The power of the cold email, or the follow up, or the pitch”—Julie Niemi. Write an email and say you like what you’re looking at.
- Q: Everyone, great presentations. Dianne, wondering if you had a chance to explore the idea of approval plans in academic library acquisitions? Are there examples of art librarians challenging these?
 - (audience member): UCLA was looking into this for latin american photobooks, zines etc but we couldn’t find a vendor who had the expertise/time (to connect w many small publishers/artists) to do it. We found it was easier for us to travel to the indie book fairs in the region.
 - (audience member) CCS Bard (Julie’s alma mater) has a particularly great contemporary artist book collection, their head of library and archives is Ann Butler
- Q: For Julie: can you talk a bit more about how you established relationships with the archivists in your project, and if you had any challenges in that process? What are your guiding principles when forming and approaching those relationships?
 - Helped that she had an institutional affiliation.
 - Best response when she writes with a clear plan and scope (as independent researcher)
 - Marquette university, 1920s socialist/feminist histories. Emailing archivist, pretty clear x not as much success there.
 - Bob at University of buffalo, its varied over the years.
- BIPOC small presses: brown recluse zine distro & cassandra press

Panel 2: New Directions in Community Archiving and Activism (introduction by Lisa Kahn)

The Amplification Project (presentation by Kathy Carbone)

- Number of asylum seekers is the highest its ever been. New narratives around forced migration are taking place in art spaces.
- Art “brings us to our senses”
- Contemporary art and activist work created by and supported by refugeehood, displacement, and the experience of undergoing asylum.
- Critical archiving -- what is the point of art if not to change our ways of thinking, changing?
- Self determination
- Participatory archives... people from diverse communities can contribute shares, skills, and various actions in building the archive itself.
- Activist/interventionist archive.
 - Be a corrective to mainstream archives.
- People uploading materials have the ability to describe their own materials
- Spotlight on: <http://www.asylumarchive.com/>
 - Started as a coping mechanism

Los Angeles Contemporary Archives: collections and collectivity in archives (presentation Saida Largaespada)

- Background in musicology. Role at LACA is archivist. Programmer, administrator, grant writer, cleaner, etc.
- How LACA uses its collections, programming, and partnerships to engage artist communities and collectivity.
- LACA is an artist run archive and non-circulating artist book library in which contemporary creative processes are recorded and preserved. Goal is the study and dissemination of materials documenting contemporary art production. LACA sustains a unique experimental environment for critical inquiry, artistic research, and public dialogue.
- Queer poc womxn in the arts - began as main focus
- Artists write their own database... (much like amplification project)
 - Use their own vocabulary and get to choose how their work is framed and disseminated.
- Community is a vague term, struggle with that.
- Mobilize communities through local programming.

- The Chinese Historical Society
- WAPOW Magazine -- free bilingual magazine on arts in LA
- Intergenerational oral history event
 - Raise curiosity across generations
 - Day for people to come together and learn from each other.
 - Encouraged everyone to continue having these conversations.
 - Infographic... graphic design by Debbie Cho
- Essential for LACA to continually collaborate with sister spaces/informal partnerships
 - Wendys subway
 - Southland institute
 - Yaxs
 - Amcva radia
 - Big conversation project
 - Mountain school
 - Beta local
 - And more.
- Beta Local - Seed Drive
 - Aftermath of Maria and deeper issues around colonization (specifically of agriculture in this event)
- Reflexivity and Re-Imagination - Community Reading Group
 - Philosophical investigations of the concept of community in popular, political, and legal rhetoric. We focus on scholars who complicate positive invocations of community, such as community building, resilience, preservation, health, or rights. Our aim is to foster an approachable space for an individual of any background to challenge their own inherited ideas around common being.
 - Current...
 - <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674737563>
- Russian dolls! Communities within communities
- saida@lacarchive.com

Conclusion: Building Communities



- LACA works to foster a space where participants and collaborators can reflect, reimagine, and transform.
- **How do we do this?** We create test projects that are rigorous, collaborative and supportive. This includes groups of like-minded or even opposing individuals that seek a productive and inclusive learning environment.
- We create/facilitate groups who want to imagine together.
- Experimentation in processes of archiving, memory, and preservation



Change through Exchange (presentation by Zachary Rutland)

UCLA intern Mellon foundation grant. Tension between professionalizing self while also working in community archiving. Deeper and richer experience of doing community archival work is very valuable. We can learn from the community spaces and have it inform professional archival work.

- Skid Row History Museum and Archive
 - Documents community and history of Skid Row
 - Creative and activist culture. Recovery culture.
 - Skid row is the heart of downtown LA.
 - “Containment area” language by city planners
 - Homeless placed into one area. Los Angeles Poverty Department... the containment plan works against what the city wanted. What has resulted in the past 40 years, we have seen real community join in power, activism, and the arts.
 - Founded in 1985 // community arts and theater group
- John Malpede “LAPD: Process to Performance”
- How to house 7,000 people (Skid Row)
- Parade route throughout skid row — march through a section where a community honoree is “walk the talk”
 - Link to video?

Collaborating Society: Art-Activism for the Divided Korea)

- I archive my experience
- Humans of North Korea — Jae stepped down from this role last week.

- “I am the next generation that will decide the future of the Korean Peninsula”
- Volunteer to teach Korean defectors
- Archiving the experience...
 - genuine and remembers (in my mind)
 - searchable archives (beyond)
- Analyzing Tehran Archive.... categorizing perspectives
- North Korean defectors... did not reveal themselves to the public yet worked to emancipate NK.
- Archive into art— how does the general public perceive North Korean defectors?

Question and answer session from panel 2:

- Q: Are participatory archives exclusive to community based archives, or can it be applied retroactively in mainstream institutions?
 - In a smaller scale its manageable and easier to get information than larger spaces
 - LA Poverty Dept. has created community connections over time. What is the relationship between community and the institution? There are many tensions there.
 - Kathy: New Zealand national archive is very connected to indigenous communities (indigenous communities participate in description). Not happening as much as it should be... but Australia is also doing it. Needs to happen in a larger institutional context.
 - Jae: North Korea... oral history defector community in LA and Chicago, and within the East Asian Library at UCLA. It's a community that's very hard to work with, because defectors do not want to reveal to the public.
- Q: LACA — who writes metadata for materials donated posthumously?
 - Ongoing relationships... so they haven't run into that issue.
- Q: Do the community members in Skid Row participate in any of the archival processes and in what way?
 - Depends on how you participate in the archive. They participate in oral history. They participate in the parade. But, they aren't doing mass tagging events for collections or anything like that.

Short film screening

Anti Racist practice in LIS discussion

While we allocated 20 minutes for this discussion, it ended up lasting about 40 minutes.

- Introduction...Confronting our failure of care:
 - How do we begin? We need to start at taking a hard look at professionalism, and ask instead why people are not at the center of our work. (Jarrett Drake)
 - We Will Not Be Silent: Amplifying Marginalized Voices in LIS Education and Research by Amelia Gibson, Sandra Hughes-Hassell: “As a field, we are presented with a dilemma. Should we keep our heads down quietly and hope that no one notices us and our values? Or should we do the difficult work of continuous learning and introspection, continued development of our pedagogy, and open public discourse about our values? Should we choose not to speak for fear that our expertise might touch on current political concerns (i.e., real life)? Or should we be proactive in our personal learning, research agendas, pedagogy, and community engagement? We embrace the last. As faculty, we can use our privilege to challenge social and institutional systems that silence and marginalize. When we have the courage to break our own silence, we can make room for others to speak.”
- One strategy: Reallocate wealth... proactive cities in the museum world seem to be Chicago and New York. What can be done for those of us in Los Angeles as cultural workers to create a similar model and coalition?
 - Joint art/librarian organizing.
 - Information silos are a big issue
- National in scope: The VRA Equitable Action Committee (<http://vraweb.org/about/committees/equitableaction/>) has been holding bi-weekly forums on these topics, but their documents full of links are not (yet) public
- Erin Christovale, one of the Hammer Museum curators, has been vocal about redistribution of art world resources.
- Anti-racist work is anti-capitalist work: We are conditioned to think in a scarcity mindset.
- Resources are being withheld, particularly in LIS:
 - Get the sense that we are in a good position to “not accept” things anymore. We don’t want some changes.
 - Difficult to include these things in your professional work. Goes against the logic of why you have to show up to work everyday.
- Resource: <https://summaeverythang.org/>
- Union work... demands can be made by art workers, and workers within larger institutions.
 - What is demanded?

- Labor rights issues but also within the contracts, rework ways in which the institution is allocating their resources.
- Important to consider what places are being over-funded and reallocate resources from there.
- Librarians and archivists unionizing. Are archivists unionizing?
- Archivists who work for big institutions.
- UCLA hires term archivists.
- Resource: <https://www.diglib.org/groups/df-working-group-on-labor-in-digital-libraries/>
- Critique what a professional actually is...
 - Abolish professionalism all together?