ART Now! Contemporary Art Resources in a Library Context

Overcoming Zine-ophobia: Limited editions in the academic library

**Introduction.** As so many are fetishizing the library and information going digital, there has been a tremendous backlash to this concept in contemporary culture and the arts. It is everywhere. We see people getting together in cafes with their typewriters, we see the rise of the ebook and its ubiquity in almost every discipline except the visual arts, and we see zines, limited editions and DIY publications making a comeback.

What is the role of the art library in collecting zines, limited editions and DIY publications that are works of art in and of themselves? Is the role of the library to be the same as all of our peers or will our role in the future be that of developing unique collections? And how can we be unique in this age of limited budgets? Purchasing rare materials for thousands of dollars is not realistic for most of us anymore. Working with local vendors to purchase local and unusual content is our future. But who will use these materials and how will they find out about them? What is appropriate for our collections and what is not? Should we be providing equipment and materials to support the creation of zines, limited editions and DIY publications analogous to the support we provide to create e-content? Arts research, documentation, and collecting is rapidly changing, how do we create collections that are scholarly and serious and make room for cutting-edge, interesting and culturally relevant materials? These are the issues I will be exploring with you today in the context of ART Now! Contemporary Art Resources in a Library Context.

**What is a zine?** Zines can be difficult to define. Very briefly, From the NY Times (Oct 22, 2011): The word “zine” is a shortened form of the term fanzine, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Fanzines emerged as early as the 1930s among fans of science fiction. Zines also have roots in the informal, underground publications that focused on social and political activism in the ’60s. By the ’70s, zines were popular on the punk rock circuit. In the ’90s, the feminist punk scene including Kathleen Hanna produced *riot grrrl* out of Olympia, Washington propelled the medium. From Wikipedia (viewed March 22, 2012): a zine is most commonly a small circulation publication of original or appropriated texts and images. More broadly, the term encompasses any self-published unique work of minority interest usually reproduced via photocopier. A popular definition includes that circulation must be 5,000 or less, although in practice the significant majority are produced in editions of less than 1,000,
and profit is not the primary intent of publication. There are so many types of zines: art and photography zines, literary zines, social and political zines, music zines, perzines (personal zines), travel zines, health zines, food zines, and the list goes on and on.

**Zine Libraries.** Over the last 20 years, zines have been collected in libraries but the momentum has really been building over the last 10 years. There has been a renewed interest in zine creation and a real dialogue about collecting zines that has hit the mainstream. Zine collections can be found in academic libraries, in public libraries, as independence entities within bookstores or cooperative spaces, and even as nonprofit organizations. The Barnard College Library Zine Collection may be the most well-known zine collection in an academic library in the United States. Their collection specializes in women authors and artists and feminism. They began collecting in 2003 and their collection numbers approximately 1,400 as of June 2010. They distinguish their collection as an open stacks circulating collection, not in a special collections (a point I will revisit later). The Papercut Zine Library may be the largest most well-known independent collection in the U.S. Papercut is in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is self-described as “a fully-functioning lending library, with a focus on hand-made and independently produced materials. Our collection includes everything from the all-familiar photocopied punk rock zines from the ‘80s to hand-crafted personal zines bound together with yarn. Papercut is run by a collective of volunteer librarians. In addition to archiving and maintaining this collection, librarians also host a number of events including zine making workshops and zine release parties.” (http://www.papercutzinelibrary.org/wordpress/) They are currently housed in a used bookshop and numbers about 15,000. And then there are nonprofit organizations like the Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland, Oregon. Self-described as the heart of the DIY artistic and literary movement in Portland, their library collection, completely built on donations totals 6,000.

**Why collect?** A few years ago, a new art book store opened up in Austin, Texas. Domy Books, originally from Houston, opened up a second location in Austin. Now I should be clear that this was Austin’s first book store dedicated to art books. This bookstore is an interesting place. It sells materials ranging from limited run zines to high dollar exhibition catalogs, the local and global, respectively. In addition, about 1/3 of the store’s space is an exhibition space. The manager of Domy was a friend of a friend and we met at an opening one evening. I kept thinking to myself, there must be some sort of relationship that we could forge, but I wasn’t sure what this would look like. Several months later, I was visiting with a colleague, Milan Hughston from the Museum of Modern Art Library and Archives and a UT Alumnus. Milan was in town for a Latin American Art symposium. I was showing him around the Fine Arts Library

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that I manage, having a lively conversation about old traditions and current trends when suddenly he asked me “What are you doing about zines?” I stopped for a minute, unsure exactly what to say. I’d been pondering going down the acquisitions road with Domy but hadn’t yet taken the leap. My response was “What are you doing?” He said that he had a relationship with Printed Matter Inc. in New York City and was acquiring these publications. Printed Matter is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of publications made by artists (http://www.printedmatter.org/about).

Now, I had been buying artists’ books regularly for several years. There was a decent collection when I arrived at the Fine Arts Library in 1995 and I thought it prudent to continue to develop the collection even though there were no regular users and no real classes that used these objects in class. About five years ago, a new faculty member was hired who began teaching a bookmaking class, she now uses our collection of artists’ books every semester. I learned a lesson. If you think something is important to collect, there will be users. Contrary to the current rhetoric and the ideas behind Demand Driven Acquisitions (DDA) or Patron Driven Acquisitions (PDA), I believe we are building collections not just for the scholars of today but for the scholars of the future. Sometimes the future is 10 years, but sometimes it may be tomorrow. So in 2010, I began a formal relationship with Domy but I was keeping my limited edition collecting a bit of a secret not yet ready to publicize what I was doing with my modest budget for art books. I was not ready to let the faculty know that I was spending approximately 10% of the budget on what they may consider non-scholarly content. Then last year, I had a fairly new faculty member in passing tell me that she was going to ask her students to make a zine and she wanted to inquire about adding all of the zines that were made in her class to the Fine Arts Library. This last assignment of the semester is called Project Publish. The students are required to make several copies of their zines. One for every class member, one for the faculty member’s teaching collection, one for possible addition to the Fine Arts Library and one to submit to a zine library of their choice. Now we know the uneven quality of first-year undergraduate output and I was reluctant to promise the addition of every single work. Instead I thought it best to make it a competition and to add the one or two best works to the Library’s collection. This was also my opportunity to share the collecting I was doing with this faculty member and see if I could begin getting some real use of the collection, thus making it a justifiable cause. She was thrilled to learn that I was collecting and wanted to begin to use what I had purchased in her class as examples, similar to what the bookmaking class was doing with artists’ books. In Spring 2013, this professor is teaching a class on Print in the Digital Age. The objectives of the course: This course will survey the contemporary print landscape from the current revival of letterpress and other

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traditional hand-printing methods to the introduction of on-demand printing technologies and three-dimensional printers. Students will evaluate the relevance of physical printed matter in an increasingly digitized world. What does it mean to hold a book and turn a page in 2012? How does paper and ink affect the viewing experience? Part of the course requirement is to spend time with the zine and artist’s book collection at the Fine Arts Library.

The first answer to why collect is that if you are supporting an innovative program with young and vibrant faculty artists and designers and even contemporary historians, this material will get use. Secondly, the uniqueness of our collections is essential to our future. We have to distinguish ourselves from one another, we have to continue to be special though we no longer have the collections budget to support this tenet. Third, this is one of the media that contemporary artists are using and since it is a print medium, I believe it is up to libraries to collect these objects. Galleries and museums are not doing it and if it is not collected there will be no record of its importance and prominence in our culture. Forth, these objects are visually interesting and make our collections rich, fun and attractive. They inspire, educate, and entertain.

When speaking at ARLIS/NA in March, Marshall Weber of Booklyn, the artist-run nonprofit that promotes artists books’ discussed the ideas that make zines so interesting. He states that with zines non-experts/amateurs have a voice. He posits that zines offer a diverse perspective and that these alternative materials are excellent additions to the canon as one of the many reasons libraries should be collecting zines.

And I’m sure we could all come up with additional reasons. So how do we begin to collect?

**How to select?** When I speak about zine collecting informally with my friends and colleagues, I always get the question, “how do you know what to buy?” When I was last in Domy to pick up materials, I purchased a zine recommended to me by the manager and zine aficionado. The artist happened to walk in during our transaction. I was introduced to him and at that time he was told that the University of Texas was purchasing his zine for their art library. He was excited that day because he had just received a call from the *New York Times*, they were commissioning him to do an illustration for the newspaper and he had 24 hours to get something to them. I was immediately satisfied to have purchased his zine for our library. I will admit that when I started down this road, I did not know too much about zines and zine collecting. I was not familiar the seminal artists/authors or titles. My strategy was to call on folks that do have this knowledge. Fortunately, Russell the gentleman that runs Domy is an amazing fountain
of knowledge in this area and a zinester and zine creator in his own right. What I had been doing is making an appointment once a month. Russell would have a chance to look out for stuff for me and when I came into the shop, he would go over each item with me and let me know why he thought it was important for me to add to the Fine Arts Library collection. Reasons included were local or well-known artist, interesting design/structural elements, interesting content, scarcity, and the like. This was working just fine. But now that faculty were actually going to be using the collection for teaching purposes, I enlisted the faculty members to go with me to make selections at Domy. This worked out very well and I knew for certain that the material that the faculty members picked out would definitely be used. As I move forward, I will solicit recommendations from faculty and the shopkeeper but I have learned enough about zines during this process to make some decisions on my own.

Though zines have been around for years, it is only most recently that conventional librarians are discussing collecting these objects. At the ARLIS/NA conference this year in Toronto there was both a workshop and panel on collecting zines, a new topic for this group, and an example of this important trend making it to the mainstream dialogue on collecting in an arts library. The four hour workshop discussed building, promoting, and sharing zine collections and the 90 minute panel focused on progressive collection policies and practices for zines, minicomics, and alternative presses. At the RBMS (Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL) pre-conference in San Diego this year there is a session on cataloging, processing and accessing fringe formats (From Dungeons and Dragons...).

Of course, there are several ways to educate yourself when it comes to zines including books on zines like *Fanzines: the DIY Revolution* (2010) by Teal Triggs and books on zine collecting, most notably *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in your Library* (2004) by Julie Bartel. Websites abound including the extremely informative *Zine World: A reader’s guide to the underground press* (http://www.undergroundpress.org). As of December 2011 there is a new official member interest group within the American Library Association (ALA) called Library Boing Boing. *Boing Boing* (http://boingboing.net) started as a zine in 1988 moved to the web in 1995 and became web only in 1996. This partnership is significant because Boing Boing which has a huge readership will be formally featuring interesting new ways that libraries are connecting with their patrons (I will revisit this later).

And there is more. There is a zine librarian unconference, this year it is in July in Pittsburgh (http://zinelibraries.info/wiki/pgh-zluc-2012-july-27th-28th-pittsburgh-pa), an International Zine Library Day (last year it was July 21), a Zine Librarians Yahoo Discussion Group, and even a discussion of a Zine Union Catalog and Zine Core (akin to Dublin Core or VRA Core). If you are interested in building a

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collection of zines and art-related limited editions, these types of workshops, presentations, publications, and interest groups will help you get started.

**Challenges: acquiring, preservation, cataloging, access.** As you can see it took a lot of thought for me to decide to collect zines. After I made that decision then I had to deal with the lifecycle of the handling of these objects including acquisition, cataloging, preservation treatment, and access. All four of these elements must be considered to have a successful zine collecting program. The materials can be challenging because they are hybrid group of special materials that come in more than one time so an independent workflow needed to be set up that is not similar to the regular workflow of processing regular materials.

**Acquisitions.** Step one was setting up a formal relationship with the local vendor. This entailed a meeting at the bookstore between the Head of Library Acquisitions and the bookstore manager. All of the proper forms were filled out and we were set to go. I basically visit the bookstore once every other month. I leave with a bag full of books, catalogs, and zines as well as an invoice. This is the only vendor that I physically visit to obtain items. All of the items and the invoice are then taken to our central library where our technical services division is housed. These items are dropped off with the manager of monographic acquisitions. I do not hand deliver items to our technical services division with any other vendor. I do not have the vendor ship the materials across town to save on shipping but more importantly to make acquisitions decisions on the spot. Some of the material is more appropriate for our collection than others. In addition to purchasing from Domy, donations from former students and artists in the community that have heard about the collection are also accepted. And as I learn more about this material, I know that distributors such as Printed Matter, Booklyn, Art Metropole Division Leap are vendors in my future. Once librarians get into this genre, they want to be able to purchase historical materials Collecting historical zines can be a challenge. They are rarely available on the open market. Collectors have them in personal collections and when they are ready to part with these collections, libraries should be ready and poised to accept these donations.

**Preservation.** After the acquisitions process is complete, all of the materials purchased at Domy including the zines are then routed to our Head Librarian for Preservation Services. Again, this is quite an exception as this unit head directly oversees limited numbers of materials processed. She determines who on her staff should oversee the handling of each item and gives them to
the appropriate technician. For zines, we are mostly doing pamphlet binding either stapled directly in or placed into an envelope. These decisions are made by the technicians in consultation with me or the Preservation unit head if necessary. Though my role is minimal and it should be clearly stated that any treatment I recommend is simply a recommendation which cannot always be acted upon as I am not a preservation expert. Core for determining the correct treatment is an understanding of how these materials are going to be used and where are they going to be housed, open stacks or special collections. After these materials are handled by the technicians in preservation they are routed to our Head Librarian for Cataloging and Metadata Services.

**Cataloging.** As one would imagine, many of the zines collected in libraries need original cataloging because it is the only known item in OCLC Worldcat. Therefore the cataloging of this material can take a while because we have very few catalogers who can perform complex cataloging that are on our staff. First we search to see if it has already been cataloged, then we wait for a period and hope it gets cataloged. In addition, local notes are often times included because zines can be numbered and we put in the catalog the number of the item we have in our collection. After it gets cataloged, it finally gets routed to the Fine Arts Library. Original cataloging is not by nature necessarily complicated or problematic but this material can be because of the very limited textual information that may come with it. I have heard it suggested that if a zine is donated to get as much metadata from the maker as possible. In addition, there can be an additional complication due to the possible seriality of the work so sometimes monographic complex catalogers need to bring in serials catalogers. Specialists need to handle zines to facilitate the most robust discovery but these specialists are fewer and farther between. It is essential that the art librarian examine the work of the catalogers. Upon closer examination of the cataloging I noticed that the catalogers were using the subject heading artist book instead of zine when doing original cataloging. This is something that will need to be modified. Since my collection is interfiled with the circulating collection of hundreds of thousands of items, the keyword access point for discovery is crucial. Furthermore, I created a finding aid for our artist book collection that has hundreds of items, I expect that I would like to create a finding aid for the zine collection to use as another access point that would be browseable.

**Access.** Our Fine Arts Library has a special collections as do so many arts libraries. Initially I was torn as to whether or not to add zines to our special collections. These items are limited
editions, similar to artists’ books in that regard. But by locking them up I believe we are fundamentally going against the intention of their creation which is wide, unfettered distribution. (One might argue that collecting them in an institutional setting also goes against the ephemeral nature of their intention and that zinester do not intend to have this material available in perpetuity but that is a philosophical discussion we can have later). In addition, most of the zines I have collected cost less than $10. The materials in the special collections cost hundreds or thousands of dollars to replace. Therefore the decision at this time is to let them circulate which also means to let them circulate not only to our local users but through Inter Library Loan. Of course this would be revisited on a case-by-case basis with items that have increased in value over time. But so far this is not a concern.

What’s next? Marketing and outreach, fair, workshops, lab. In Spring 2013, the Visual Arts Center at UT Austin and the Fine Arts Library will be collaborating on a zine-centered project. We will both curate exhibits on zines. We will invite a speaker/local artist to discuss the zine resurgence and review their history. We are planning for a workshop where folks can make zines in our spaces. And maybe in our future, a zine fair in Austin will be planned. After hearing papers at ARLIS/NA and listening to what other librarians around the country are doing, I am empowered to do more including marketing our developing collection which would include creating flyers, buttons, posters, and posts on a news blog highlighting the collection. Temple University Library has a model research guide focusing on zines: http://guides.temple.edu/content.php?pid=266583&sid=2201163.

Why the rise in interest and popularity? Why have zines and zine collecting become a hot topic lately? I was recently looking at some zines in my office and one of my staff members peaked his head in and said, “wow, zines I didn’t realize people were still making them!” There is a conception that this is a dead art due to the digital age. But this is very much not the case. In our world where the digital has become fetishized, I noticed a real backlash and deep interest in the physical object. Zines and zine creation is very much a part of this trend. An article in the New York Times in October 2011 describes this resurgence eloquently, pointing to the ubiquity of the internet “Their creators say zines offer a respite from the endless onslaught of tweets, blog posts, I.M.’s, e-mail and other products of digital media.” (Jenna Wortham, Raised on the Web but Liking a Little Ink, New York Times, October 22, 2011).

Workshop/Maker phenomenon/Do it yourself intersection. While there are zine collections in libraries throughout the United States, there are few workshop spaces in libraries to create zines. Two public libraries that are known for the spaces that they have developed are the Fayetteville (New York) Free
Library and Allen County (Indiana) Public Library. These spaces are called hackerspaces, fablabs, makerspaces, or hacklabs. It is a creative space where folks gather to make things and share ideas. For the past ten years, libraries have been providing collaborative spaces to foster group study and we have been providing digital tools for creating digital objects including webpages, presentations, blogs, wikis, and the like. But what about the physical object? Why can’t we be providing a space for our patrons to make things, like zines? To my knowledge, there has yet to be a space developed for zine making in an academic library though maker events are on the rise at academic libraries. I am currently exploring the possibility of developing a maker space for our users to create things such as zines. In February 2012 a very interesting article was published in *American Libraries Magazine* (http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/columns/outsidelin/create-library-tech-shop) about putting tools in our users hands. The article looks at three burgeoning phenomena: Digital media labs, hackerspaces, and coworking spaces. For over five years, my library has had a media center focusing on digital content creation. A patron can digitize and manipulate and image, a sound recording, or a video. We circulate cameras, scanner attachments, and digital voice recorders. We have someone on staff who can assist folks in using the technology. A hackerspace is an extension of this notion, for non-digital content creation. These spaces contain tools such as 3D printers, drill presses, laser cutters, routers, electronics equipment, and computers. Usually, there is a trained individual that can assist with the equipment.

This third phenomenon, coworking spaces, is one that some of you may be very familiar with because the Helsinki Public Library is the worldwide model. According to the article, “coworking brings together independent workers, freelancers, small-business owners, and others who need workspace. These folks regularly gather to brainstorm ideas, team up on projects, and get work done in a more social setting. It’s an alternative to meeting at home or at a coffee shop.” For years, libraries have put tools into the hands of our patrons. In a traditional sense this has meant information resources, but as we move into the 21st century, many of us have realized that we have learning spaces that go beyond a place to find and ingest information, instead we are moving into the realm of facilitating creativity and connections. Zines are part of this DIY culture, which we can no longer ignore. Even the contemporary art world has acknowledged zines. Let me give you two examples.

**2012: 1. celebration of the zine format, 2. celebration of the art magazine.** The zine format has become so popular even mainstream publications have begun to emulate the format. It must be noticed that the publications coming out to document Documenta 13, which will open in Kassel Germany in September 2012, published by Hatje Cantz Verlag, one of the largest publishers of art books worldwide, are a homage to the zine. *100 Notes - 100 Thoughts* is a series of 100 small-format
publications presenting facsimile notebooks, conversations, theoretical writings, commissioned essays and other wide-ranging texts representing the thoughts of various artists, curators, philosophers, anthropologists and other cultural figures.

During the spring of 2012, MoMA librarians curated an exhibit entitled *Millennium Magazines*. From their website: “This survey of experimental art and design magazines published since 2000 explores the various ways in which contemporary artists and designers utilize the magazine format as an experimental space for the presentation of artworks and text.” ([http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1244](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1244)) The connection between these art magazine publications and zines cannot go unnoticed. 10 of the publications in this exhibit are considered zines, fanzines or in the zine-style. According to Susan Thomas in her article “The Value and Validity of Art Zines”, the primary thing that sets them apart is the advertising in the art magazine. This seminal exhibit considers them together.

**Closing thoughts.** I hope you have decided to begin a zine collection in your library. Let me review the steps that should be taken to have a successful zine and limited edition collecting program. 1. Create a collection development policy to focus the collection scope. 2. Build relationships with vendors either local or specialized and communicate your collection policy to them. 3. Communicate with faculty or external constituents who may want to use the collection. 4. Develop an access policy for the material. 5. Work with technical services at your institutions to develop best practices for acquiring the material, creating discovery points for the material and handling the material. 6. Market the collection to a larger audience.

Zines come in all shapes and sizes, run the gamut in terms of subject matter and are difficult to define which is why I believe that every library treats their collections a bit differently. Some zine libraries are stored in special collections and some are in the open stacks. Some are cataloged at the item level and some at the collection level and some maintain a database or finding aid. Some libraries collect two copies, one for special collections and one for circulation. Some libraries do not catalog their items and instead keep them all together in a discrete and browsable collection alphabetized by title or organized by genre. Some librarians are constrained by collection policies or budgets or space issues, some are driven by user needs. We all face unique challenges and these materials seem to highlight these challenges. Thank you.
Selected Bibliography


Appendix: 10 Examples of zines at The University of Texas at Austin, Fine Arts Library


Sumi Ink Club. Tux zine. 2010. N 7433.4 S86 T89 2010


Study Group12!. #4, vol. 1. PN 6726 S78 2010

Stone, Barry. Heavy water, or Metal and the sea. O’Empire Books, 2010. TR 655 S76 2010