

Roadblocks to Assessing Arts Collections for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion



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Art Library Context

> The University of Washington (UW) Art Library is currently in the process of assessing book collections for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The goal is to increase the percentage of Art Library collections and acquisitions that center BIPOC art and artists by establishing a baseline and assessing purchases from year to year. Suggestions welcome!

> The Art Library at UW is **one of sixteen libraries** across three campuses (Seattle, Bothell, Tacoma), and is located within the School of Art + Art History + Design on the main Seattle campus. The Art Library branch houses roughly **60,000 monographs** and primarily reflects faculty research areas and curricula.

2020 FY Art Library Monograph Fund Code Purchases

- > **203** total titles selected
- > ~**66** or **32%** were either by or about BIPOC art and artists
- > ~**44** or **21%** were either by or about people of color
- > ~**21** or **10%** were either by or about Black art and artists
- > ~**3** or **less than 1%** were either by or about Indigenous/Native art and artists

> This fund code data does not include exhibition catalog approval plan purchases, endowment gift fund purchases, undergraduate library arts fund code purchases, built environment purchases, or international studies selector's purchases



The Art Library is located in the School of Art + Art History + Design (left), across from the Music Library, located in the School of Music (right)

Process: Experiment & Adjust

The process has been flexible, experimental, and iterative. Work is still **very much in progress**. Thus far, I haven't identified a "quick and easy" way to comprehensively assess a large academic library collection for EDI.

WORKFLOW

- > Talk to colleagues, literature review
- > Determine goals, foundational values; our goals are to:
 - > Shift away from building collections that center whiteness and white scholarship, as libraries, the academy, publishing, museums, art institutions, and "Western culture" has done for centuries
 - > Increase percentage of collections that center BIPOC art and artists, work to identify and fill gaps (whether by subject area or by author racial/ethnic identity, when able to identify)
- > Establish a way to code each book in a way that points out the criteria you're looking for²
- > Decide on a small piece of the collection to experiment on - this can be determined by LC, subject heading, fund code, location code, purchases over the past year, etc.
- > Pull, clean data (we used Alma Analytics and Google Sheets)
- > Review each title for subject matter and research authors, label with appropriate codes

Title	Author	Vendor Name	Expenditure	Order Line Type	Publisher	Code	INTL
"THE BEAUTIFUL ONES": NIIDEKA IKUNYILI CROSSBY	CROSSBY, NIIDEKA	GOBI YBP LIBRAI	31.72	Print Book - One	VICTORIA MIRO	BLK	INTL
1971: a year in the life of color / A different mountain : selected works from the Arnett Collection / A forest of symbols : art, science, and truth in the long nineteenth century / A matter of fact / A tale of two women painters : Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana / AS/09 West-Berlin Grafik-Design: Gestaltung hinter dem eisernen Vorhang: graphic design behind the iron curtain / Acts of reparation : Hayy Kahraman : September 8-December 31, 2017	English, Darby, 1	GOBI YBP LIBRAI	67.5	Electronic Book - Press	The University of Chicago	BLK	
		GOBI YBP LIBRAI	40.88	Print Book - One	Marlborough	BLK	Black art, white collector
	Pop, Andrei, aut	GOBI YBP LIBRAI	32.66	Print Book - One	Zone Books	White	
	Oduola, Toyin, 1	PROCARD	49.46	Print Book - One	Company + Museo Nacional del	BLK	
		ALIBRIS	70.4	Print Book - One	Prado	White	
	Müller, Jens.	HARRASSOWITZ	37.53	Print Book - One	Optik Books Contemporary Art Museum St Louis	White	
		GOBI YBP LIBRAI	22.71	Print Book - One	ARTBOOK DAP	POC, INTL	Iraq

Image shows one of the coded spreadsheets of 2020 FY Art Library purchases

¹ The most helpful document I've found for this project has been *Creating a Social Justice Mindset: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Collections Directorate of the MIT Libraries*, <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/108771>
² I was inspired by the following poster in creating my own categories & code for our assessment: Kennedy, Marie and Ramirez, Marisa, "Assessing the Diversity of the E-collection of the William H. Hannon Library" (2018). LMU Librarian Publications & Presentations. 100. https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/librarian_pubs/100

Roadblocks

- > **Individual limitations:** My positionality as a cis white woman and an American library worker; I'm not exempt from the white supremacist culture that has saturated my life, and I perpetuate it; my knowledge of the disciplines I liaise with
- > **Systemic whiteness:** White supremacy permeates all the systems around us, including higher education, faculty demographics, scholarship, publishing, librarianship, and the technology, tools, and software that libraries use. Because BIPOC scholars, authors, and artists have been purposefully excluded from these systems over centuries, selectors need to go beyond scholarly publications and traditional publishing pathways to collect materials. Building collections that decenter whiteness and assessing the whiteness of our collections has not been valued in libraries or collection development. Librarianship, as a white dominated field, must commit time and energy to work against the centuries of collection development practices and behaviors that have centered white supremacy, white scholarship, and white artists
- > **Large collection size = huge time commitment:** It takes several hours to code 100 titles if you're going to research each title beyond a cursory glance. Multiply that by collection size and that's a lot of time. Taking a small sample size of the collection, or assessing purchases made from year to year, can be more manageable
- > **Limiting faculty research areas & budgets:** If faculty only teach and research white Eurocentric art and artists, selectors may not feel empowered or able to fund decentering whiteness in library collections, especially if budgets are tight and only faculty requests can be funded. White faculty and white-centered research areas perpetuate white library collections
- > **Identities are not explicit and very personal:** Identity, as it relates to race and skin color, can change based on geography, nationality, and ethnicity. Selectors can't simply view a picture of an author or artist and know how they identify themselves across cultural markers. Developing a code, or classification system, around identity and racial identity is sensitive and can cause harm. We will make mistakes and you will, too
- > **No easy way to expedite the process:** Metadata/catalog records often don't capture (or accurately capture) the EDI related data points that are needed for this project; most titles require manual skimming and individualized research to code
- > **#OwnVoices vs white scholarship:** The library may purchase titles about non-white art and artists, but find that the book is written by a white author - how does this impact the work?
- > **Deceptive title, harmful content:** Just because a title sounds as if it may contribute to increasing EDI collections efforts doesn't mean the content will be inoffensive or unharmed. Only a close reading, skim, or book review can possibly help shine a light on that
- > **Lack of helpful library scholarship:** Much of the literature on assessing collections for EDI comes from public library or school library contexts, not huge academic library contexts
- > **Consolidation of collection development responsibilities and automation:** If libraries rely solely on approval plans, collections are likely missing non-white authored publications that exist outside of the traditional scholarly publishing pipeline. Being intentional and deliberate about purchasing works by BIPOC authors and artists will take time and care. Because white supremacy is inherent to the systems described in "Systemic whiteness" above, selectors can't fast track or automate their way to decentering whiteness in their collections.
- > **Vendors and publishers:** Not all vendors or publishers make finding the works of non-white art, artists, and scholars easy. Vendors and publishers would do well to accurately label and group works based on various identities such as race, geography, ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity, etc, in consultation with authors, so librarians can easily identify and purchase products that decenter whiteness. Additionally, publishers and vendors could commit to publishing, stocking, and promoting more works by BIPOC artists and authors in the first place

Ongoing Questions & Plans

- > What does success look like and how can it be measured?
- > How do we code edited collections, or multi-author publications, if they include only one BIPOC author or artist?
- > Relatedly, what if a book documents a group exhibition where only one of the artists isn't white? Should it be coded as a white publication? What if a publication has a white editor but the contributors are largely people of color? How is whiteness measured when coding books for assessment? What would be helpful for us and/or for users to know in these instances and how can that be communicated effectively?
- > Western art and European art dominate much of the scholarly and publishing landscape. What is the best way to code for non-Western art?
- > Should art mediums and formats be considered as a way to diversify collections? For example, how has painting been privileged in the art historical record versus textiles, crafts, or performance art? What type of art has been historically respected, valued, and therefore written about, and what has been less so? How does this intersect with the identity of the artists associated with these mediums?
- > I've experimented coding works into the following categories: race, gender/sexual identity, disability, nationality, citizenship, feminist, faith/religion, multicultural, and anti-racist. I seek guidance on how best to expand and specify the scope of the assessment.
- > What unique issues, if any, might surface when assessing music, drama, dance, and cinema studies collections for EDI?
- > What are we missing? What haven't we considered?

