

**BEYOND THE WALL LABEL: MOVING IMAGES IN THE
ARCHIVES OF THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM**

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I. PROJECT SUMMARY

In the Archives of the Brooklyn Museum, in the records of the Education Department, there is a 1977 document called “Access To the Best: A Case Statement for the Brooklyn Museum,” that lays out the Museum’s mission, and its view of itself. Referring to the Museum’s activities at the turn of the 20th century, the document states,

For of all American art museums, The Brooklyn Museum had its roots set firmly in the soil of its community and was consistently seeking better ways of bringing superb objects of art and people together in a setting free from condescension and pretense. Visitors to the Museum were welcomed by a curatorial and educational staff open to questions and request for assistance—a staff that shared the conviction that direct personal communion with the most beautiful expressions of man’s creative powers could be encouraged and enhanced through imaginative interpretation.¹

As a public service institution, the Museum has always believed its superb collections are of greatest value when they are invitingly accessible and sensitively interpreted to the public. This generates the kind of interaction between object and viewer which is the Museum’s primary reason for being.²

Again and again, in the Museum’s files, I found documents, letters, and statements to this effect—that the Brooklyn Museum had a long and important tradition of outreach, of working to bring the public closer to its collections, and of interpreting its collections to make their value and significance as meaningful as possible. In this context, the Museum’s audiovisual collections—in which I completed my thesis

¹“Access To the Best: A Case Statement for the Brooklyn Museum,” Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Department of Education, unprocessed records, Box W02/A/5/c, Education boxes 19-21 (from original box 20), Folder “Access to the Best.”

² Ibid.

project—took on a particular and surprising significance for me.

Under the direction of archivist Deborah Wythe, I surveyed film, video, and audio materials for condition, format, age, and other factors impacting preservation, and helped modify the Archives' database to track condition and preservation information. I assisted with the accession of two large groups of film and videotape, found in storage areas outside the Archives. I drafted a preservation plan for the collection, as well as an accession policy for audiovisual materials. In addition, using primary documents in the Archives, I researched the Museum's long and fascinating use of moving images through its history, from the 1890s on, in order to contextualize the Archives' holdings.

In this report I will review that history, as well as the history of the Archives, and detail its current media holdings. I will also give a plan for film, video, and audiotape preservation, and an accession policy specifically addressing audio and moving image materials.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The history of the Brooklyn Museum

The differing and evolving roles of libraries, museums, and archives have long been a subject of study in the academic community at large, and in the MIAP program in particular. It was interesting, then, to learn that the Brooklyn Museum is in fact a museum that began as a library, and that only relatively recently in its long history did it create an Archives as a separate entity. Indeed, the Museum's earliest roots lie in an attempt to bring education to what today might be called an “underserved” community.

The Museum's story begins in 1823, when Brooklyn was a town of 8,000 people, with a large population of young men apprenticed to various trades—a population seen

as a potential source of trouble. That year, the Brooklyn Apprentice's Library Association was founded; its goal was "extending the benefits of knowledge to that portion of our youth, who are engaged in learning the mechanic arts, and thereby qualifying them for becoming useful and respectable members of society."³ The library, housed in a building in Brooklyn Heights, became the first circulating free library in Brooklyn, its initial collection gathered by its founders' wheeling carts through the streets and soliciting donations of books.⁴ In addition to providing access to reading material, the library offered lectures such as "The Success of persevering Self-Cultivation, independent of Native Genius."⁵

In 1843, the library merged with an educational organization called the Brooklyn Lyceum, and became the Brooklyn Institute.⁶ Over the following decades, the Institute's activities expanded greatly, eventually spawning departments covering subjects ranging from archaeology to zoology. By the 1880s, in an atmosphere of Brooklyn boosterism, the citizens of what had by then become America's third largest city began to make plans for an expansion of cultural activities, as described in a speech given at the 1881 dedication of the Long Island Historical Society:

We are now at the beginning of a great movement of that kind when this City of Brooklyn of ours ... is to be aggrandized, to be built up in institutions, is to have its university, its great libraries, its great collections of art, is to have everything that adds to the sweetness of life and the moral and intellectual excellence of a great city.⁷

During this time, plans were made to expand the Brooklyn Institute into a much

³ Brooklyn Museum, *Masterpieces in the Brooklyn Museum*. New York: Brooklyn Museum, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1988, 8.

⁴ Lawrence, Deirdre. "From Library to Art Museum: The Evolution of The Brooklyn Museum," *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 1987, 381.

⁵ "Brooklyn Apprentices Library," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, December 30, 1841, 2.

⁶ Lawrence, "From Library..." 381.

⁷ *Masterpieces*, 11.

larger organization: the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, one component of which would be a museum designed to showcase fine arts, ethnology, and natural history. The architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White was chosen to design the new building: a massive Beaux-Arts structure that would have been, at more than 1.5 million square feet,⁸ the largest museum building in the world—a plan that the Museum’s current director, Arnold Lehman, has described as “a monument tochutzpah.”⁹

Its cornerstone laid in 1895, the Brooklyn Museum’s building was constructed in a series of stages over the next three decades, including a lengthy delay occasioned in part by World War One, during which large sections stood half-finished. By 1927, when the last major portions of the original design were completed, only about one-sixth of the Museum’s original plan had been built...fundamentally the state in which the Museum now stands.¹⁰

In 1934, the Museum decided to narrow its focus, by closing its divisions of Natural History, Anthropology, and other sciences, and deaccessioning those collections in order to concentrate solely on art. Writing at the time, the Museum’s director reported that, with this change, the institution would become

...a museum of a different type emphasizing the history of cultures, and the social and industrial relations of art. Wishing to co-operate with [other New York museums] and to develop in the Brooklyn Museum a service not duplicated elsewhere, the Governing Committee of the Brooklyn Museum adopted the following policy:

...The future of the Brooklyn Museum lies along a line of culture history with special emphasis on social and industrial relations of art...
...The Museum should undertake to serve a general public, to arrange its collections in an educational sequence which will best serve to awaken

⁸ Lawrence, “From Library...” 383.

⁹ Curiel, Carolyn. “Brooklyn’s Museum Under Glass,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2004, Section A, p. 20.

¹⁰ *Masterpieces*, p. 16.

the interest and fulfill the needs of the lay public.¹¹

Yet even after the deaccessioning of its natural history collections, The Brooklyn Museum maintained a much more diverse collection than many other art museums. From the turn of the century, the Museum had been a pioneer in the display and interpretation of objects from African and other cultures as *art*, not as merely “primitive” ethnographic artifacts, as they were generally regarded by other museums at the time. It is an outlook that has, for the most part, served the Museum well through the many changes that have come to the museum world in the succeeding decades.

In sum, the Brooklyn Museum’s history is critical to keep in mind when considering the audiovisual holdings in its archives—and in particular, when reviewing the ways in which the Museum has used those materials over the years in the context of its prioritizing of outreach, education, and innovative interpretations of its collections.

2.2 The Museum today

Today, the Brooklyn Museum holds more than one million objects, making it the second-largest art museum in New York and one of the largest in the United States. Its collections are managed by following departments:

- Arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands
- American Painting and Sculpture
- Art of the Americas
- Arts of Asia and the Islamic World
- Contemporary Painting and Sculpture
- Decorative Arts
- Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art
- Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art
- European Painting and Sculpture
- Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

¹¹ Brooklyn Museum. *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1934*, Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1935, p. 5.

On its website, the Museum describes its current mission this way:

The mission of the Brooklyn Museum is to act as a bridge between the rich artistic heritage of world cultures, as embodied in its collections, and the unique experience of each visitor. Dedicated to the primacy of the visitor experience, committed to excellence in every aspect of its collections and programs, and drawing on both new and traditional tools of communication, interpretation, and presentation, the Museum aims to serve its diverse public as a dynamic, innovative, and welcoming center for learning through the visual arts.¹²

2.3 The Museum’s use of moving images in history

2.3.1 Screenings

The Brooklyn Museum’s relationship with moving images can be traced literally to the dawn of motion pictures. On May 9, 1893, the very first public demonstration of Thomas Edison’s kinetoscope was given at the monthly meeting of the Physics Department of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, the organization that would eventually found the Brooklyn Museum. An audience of 400 witnessed a lecture detailing the machine’s construction and features—though projection of the kinetoscope images required the use of lantern slides, as the kinetoscope was a single-person peephole viewer. After the lecture, the audience was given the opportunity to view individually a thirty-second film in the kinetoscope: the film now known as “Blacksmith Scene,” shot in Edison’s Black Maria studio.¹³

At the time, the Institute was providing a variety of cultural events for its members; as enumerated by Charles Musser, they included “musical concerts and recitals, dramatic readings of Shakespeare, Tennyson, Lowell and Longfellow, public

¹² “Mission Statement,” <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about/mission>, accessed May 1, 2005.

¹³ “First Public Exhibition of Edison’s Kinetograph,” *Scientific American*, May 20, 1893, 310.

lectures, and a variety of courses from its departments of philology, fine arts, political science, and law. Travel lectures, usually illustrated with lantern slides, were particularly popular.”¹⁴ (In fact, this tradition continues to this day, in the form of educational slide shows given by museum guides.)

Indeed, projected slides were nearly ubiquitous at the Institute; during this period, almost every lecture was announced as being “illustrated by lantern slides.” In addition to factual presentations, fictional “picture plays”—stories told through a lengthy succession of slides—were also given.¹⁵ Thus the transition to screening motion pictures was a logical one for the Brooklyn Institute. The first projected film at the Institute came very early in cinema’s history: in November 1896, the Institute sponsored a presentation of the Lumiere brothers’ Cinematographe, accompanied by a lecture and slides. As with the Edison demonstration, archetypal early films were shown; in this case, they included *Lumiere Workers Leaving the Factory*, and *The Baby’s Breakfast*—as well as what *The Brooklyn Eagle* called “the well known scene of the arrival of a small train.”¹⁶

Motion pictures quickly became a regular feature of the Institute’s public programming, and were usually presented by prominent traveling lecturers who specialized in educational presentations. Charles Musser has described three different audiences for these traveling exhibitors: “church-oriented, moralistic conservatives, overwhelmingly Protestant; lovers of urban, commercial, popular culture; or advocates

¹⁴ Musser, Charles and Carol Nelson. *High-class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880-1920*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, 79.

¹⁵ Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. *Tenth Year Book of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences*, Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1898, 247.

¹⁶ “The Cinematographe and Other Novelties Exhibited at the Institute,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 28, 1896, 9.

of a refined, elite culture.”¹⁷ Despite its populist bent, The Brooklyn Institute clearly fell into the last category. Lectures there covered a broad range of educational topics. For example, in the 1897-98 season, the Department of Geography sponsored a January 14 lecture by Henry E. Northrop of the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute: “A Bicycle Tour with the New Cinematograph.”¹⁸ The lecture, according to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, featured both

...lantern slides and cinematographic views, shown alternately in the ratio of one moving picture to five or six photographs, by this method securing for the eyes of the audience a grateful rest from the always trying quiver of the rapidly moving cinematograph films.¹⁹

Two other prominent travel lecturers who would become fixtures at the Brooklyn Institute made their first appearances later that year. Between April 11 and 22, 1898, the Institute sponsored a series by Burton Holmes, one of the most famous and successful of the traveling lecturers, who showed films including *The Yellowstone Park*, *The Wonders of Tessaly*, *Oases in the Algerian Sahara*.²⁰ At the time, Holmes was utilizing French Gaumont Cinematograph that used 60mm film. He would become a frequent lecturer at the Institute. Later that year, Dwight L. Elmendorf presented four lectures on geography²¹—though announcements of the screenings did not mention that, unlike most lecturers, these were films he purchased rather than shot. Elmendorf would also return frequently to the Institute.²² Screenings of this type—accompanying

¹⁷ Musser and Nelson, 68.

¹⁸ *Tenth Year Book*, 168.

¹⁹ “Educational Notes,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, November 16, 1898, 26.

²⁰ *Tenth Year Book*, 171.

²¹ Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. *Eleventh Year Book of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences*, Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1899, 195.

²² Musser and Nelson, 83.

lectures by scientists or other scholars—continued well into the 1930s.²³

For its part, the Brooklyn Museum used films to reach an audience different from that of the Institute: the children of the borough. In a letter dated April 9, 1913, Curator-in-Chief William Henry Fox wrote to nine film exchanges in the New York City area:

We are considering a plan of lectures with motion pictures, at the Brooklyn Museum for the pupils of the Brooklyn Schools, and would like to have films relating to animal life, plant life, travel, customs of the different races, and other classes of films of an educational nature.²⁴

The Archives' file contains replies from Gaumont, Roma Film, and Film Supply Co. of America, and though no record of immediate action is present, screenings for children did begin. In 1915, a projector was donated to the Museum by the Nicholas Power Company²⁵ and by 1916, the Museum was holding regular screenings of educational and entertainment motion pictures for children. On May 1, 1916, for example, the program included: *Largest Pigeon Farm*, *Feeding Seals*, *How Plants are Born, Live, and Die*, *Mushroom Culture*, *Egypt the Mysterious*, *Potters of the Nile*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. On May 8: *Alice in Wonderland*, *Riding School at Saumur*, *Cossacks*, *Hop Industry*, *Our Ice Supply*, *Pepper Industry*, and *Universal Winter Sports*.²⁶ That year, Fox wrote to teachers inviting them to bring their students to the screenings by making a clear differentiation between these films and those that might be seen in commercial theaters:

...the subjects have been selected with care to avoid the objections

²³ Musser and Nelson, 274.

²⁴ Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director, (William Henry Fox, 1913-33), Box 10, folder 573.

²⁵ Brooklyn Museum. *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1915*. Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1916, p. 20.

²⁶ Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director, (William Henry Fox, 1913-33), Box 10, folder 542.

which might be made to many exhibitions of motion pictures. The pictures are educational in intention as well as entertaining, and it is believed that they will satisfy the desire of parents in providing the kind of entertainment suitable for young people.²⁷

Also in 1916, the Museum also held a series of screenings—aimed at a primarily adult audience—in conjunction with an exhibition of Swedish art, showing documentary films originally seen at the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915.²⁸ The films covered topics such as sports, urban and rural life, lumbering, mining, and other industries, and folk dances. It was a very early use of motion pictures to compliment an exhibition of fine art; as the *New York Times* noted,

These exhibitions are planned by the museum authorities as giving additional interest to the Swedish Art Exhibition, which has just been opened, and are calculated to interest and entertain the Scandinavian colony of Brooklyn and New York, as well as to attract all others who may be interested in the Swedish Art Exhibition.²⁹

In 1917, as a sign of its commitment to moving pictures, the Museum constructed a new soundproof booth for projection, and Miss Mary Day Lee became their projectionist, the first woman in the City of New York to receive a projectionist's license.³⁰ Eight years later, the Museum began to build its film collection and further stabilize its exhibition practices by acquiring a set of the Yale University-produced film series "The Chronicles of America," 15 films that gave an overview of "great moments" in American history³¹. These films became a staple of Museum screenings for children—

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Swedish Art Exhibition," *The New York Times*, February 3, 1916, 8.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brooklyn Museum. *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1917* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1918), p. 31.

³¹ The 35mm films shipped to the Museum in October 1925 were *Columbus, Jamestown, The Pilgrims, The Puritans, Peter Stuyvesant, The Gateway to the West, Wolfe and Montcalm, The Eve of*

originally as 35mm nitrate prints, later replaced by 16mm prints. Their use during 1929 was described in the Museum's annual report:

...Films from the Yale Chronicles of America...have been shown on an average of six times a month each to public elementary schools, private, parochial, and high schools...on Saturday afternoons the Yale Chronicles of America were shown to an adult audience of the foreign born." Also shown to the "cripple children" [sic] of Brooklyn and Queens.³²

By 1934, though, the films appear to have outworn their welcome: the Museum's annual report for that year, noted a precipitous decline in attendance.³³ (What appears to be at least one complete set of 16mm prints still remain in the possession of the Museum.)

Screenings for children were held throughout the 1940s and 1950s, as the Museum added to its internal collection of films, as well as showing comedies and other child-friendly subjects presumably obtained from rental exchanges. During 1948-49, according to the Museum's annual report, "[two] regular series of motion pictures were given throughout the year from October to May. Documentary and art films were shown every Sunday afternoon and efforts were made to correlate these with special exhibitions. Travel films and comedies were shown for children and their parents every

the Revolution, The Declaration of Independence, Yorktown, Vincennes, Daniel Boone, The Frontier Woman, Alexander Hamilton, and Dixie. Yale University Press Film Service to William Henry Fox, October 5, 1925. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (William Henry Fox 1913-33), Box 28, File 897: Yale University Press Film Service.

³² Brooklyn Museum. *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1917.* Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1918, 6-7.

³³ Brooklyn Museum. *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1934* Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1935, p. 23.

Saturday afternoon and on week days during vacations.”³⁴ The Museum’s Loan Room, which circulated films and other educational materials, acquired films from sources including corporations and other organizations; in 1948-49 it was given films made by DuPont, as well as *Fantasy in Fashion*, which had been given to the Museum’s Industrial Division.³⁵

These screenings appear to have ended in the 1970s, though I was not able to find specific documentation on this point. Regular screenings for adults, however, continued. Today, the Museum’s film screenings are less frequent; often tied directly to exhibitions (for example, the recent exhibition of photos of Marilyn Monroe, which was accompanied by a series of Monroe’s films.) The Museum also plays host to a number of festivals, including the Brooklyn International Film Festival and the African Film Festival New York.

2.3.2 Creation of moving images: film

The Brooklyn Museum’s production of moving images can be roughly divided into two eras: the first—the film era, during which production was relatively rare, the second, the videotape era, during which production was initially quite prolific, but has now become quite rare again.

As early as 1915, the Museum was considering producing its own films. The acquisition of a projector prompted this remark in the Museum’s annual report: “All that remains necessary for getting the most good out of our machine is the possession

³⁴ Brooklyn Museum. *The Annual Report of the Brooklyn Museums*. Brooklyn, N.Y. : Brooklyn Museum, 1949, p. 29.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 30.

of a motion picture camera so that we may make our own natural history films.”³⁶

Shortly thereafter, the Museum did begin to make such films—though they worked, it seemed, with a rented or leased camera.³⁷ The Brooklyn Museum’s first film documented the work of its staff as it was being carried out. In 1918, six caribou carcasses that the Museum acquired on a 1917 expedition were stuffed and mounted; a film was made to record “the entire taxidermic process in its zoological, mechanical, and artistic aspects.”³⁸

Then, in 1919, ornithologist Robert Cushman Murphy went on an expedition to the Peruvian Littoral, in order to study the guano-producing birds of the islands. He convinced the Museum to purchase an Akeley 35mm motion picture camera—extremely expensive at the time, but widely considered to be the best for this type of work³⁹. On his return in the spring of 1920, Murphy reported to the director that he had shot 53 200-foot rolls of film “of an extremely high order of excellence.”⁴⁰

³⁶ *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1934*. Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1935, 20.

³⁷ Interestingly, around this same time, the Museum began to be used as a location for motion pictures; in 1923 the *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* noted it had been used by producers including Goldwyn and Vitagraph, standing in for the Mansion House in London and the Paris Opera, and was about “to represent the steps of the Victor Emanuel Monument, Rome, for a stirring scene in which the Fascisti are to play a leading part.” It appears that this last film may be *The Eternal City*, directed by George Fitzmaurice and release in 1924. (The museum also appeared in the 1972 caper film *The Hot Rock*.) See *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, v. 10, p. 177, and Greenspun, Roger. “Diamond Theft Theme of Comic Caper,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 1971, p. 42.

³⁸ *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences: Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums for the Year Ending December 31, 1919* Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1920, 12. Obviously, the caribou are no longer in the Brooklyn Museum’s collection, nor is the film. Their whereabouts are unknown.

³⁹ Robert Cushman Murphy to William Henry Fox, April 30, 1919. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (William Henry Fox 1913-33,) Box 5, Folder102: Natural History Department, 1914-29.

⁴⁰ Robert Cushman Murphy to William Henry Fox, March 22, 1920. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (William Henry Fox 1913-33, Box 5, Folder102: Natural History Department, 1914-29.

His films, however, are no longer in the Museum's collection—neither his original footage nor the completed film. In 1934, when the natural history collections were deaccessioned, Murphy's film appears to have been transferred to the American Museum of Natural History, for whom Murphy worked both before and after his stint at the Brooklyn Museum.⁴¹

After the closing of the Natural History divisions, production of films by the Brooklyn Museum remained sporadic, though some projects were considered, if not carried out. One of the more ambitious proposals came in 1941, when one Irving Jacoby drafted a plan for an in-house film production department. In a July 1 letter to Laurance P. Roberts of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Jacoby wrote,

In accordance with our recent discussions regarding the production of films by the Brooklyn Museum, I submit this formula for the organization of a department to carry on this work...The duties of the Film Officer would consist of the preparation of a film program for the year; the writing of scripts that would serve as blue prints of the proposed productions, both for raising money and for making films; the preparation of budgets; the organization of sources for production financing; and the supervision of all actual film making. In addition, he would be responsible for the museum's Newsreel relations, and for co-operation with other museums in matters pertaining to film; and might consult with the Education and Exhibit departments on the use of film in their work.⁴²

Jacoby noted that "...no museum has undertaken a planned, continuous schedule of production of the educational films for which there is an ever-increasing audience."⁴³ Pointing out that that museums recognize the value of film but do not have the financial resources necessary to produce good films, he proposes a plan "whereby at a feasible

⁴¹ AMNH's catalog lists a 35mm print of *Bird Islands of Peru*, but does not record any information about a negative or raw footage.

⁴² Jacoby, Irving. "The Museum and Film Production: An Analysis and a Plan" (typescript.), np. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (Laurence P. Roberts 1941-41), Oversize Folder: Various folders DIR 1941-42.

⁴³ Ibid.

expenditure, which over a period of time would be self-liquidating, the Museum could produce an extensive and regular series of films of the highest artistic and technical standards.” Jacoby suggests that national advertisers would be willing to underwrite films for public-relations purposes, arguing that this should present no particular conflict of interest:

In the museum world where it has long been the custom to accept outside help from donors and even to acknowledge important contributions in labels, no stigma need be attached to a film title acknowledging the cooperation of a corporative donor.⁴⁴

This ambitious project was never funded—possibly due to the outbreak of World War Two, but its underlying ideas would be taken up again in the videotape era, in the 1970s.

In the postwar period, two of the prime motivators behind the Museum’s film productions were its husband-and-wife conservators Sheldon and Caroline Keck. Twice the Kecks produced films on painting conservation for the Museum. In an extremely early use of moving images within a museum gallery setting, they produced a 1200’ film in 1954 called *A Future for the Past* that was displayed along with an exhibition on conservation entitled “Take Care,” held from January 18 through February 28 of that year.⁴⁵ In a letter to Harold J. Szold of Lehman Brothers, Caroline Keck wrote,

The movie is our baby, born with much struggle and nursed into shape and dearly loved by us. The realization that we can finally exhibit it as we dreamed of doing, as part of the TAKE CARE exhibition, has been our happiest thought in many a long day. To us, having the movie right there in the show ties every exhibition together and means that the public can go away with a fairly clear idea of what we are doing to preserve our vast

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Brooklyn Museum. *The Annual Report of the Brooklyn Museums*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum, 1955, 30.

heritage of art.⁴⁶

A copy of the film is held in the Museum archives, as is the Keck's second production, *The Secret Life of a Painting*. This film, also black-and-white 16mm sound, was produced in conjunction with 1962's Exhibition of Painting Conservation, or EPC. A budget dated September 21, 1962, describes the film's production and goals:

SCRIPT: To be developed post facto EPC. Audience level, general. Slanted towards promotion of Fine Arts Insurance protection for paintings. Audience will be invited to come behind the scenes at the EPC and watch how experts care for masterpieces, joining the distinguished persons who attend this exposition, etc.⁴⁷

The film was eventually sponsored by the Continental Insurance Companies, and completed in 1963...not necessarily to its creators' satisfaction. Mrs. Keck described her reaction to the film this way in a letter to the Museum's director:

We have to live with our own mistakes. How do you think I feel about that gd film? Editted [sic] so some of the shots are left to right – and therefore out of focus – with the soundtrack so botched that few comments occur with the action they explain. It makes me sick. But I wasn't wise enough to foresee and attend to this part and now it is done and my name attached to something which is bad.⁴⁸

The last motion picture project to be completed on film by the Museum was the 1971 production *Statues Hardly Ever Smile*, which depicted a summer program in which Brooklyn children created a theater piece based on the Museum's collection of Egyptian

⁴⁶ Mrs. Sheldon [Caroline] Keck to Harold J. Szold, December 2, 1953. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Department of Conservation. Box: Reports, Memos, 1946-1968.

⁴⁷ Budget, unsigned, dated September 21, 1962. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (Thomas S. Buechener 1962-1963) Box 2, Folder: Departments: Conservation Laboratory.

⁴⁸ Letter October 22, 1963, Caroline Keck to Thomas Buechner. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (Thomas S. Buechener 1962-1963) Box 2, Folder: Departments: Conservation Laboratory. Files on the film in the Archives do not record the specifics of what may have gone wrong with the production.

art⁴⁹. It was described in its initial proposal in this way:

The purpose of the film is to document the process in which a group of teen-age children, naive both in terms of Egyptian art, history and mythology and in terms of theatre, dance, mime, and poetic expression, developed highly sensitive and creative responses to (a) the art objects in the Egyptian collection, (b) their own inner feelings and imaginations, and (c) their own bodies as creatively expressive entities. The film will document both the affective (sensory, emotional) learning process as well as the cognitive (intellectual, informational) learning process. It will include filmed records of (a) object-child interaction, (b) child-child interaction, (c) child-instructor interaction, (3) verbal poetic expression, (e) mime, dance, drama elements as developed by the students (f) location establishing footage of The Brooklyn Museum, and (g) location establishing footage of the students in their urban environment.⁵⁰

This film has suffered a fate similar to that of many educational films. Though the Archives holds several former circulating prints of the film, they are faded and battered, and the negative appears to have been lost when the lab that held it went out of business.

2.3.3 Creation of moving images: videotape

In the early 1970s, as the Museum's relatively rare production of films ceased altogether, it nevertheless began to undertake the production of moving images on a larger scale, by taking advantage of the newly-available technology of portable videotape. The Museum was not alone in this project.⁵¹

At the time, the museum world was undergoing what the journal *Museum News*

⁴⁹ Files in the Museum Archives refer to a 16mm film project from the early 1980s that was given various titles, usually *Objects of War*, and which was supposed to be a film aimed at making museums relevant to teenagers. Though the files indicated that footage was shot, it does not appear to have been completed. No relevant footage was found in the Museum.

⁵⁰ Contract between The Brooklyn Museum and Chamba Productions, Inc., August 12, 1971. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director, (Duncan F. Cameron, 1971-72). Box 7, Folder: Special Projects: Chamba Productions.

⁵¹ It should be noted that this history (as with the history of the Museum's filmmaking activities) focuses on the period in which most audiovisual materials in the Archive were produced; in the case of videotape, this covers the early 1970s through the mid-1980s.

referred to as “The AV Revolution.” Videotape was lumped together with other “audio-visual” or “AV” technology: projected slides, sound recordings, and films; in the beginning, museum uses of these technologies were often derived from their uses in trade-show exhibits.⁵²

This revolution was sparked by a number of factors. Certainly critical was the technology itself—videotape recorders formerly the size of large refrigerators were now the size of electric typewriters, costing less than \$2,000. Moreover, the early 1970s were a time when “relevance” and “accessibility” carried increasing weight in the museum world; museums across America were looking for ways to break down barriers between visitors and art, and shifting from “object exhibits” to “concept exhibits” or “storytelling exhibits” These factors combined to make video a tool increasingly utilized by museums.

A 1971 study conducted by the Akron Art Institute, entitled “The Application of Portable Video Tape Television in Museum Programming,” summed up the way video’s potential was seen:

...there are some applications of VTR unique to the museum field such as: exhibition research, exhibition documentation, collection documentation, exhibition interpretation, documentation of meetings with artists and of art work for library archives, and use as a creative tool by artists and students working with the museum.⁵³

And a survey conducted in 1972 at the annual meeting of the Association of American Museums provides a useful snapshot of the situation at the time: of 100

⁵² “Thoughts on the Audio-Visual Revolution,” *Museum News*, January 1973, 13-14.

⁵³ Akron Art Institute, “The Application of Portable Video Tape Television in Museum Programming, 2. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (Duncan F. Cameron 1971-72), Records of the Department of Education, unprocessed materials, Box 5, Folder K1.

museums responding—the Brooklyn Museum included—21 owned their own video equipment; all used 1/2” black-and-white tape, 12 of them using Sony Porta-Paks. The uses included community relations, fundraising, off-air taping, “creative expression and media exploration,” “exhibition reinforcement or display enhancement,” registrar activity, documentation, training, internal communication, or research.⁵⁴

That same year, 1972, the Brooklyn Museum drew up a plan for a media center that would allow for the on-site production of both film and video, for internal use as well as education: a “...full-time, permanent Audio-Visual Center dealing with the media of film, video-tape, photography, and ‘multi-media’.” It was an ambitious program, calling for, among other equipment, 12 super-8 film cameras, 2 Bolex 16mm cameras, 2 Sony Videover II AV3400/AVC-3400 videotape recorders, and a Panasonic NV-3130 color editing deck.⁵⁵

Though the center was never fully funded, the Museum did acquire video equipment and began producing tapes, though on a relatively small scale. In 1973, in conjunction with Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Anthropologia e Historia, the Museum created a tape documenting Xochicalco, archaeological site in Mexico, with a crew of just three: an anthropologist, a local interpreter, and Lynn Kohl of the Museum’s education department acting as videographer.⁵⁶

The Museum also began producing videotapes for use in galleries as didactics—accompaniments to exhibitions providing context of information to viewers. The first was used in an exhibition of Lewis Hine photographs, which opened in March 1977.

⁵⁴ Katzive, David. “Museums Enter the Video Generation,” *Museum News*, January 1973, 22.

⁵⁵ “The Brooklyn Museum Audio-Visual Center: A Proposal.” Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Office of the Director (Duncan F. Cameron 1972-73), Box 4, Folder: Interpretation: Audiovisual and Electronics Design.

⁵⁶ Grossman, Joel W. and Kohl, Lynn. “Xochicalco,” *Arts Magazine*, December 1974, 70.

The black-and-white tape, 17 minutes in length, was produced by Beth Friend, Nina Mende, and Gail Pellett, and was on continuous display between March 10 and May 15. The video was initially budgeted at \$1230.72: \$699.28 for expenses and \$531.44 for transportation; a January 1977 agreement specified that the three producers would be paid \$600 each and spend a total of \$700.⁵⁷

Yet as simple as this production was, just a year later the Museum took on a much more elaborate video didactic project, for the exhibit “Haitian Art.” The show was among the largest exhibits of Haitian art to be held in the United States to that time, and among the first to present the art mostly stripped of the trappings of “primitivism” that often accompanied it. The video presentation was, for the time, equally elaborate and involved. Instead of the single-channel black-and-white installation that had accompanied the Hine show the year before, the Haitian Art show had three separate stations showing color video that had been shot on location for the Museum; two of the stations had multiple tapes that could be cued using a primitive computer control system called the Video-dex 2020.⁵⁸ A Brooklyn Museum report on the exhibit later stated:

The use of video taped documentaries for this exhibition was virtually unprecedented in manner and scale among museum exhibitions. Video tapes, produced by Gail Pellett, served to define the context for Haitian art through introducing the history and social structure of Haiti, explaining the Voodoo religion and its impact upon Haitian art and illustrating the sources of Haitian art in Haitian everyday life. The interpretation of paintings related to Haitian festivals was enhanced by a

⁵⁷ Letter to Gail Pellett, Beth Friend, and Nina Mende, from Nina Jensen, Brooklyn Museum Education Department, January 25, 1977. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Education Department (unprocessed materials accessioned February 9, 1990, original box 32, Folder: Lewis Hine Video.)

⁵⁸ Memorandum August 15, 1978, from David Katzive to Gail Pellet, Dan Weidman, Tom Zafian. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Education Department (unprocessed materials, accessioned April 1, 1997, original box 13, Folder: Haiti: Video/Films.)

video documentation of the Holy Week Ra-Ra festival...Videotapes of interviews with artists represented in the exhibition were also presented in the galleries.... These videotapes provided evidence that belied received ideas that 'primitive' Haitian artists worked spontaneously without prior planning of their works and lacked reflexivity about their art.⁵⁹

In addition to producing materials like this for use in galleries, the Museum was also active in creating programming for cable television. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Museum produced *The Brooklyn Museum Presents*, a half-hour show broadcast on the Manhattan local-access station Channel L. It was a low-tech program: a talk-show format featuring curators discussing current or upcoming exhibits, illustrated with slides or videotapes that had been produced for use in galleries. (*Statues Hardly Ever Smile* was also shown on this program.) In 1983, *Museum News* reported some of the pitfalls that could be associated with low-budget museum programming:

Because of limited staff time, no effort has been made to notify the museum's Manhattan community about the programs and there has been no organized effort to measure their impact. "We do hear feedback from staff whose friends have seen the shows, but that's about all at this point," says Ellen Holtzman, the museum's assistant manager of public programs and media. Nevertheless, the Channel L program gives the museum free publicity in Manhattan and a free tape of the program as well.⁶⁰

Today, there is no in-house production of moving images in the Museum of any kind. The Education department has stopped using video to document its activities, and videotaping of symposia and conferences, when done, is handled by outside vendors. Major exhibits—both permanent and traveling—do often include video didactics, but often they are simply primary source material rather than fully produced short

⁵⁹ "Haitian Art Exhibition – Final Report, June 24, 1979," p. 4-5. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Records of the Education Department (unprocessed materials, accessioned April 1, 1997, original box 13, Folder: Haitian Art: NEA.)

⁶⁰ Beck, Kirsten. "A New Connection: Museums and Cable," *Museum News*, August, 1983, 57.

documentaries. For example, the recent show of Marilyn Monroe photographs included several monitors displaying newsreel clips and movie trailers. And in the Museum's American galleries, a few archival films are on continuous display—including, symmetrically enough, early films by the Edison Company.⁶¹

3. THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES

3.1 The History of the Archives

Though the Brooklyn Museum has its roots in a library, the establishment of an Archives separate from the Museum's in-house Art Research Library did not come until 1985. That year, the Brooklyn Museum received a two-year grant from the National Historical Publication and Records Commission to create an archives as an entity separate from the library. Deborah Wythe was hired as archivist in 1986, a position she maintains to this day.

At that time, organization and storage conditions for the Museum's archival materials were far from ideal, with materials scattered throughout the building, from basement to attic. That situation has since changed radically. Over the years, the Archives has accumulated approximately 2,000 linear feet of institutional records, which are now housed in newly renovated, climate-controlled space, shared with the 275,000 volumes that make up the Museum's two libraries: the Art Research Library, and the

⁶¹ An additional use of moving images by the Brooklyn Museum, though relatively rare compared to gallery usage or other production was classes in filmmaking—including a short but extraordinary course offered in the fall of 1958 that was taught by filmmaker Francis Thompson, with guest lecturers Shirley Clarke, Len Lye, Stan VanDerBeek, D. A. Pennebaker, and Louis and BeBe Barron. (See "Film-Making Course Planned At Museum," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1958, 14.) Super-8 films from a late 1970s student class also survive in the Archives.

Wilbour Library of Egyptology.⁶²

3.2 The Archives' Staff

The Department of Libraries and Archives is headed by Principal Librarian Deirdre Lawrence. The Library staff consists of two professional librarians, two administrative paraprofessionals, and a number of part-time employees in various capacities.

Archivist Deborah Wythe is the only permanent full-time staffer in the Archives. There are three Archives employees currently working under a Mellon Foundation grant; one full-time and two part-time. The grant is part of Mellon's Museum Archives Initiative, which aims to make archival materials accessible to scholarly researchers. The Brooklyn Museum received \$750,000 for processing, digitization, cataloging, and other work with the Museum's paper and photographic records, as well as the library's online catalog.⁶³

3.3 The Archives' holdings

The Archives maintains approximately 2000 linear feet of records, including correspondence, reports from expeditions, files on exhibitions, letters between artists and curators, and minutes and clipping files.

The Archives' general policy for accession is to bring records that have to do with the Museum's history into the Archives when they are five years old. Some departments send their records regularly; others need to be sought out. Initial weeding and processing is done at the time of accession—enough to make the files reasonably

⁶² <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/departments/libraries/>, accessed May 1, 2005.

⁶³ Interview with Deborah Wythe, April 4, 2005.

accessible to researchers. The files are fully processed as time permits, based on their potential research value; priority is given to the records of the Museum Director, and curatorial files. Processing is done in more detail than in most archives; each folder receives a detailed scope note that can be searched in a database.

As for photographs, the Archives holds very few—less than ten—nitrate negatives. The bulk of the collection consists of prints, and acetate and polyester negatives, in addition to glass negatives, slides, and transparencies. The Archives also holds approximately 14,000 glass lantern slides, many of which are unique to the Museum. The acetate negatives have, as can be expected, been afflicted with vinegar syndrome; approximately thirty percent of acetate negatives in the Archives have shown signs of deterioration, not counting those that have been discarded over the years due to severe deterioration, buckling, etc. Wythe points out that the figure is not as worrisome as it may seem, in that nearly all negatives also exist as prints, and that many of those lost were photographs documenting items in the collection—which can easily be rephotographed if necessary. The vinegar-syndrome negatives have been placed in boxes lined with microchamber paper to absorb acidity, and most of them are segregated.⁶⁴

Several other departments in the Museum hold photographs, including the photo studio, which is responsible for documenting objects and artwork, the conservation department, the various curatorial departments, and the planning department. Wythe acknowledges the need for cold storage facilities for acetate negatives, and envisions a joint project in which these negatives would be gathered from all departments for

⁶⁴ Ibid.

centralized storage.⁶⁵

3.4 Storage conditions in the Archive

The Archives' storage area maintains conditions of 68-70 degrees Fahrenheit and 35-40 percent relative humidity. These conditions are not ideal for long-term film and videotape storage (those ideal conditions are discussed in the supplemental materials in the Appendix.)

4. AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS IN THE ARCHIVES

4.1 Background

The Archives' initial accession of audiovisual materials came in 1999, in the form of a large group of videotapes and films that had been placed by staffers from the Education Department in nondescript closet on the Museum's second floor. Wythe had been aware of the fact that there were videotapes in the Department, but when she initially surveyed the building, the Department was still using them. When she learned that they were no longer in use, she was told that they had been placed in the closet, and that she was welcome to take them into the Archives. Wythe's report on the tapes to Principal Librarian Deirdre Lawrence, dated October 19, 1999, is worth quoting on the matter of the accession guidelines she proposed at the time:

BMA [Brooklyn Museum of Art] videos that are finished, released productions with credits should go into ARL [Art Reference Library] collections and be fully cataloged
Videos that document BMA programs, events, and exhibitions should be accessioned into Archives
Videos containing footage, outtakes, unedited/unfinished versions should be taken into Archives with the provision that they will be appraised and may be disposed of eventually

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Non-BMA productions should be evaluated for research value and be cataloged in ARL if approved⁶⁶

Wythe then weeded out a large number of tapes as outside the Archives' collecting mandate, and sent about 100 of them to the A. Kempton d'Ossche Art Video Collection at the Jean Outland Chrysler Library of the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia. The rest of the videotapes were brought into in the Archives. The films deemed worthy of accession were also placed in the Archives; the remainder were left in the storage closet.⁶⁷

My own work in the Archives began in January 2005 with a physical inspection of the videotapes in the collection—at the time, approximately 500 tapes. All of the tapes had already been entered into a Microsoft Access database containing basic information including format, title, date, etc. In the process of inspection, I gathered relevant preservation information not in the database, including tape length, stock, and condition notes (and removed record tabs.). I modified the existing database to accommodate this information. While I was working at the Museum, I also took part in accessioning two groups of audiovisual materials.

The first came on February 9th, when I had a short meeting with the Museum's audio-visual technician Osaro Hemenez regarding the availability of film rewinds.

Deborah Wythe had warned me that he'd been trying to get a large number of unused

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Deborah Wythe to Deirdre Lawrence, October 19, 1999. At the time, Wythe was proposing bringing some tapes into the Archives, and putting others into the Art Research Library, seeing a distinction between documents of Museum activities and potential research materials (i.e., the completed discussions.) Today, however, she maintains that the audiovisual materials should remain in a single collection to facilitate their management, and that the close relationship between the Library and the Archives means that any researchers approaching the Library for information would be directed to the relevant audiovisual materials, if any, in the Archives.

⁶⁷ Interview with Deborah Wythe, April 4, 2005.

videotapes into the Archives, but she was requiring that he provide a list of the tapes as well. In talking with Osaro, he mentioned that he'd given up, and had thrown away "a bunch" of tapes. He didn't consider them valuable since they "weren't movies, just meetings and stuff." I passed this along to Deborah, and fifteen minutes later we were in a fourth-floor storage room with a cart, taking all the remaining tapes into the Archives, list or no list.

The new acquisitions were inventoried by a Museum volunteer, and entered into the Archive's video database. I drew up a short inspection form for this purpose, which gathered the basic information in a way that exactly matched database fields.

Then on April 4, Wythe and I inspected a storage closet on the Museum's second floor (the same closet mentioned above, into which the Education Department had placed its outdated tapes in the late 1990s), looking for the 35mm nitrate negative that was listed in an inventory but not in the Archives. In addition to the nitrate, the closet also held a number of 16mm films and videotapes. Most of the films were commercial productions—educational films the Museum's now-defunct circulating collection. Twelve reels, however, looked as if they might have been Museum productions, and were brought into the Archive for further inspection. As of this writing (May 1, 2005), that inspection HAS not been carried out, and these films are not included in the totals above. The closet also held 47 reels of Super-8 film dating to the 1970s. Most appeared to be silent films produced in a student filmmaking class; 9 were sound films documenting Museum activities. The videotapes included 3/4" and VHS tapes that had been missing from the previous accession from the Education Department, as well as more than 100 1/2" open reel videotapes that represented some of the Museum's earliest videotape productions. These materials had been placed there

by the Education Department without informing the Archives; as Wythe pointed out to me, no one would have done that with paper records, but audiovisual materials—here as elsewhere—still do not always receive consideration as archival records.

4.2 Film holdings

The Archives holds a relatively small collection of films—85 reels, which appear to represent approximately 15 titles. The majority of the films are projection prints, some of which are in very poor condition. There are two reels of 16mm color negative film documenting the building of the Cantor Auditorium, one reel of 16mm b/w track negative for the film *The World at Your Door*, and 51 reels of Super-8 film dating from the 1970s. Additionally, one title is listed in an undated inventory, but is not present in the Archive.

A complete list of film titles, and known elements in the Archives, appears on the following page:

TITLE	FORMAT	DATE	# OF COPIES	NOTES
<i>200 Years of American Fashion</i>	16mm	n.d.		Listed in inventory but missing from collection
[Brooklyn Museum Art School, Lynn Kohl, 1970]	16mm		1	
<i>Brooklyn Progress</i>	35mm nitrate negative	c. 1920	1	
[Construction of the Cantor Auditorium]	16mm		2	color negative original
[Cooney, Bothmer conversation]	16mm	1960	2 reels (2 parts or 2 copies?)	Produced by U.S. Information Agency.
<i>Creative Leisure</i>	16mm b/w, sound	1950	1	Segment from U.S. Army film
<i>A Future for the Past</i>	16mm b/w, sound	1954	1	Exhibited in gallery with "Take Care" exhibition
<i>Glory that Remains: The Forgotten Kingdom</i>	16mm	1978?	2	In records of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, Series: Audiovisual
<i>Hidden Life of a Painting</i>	16mm b/w, sound	1962	3	Produced in conjunction with Exposition of Painting Conservation
[Mendes excavation]	16mm	1966	1	
[Middle East Exhibition at BMA]	16mm	1972	1	Produced by U.S. Information Agency
<i>Musawwarat (Nubia)</i>	16mm		1	Relationship between the three "Nubia" titles remains unclear
[Nubia]	16mm		1	
[Nubia film. Musawwarat es Sufra]	16mm	unknown	1 reel 16mm 1 reel fullkote mag	
<i>Statues Hardly Ever Smile</i>	16mm color, sound	1971	5 prints	Circulating prints in poor condition
[Super 8 reels]	Super 8		51	early 1970s
<i>This is Your Museum Speaking</i>	16mm color, sound	1979	1	Produced by National Film Board of Canada, contains 1 image of The Brooklyn Museum
[United Arab Republic Minister of Culture Sarwat Okasha on visit to BMA]	16mm	1960	1	Produced by U.S. Information Agency
<i>The World is At Your Door</i>	16mm b/w, sound	1950	7 prints, 1 track negative	
TOTAL	83 reels			

4.3 Audiotape holdings

The Archives' audio holdings consist of 386 items, nearly all of which are on cassettes or 1/4" audiotape. The majority of items are documentation of seminars and lectures, audio guides for galleries, or oral histories; they break down as follows:

FORMAT	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL	DATE RANGE	RISK FACTORS
audiocassette	318	82%	1970s-1990s	Small format, playback equipment may become obsolete
1/4" reel to reel	64	17%	1950s-1980s	Many tapes are relatively old; format quickly approaching obsolescence
1/4" audiotape carts	3	<1%	Unknown	Obsolete format
8-track cartridge	1	<1%	Unknown	Obsolete format, aging tapes
TOTAL	386			

4.4 Videotape holdings

Videotape represents the majority of the Archives' audiovisual holdings. The formats vary, with more than half on 3/4" U-Matic cassettes, and a large number on 1/2" open reel tape. The dates range from the early 1970s to the 1990s. The contents range from videotape didactics to documentation of lectures, public programming and symposia, to field tapes and camera originals produced for museum productions. A table of the complete holdings appears on the following page:

FORMAT	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL	DATE RANGE	RISK FACTORS
3/4"	790	65%	1975-1985	Obsolete format, aging tapes, formerly in poor storage conditions
VHS	187	15%	1980s-present	Small format, playback equipment may become obsolete relatively quickly
1/2" open reel	151	13%	1972-1980	Obsolete format, unstable, aging, playback equipment difficult to find
1"	23	2%	1980s-1990s	Obsolete format; equipment may become difficult to find
BetaSP	18	<1%	1990s	Relatively low risk
Hi8	18	<1%	1980s	Becoming obsolete, small format (can be unstable)
MiniDV	10	<1%	1990s	Current, but like all small formats, carries risks of instability
2"	9	<1%	1980s	Obsolete format
Digital BetaCam	1	<1%	1990s	Low-risk
TOTAL ITEMS	1207			

4.5 Intellectual control

4.5.1 The database

The maintains an item-level catalog of its videotape holdings in a Microsoft Access database. As of this writing—May 1, 2005—the first two large groups of tape have been entered; the most recent accession has not; nor have film and audio materials.

The database contains the following fields:

- Number (taken from tape case—apparently assigned by Education Dept.)
- Number extension (extension to existing number)
- Title
- Date (YYYY/MM/DD)
- Director

- Producer
- Format
- Series—The series groupings used were:
 - Exhibition
 - Programming
 - Television (commercial)
 - Educational Television
 - Publicity
 - Commercial productions (by other institutions)
 - Miscellaneous
 - Haitian Art
- Box Code (Box ID code)
- Tag (Temporary tag)
- System ID (autonumber—unique number for each tape)

In addition to these fields, on my recommendation the following preservation-related fields were added:

- Program length
- Tape Length
- Stock
- Condition Notes
- Program Date/Record Date
- Preservation Notes (info re: reformatting or other preservation action)
- Production (program/exhibition for which the tape was created)

4.5.2 Documentation

Background information on the films and videotapes, as with many archives, is inconsistent. No complete files on any single production appear to exist; there are no releases for Museum productions, and only a very few contracts with producers. There is, however, information of varying depth in the files of the departments that produced the films and videos, as well as correspondence in the files of the Director's Office regarding their production. The files of the Education Department, which was responsible for nearly all of the videotape production, have many files related to the tapes. These files, however, have only been minimally processed; more information

may be made available once they've been fully processed.

5. PRESERVATION PLAN

5.1 Overview

Unlike paper and photographic materials, moving images pose two separate challenges for archivists: the degradation of the media itself, and the obsolescence of playback equipment. The latter is a problem for videotapes in general, and for the Archives of The Brooklyn Museum in particular.

Moving images are also different from paper—though they share this characteristic with photographs—in that they deteriorate rapidly without handling of any kind. Brittle books, untouched, can be expected to remain in a sufficiently stable condition to permit reformatting for extended periods of time. The same cannot be said for film or videotapes. Active preservation, rather than passive, is required.

Wythe has stated that her primary goal for the audiovisual materials in the collection be made available to researchers; that in addition to remastering, use copies be made available, ideally on DVD (because they can be played on computers), and then be made accessible through the Museum's online catalog—but the cataloging should not take place until there are access copies, on the theory that it's pointless to provide intellectual access to materials that may actually not be available. She does not see them having wide enough appeal to justify making them available online, especially given the demands already placed on the Archives' small staff.

5.2 Videotape

The vast majority of the tapes in the Archives of the Brooklyn Museum are on

obsolete formats, and they have been stored for many years under unknown and possibly detrimental conditions. Most are reaching an age at which deterioration can be expected. In particular, the 3/4” tapes of the 1970s are likely to have suffered from sticky-shed syndrome to one degree or another. Indeed, many of these tapes, on inspection, were found to give off a strong waxy odor—one of the indicators of sticky shed syndrome.

Nearly all, however, can be considered to have high value for the Museum Archives. As the tapes have been entered into the Archive’s database, each has been assigned one of the following categories:

- **Exhibition**
These are tapes created to accompany Museum exhibitions over the years. As such, they document not only the subjects of Museum shows, but also the ways in which the Museum presented information to the public. Multiple copies exist of a number of titles, as do some production elements. A survey of these materials will be needed in order to determine the best tapes to use as masters. Additionally, a full listing of all Museum shows for which videotapes were created should be compiled, and extant tapes checked against it. In the Museum’s records, there are a number of references to copies of tapes being requested by other institutions. Should some titles no longer exist, these records could lead to other institutions that hold them.
- **Programming and Symposia**
As pure documentation of Museum activities, these videotapes are the equivalent of more conventional, paper-based records, and as such should be considered high priority.
- **Haitian Art**
This is a particularly valuable collection. It represents the only Museum production in the Archives for which all original field tapes have been retained. Shot in the mid-1970s, the 109 tapes also provide an in-depth record of Haitian Art and culture, as well as interviews with prominent Haitian artists; nearly all the tapes are unique camera originals. Additionally, the tapes represent one of the Museum’s earliest full-scale video projects designed specifically to accompany an exhibition. The tapes were fully cataloged, and their condition checked, in 1999. (Since that time, one copy of a completed program has been remastered to digital Betacam at the request of a user, who paid for the restoration and transfer.) At the time of

cataloging, their overall condition appeared to be good, but they are elderly tapes on an obsolete format and as such deserve close attention.

- **Educational Television**
For several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Museum produced a series for the local cable television outlet Channel L, called "The Brooklyn Museum Presents." There are a number of episodes in the Archives on varying topics. Most consist of interviews conducted with Museum curators by David Katzive, the Museum's director of education at the time, and can be considered detailed documentation of the thinking behind exhibits, and contemporary curatorial attitudes.
- **Publicity**
Television commercials and other forms of self-promotion are a direct reflection of how the Museum has chosen to present itself at a given historical moment—potentially valuable information for future scholars.
- **Television (commercial)**
This series, although it is labeled "NET" for network television, is composed largely of local television news segments. Though this may seem counterintuitive—the idea that a not-for-profit institution should preserve copies of commercially produced television programming—the fact is that the state of local television news preservation is such that it's likely the Museum holds the only copies of some of these 20- and 30-year-old stories. Even if they do exist, access to them is likely difficult and expensive. As documents of the Museum's public face, they are worth attention in the preservation process.
- **Miscellaneous**
This is in fact an extremely broad group of tapes, mostly poorly labeled, and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, approximately a dozen 3/4" tapes are unlabeled and are most likely blank. On the other hand, there are tapes that appear to be documentation of Museum work (i.e., "Costumes and Textiles Behind the Scenes") and would thus belong in high-priority groups.

A last category, commercial productions not created by or about The Brooklyn Museum, fall outside the scope of the Archive's mandate for collection, and should not be considered as part of this preservation plan.

There is a relatively straightforward solution to the problem of decaying videotapes: reformatting onto a new master format, which at this date (April 2005)

would preferably be Digital Betacam masters, with DVD access copies.

I propose a preservation plan made up of the following steps:

- A thorough search, undertaken in cooperation with other museum departments, to uncover any other videotape materials in the Museum that are suitable for accession into the Archives
- Prioritization to determine tapes whose condition is most questionable and whose content is most valuable
- Inspection of videotapes to determine best extant copies for remastering
- Determining content of unlabeled or poorly labeled tapes
- Following search and prioritization (which would be done more easily on-site), movement of tapes to offsite, climate-controlled facility for long-term storage
- If original elements are present, determining if they are worthy of preservation
- Establishment of a long-term relationship with a vendor experienced in the handling of archival videotape
- Ongoing reformatting to new masters

As stated above, two critical factors in determining a videotape's potential need for preservation are its age, and the possible obsolescence of its format. A first step toward preservation of the Archive's collection will be to weed out tapes whose formats are not yet obsolete—BetaSP, Digital Betacam, and MiniDV.

Based on age and obsolescence, the highest priority must then be given to the Archives' 151 1/2" open reel videotapes. These are the oldest tapes in the collection, dating to the early 1970s, and this format has proven to be inherently unstable. If any of the tapes are to be preserved before deterioration leaves them beyond repair, immediate action is necessary. The Archives' few 2" quad tapes should also be prioritized.

Then, because of the homogenous nature of the remaining physical material—the vast majority of the videotapes are 3/4"—I suggest that the Archives prioritize materials for reformatting based first on their content, and then within those categories, by age, as follows:

- Exhibition
- Programming and Symposia
- Haitian Art
- Educational Television
- Publicity
- Television (commercial)

Two points should be noted here. First, regarding digitization of video for preservation purposes. At this point, though much work is being undertaken regarding digitization of archival video, much remains to be done. No definite standards have been set, and serious questions regarding file formats, codecs, compression, and metadata remain to be ironed out. This will most likely be the preservation format of the future—but the tapes in the Archives' collection require action now. Reformatting onto Digital BetaCam will ensure the survival of the archival tapes' content for migration to digital files when the time comes.

Second, the preservation of the Archive's videotape collection is no small task, and may require several years of work. But it is a manageable task. The work that has already been done in terms of intellectual control and tape inspection will allow the Archives to move directly into preservation. The groundwork has been laid: now funding can be sought and action taken.

5.3 Film

The preservation challenges presented by the Archive's films are not nearly as straightforward as that of the videotapes. Standard archival practice calls for the preservation of motion picture films by copying them onto polyester stock, and storing both the new elements and the archival originals under optimum conditions. For the Archives, this approach will admittedly be not only costly, but time consuming—without

good-condition preprint elements such as negatives, internegatives, or a- and b-roll, creation of new preservation elements would require the laborious process of inspection, repair, and restoration of the remaining prints which, again, are generally quite worn.

Nevertheless, this is a small collection, and though difficult, proper preservation of the films is a potentially manageable task.

For these reasons I recommend the following plan of action:

- Inspection of all extant prints to determine the best surviving copy of each title
- Search of various archives and labs to track down better elements—negatives or internegatives if possible
- Creation of broadcast-quality videotape masters and access copies
- Determine if film-to-film preservation is warranted for any titles based on viewing of videotape transfers
- Following search and prioritization (which would be done more easily on-site), movement of tapes to offsite, climate-controlled facility for long-term storage
- Pursue preservation funding for selected titles
- Move films to properly climate-controlled offsite storage

5.4 Audiotape

As recently as two years ago, the proper recommendation for long-term preservation of audio materials might well have been to remaster them onto new 1/4” analog audiotape. Today, however, with no reliable source left for audiotape, digitization has become, by default, the preferred format for audio preservation. Fortunately, unlike video, generally accepted standards have been achieved. Therefore, the following steps are in order:

- Prioritization based on age, obsolescence, and the perceived future value of the material
- Creation of high-quality .wav files for preservation masters, and audio CD’s for access copies
- Storage of the files a reliable server with geographically separate backup storage on data tape or other storage media

For this project, the participation of the Museum’s IT department in any audio preservation plan will be critical. Additionally, as with any undertaking involving digital media, technical standards, software, etc. change rapidly—so before any more detailed proposals or grant applications are made, research into the most up-to-date practices will be necessary.

6. ACCESSION POLICY

6.1 Background

As yet, the Museum Archives has no fixed policy regarding the accession of media materials. This is not uncommon—in fact, it is rare for archives to have explicit policies regarding moving image accession. But the nature of moving image materials means that, in fact, they are *more*, not less in need of explicit accession policies.

In drafting this policy, in addition to seeking the archivist’s input, I met with the Museum’s chief designer and chief curator in order to understand how decisions are made about creating video materials for use in exhibitions. In general, only the highest-budgeted and highest-profile shows are able to use video didactics, particularly shows that are touring. These decisions are generally made by the curatorial staff, with participation from the chief designer largely due to the fact that he has a background in production and curating video art. (In fact, a number of the masters of recent didactics remain in the design department).

All videos are handled by subcontractors, with varying degrees of control and input from the curatorial and design departments. Deliverables generally include two

digital Betacam masters and DVD exhibition copies. Shows that go on tour are generally sent out with one master and one DVD. When shows are dismantled, or go out on, or return from, a tour, the videos, as well as all the objects in the show, become part of the registrar's responsibilities. As the chief curator pointed out to me, by the time a show returns from a tour, it has become a low- or no-priority matter for the curatorial and design staff, who by then have moved on to other projects. He also pointed out that at the end of touring shows, most items that will not be reused—including displays, vitrines, and signage—are not returned but discarded at the last display location. It's not clear if videos are also discarded...more investigation into this matter is needed.

What is clear to me is that, because of the way video materials are created, that it is critical to bring them into the Archives at the point of creation, when they are still a high priority, rather than waiting the standard five years for paper records. Otherwise, they too easily become lost in the shuffle until it's too late.

6.2 Policy draft

The Archives of the Brooklyn Museum has as its mandate the collection of records that document the Museum's activities. Those records include media—film, video, and other moving image materials that are as important in their own way as paper records.

Moving images, however, present preservation challenges that paper records do not. For that reason, they require special consideration—an active, rather than passive approach to their preservation. In the past, moving images have been an afterthought when it comes to archiving. This policy looks to change that situation—by bringing

moving images into the Archives in an orderly fashion, their future preservation will be easier to accomplish.

Collecting guidelines

- **The Archives will always collect:**
 - Videos produced by/for The Brooklyn Museum to accompany exhibitions (didactics)
 - At the delivery of the final master materials, the Archive should be provided with:
 - 2 Digital Betacam copies: one preservation master, not to be touched unless absolutely necessary, and one duplication master, to be used if needed to strike duplicates
 - A DVD access copy
 - A copy of the final script
 - The following related materials should always be retained for eventual accession into the Archives:
 - Contract with producer
 - Any and all releases (talent, music, photo, footage)
 - Video documentation of Museum activities, including but not limited to:
 - Educational and outreach programs
 - Public events and benefits
 - Videotapes of Museum-sponsored Symposia
 - Television broadcasts, films, etc. produced in the Museum, or in which Museum curators or staff are interviewed
- **The Archives will sometimes collect (on a case-by-case basis):**
 - Original elements of a production
 - Productions created by outside entities or organizations that feature Museum artworks, artifacts (i.e., documentaries on artists for which Museum artworks were licensed)
 - Home movies or videos created by Museum visitors that document their visits, Museum activities, or the building
- **The Archives will not collect:**
 - Commercially produced videotapes, DVDs, etc. not directly related to the Museum or its activities, even though they may have been used by Museum staff or Departments

7. Summary

The Archives of the Brooklyn Museum was not the type of institution I'd initially thought of working with, and the process of coming to work there was a difficult one. Nevertheless, I found the work to be rewarding on many levels—both in terms of what I learned while I was there, and also in terms of what I believe I was able to contribute to the institution in a relatively short time. Certainly my work was made easier by the fact that the existing collections were already well organized and under control—in fact, my work at times created order rather than disorder. Also, I was working with an archivist who recognized the potential value of the audiovisual materials in her collection, and who was willing to give them the resources they needed, within the limitations of a small staff and other (all too common!) constraints. For this reason, I feel confident that the collection has a positive future, and hope to hear more about it in the years to come.

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- 8. Appendices**
 - 8.1 Videotape and film inspection forms**
 - 8.2 Supplemental materials**

**The Brooklyn Museum Archives
Videotape Inspection Form**

Title: _____

Format: _____ Program Length: _____ Tape Length: _____

B&W/Color: _____ Standard: _____

Program date: _____ Date recorded: _____ Generation: _____

Housing Information: _____

Housing Condition: _____

Does the tape emit any odor when the case is opened? If so, describe.

Cassette/reel Condition: _____

Cassette/Reel Information: _____

Is there any evidence of fungus or mold on the tape? If so, describe, and stop inspection.

Is there any evidence of bad wind-popped strands, flange pack, pack slip, edge damage, cinching or gaps in the pack?

Are there any signs of particulate contamination or liquid staining? White powder, crystalline residue, or black/brown flakes of oxide?

**The Brooklyn Museum
Archives
Film Inspection Form**

Inspected by: _____ Date: _____

Original Number: _____

Title: _____

Artist/Director: _____

Gauge: _____ Base: _____ Color/B&W: _____

Generation/Type (Print, negative, reversal): _____

Leader
information: _____

Can/container information: _____

Edge code information: _____

Physical damage:

Mark on a scale of 1 (slight) to 5 (severe)

_____ Emulsion scratches	_____ Base scratches
_____ Perforation damage	_____ Edge/perf repair
_____ Dirt	_____ Warping
_____ Shrinkage	_____ Color fade

Number of splices: _____ AD reading (0-3): _____

Notes: