Organization and Management of
Art Slide Collections

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Many of the problems encountered in organizing and managing slide libraries are endemic to audiovisual collections. Like other film media, slides lack the classical title page prototype and can be acquired in a variety of formats. These and other factors confound the most rational of organizational and storage systems. Slides illustrate to an extreme those qualities which create media alienation among many librarians. Selection aids are minimal. Quality control is difficult if not impossible without trained photography technicians. Library of Congress and Dewey decimal classifications and LC and Sears subject headings do not readily adapt to slide collections focusing in-depth on a single field such as the fine arts. The concept of “standard” housing does not exist but is dependent upon a number of organizational and utilization variables. Formalized circulation procedures for slides are not commonly used in academic institutions. The majority of public libraries have abrogated all responsibility for even maintaining slides, let alone circulating them.¹ School systems which have slides usually maintain and circulate them as sets stored in trays, carousels, or projector magazines immediately ready for classroom instruction. Museums are among the only institutions known to the author which provide general circulation of slides to the public. There are very few individuals trained to organize and manage slide libraries.

Lest the overall picture appear hopelessly bleak, the reader should be encouraged by the trends of the last ten years: publication activity that is providing selection guides and meaningful approaches to organizational and staffing problems; regularly established annual meetings of slide and photograph librarians; and an increasingly expanding supplies and equipment market designing materials for

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slides. For whatever reasons slides have been neglected, if not ignored, by libraries in the past, the materials explosion of the 1960s, coupled with the rapid development and expansion of slide libraries particularly in academic institutions and museums, demands recognition of the importance of slides as a source of relatively inexpensive visual images capable of wide-ranging instructional diversity.

Publication trends since the beginning of the 1960s have revealed a far more sophisticated approach to the organization and management of slide libraries than was previously provided by the literature. The hallmark article which introduced this period was written by Phyllis Reinhardt in 1959. Prior to this time, brief descriptions of classification systems and methods for producing slides typified published contributions about slide collections.

Another propitious development has been the formalization of communication exchanges among slide librarians handling art collections in colleges, museums and universities at College Art Association (CAA) annual meetings. Since 1969, photograph and slide librarians have held regular sessions at CAA meetings, some of which have included workshop sessions on various aspects of slide library management and operation. These meetings represent the first channel on a national level through which slide librarians may share their specialized expertise with colleagues and benefit from those with professional training who are managing major American slide libraries. Because of the emphasis on fine arts rather than library background and minimal academic training, most individuals placed in charge of slide libraries have not readily associated with a particular library organization; consequently, CAA has provided a natural outlet for the activities of slide librarians managing art collections.

Staffing

A factor which has greatly affected the manner in which slide libraries have been staffed and managed is the institutional setting in which collections have emerged. College and university art collections rarely developed within the aegis of a library but instead were started departmentally by faculty who also administered the collection or placed part-time students or office secretaries in charge of the slides. As collections grew, full-time administration was necessary and usually followed the clerical precedent established by part-time and/or full-time staffing. The vast majority of slide libraries today are in
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academic institutions; consequently, many small collections (fewer than 50,000 slides) still have inadequate staffs stemming from initial development patterns. Fortunately, this pattern is changing; a recent survey by the author showed that, for collections having more than 50,000 slides, the probability of a professional staff is relatively high with about 60 percent of these collections having at least one full-time staff member with a graduate library degree and/or a master's degree in fine arts or art history. In addition, supporting full-time staff is becoming comparatively common. Museum slide libraries have usually developed within the museum library and may consequently reflect the professional attention which they receive, e.g., the Chicago Art Institute and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

One of the problems confronted when attempting to explain the need for professional management of slide libraries is that the traditional clerical staffing of these collections has obscured the distinctions between professional, clerical and technical responsibilities; consequently, justification for professional and support staffs is difficult for most individuals desiring to change personnel standards and requirements for specific collections.

Unfortunately, at least 50 percent of academic collections are still under the sole management of a clerical staff member, although many of these individuals have undergraduate degrees in fine arts. An individual with such minimal training cannot be expected to make short- and long-term administrative decisions such as those in the following outline giving the duties and responsibilities of a professional staff member. If the individual hired on a clerical level is able to perform these responsibilities, then the collection, the department and college, museum or university have momentarily enjoyed a propitious staff selection. To expect every clerical hired and paid on a clerical scale to perform on a professional level is an unreasonable and invalid expectation. A position should not be based upon the qualifications of a temporary staff member but upon an accurate and appropriate job description which defines the position and places it on a professional, clerical or technical level—but not on all three simultaneously.

The following descriptions of the duties and responsibilities of the various members of a slide library staff are usually operative in those collections which have already established sound management and staffing practices. The professional staff may include the head of the slide library, catalogers and reference librarians. Each should be identified as a slide librarian. Titles for the support staff include binders, file clerks, photography technicians, projectionists and typists.
Based upon the tasks performed, each should be identified as a slide library technician or aide.

The professional staff of the slide library would have the following responsibilities and duties:

1. Cataloging and classification of slides, including development of catalog headings, development of authority file, development of shelflist and auxiliary catalogs to the collection, revision of cataloging and classification system, and/or revision of a section or entire collection.
2. Educating, training and informing the users of services and equipment available from the slide library.
3. Providing reference service to the users of the collection.
4. Determining and planning the activities of the support or clerical and technical staff.
5. Directing the production of slides by the slide library.
6. Selecting and evaluating commercial and museum sources of slides.
7. Evaluating the methods of operation.
8. Selecting equipment for the slide library.
9. Reporting on the short- and long-term needs of the slide library and recommending changes and policy decisions on the operations of the slide library.
10. Developing channels of cooperation and communication within a department, college, museum, or university.

The support staff of the slide library would have the following responsibilities and duties:

*Slide Library Technician*

1. Making of all materials for the slide library, e.g., color and black and white slides (this individual may be a professional photographer who is on contract to perform this function, or a part- or full-time employee skilled in slide production, or campus audiovisual services or museum photography departments may be used).
2. Maintaining and making available equipment for showing slides (this function may be performed by campus audiovisual services, by the staff of the slide library solely or with the assistance of a campus service or by a museum photography department for the slide library).
3. Training slide projectionists, binders, and filers (this function
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may be performed by slide library technicians or by aides, i.e., projecting, binding and filing slides).

Slide Library Aide

1. Performing circulation routines and record keeping (charging and discharging of slides).
2. Typing slide labels, correspondence, purchase orders and other slide library records.
3. Binding, filing and projecting slides.

If the slide library support staff is small, there may be an overlap between tasks performed by technicians and aides. If the slide library does not handle its own production and maintenance of equipment, a full-time technician would probably not be necessary. The majority of academic art collections do have facilities for producing slides so that additional staff on either a part- or full-time basis is required. The size of staff ranges from one part-time individual to four full-time professional slide librarians, several full-time aides and up to ten part-time aides and/or technicians for a single slide library in an academic institution or an art museum. Most museums have their own photography departments which can provide equipment and production services for a slide library. Collection size, production and expansion rates and user needs commonly determine the number and type of staff members required to manage a slide library.

Once the distinctions have been made between the responsibilities and duties of the professional and support staff and given the size and administrative demands of a particular collection, it should be possible to justify proper management of a slide library by qualified individuals. As indicated earlier, relatively few academic slide collections are under the administrative jurisdiction of a library. If, however, the slide library remains outside the traditional lines of academic library management, professional staffing may continue to present problems for many collections.

As is apparent from the description of what is expected of a slide librarian, qualifications based upon library training and fine arts subject expertise are necessary. An art background is required because of cataloging and classification functions and reference service. Although many librarians and individuals of strong subject background vigorously debate the pros and cons of library versus subject training for special libraries, the experience of the author indicates that a combination of both are demanded for competent management of art slide libraries.

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Why stress library training? Above all, slide collections are libraries in that they represent highly sophisticated instructional resource collections which are managed, organized and stored for maximum retrieval and utilization. What has made this issue particularly sensitive is the unresponsiveness of many library schools to tailor their curriculums to fit the needs of librarians managing nonprint libraries. This is the most common complaint against having the library science degree for fine arts slide librarians. At the same time, however, training only in the arts does not coincidently prepare an individual to manage a slide library. To accept the validity of the graduate library degree requires corresponding recognition of slide libraries as requiring more than art or clerical training for competent management. Library schools should be encouraged to cooperate with those programs on academic campuses which do include courses on audiovisual materials when library science curriculums cannot satisfy professional training requirements for special librarians. Library schools should coordinate programs for slide librarians with audiovisual curricula which may be located in schools or departments of education. Resident training in a major academic and/or museum slide library should also be arranged through the library school to supplement curricular preparation. Fine arts subject training can be acquired through an undergraduate degree or an additional master's degree in art history or fine arts. Although there has been at least one attempt to initiate a combined art history and slide and photograph master's degree in a university art department, such efforts should not be forced upon academic art departments which are ill-equipped for such training. Hopefully, as more individuals seek preparation for slide librarianship, library schools will respond with the appropriate curricula.

Organization

Although art slide collections can be traced to the 1880s in the United States and lantern slides date to the seventeenth century, the majority of individuals placed in charge of such collections, both because of their lack of training and the absence of information on the subject, have been forced to develop independent means for organizing slide libraries.

Before further discussion of possible organizational patterns for slide collections, a distinction needs to be made between collections of slide sets and what the author refers to as unitary image collections.
The former is based upon commercially designed or institutionally produced sets comprising slides on a single topic or theme which usually adapt to standard cataloging and classification procedures (Dewey decimal or LC classifications); can be stored in slide trays, carousels or projector magazines that can be placed in boxes for storage on standard book shelving; and are generally adaptable to media inter filing, i.e., the shelving together of books, filmstrips, recordings, slide sets, media packages and other materials. Unitary image collections are based upon the integrity and value of the single slide as worthy of cataloging, classifying, identifying and circulating in whatever manner is customary by a given institution. Frequently, collections of 50,000 slides represent as much time and effort to organize as a similarly sized book collection with each slide individually selected and processed for inclusion within the library.

There are three basic methods of slide collection organization: accession number; classified; and subject order. The arrangement of slides in sets can be used in any of these three systems. An accession number arrangement may be adequate for a collection of less than 10,000 slides or for a collection of slide sets assuming the availability of an artist, subject and title catalog for access. However, once a unitary image collection exceeds 10,000 slides on a single topic such as fine arts, traditional library classification systems do not allow for the in-depth organization necessary for a classified order. A subject order based upon the alphabetical organization of subject classes and divisions is commonly utilized for collections of art slides. Using this arrangement, the collection is considered self-indexing and does not include supplemental catalogs. This system of organization limits the number of access points to an individual slide, basing retrieval facility on the subject competence of the user.

The majority of art slide libraries in academic institutions and museums base the organization of their collections on an art historical classification scheme derived from media classes (architecture, painting, sculpture, decorative arts, etc.), artistic periods or styles as divisions (ancient, medieval, renaissance, etc.), geographical or cultural subdivisions (country, cultural area or city), and artist and subject entries. A collection arranged in this manner would assume user knowledge of an artist’s medium, nationality, stylistic period and subject content emphasis. For clarity, a brief outline of the basic class, division, subdivision, and section format which such a system utilizes follows:
Because art slide libraries were established within art departments of colleges and art schools and museums, knowledge of art history as a requirement for collection utilization was rarely considered a problem. With the increasing use of slides in general humanities instruction, individuals having heterogeneous backgrounds find it awkward to use collections organized according to the parameters of the system described. The development of a computer manipulable classification system for slides and pictures at the University of California at Santa Cruz by Luraine Tansey and Wendell Simons represents an important step in making these collections readily accessible to users regardless of their subject backgrounds. Pending publication at this time is the Metropolitan Museum of Art classification system which should also prove to be an invaluable aid to individuals developing slide libraries or revising established collections. The author's monograph on slide libraries does not include a complete system but does provide analysis of ten classification systems currently utilized in academic institutions and museums representative of the basic model used for organizing art slides.

**Acquisition and Selection**

Two major methods are available for building a collection of slides: local production and commercial purchase. The sophistication and minimal expense of photographic processing of black and white and
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color slides has made it relatively easy for many institutions to make their own slides. The average annual acquisition rate for college, museum and academic art collections is about 6,000 slides. From 2,000 to 3,000 of these slides are usually commercially purchased. Museum collection building may vary within these figures, depending upon the stress placed upon having a slide library representative of the museum's holdings, although most large museums need broad-based resources for public lectures and instructional purposes. Another method used by many collections as a source of slides is duplication of faculty or student material which has been made at the original site. Many art history faculty and students spend their summers in Europe engaged in research which frequently includes shooting slides or prints—either of which can be later copied for the slide library.

Each institution, depending upon available funds and technical staff, develops its own parameters for local production with facilities varying from a copystand and 35mm camera to a fully integrated Leitz Reprovit copy system. Quality control varies with the sophistication of the system utilized, the staff's photography training and the sources used for slide copying or production. Color plates from books are the primary source for slides made locally by slide libraries in academic institutions; consequently, quality control is rather difficult to maintain for two reasons: (1) color plates are rarely faithful reproductions of artworks, particularly paintings; and (2) the mere act of copying a copy removes the slide at minimum three times from the veracity of the original object, assuming that the plate was made from a photograph taken directly at the actual site of the work. The very process of duplicating copies automatically causes some loss in quality from one photographic stage to another. Obviously, good original slides (slides made directly from the object) are the most desirable source for building a quality slide library. These slides can be obtained from individuals who are willing to take two exposures—one for the slide collection and one for their private collection—when making research trips abroad.

Another source of original slides is from commercial producers and distributors. Commercial slide sources vary radically in quality and many may only provide duplicated or copied slides rather than originals. Reputable producers will usually specify whether slides are originals or duplicates with a corresponding increase in cost per slide for originals. When possible, slides should be purchased on approval so that, after careful examination, they can be returned to the source if unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, illegal copying of commercial slides

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when sent on an approval basis to institutions has prevented some dealers from providing this service to prospective customers. Because the process of duplicating slides and copying plates is such a relatively simple process and is commonly practiced in most institutions having slide collections, copyright questions have either been ignored or assumptions have been made about what is educationally permissible.

Duplicate slides can be of several types. Many museums such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which has a large purchase-order program for slides, keep a master file of high quality color slides from which they directly make their duplicates for sale purposes. Such duplicates frequently maintain similarly high standards as do originals because of the quality controls on the master file and duplicating procedures. Slides taken from a master file of negatives should be considered originals. Another interpretation of duplicate is a slide taken from another duplicate which may or may not have been taken from the original slide. The further away the copy is from the original slide, the more it suffers in quality.

Commercial slides range in price from about $.25 to $3.00 per slide depending upon the source and whether or not the slides come prebound, labelled, and as duplicates or originals. Most producers and distributors will provide slides most commonly in cardboard mounts with a catalog number on the slide corresponding to the original dealer catalog with descriptive information for ordering purposes or with a brief description printed or written directly on the mount or paper label. Slides purchased with only the cardboard mount and minimal precataloging data are usually less expensive than those supplied fully glass-mounted with a completed label. Frequently, however, such prelabelled slides do require changes in cataloging data if only to re-arrange the information in terms of a given collection's entry format and filing order.

Although it may initially appear less expensive for a slide library to produce and process its own slides, overhead and labor costs frequently are not taken into consideration by individuals computing such costs. Many times, however, it is necessary to purchase slides because the information is not available in any other convenient format for copying. Many European producers offer slides of art objects which are not reproduced in publications or if they are, the reproductions are so poor that slides cannot be made from them; consequently, a choice between commercial acquisition and institutional production is not always possible. Some coordination of these two methods of collection building is in order. Most museums
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consistently provide high quality slides taken directly from objects in their collections and should be considered a preferred source for original slides. In addition, museum-produced slides are frequently quite inexpensive in comparison to many commercial sources which make them well within the budgets of most slide libraries.

Surprisingly, although many slide libraries in academic institutions are in schools which have campus audiovisual services, few take advantage of such a center as a source of local production. Instead, equipment and facilities are duplicated in the department or school having the art slide collection. Part-time photography students or local commercial photographers are hired to shoot and process the film. Although one could argue that more control could be exercised over the quality of the slides made by having a separate facility, very few collections have consistently high quality slides either in black and white or in color. More than likely, separation within an institution as an isolated collection developed solely for the use of one school or department has promoted other activities divorced from any centralized campus functions. Institutions which do rely on audiovisual services for slide production include Miami University in Ohio, Pennsylvania State University, San Jose State College and Yale University.

Until recently, the only comprehensive list of commercial and museum art slide sources available has been the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Sources of Slides: The History of Art, distributed free of charge by the museum’s slide library. This list is periodically updated and still represents a reliable directory of distributors and commercial slide manufacturers throughout the world.

With the first meetings of slide librarians at College Art Association (CAA) meetings, an increased awareness of quality slide sources has been possible through formal and informal communication. In 1972, the Slide and Photograph Librarians Commercial Slides Committee of the CAA, under the direction of Nancy DeLaurier and Margaret Crosby, prepared A Slide Buyer’s Guide which includes film type, prices, subject coverage and other information on commercial and museum slide sources. A unique aspect of this publication is the reporting of the results of a survey taken among academic and museum slide librarians on the quality of slides and service characteristics of the distributors and producers in the Guide. Consequently, A Slide Buyer’s Guide marks the first attempt at providing qualitative and informative guidelines for slide acquisition and selection from commercial sources. Also published in 1972 was A Handlist of Museum Sources for Slides and
Photographs prepared at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Another selection tool which can be utilized is *Slide Libraries: A Guide for Academic Institutions and Museums*, which includes a chapter on slide acquisition and production, a bibliography of selection guides and a directory of commercial and museum slide sources of architecture, art, history, geography/travel, science and other subjects. Unfortunately, well known general media sources and periodicals such as the Westinghouse Learning Directory, the Audiovisual Marketplace, Library Journal and Previews offer extremely limited coverage of a small number of commercial slide dealers. The most recent breakthrough in this field is the publication of an *Index to Educational Slide Sets* by the National Information Center for Educational Media (NICEM).

In the past, slide librarians depended upon timeconsuming trial-and-error methods for determining reliable high quality slide sources. Current publication trends indicate a greater level of recognition and concern for identifying and evaluating commercial slide distributors and producers than occurred previously. Hopefully, general media selection tools will follow the precedent set by NICEM and begin giving slides the attention which they deserve by providing broader coverage of this area in standard acquisition and selection guides.

**Housing the Collection**

Ultimately, visual data may be electronically stored and retrieved through large display consoles in classrooms or auditoriums so that lecturers would never become involved in the physical removal of slides from a drawer or file. At the present time, however, such possibilities are outnumbered by a variety of rather simple storage facilities for slides.

In order to select suitable cabinets for filing slides, both the storage and accessibility functions of a given unit should be considered. The following questions should be asked and answered in a satisfactory manner to determine which type of facility will be best suited to institutional needs:

1. How are the slides to be used? By set or individually?
2. Who is to use the slides? Teachers prefering a broad, multidisciplinary approach? Subject specialists only? Combinations of users?
3. How frequently will the slides be used?
4. How many individuals will the collection serve?
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5. What type of expansion schedule will the collection have?
6. How will the collection be organized and filed? By call number or accession number? By alphabetical and subject order?
7. How will the collection be circulated? By set or individually?
8. How much preparation time can be allowed for slide presentation?
9. How much care should be taken to prevent the handling of individual slides?
10. What are the budget limitations for the collection—both short- and long-term?

Two major elements in the selection of cabinets are reflected by these questions: the organization of the slide library by set or by individual slide; and the use patterns which the collection will support. Budget will play a role in selection but the variety of cabinets and range of prices permits flexibility based upon organization and use requirements.

Questions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 may seem to imply that a single slide library may utilize either a set or unitary image arrangement. To the contrary, a collection may have combinations of both, thereby requiring several different types of housing. For example, user needs may demand that prepackaged slide sets be prepared for some classes while individual selection will be preferred for others. The slide librarian should allow for both alternatives. Some lecturers may also appreciate the reduced time for slide presentation preparation required by slide sets.

Introductory art courses may be particularly well suited for preplanned visuals; moreover, such sets could be made readily available for student viewing after lectures and before examinations. If possible, a room contiguous to the slide or print library should be provided for this purpose. Storage by set also discourages handling of individual slides keeping the glass of the mount free from dirt and fingerprints. In addition, slides stored by set are usually kept in projector carousels, magazines or trays thereby providing a convenient unit for circulating the slides outside the slide library.

Collections used by a large number of individuals consistently and at overlapping times may discourage some forms of compact storage which house as many as 10,000 slides within a single vertical cabinet approximately 12 inches wide by 4 to 5 feet high. At the same time, however, such storage can accommodate removable slide trays within each drawer, allowing users to select slides at locations away from the location of the cabinet. Even large departments, schools or museums
may not have enough specialists within a given area of art history to create congestion at regular intervals within a specific section of the collection; consequently, user variations from one institution to another will radically affect the choice of storage medium. The physical layout of the collection, both in terms of the cabinets and the holdings of each cabinet, can also accommodate varied use patterns. For example, if compact storage is preferred, groups of cabinets should be placed so that they are interspersed among viewing tables to avoid an assembly-line placement of narrow cabinets which may interfere with multiple-access requirements. Fortunately, free-standing slide cabinets are the common storage mode so that overall slide library design can readily adapt—given adequate space—to the needs of both users and staff and to the cabinet style selected.

There are four basic types of slide storage:

1. Filing drawer cabinets for individual or slide set storage with viewing allowed only by slide removal from the drawer, e.g., cabinets made by General Fireproofing, Library Bureau Division of Sperry Remington, Nega-File, Neumade Products, and Steelcase.

2. Visual display rack cabinets with slides filed on metal frames for immediate visual access frequently equipped with light panels, e.g., cabinets made by Elden Enterprises and Multiplex Display Fixture Company.

3. Tray, magazine or carousel storage with these units placed in boxes suitable for stacking or shelving and boxes for slide sets provided by commercial dealers, e.g., Eastman Kodak, Honeywell, and E. Leitz.

4. Plastic sleeve storage in looseleaf binders for immediate visual access, e.g., sleeves made by Bardes Plastics, and the Plastic Sealing Corporation.

Unlike the first method of collection housing, the second is not readily adaptable to rapidly expanding collections that require continual interfiling and integration of new slides. Visual display rack cabinets, however, are suitable for libraries having users who need immediate visual access to the slide content rather than access through historical, medium, or artist approaches per se. For example, an art school may maintain two sets of slides—one in a traditional organizational pattern in filing cabinets and another having a subject approach by type of image, such as: advertisements for American cars, for European cars;
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mental health posters in color and in black and white; and packaging labels on household cleaning products. Commercial art instructors preparing lectures on the visual impact of different design and color techniques could select slides by being able to view about 100 slides on a single rack at a time. Moreover, such collections might be organized by broad subject categories so that a precise filing order would not be necessary for relatively small collections (fewer than 10,000 slides). The primary value of this type of storage is the immediacy of visual access. Similar to the concept of visual display racks but smaller in scale is plastic sleeve storage which also adapts to the same housing patterns. Plastic sleeves for slides are available from most commercial photography dealers.

The third category refers to slide storage in boxes, carousels, magazines or trays provided with various types of automatic slide projectors and/or by producers of slide sets. Accession number order, Dewey decimal or LC classification with supplemental artist, title, and subject catalogs can be used with this arrangement of the collection. The major advantages to housing slides directly in projection trays is that of user and storage convenience. Frequently standard slide sets will be developed for introductory art courses so that each time such lectures are given, faculty or curatorial staff need not reorganize the same material. In addition, if students are allowed independent access to slides after classroom or museum presentations, having them organized in this manner makes it relatively easy for students or patrons to study the slides.

The majority of academic art collections in the United States utilize a metal filing drawer cabinet allowing for individual slide filing. This method of storage is indicative of the use, cataloging, circulation, and filing patterns common to art schools, colleges and universities. These collections have relatively heavy use on a daily basis and need a system whereby large quantities of single slides may be continually removed from the drawers. Each slide is individually cataloged, circulated and filed as a single unit rather than as part of a predetermined subject set. In addition, most of these collections exhibit extensive expansion patterns so that storage must be readily adaptable to continual interfiling of new slides. Carrying cases specifically designed to carry slides are used for circulation or the slides may be placed directly into projector trays as they are selected.

Slide housing and organization are integral aspects of service provided by the slide library. How users intend to select slides and utilize them for presentation can be enhanced by the manner in which
the collection has been developed. A well-organized and properly managed slide library can offer unlimited possibilities for art instruction.


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Additional References