

Putting Archival Audiovisual Media into Context: An Archival Approach to Processing Audiovisual Media in Mixed-media Manuscript Collections

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Abstract: The Archives of American Art is in its final year of a 3-year project funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources' "Hidden Collections" grant program to investigate ways to keep audiovisual media from being hidden within larger mixed-media collections throughout the lifecycle of collections in manuscript repositories.

Guidelines and standards for evaluating, arranging, and describing audiovisual media in archival collections where media is mixed with other types of documents are currently underdeveloped. This scenario is rarely addressed in professional discourse despite being increasingly common as we collect heavily from the late 20th century when use of audiovisual media for documentation became commonplace.

To address this gap, AAA has been developing an approach to processing that integrates its standard collections processing procedures with explicit guidelines for audiovisual media. Our approach includes media-specific processes for surveying collections, defining levels of processing, arrangement strategies, and guidelines for describing audiovisual media in EAD. Throughout the project, we have also kept metrics on media-specific processing tasks to develop benchmarks for collection management and processing planning.

A key goal of this project is to create tools that can enable all archivists, not just media specialists, to improve physical and intellectual access to archival audiovisual media in the course of processing manuscript collections according to measurable standards. To that end, we look forward to sharing drafts of the survey, assessment, planning, and description tools and guidelines we have developed in the course of the project with the wider SAA community.

About the author:

Megan McShea is the Audiovisual Archivist at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, where she has been developing and implementing a sustainable program for managing, preserving, and making available films, videos, and sound recordings from the Archives' mixed-media collections since 2007. Since 2012, she has been working on a grant project funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources' "Hidden Collections" grant program, developing approaches to archival processing aimed at promoting access to audiovisual media found in manuscript collections. She received her MLS from University of Maryland, College Park and a BA in Cultural Anthropology from Duke University.