



HARRY RANSOM CENTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Collection Development Policy

Purpose

The Harry Ransom Center's Collection Development Policy provides a framework for the acquisition of original cultural materials to support the Center's mission to advance understanding of the humanities for a broad and diverse audience. The Ransom Center builds collections to support scholarship, education, and the engagement of The University of Texas at Austin community, international students and scholars, and the broader public.

Collecting Rationale

The Ransom Center seeks collection materials that

- enhance, complement, or diversify established holdings
- foster connections among the Center's collections
- document the creative process of diverse individuals or organizations working in literature, the arts, and the humanities
- support the broader research, teaching, and community engagement mission of the Center and The University of Texas at Austin

The Ransom Center seeks collection materials through donation or purchase that fulfill the above criteria. Acquisitions that do not fall into existing collecting priorities may be made in anticipation of changing research needs and interests.

In evaluating a prospective acquisition, the Center also considers the attendant costs of processing, housing, preserving, and providing long-term access. The Center reviews its Collection Development Policy on a periodic basis.

Current Priorities

The Center's collections have been shaped by collection development practices that date back to the early twentieth century and reflect a range of past and present cultural biases. Current collection development efforts aim to reflect a more inclusive and diverse representation of perspectives and experiences, both building on strengths and addressing longstanding gaps within our holdings.

Types of Materials

The Center collects manuscripts, archives, books, photographs, artworks, film, audio and moving image recordings, and other formats. The Center collects both analog and digital materials, and emphasis is placed on acquiring items in their original states.

Literary Manuscripts and Archives

The Ransom Center actively collects archives of prominent modern (active ca. 1880–1950) and contemporary (active 1950–) writers of fiction, literary non-fiction, poetry, and drama. We evaluate potential acquisitions on the basis of their literary merit and research value. Priority is given to archives that document the creative process of an entire body of work, that enhance the diversity of perspectives and experiences represented in the Center’s holdings, or that foster connections among the Center’s collections.

The Center also acquires archives of publishers, editors, agents, and others who are instrumental in the creation, publication, and distribution of modern and contemporary literary texts. We make limited acquisitions of scholars’ and translators’ papers when they supplement existing collections with substantial primary materials, such as original correspondence or interview recordings.

Selective additions are made to existing modern and contemporary manuscript collections, particularly when the Center houses the principal archive or is considered the repository of record. We rarely consider individual manuscripts or small collections when the Ransom Center is not the principal repository for an author’s works.

The Center will consider manuscripts from the pre-1880 period that strengthen existing collections, particularly materials relating to authors and readers from underrepresented communities, or that support the teaching and research of the university’s faculty and students.

Books

The Ransom Center collects first editions of primary works by modern and contemporary creative figures when we house their principal archive or are considered the repository of record. We selectively collect later printings, limited editions, translations, and periodical appearances for these creative figures. We are also interested in electronic publications that contain text or other features not available in printed form. The Center selectively collects books annotated or inscribed by the creative figures whose archives we hold when the books have strong research value.

The Center selectively acquires books that enhance existing strengths, especially works of late-medieval, early-modern, and early-eighteenth-century English literature and culture; books printed by Aldus Manutius and his successors; and Victorian fiction. Priority is placed on copies

that offer unique evidence of a book's production and use and on editions that are unavailable online in cover-to-cover facsimiles. We are particularly interested in materials relating to authors, readers, printers, publishers, and other bookmakers from underrepresented communities.

The Center selectively collects artists' books that foster connections among existing collections or that support research and teaching.

The Center will consider book collections that complement or enhance existing holdings or that add strength in underrepresented areas. We do not typically acquire generalist, personal libraries.

The Ransom Center selectively collects secondary works including authoritative biographies, bibliographies, catalogues raisonné, and exhibition catalogues that relate closely to the Ransom Center's core holdings, as well as works related to the history of the book, bibliography, and conservation.

Photography

Building on the Gernsheim Collection, which traces the evolution of photography as an art form and is the foundation of its photography collections, the Ransom Center acquires photographs spanning the history of the medium. We acquire single works as well as carefully assembled collections.

While the Center acquires photographs that enhance its existing holdings, its priority is to fill significant gaps, especially works made in the interwar period by pivotal figures of the European avant-garde and American modernism, as well as works that document the major creative and conceptual developments of the post-war era up to and including postmodernism. We also selectively collect works by leading contemporary photographers.

The Center seeks to make available for research a broad historical, cultural, and aesthetic range of photography. Commensurate with its efforts to represent a diversity of perspectives, the Center seeks to expand its holdings of works by groups that are underrepresented in many histories of photography. With particular strengths in British, French, and American art photography, the Center also continually works to enlarge the geographic reach of its holdings.

The Center selectively acquires the working archives—including negatives, contact sheets, prints, and manuscripts—of individual photographers. The papers of other figures, including historians and collectors, who have made a significant impact on the medium are also of interest. We also selectively acquire correspondence by major photographers, annotated books from photographers' libraries, and audio and moving image recordings of photographers' interviews or lectures with strong research value.

The Center very selectively acquires cameras and photographic apparatus based on rarity, historical significance, or relevance to existing collections.

Photographs related to other Center collections are selectively acquired in consultation with curators in those areas.

Film

The Ransom Center collects archives and select materials documenting creative and business activity related to important narrative feature films and broadcast series, with a primary focus on the archives of prominent producers, screenwriters, directors, designers, and actors. Priority is given to materials that illuminate the creative process, document collaboration, enhance or respond to existing collections, or reflect the contributions of individuals from underrepresented communities.

The Center collects avant-garde, animation, and documentary film only when it relates closely to other Center collections.

The Center very selectively collects costumes and props featured in important works that are documented in our archives.

The Center collects materials related to film exhibition, including distribution and business records of theater circuits, movie theaters, and distributors.

The Center selectively collects lobby cards, fan magazines, film stills, industry newsletters and publications, posters, and other materials to fill gaps, document film and broadcast history, or support teaching and research.

Performing Arts

The Ransom Center collects contemporary and historic archives of prominent theatre artists, especially archives that reveal the complexities of the creative process and the collaborative nature of the performing arts. The Center has a particular interest in American, British, and Irish playwrights but also collects the work of producers, directors, performers, composers, designers, stage managers, critics, and other theatre professionals. We are especially interested in archives that reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences in the performing arts profession. We collect a wide range of physical and digital formats, including manuscripts, promptbooks, photographs, audio and moving image recordings, design renderings, promotional materials, clippings, legal and financial records, and correspondence.

The Center is interested in enhancing its holdings in popular entertainment pertaining to the circus, minstrelsy, magic, and vaudeville before 1950. We also seek to expand holdings of production photography and recordings for theatre and dance productions, spanning the history of the genres.

The Center selectively collects playbills that relate to figures represented in the collections. We are also actively collecting pre-1900 broadside playbills from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland that fill gaps in our current holdings. The Center is unable to consider collections of post-1900 theatrical or musical playbills at this time.

Art

The Ransom Center selectively acquires artworks that document the creative process, enhance or respond to the Center's broader existing collections, and/or demonstrate networks of collaboration and intellectual exchange, particularly between writers, artists, printers, and publishers. Materials may take a variety of forms, including finished works but also sketches, proofs, drafts and working states, and preliminary and annotated studies. The Center collects materials that date from the earliest printing technologies to the present. We are particularly interested in visual works that diversify or complicate a standard or dominant narrative, or that are created by individuals who have been historically underrepresented in the collections.

The Center is interested in selectively enhancing and building on its existing strengths related to illustration, word and image, and book art—including but not limited to fine bindings, original illustrations, artists' books, artist collaborations with fine presses, and *livres d'artiste*. We place emphasis on visual works that complement and participate in co-equal dialog with the Center's literary holdings, that represent the design process from conception to production, or that employ text as a medium to advance the visual argument of the work.

The Center selectively acquires exceptional examples of portraiture of literary figures, with a focus on those created from life or during the subject's lifetime, as well as visual works by literary figures represented in our collections. The latter are evaluated on the significance of their ability to demonstrate the broader creative practice of the figure. The Center also selectively acquires art that reinterprets literary works, characters, and figures.

The Center very selectively acquires manuscripts and artists' working archives that strengthen our ability to enhance and interpret existing holdings.

Personal Effects

The Ransom Center very selectively acquires personal effects that support and add research and exhibition value to its collections. The Center makes limited acquisitions of personal effects that belonged to creative figures for whom the Center holds the principal archive or a substantial collection. We do not collect personal effects of individuals not extensively represented within our holdings or for individuals who are not creative figures working in the core areas of the Center's collecting focus.

Consideration is given to personal effects that relate directly to the creative process, that have a direct and meaningful connection with a significant work or works in our collections, or that convey a deeper understanding of a creative figure represented in our collections.

The Center does not typically acquire furnishings, decorative objects, or other materials that present significant challenges for housing, preservation, or providing long-term access.

Additional Collection Strengths

Beyond the priority collecting areas described above, the Ransom Center has particular strength in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature, Italian literature, music, and the history of science. We welcome conversations about materials that could potentially be donated to enhance these important collections.

Related Collecting Institutions

The Ransom Center is complemented by a rich community of cultural institutions at The University of Texas at Austin, including the [University of Texas Libraries](#), the [Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection](#), the [Dolph Briscoe Center for American History](#), the [Blanton Museum of Art](#), the [Art Galleries at Black Studies](#), the [Alexander Architectural Archives](#), the [Fine Arts Library](#), the [Tarlton Law Library](#), the [H. J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports](#), and the [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library](#). In considering potential acquisitions, the Center recognizes the collecting strengths of these institutions and other peer institutions.

Revised, 2021.