



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. 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

- enrich or complete established holdings
- foster connections among the Center's existing 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 current collecting priorities have been defined against a backdrop of collection development practices that date back to the early twentieth century. A brief [history of the institution](#) can be found on the Center's [website](#).

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 or that complement existing holdings.

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 enrich 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 fill gaps in existing collections or support the teaching and research of the University's faculty and students.

Books

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

The Center selectively acquires books that enhance existing strengths, especially the Pforzheimer Library of English Literature (1475–1700), Aldine imprints (1495–1588), Recusant literature (1558–1829), the Queen Anne Collection (1702–1714), and Victorian fiction. Priority is placed

on books that contain copy-specific information, such as manuscript annotations and other evidence of use, or are unavailable in full text online.

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

The Ransom Center selectively collects secondary works including authoritative biographies, bibliographies, catalogues raisonné, and exhibition catalogs 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, 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 that enhance our established holdings.

The Center seeks twentieth-century works that trace the evolution of photography as an art form, especially works 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 seek works of leading contemporary photographers.

The Center selectively acquires the working archives—including negatives, contact sheets, prints, and papers—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 documenting creative and business activity related to important Hollywood feature films, particularly those from the post-World War II era, with a primary focus on the archives of prominent producers and screenwriters. We also selectively collect the papers of actors, art directors, costume designers, production designers, cinematographers, editors, and sound designers. Priority is given to collections that complement existing holdings.

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 films that are documented in our archives.

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

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

Performing Arts

In addition to collecting the archives of prominent British and American playwrights, we selectively collect materials that document the collaborative nature and performance history of dramatic works. Special emphasis is given to archives of producers, directors, and theatre companies who have worked closely with these playwrights. We collect a wide range of formats, including production scripts, photographs, audio and moving image recordings, costume and set designs, 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, and magic between 1880 and 1950 and its holdings of stage photography for theatre and dance productions.

The Center selectively collects playbills and programs, set models, lighting designs, costumes, published playscripts, books, periodicals, and other items that fill gaps in existing collections.

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. The Center currently acquires art materials primarily through donation.

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.

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 Archive](#), 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 and Museum](#). In considering potential acquisitions, the Center recognizes the collecting strengths of these institutions and other peer institutions.

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