

editorial

Revealing the ephemeral and the invisible is not something new to either artists or librarians. Libraries are recognized as having the responsibility of being repositories for information in all its manifestations. This issue of *Art libraries journal* includes contributions from librarians, archivists, teachers and artists who examine the particularities of the invisibility of time: its nature, transmission and reception.

Time is on everyone's mind, be it the past, the present, the future, or their variables: transitional, delayed, misdirected or uncanny time. It is ephemeral, fugitive and elusive. We speak also of telling time, inferring time, repeating time, celebratory time, time immemorial, unstable time and allegories of time. In 1884 the need for a uniformity of public time, a standardisation and streamlining of time to promote efficiency, resulted in the creation of a single meridian, a 24-hour day in the world. The speed of railway travel and the instantaneous dissemination of telegraph communications forced a profound change in the world's sense of time. Ongoing technological advances in transportation and communications continue to provoke our human perception of time. During the 20th century we experienced a growing sense of the unpredictability of time. We are now, at the start of the 21st century, working in a-temporal and digital time. Our cell phones and e-mails transcend fixed time and space.¹

The first two articles in this issue revolve about the organization of time. Heidi Abbey launches this issue with an evaluative webliography of selected art and art history timelines. Peter Dykhuis recounts an exhibition he curated: a chronological display of promotional materials from an artist-run centre to celebrate the organisation's 20th anniversary. The exhibition not only revealed production histories of individuals but also reflected the aesthetics of time: stylistic and economic changes, shifts in subject matter and context.

Live art is art designed to be lost. The radical ephemerality of performance art is key to its aesthetic meaning. Documentation as memory becomes embedded in the work. Early examples of live art are found in festival books from the 16th and 17th centuries. Visual records of fireworks, triumphal entries, royal celebrations and spectacles were

published to record a dazzling moment destined for immediate disappearance. Marcia Reed's illustrated article describes a number of festival books from the Renaissance and Baroque eras which savoured the moment they captured and are now seen as indispensable resources for scholars researching the festival in all its manifestations. Such celebrations continue today and 2002 marks the 50th Jubilee of Elizabeth II's reign. Peter Trepanier seizes two moments in 20th-century royal history to create a collage acknowledging this anniversary.

The internationally renowned Cirque du Soleil has consciously recognised the need for its equally unique documentation centre to collect records of the company's performances. The centre maintains a collections database which includes the measurements of all performers and archives actual props and costumes. Though Emmanuella Saint-Denis states that each separate performance is temporal and cannot be fully documented, the steps in the creation of the production can be, and they are woven into the continuity of the performances. While the documentation may become the heart of the collected body of work, it in effect recalls its disappearance. Jayne Wark teaches courses on time and body-based art. She highlights the temporal and chaotic nature of the infrastructure of the alternative galleries which support equally fugitive artwork. In her research she has discovered that many of these centres have disappeared without a trace. Wark appeals to libraries to actively seek information from their local galleries to ensure that their legacy does not vanish.

Conceptual artists in the late sixties purposely used impermanence as a strategy to manipulate time and to undermine the making of the unique art object. 'Information, communication, documentation' was the Conceptualist's mantra. Documentation was often the sole remnant of the 'concept'. Ephemeral in nature and cheap to make, the concept was easily transportable and reproducible. Conceptual art possesses unique qualities as archival material since it includes items which fall into the grey area between art and document. Curator Catherine Moseley discusses the conceptual document as a blueprint from which a number of works were re-made for an exhibition, reiterating the conceptualist's claim that art need not reside solely in static timeless objects.

Darlene Tong discusses her experience of saving and moving the archive of an artist organization whose activities were often time-based, experimenting with form and materials, questioning the boundaries and definitions of art. She reminds us that the archival recreations are viewed out of context and only partially resemble the original 'primary' version. Tong notes the irony that the ephemeral nature that was such an integral part of so much of fugitive and alternative art stands in stark contrast to our concerted efforts now to preserve it.

The Central Art Archives within the Finnish National Gallery has employed research specialists to monitor and acquire documentation about impermanent art. Liisa Lindgren introduces us to the growing archive collections of conceptual, performance, environmental and ephemeral, community-based art forms.

Micah Lexier is an artist who makes books and ephemera, and also collects these. He is drawn to work which is similar in its attributes to his own production. Lexier introduces a number of items from his collection of ephemera, selected because of their relationship to conceptual art history and his desire to own a piece of it.

Today, the Internet makes information, and art, instantaneously and globally accessible. People have the illusion that they are everywhere and nowhere at once. Deirdre Donohue has discovered that commercially driven databases such as eBay can serve as a new and effective tool when conducting interdisciplinary research.

Canada's Digital Collections is an integrated collection of electronic representations of primary, rare and often unique works and artifacts held in Canadian research collections. It includes approximately 150 sites within the fine arts. Nadia Kazymyra describes the program's success in providing greater access to collections in a country where vast distances hinder

access and its ability to provide employment opportunities and skill development for youth.

Finally, we come to the afterlife of time. Vera Greenwood, an artist from Ottawa, has created an insert for this issue in the form of a handwritten letter, folded and appearing to have been left forgotten as a bookmark. The letter is representative of Greenwood's work, of her interest in recapturing the moment, or as one critic describes it '... is crafted with a reader in mind. In this manner the writer participates in the guilty pleasure of the words being uncovered and read'.²

Ilga Leja questions the validity of the criteria librarians use to evaluate what is retained and what is discarded in library collections. Leja asks: are we conscious of our present prejudices when we determine how our collections are to be used in the future?

Are we 'making progress' in revealing the ephemeral and invisible? Is the ease of capture of the fleeting moment (through video and webcam) creating more interest in the documentation than in the act or ephemeral object? Has the digital age freed up collections by allowing unprecedented access for scholars and the public? Or has it diverted them from truly mining the historical moment by offering a quick surrogate? Is our sense of time becoming ever shorter? Will we be successfully capturing the impermanent in our lives, but losing the long view of history in our rapidly changing world?

References

1. Blaise, Clark. *Time lord: Sir Sanford Fleming and the creation of standard time*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2000.
2. Mizgala, Johanna. "'S' is for 'Storytelling': on diaries, voyeurism, Sophie Calle, and Vera Greenwood". *Blackflash* vol. 18 no. 3 2001, p.12-21.

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