

VRC REPORT- WINTER I, 2021

PRESENTED BY RÉMI CASTONGUAY ON
SEPT. 29, 2021

VISUAL RESOURCES CENTRE
FREDERIC LASSERRE BUILDING 206 – 6333
MEMORIAL ROAD | VANCOUVER BC

EY SWAYEL! EY KW'ELS KW'ETSLOME.

*WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE MUSQUEAM PEOPLE ON
WHOSE ANCESTRAL AND UNCEDED LANDS UBC-
VANCOUVER IS LOCATED.*

TS'ITHOMETSET LAM KW'É MÉKW' STAM.

PASSING THE TORCH

WE SAY AU REVOIR...

TO MICHAEL MAO AND JANE YOUNG

How can we start this report without acknowledging the retirements and immense contributions of two of our long-standing employees at AHVA? Michael Mao retired fully in June 2021 and Jane Young is now retiring as of September 30th, 2021.

Michael Mao (BA'81; MLIS'84), Curator of the AHVA Visual Resources Centre, retired after more than thirty-four years of continuous service to the department and the university. On the occasion of his retirement, Michael recalled some highlights from his UBC career. We thank him for stewarding our collection of visual resources through constant technological change with unstinting care and enthusiasm. He will be greatly missed for fostering such a warm and welcoming environment in the VRC for our community.

"It has been a long and fulfilling career working together with my knowledgeable and supportive colleagues who share a common goal of contributing to the wellbeing of this dynamic department. There are many fond memories to cherish starting with, for instance, when I was told by my predecessor in a trusting and affectionate way, 'You'll find out in no time how to run this place' and by my first boss with unwavering support, 'It's now up to you to build this domain' and by two donors with the VRC in mind always as the recipient, 'We'll bring back digital images of Japan's cultural heritage as requested instead of sake for you.' Many moons have come and gone, the VRC remains a vibrant hub that continues to provide dependable, specialized services with its professional and unique digital/analogue resources of visual culture to support scholarly and social activities. Witnessing the many vigorous changes in the department, I extend my warmest of wishes to everyone in AHVA for every success in 2021 and beyond." – Michael Mao

And the Curator asked Jane Young (BA'82) to write a few words reminiscing on her time at AHVA:

"When I joined the FINA department 28 years ago, I had no inkling of what lay in store for me and what a rich experience it would be. When I first met Michael Mao for my interview, I was pretty overwhelmed by his positive personality and he basically talked me into the job which was an interesting experience in itself. I am eternally thankful that my imminent move from Human Resources to Finance was changed to Fine Arts! I learned the whole gamut of shooting of slides, mounting, preparing of labels, changing bulbs for slide projectors, tying down data projectors with bungee cords to the old desks in lecture halls (we actually did that!), and then moving on into digitizing the collection. I certainly grew in my appreciation of what making art required of the creator and grew to look at the world with an increased discrimination. I enjoyed immensely the mixing with students and faculty in the Slide Library/VRC and took a few credit courses along the way in VISA and the Theatre department, singing in a few choral groups in the Music department. I was even 'volunteered' by Mr. Mao to sing some traditional Japanese songs for a special Japanese Heritage celebration which featured a concert in the Music Department's recital hall. Michael who also participated in the concert heard some folks backstage while I was singing, commenting on my very good Japanese pronunciation which he relayed to me with some delight. (just the mimic in me...) So, thank you to all for being a part of my time here on campus and being the wonderful people you are."

REDEFINING OUR SPACE

COMPLETING THE TRANSITION FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL

SUMMER 2021

During Summer 2021 we initiated a vast weeding project to tackle the legacy of decades of 35mm analog slide collecting. Our first target was slide donations received over the years. Those donations amount to tens of thousands of slides. Many of those bequests have been examined this summer and carefully assessed by our work learn student, Alexi Paglinawan, Library Assistant, Jane Young and the Curator, Rémi Castonguay. All were steadfast in their focus on this task. Among other things, donations from emeriti faculty, Marvin Cohodas, Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Mary Morehart were examined. There are still vast amounts of bequests to go through, notably the collection of James Caswell (mostly Chinese art) and George Knox (mostly Tiepolo). Those collections represent precious institutional memory and are treated very carefully. In the longer run, they will most likely be digitized and/or sent to the UBC Archives for long-term preservation.

Most of our analog assets, however, consist of slides, stored in a well-organized catalog. Over the years, Michael Mao and his team have digitized sections of the catalog, notably the post-1945 and photography sections, but vast swaths of our holdings remain unaddressed. As the new VRC Curator, Rémi Castonguay, started to explore the collection and experiment with scanning technology. It quickly became obvious that digitizing the whole collection would be an unreasonable goal with an unconvincing outcome. The process of digitizing is time-consuming and costly, and even more so, is the cataloging of over 500,000 images. Additionally, many of the slides are low-quality images, faded by time or damaged from usage. Scanning those slides results in poor quality outcomes. Another component of our decision-making is the general availability of many of those images on the Internet, sometimes at a very high-quality.

The Curator met with many AHVA faculty members over the summer to determine areas of particular interest that should be preserved. Generally-speaking, however, most faculty agreed that extensive sections of the collection should be culled. Canonical Western Art, for instance, is generally available in good quality on the Web. What is called “copy-work”, i.e., pictures of pictures in a book, is also an important criterion for weeding. Areas of particular relevance, however, were identified: First Nations Art; UBC-related, Vancouver-related, BC-related, Canada-related slides; etc. Please consult Appendix I for a more-detailed view of our weeding guidelines.

FALL 2021 AND BEYOND

The process initiated during summer 2021 will take time, likely many years. Our goal is to ultimately reinvent the space to make the VRC an even more inviting collaboration ground for everybody at AHVA. Many of our faculty and students have told us how the VRC is considered the “social heart” of AHVA, a place where impromptu and informal conversations happen, where ideas are exchanged and collaborations are born. We want to promote that use of the space as much as possible. With that goal in mind, we have cleared a lot of old supplies and equipment during summer to create space. A new meeting table is now available and soon, a quiet meeting room will also become available. More modest changes to the space should be expected.

In the longer-run, to avoid a piecemeal approach, we will conduct a vast consultation with faculty and students to see what spaces and services are needed for teaching and learning.

There will likely be an emphasis on image technology with the possibility of designing an interactive “retro image technology” space where AHVA users can experiment and learn about the evolution of image media. State of the art computer workstations are also something that has been expressed as desirable. That being said, the user consultation will benefit from a relative “return to normal”. At present, because of the ongoing 4th wave of the pandemic, few users crave in-person contacts and it’s made it difficult to conduct such a study.

REDEFINING OUR SERVICES

ADAPTING TO CHANGING USER NEEDS

FALL 2021 - EXPLORATION

The new service philosophy of library and resources centres revolve around a proactive methodology that focuses on user needs and energetically reaches out to fulfill those needs. Libraries used to be the gatekeepers of information and could afford to passively sit back and wait for users to show up. This is clearly not the case anymore. To his great credit, the VRC’s retired Curator, Michael Mao, did a lot to engage the AHVA community and created resources (e.g., image database) to meet researchers’ needs. The new curator would like to follow in his footsteps and take things even further.

Much of the UBC Library landscape revolves around a new set of services, largely powered by the Research Commons (RC). The VRC is planning to interface with the RC to offer services that align with contemporary research and teaching needs. In collaboration with various colleagues at the library we have scheduled the following **workshops, especially designed for AHVA faculty and students:**

- Oct. 27th , 11am-12pm:
Arts Research Resources: Finding Images and More
In collaboration with Arts Librarian, Sara Ellis
- November 19th, 11:30am-12:30pm:
Copyrights in the Visual Arts: a Q&A Session
In collaboration with Stephanie Savage
- November 26th, 10am-3pm (with a lunch break):
Digital Exhibits Survey Workshop
In collaboration with Eka Grguric, Donna Langille and Sara Ellis
Covering software like Collection Builder, Omeka, Scalar, etc.
- December 10th, 11am-12pm
Research Data Management for the Visual Arts
In collaboration with Jess Yao

In past years the VRC has offered and will continue to offer well-appreciated services among which were:

- Digital imaging on demand (e.g., from print publications)
- Image research/acquisition/production
- Instruction/tutorials (e.g., copyrights, finding images, research tools, etc.)

- AV equipment/set up and troubleshooting
- Laptop computer loans
- Presentation assistance
- Seminar/screening room (by appointment)

We are now working on developing new services to assist with evolving needs. Faculty and students can contact us for assistance with the following:

- RDM - Research Data Management (e.g., best practices to manage your data)
- Digital exhibits project or support
- Digital humanities project support
- Grant writing technical support (i.e., for technical language pertaining to imaging, technology, DH, etc.)

The VRC also secured the services of a Professional Experience Student from the UBC iSchool. The Professional Experience program at the iSchool, pairs a skilled student with a library or resources centre, to work on a project for a semester (in exchange for 3 credits). iSchool student, Jess Yao, will be working with the Curator this term to assess AHVA researchers needs in the area of RDM and start building services/workflows for the VRC. The professional experience will conclude with an RDM workshop on December 10th (see above).

FALL 2021 – KEEPING YOU IN THE LOOP AND WHO’S WHO?!

The VRC also intends to keep the AHVA community abreast of events, workshops, services, etc. To serve that goal we started publishing a newsletter highlighting our most recent accomplishments and offerings. In early September we sent out the first issue of the newsletter and are hoping to send a new issue every 2-3 months.

At the moment the VRC is employing two Work-Learn students, Alexi Paglinawan, M.A. student at AHVA, who has been a steadfast presence during this pandemic; and Richard Chappelow, PhD candidate at AHVA, our newest hire and a self-described tech equipment aficionado. We are grateful for their continuous contributions and dedication to our centre.

Jessica Law, is our new Graduate Academic Assistant. Her duties remain similar to what she was working on in past semester(s) (i.e., supporting the teaching and learning component of faculty at AHVA.) Digging further into that role, she will be developing resources that can help faculty address the research needs of students. It is a cliché among librarians, that students start their research on Google no matter what. But beyond Google, how can we help faculty guide students to high-value information resources, and enhance their academic success?

Last but not least, recent AHVA graduate, Jeff O’Brien, will temporarily replace Jane Young until a search for a permanent replacement can be done. The VRC hopes to redefine the role to adjust it to the services and collection priorities listed above and below.

PRESERVING OUR PAST...AND FUTURE

BUILDING A DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Upon the start of his appointment at the VRC, the Curator began to invest significant time in establishing a solid digital infrastructure. What started as an attempt to understand and organize digital assets on Teamshare, morphed into work to create Digital Preservation mechanisms to insure the long-term survival of important assets at the Department. The current state of affairs on Teamshare is worrisome. The Teamshare drive is very disorganized. There is little sense of version control of the 325,000+ files stored on it. There is no clear folder and file naming convention. There is no plan for systematic file conversion (e.g., old video files or PowerPoint might become unreadable over time). There is also no system to verify files integrity, something known as fixity checks. Still, thousands of files on Teamshare are crucial AHVA institutional memory assets. For example, there are many photographs of AHVA events like exhibition opening nights, posters for such events, video recordings of lectures, etc. These assets are at risk unless properly managed. Digital files, for instance, can succumb to bit rot, or become unreadable because of their obsolete file format (think of old PowerPoint files for example).

In September 2021, the curator completed an assessment using the Digital Preservation Capability Maturity Model (DPCMM), an established model in the field, and found that AHVA-VRC current digital preservation practice is at the bottom end of preservation standards. The DPCMM results outlined that our “Digital preservation capabilities are rudimentary and most electronic records that merit long-term retention are at risk.” Our score was 5/60 with nominal scores (zero) in most categories.

To get started on Digital Preservation, the Curator initiated a vast cleanup project, systematically reorganizing and renaming files and folders to reflect best-practice. He also started creating something called checksums, to be able to perform fixity or integrity checks on files. The Curator also began forming alliances with stakeholders at the UBC Library (Bronwen Sprout) and UBC Archives (John Moran, Barb Towell). We are hoping to take advantage of their expertise and infrastructure to insure proper treatment of digital assets and save on costs. Notably, we started collaborating with UBC Archives and its E-Warehouse service to plan for the long-term storage of digital assets using the MoveIt service.

Last but not least, UBC has an established Records Management Policy that, among other things, mandates departments:

“To ensure preservation of the University’s Records of permanent value”. (Records Management Policy: https://universitycounsel-2015.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2019/08/Records-Management-Policy_GA4.pdf).

In the longer-run, the Curator hopes to establish a solid records retention workflow(s) that brings us in alignment with this mandate. This workflow will involve multiple stakeholders at AHVA (e.g., the Department Administrator, the Administrative Coordinator, the Program Assistant, etc.)

– VRC Report Winter I, 2021, respectfully submitted by Rémi Castonguay, September 29, 2021

Appendix I - Weeding Guidelines – AHVA VRC

1. COLLECTION DONOR
 - a. Is there a donor? Who donated it? Is there a donor agreement?
2. PHOTOGRAPHER
 - a. Who photographed it? Was that person under contract, or important for other reasons? Did they teach at UBC? (e.g., keep complete works of well-known photographer.)
3. COPYRIGHT
 - a. Can it be digitized? If vendor-purchased materials, vendor contracts need to be reviewed.
4. SOURCES
 - a. Is the 35mm slide original photography, copy work or purchased from vendor?
5. CONTENT
 - a. What type of media or built work is represented? Does the material still fit the institution's mission and curriculum?
6. PLACE REPRESENTED
 - a. Is there any geographical significance?
 - b. Keep everything related to UBC as a place and BC-related images
7. TIME PERIOD
 - a. Is there any temporal significance?
8. DATE OF PHOTOGRAPHY
 - a. Consider older images of some monuments that have changed or disappeared.
 - b. Unstable film was used in the past;
 - c. Check for fading or discoloration, especially if an image has been heavily used.
9. TECHNICAL QUALITY
 - a. Is the image in focus? Well-composed?
10. CONDITION
 - a. Is the image scratched, warped, discolored, faded, moldy, torn, or otherwise in poor condition?
11. DOCUMENTATION
 - a. Is there enough information/metadata to identify the image? and where it came from?
12. OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE

- a. Try a rubric from 1 lowest to 5 highest, based on local needs and curricular criteria.

13. CURRENT AND FUTURE REPOSITORIES OF SIMILAR IMAGES

- a. Who else might have this type of material in analog and/or digital form? Can those sources be used for local purposes? (i.e., Is access available via database subscription)