

Books on photographers: cataloguing at the Heinz Archive and Library, National Portrait Gallery

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The National Portrait Gallery's Heinz Archive and Library has a fantastic collection of books about British and international photographers. This brief update explains an ongoing project to catalogue the material in this collection.

Having trained at the Courtauld Institute Book Library, in May 2016 while finishing my Library and Information Studies master's degree at University College London (UCL), I started working part time as Library Cataloguer at the National Portrait Gallery, focussing on the retrospective cataloguing of books on photographers.

As the main centre for research into British portraiture, the Heinz Archive and Library holds more than 40,000 monographs and exhibition catalogues, 150 periodicals, as well as access to electronic resources. Materials include biographies of sitters and artists, and history of art and photography resources. The collection of books on photographers consists of approximately 1,700 biographies, other monographs and exhibition catalogues, covering hundreds of historic and contemporary photographers, from James Abbe to Bettina von Zwehl. More than sixty publications are held on Cecil Beaton, including his diaries. Beaton's influential portrait photography is very well represented at the Gallery. There is also a substantial collection of books on the artist and photographer, Man Ray.

The Archive and Library are used by gallery staff and curators researching exhibitions and collections and increasingly by members of the public who are welcome to use it free of charge by appointment.

The important work of making the Library's collections discoverable online and accessible to the public has been in progress since 2007, with the online catalogue launched in November 2009. A card catalogue is still in use although approximately 70% of the Library's collections have been added to the online catalogue. When the EOS.Web library management system was first implemented, Library staff were able to import very simple bibliographical records for materials acquired since 1994; many of these records still require enhancement. The significant retrospective and re-cataloguing projects carried out so far have been enabled through the generosity of external funders. Increasing accessibility to our collections through good quality cataloguing strengthens the sector's network of support for research and other professional work and hopefully creates further interest in and use of the Archive and Library's resources.

The original funding to catalogue the books on photographers lasted until February 2017, however an extension of the project has been made possible through the generous financial assistance of a private trust. I am therefore continuing to work my way through the collection alphabetically by photographers' surnames, creating or editing around 12 records per day. Detailed records are now online for approximately half of the material, as I have reached 'L'. I am adding RDA 3XX fields to existing or downloaded AACR2 records, updating authorities where necessary and adding detail through subject headings, and contents and exhibitions notes. The work also involves accessioning and processing some of the books, as well as assigning classmarks and labelling them, and identifying items in need of conservation treatment.

The project is great experience for me, using both my art history knowledge gained in my first degree, and the cataloguing skills I developed at the Courtauld and in the Cataloguing and Classification module at UCL. There is a lot of eye-catching material in the collection, with diverse sitters represented in the images. I particularly enjoyed cataloguing the books on Victorian photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll. It can be a challenge not to be distracted by the amazing images!

The process of cataloguing means that the books are more visible. When the curatorial staff of the Gallery notice a particular book being catalogued, this sometimes gives rise to discussion about the photographers featured. Some of the books have been in the library for many years and it is rewarding to be improving the accessibility of this inspiring collection of material on photographers for more people to discover.

To access the online catalogue, follow links under the 'Research' section of the gallery's website <http://www.npg.org.uk>, or go to <http://librarycatalogue.npg.org.uk/>.