

At the 2014 College Art Association (CAA) Annual Conference in Chicago, we presented a session on the subject of archives for art history that dealt with artists' archives before and after they move to institutions, as well as estate planning and taxes, appraisals, and the market for archival collections. Artists' archives are a principal area of the Getty Research Institute's (GRI) special collections. Although they are all different, artists' archives share distinctive features. It seemed useful

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From the Archive to Art History

to elaborate on how and why the institute, like other research libraries, museums, and foundations, collects archives, and share some of the GRI's practices and perspectives with other stakeholders.

The session was intended to provide information for those who have inherited estates, for artists who are thinking of their legacies and wondering how archives should be organized for their future dispositions, and for researchers who deal with artists' archives. The presenters were a purposely diverse group, not the usual attendees at the CAA conference, including a representative from a major auction house and a financial planner.¹ They are people whom you might encounter when considering the fate of an estate or an archive. Managing, maintaining, and placing an archive is something most people are unprepared for. It is the first, sometimes the only, time they have to deal with a large number of artworks and diverse property, with values to be determined. Interestingly, I don't think there was an artist in the room at the session, affirming that, for the most part, artists have historically not been involved in placing their archives.

But this picture is changing. In the past, artists' archives have almost always come to institutions from larger estates after the artist has died. Recently, however, the GRI and other institutions have been talking with artists concerning arrangements for their estates, the placement of their art and archives by means of staged acquisitions through purchases, promised gifts, and named collections and buildings. The artist or the artist's gallerist, studio manager, or lawyer initiated these discussions; not surprisingly, in every instance the artist under consideration is well known. Increasingly, artists' archives can be classed among other documentary historical collections that chronicle creation and production by signal cultural figures. No doubt, the well-publicized sale of Bob Dylan's archive to the University of Tulsa has been duly noted as a coup that sets the bar even higher.²

Yet it is not only about the money. Artists' estates, foundations, and gallerists now recognize the significant promotional benefit of placing an archive in a distinguished institution that will add the artist's name to its catalogue of collections, not only associating the artist with the institution itself, but also canonizing his or her name as part of the history of art and culture. Better still, placing an archive in a publicly available collection affords access to unpublished sources and exhibitible objects that disseminate the artist's works, allowing the artist to be part of new research and publications, and to be shown in exhibitions, performances, or events. Along with high-profile, high-value acquisitions, research libraries and academic institutions are appropriately concerned with research value, although this is difficult, if not impossible, to determine in dollars. As new archival sources are collected and made available, the long-term effect is the writing of history.

I am grateful to my colleague Glenn Phillips, head of modern and contemporary collections in the Getty Research Institute's Curatorial Department, for his comments and suggestions concerning the subject of collecting archives; as well as to Stephen Clark, vice president, general counsel and secretary, Getty Trust, and Rhiannon Knol, my research assistant, for their valuable advice and assistance.

1. Lisa Cambier of the J. Paul Getty Museum and I introduced the session. Her talk was "The Life Cycle of an Artist's Archive: From Creation to Legacy"; her master's thesis, "The Valuation and Institutional Placement of Artists' Archives" (Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2011), informed the content of the session. See Cambier, "The Valuation and Institutional Placement of Artists' Archives," *Journal of Advanced Appraisal Studies*, 2012, 43–73. Catherine Williams, the head of the books and manuscripts department and entertainment memorabilia at the Bonhams auction house, spoke on "The Literary Estate of Milton Berle"; Susan MacMichael John, the president of Financial Focus Inc., talked about "Best Practices for Artists and Collectors: Tax and Estate Planning."

2. "The Bob Dylan Archive, comprising more than 6,000 items spanning nearly the entire length of his career, was acquired by the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the University of Tulsa and will be housed at TU's Helmerich Center for American Research. The materials—nearly all of which have never been viewed or accessed by outside parties—will be made available to scholars and curated for public exhibitions in the near future." "About," The Bob Dylan Archive, at bobdylanarchive.com/about/, as of February 1, 2017.

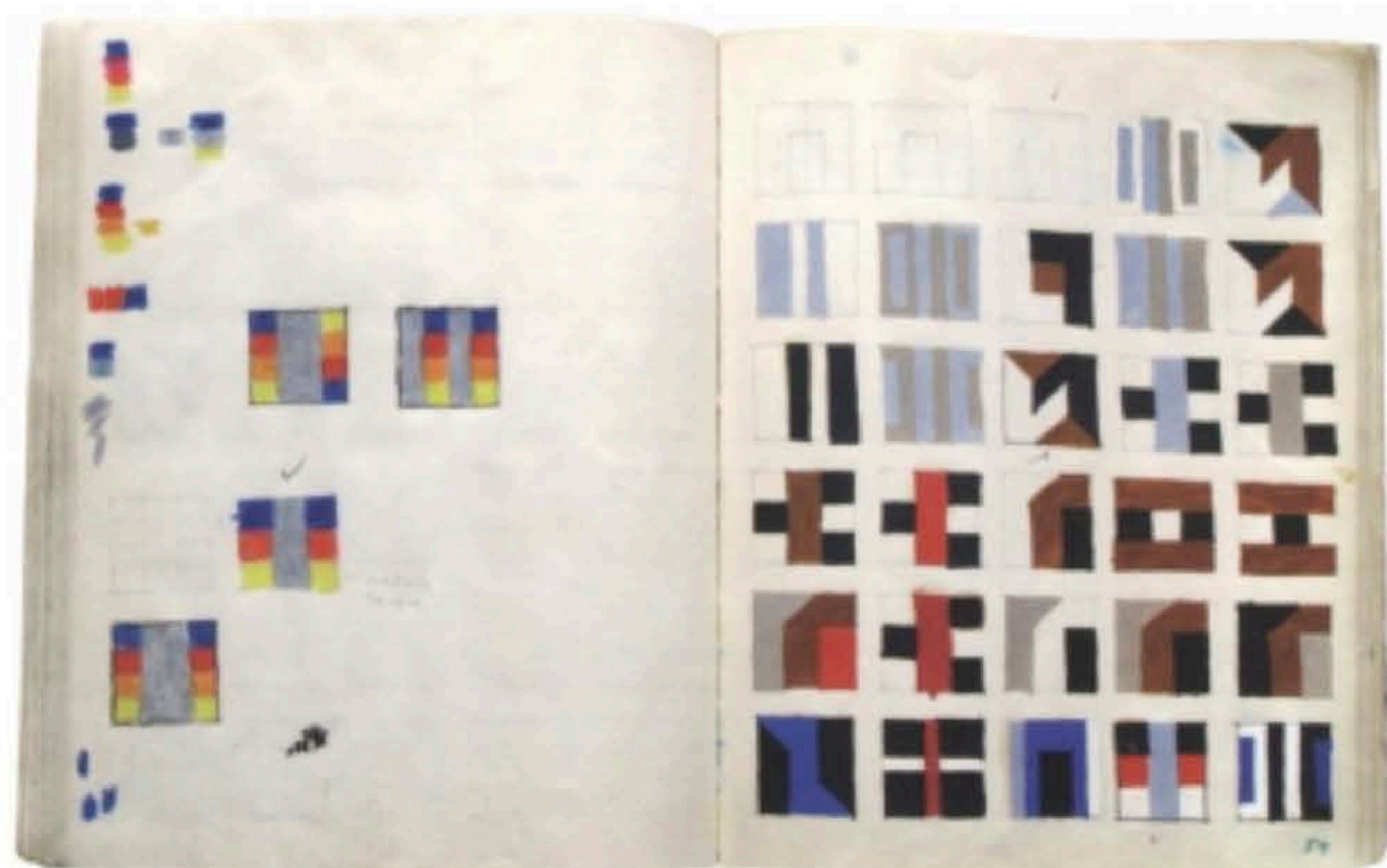
Defining the Archive

As unpublished primary sources, archives are arguably the most significant raw materials for research in art history, providing contemporary information and context from the artists' perspectives. This documentation, organized and preserved by artists, their assistants, and their families, supplements public information on works selected for acquisition and exhibition by museums and galleries, or art sold at auction. In addition to other historical sources such as dealers' and museum archives, as well as those of art-world figures such as curators, critics, collectors, art historians, and fellow artists, artists' archives are foundational to creating the canon of the most valued or revered artworks and artists. Especially now that the internet and digitized material play a major role not only in disseminating information but also in its discovery, archival collections have enormous potential to inform and structure the history of art. Archives are often mines of information that must be plumbed and laboriously read, even though the search process is now far quicker and easier. They document certain artists, with memories, facts, and reports of events. Increasingly, when rights allow, digital copies of archival documents can be found on the web. Because history is written from the available documents and evidence, there is a tendency to omit those artists for whom there is less than full documentary material or to pass over those with archives and information that are not publicly accessible, or those to which access is restricted. As records of epiphanies, meetings, and conversations, in many cases archives are the substantiating, occasionally groundbreaking historical source, even though there may be conflicting accounts from different sources. The caveat is that so-called facts found in archives are often highly subjective perspectives.

Composing the Archive

Ideally transferred directly from the artist's studio, archives that are acquired by institutions and made available for research could appear to have a certain impeccable integrity. In fact, they are extractions from larger estates, which include property, works-in-progress, art supplies, studio furniture, tools, personal libraries, and other inspirational materials. They may have been collected, culled, and pruned by estates and dealers, and reorganized by institutions. Lacking an understanding of archives or motivated to present a particular vision, family or business associates may remove significant parts or even discard them while the estate is being settled or is in storage. Thus, it is useful to comprehend the larger estate from which the archive is drawn. If possible, it is helpful to view the archive in situ, preferably while the artist is still at work, and to make a critical examination and assessment of the material. The GRI often works directly with artists and estates on prospective archives to help define the archive, rather than expecting the artist or others to do this in isolation and then approach us with the result. The transition from the artist's space to the vault is a drastic change—it can seem as though the oxygen has been sucked out of the archive. Yet somehow archives should represent the artist's life and work with authenticity.

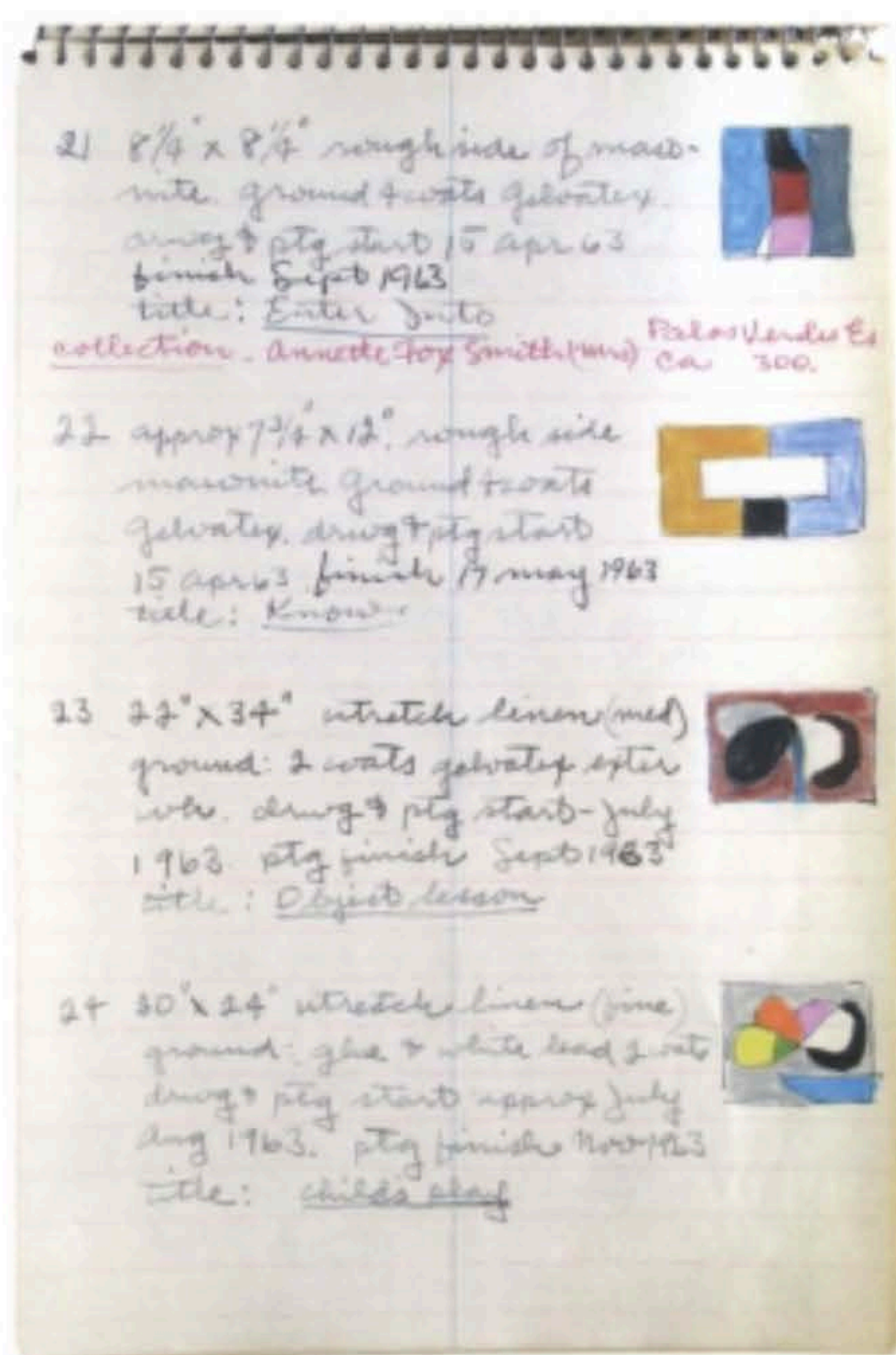
Because archives are by definition personal, occasionally it is a challenge to isolate them, separating them from the larger estate. Tucked away amid art, real



Frederick Hammersley, page from Notebook #3, ca. 1959–80, colored pencil on paper, 8¼ x 13¼ in. (21 x 34 cm). Getty Research Institute, 2013.M.33 (artwork © Frederick Hammersley Foundation; photograph provided by Getty Research Institute)

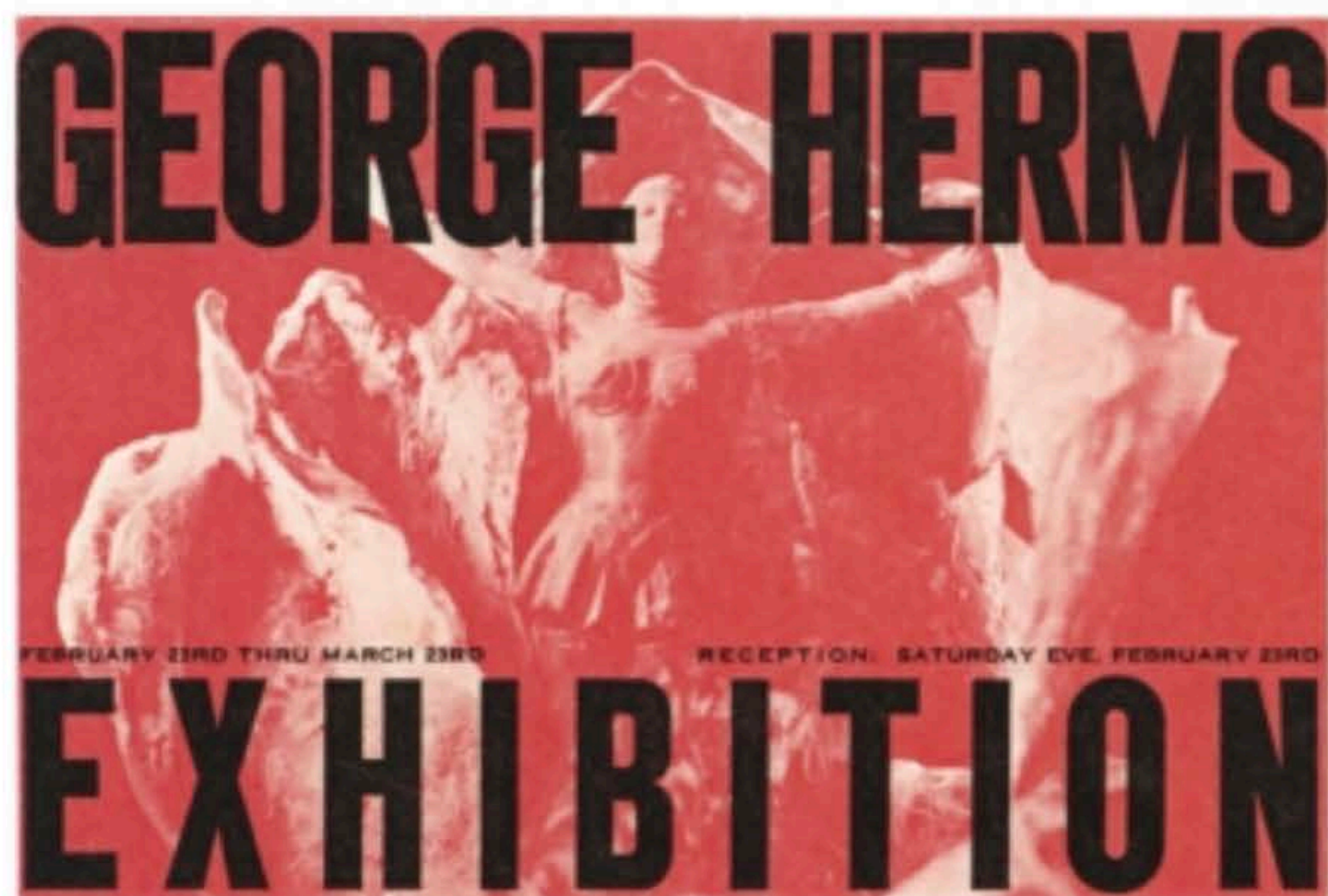
Frederick Hammersley, page from Painting Book #2, ca. 1959–80, ballpoint pen and colored pencil on paper, 9¼ x 6¼ in. (24 x 16 cm). Getty Research Institute, 2013.M.33 (artwork © Frederick Hammersley Foundation; photograph provided by Getty Research Institute)

3. Alan Phenix and Thomas McClintock, "Frederick Hammersley: An Artist's Documentation of His Painting Practice," in *The AIC Painting Specialty Group, Volume Twenty-Five*, 2012, ed. Barbara Buckley (Washington, DC: American Institute for Conservation, 2015), 8–20.



estate, and furniture, archives are often the ugly ducklings, certainly not seen as valuable, and difficult to accurately appraise. Paper and computer files compose the most voluminous amount of material; often they are the least organized. At the 2014 conference session, Catherine Williamson told a story about her appraisal of the Milton Berle estate, during which she discovered his annotated scripts and joke files. These revealed Berle's meticulous recording of all the jokes he had ever told. In the process of dealing with the extensive property in his estate, the files had been shuffled off to the side. However, Williamson recognized their cultural value, and the joke files were acquired by a private collector. The rest of the archive is at the Library of Congress. Imagine what these materials tell us about mid-century American culture. Williamson pointed out the variability of different archives and their associated collections, explaining the importance of considering the relationships among diverse materials—photographs, family history, libraries of books, and other collections—because of the benefits of inclusiveness in framing the archive. Collecting institutions and artists' estates should make these decisions jointly; in the context of assessing archives for the GRI, the staff has considered easels, brushes, paint samples, studio furniture, exhibition models, and exhibition furniture.

The GRI has a similarly meticulous record of the artist Frederick Hammersley's paints and alterations to his works in notebooks. Scientists at the Getty Conservation Institute are currently studying these small but stunning journals.³ The works are also part of the preparatory curatorial research for a forthcoming exhibition on Hammersley at the Huntington Art Gallery in San Marino. Over the years,



Wallace Berman, announcement for George Herms exhibition at Aura Gallery in Pasadena, California, 1963, offset lithograph, sheet $3\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ in. (9.8 × 14.4 cm). Getty Research Institute, Gift of George Herms, 2009.M.20 (design © The Estate of Wallace Berman; photograph provided by Getty Research Institute)

Dean Stockwell, Card to George Herms, 1967, letterpress, ink, and gelatin silver prints on board, $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$ in. (14 × 9 cm). Getty Research Institute, Gift of George Herms, 2009.M.20 (artwork © Dean Stockwell; photograph provided by Getty Research Institute)

4. For example, *George Herms: The Secret Archives*, an exhibition with catalogue (an assembled portfolio of diverse works on paper, including postcards and ephemera) at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in 1992; or *The Prometheus Archives: A Retrospective Exhibition of the Work of George Herms*, a retrospective with catalogue at the Newport Harbor Art Museum in Newport Beach, CA, in 1979.



Hammersley placed increments of his archive at the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institute, but the notebooks were not included. Fortunately, his estate realized their value to conservation science, particularly to analyses of mid-twentieth-century paints and treatments of artworks. The institute hopes to digitize the notebooks in the near future, and this will mitigate the separation of Hammersley's archives housed in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. In general, splitting archives is not recommended.

Only a few artists have been prescient enough to document their art as Hammersley did, or have studio assistants do it. Even fewer have actually organized and edited their archives. But the GRI holds a unique example: a composed archive created several years ago, just after the West Coast assemblage artist George Herms was an artist in residence at the GRI. As part of his practice, Herms delves into his own collections, returning to past work for new projects; he creates archives as elements of his performances, installations, and publications.⁴ In recognition of the central role that archives play in his work, the GRI did an archives project with Herms in which he donated a portion of his archive. The Herms archives project seemed especially appropriate to the institute's special collections, both in collecting examples of Herms's own work and in observing how his artistic archival practice paralleled the GRI's institutional models or perhaps even questioned their presumed authority and standards. Herms worked with an assistant, Sarah Anderson, who is also an artist (a.k.a. Sara Rara), and the active process of constructing the archive—Herms termed it “winnowing”—was recorded on video and tape.

The recent book *Artists' Studio Archives: Managing Personal Collections & Creative Legacies* provides strategies for harnessing and preserving archival material.⁵ Providing practical methods, the volume is written from an institutional or professional perspective, that of archivists or librarians. It is important to remember that just as institutional scopes are defined and often quite disparate, decisions about acquiring and organizing artists' archives can be very different. This is not detrimental, but rather what collecting is about, as it focuses on specific interests and subjects.

Collecting Archives

In the past, archives of artists, art institutions, critics, and art professionals were primarily donated to institutions. Collecting archives was a relatively quiet, passive endeavor. Defined collecting policies, aggressive solicitations, and outright competition among institutions for certain high-profile archives played minor roles in collecting artists' archives. By the end of the twentieth century, parallel to efforts to encourage distinguished institutional acquisitions of artworks, artists' foundations, families, estates, and increasingly dealers have played stronger roles in the placement of archives, promoting their collecting, assembling, and selling—rather than donating—and occasionally dispersing archives or destroying their integrity by cherry-picking and selling single works, such as sketches or letters; these might formerly have been viewed as ephemera with low market values, but are now valued as original drawings or autographs directly from the artist. It has been recognized that placing an archive in a notable institution, or selling an archive for a high price, can increase the market value of the artist's artworks by making archival sources available so they can be published by scholars or displayed in exhibitions that augment and substantiate the artist's renown. Together with works of art, the archive becomes part of the artist's heritage.

In contrast to assertive marketing or a distanced institutional view of archives as original sources or documentation for research, artists' families and loved ones speak of archives as the legacy, a highly personal one that remains with them as the memory of the artist. They feel that they know what the artist would have wished for and what would be best for the artist's reputation. Emotions play a part: sadness, anger, separation anxiety, generosity, and altruism may all engage at certain moments. Because the artist is no longer alive, heirs often project these emotions on the estate, including not only the art but also the archival materials. A sensitive book by Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau describes "the conflicts and frustrations, goals and desires and emotional and financial constraints that confront widows and widowers, daughters and sons, companions and partners."⁶ The book's subtitle, "Reputations in Trust," points to a common concern of heirs: the keeping of the flame. This mission can be expressed in many ways: placing works in eminent collections, organizing important exhibitions and significant publications, and insuring authenticity and integrity, hence the importance of preparing the catalogue raisonné.

There are occasionally protective efforts to control access to the archive—who may see or who can publish material in the archive—or to present a particular perspective or narrative, excluding certain documents. Letters, photographs, and journals—the stuff of archives—are by nature highly personal and

5. Neal-Ambrose Smith, Joan E. Beaudoin, Heather Gendron, and Eumie Imm Stroukoff, *Artists' Studio Archives: Managing Personal Collections & Creative Legacies* (2016), at works.bepress.com/heather-gendron/2/, as of February 1, 2017.

6. Magda Salvesen and Diane Cousineau, *Artists' Estates: Reputations in Trust* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), cover flap copy. For an up-to-date, comprehensive study from the distinct perspective of the estates of well-known artists, see Loretta Würtenberger, *The Artist's Estate: A Handbook for Artists, Executors, and Heirs* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016).

sometimes reflect bias. It should be recognized that archives are not always objective. Artists have been known to add or redact information, and sealing archives for reasons of privacy for a specific period of time is completely legitimate. Sometimes this urge to control goes too far. Artists' estates are always personal, and so are the concerns of the loved ones. As we plan shipments of soon-to-be-acquired archives at the GRI, I have come to expect an invariable stutter in the schedule. Something is found to be wrong at the last minute and must be addressed. It seems to be an understandable kind of separation anxiety, for indeed, the departure of an archive from a studio or home workspace can seem like another death as the material remains of the practice leave the premises, heading toward the vaults.

Such anxieties and apprehensions relate to the transition in the archive's status. When materials move from studios or estates, things necessarily change. The archive is no longer in the process of becoming; its period of development and assembly is terminated. Additions made by someone else are not part of the artist's archive, but someone else's project. This fact alone can be quite disturbing to families, friends, and heirs who wish to extend the documentation of the artist's lifetime achievements, continuing to take care and guide the archive, to enhance the artist's reputation. Thus, institutions must consider the agreements they make with former owners and rights holders concerning the content of archives, keeping in mind that archives are intended to be available for research and publication. It is not beneficial to the artist or the archive to seal the archive for an unreasonable amount of time or to allow access only to those whom the estate gives explicit permission in advance. If there is a need for special surveillance, the archive is not ready to be placed in an institution. When there are limitations on permissions, in this age of almost too much information and data, researchers and writers will simply move on to another subject.

Placing Archives

The most important consideration in placing an archive in a public institution or study center is to make certain the archive is complementary to the institutional mission and that there is a genuine interest in the artist. The second essential concern is to make sure the archive is properly housed and preserved, and that it will be catalogued in a reasonable amount of time so that the material is accessible to researchers and is easy to view, reproduce, and publish. Representatives of artists' foundations and estates should visit prospective institutions, talk with the staff, and find a place they feel is appropriate and sympathetic. Choices range from an institution that will feature the artist in a small, focused special collection to a place in which the artist can be contextualized among larger corresponding, even overlapping, archives and other compatible collections. There should be a relationship of trust with the institution, so that estates or heirs do not feel they have to be protective or seek to control the use of the archive. Restricting rights to view or to publish because of worries about access by the "wrong" people, those who do not respect or appreciate the artist—although this is done with the best intentions—is the wrong way to go. Indeed, most institutions are hesitant to put their resources into archives that cannot be made available and published. When acquiring an archive, the GRI always requests a

minimum of nonexclusive rights in order to reproduce and publish the material in all formats. If this cannot be secured, it is a deal-breaker, and the potential acquisition does not proceed.

Sustaining Archives

Institutions evaluate prospective archives in terms of content, the relationship with existing collections, potential for new research, and collecting initiatives on new subjects. Some collect single figures of local or institutional significance: artists from certain periods, for example, modern or contemporary, or artists who work in a particular medium, for example, glass, graphics, or video. The GRI focuses on art history and seeks collections that correspond and connect, illuminating networks and collaborations among artists, curators, collectors, and dealers. In part, the Robert Mapplethorpe archive fits so well in the GRI's special collections because the institute already holds the archives of the artist's partner, the noted collector and curator Sam Wagstaff, and his dealer, Harry Lunn. The three archives overlap and inform each other. In addition, like the Ed Ruscha archive, which we are in the processing of acquiring, the J. Paul Getty Museum's department of photographs shares the Mapplethorpe acquisition and will house and exhibit the artist's canonical photographs.

The GRI collects archives selectively, and the staff has frequent discussions concerning potential acquisitions. When assessing potential acquisitions, the following questions are asked, among others: What is most desirable for researchers in terms of access and publication? Have exclusions been made that are detrimental and detract from the integrity of the archive, e.g., drawings or sketchbooks from artists' archives or models from architects' archives? Typically, the institute acquires these materials together with archives because they are integral to understanding an artist's process of conception and production; they are frequently exhibited and loaned to other museums. May an archive be partial or contain "representative" material? Yes, sometimes, if there is an integrity to the projects or period represented. Archives necessarily change their unique personal character when acquired, and the GRI tries to build in some mitigating features, taking documentary photographs or videos of the studio or workspace, and making recordings or oral histories of the artist, relatives, or studio assistants. All archives are by definition individual and different; thus standards of evaluation and assessment for purposes of collecting must always be flexible.

Values for archives are similarly difficult to establish. In the postwar period, sales of the archives of high-profile artists and authors have promoted monetary values for such collections. Yet if all archives are unique, how can one point to comparable ones for purposes of appraisals? Even works by the same artist are different. Are letters from René Magritte to his dealer Alexander Iolas concerning his paintings more valuable than letters between the artist and his wife about how they lived and worked? Money aside, is not the most appropriate criterion for assessing the value of an archive what researchers would find most useful? Yet research value cannot be quantified, and research interests change over time. Is it legitimate to put high prices on archives so that only a few institutions can afford them when so many archives need to be preserved and made accessible? Does this not create an elitism of collecting, canonizing the artist with the most

expensive archive? Does it not result in extractions, cherry-picking items that might sell for high prices? Most important, unlike single works of art that can be conserved and stored individually, the processing and housing of archives is both labor- and space-intensive. The GRI always looks at the costs of processing, conserving, and providing appropriate access to archives when considering a potential acquisition, because an archive is an ongoing project that requires considerable investments in cataloguers and supplies. Archival boxes must be paged and reshelfed in vaults with appropriate storage conditions. Institutional reading rooms must be supervised, with reference librarians and registrars available to respond to queries and professional photographers on staff to create reproductions and digitizations. In a number of cases, estates or families place archives in institutions after providing access and information themselves and realizing that they no longer wish to be “of service” for research. Preserving and presenting the materials of an artist’s life and practice through the maintenance of an archive is a considerable amount of work that requires ongoing funds following the initial acquisition. Archives have long lives, and it is essential to have the requisite resources in place to sustain them.

Presently chief curator and associate director at the Getty Research Institute, Marcia Reed focuses her research on works on paper. Among the exhibitions she has curated at the Getty are *The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals* (2015–16), *China on Paper* (2007–8), *The Magnificent Piranesi* (2007–8), *Picturing the Natural World* (2003), and *Naples and Vesuvius on the Grand Tour* (2001–2). Work-in-progress concerns the Jean Brown archive and a forthcoming catalogue of the GRI’s collections of artists’ books.