

# Driving in the slow lane: Improving digital collections one quarter mile at a time



Hanna Bertoldi  
Peggy Griesinger  
Mikala Narlock

*Presented at the ACRL / NY 2023 Symposium “Embracing Slow Librarianship”  
Dec. 1, 2023*

# Context

- Grant-funded digital collections platform
  - Library, Archive, and Museum
- Pervasive idea: More content is better.



# Our foundational beliefs

- More does not always equal better
- Something is not always better than nothing



Challenges  
we've seen



# Challenges we've seen pt 1

- Diversity in online collections = more equitable
- Identities in descriptive systems
- Privacy and PII



## Challenges we've seen (cont.)



- Transparency in cataloging
- Cataloging systems
- Prioritization ouroboros
- Undervalued digital collections labor

# Suggestions



# Slow Movement





# Possible solutions



- Transparency and documentation

# SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Tips and tools for researching primary sources in Special Collections and Archives and online

## Special Collections and Archives ▾

What is in Special Collections and Archives?

Search Special Collections archives holdings

Search Special Collections Digitized Content

Primary Sources beyond Cal Poly Special Collections

How to cite primary sources and archival materials

Set up an appointment/Get Help

**Gaps and Silences in the Archives:  
Critical Use of Archives and Primary  
Sources**

[Bias in Archives and Special Collections](#)

[Gaps and Silences in the Archives](#)

FAQs

## Bias in Archives and Special Collections

Archives are spaces of gaps and silences. Sometimes this is due to historical and internalized racism, classism, sexism, and ignorance of marginalized genders and sexualities. This enters both into what you find in a collection--archival silence--and what you read in the description, or archival neutrality. Archives have never been neutral.

Sometimes, what you discover, or don't discover, in archives has less to do with digitization or description, and more to do with historical and internalized racism, classism, sexism, and ignorance of marginalized genders and sexualities. This enters both into what you find in a collection--archival silence--and what you read in the description, or archival neutrality.

Archival silences are the voices missing from the collections. These gaps in the historical record preserved by archives are real, and are not accidental. Archivists have made decisions over time about who and what is deemed important enough to be preserved, and these decisions have influenced the historical record.

Archival neutrality is the tone in archival description that erases or avoids inequity. For a long time many archivists believed we were just including facts, and avoided language that made us feel like we were interpreting, or editorializing. Be cautious of possible description this way in finding aids and online archives.

[Adapted from the work of Dorothy Berry.](#)

# Possible solutions



- Equitable, not equal, attention for all materials

# Nocturne

ca. 1903

*Edward Steichen*

📍 Raclin Murphy Museum of Art

Edward J. Steichen's oeuvre as a photographer is well known, as is his participation with Alfred Stieglitz and other artists in the pivotal Photo-Secession group, who from 1902 to 1910 exhibited their work in both a New York gallery and the magazine Camera Work...Steichen's early creative efforts included both paintings and photographs, often of the same subject.

Steichen preferred nocturnal scenes, with their "pictorial" tonal ranges and Symbolist spirituality...The square shape of this canvas, its compositional focus on the center section, and the surrounding areas of softly obscured forms echo Steichen's compositional techniques when photographing a landscape.

Steichen ceased painting in 1923 and concentrated his professional and creative efforts on his new job as chief of photography for Condé Nast Publications.

from Snite Museum of Art, Selected Works: Snite Museum of Art (Notre Dame, 2005)

## Related Items



Song, I

Albert Bloch (American, 1882 - 1961)  
1913-1914



Their Audience

Walter Ufer (American, 1876 - 1936)  
ca. 1925



# Possible solutions



- Value and invest in cataloging and digitization positions

# There's no one solution.



***I Can't Give That To You***

# Summary

- More does not always equal better
- Something is not always better than nothing





**Peggy:**

mgriesi2@nd.edu

**Hanna:**

h.bertoldi@bowdoin.edu

**Mikala:** mnarlock@umn.edu

**Book chapter:**

<https://curate.nd.edu/show/r494vh57h6s>





Since we're  
almost out of  
time...

