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Digital Preservation Report

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# Executive Summary

The Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) is a small non-profit art gallery in Seattle, Washington, founded in 1980 with “the intention to foment and create contemporary art in Seattle.” The heart of this report, CoCA’s Archives Project, was established in 2013 by Anna H., who served as the project lead until 2018 and now serves in a volunteer advisory role. CoCA’s digital archives are the public-facing, digital side of the total archives project. Grant funding from 4Culture provided nominal stipends for archivists, funds to purchase in-house digitization equipment, and aided in digitization, cataloging, and the creation of the CoCA Archives Project website.

As a small arts organization, CoCA faces many challenges - a single paid staff member, with an engaged board of directors and many volunteers and interns to help. Given these constraints, the following next steps and preservation policy aim to strike a balance between established standards in digital preservation and what is feasibly possible, given CoCA’s restraints. CoCA is a vibrant organization, with a large community presence and rich, unique archival holdings, and a wealth of engaged, knowledgeable volunteers, and these suggested priorities aim to capitalize on these strengths.

# Introduction and Survey

## ► Scope of digital holdings

[The Center on Contemporary Art \(CoCA\)](#) is a small non-profit art gallery in Seattle, Washington, founded in 1980 with “the intention to foment and create contemporary art in Seattle.” (CoCA Archives Project “About” page) The [CoCA Archives Project](#) was founded in 2013 by Anna H., who served as the project lead until 2018 and now serves in a volunteer advisory role. CoCA’s digital archives are the public-facing, digital side of the total archives project. Grant funding from 4Culture provided nominal stipends for archivists, funds to purchase in-house digitization equipment, and aided in digitization, cataloging, and the creation of the CoCA Archives Project website.

CoCA’s mission statement described that it “serves the Pacific Northwest as a Catalyst and Forum for the Advancement, Development, and Understanding of Contemporary Art,” and CoCA’s Archives Project has an in-house tagline of “preserve, catalog and share our unique collection of archival materials.”

Physical holdings of CoCA’s archives are comprised of records and images documenting the over 200 major exhibitions held at the gallery, as well documents related to the internal organization of CoCA (founding documents, bylaws etc.), 40-60 bankers boxes, 4000 slides, 125 posters, and approximately 500 articles and reviews. Digital collections comprise roughly 300 items, organized into 31 online exhibitions. CoCA’s VHS collection was recently digitized - Anna H. indicated that there has been three separate digitization projects, resulting in 80% of the poster holdings, 100% of video holdings, and a small portion of newsletter holdings being digitized.

Formats in the digital collections include: PDF, DOC, PPT, CSV, TIFF, JPEG, PNG, GIF, MPEG, MOV, and MP3. There might be other formats being used in creation of documentation of newer exhibitions as well.

The archives are housed in a daylight basement of a 1920s building a few miles from the main exhibition space. The business overhead is a trapeze school and studio, which causes some unique preservation concerns - heavy landings in the studio above can dislodge dirt from the ceiling or cause light bulbs to fall and potentially break. The building is also older and archives volunteers have created workarounds to protect the collections, but there are also concerns about the safety of the building, since there have been break-ins in the neighborhood.

The archives are primarily used by CoCA employees and volunteers, although there is researcher interest in the images and files related to the exhibitions, since many notable contemporary artists have displayed their work at CoCA. There is likely to be local interest as well, in CoCA’s role in Seattle’s art and counterculture scenes. CoCA’s archives are not accepting outside donations.

## ► Management of digital content

Images are digitized then uploaded to LibraryThing's [TinyCat system](#), which creates MARC records for every image. Each image is cataloged with hand-keyed Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) terms. Copies of digital images live on local machines with backups on Google Drive, and some images taken by a previous board president live on that individual's personal server. URLs to digital objects are shared through CoCA's Archives Project website, which is run on Weebly. A finding aid exists for the full extent of archival holdings, and digital objects can be accessed by searching TinyCat, or through the "exhibitions" tab on CoCA's Archives Project site.

Some content in the digital archive might be under copyright, but CoCA's Archive Project site makes a statement that they believe this content is covered under fair use and provides contact information for copyright holders to submit take-down requests.

Current files are also stored in Google Drive (in-use administrative files can be found there) as well as on the archives desktop computer. The desktop has an external hard drive that is used for backups; the HD is stored off-site.

## ► Perceptions of state of digital content

The volunteer archivists are concerned about the longevity of the collections they steward, since CoCA is a small organization and the archives have no regular paid staff. Additionally, the physical space that collections are housed in and digitization is conducted in poses preservation challenges. The archivists also expressed concern about staff and intern work potentially being done on personal computers and then not uploaded to CoCA computers or being backed up. The nature of a small arts nonprofit does not seem to lend itself to large-scale preservation projects.

Digitized version of administrative materials have the potential to be very useful to CoCA staff and board as it will be easier to find information for grant applications. Digital collections aid the work of CoCA as well as generating interest, but may not be seen as mission-critical, especially in a small non-profit that has many areas needing funding.

### ▶ Future collection plans

CoCA's archives do not intend to expand beyond the material they currently have, but there are some future directions for digitization that Anna H. brought up, such as digitizing administrative files for easier searching and access by CoCA's staff and board. The focus for CoCA's Archive Project now is preserving existing digital content and maintaining digitization projects.

### ▶ Resources

CoCA's archives contain unique content, and illustrate contemporary art, the Seattle arts scene, and Seattle culture in general. While small, CoCA's archives of exhibition-related material are remarkably well inventoried and catalogued (Anna H. points out that administrative records are less thoroughly inventoried), and TinyCat seems to be serving them well. However, with CoCA's Archives Project being entirely managed by volunteers, staff resources are scant. Anna H. is rolling off of her volunteer role, and a new head consulting archivist volunteer (Staci C.) will be taking over. Losing the founder of the Archives Project might lead to some loss of institutional knowledge, although Anna H. will be available to answer questions. In addition, CoCA's archives have a number of interns (primarily from the University of Washington's iSchool) who assist with archival work, as well as some CoCA-wide IT interns. The relationship with UW's iSchool provides lots of opportunities for student labor, although interns are by nature a shorter-term staffing model that present significant preservation and stability concerns. There is also no regular budget for digitization or preservation - the digitization equipment and much of the work on the digital archives has been grant funded thus far.

# Next Steps Plan

## ► Organization

[The Center on Contemporary Art \(CoCA\)](#) is a small non-profit art gallery in Seattle, Washington, founded in 1980 with “the intention to foment and create contemporary art in Seattle.” (CoCA Archives Project “About” page) As I wrote in the [survey](#), CoCA’s main preservation issues stem from the fact that they have no regular, paid archives staff, which poses challenges when it comes to what the organization has the time and budget to implement. On the positive side, the digital collections are relatively small, and well-cataloged.

This next steps evaluation will establish danger areas for CoCA’s digital collections and provide suggestions at varying levels of sophistication and resources needed. I measured resources needed mainly by time estimated to complete, as time to do digital preservation is the most precious resource in CoCA’s situation.

A digital preservation policy for CoCA will need to be flexible enough to be practical for a small organization with very limited staff, but provide enough information and sources to aid archival consultants and interns as they try to effectively steward the CoCA Archives Project.

## Storage and Geographic Location

- ▶ **NDSA Level: 1**
- ▶ **Description:** While storage of digital objects is split between a local server maintained by the past board president, local computers, Google Drive, and external media, all digitized objects have copies stored on Google Drive and a hard drive backup. However, there are some floppy disks and other external media that may contain content that has not been transferred to computer/drive/HD backups as of yet.
- ▶ **Low resource recommendation:** Identify external media that has not yet been looked at or digitized; for the formats that can be read by CoCA owned machines, download content and add to stable, centralized storage. Make a list (including any information written on the exterior of the floppy disk etc.) of external media types that CoCA does not have a drive for, with an eye towards exploring how these can be read and converted at a later date (potentially as a grant-funded project).
- ▶ **Medium resource recommendation:** Explore options of converting external media not able to be read/accessed by CoCA computers. Compile documentation about storage systems, mediums, and locations of all digital objects. Verify that each digital object has a minimum of two copies stored in different locations, and explore possibilities for third copy of objects.
- ▶ **High resource recommendation:** Explore another cloud storage option that is not Google Drive, potentially something with version control (especially for the born-digital administrative files and current documentation of exhibitions), such as Dropbox or Box. Potentially create third copy of each digital object to be stored in a different location/medium. Look into establishing a partnership with another organization to store backup files.

## File Fixity and Data Integrity

- ▶ **NDSA Level:** Below 1
- ▶ **Description:** Fixity has not yet been actively addressed. Establishing data integrity will be an important step for CoCA to ensure that their digital files are unchanged. One of CoCA's Archives Project's advantages is that their archival consultants are very knowledgeable, and interns also come from the University of Washington's iSchool. While time and money are challenges for CoCA, the archivist volunteers and interns are creative and often have knowledge of digital preservation.
- ▶ **Low resource recommendation:** Create an internal document/spreadsheet that lists file inventory, current location, and file size. Check file sizes by folder every few months or when moving location or storage system to monitor for any changes, which would indicate problems.
- ▶ **Medium and high resource recommendation:** Begin to generate MD-5, SHA-1, or SHA-256 cryptographic hashes to generate fixity information for existing and newly created digital objects in the archives. AVP's [Fixity](#) tool is an excellent choice for this, as it is a free service that will email a report on file changes.

## Information Security

- ▶ **NDSA Level:** Below 1
- ▶ **Description:** Access to files is not restricted at this point, and IT assistance is sometimes provided by friends or partners of volunteers and interns, which could lead to security concerns or accidental modification or deletion of files.
- ▶ **Low resource recommendation:** Determine who should have access to storage and software of digital collections, and restrict Google Drive, TinyCat, and Weebly logins to that list.
- ▶ **Medium and high resource recommendation:** Evaluate computers used by CoCA staff, consultants, and volunteers. What machines are owned by CoCA, and what information is stored on personal computers? Given the nature of the organization, limiting volunteers using personal computers may not be practical, but having a list of who is doing what work on what machine or platform can provide more information to evaluate security risks.

## Metadata

- ▶ **NDSA Level:** 2-ish
- ▶ **Description:** CoCA's Archives Project has a detailed finding aid that covers the full archives collection of the organization, including exhibition-related materials and organizational files. Digitized materials, available through TinyCat, have well-formed MARC records and organized by related exhibition as well as through keyword search.
- ▶ **Low resource recommendation:** Add information on which materials have been digitized (including file formats, when appropriate) to the finding aid for the archival collections, to aid in identifying existing digital materials, their place within the larger collection, and what materials will be prioritized for upcoming digitization projects.
- ▶ **Medium resource recommendation:** Establish documentation on digitization and descriptive metadata in order to aid in standardization. Store transformative metadata on digitization within TinyCat records.
- ▶ **High resource recommendation:** CoCA may want to look into a more robust content management system, which could aid in uniformity of metadata and allow for growth of collections in the future. However, TinyCat seems perfectly adequate for CoCA's current and near future activity, so I would not recommend considering a CMS change and migration unless the organization significantly expands.

## File Formats

- ▶ **NDSA Level: 2**
- ▶ **Description:** CoCA's digital archival holdings are primarily digitized from physical holdings, so archival consultants and interns have been able to control file formats. An rough inventory of all file formats currently in the collections already exists. New incoming material documenting exhibitions is likely to be born-digital (photographs, documents), so establishing standardized policy on acceptable formats is likely to be helpful on this front.
- ▶ **Low resource recommendation:** Place inventory lists of existing file formats into documentation for future archival staff, volunteers, and interns.
- ▶ **Medium resource recommendation:** Establish preferred formats list with a particular eye to born-digital material and share this list with CoCA's executive director, board, and other departments' volunteers to aid in documenting and transferring that future documentation of exhibitions to the archives. Identify file formats in the archives that are in danger of obsolesce.
- ▶ **High resource recommendation:** Begin format migration for materials on the danger-of-obsolesce list.

## Conclusion

- ▶ CoCA's Archive Project benefits from knowledgeable and passionate consultants and volunteers, but the lack of regular funding makes it difficult to plan for a sustainable future. However, there are several low resource baseline steps that archival consultants and interns can take on to help secure digital collections and plan for their continued preservation.

# Digital Preservation Plan

## ▶ Executive Summary

This plan documents digital preservation challenges and plans for the Center on Contemporary Art's Archives Project. Since the Archives Project was founded in 2013, the team of archival consultants and volunteers have taken great strides in organizing the physical archival holdings of CoCA, and digitizing a portion of those holdings.

The objectives of this policy are:

- ▶ To document the need for digital preservation at CoCA.
- ▶ Define the scope of digital collections at CoCA.
- ▶ Outline some of the principles behind preservation actions.
- ▶ Make priority recommendations for digital preservation actions CoCA can take in the near future, as well as for the long-term.
- ▶ Establish a regular schedule of review for this policy.

This policy plan has been crafted in December 2018 by digital preservation consultant Caitlin Christian-Lamb, with assistance from Anna H. and Staci C.

## ► Mission and Mandate

The Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) is a small non-profit art gallery in Seattle, Washington, founded in 1980 with “the intention to foment and create contemporary art in Seattle.”

CoCA’s mission states that the center: “serves the Pacific Northwest as a catalyst and forum for the advancement, development, and understanding of Contemporary Art.” Further, according to their purpose statement, CoCA “is a space for creative expression, community and inclusivity in contemporary art.” CoCA’s Archives Project has an in-house, unofficial tagline of “preserve, catalog and share our unique collection of archival materials.”

The CoCA Archives Project was founded in 2013 by Anna H., who served as the project lead until 2018 and now serves in a volunteer advisory role. CoCA’s digital archives are the public-facing, digital side of the total archives project. Digital preservation is a key part of fulfilling CoCA’s mission of serving as a space and an organization that fosters contemporary art, and the digitized archival material that documents exhibitions particularly aids in this mission.

Preservation is not a one-time activity, but rather a series of maintenance actions over time. Using the [Digital Curation Centre's Curation Lifecycle model](#), we can identify several stages applicable to CoCA's digital archival collections:

- ▶ Create or receive: As digital content is created, administrative, descriptive, structural and technical metadata about the objects should be captured or created. Rights information should be noted, as applicable.
- ▶ Appraisal or selection: Selecting objects for digitization, or born-digital objects for capture, will be done by archival consultants, volunteers, and interns.
- ▶ Ingest: Ingesting digital objects into the cataloging software (LibraryThing's [TinyCat system](#)) will follow the pattern set by existing digital objects by hand-keying Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) terms (TinyCat automatically creates MARC records for each object).
- ▶ Preservation action: Several different types of maintenance might be needed, depending on the object and/or collection. The DCC notes that "Preservation actions should ensure that data remains authentic, reliable and usable while maintaining its integrity," which can include data cleaning, validation, recording preservation metadata, and ensuring acceptable data structures or file formats."
- ▶ Transform or migrate: As technology advances, some formats, software, hardware will change, become incompatible, or obsolete. In order to ensure long-term access to digital objects, CoCA archives consultants, volunteers, and interns will need evaluate when objects in their collection need to be migrated to new formats and check that programs and external hardware can still be read by machines in use at the CoCA.
- ▶ Access, use, and reuse: The primary reason for preservation is for future use, and with this in mind, CoCA staff need to ensure that digital objects in their remit are discoverable. The TinyCat catalog that is currently in use, as well as the archives collection finding aid, and pointers on the Archives Project website serve this purpose.
- ▶ Reappraisal and disposal: Digital objects in CoCA collections should be periodically reappraised to make sure the organization's limited resources are in line with the existing Materials Donation Policy.

## ► Scope and Content Types

Physical holdings of CoCA's archives are comprised of records and images documenting the over 200 major exhibitions held at the gallery, as well documents related to the internal organization of CoCA (founding documents, bylaws etc.), 40-60 bankers boxes, 4000 slides, 125 posters, and approximately 500 articles and reviews.

In late 2018, digital collections comprise roughly 300 items, organized into 31 online exhibitions. CoCA's VHS collection was recently digitized; there have been three separate digitization projects, resulting in 80% of the poster holdings, 100% of video holdings, and a small portion of newsletter holdings being digitized.

CoCA's digital archival holdings are currently all digitized surrogates of analog material held in CoCA's archives. Collecting born-digital objects will need to follow in the near future, as planning and documentation of exhibitions (as well as potential works of art) are being generated digitally first. Internal administrative files are similarly born-digital, and examination of which of these will be selected for inclusion in the archives will need to be a priority.

Formats in the digital collections currently include: PDF, DOC, PPT, CSV, TIFF, JPEG, PNG, GIF, MPEG, MOV, and MP3. CoCA's Archives Project will continue to accept commonly used file formats.

## ► Preservation Principles and Strategies

As CoCA is a small non-profit and the Archives Project does not have a regular budget, staff will focus on free or very low-cost subscription software and storage solutions. This needs to be balanced with reasonable-to-support-ness, as IT assistance is also extremely limited. CoCA's use of TinyCat is one example of appropriate cost and ease-of-use; tools such as [AVP's Fixity](#) is another.

Using the National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA)'s [Levels of Digital Preservation](#) as a guide, CoCA's Archives Project will aim for the following baselines:

### ► STORAGE

While storage of digital objects is split between a local server maintained by the past board president, local computers, Google Drive, and external media, all digitized objects have copies stored on Google Drive and a hard drive backup. However, there are some floppy disks and other external media that may contain content that has not been transferred to computer/drive/HD backups as of late December 2018.

CoCA's archives team will seek to identify external media that has not yet been looked at or digitized, and for the formats that can be read by CoCA owned machines, download content and add to stable, centralized storage. A list of any external media types that CoCA does not have a drive for will be generated, with an eye towards exploring how these can be read and converted at a later date.

## ▶ FILE FIXITY AND DATA INTEGRITY

Fixity refers to the concept of checking that a file has not changed over time. Establishing data integrity will be an important step for CoCA to ensure that their digital files are unchanged. One of CoCA's Archives Project's advantages is that their archival consultants are very knowledgeable, and interns also come from the University of Washington's iSchool. While time and money are challenges for CoCA, the archivists, volunteers, and interns are creative and often have knowledge of digital preservation.

Archives consultants, volunteers, and interns will seek to create an internal document or spreadsheet that lists a file inventory, current location, and file size. A first step towards fixity will include checking file sizes by folder every few months or when moving location or storage system to monitor for any changes.

## ▶ INFORMATION SECURITY

Access to files is not restricted at this point, and IT assistance is sometimes provided by friends or partners of volunteers and interns, which could lead to security concerns or accidental modification or deletion of files.

CoCA staff will determine who should have access to storage and software of digital collections, and restrict Google Drive, TinyCat, and Weebly logins to that list; however, given the nature of small arts organizations, IT assistance will still be sought where it can be found.

## ▶ METADATA

CoCA's Archives Project has a detailed finding aid that covers the full archives collection of the organization, including exhibition-related materials and organizational files. Digitized materials, available through TinyCat, have well-formed MARC records and organized by related exhibition as well as through keyword search.

Future steps to improve metadata for digital objects will include adding information on which materials have been digitized (including file formats, when appropriate) to the finding aid for the archival collections, to aid in identifying existing digital materials, their place within the larger collection, and what materials will be prioritized for upcoming digitization projects.

## ▶ FILE FORMATS

Since CoCA's digital archival holdings are primarily digitized from physical holdings, archival consultants and interns have been able to control file formats. An rough inventory of all file formats currently in the collections already exists. New incoming material documenting exhibitions is likely to be born-digital (photographs, documents), so establishing standardized list of acceptable formats is likely to be helpful on this front.

## ► Roles and Responsibilities

CoCA has one full-time, salaried employee, the Executive and Artistic Director, Nicole DeMent. The organization also has a working board of directors, comprised of seven individuals, who aid in aspects of daily work in addition to fiscal and governance responsibilities. CoCA also has a dedicated team of volunteers.

CoCA's Archives Project was conceived by and operated by volunteers and interns, some of whom received stipends through grant funding that has now ended. Consulting archivists and interns, both unpaid, are responsible for the stewardship of digital archival collections. In the future, ways of securing more sustainable stewardship, such as additional grant funding to again pay stipends, should be prioritized in order to ensure that archives consultants, volunteers, and interns are able to dedicate sufficient time to preservation activities.

Stakeholders for digital preservation at CoCA include all of the roles listed above: archives consultants, volunteers, and interns; the Executive and Artistic Director; the board of directors; and the other interns and volunteers working in other units of the organization.

Audiences for digital archival materials include: all stakeholders; artists whose work has been exhibited at CoCA; Seattle and the broader Pacific Northwest community; those interested in the local arts scene of Seattle; and contemporary artists and scholars of contemporary art.

## ► Challenges

CoCA's Archives Project faces many challenges in attempting to preserve and share the history of this small arts organization. To begin with, regular staffing of the archives has been inconsistent - the establishment and maintenances of the Archives Project was driven by consultants, volunteers, and interns who are not regular employees of CoCA. This staffing model does not lend itself to sustainability, so CoCA's board of directors may want to consider what the exit policy for the archival material would be, should a day come when CoCA cannot store or maintain these materials. One viable option is to form a partnership with area institutions like the University of Washington or Seattle Public Library, in order to provide a repository-of-last-resort relationship should CoCA no longer be able to steward their own archives.

The nature of small non-profit arts organization does not lend itself well to longevity of digital materials that need periodic maintenance, and the lack of permanent archival staff and the nature of the archives' physical storage space also provides a challenge. However, despite lack of regular funding lines, permanent staff, and a less-than-ideal workspace, CoCA's Archives Project team have made significant steps in organizing and making available the unique content they steward. Solutions can be found, and grant funding can again be sought to provide some stability.

## ► Maintenance of Digital Preservation Policy

This plan will be revisited and updated or reaffirmed every three years. The next review date will be December 2021.