

# Beyond the White Cube: An Archival Pop-Up Exhibition

Nina Patterson, *Former Archives Practicum*

## The Archive

**Paul D. Fleck Archives** serves as the institutional memory of **Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity**. The archive contains recordings, photographs, documents, etc. related to the Centre's history. The user-base primarily consists of participants of residencies (artists, musicians, practitioners), practicums, staff, local community members, and researchers.

## The Project

The project was a culmination of arrangement and description work completed on the **Walter Phillips Gallery Fonds**. The Walter Phillips Gallery is located on the Banff Centre campus and was established in 1977. The main target for the exhibition were curators and artists on a 5-week residency. The Pop-Up was held in a small gallery space which is located between the main Walter Phillips Gallery and the Glyde Hall Artist Studios. This was a chance to bring the archival material within the vicinity of where the records were originally created and where the exhibitions that they document took place. It was also a chance to market and arrange an archival exhibition much more like an art exhibition, in turn, appealing to the target audience.

## Why?

- “Taking public service and outreach activities seriously can **benefit acquisitions, archival management, description, and public service programs**” (Harvey and Moosberger, 2007, p.36)
- As the Derbyshire Records Office (2018) stated in relation to their own “Pop-Up Archives” project, an outreach project such as this provides a chance to “**demonstrate how archives have relevance to everyone**” (p. 3)
- **De-mystify the archives** by holding the exhibition in a different space to the library and archive.
- **Educate participants** about how to use the materials and why the holdings are valuable to them (Ericson, 1990)



*Selected documents on the larger display table generously supplied by the Walter Phillips Gallery.*



*Reproductions of photographs and posters, along with exhibition title cards lined the walls*



*Poster for the Archives Pop-Up, Background Image from the Paul D. Fleck Archives*

## Materials

Materials consisted of exhibition planning files from approximately **1998-2008** providing a slice of contemporary art from Canada and around the world. Selected materials included:

- Correspondence
- Exhibition flyers and postcards
- Pamphlets
- Photographs and slides
- Newspaper clippings
- Video recordings of artist talks

The material covered approximately **12 exhibitions** and featured artists such as Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Richard Ray Witman, Jake Moore, and Roy Kiyooka. A reference box was also available for those who wanted to leave anonymous questions and comments.

## Results

- “Short-term focus on outreach activities...has reaped long-term benefits from the improved visibility within...archival, and research communities” (Harvey and Moosberger, 2007, p. 54)
- Unexpected outcome: long-time staff of Banff centre visited and were able to supplement their knowledge which aided with descriptions/photo identification.
- Getting staff to think about their own **records management** i.e. emails and other digital documents.
- **Uptick in visitors** to the archives during the period after the exhibition specifically to consult the WPG fonds.
- Sample reference box comments:
  - “I really enjoyed the collection!”
  - “It’s nice to see the Archives in a exhibition space like this - it makes the archives accessible to all!”

## Going Forward

The original intention behind this project was to monitor the amount and types of reference questions in the months following the Pop-Up to see whether the outreach project had had concrete effects on users. Unfortunately, in March the archives was closed due to the pandemic. Future projects could be translated to a digital context. Platforms such as Omeka could be used to convey the same types of information and target the same user-bases. This fits in with the Banff Centre’s future plans to potentially try artist residencies in an online context. Key takeaways:

- Shifting archival material to new/different contexts and locations has tangible benefits.
- Outreach to users must be continual beyond the exhibition – this could happen in online formats, opens user-base to further geographic locations/accounts for safety of gathering in crowds.

## References

- Derbyshire Record Office. (2018). The Amazing Pop-Up Archives Project Case Study. <https://recordoffice.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/the-amazing-pop-up-archives-project-case-study.pdf>
- Ericson, T. L. (1990). “Preoccupied With Our Own Gardens”: Outreach and Archivists. *Archivaria*, 114-122. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11724>
- Harvey, K., & Moosberger, M. (2007). Theatre Archives’ Outreach and Core Archival Functions. *Archivaria*, 35–54. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13126>

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to my mentors during my time at Banff Centre: John Yolkowski, Mark Black, and Alyssa Hyduk. Thank you to the Walter Phillips Gallery and the Visual Arts Department at Banff Centre. Thanks to Andrew Hennan and the rest of the staff at the Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives for their valuable guidance and assistance with this project.