

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

Fine and Applied Arts – Non-book Materials (Graphic Arts)

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I. Scope

This statement covers graphic arts materials in non-book formats, as detailed in the Collecting Policy guidelines below. For books and periodicals, see the [Fine and Decorative Arts - Books and Periodicals Collections Policy Statement](#).

The Library's graphic arts collections include original prints (e.g., woodcuts, engravings, and lithographs), drawings (e.g., ink, charcoal, watercolor), printed posters, historical ephemera (e.g., postcards), and original digital works that do not reproduce works in other media. These artworks reflect the history of visual communication from the 15th century to the present day and encompass documentary to creative content. There are standalone images as well as serial or sequential works, including works that show both creative and technical processes from spark to fruition. Selected examples of cross disciplinary subject matter include visual works documenting or responding to significant historical events, places, and people; the built and natural environment; social and political issues, including protests and propaganda; works of imagination and visual poetry; works engaged with science, technology, commerce, and industry, including advertisements; narrative illustration and comic and satirical art, etc.

The Library's role as the national library of the United States is defined as being to "Engage, inspire, and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity." The graphic art collections support this larger goal by documenting a range of national and regional subjects, and by representing the history, concerns, and significant achievements of the American people with an emphasis on diversity of viewpoints and creators. The Library collects more selectively graphic art of international concern supporting the research collections and interest of the Library's area studies divisions within the General and International Collections Directorate.

The Library of Congress makes every effort not to duplicate the collecting efforts of other local institutions, such as the Smithsonian Institution and all of its museums, The Phillips Collection, the National Gallery of Art, and the Historical Society of Washington DC.

Paintings, sculptures, and other three-dimensional works of art are not acquired except under the special conditions described in the [Non-library Materials Supplementary Guideline](#) or on a case-by-case basis. An exception is made for printing matrices (e.g., printing blocks, plates, stones), which are acquired selectively. The Library of Congress does not acquire art reproductions or reproductions of works in our own or other institutions.

For information about related collections see the Collections Policy Statements for:

- [Fine and Decorative Arts: Books and Periodicals](#)
- [Photography](#)
- [Ephemera](#)
- [Manuscripts](#)
- [Moving Image Materials](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Theater](#)
- [Folklore and Folklife](#)
- [Non-library Materials Supplementary Guidelines](#)

II. Research Strengths

The Library of Congress supports scholars engaged in researching graphic art including creators; techniques and media; and subject matter documenting American creative, cultural, and intellectual achievement; and seeking visual content related to almost every Library of Congress collecting policy. Ranging from ephemera to documentary and fine art works, the areas of topical strength in the graphic arts collections are: the history of American architecture; fine and popular arts; the history of graphic design and communication; works by both prominent and emerging artists; documentary aspects of American politics and government, cultural events and social movements; and the history of propaganda and political art.

In its capacity as an international research library, the Library collects prints and drawings that support the Library's area studies collections and document subjects of global and international interests; foreign events, individuals and trends impacting or affecting American history, achievements and concerns; and provide insight on matters of American interests, influence and concern abroad.

III. Collecting Policy

A. Fine prints

1. The Library of Congress selectively acquires artists' original woodcuts, engravings, etchings, lithographs, screenprints, prints created or printed with digital tools, prints intended for digital viewing, and other types of original prints that build upon and complement strengths or fill important gaps in the Library's existing Fine Prints Collection. Single works as well as prints in collections, groups, and series (including artists' portfolios) are collected.
2. International in scope, the Library's Fine Prints Collection includes works created from the 15th century to the present day with particular emphasis on prints produced in the United States since 1870. Collecting emphasis is on selective, broad, diverse representation of creators, topics and perspectives, styles, techniques, and subjects. However, in special, limited instances efforts are made to acquire the complete oeuvre of printmakers for whom the Library's holdings are particularly outstanding, e.g., American printmaker and illustrator Joseph Pennell (1857-1926), American

architect turned printmaker John Taylor Arms (1887-1953), and Printmaking Workshop founder Robert Blackburn (1920-2003).

3. Comparable to its efforts to collect non-visual works of creative prose, poetry, and music, the Library seeks to include in its collections artists' prints that compellingly blend artistry, technique, and subject matter. Visual content can include representational, figurative, and/or abstract imagery. Primacy is given to artists, subjects, and art movements that have had or potentially will have an impact on printmaking in the United States.
4. Selective acquisitions of foreign fine art prints seek to support research collections and interests of the Library's Area Studies divisions and build on such extant strengths as prints by African, Asian, Australian, European, Middle Eastern, and Central and South American creators.
5. The Library aims to acquire works by a diversity of American creators from multiple communities, places, perspectives, and heritages, including African American, Arab American, Asian American, Latino (including Chicano), Native American, women, LGBTQ, and disabled artists, particularly working in or after the 20th century. Notable subject strengths across the collection include Italian Renaissance and Baroque chiaroscuro woodcuts; French and British prints; American prints, especially works from the 19th century forwards, including: Etching Revival, WPA/FAP, Social Realist and American Scene/ Regionalist, Abstract Expressionist; and narrative and issue-driven prints related to such topics as history, politics, health, civil rights, and the environment. Prints from U.S. regional collectives including workshops, studios, publishers, fairs, and printmaking departments, are both an extant and growing strength.

B. Posters

1. The Library acquires selected posters illustrative of political, military, social, economic, industrial and cultural history, including advertising and propaganda, with priority given to documentation of the United States life and history.
2. Posters that are examples of the work of major artists, with priority given to work of United States origin, are sought.
3. The Library acquires selectively the motion picture posters submitted for copyright, augmented by select movie posters, lobby cards, and related materials representing blockbusters, cultural trends, and independent films, motion pictures representing the diversity of the American people, movies with trendsetting special effects, and outstanding examples of genre films. New acquisitions complement the already significant holdings that begin with depictions of the earliest presentations of the motion picture, to serial versions and feature-length silent films and talkies through the emergence of the movie star and the rise of the great Hollywood studios and independent filmmakers.
4. The Library seeks works illustrative of the history of the poster as an art form and as a medium of communication.
5. The Library collects foreign posters that support the research collections and interests of the Library's area studies divisions. The Prints & Photographs Division selectively acquires, for the permanent collections, posters gathered by its Overseas Operations field offices.
6. The Library will acquire digitally distributed posters that fit into the above categories as well as hard-copy posters as appropriate.

C. Artists' drawings

1. The Library selectively collects fine, representative examples of preparatory studies, sketches, and finished drawings prepared for illustrations in American books, magazines, and newspapers that enrich the Library's existing graphic arts collections.

2. Selected drawings that support and are related to the Library's existing collections of fine and historical prints and posters are sought. These include drawings by major printmakers represented in the Library's collections and drawings executed in preparation for or closely relating to prints and posters in the collections.
3. The Library selectively collects drawings for American political and social cartoons and caricatures as documents of public opinion and of the history of visual satire and propaganda. Drawings for foreign political cartoons and caricature drawings of personalities of international prominence will be acquired selectively as documents of the comparative history of visual satire and propaganda. This includes, but is not limited to, political illustration, caricatures, comic strips, sports cartoons, gag cartoons, and illustrations for comic books and graphic novels, and advertising.
4. The Library seeks to document American political, economic and social history through topographical drawings of a scenographic character and other drawings of documentary value as records of American historical events and American urban and rural buildings, structures, and scenery.
5. The Library will acquire digitally created drawings that fit into the above categories as well as hard-copy drawings as appropriate.
6. The Library will not acquire drawings for portraits of American public figures that duplicate the efforts of the National Portrait Gallery. The Library collects drawings of American public figures associated with major court trials.

D. Architectural and engineering drawings and documentation

1. The Library acquires selected original drawings by significant or potentially significant American architects, designers and planners that serve as primary research materials for the study of architecture in the United States, its territories and possessions. The Library will not normally collect detailed engineering drawings, or the entire output of an architect's office. It does attempt to build a documentary collection of drawings and related materials showing the history, monuments, and achievements of architecture and civil engineering in the United States. The emphasis is on buildings other than those erected by the Federal government, since the National Archives and Records Administration is responsible for the building records of the majority of federal structures.
2. In attempting to document the history of architecture, design and engineering, the Library seeks selected measured drawings, photographs, and other documentation of existing, lost and, in some cases, unexecuted buildings; characteristic building types and technologies; historic structures; and the work of notable architects, craftsmen, engineers, landscape architects, urban planners and interior designers active in the United States. These materials include, but are not limited to, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) / Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) / Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS). The Library does not attempt, in general, to build large collections of original engineering or technical drawings, blueprints and specifications. Rather, the Library attempts to coordinate its acquisitions in the field of historic engineering with those of the National Museum of American History in order to avoid duplication.
3. In building a collection of materials associated with the built environment, the Library considers for acquisition selected drawings, photographs, and other documentation of buildings or sites outside the United States representing particular designers, techniques, building types and styles, technical or design innovations, etc., that have had notable impact on work in the United States or were influenced by work in this country.
4. Materials relating to foreign buildings and sites that substantially strengthen or supplement the existing holdings of the Library, or fill notable gaps in the Library's record of the history of architecture in all countries are acquired.

5. For Western architecture before 1800, the Library attempts to coordinate its acquisitions with those of the National Gallery of Art in order to avoid duplication. Similarly, the Library works with the Dumbarton Oaks Library to avoid duplication in the field of garden and landscape architecture.
6. In general, the Library does not endeavor to build large collections of original architectural drawings, blueprints and specifications relating to the construction and building trades, as these fall within the scope of the collections of the National Building Museum.
7. The Library, as part of collaborative efforts to preserve architectural records within architectural archives in the United States, encourages the placement of archives of limited subject or geographical interest in appropriate regional collections.

E. Popular and applied graphic art

1. Particular emphasis is placed on the acquisition of prints that are important pictorial records of the people, history, and culture of the United States and of its present and former territories and possessions. These include views of American buildings, cities, urban and rural sites, people, and events or personalities whose work is of significance or of special importance to the history of the United States, and are acquired on a selective basis.
2. The Library acquires on a selective basis important examples of the ornamental and functional uses of the graphic arts in the United States. The types of materials include, but are not limited to, such ephemera as illustrated sheet music, baseball cards, advertising labels, postcards, trading cards and bank-note engravings. Outstanding examples of foreign works in these categories will be acquired if they can be shown to have influenced developments in or were significantly influenced by American illustration and graphic design.
3. The Library collects foreign prints of historical significance that support the research interests and collections of the Library's various area studies divisions.
4. Works which are of strictly local significance are considered the province of regional repositories. The Library attempts to direct such works to appropriate local institutions.
5. Collections, in most cases, are confined to individually issued prints or series of prints, as distinct from those originally included in books or periodicals. Every effort is made to collect across the spectrum of popular printmaking: woodcuts and wood-engravings, etchings and engravings, lithographs and chromolithographs, and silkscreens, as well as photomechanically and digitally produced prints.
6. In acquiring examples of popular and applied graphic arts, the holdings of other institutions in the Washington area are to be taken into account so that duplication is generally, though not necessarily, avoided. For example, the Library takes care when acquiring portraits of American statesmen and public figures to not duplicate the efforts of the National Portrait Gallery.
7. The Library acquires on a selective basis American and foreign political satires, allegories, and caricatures and other types of political prints from the Reformation period to the present, with an attempt to represent each historical eras and reflect diversity in opinion and creators.

IV. Acquisitions Sources

Graphic arts materials are collected to support the mission of the Library of Congress across the broad spectrum of its collecting areas. The Library accepts gifts and makes purchases of those items which qualify as the best edition of works of art on paper available, both published and unpublished, regardless of fragility and wear and tear due to use and age, if they qualify based on the specific Collecting Policy guidelines above. The Copyright Office states its Best Edition of Published Copyrighted Works for the Collections of the Library of Congress, Circular 7b. While this establishes the ideal practice, in reality most copyrighted Visual Arts works are submitted in a reproductive format as

permitted in circular 40a Deposit Requirements for Registration of Claims to Copyright in Visual Arts Material which is outside the scope of the graphic arts collections of the Library of Congress. In the 21st century, when relatively few artists use copyright registration to control their interest in copyright, the Library of Congress cannot limit to copyright deposit the means by which it acquires graphic arts in order to fulfill its mission.

Increasingly, graphic arts are produced digitally both by file and website. Artists often make their works available online. The Library makes every attempt to collect visual materials in the highest resolution and best format available by the artist or publisher, understanding that it has a role to play in providing access for future generations. For digital works, the Library seeks faithful representation equal in quality to the published version, best edition, or master copy. The preference is to acquire files in the same format as the master copy. The Prints and Photographs Division has already been participating in web archiving activities in anticipation of the day when more of its acquisitions work is done online. Nevertheless, the Library excludes those materials that are reproductions in digital format of those works created originally as drawings or prints.

V. Best Editions and Preferred Formats

For guidance regarding best editions for material acquired via the Copyright Office, see: <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ07b.pdf>.

For guidance regarding recommended formats for material acquired via all other means; e.g., purchase, exchange, gift and transfer, see: <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs>.

For information regarding electronic resources and web archiving, see the following Supplementary Guidelines: <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/electronicresources.pdf> and <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>.

VI. Collecting Levels

The Library of Congress acquires graphic arts selectively within each category as described in the specific Collecting Policy guidelines above. Acquisition is determined by the visual content of the work offered to the Library for gift or purchase, desire not to duplicate the collecting efforts of other local institutions, attempt to fill in gaps in existing holdings, efforts not to replicate existing Library of Congress collections, and the financial cost to the Library in accepting works of art, whether it be financial, spatial, or other.

Level 3

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