“Too Cool for School: Art Zines in Academic Libraries”
by Susan E. Thomas

ARLIS/NA 2012 Conference
Toronto, Canada
March 31, 2012

Part of the panel *Unexpected Legacy Collections: progressive collection policies and practices for zines, minicomics, and alternative presses.*

bag made by The Holster collective, sold at the Art Book Fair, 2010.
Photo by author, used with permission.
Quick Zine Definition, 1930’s-Present

Self-published booklets sold cheaply or traded by individual or small “distro” (distributor); printed material, at least one folded page

Noncommercial, nonprofessional, urgent, unmediated expression

Low tech materials (cheap paper, copy machine, staples), content often detouring cheap methods

DIY ethos: “make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you.” (Stephen Duncombe)

Disruptive Pedagogy?

Students in higher education are making zines.

Students and faculty are studying zines and magazines (See accompanying paper for bibliography published in Zine Studies Fanzine, which was distributed at session)

Zine collections as contemporary primary sources, mysteries to be penetrated, problems to solve, alternative press, art objects, & life changers, even, for some
Slides from Zines from the Borough Presentation

Posted on February 5, 2012 by Alycia Sellie

A few ideas:

- Classes could come to the library to view the collection and to do research (about alternative publications, media, art history, book history, the history of Brooklyn, etc.)
- Zines as portfolio projects—to showcase class work at the end of a semester, etc.
- Zine-making workshops
- Zine Readings, zine-maker visits, etc.
- Information Literacy through zines?
- Brooklyn, as seen through zines and self-publishing

Screen shot from Alycia Sellie’s blog “Zines at the Brooklyn College Library,” published on the CUNY Academic Commons. March 2012. Used with permission.

Slideshow was part of a workshop Sellie conducted for Brooklyn College faculty interested in teaching with zines.
Zines in Curricula

*Bennington College*—Mary Lum “Small Books and Zines: The Sequential Image & Word” and “13 Zines – Research/Drawing/Design” (Drawing)

*Watkins College of Art, Design & Film* *Virginia Allison, guest lecturer in “Book Arts”, “Dada & Special Topics,” “Performance Art”

*Ontario College of Art & Design University*, Fiona Smyth “Nano Publishing—Independent Publications” (Printmaking) and “Graphic Novel Illustration” (Illustration)

*Wellesley College*—*Alana Kumbier, guest, women’s and gender studies classes

*Pratt Institute*, *Susan Thomas, guest, creative writing and artists’ books classes*

*Borough of Manhattan Community College*— *Susan Thomas, guest, “Intro to Color & Design*

*Colorado State University*—Todi Jacobi, “Zine Writing, "Literacy in Gendered Context,” and “Zine Writing as Art”

*indicates librarian instruction
information gathered through informal email queries among friends and colleagues
Zines in Curricula

*Brooklyn College*—*Alycia Sellie, guest, “English 1012” and “American Dreams and Realities” (history)*

*New York City College of Technology*—*Susan Thomas, guest, “Research & Documentation for the Information Age” (Library Science)*

*Barnard College*—*Jenna Freedman, guest, Women’s Studies classes*

*Long Island University Brooklyn*—*Jenna Freedman, guest, “Theories of Feminism”*

*Yale School of Architecture*—*Luke Bulman, “Books in Architecture” (graduate)*

*Woodbury School of Architecture*—*Jessica Varner, “General Survey”*

*University of Alabama*—*Joshua Burford, “Modern Gay America, “Contemporary Queer Culture,” and “Coming of Age in America” (a course about youth culture in the late 20th century)*

*indicates librarian instruction
information gathered through informal email queries among friends and colleagues*
Zines Provide Opportunity & Alternatives

collaborate with other faculty, librarians, or instructors in classrooms, libraries, studios

special collections create opportunities for alternative and creative library instruction (class or workshop)

when libraries establish, develop, manage, and promote print collections, libraries become destinations and points of interest for students, scholars, artists, journalists, alumni, administrators, and donors

Students in a variety of classes can make simple zines; art and design students can make more sophisticated zines or publications

Resulting publications or exhibitions create value for the library and institution

photo from author's zine collection
**Simple Zines:** Covers of zines made by high-school students, part of the “Small Science Zines” project of the *Small Science Collective*, a collaboration of scientists, artists, students, and others interested in science. Students need not be artists to make zines.

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Creative Commons NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 <http://smallsciencezines.blogspot.com/p/zine-library.html>
Michelle Doh's zine, *Fresh Water vs. Bottled Water*, made with one 8.5 x 11 page. Students in a variety of classes could (and do) make simple zines such as this.

But art and design students often take a special interest in zines....

Art & Design Zine Features:

- Made by artist, designer, or architect
- Features illustration (including sequential panels), typography, graphic design, photography, silkscreen, and, lately, risograph
- by hand: screened, illustrated, collaged, punched, stamped, cut, torn, sewn, die cut, signed
- Subject matter conceptual, appropriation, assemblage-- or about art, design, and architecture
- not “perzines,” fanzines, or explicitly political zines (most zines are)
- Cost more than most zines (but less than most artists’ books)
- Not usually available for trade
Good example of a contemporary art zine. Notice how description includes both “zine” and “artist book.”
Image used with permission of Ooga Booga. www.oogabooga.com
Art & Design Zines vis-à-vis Artists’ Books

• Open editions or large, numbered editions
• reproducible
• 2-dimensional, not sculptural
• resemble or even directly engage with early conceptual artists’ books and magazines
• cost less than most artists’ books
  (but more than most zines)
• Available from book stores, specialized stores, as well as galleries
• I.D. by maker or seller as “zine” or “fanzine”


images used with permission of artist.
spreads from zine and artist’s book

images used with permission of the artist.
Zine-y-ness of Independent Art, Architecture, and Design Magazines

- No ISBN/ ISSN No Problem
- none or little advertising (and ads are often standardized)
- often thematic
- irregular size or shape
- irregular publication schedule, if any
- may be no masthead
- subscription may not be available
- Very popular with students
Mousse Issue 30 . Cover image used with permission.

Graphic magazine #4. Cover image used with permission.
Zoetrope: All-Story magazine, vol. 15 no. 3. Designed by Rodarte. Each issue is designed by a guest artist or designer. Image used with permission.

A Public Fiction magazine, issue #1, “The Church Issue.” Cover image used with permission.
The magazine features an extended interview with one artist in each issue. Its small shape and modest price make it zine like. Image used with permission.
This survey of experimental art and design magazines published since 2000 explores the various ways in which contemporary artists and designers utilize the magazine format as an experimental space for the presentation of artworks and text. Throughout the 20th century, international avant-garde activities in the visual arts and design were often codified first in the informal context of a magazine or journal. This exhibition, drawn from the holdings of the MoMA Library, follows the practice into the 21st century. The works on view represent a broad array of international titles within this genre, from community-building newspapers to image-only photography magazines to conceptual design projects. The contents illustrate a diverse range of image-making, editing, design, printing, and distribution practices. There are obvious connections to the past lineage of artists’ magazines and little architecture and design magazines of the 20th century, as well as a clear sense of the application of new techniques of image-editing and printing methods. Assembled together, these contemporary magazines provide a first-hand view into these practices and represents the MoMA Library’s sustained effort to document and collect this medium.
Student input regarding a periodicals collection. These are comments Pratt Institute students wrote in sample copies of Permanent Food, Tin House, and Thrasher in 2004. Librarians considered student input when making subscription decisions.
The Pop magazine, 2009, partially art directed by Murakami. Issue included “bookzine” insert (Cover on Right): The zine consists of photographs of Cindy Sherman photographed in Chanel couture, including historical pieces.
Screenshot from *Plazm* website. For only $200 a library could acquire this box set of back issues of the design magazine *Plazm* (as well as assorted ephemera). This is a great opportunity to make an inexpensive acquisition that will not be duplicated by another library, it seems. Screenshot used with permission.

**The Plazm Collector's Box**

A limited edition set – 50 boxes total

All remaining back issues of Plazm magazine packaged in a custom silkscreened box. Weighs over 20 pounds!

Includes approximately 20 early Plazm handbills, flyers, and assorted ephemera, 4 posters, a Plazm T-shirt and the following issues of Plazm magazine:

#30, #26, #24, #22, #21, #20, #19, #18, #17, #16, #14, #12, #11, #10, #09, #08, #07, #06, #05, #04, #03, #02

$199.00 - Add to cart
Zines as
- works of art
- material in work
- art practice
Example of a periodical zine, *KnitKnit*, founded by artist Sabrina Gschwandtner.

screenshot used with permission.

*KnitKnit*, an artist’s publication dedicated to the intersection of traditional craft and contemporary art, was founded in 2002 by artist Sabrina Gschwandtner.

KnitKnit issues 1–7 with their limited edition covers are now included in the permanent collections of the Fine Arts Library, Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, the New York Public Library, and The Museum of Modern Art. New York—anyone can make an appointment with those institutions to read the KnitKnits there.

Table of contents for each issue, and information about contributors and events (KnitKnit receptions, film and video screenings, art shows) can be found here.

KnitKnit has been included in art exhibitions at the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam), KickArts Center of Contemporary Arts (Australia), the Bureau Gallery (Salford, England), Art in General (New York), ThreeWalls (Chicago), Ambrosino Gallery (Miami), Triple Base Gallery (San Francisco), Gavin Brown’s Enterprise at Fasserby (New York), Visionaire Gallery (New York), Contemporary Art Centre (Vilnius, Lithuania), Confederation Centre Art Gallery (Prince Edward Island), the Illingworth Kerr Gallery (Calgary, Canada) and Youngblood Gallery (Atlanta).

The *KnitKnit* book was published in September 2007.
Cover of *KnitKnit* #5, featuring a crocheted band. *KnitKnit* zine ran for 7 issues (1-7).
American Photography #1 zine by Nick Relph, purchased at Art in General gallery in NYC. Sold in conjunction with group exhibition that included photographs by Relph. Each page in zine is a flawed Google Book Scan, including this manipulated cover art. Pink gloved hand is the scanner’s; other hands are the artist’s, it appears. Image used with permission of artist.
American Photography #1 spread. Google Logo slightly visible to right of pink gloves on both pages. Image used with permission of artist.
another spread from “American Photography #1”. Page on left is about importance of focusing in photography!
Running Amok Zine Issue 25-Kelly Lynn Jones by Kelly Lynn Jones

Yay I have a zine out! This one was made by the lovely folk over at Analogue Books. I am Issue 25, you should check out the other issues they have, some great artists! http://www.runningamok.co.uk
Published by Analogue Books, July 2008 24 pp, Softcover, stapled, b & w, comes in an edition of 100, all numbered. These drawings were from my sketchbook. Most of them were small studies for paintings.

$5

add to cart

More from this Artist

Zine by Kelly Lynn Jones: Example of artist utilizing zine form in practice: drawings from artist’s sketchbook, most were studies for paintings. Screenshot from Little Paper Planes used with permission.
The Holster art collective participated at the NYC Zine Fest 2009 and made zines on demand. The project continues at other book fairs.

The exhibit/event includes the mechanics of production, further emphasizing the zine’s simplicity while concurrently showcasing the object’s production as a performative act.

“The zine one receives at the end is an object imbued with care and love, something not typically found in other staple bound collections of paper.” (paraphrase and quote from the Holster website)

Poster image used with permission.
Covers of various zines published by The Holster. Screen shot used with permission.
Zincs as
- Subjects of exhibitions
- Exhibition catalogs
- Exhibition "take aways"
photo of ARCHIZINES exhibition at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (2011). The exhibition of contemporary independent publishing about architecture and the built environment is traveling and currently installed at Storefront for Art & Architecture in NY, NY, May 2012.

photo credit Sue Barr / The AA School
Cover (upper left) and spreads from Archizines, the exhibition catalog. Photo from Preston is My Paris blog. Used with permission. Archizines is a unique source book about contemporary architecture small press and self-publishing.
Published in celebration of the Baby Geisha launch at Spoonbill & Sugartown, Brooklyn, 2012. the CANYONS contains a selection of my first poems, circa early 1990s, plus one new text, "Little Migrants." The images are selections from my flowering plant photo collection amassed during my travels through California, New England, and the Southwest. the CANYONS will be disassembled and reconfigured, eventually, into a botanically accurate photographic herbarium / field guide.

Cut-ups and illustrations are borrowed from The Mysteries of Sedona by Tom Donge, a book I bought during an early 1990s camping trip through northern Arizona. After hauling this dubious pamphlet around for two decades, it seemed fitting to slice it up in anticipation of the end of the 13th Mayan baktun.

Trinie Dalton’s The Canyons. covers and artist’s statement from page one. Used with permission.

This exhibition of historical zines emphasized a particular zine network from the 1990’s. Each of the zines in the exhibit was traded with one of Larned’s zines in the 1990’s as well as with at least two others included in the exhibit.

Screenshot published with permission.

Created for a zine exhibition about 90s zine trading networks I curated at Asheville Bookworks, North Carolina, open from May 28 - July 7, 2011. The front (poster side) of the exhibition guide shows all zines in the exhibition as well as a map of their trading relationships, as inferred from interviews and published zine reviews. If you'd like to investigate more closely, you are welcome to download a copy of the guide. If your zine is included in the show and you didn't receive a hard copy in the mail, email me your address and I'll send you one! Thanks to all zinesters who participated, and to Asheville Bookworks for hosting the show. 

2011, 11x17 in unfolded, unlimited edition
Amy Sillman’s exhibition at Sikkema Jenkins Gallery, 2010, “Transformer—or how many lightbulbs does it take to change a painting?” included the zine, The O-G, vol. 3, for sale for $1.00. Image of spread used with permission of artist.
The credits page from the zine, which includes a poster and CD-ROM (itself an art project). Image used with permission.
The Zine Unbound: Kults, Werewolves, and Sarcastic Hippies, catalog of an exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, Oct. 6-Dec. 30, 2005. Packaged in a hand sewn and silk screened folder, the catalog is composed of many discrete parts including a perfect bound book with photographs of the exhibit, the artists, and their works as well as essays; print set; CD; announcement card; and pamphlet stapeled into the cover, featuring work from fifteen artists in the exhibition.

Photo by author, taken at 6 Decades Books in NY, NY. Used with permission.
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Etsy (*great place to find artists who might not be part of urban networks or connected by an art school*)
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Thank You for Looking and Reading!

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please contact me with questions or comments—and if you are teaching with zines or magazines at all, I would like to hear from you.

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Bins at 6 Decades Books in NY, NY. Photo by author. Used with permission.