

As easy as 1, 2, 3: A system for organizing artists' books

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Introduction

Pushing the boundaries of the form and definition of the book, artists' books come in a vast array of shapes and sizes that can be challenging to store and access. At Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries' Special Collections and Archives, a system of organizing artists' books according to size and accession has made it easy to organize, preserve, and access its growing collection of artists' books.

The system

VCU groups artists' books into four size categories that are housed in distinct locations.

Ones consist of zines, pamphlets, and slim volumes that can be housed individually in archival folders within document boxes.

Twos are book volumes that can be shelved upright with their spines facing out.

The collection

The VCU Book Art Collection was established in 1979 through a collaborative effort between School of the Arts faculty and the visual arts librarian. Today, it consists of over 4,000 items and is strongest in publications from the 1960s to the present. The collection encompasses all aspects of contemporary artists' publications, from photobooks to hand-made artists' books. The collection is open to all users for research, education, and inspiration.

Threes are three-dimensional books of all sizes housed in custom enclosures and archival boxes.

Fours are oversized items, generally housed in large archival boxes.



Storage

Twos are housed together on standard book shelving. **Ones**, **Threes**, and **Fours** occupy shelves that are designed for archival collections. Within each size category, items are shelved in numerical order.

Cataloging and access

Items in each size category are assigned unique accession numbers instead of Library of Congress call numbers. The first artists' book accessioned in the **One** size category has the call number 1-1. The most recent accession is 1-2800. Similarly, the first artists' book in the **Three** category is 3-1 and the most recent accession is 3-415. As new items are cataloged, they are assigned the next accession number in their size category and shelved in order of acquisition.

A bar code is affixed to the enclosure or archival book tag for each item so that it can be scanned for tracking and use statistics.