

Oral History as Care: Preserving Memories & Maintaining Stakeholder Relationships

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Context

Bill Hutson (b. 1936), also known as William R. Hutson, is an abstract fine artist living and working in Lancaster, PA. Hutson is currently the Jennie Brown Cook and Betsy Hess Cook Distinguished Artist-in-Residence at Franklin & Marshall College, where he also taught in the Art & Art History Department. Hutson's work has been exhibited and collected internationally, and he donated a major portion of his work to the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin & Marshall College, as well as books, manuscripts, and archival records to the College Library.

Over the course of his time at F&M, Hutson has spent much time involved in classes, speaking to students about his work informally, and it was noted by many parties that a formal oral history with Hutson would complement and further expand the College's holdings of his work. It was determined that the College Library would be a natural partner in this endeavor, falling under the purview of the Research & Visual Arts Librarian.

Process

Initial Stakeholder Meeting, including Museum & Library staff and Hutson, to discuss project goals and outcomes.

Over twenty hours of archival research, focusing on records of Hutson's teaching and artistic career.

Development of custom permissions form.

New equipment was ordered and tested.

Oral history interviews began, with a structured set of questions developed by Boutin-Cooper, and shared with Hutson in advance.

After interviews commenced, the transcription process began.

Resources

Leavy, Patricia. *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*. USA: Cary Oxford University Press, 2014.
Richie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

Intersections: Best Practice v. Praxis

Best Practice: Have present at the interview the interviewee and the interviewer (Ritchie, 49).

Praxis: Present at these interviews were two additional project team members: Lindsay Marino and Brianna Gormly. Marino served as an expert and representative from the Museum, helping Bill to recall dates and events, and Gormly served as the technical expert, managing the recording equipment.

Best Practice: Preparation in advance of a question list, for the interviewee to use (Ritchie, 74 & Sommer and Quinlan, 63).

Praxis: This best practice was followed, as Hutson himself also requested a question list to follow.

Best Practice: When interviewing outside of one's own race, gender, and age, demonstrate respect and a thorough preparedness for the interview (Sommer and Quinlan, 87 & Ritchie, 91).

Praxis: This best practice was followed.

Lessons Learned

Comfort of the interview subject is key. If measures to do so go against established best practices, carefully weigh your options.

Identify and work in concert with key stakeholders, looking beyond your immediate area of involvement.

Fillers are incredibly difficult to avoid, but try to do so for your own sake - especially if you're the one transcribing.

Acknowledgements

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2018

August

Boutin-Cooper starts position as Research & Visual Arts Librarian.

November

Meetings begin in preparation for project.

2019

January

Project starts: research phase in A&SC, testing equipment, initial stakeholder meeting.

March

First oral history interview with Hutson takes place.

May

Transcription process begins, continues throughout 2019.

July

Seventh and final oral history interview with Hutson takes place.

August

Colleague Jenn Buch begins assisting with transcription.

2020

April

Transcription process ongoing, nearing completion.