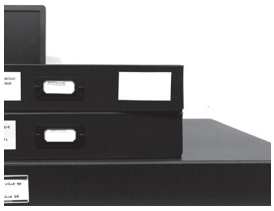

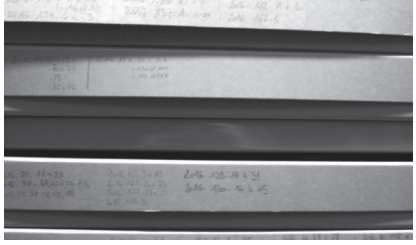

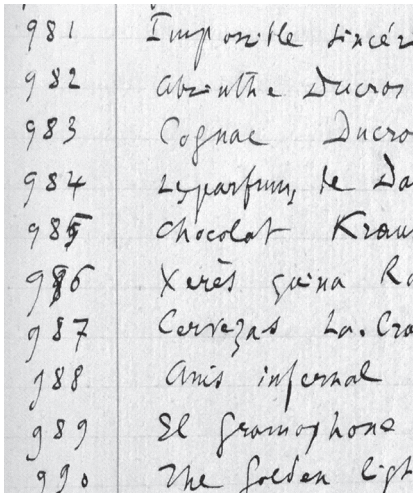
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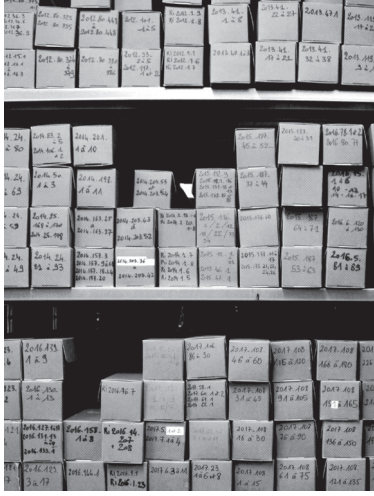

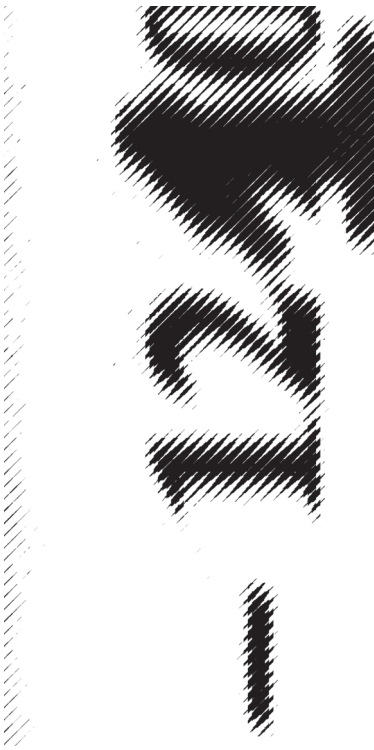

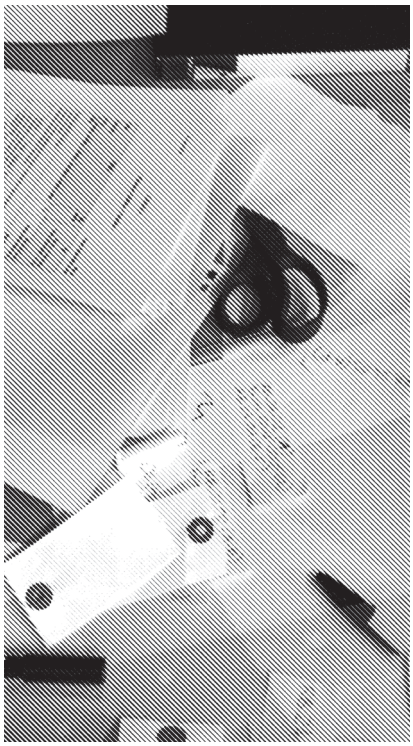

Caroll Maréchal

Graphic design collections in public institutions in France. History and practices

PhD thesis under the direction of Valérie Tesnière
École des hautes études en sciences sociales
(School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences)

Abstract

This doctoral dissertation looks at the recent constitution of graphic design collections in several French public institutions. It aims to study the historical conditions of the collecting of graphic designers' production and to analyse the practices of acquisition and documentation of these objects. Throughout the 20th century, graphic design was represented in French collections, mostly either as an applied and industrial art (printing museums, graphic arts library, etc.), and/or through the poster, which constitutes a genre in its own right. Graphic productions are thus found in various places such as museums, libraries, archives or regional and national contemporary art collections. Over the past ten years, several institutions have been pursuing a proactive acquisition strategy for graphic design, moving away from the poster medium alone to embrace all the elements produced by this practice. Confronted with these objects, which have long been considered from a documentary perspective, and sometimes still are, this work questions the representations that both the professionals in the conservation institutions and the graphic designers themselves have of these objects by examining the relationships and interactions between a professional practice—graphic design—and the practices through which this field is apprehended in the places where it is conserved. An investigation carried out at the Centre national des arts plastiques (National Center for Visual Arts) makes it possible to describe the operations of collecting, organising and cataloguing this field. Based on the materiality of the representations, it reveals the difficulties of naming, classifying, and reporting that these objects generate, while explaining the criteria of choice and selection, the ways of legitimizing, and the trajectories of these objects with a shifting status (work of art, document, archives).

Keywords: collection, museum, library, archives, graphic design, graphic designers, graphic design history, decorative arts, museum studies, material culture.

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