

The Curator's Toolkit

Artifact Lab

Session 5: Archives and Collective Memory

Learning Objectives

- Consider how scholars use archival source materials to arrive at conclusions about history—and how the stewards of archives and other collections *actively construct and shape* historical interpretation.
- Become familiar with The Rosenbach's largest (non-institutional) archival collection: the Marianne Moore Papers, and gain insights into how researchers have employed it.

Artifact Selection

Set 1: Moore Collection Artifacts – *Eric Williams*

- Box 25
- Box 31
- Box 32
- Box 48

Set 2: Scrapbook – *Thi Phan*

- Papers of Marianne Moore Series X:05 scrapbook, [1913-1914].

Set 3: Personal Correspondence – *Jordan Rothschild*

- Papers of Marianne Moore Series V: General Correspondence Box 65.
- Papers of Marianne Moore Series VI: Family Correspondence Box 20, 1914 [Letter dated January 15, 1914, beginning "I have solved..."].

Set 4: Volumes from the Marianne Moore Library, and Typescript of Moore's Memoir – *Frances Dilworth*

- Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963). MML 0668.

- Langston Hughes, *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers: An Anthology from 1899 to the Present* (Boston: Little, Brown, [1967]). MML 0667.
- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, c.1970), MML 0960.
- Marianne Moore Papers Series V: General Correspondence – Box 29
- Marianne Moore Papers Series III: Book Manuscripts – Box 4, Folder 19, pages 42-44 [refer to pages 116 – 120 of *Holding On Upside Down* for some context]

Set 5: Poetical Works – Tara Kenney

- Series I: Poetry – Box 1, A-E

Set 6: Poetical Works – Aaya Kingsbury

- Series I: Poetry – Box 2, F-L

Set 7: Prose Works – Janine D. Lieberman

- Series II: Prose – Box 8, Interviews and Broadcasts
- Series II: Prose – Box 10, The Dial

Set 8: Book Manuscripts – Nicholle J. Thery-Williams

- Series III: Book Manuscripts, Box 1
- Series III: Book Manuscripts, Box 2

Set 9: Photographs from the Moore Papers – Mary Holman

- Series XII: 16 MM photos: MM w/celebrities (1)
- Series XII: 17 MM Photos: MM w/celebrities

Set 10: Photographs from the Moore Papers – Ellen O'Neill

- Series XII: 18 MM Photos: Cecil Beaton et al.
- Series XII: MM Photos Box 24 Marianne Moore photo wallet

Set 11: Marianne Moore Room Scavenger Hunt – Gage Johnston

- Venture into the Marianne Moore Room with Registrar Jobi Zink and choose up to 5 (easily-transportable) objects in the room to bring to class, and discuss what they may reveal about Moore, her life, and her work.

Directions

(Prior to beginning the Lab, Alexander Ames will provide guidance on the purpose of the activity, and Librarian of The Rosenbach Elizabeth E. Fuller will offer perspectives on how Reading Room researchers have made use of the Marianne Moore materials in years past.)

Sit down with your selection of archival materials and explore the contents of your set. Answer the questions at the end of this handout. Your goal is not to find anything specific in the set of materials, or even to understand exactly how they fit into the life story and literary work of Marianne Moore. Rather, your aim here is to imagine how scholars (like you!) use primary sources like these to study, and construct narratives about, history and literature. How would you set about analyzing, interpreting, and writing about these sources if you were undertaking a major research project about Marianne Moore?

The class has been provided with a number of copies of Linda Leavell's groundbreaking, award-winning book *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.). While the majority of your time in this Artifact Lab should be spent reviewing your archival materials and considering the questions, feel free to consult the book if you have questions about the context of your archival selection, and to get a sense of how a scholar has worked with this very large collection of papers. This book will provide a wonderful example of how primary sources get "processed" and interpreted by scholars.

Following +/- 30 minutes spent with your materials, each class member will be invited to report out to the group about the contents of their selection and some of the questions they considered. We will then draw broad conclusions about the nature of archives, scholarship, and collective memory.

Think of this Artifact Lab as working together as a class on assembling a huge puzzle consisting of tens of thousands of tiny pieces. You're not going to see the whole picture just from your set of materials, but you'll begin to sense how an historian assembles a narrative using these sorts of sources and through laborious, thoughtful, passionate research.

Interrogating the Archive

Research Questions

1) What is the condition of the material? Are the materials safely housed and in good-enough condition to handle? What constraints and safety measures should you practice while handling the materials? (Do you need to wear gloves?)

2) How is the material organized, if at all? Whom do you think created this organizational mechanism?

3) Is Marianne Moore the sole creator of the materials in your set? What other people may have been involved of the creation of the materials—*both* the physical artifacts themselves and their intellectual contents?

4) From what era in the life and work of Marianne Moore do these materials date? What time span is covered by the materials you've selected?

5) What components of Moore's life and work are covered in your selection? (That is, does your set of material focus on correspondence, literary manuscripts, etc.?) If you have an electronic device handy, log on to The Rosenbach's Moore Papers Collection Guides to get a sense of where these items figure in the archives: <https://rosenbach.org/research/catalogs-databases/>. Note that the Moore Library and objects are not covered in the Collections Guides, but you can search many of those items via the Phil and Rosy online databases.

6) How would this material be of use to a literary scholar studying Marianne Moore's work? To an historian studying Moore's place in American life? (Refer to Linda Leavell's book *Hanging On Upside Down* as a starting point for reflection.)

7) If you are working with a set of material that doesn't fit into traditional archival categories, such as volumes from Moore's library or 3D objects, do you think these items are important in understanding Moore's life? Why or why not? How might these materials be used in a book, article, or exhibition to interpret Moore's life?

8) What questions are left unanswered from looking at your set of materials? In other words, what topics and information are you encountering that would require follow-up research?