

# COLLECTIVE DESCRIPTION:

A Knowledge Exchange for Printmakers, Information Professionals and Subject Specialists at Emily Carr University of Art + Design

## RESEARCH TEAM

Ana Diab - Collections, Reference + Instruction Librarian (ECU)  
 Beth Howe - Associate Professor Print Faculty (ECU)  
 Kristy Waller - Archivist (ECU)  
 Marina Morrison - Research Assistant (ECU)  
 Eavan McNeil - Research Assistant (UBC)

## AFFILIATIONS

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## COLLECTIVE DESCRIPTION WEBSITE

<https://demoblog.ecuad.ca/collectivedescription/>

## INTRODUCTION

As of 2017, the Wosk Print Collection, comprised of a series of donations from 2000-2012, came under the purview of the ECU Library + Archives. The collection includes works by well known artists such as Goya, Rembrandt, Miro, Cézanne and Dali, among many others. It was always intended to be a teaching collection, where students and faculty can physically interact with the prints, with the hope that they could be integrated into printmaking curriculum. Our initial questions were: **What information do printmakers and artists need to search the collection and what do information professionals need to manage the collection? How can these two perspectives work together to increase meaningful access - both online and in-person?**

## OBJECTIVE

In order to begin to address these questions we needed to host an interdisciplinary gathering. We were successful in securing a SSHRC Connections grant, that helped shape the work and fund a colloquium. The project seeks to exist within a collaborative framework of care by resisting the expectation to steward materials for preservation; moving away from the western collecting paradigm towards caring and collaborative interactions with prints. Not just seeing the materials from afar but using them to tell stories, teach and learn together, not only through access and curriculum but in the everyday management of the prints. The colloquium provided an opportunity for students and participants to engage with the print collection and to voice their own research needs, influencing how the collection will be interacted with in future. Our goal was for participants to leave the colloquium with new perspectives to incorporate into their practices, having had space to think critically about the intersections of research, artistic practice and metadata/information. We would like the ECU print collection to be a case study that can be applied in other settings.

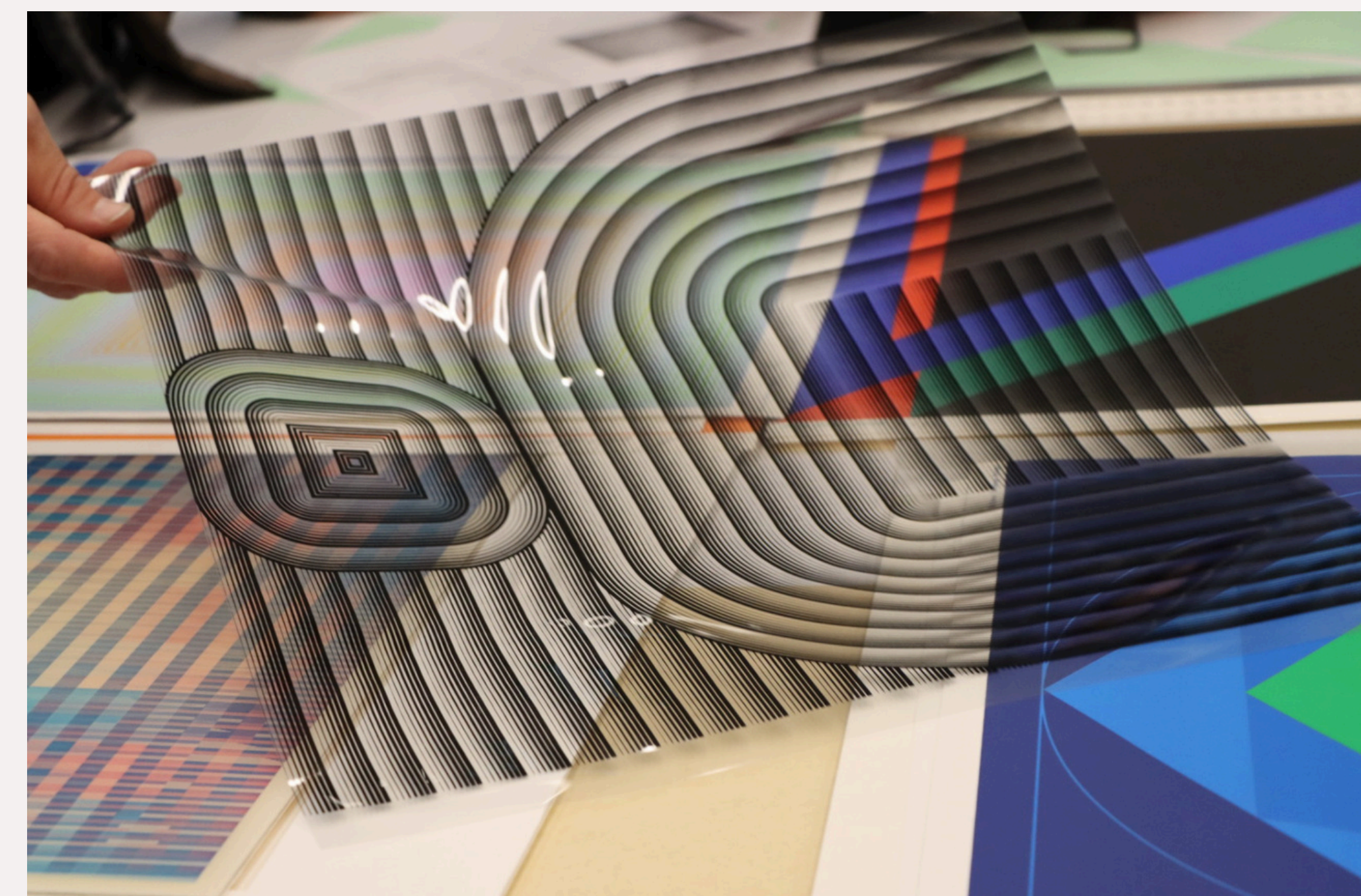
## COLLOQUIUM

Printmakers, curators, collections managers, librarians and archivists were invited to come together and work with the print collection for a two day colloquium.

**DAY 1:** Collection orientation, print shop tour, guest speakers (Emma Metcalfe Hurst, Catherine Jacob, Jillian Forsyth, April Dean) shared non-textual archives activation initiatives in order to learn from current practices/projects across fields.

**DAY 2:** Three workshops - **Workshop One** had interdisciplinary groups describe and discuss a group of prints using their own disciplinary analysis and viewpoints.

**Workshop Two** narrowed this work and participants annotated the current record, providing dream fields, subject terms and creating an alt text. **Workshop Three** asked the groups to select prints for a responsive exhibition, and create collaborative descriptions to accompany them.



## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Gaining an understanding of each other's labour.** Hearing from printmakers allowed us to see prints in a new way: as layers of images applied to create a final piece, and as part of a larger grouping of works that are distributed separately. In turn, printmakers discovered the labour that goes into creating an archival record for a work of art, and the limitations of systems we use.
- Managing sensitive content in prints.** Through discussions that followed the presentations on reparative description and Local Context labels, we gained understanding in how printmakers are thinking about access to collections that include potentially harmful content.
- Terminology and display.** We found there were limitations to the existing vocabulary to describe prints in our database and the Getty Thesaurus. The printmakers were interested in visual display that shows meaningful connections based on theme, content, process, technique, and creators, and allowed for serendipitous discovery of new artists through linking authority records and discipline specific keywords.
- Accessibility and alt text:** Not only does alt text provide an avenue for more accessible interaction, it also allows for a place to put descriptive words that can become searchable. It improves access for everyone.
- More brains are better!** Getting everyone's perspective was integral in understanding how researchers want to search for prints. It also helped us connect with our community and build new connections, fostering a better understanding across disciplines and institutions.

## NEXT STEPS

- An exhibition in Fall 2024 of prints chosen and collaboratively described by the participants. The exhibition will invite further collaboration through interactive elements asking viewers to add keywords, alt text, contextual information and general impressions of the works on display.
- A publication will follow to share out our findings, documentation,
- Migrating all of the print collection records from Arca into AtoM. This will include creatively using fields to implement what we learned from the colloquium and exhibition, including the addition of alt text, new vocabularies, links to contextual works/materials, authority records, links to library materials.

## ALT TEXT EXAMPLE



Mother and child with wave background III (YW124)  
 Henry Moore (1976)  
 colour lithograph

**"Grey-green tonal landscape lithograph on white paper. The background features undulating lines like waves. A group of clustered figures with obscured features form a shape in the bottom left corner."**