Library Resources as Inspiration: Using Artists' Books to Prompt New Choreography

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Library resources are regularly used by dancers studying topics across a broad range of topics such as dance history, dance medicine, dance and social issues, and others. But what about the actual act of creating dance? Is the library able to be part of this personal process? This article discusses how a graduate dance choreography class interacted with artists' books in the UCI Libraries Special Collections as part of an assignment to create new 2-min dance pieces. As the students explored these unique resources, they were able to learn more about these new-to-them materials and use both their formats and contents to inspire choreography in ways that they had not previously experienced. Later, they presented their new pieces in their studio after presenting what they had learned from their chosen book, why they had connected with it, and how it inspired their new work. In addition to describing the project and its outcomes, this article also explores how librarians and library resources can be part of the creative process and how this should be part of information literacy education.

Keywords: Artists' books; dance; choreography; information literacy; inspiration

Where do ideas for dance come from? From many sources: experience from life itself, music, drama, legend, history, psychology, literature, ritual, religion, folklore, social conditions, fantasy; and from such vague promptings as moods, impressions. And special interests, such as technical aspects of a theory of movement, comment on styles of dances or other arts, theatrical effects, or even abstract sources: line, color, shape, dynamics, rhythm.[1]

—Doris Humphrey

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1. Doris Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959), 32.

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As Doris Humphrey writes in her seminal choreography book, choreographers can be and are influenced by a wide range of elements as they create new dance works. They can use information sources that come from so many different fields that it can be difficult for the librarian to know how to anticipate their information needs. The process of one artist is probably very different from another's. What influences someone now might not be influential later and certainly might not resonate with the creative sensibilities of someone else. Through discussions between the performing arts librarian and dance faculty to get to know one another and what drives us, this conundrum was slightly cracked by bringing library resources into the choreographic process of MFA Dance students at the University of California, Irvine (UCI).

About one hour south of Los Angeles, UCI is a large research university close to beautiful beaches and Disneyland. The university is home to almost 36,000 students and over 19,000 faculty and staff. The Dance Department at UCI, part of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, has approximately 175 students, including both undergraduate and graduate students, who are taught by approximately 20 full-time faculty. Dance forms regularly studied include ballet, modern, jazz, tap, hip-hop, and a variety of other dance forms from around the world. There is a strong interest in the intersection of dance and technology, as well as critical issues in dance that explore a wide array of interdisciplinary approaches.

Supporting more than 85 different majors across campus, the UCI Libraries is a large research library with over 4.5 million physical volumes, 200,000 audio-visual materials in a multitude of formats, 2.5 million e-books, and a plethora of digital and print subscriptions to periodicals and databases. Part of a team of about 150 librarians and staff, I am the Research Librarian for Performing Arts and work with the Dance, Drama, and Music Departments, as well as supporting other scholars across campus whose work intersects in various areas of performance. In my 10 years at UCI, I have worked closely with various faculty in the Dance Department to support their own research and pedagogy, as well as with students—most especially those in the MFA program; however, the majority of my work has been with the faculty and students in support of dance history, individual thesis research, and other more text-based activities, rather than with those who primarily work in the studio.

Our Special Collections and Archives is home to a wide range of archives, special collections, and rare books primarily in the areas of critical theory, Orange County history, performing arts, political literature, and the Southeast Asian diaspora, as well as over 1000 artists' books. Artists' books, unique materials broadly defined as "any work of original art created in the book format," are rich sources of both visual and literary information.[2] These unique

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2. Johanna Drucker, "Artists' Books," in *Grove Art Online*, ed. Sonya Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2220480.

materials are as varied as literal eggshells inscribed with poetry and hung from yarn to a small backpack filled with watercolor paintings and diaries to a 12-ft-long accordion folded book. We primarily focus on collecting artists' books that engage with politics, sexuality, gender, or environmentalism and are created by Latinx, Asian/Asian American, or female artists. They are regularly studied by classes in the Departments of Art and Art History, along with various other humanities classes, most especially Humanities Core—a year-long undergraduate, research- and writing-focused class sequence that is taught by a team of interdisciplinary faculty who focus their instruction and discussion on the study of cultural artifacts (i.e., learning through the study of primary sources). Traditionally though, they have *not* been used by classes in the performing arts until Dance Professor Lisa Naugle[3] and I talked in 2017 about how the library could support her MFA choreography seminar. Little did we both know, this conversation that Prof. Naugle initiated would result in MFA dance students using artists' books to inspire the creation of new pieces of choreography—and a new way for us to approach information literacy for the artistic creator.

Preshow Talk: Examining the Field

This literature review will focus on two main themes: information literacy for creativity and to inspire the creation of new works and artists' books as pedagogical tools.

Information Literacy and Creativity

Much of the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature centered on information literacy tends to be focused on innovative ways to teach research skills and critical thinking mindsets that facilitate learners' ethical use of information as they enter into the scholarly conversation. When discussing the creation of "new knowledge"[4]—an integral part of the Framework for Information Literacy's (hereafter, Framework) definition of information literacy—the scholarship generally focuses on the creation of text-based information like articles, books, and book chapters. The LIS literature much less frequently examines the creation of

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3. Naugle's choreography pedagogy regularly prompts her students to work outside of the traditional studio. She typically has her students work with site-specific exploration to better explore space, scale, and depth, as well as other similar ways to step away from the Marley floor.

4. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," Association of College & Research Libraries (2015), https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

non-text-based information even though this is a significant part of the research created by performing and visual artists.

While Dane Ward was reacting to the Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning,[5] a now superseded way of thinking about information literacy, his views about our profession's need to have a more comprehensive view of information are still captivating.[6] He posits that "growth in reflection and self-knowledge…is just as important as critical thinking to the development of information literacy."[7] Ward urges librarians to "teach this other side of information," and to help our users "imagine or create mental images in response to information."[8] Cait Peterson ties together psychology and LIS research by examining how people find inspiration. She acknowledges that "for many years, the library and information science literature mainly explored purposive, problem-driven, active searching, but there is a growing interest in passive, non-directed information behaviour."[9]

Randy Burke Hensley includes curiosity and creativity as important attributes of information literacy.[10] He believes that these attributes cannot be taught, but that they "can be fostered by providing a rich environment that asks why and embraces problems."[11] In a similar vein and specifically celebrating the more fluid nature of the Framework, Mark Dahlquist uses the phrase "information creativity" to describe how libraries can more actively leverage their expertise and collections to support the development of students' inquiry into resources, rather than solely using them to answer immediate questions at hand. Dahlquist suggests that information creativity practices could include activities like "the pursuit of nonresearch [sic] projects with creative orientations, such as artistic or reflective projects" and "experiential or surprising encounters with things, such as rare print materials."[12] An interview by Jean-Michel Lapointe with Trudi Jacobson and Craig Gibson—the co-chairs of the Task Force that led to the creation of the Framework—indicates that the Task Force specifically grappled with various interpretations of information literacy when creating this guiding

5. "Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning," Association of College & Research Libraries (1998), https://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslproftools/informationpower/InformationLiteracyStandards_final.pdf.

6. Dane Ward, "Revisioning Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 4 (2006): 396–402.

7. Ward, "Revisioning Information Literacy," 396.

8. Ward, "Revisioning Information Literacy," 398.

9. Cait Peterson, "'Inspiration' and how it is Found: Exploring Psychological and Information Behaviour Theories," *Art Libraries Journal* 45, no. 3 (July 2020): 87.

10. Randy Burke Hensley, "Curiosity and Creativity as Attributes of Information Literacy," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 31–36.

11. Hensley, "Curiosity and Creativity," 33.

12. Mark Dahlquist, "Toward a Framework for Information Creativity," *College & Research Libraries* 84, no. 3 (May 2023): 453.

document for our profession. They state that there were six different "strands" of information literacy that were taken in mind throughout the iterative development process, including "information literacy as liberal art encouraging interdisciplinary understanding."[13]

There is only one article that I have found in the LIS literature that examines the creative process of dancers. Shannon Marie Robinson interviewed a variety of dance faculty to understand their information-seeking behavior. She determines that "performance-based scholars" generally do not use the library "because practitioners do not view the library as a place for inspiration or serendipitous discovery."[14]

With a dearth of LIS literature focused on dance, I next look into resources that examine this topic for artists from other disciplines. There is a corpus of literature focused on information literacy for visual artists, some of which delve into encouraging creativity and inspiring new works. Sarah Carter, Heather Koopmans, and Alice Whiteside wrote a large literature review examining information literacy for artists. They conclude that the Framework encourages librarians to have greater flexibility in their pedagogy that "engag[es] with faculty and students in their processes" instead of focusing on "evaluating the output of creative practices."[15] While detailing the creation of a scaffolded information literacy instruction program for studio art at Oakland University, Katie Greer acknowledges the importance of artists "continually seek[ing] both information and inspiration" as an important part of the creative process.[16] Patrick Lo and Wilson Chu undertook a large survey of artists and designers at the Hong Kong Design Institute to better understand how they interact with information resources as part of their creative process. These artists indicated that they used and were inspired by a wide variety of information resources, leading Lo and Chu to conclude, just like Doris Humphrey expressed in her choreography book, that "many things can become information sources or inspiration for creativity"—not just the books and periodicals that information literacy sessions so frequently center upon.[17]

13. Jean-Michel Lapointe, "Insiders' Perspectives on the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy: An Interview with Trudi Jacobson and Craig Gibson," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 7 (2021): 12.

14. Shannon Marie Robinson, "Artists as Scholars: The Research Behavior of Dance Faculty," *College & Research Libraries* 77, no. 6 (November 2016): 788.

15. Sarah Carter, Heather Koopmans, and Alice Whiteside, "Crossing the Studio Art Threshold: Information Literacy and Creative Populations," *Communications in Information Literacy* 12, no. 1 (2018): 50.

16. Katie Greer, "Connecting Inspiration with Information: Studio Art Students and Information Literacy Instruction," *Communications in Information Literacy* 9, no. 1 (2015): 84.

17. Patrick Lo and Wilson Chu, "Information for Inspiration: Understanding Information-Seeking Behaviour and Library Usage of Students at the Hong Kong Design Institute," *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 46, no. 2 (2015): 115.

Artists' Books as Pedagogical Tools

In 2005, Louise Kulp wrote a literature review about artists' books in LIS literature. In this article, she classifies the existing literature into three categories: collection development, cataloging, and collection use.[18] The literature in the collection use category tends to focus on how these rare materials are cared for and protected (generally from use), rather than how these materials can be used in classroom settings and for other pedagogical purposes. Ten years later, Kulp again wrote about artists' books, but this time entirely focused on how she and her colleagues at Franklin & Marshall College were using artists' books for teaching purposes.[19] In this article, Kulp provides different examples of how these materials were used as part of the coursework in three different classes—a first-year seminar, a photography class, and a French language course. Kulp believes that the use of artists' books in a "liberal arts curriculum" can "effectively teach critical thinking, encourage discovery of interdisciplinary connections, and prompt consideration of relationships between text and image and form."[20]

Laurie Whitehill Chong describes how artists' books have been used at the Rhode Island School of Design in a 2007 article.[21] Her own background as a librarian, fine artist, and bookmaker came together in an effective combination of an art librarian who is able to make connections between the artists' book collection she curated and the faculty and classes she regularly worked with. While providing a high-level overview of the variety of classes she has worked with, she also describes why she believed artists' books are perfect for inspiring the work of artists. She describes the relationship between the artist and book reader as "the viewer tap[ping] into the artist on many levels, as the work is experienced"[22] and concludes that artists' books "provide a vital link to creative possibilities, verbally and physically, for students, faculty and researchers alike."[23]

Similar to Chong, Sara DeWaay wrote about her efforts to incorporate active learning in information literacy sessions centered on artists' books at the University of Oregon.[24] When examining the literature, she identifies an ongo-

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18. Louise Kulp, "Artists' Books in Libraries: A Review of the Literature," *Art Documentation* 24, no. 1 (2005): 5–10.
19. Louise A. Kulp, "Teaching with Artists' Books: An Interdisciplinary Approach for the Liberal Arts," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 34 (Spring 2015): 101–23.
20. Kulp, "Teaching with Artists' Book," 101.
21. Laurie Whitehill Chong, "Making Connections, Creating Dialogues: Artists' Books at Rhode Island School of Design," *Art Libraries Journal* 32, no. 2 (2007): 10–14.
22. Chong, "Making Connections," 11.
23. Chong, "Making Connections," 14.
24. Sara DeWaay, "Using Learning Outcomes to Create Activities for Artists' Books Instruction," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 37 (Spring 2018): 90–103.

ing theme that artists' books were "an ideal tool for library sessions," but that "it is difficult to find examples [in the LIS literature] incorporating active learning into artists' books instruction" because they primarily rely on lectures.[25] The classes she leads were primarily focused on using already existing artists' book as exemplars to create other items in this genre or to practice critical thinking skills that could be applied to artist critiques.

My own use of artists' books falls within Kulp's third identified theme of collection use. Unlike how most of this literature prior to her 2005 literature review focused on preservation, it instead aligns with Kulp's later article, as well as Chong and Dewaay. Chong's philosophy about how artists' books are an excellent type of material to inspire creativity strongly resonates with me, and as will be demonstrated later in this article, also with choreography students.

Act 1: The Project

When Prof. Naugle approached me with the idea of using artists' books from UCI Libraries Special Collections for her graduate choreography seminar, I honestly did not know what to expect. The idea was simple: the MFA choreographers would come to the library for one class period of 80 minutes; explore a curated selection of artists' books to find one or two that they connected with; and then use their notes, photographs, and videos of the books to spark their creativity in the form of an approximately 2-minute dance piece. This assignment would allow them to explore outside of the studio and interact with the work of other artists, particularly examining the materiality, content, shape, scale, color, and texture of the books. Prior to this assignment, I had not previously used artists' books to any great length. I had seen several amazing examples of them at various events over the years, but since they had not had a direct impact on my day-to-day work life, I had filed them into the back of my mind as interesting art objects that I might not ever regularly interact with as part of my work with Dance, Drama, and Music. Thankfully, this project changed that.

To prepare for the class, I spent several afternoons paging through and exploring about one hundred different artists' books in the Special Collections Reading Room. At this stage, I was exploring the collection based on catalog records and recommendations from my colleagues, especially the Research Librarian for Visual Arts and the Education and Outreach Librarian for Special Collections. I paid close attention to the extensive notes that many books had in their catalog records (e.g., "A flag book structure with a circular format wraps

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25. DeWaay, "Using Learning Outcomes," 93.

around and comes together in the shape of a bowl.")²⁶ and some subject headings that help indicate which books might have more unique physical formats (e.g., Flag books [Toy and movable books]; Accordion fold format [Binding]; Found objects). With an artists' books collection comprised of over 1000 objects that all have to be individually paged, I found the descriptions in the catalog records to be a vital part of my exploratory phase of this project. If a book lacked a detailed description, then I chose not to page the item because there were so many other seemingly interesting books that appeared to be better candidates for use in class. As I explored these materials, I became increasingly excited by the prospect of these items being used by choreographers to create new pieces of movement. Each item was unique and wonderful in its own way. Many of them were highly interactive and included moving parts in some form or another—something that I felt would naturally be of interest to dancers.

Ultimately, I chose books to use in class using two main criteria. First and foremost, the books should be physically interesting and present a wide array of binding types (e.g., accordion books, flag books, found objects) and sizes. The other criterion was the subject of the book. I wanted the students to have a selection of books that were aesthetically interesting but also explored subject matters that might be of interest to them. This generally included books that amplified women's stories, explored voices in a wide range of sexualities, or could be relevant to current political discussions, particularly topics related to immigration and climate change.

Rather than provide a complete bibliography of books that we have used (since these items are rare and it is unlikely another library would have the exact same holding), I will instead describe several of the materials that students have been especially drawn to over the few iterations of this class.

- *Estoy queriendo ser otra–* by Yani Pecanins is comprised of a small ironing board, a small electric clothes iron, and multiple pieces of linen. Pecanins embroidered and wrote on the pieces of linen, which have been pinned to the ironing board. The variety of common household-found objects that comprise this book allow one to interact with it in a variety of ways. It is a work that has been chosen by a choreographer each time this project has been assigned.
- *Blessing Bowl* by Linda K. Johnson is a flag book in a circular format that comes together in the shape of a bowl. Johnson has printed a wide assortment of blessings inspired by Buddhism on the flags. The variety of blessings has inspired at least one new piece of choreography.

26. "Blessing Bowl/written and designed by Linda K. Johnson," UC Library Search item record, accessed November 14, 2004, https://uci.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CDL_IRV_INST/17uq3m8/alma991019651669704701.

- *Literary Essences* by Wendy A. Fernstrum is comprised of a few dozen small vials containing paper circles that were punched out from works of literature (one title to each vial). The paper was then scented with a unique perfume that Fernstrum believed represented that piece of literature and, when smelled, can be used to invoke a mindset that could represent the original work of literature.
- *The i of the Storm* by Marshall Weber is a massive book of photographs from a variety of contemporary social protests, such as Occupy Wall Street, the police killing of Eric Garner, the Woman's March after Donald Trump was elected president, and other similar events. Each page is almost 3 feet long, and many become significantly larger due to different fold-down pages. Not only have the photographs inspired students, but the physical movement necessary to turn the pages of such a large item has also entranced several others.

During the class session in the library's classroom, a colleague from Special Collections helped display the books on tables around the room. We moved the majority of furniture to the sides of the room, which allowed a large amount of empty space that the dancers can use to move. Upon first encountering the materials, the students always looked tentative and baffled. Even though Prof. Naugle has told them about their assignment in advance, they never know what to expect. Most of them have moved through this puzzled phase quickly, but a few have had difficulty connecting three-dimensional art objects to movement.

My role in the class session is to facilitate and ease their initial anxiety. If a student just moves from book to book without engaging with any of them, then I ask them what interests them and then lead them to a book or two that might fit. Sometimes, a student immediately makes a connection with a book and they spend almost the entire class time reading and interacting with it; in these instances, I ask them questions about their experience with it and help them critically think about the book's physicality, as well as the social and historical context of the artist, why the book might have been created, and what its message might be. These guiding questions can help the students move beyond first impressions so they can engage with the item on an intellectual, and not just physical, level. Occasionally, my involvement is purely as an assistant, and I flip pages while they make videos to consult later, or I take videos of them interacting with and talking about books so they can attempt to capture their thoughts in the moment to use later as they work on their new pieces of movement.

Generally, one week after their visit to the library, the MFA choreographers present their new pieces in their studio classroom. I always attend this session and bring the artists' books that students chose to inspire their work. Before performing, each student will take several minutes to introduce all of us to the book

they chose. It is interesting to see how each student approaches this in a different manner; some will be very fact-based (e.g., describe the physical aspects of the books), whereas others will dive deep into their emotions (e.g., tell a story about how the book reminded them of something from their childhood). Similarly, when performing their pieces, some students choose music to accompany them, create costumes, give instructions to the viewers on how to interact with them, bring props, or use other methods of expressing themselves.

Act 2: Inspired Movement

Because I have been in class when they talk about the books and their process, I have gained an understanding of the students' thoughts and feelings related to this project. In addition to these in-class discussions, I also spent an hour talking with a recent MFA cohort to better understand their view of this assignment. Overwhelmingly, students were thrilled about this assignment. One described it as a "new portal of creative work."[27] They enjoyed the open-ended nature of this creative process and found the artists' books to be an especially rich source of inspiration due to their unique visual aesthetics, kinesthetic potential, and subject matter. All agreed that using these materials as inspiration opened creative mental pathways that helped them envision complete works, including costumes, music, lighting, and similar creative decisions—not just movement.

The students described the artists' books as "fascinating," "engaging," "multisensory," and other similar terms. In some instances, this led to difficulty in choosing an item or two to focus on for their assignment. Many students felt overwhelmed by the creative possibilities these items opened up for them. Only one student felt they had enough time (in an 80-minute class period) to intimately grapple with their inspirational item; and that was because they were instantly drawn to a single item and spent little time examining others. Most of all other students would spend a few moments with a book before moving on to another, looking for one that would draw them in with both physical and intellectual attributes. While all were happy with the materials they chose, several believed that they would have probably chosen differently if there had been more time.

When I asked the students if using objects to inspire choreography was commonly asked of them, they said that this assignment was fairly unique. A few said that they have been asked to respond to a subject-focused prompt in other classes, but never with objects that they were drawn to so intensely. Echoing

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27. All student quotes in this section come from an in-person discussion with me. The date of this meeting is not being disclosed to better anonymize their participation since their cohorts are quite small.

Doris Humphrey, they indicated that their general creative process is based on various things: some said they keep journals and lists of ideas filled with "personal experiences" that they want to delve into more; others use current events, music, movies, or the time of the year; and some said that "it just comes" depending on their mood and the dancers they are working with at that particular moment. All the students I talked with agreed that they would like to continue using objects like artists' books to inspire other pieces in the future.[28]

Because I am not a dancer or choreographer, I would not comment on the quality of the pieces they presented in class. However, it was clear that almost all students over the years have taken this assignment seriously, have taken time to create more than was required of them, and have a clear line of inspiration from their artists' books to their work. Some students have created costumes—one going so far as to create one out of paper, which was inspired by their artists' books that was a collection of paper clothing for dolls. Several have created interactive pieces: one example, in response to an exquisite corpse-style book, required the audience to select props from a small collection they provided, each of which was correlated with a specific movement they would then perform when they had the item in their possession. The students' enthusiasm and passion have clearly been on display when they presented their chosen item before performing their piece, and the critiques that we were all invited to give after their presentations have generally been quite positive.

Act 3: Expanding Creativity with Information Resources

With these recent experiences using artists' books to inspire new creative works by dancers, it is clear to me that there is a niche to be filled in the information literacy world to use our information sources to not just answer questions, but as prompts to inspire new creative works. As previously documented by Kulp and Chong,[29] artists' books are fertile resources to inspire new creative works. This project is another example of the wide variety of ways that these unique materials can be used in library classrooms. In the same vein as the annual "Dance Your Ph.D." contest sponsored by the journal *Science* and its publisher, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS),[30] this collaboration with

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28. One student from several years ago was so enamored with this project that they reached out to the artist of their chosen book to learn more about their philosophy and working method so that they could react to and incorporate it as part of their inspiration for a larger piece. Other students have told me that this project has inspired at least a portion of the pieces they have presented in large dance concerts here at UCI and also their thesis works.

29. Kulp, "Teaching with Artists' Books"; Chong, "Making Connections."

30. "Announcing the Annual Dance Your Ph.D. Contest," *Science*, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.science.org/content/page/announcing-annual-dance-your-ph-d-contest.

Prof. Naugle was a fun and unique way to use pre-existing, nondance-focused information resources to inspire choreographic works.

The interdisciplinary nature of MFA dancers has already been documented,[31] so I was not surprised at how these student choreographers were particularly drawn in by art objects that have clear social messages. What surprised me was their clear enthusiasm for this project. Unfortunately, I am not a stranger to struggling to engage with classes of undergraduate students—a few of whom will actively participate while the rest pretend like they are not browsing social media throughout class—while helping them learn about the research process in direct support of various written assignments. This project was a direct contrast to that experience, and it was a joy to work with enthusiastic students!

Additionally, this has also served to break down the barrier that can exist between librarians and students. I have noticed that MFA students who have participated in this project have been more likely to contact me later for assistance with their other research needs (e.g., their theses). When asking the students about this, one simply stated that they saw me as a collaborator and someone who was enthusiastic about working with them. It is amazing how a simple perspective shift can make such a strong difference and help bring students and librarians together, which is a main part of the library's mission to support campus research and leverage resources to promote intellectual pursuit and creativity.[32]

In addition to the pleasure of working with students who are engaged and eager, it was also personally fulfilling to be part of the creative process of other artists. Like many performing arts librarians, I have a background in performance, which is something I do not have as much opportunity to engage in any longer. Many of my collaborations with faculty occur with those who are more text-driven (e.g., history, criticism, and theory) and traditionally result in students producing papers. Working with performers as they create art is not as common in my professional world, so the very act of bringing the library into the creative process has been a wonderful experience that I look forward to continuing to explore with Prof. Naugle and other performance-focused faculty at UCI.

While it is gratifying to see our resources be used for any purpose, this project also benefits the choreographers more than by simply exposing them to new forms of art (i.e., artists' books). The students are asked to approach their own artistic process in a manner that pushes them into new areas of creativity. This could be useful someday: perhaps they will be commissioned to create a new dance that is inspired by a data infographic on global warming or that uses a century-old scrapbook of family photos. They will have already encountered

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31. Scott Stone, "The Interdisciplinary Nature of Dance Scholarship as Seen Through a Citation Analysis of MFA Theses," *Notes* 79, no. 4 (2023): 475–94.
32. "UCI Libraries Strategic Plan," UCI Libraries (2016), https://www.lib.uci.edu/strategic-plan.

and learned how to possibly approach creating work in this manner, by both examining the physicality of the material as well as engaging with its sociopolitical context and message.

As I ponder ways to help faculty and students bridge their creative worlds with the information resources available to us through UCI Libraries, I continue to be inspired by both Ward and Dahlquist's articles on the subject. Writing pre-Framework, Ward stated that "information literacy consists of a broader array of competencies than our instructional practices and competency standards would suggest."[33] I believe projects like this—facilitating the use of our information resources to inspire creation—are exactly the sort of broadening he was suggesting. The flexibility of the Framework (as opposed to the more rigid Information Literacy Standards) empowers the performing arts librarian by enabling broad interpretation of the frames "Information Creation as a Process" and "Research as Inquiry" to encourage our students to create new art (i.e., information) through a deeply personal process of examining preexisting materials. Similarly, almost 20 years after Ward's article on broadening how we view information literacy, Dahlquist describes the practice of "information creativity" as "the experience of encountering, employing, transforming, or making informational objects for artistic, exploratory, or communicative purposes when creative originality or production is of primary concern."[34] This project has demonstrated how librarians can actively encourage information creativity and how effective it can be as a tool for the library to become part of the artistic process.

Curtain Call

Helping faculty nurture the creative sides of our students is just as important as helping them find and use information to answer their scholarly questions. Librarians are perfectly positioned for this type of work. We know our collections and what materials typically get a gasp, extra look, or prompt discussion when we are providing tours. We have items we personally love just a little bit more than others and want to share with the world. By leveraging our knowledge and passion of library resources together with the expertise and guidance of faculty, we can breathe new purpose into parts of our collections while creating an exciting learning opportunity for our students.

I look forward to continuing this project with Prof. Naugle and future cohorts of MFA dancers at UCI. There is a strong possibility of expanding this project so that the students will have more time to thoroughly engage with their chosen

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33. Ward, "Revisioning Information Literacy," 396.
34. Dahlquist, "Toward a Framework for Information Creativity," 453.

objects and become increasingly inspired through a deeper exploration of the artist's life and processes and the book's content. I know that this shifted mind-set in the library's classroom will influence my own approach to working with other faculty and students in the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Perhaps we will continue to use artists' books or other primary sources to create new works of art, or perhaps small portions of more traditionally focused information literacy classes will ask students to engage more creatively with information sources they find by drawing their search strategy or writing a brief poem about their research experience.

My hope is this article will encourage other performing art librarians to utilize their collections to inspire artists to create new pieces of art. While I have focused on the use of artists' books to create new choreographic works, there are unlimited other possibilities, such as streaming documentaries to inspire sculpture; archival papers to inspire music compositions; photography books to inspire costume designs; and a never-ending list of resources you, the performing arts librarian, know about at your specific library and within the context of your local arts users. I continue to stand by my advice to "just smile and try something"[35]; you never know what beautiful work will emerge when you bring together amazing and unique information resources with eager artists.

Acknowledgments

About the Author

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