

Feature

Creating the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Production Art Database

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The Graphics Arts Librarian at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences' Margaret Herrick Library tells how she created their online database that catalogs and conserves costume design drawings, and makes them available to costumers online.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science' Margaret Herrick Library houses a great many tools for researchers in the area of film production. The library has more than 30,000 books, 2,000 periodicals, 80,000 scripts, an estimated 500,000 clipping files, 1,100 manuscript collections and more than 10 million photographs. It also holds a collection of two-dimensional works on paper, including several thousand costume design drawings received from individual designers, filmmakers, collectors, and organizations.

Whether rendered by famous designers or anonymous studio illustrators, these

drawings were initially created as part of the film production process, and provide a window into the day-to-day reality of designers working in a studio setting. They can be used to study fashion trends, stardom, depictions of historical eras in film, and to shed light on both the artistry of individual designers and the collaborative nature of moviemaking. Along with the library's other holdings, the drawings are a vital resource for costumers and other researchers studying motion picture costume design.

Physically larger than most library materials, these costume design drawings

and other two-dimensional artworks are often composed on highly acidic board or paper, so they require careful handling at all times. Cataloging them and providing access to costumers and other researchers, while conserving the collection, is challenging.

Here is a behind-the-scenes look at our approach to cataloging costume design drawings, the conservation measures we use to protect the library's holdings, and how we went about creating our Production Art Database, which makes these images and descriptions available to costumers and other researchers online.

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Graphic Arts Collection

Search Posters Search Production Art

COSTUME DESIGN "DOCTOR DOLITTLE" (1967)

The library's Graphic Arts Collection encompasses posters and production art. The poster collection includes more than 42,000 items representing the cinema from some of its earliest attractions to current theatrical releases, and consists primarily of one-sheet posters from Hollywood films as well as examples from independent and foreign productions. Production art materials document more than eighty years of motion picture design. Acquired from designers, collectors and professional organizations, the collection primarily consists of costume and production design drawings, but also includes other forms of production art such as title art and animation artwork. The collection also includes a small number of paintings and illustrations of individuals prominent in the motion picture industry.

Research & Preservation

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Poster Preservation

The library has an ongoing preservation program to care for its posters. The video seen here documents the conservation of one of the largest pieces in the library's collection.

► Video: "How to Put Together a King-Size Poster"

Home page of the library's Graphics Arts collection: <http://www.oscars.org/library/collections/posters/>

Genesis of the Production Arts Database

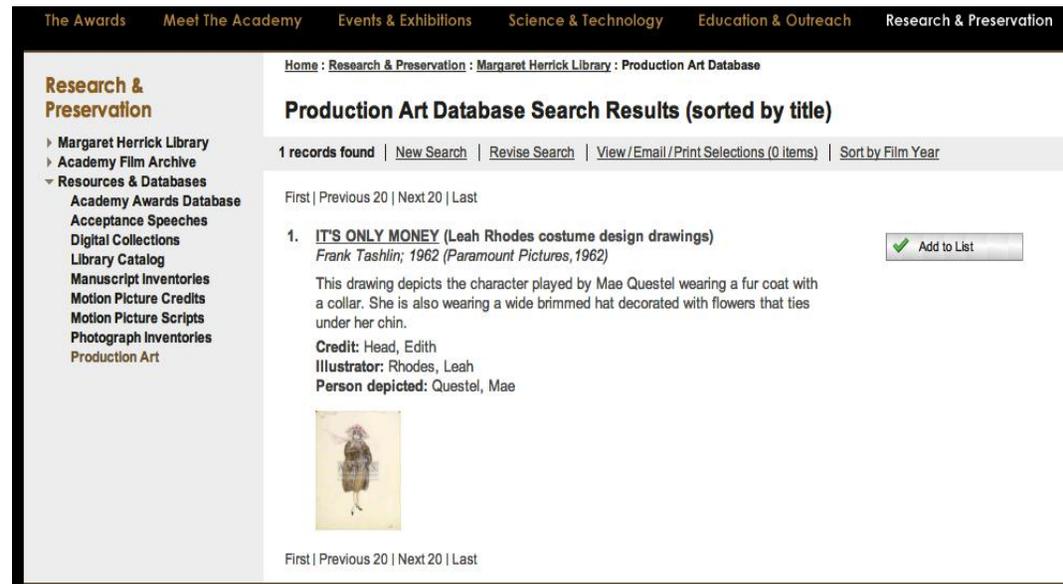
We initially modeled the cataloging of production art materials on the library's item level cataloging of its poster collection, a process that began in 1994. At that time the library added digital reproductions to the physical and analog photographic conservation processes that had been in place since the mid-1980s. Catalog records with digital images attached to them were created and used by the library's cataloging staff, and were later opened to the public via the library's online card catalog. These procedures laid the foundation for cataloging other production art materials, including costume design drawings.

Our desire to follow national and local standards lead the library staff to move to more flexible cataloging software that allowed us greater control. Over the course of three years, *DB/Text* by Inmagic also enabled us to reach online researchers. The Production Art Database has become an effective research tool for many aspects of film production, including our costume design collections.

Crediting Designers and Illustrators

Costume design is an essential component of filmmaking, but costume designers have not always received the attention they deserve. The most challenging aspect of cataloging costume design drawings is determining who should be recorded as the creator of the drawing. It is

complicated because onscreen costume credits were not often seen through the early 1930s, and were not always employed going forward (it's unfortunately still true today). Additionally, some costume designers do not draw their own illustrations: instead, they employ the talents of illustrators who are responsible for providing designers with graphic renderings of their concepts. This form of collaboration was (and continues to be) common practice.



The screenshot shows the 'Production Art Database Search Results' page. The search results are sorted by title and show one record found for 'IT'S ONLY MONEY'. The record details include the film title, the designer (Leah Rhodes), the film title and year (Frank Tashlin; 1962), a description of the drawing (Mae Questel in a fur coat and hat), and the credit (Head, Edith). The illustrator is listed as Rhodes, Leah, and the person depicted is Questel, Mae. There is a small image of the drawing and an 'Add to List' button.

Production Art Database listing for *It's Only Money* credits Leigh Rhodes as illustrator.

For the purposes of the Production Art Database, the credited designer is considered the primary author of the drawing, and the illustrator, when known, is the secondary author. We established these general guidelines for determining authorship of drawings as a way to acknowledge the work

of both the costume designer and the illustrator. The names appear in separately indexed fields of the database. In some illustrations, the designer and illustrator are relatively easy to identify. When information is not available, catalogers can consider other factors to determine whose work is represented in a particular drawing.

For instance, costume designer Leah Rhodes was known to illustrate her own designs; surviving examples have a

consistent look throughout her career and are clearly from the hand of a single individual. Consequently all of the drawings in Leah Rhodes' collection are noted as being illustrated by Rhodes and, in examples where she received onscreen credit, she is also listed as the designer.

In the case of the 1962 film *It's Only Money*, however, there is no onscreen credit and research has not resolved who was responsible for the costumes. Since the drawings demonstrate her involvement in the production, she is noted as the illustrator only.

Another collection that demonstrates the designer-illustrator relationship is the Edith Head collection. This collection includes twenty-four drawings from the 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments*, and in most cases it would be fair to assume that all of these costumes were designed by Head. However, this elaborate production had five credited costume designers (Head, Dorothy Jeakins, Ralph Jester, John Jensen and Arnold Friberg) and several of the

drawings in Head's collection are clearly in the hand of Jeakins, a designer who illustrated her own work, and Marilyn Sotto, who worked throughout her career as an illustrator. Records for these drawings (below) credit all five designers and, when known, the illustrators have been identified.

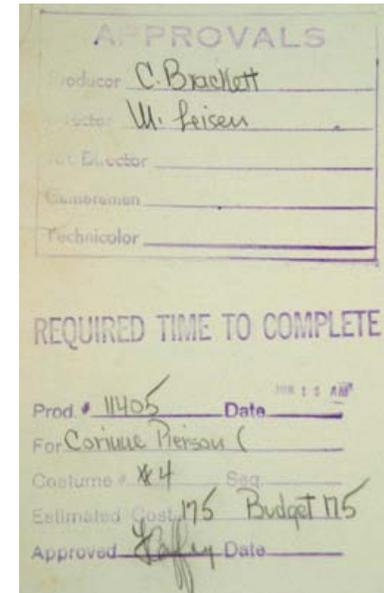
Standardizing Titles

With guidelines for determining authorship established, the next major hurdle was to look at how titles should be assigned.

Film titles are one of the library's central organizing principles, and it is essential to connect production materials to particular motion pictures. This allows users to see consistent film titles and production information in all of the library's databases. This has become more and more important as single searches across multiple library databases are more common and beneficial to researchers.

Identifying costume design drawings from a specific film is fairly straightforward. In many cases, the title or perhaps a working title, is written on the front of the drawing by the designer or illustrator. Often, though, information as basic as film title is not evident. The Paramount Studios costume department made an attempt to record the trail of responsibility on

Title:	THE TEN COMMANDMENTS Cecil B. DeMille; 1956 (Paramount Pictures, 1956)
	
Description:	This drawing depicts a group of men both young and old. They are wearing ragged tunics, loincloths and headscarves. They are holding what appear to be rudimentary weapons.
Text:	#16. Across the top of the drawing, two drawings are highlighted with the note "more ragged" and the center figure has been marked "N.G."
Physical description:	1 costume design drawing(s): gouache on illustration board
Dimensions:	15 inches x 20 inches
Subjects:	Biblical events.
Form and Genre:	Feature; Religious
Credited designer:	Head, Edith: Costume designer Jester, Ralph: Jensen, John: Jeakins, Dorothy: Friberg, Arnold:
Credit notes:	AFI catalog credits Edith Head, Ralph Jester, John Jensen, Dorothy Jeakins and Arnold Friberg with "Costumes".
Additional designers:	Jensen, John L. (Illustrator). Jensen's signature appears in the lower right corner.
Collection:	Costume design drawings for THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



Paramount costume sketch by Edith Head for Mary Anderson, in *To Each His Own* (1946).

a production by placing a large stamp (left) on the verso of many of its costume drawings. The stamp was intended to be annotated with the film title and production number, the names of the director, actress and fitter along with a budget, including a breakdown of

labor and materials required to manufacture the costume. When annotated, these stamps are very useful, but the level of detail was not strictly imposed and many of the drawings are partially or completely unidentified as a result.

Making presentation copies of costume design drawings is a common practice, and the library's collections include examples by Walter Plunkett, Helen Rose and Edith Head. Head's drawings for a costume worn by Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun* (1951) illustrate the importance of original drawings over those made solely for the purpose of gifting. In Head's collection there are two almost identical drawings of one of Taylor's costumes. When the Leonard Stanley collection came into the library, a

Title: **A PLACE IN THE SUN**
George Stevens; 1951 (Paramount Pictures, 1951)



Description: A drawing of Elizabeth Taylor wearing a strapless, white gown decorated with flowers at the bust.

Text: Elizabeth Taylor. In the upper left corner erased notes are partially visible indicating a boned bodice. Erased notes in the lower right corner indicate the dress was to be used in scene 77, Xmas. The back of the drawing includes a studio stamp as well as a cost breakdown as follows: petticoat 100., 3 taffeta 14., 16 Marq. 64., Flowers 39., Scarf 35., Labor 250., Shoes 30., Stockings 12., Total 544; 18 days to complete; Budget 500.

Physical description: 1 costume design drawing(s): pencil and gouache on paper

Dimensions: 23.25 inches x 14.75 inches

Person depicted: Taylor, Elizabeth

Subjects: Twentieth century.

Form and Genre: Feature; Drama, Romance

Credited designer: Head, Edith: Costume designer

Credit notes: AFI catalog credits Head with "Costumes."

Collection: Leonard Stanley collection

as a gift), and while the resulting drawings serve as a representation of the designer's vision after the fact, they do not carry the same intellectual weight as the annotated original.

In the absence of a film title on the drawing, annotations, reference dates, character names, and cast or crew names can all provide clues that help to determine the film title. For example, two drawings of 1920s actress Billie Dove include only the name of the actress, the signature of designer Edward Stevenson and a plot reference. Searching for films with costumes designed by Stevenson was fruitless because it was not yet common practice to assign credit for costume design, but a search of the American Film Institute catalog, combining the name of the actress with part of the plot reference, yielded one result.

Photographic research confirmed that the drawings were from *Her Private Life*, made in 1928 (right).

It is not always possible to associate a drawing with a specific film. In these cases, the cataloger supplies a descriptive title based on whatever information is evident on

the drawing, such as the actor's or designer's names. In addition to finding drawings from particular films, users and staff researching costume design are also interested in viewing the work of specific designers or depictions of certain actors. We decided to include those elements as part of a supplied title when the film title could not be determined.

For example, a drawing of Hedy Lamarr by Leah Rhodes would be titled "Costume design drawing for Hedy Lamarr by Leah Rhodes." If cataloging a drawing of

Title: **HER PRIVATE LIFE**
Alexander Korda; 1929 (First National Pictures, 1929)



Description: A drawing of Billie Dove wearing a black dress with a fur collar and a black cloche hat.

Text: Miss Dove - Int. Ritz tearoom. In the right center is an illegible signature

Physical description: 1 costume design drawing(s): gouache on paper

Dimensions: 14.75 inches x 11.5 inches

Person depicted: Dove, Billie

Subjects: Twentieth century.

Form and Genre: Feature; Drama

Credited designer: Stevenson, Edward: Costume designer

Credit notes: AFI catalog does not list a costume designer.

Collection: Leonard Stanley collection

third, framed copy was included. But when this drawing was unframed, the annotations on its verso made it clear that this specific drawing was the original working document (above). The other drawings were likely created at a later date for the purpose of illustrations used in Head's [autobiography](#). This practice is quite common (although usually the drawings are created to present

an actor for which the designer has not been identified, the title might be "Unidentified costume design drawing for Miss Piggy by an unidentified designer" (right). If the designer is known but the actor is not, the title would be "Costume design drawing for an unidentified actress by Edith Head." And when all else fails, the drawing may simply be cataloged with a supplied title, "Costume design drawing for an unidentified actress by an unidentified designer."

Additional Fields

The remaining plans for the database fell into place more easily. Two separate notes fields record a description of the costume itself, including (when known) the name of the actor depicted, and a transcription of the annotations. Other fields include the media used; the type of work; the presence of fabric swatches; dimensions; facsimile elements; and condition notes as well as images for drawings that have received photographic conservation. Individual catalog records capture this level of detail, which aids users in making a better educated decision about a drawing's relevance to their own work. From the point of view of managing the collection, this level of cataloging provides distinctions between copies, and aids in tracking. Notes fields such as these are keyword searchable, but added entries such as personal names and genres are indexed.

The use of personal names extends beyond that of authorship. In addition to the costume designer and illustrator, the name of

Title:	[Unidentified costume design drawing for Miss Piggy by an unidentified designer]
Description:	A drawing of Miss Piggy wearing a pink plaid dress and matching beret. In the lower right corner is an alternate version of the bodice and in the lower left corner is a walking stick.
Text:	HOLD try a swatch.
Physical description:	1 costume design drawing(s); pencil on tracing paper + pantone color swatch
Dimensions:	12 inches x 9 inches
Notes:	This drawing has been attributed to the movie THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN but this has not been verified.
Person depicted:	Miss Piggy (Fictitious character)
Subjects:	Twentieth century.
Collection:	Leonard Stanley collection

the actor depicted is indexed because users demonstrated a keen interest in this information. In addition to personal names and titles, both users and staff wanted the ability to see the library's holdings related to films of a particular genre, such as westerns, musicals or science fiction. The genre heading list is stitched together from a variety of sources, and includes local terms as well as those from the Library of Congress and the [Moving Image Genre Form Guide](#). Users can select a genre from a pick list.

The one area of cataloging practice that has yet to be completely resolved is how to apply subject headings to costume design records. Part of the problem is that the subject headings are being used to describe a byproduct of the production. The drawings are not fashion illustrations, and only a few headings from the Library of Congress Subject Headings and the [Thesaurus for Graphic Material](#), such as Wedding clothing & dress, Ice skating, Skin diving, Bathing suits or Cross dressing, can be applied to costume design drawings. We also reference a specific century, but it is not yet clear if this is especially meaningful to researchers as a point of access.

Since the Production Arts Database was developed, we have created more than 10,000 records. The ability to search across collections using a wide variety of terms, and the fact that so many of the records have images attached, makes the database a very useful tool for researchers and staff alike. Users can access the database through the library's [website](#).

Conservation and the Creation of Facsimiles

The library began collecting costume design drawings in 1976. When a collection comes into the library, we create an initial inventory and evaluate the items in it for conservation. Costume design drawings were never intended to be saved and revered as art objects or texts for study, and those that do survive often show signs of wear and tear. Starting life as working documents,

costume design drawings often retain evidence of the filmmaking process, such as date and time stamps, approvals, notes, and fabric swatches attached with paper clips, staples or tape. The paper is often highly acidic, so the corners and edges are generally worn and chipping, with added deterioration from pinholes, creases and general overall wear. Some drawings show evidence of long-term storage in less than ideal conditions, which may result in fading, fire or soot damage, or water and mold stains. Passing out of the studio workrooms and away from their original purpose, remaining drawings often became decorative objects that were matted and framed for display. Unfortunately, most retail framing brings with it all manner of tape, adhesives and other non-archival practices.

The conservation treatments for these drawings often include the removal of a myriad of taping material, the consolidation of delaminated paper layers, mending breaks and tears, and surface cleaning. In addition to adding condition notes in the local conservation field of catalog records, the library's conservator also maintains a separate conservation treatment database, which tracks work performed on objects throughout the library. This information displays in the staff side of the database.

Once conservation is completed on the drawings, the cataloging staff assesses the collection to decide which drawings should be photographed. A long-term goal is to extend photographic conservation to all

drawings in the collection, but due to budget and staffing considerations, this is not yet a reality. When choosing the drawings to photograph from the collection of a working designer, we attempt to give the overall flavor and range of the collection. These collections generally contain multiple drawings from the same film, and may include concepts for leading performers and supporting players, as well as variations of specific costumes. We take the opportunity to show the character arc developed by a series of costumes, and include lesser-known productions as well as films from various time periods or genres.

Title:	EASY TO LOVE Charles Walters; 1953 (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1954)
	
Description:	A drawing of a woman wearing a yellow bathing suit with long, black gloves. She is wearing a matching hat and holds a small purse. She is water skiing.
Text:	Easy to Love. There is an unidentified set of initials in the lower left corner and two sets in the left center. One set is Busby Berkeley's. The back of the drawing includes a studio stamp dated 12/12/52 and noting the fitter's names and the following: 32 girls ski number #14 (with Esthers shocking pink); Completed January 9-53.
Physical description:	1 costume design drawing(s): pencil and gouache on illustration board
Dimensions:	18.25 inches x 12.75 inches
Subjects:	Bathing suits. Water skiing. Twentieth century.
Form and Genre:	Feature; Romance
Credited designer:	Rose, Helen: Costume designer
Credit notes:	Rose's signature appears in the lower right corner. AFI catalog credits Rose with "Women's Costumes Design."
Collection:	Leonard Stanley collection

By contrast, the strength of artificial collections assembled by an individual or an organization resides in the importance of the examples that have been collected. Private collectors often concentrate on specific designers or actresses and work with a sort of "best of" mentality. Their collections stand out for their singular focus on the documentation of great design done by costume designers from the "golden age" of Hollywood. The emphasis of photographic conservation for this kind of collection is on documenting iconic designs and the range of designers represented as a whole.

Another factor in deciding priorities for photographic conservation is how a drawing relates to the rest of the library's holdings. Costume design drawings may also correlate to manuscript or photo collections and, in certain cases, may also merit photo conservation. For example, the MGM Wardrobe Department records include a wardrobe plot book for *Easy to Love* (1953). The plot book contains a black and white photograph of a supporting cast member wearing a bathing suit used in one of the film's waterskiing sequences. The costume includes a pill-box hat with elbow-length gloves with a small evening bag attached to one hand. A drawing for the same costume in the Leonard Stanley collection (left) depicts a yellow swimsuit, not the shocking pink noted in the wardrobe plot book.

The last component in the conservation process is the creation of surrogates. For many years, the library used the services of

outside labs to produce photographic elements such as negatives, transparencies, slides and prints. Today, that work is produced in a digital format with separate storage in a digital asset management system that is only available to staff and in-house researchers. The elements, as well as our digital files, document the drawings in their true state, and are not retouched. These files are used for a variety of purposes including printing copies and creating low resolution images to attach to our catalog records.

Conclusion

By and large, we provide a great level of access to costumers and other researchers through our catalog records in the Production Art Database, with minimal handling of the original material. The database provides access to oversize and fragile material, including costume design drawings, by way of surrogate records. Users and staff can easily search and view records, while at the same time, the library is meeting its goals for conserving and storing these items.

As the Production Art Collection continues to grow, our department and its staff will face new challenges. In the area of cataloging and bibliographic presentation, we will continue to make adjustments to practice and remain flexible about using new taxonomies and new technologies, while continuing to fulfill the needs of our users and programs. We will also be proactive in the area of conservation education, because materials used in construction of the drawings are fluid. As costume designers continue to use “creative” methods to construct their work, their presentation boards will more resemble mixed media assemblages than drawings, and born-digital items may eventually comprise a larger part of the collection.

Search Tips

- To limit your search to only "costume design drawing," use the "type of art" field on the Advanced search screen
- "Select from a list" boxes allow users to select information from a list and

eliminates a lot of guesswork. Don't want to waste your time searching for something that we don't have? Use these to get a preview of what's included in the database.

- Subject headings are based on Library of Congress Subject Headings and Thesaurus for Graphic Materials.
- Records are being added constantly and the online database is updated monthly.

Anne Coco is the Graphic Arts Librarian at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Margaret Herrick Library. She holds a bachelor's degree in film studies from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) and a MLIS from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). She oversees the Library's collection of two-dimensional works on paper, which includes one of the largest known collections of motion picture costume design drawings. In 1998, Ms. Coco co-curated the exhibition "The Origins of Screen Style: Hollywood Costume Sketches from the Leonard Stanley Archive." She presented "Drawn into Hollywood: Documenting Costume Design in the Movies" at the Costume Society of America's 32nd Annual Meeting and National Symposium in 2006. Her essay, "Drawing on Film: Access, Cataloging and Conservation of Costume Design Drawings at the Margaret Herrick Library" was published in "Documenting: Costume Design" (2010).

