"Art and Archives: Theoretical and Practical Definitions of 'Documentary Art' in Canadian Archives"
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This thesis examines the nature of art held by archives, known collectively as "documentary art." While the category exists firmly across Canada, exactly what is meant by documentary art has not been comprehensively discussed. In this thesis, both theoretical and practical definitions and their application to the collections will be explored. This will be done by examining three broad dimensions: the very limited theoretical writing that tries to define art in archives; the much broader base of art theory over the past centuries as well as writings about art in general within the Canadian context; and the actual historical evolution, current practices, and personal ideas of archivists who work with art, and comparing these to the ideas and understanding about documentary art held by professionals in the art gallery world.

The first stage of this investigation works towards establishing the larger context of archival art, specifically examining the nature of art itself, as well as the development of art in Canada specifically. The larger contextual picture helps clarify the specific ideas of "documentary" art and its development in Canada. The next stages of these investigations included looking at catalogues, scholarly articles, websites, finding aids, and then interviewing senior curators and archivists in both art galleries and archives, so that a sense of the differences between art, or aesthetic or "gallery" art, on the one hand, and "documentary" or archival art on the other, could be formed. The institutions used for this research and comparative analysis, and staff interviews were Library and Archives Canada, the National Gallery of Canada, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Centre du patrimoine at the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre and the Archives of Manitoba.

Based on these explorations, comparisons, and research the thesis concludes that there is a traditionally understood definition of documentary art as art that is realistic in style and accurately depicts people, places, activities and events. It is also generally considered to be of an inferior quality than art held in art gallery collections, it is art that was collected for what it depicts, not who created it or the quality of the work itself. This definition, however, is vaguely stated in much literature, with the assumption that most readers already understand the nature of art in archival collections as opposed to the more familiar art gallery collection. A definition is not useful if the audience is unaware of it.

This definition also arose at a time when much art was still realistic in style and depiction, in the early twentieth century. At this time, it was accepted that such realistic images portrayed the truth. Scholarship into history and art history has changed drastically over the past hundred years, and these ideas are no longer valid. What become evident in both interviews and literature is that definition is flawed, and has faced, and will continue to face challenges as ideas about art and information continue to change.