

The Future of Print Report: Dust & Shadow

By: Emily Pattni, Curation Specialist for the Future of Print

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Photos of the Acoustic Ecology Salon in Hayden Library

About the Future of Print

ASU Library was awarded a \$381K grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to experiment with different ways in which libraries present print materials to the public. We know that information is more digitally accessible than ever before. As students turn to what is quick and convenient for them, ASU Library is exploring how to present our print materials in ways that remain engaging and relevant to the twenty-first century user. Through a series of book displays, The Future of Print team hopes to gain a sense for how students perceive print collections, how they use the library, and what it takes to engage them in physical books. For more information on our projects, visit <https://lib.asu.edu/futureprint>

Research Question

We were interested in how we can present print books in intriguing and unexpected ways that engage our users. In particular, how do students interact with reading materials that are embedded in an immersive learning experience tied to an interesting topic? Additionally, how can we use our print collections to collaborate with and support faculty research?

Philosophy

In September of 2019, the Institute for Humanities at ASU launched a Desert Humanities initiative supporting inquiry into sustainability, responsible living, and education in connection to our coexistence with the desert and other natural environments. The co-director, Dr. Ronald Broglio, teamed up with FoAM, a Europe-based organization that works on projects around the world that study how natural landscapes, wildlife, culture, technologies, and media intersect and interact, to develop a “desert salon” concept. Brittany Lewis, the Library’s Communications Specialist, shared this opportunity with our project team as a new way to utilize the library space and its print collections. We had been seeking new ways to present print books that go beyond traditional shelving, so the fit was obvious.

Working with Dr. Broglio, Maja Kuzmanovic and Nik Gaffney, two artists from FoAM, had captured many sounds of the Sonoran Desert, including the soft winds, distant animal calls, and rustling plantlife, by using mics and various recording devices. A pressing of this vinyl record was made available, along with a record player, in a library study room to allow visitors to recreate the desert. With the help of Luke Kautz, the

Digital Design Fabrication Specialist for the School of Arts, Media, and Engineering, the artists designed the space to be equally intriguing. The Dust & Shadow: An Acoustic Ecology Salon consisted of objects of curiosity such as rocks, sand, desert images, and journal logs encouraging student interaction. The artists used lavender and rosemary to scent the room, and included wooden seating, rugs, and wooden beams to create a space that appealed to our senses. We added science fiction, critical texts, memoirs, and photography books in the space inspired from their list of research influences. These books were placed throughout the room, amongst the wooden beams and artifacts. We also worked with the Map and Geospatial Hub and the Arizona Collection to reproduce maps and archival images showing the desert regions. In this way, we were able to feature print books in a fully-immersive sensory experience to encourage discovery, learning, and engagement.

The full project is documented and available on the [FoAM website](#).

Full Selection Methodology

To create a book list that supported this theme, I referenced Maja, Nik, and Ron's list of [influences](#) and their [project's bibliography](#). I identified other related books and worked with Joyce Martin, then the Curator for the Labriola National American Indian Data Center, to add works about how Indigenous communities in Arizona interact with the lands where they have lived and continue to live today. The [final book list](#) has 112 titles featuring authors like Ofelia Zepeda, Charles Stross, and China Mieville. We already owned 56 items, and we purchased 56 items for this collection.

Assessment Mechanisms

Circulation

Out of the 98 items on display, 18 items were checked out during the project dates. 12 of these were requested online, meaning that users discovered them after intentionally searching our library's catalog rather than by browsing; it is also possible that some users were unsure whether they could borrow books in the installation and requested books online after visiting the salon.

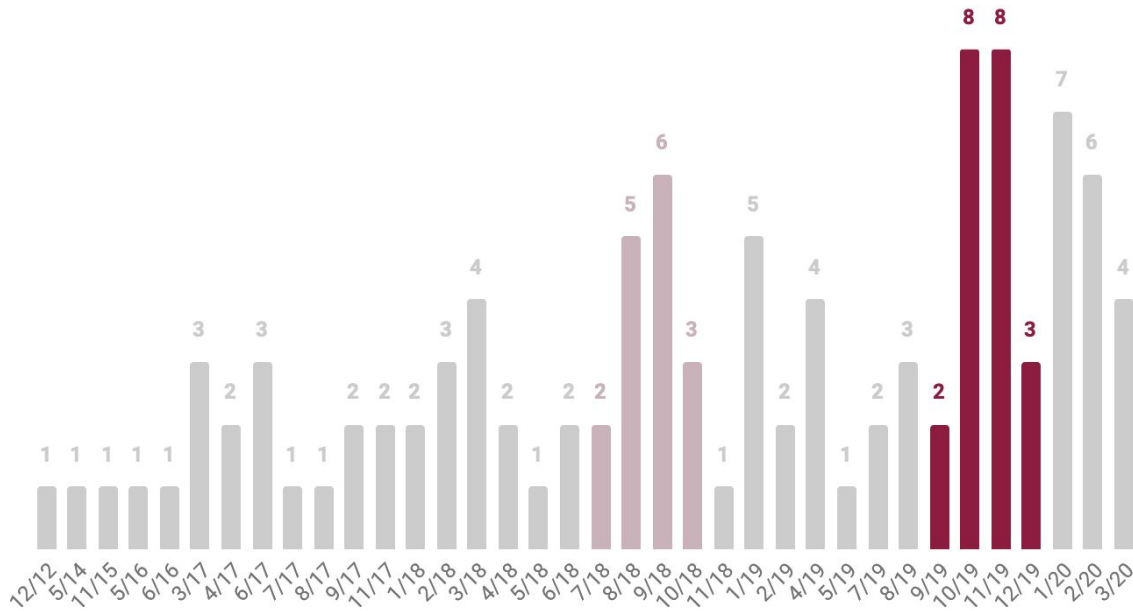
Eight of these checkouts were books previously owned by ASU Library. The last time any of these 8 items circulated was an average of 1.8 years ago. Newly purchased items made up 42% of the collection, but 56% of items that loaned.

Comparing loans during the project dates (see red in Figure 1) to the highest loan period in previous months (see light red in Figure 1), we can see a 29% increase in

circulation. Comparing this to each day since 2017 (see grey in Figure 1), we observe a 190% loan increase. This means these books loaned nearly three times as often than on an average day. Overall, these books saw the most circulation while the installation was in place, particularly in the month of October when it was new.

Figure 1

Loans by Month

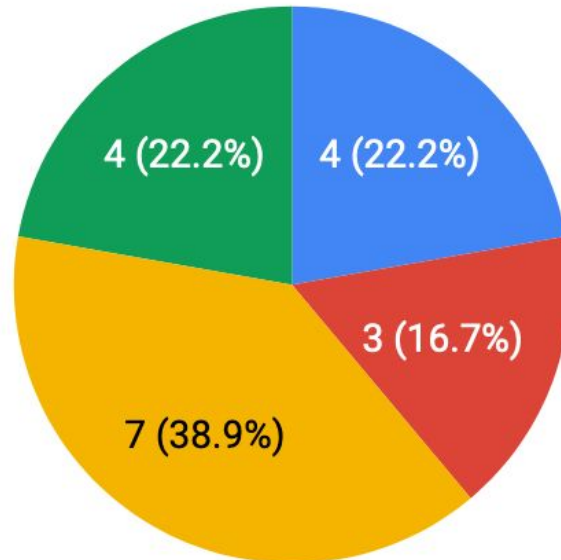


Bar chart showing number of loans per month from December 2012 to March 2020

Finally, it is also interesting that the majority of books were loaned by ASU Staff (38.9%) and the least amount of books were loaned by graduate students (16.7%).

Loans by User Group

● Faculty ● Graduate Students ● Staff ● Undergraduate Students



Pie chart showing 7 loans by ASU Staff (38.9%), 4 loans by faculty (22.2%), 4 loans by undergraduate students (22.2%), and 3 loans by graduate students (16.7%).

Opening Reception Event

The Institute for Humanities hosted [an opening reception](#) in the Hayden Library, following a lecture given by Timothy Morton, cultural theorist and professor at Rice University, as well as Nik and Maja from FoAM. This event celebrated the first day that the salon was open for exploration and allowed guests to meet the artists, ask questions, and socialize. Although no formal assessments were taken at this event, it was well-attended by students, faculty, and researchers. This allowed our team a chance to share information about the Future of Print projects and the Hayden Library renovation.

Reflection

Successes

- Working with the Institute for Humanities and FoAM highlighted the Library as an important resource supportive of ASU departments and research initiatives. This led to a discussion of how ASU Library is a key partner that offers a space for

learning, and how we provide dynamic and essential collections in print and other formats.

- The Library was able to form a relationship with an international organization that shares our aspirations of using creativity, technology, and new perspectives to engage learners.
- Students and staff responded with curiosity and wonder, providing informal feedback that they wanted to spend more time in the salon. They interacted with the room by taping images to the white board and writing responses to the prompts. One student commented that the Library “should do more stuff like this.”
- I learned a lot from the shared ideas and creativity of the project leads, Luke, Ron, Maja, and Nik. They consistently came up with new ideas for how to translate complex topics in a library space using static objects. This framework aligns closely with the Library’s print initiatives as we experiment with building collections that are interactive learning experiences rather than simply “books on a shelf.”
- Our student workers were able to locate and reshelve books arranged in this very non-traditional setting. They also did a great job maintaining the salon and ensuring that the technology was working.

Challenges

- The salon was placed in a study room in Hayden library, and the door was kept ajar to invite students to wander inside and explore. Occasionally, students would turn the record player off or close the door to the room.
- Although there was a sign letting students know they could check books out, people may not have wanted to disturb the installation. They may have felt that taking books out of the space would disrupt the design.

Discussion

Dust and Shadow was an opportunity to bring our communities into the Library space to learn about an important research topic, think critically about their own experiences, and engage with library resources. We were glad to see patrons interacting in the space and checking a few books out, because we were unsure how they would respond to this nontraditional set-up. We learned new strategies to designing print collections using space, senses, and art to engage users. Additionally, these books have been a great addition to our collection beyond the project dates, because they continue to circulate

and have been used for other projects. The relationships formed in this project have reinforced the Library's value for researchers, and have fostered conversations around how we can continue to design learning experiences that invoke curiosity and interest.

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