The National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa
National Digital Heritage Archive

Increasingly, knowledge is being created and stored in digital form. Institutions that collect, arrange and archive our social and cultural heritage, such as The National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, are being challenged to preserve and provide access to these burgeoning digital collections. As well as digitisation programmes like Papers Past (newspapers), Timeframes (photographs) and Matapihi (online search facility), the National Library is harvesting websites that feature New Zealand content for the National Digital Heritage Archive.

As part of A Mobile Library, a selection of harvested websites from the National Digital Heritage Archive is profiled here, alongside a range of print publications from the National Library’s physical archive. The online materials were chosen for their emphasis on discussion forums, project documentation, or connection to community organisations. Providing a point of comparison, printed material from these digital providers is included, and a variety from specialist art publishers.

The digital knowledge revolution has heightened awareness of the differing nature and value of digital and print formats. In relation to contemporary art discourse, do digital forms enable dialogue, debate and temporal art practices to be captured? Do they result in greater distribution and more extensive content? Given the financial resources that print demands, does the medium foster more in-depth critical writing and substantial documentation? Or, considering the importance of aesthetics in this context, are we reluctant to relinquish print media simply because it is nicer to look at?

Considering these formats side by side reinforces the possible strengths of print media. For example, Speculation and Public Good show how the book operates as a framing device for a group of artists, ideas, or, in the case of Sean Kerr’s monograph, an artist’s oeuvre. A book can act as a comprehensive survey as in the Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader, or a community resource like Enjoy’s retrospective catalogue. Site-specific or time-based projects are manifest in print documents, such as Bruce Russell’s Writing on Sound. A book can act as object and medium in itself, as shown by David Knorr, and as a platform for contemporary design.

This simplified comparison of print and digital media implies the radical shift in knowledge production, storage and access in the digital age. While print formats gather information together into an ordered structure, digital forms are based on interconnected networks, reflecting our contemporary relationships to information, and to each other.

Melanie Oliver
Learning Programmes Specialist
National Library of New Zealand

You can nominate a website for inclusion in the National Digital Heritage Archive by visiting: http://www.natlib.govt.nz/collections/a-z-of-all-collections/nz-web-archive/natlib-forms/nominate-a-site