

Nan Hoover – Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1

A research tool for understanding an artist's life and work: Analog to Digital

The artist Nan Hoover (1931-2008), noted internationally for her pioneering work with video, light and time, died in Berlin in 2008. In her memory, and to establish a scholarly legacy for her life and career, the *Nan Hoover Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1* has been published by the Nan Hoover Foundation (NHF). My interest in this publication stems from my personal research in the artist's archives, and my memories of Nan Hoover as a friend. She was an important international artist who 'mentored' me, an emerging 'video' curator from California with little knowledge of Europe. She was well-known, a respected artist working with video for a decade when we first met in Los Angeles, in 1982. Over the years, Nan Hoover became a dear friend, and she was always helpful with advice and encouragement about making radical decisions. While writing this text about the new NHF e-publication, I reflected often on how instrumental she had been in helping me establish my curatorial position. She was known for her straight talk (yes, she was very opinionated) as well as her open mind. She invited me into her studio, put me up overnight on her sofa on several occasions, and was gracious enough to introduce me to her colleagues: curators, gallerists, other video and performance artists active in the Amsterdam scene of the 1980s. I have many of her publications in my library, and treasure several of her artworks in my personal collection. Nan Hoover is an example of how I would like to be remembered: a person with high standards, always associated with generosity, and one who cares deeply about her extended circle of friends.

In preparation for this writing about the online *Nan Hoover Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1*, I realized that I had no clear understanding about what comprised a good catalogue raisonné publication. So, I spent some time at the Getty Research Institute Library, which has thousands of catalogues raisonné. If I

thought I knew anything about this category of publication before I started, I was met with many surprises. While perusing the examples in the open stacks, something became immediately noticeable: there were so many more catalogues raisonné of male artists than there were publications that documented the work and artistic lives of women. There were examples of female artists, of course, both famous and unknown, and many interesting publications, too! But the number of men who were 'catalogued' and the wide-ranging number of volumes about their work (some male artists have dozens of catalogues raisonné) by and large outnumbered the work of women, massively. This initial observation was perhaps predictable, because the number of women artists who are shown in exhibitions, collected and celebrated for their contributions to art history with major catalogues, falls way behind the number of men. Therefore, the deep research into female artistic practice falls significantly behind as well.

It was also important to discover the differences between published, hard copy catalogues raisonné and those that exist online as e-publications. While in the library, I could stack the books up on the desk and compare them, note the different quality of photos and design of the books, as well as the types of entries that comprised the focus of each catalogue. Although the scope and quality of research may be comparable between an online and a printed catalogue, the collectability of a 'book' is a factor that cannot easily be overlooked. While looking for examples of online publications, it was not as simple to find original e-publications. Several databases give information on e-publications (including catalogues

raisonné), for example: Art Resources Online; Authentication in Art (AiA); and IFAR, the International Foundation for Art Research, as well as the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA). In many cases, I found the online publication to be a second stage of distribution, or the uploading of the original printed publication.

A catalogue raisonné, according to the New York Public Library, is ‘a comprehensive annotated listing of all the known works of an artist either in a particular medium or all media...’ While looking over multiple catalogues raisonné, there seem to be no set rules for the research perimeters on an artist, nor any prescribed method for how materials should be presented. The research can be an artist’s activity during a particular period of their career, works made in a particular type of media, works created between specific dates of practice, or the provenance of a specific series of an artist’s work. In the case of the *Nan Hoover Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1*, compiled by Dr.habil. Dawn Leach, the publication is a complete annotation of works in her estate. It also includes the first detailed overview of Nan Hoover’s personal life and career history, including her exhibition record, and an extensive bibliography. It is also the first of what eventually will become three volumes. The second volume proposes to identify, list and annotate works held in public and private collections while the third volume will be focused on Addenda, that which arises from the first two.

Volume One can be accessed at: oops.uni-oldenburg.de/3382/

The *Nan Hoover Online Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1* is an e-publication, a .pdf of 538 pages, with a publication date of 7 November 2017. It is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License. According to Leach, the e-publication is equivalent to a printed publication. It was created specifically as an online resource, with copyright. Although it cannot be updated or altered, it is available to read and download, free of charge. The epublication is hosted and maintained by the Carl-von-Ossietzky University in Oldenburg, Germany, and is not offered on any third-party platforms. Dr. Leach, who completed her post-doctoral degree and was a senior lecturer for art history and art theory for thirteen years at the University in Oldenburg, was generously granted server space for this e-publication.

There are 988 individual artworks of Nan Hoover identified, as noted in the catalogue raisonné chapter beginning on page 130: HOOVER’S ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN THE ESTATE. This section, the largest in the publication, chronologically lists all paintings, drawings, collages, video and films, photography and those ‘difficult to classify’ works: performances, installations and environments that the artist personally documented throughout her career. Thumbnail .pdf images of selected works, as well as installation instructions and drawings, are included in an extended appendix. The tricky aspect of the research seems to have been interpreting details of works from the computer hard drives, where the artist stored various versions of her works, without really noting the digital differences in some files (now a task for others to carefully observe).

No stranger to Hoover’s work, Leach was the Düsseldorf Akademie’s (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf) art historian in charge of the Academy’s Archives with Collections, where she ‘organized a database and scans of the Nan Hoover Estate for long-term archival storage.’ This process started in 2009 and was completed in 2012. As the art historian and scholar who is probably the most knowledgeable about Hoover’s archive, Leach has tremendous insight into Hoover’s practice, which was intensified when she sorted and catalogued the Estate holdings, including the artist’s personal papers, after her death in

2008. The Nan Hoover Archive was maintained at the Kunstakademie Library from 2009 until 2016. After Leach retired, the Academy transferred the duty of care for the Nan Hoover Archive to the Nan Hoover Foundation, and it relocated to the NHF headquarters at LIMA (Living Media Art) in Amsterdam, where it remains. See also: www.nanhooverfoundation.com

Leach not only documents and annotates every work that the NHF maintains, she also has written a summary overview of Hoover's artistic career, a personal history of the artist and the various career moves she made. This history is gleaned from interviews, reviews and exhibition catalogues, in a reportstyle writing that doesn't give much room to comment on any of the artist's beloved personality traits: her determination, her love of a smoke and a glass of whiskey late at night, her love of dancing to rock 'n' roll music, her commitment to black and white (especially her personal environment), and her outspoken manner when confronted by any injustice. These traits endeared her to me and created her legendary persona. Nan Hoover, always dressed in black, complete with a flowing black cape and brimmed felt hat, would always have a warm welcome and big smile for her friends.

Dr Leach and Nan Hoover were colleagues at the Düsseldorf Academy during the time that Hoover was Professor for Video and Film (1987 – 1996). Leach would have been witness to the exciting years at the Academy and would have known the notable professors who brought status to the institution, like Tony Cragg, Jan Dibbets, Nam June Paik, and Gerhard Richter (yes, it was, and still is, a predominately male faculty*). The Video and Film studio is located in the same building as the library, and Leach certainly would have observed student/professor relationships, like Hoover built with her students (which allowed them to be respected as working artists). Leach was also an important English-speaking colleague for Hoover, who often found herself defending the experimental nature of video and performance, in the very traditional and strict German educational institution, built on decades of traditional and conceptual artmaking. Hoover never used the excuse that she was female or blamed her gender for her power struggles. She always succeeded in a male environment using her attitude as her strength. The time she spent in Düsseldorf was an important decade in Hoover's career, one where she could realize new productions (with the assistance of talented and devoted students) and one where she established a tremendous influence on the generations of artists she taught.

The decision to create the Nan Hoover Catalogue Raisonné as an e-publication was a practical one. The Nan Hoover Foundation simply could not afford to print a paper publication, not to mention the additional distribution and storage costs associated with a printed edition. The cost of printing a sizeable publication, of the scope and depth of the Nan Hoover e-publication catalogue raisonné, would result in a retail purchase price to purchase it that would be prohibitive to most of the connoisseurs of her work. So, the e-publication is an accessible solution, available to all, without any compromise to the content. Members of the NHF board were vital to the creation of the catalogue raisonné, by offering editing and by assisting with the presentation of Hoover's artistic priorities. I believe that an online catalogue raisonné is also in keeping with the artist's experimental and exploratory practice: her outlook engaged in new methods of how to explore the poetic varieties of interpretation that digital processes allow. These processes can now bring her work, and the story of her life, to a wider audience. Hoover, as stated previously, was a noted pioneering artist who made her international reputation working in light, performance, and video. She was a noted influence in these new fields which she explored with gusto. Both the archive and the catalogue raisonné of Nan Hoover offer research scholars and historians of media art new insights into Hoover's paintings, drawings, and photographs, and allow for new

understanding into how she transitioned from figurative painting and drawing (from the late 1950s) to the experiments with light, video and photography, until the digital explorations she made in her studio late in her life (alongside many bold drawings of her hands). To the many friends and colleagues of Nan Hoover, located around the world, the e-publication offers the ability to re-visit Nan Hoover's work and offers essential information not previously published.

Serious work remains to identify and annotate the private and public holdings of the work of Nan Hoover. Hopefully, this second volume will also include her sculptural work (as nothing of this genre is held by the NHF) and editions previously not accounted for. The compilation of the next e-publication will be organized by the Nan Hoover Foundation but will require the cooperation, interest, and professional responsibility of those institutions and individuals who have Nan Hoover work in their collections. It will also need to engage the artists, curators and colleagues who have been recipients of Hoover's work, as personal gifts. Hoover, like many artists, was very generous, and gave away photographs and drawings, valuable artworks, to many individuals, often in exchange for their services, support, and personal encouragement. For Nan Hoover, art was a gift, and her generous gifts were always a treasure to receive.

Kathy Rae Huffman, 2018

- Faculty and students at the Düsseldorf Academy by name:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunstakademie_D%C3%BCsseldorf#Notable_professors_and_students