Hidden Archives of Amateur Cinematic Material: Making Orphan Works Accessible to Scholars

Howard Besser, Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program, NYU

Only recently have large moving image archives recognized the value of collecting amateur material. In this Talk, Howard Besser will first lay out the value of this type of material and the increased scholarly use of it. He will then discuss the interplay between cinema studies scholarship and the works collected by archives. Finally, he will discuss recent collaborative efforts to make this hidden material more accessible.

Biographical Note

Howard Besser is founding Director of New York University's Moving Image Archiving & Preservation masters degree program. Previously, Besser was a Professor of Library & Information Studies, where he taught and did research on multimedia, image databases, digital libraries, metadata standards, digital longevity, web design, information literacy, distance learning, intellectual property, and the social and cultural impact of new information technologies. He has also been in charge of information technology for two art museums. Besser has been working with still and moving images for more than 40 years, and in the mid-1980s he began working extensively with digital images. Around 1985 he was likely the first person to direct-scan an oil painting, and soon after led a team that created the first client-server networked image database (UC Berkeley's ImageQuery). He has been at the forefront of numerous multi-institutional digital image exploration projects: from the Getty sponsored "Museum Educational Site Licensing project", to the National Digital Information Infrastructure Preservation Programs "Preserving Digital Public Television project". He has also been actively involved creating a number of standards used by the cultural heritage community, including the Dublin Core, the Metadata Encoding & Transmission Standard (METS), and the digital preservation standard PREMIS. He has published more than 40 articles on digital image issues, ranging from their impact on scholarship and culture, to manipulating the architecture of image retrieval system to better match user queries. In 2009 he was named to the Library of Congress select list of "Pioneers of Digital Preservation"