

# **“Her Own Version of History”: A Case Study of the Guerrilla Girls Oral Histories at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution**

**ERIN DICKEY**

## **Abstract:**

Broaching issues related to archives' ethical obligations to participants, transcripts as derivative oral history documents, and web publication of archival materials, this case study explores the development of web access policies in oral history archives by examining the complications that emerged during the Archives of American Arts' (AAA) 2007-2008 collection of a set of oral history interviews with the Guerrilla Girls, an influential feminist art collective. These complications involved the pseudonymity of interview participants, interviewees' lack of response to the AAA's requests for transcript reviews, and the online publication of interview transcripts. This case demonstrates one instance of institutional archives' complex mediation between artists represented in collections and researchers using those collections to generate historical narratives in an era of increasing digital access to archival materials. Using program documentation and data gathered from current and former AAA staff members as well as from a user of the Guerrilla Girls material, this study compares the AAA's standard processes for oral history collection to the process of collecting the Guerrilla Girls interviews. Study participants discussed lessons learned from decisions made regarding web access to those interviews. Findings from this study bear a transferrable relationship to policy review for oral history collections, archives' donor/patron relations, and web access to oral histories.

## **About the author:**

*Erin Dickey* is dual degree candidate (MA Art History/MS Information Science) at UNC-Chapel Hill. As a Fellow in the IMLS-funded "Learning from Artists' Archives" program (2015-2017), Erin held a summer internship at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, conducted a studio archiving project with Asheville, NC area painter Connie Bostic, and helped to organize UNC's March 2017 conference, "Artists Archives in the South". Prior to coming to UNC, Erin was Development and Outreach Coordinator at Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center in Asheville, NC. From 2010-2012, she worked as a Mobile Facilitator recording stories and conversations across the U.S. for the national oral history nonprofit StoryCorps. She holds an MA in Religious Studies from the University of Chicago and received her BA in English and Religious Studies from Boston University in 2008. She currently works as a Research Assistant for the Southern Folklife Collection at UNC.