Grabhorn Type Specimen Collection

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San Francisco Public Library. Book Arts and Special Collections Center
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Grabhorn Type Specimen Collection

Dates: 1781-2012

Collection Number: BASC 5

Creator/Collector: Grabhorn, Robert

Extent: 8.25 linear feet (18 pamphlet boxes and 1 flat box)

Repository: San Francisco Public Library. Book Arts and Special Collections Center
San Francisco, California 94102

Abstract: The collection contains type specimens in various forms, including booklets, brochures, pamphlets, sheets, posters, and portfolios, from the 18th Century to the present. Additions to the collection are ongoing. The bulk of the specimens are printed in the US and Europe but there are also specimens from Argentina and Japan. The specimens are organized into 2 groups – by individual typeface and by type foundry.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research and is available for use during Book Arts & Special Collections hours.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

San Francisco Printer Robert Grabhorn (1900-1973) of the San Francisco-based Grabhorn Press started collecting the works of printers, type specimens, and books on the subject of hot metal printing from an early age in order to study the masters' solutions to various problems in design, typography, and bookmaking. By the time his collection was presented to the San Francisco Public Library on November 17, 1965, it had grown to include almost every typeface, printer, and bookmaker of note since the 15th century, with particular emphasis on early type specimens and works of 16th century French and Italian printers. Since its acquisition by the Library, the collection has grown to become one of the most important of its kind. Type specimens have been collected and continue to be collected through donations and purchases.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection consists of hundreds of type specimens in various forms, from the 18th century to the present, with the bulk dating in the 20th century. The type specimens included in the collection come from all over the world, but predominantly from the US and Europe. There are type specimens of individual typefaces as well as of multiple typefaces from a particular foundry or printer. The range of materials include single sheets, pamphlets, booklets, catalogs, cards, folios, folders, and posters. Type specimens are largely letterpress printed or offset printed, with a small number of contemporary specimens digitally produced.

Indexing Terms

Printing -- Specimens
Type and type-founding -- Specimens
Type specimens
Typography
Graphic Design (Typography)
Fonts