

## **The Print Albums of the 1st Duchess of Northumberland: Sociability, Exchange and Collecting in England in the Eighteenth Century**

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The Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne, Australia, holds nine albums of Renaissance prints once owned by English aristocratic collector and arts patron, Elizabeth Seymour Percy, 1st Duchess of Northumberland (1717 - 1776). Most of the Northumberland print albums in the Baillieu Library collection retain their original bindings and configuration, therefore enabling new interpretations of the albums as objects. A vibrant consumer market for prints existed across all social classes in the eighteenth century, and the medium of print was linked with a growing interest in the categorisation and display of art objects. Comments about the acquisition of the prints and descriptions of their ordering and display in specially-fitted domestic 'museum' rooms in the Duchess' London home, are recorded in the Duchess' surviving diaries and inventories. Some of the Duchess's extensive collection of prints were purchased through print sellers in the UK and abroad, and intact albums were acquired from other collectors in her social circle. Evidence in her diaries suggests the Duchess arranged prints in some of the Baillieu albums herself, using a unique cutting and pasting method.

Study of the Northumberland print albums therefore provides an insight into the complex social interplay between an art object and its collector/creator/maker, the consumer market and audiences/viewers in the eighteenth century. How did the Duchess and her society visitors engage with her print collection? How do the print albums - as consumer objects - demonstrate the conscious and unconscious personal and social identities of the collector, for example exhibit her taste or her status as a 'connoisseur' or 'informed amateur'? What can we learn about the purchase and exchange of print albums in aristocratic circles in the eighteenth century? The Baillieu Library Northumberland print albums are a fascinating lens through which to consider art history, consumer culture and sociability in the eighteenth century.