Workshop 6

Subject Cataloging First Aid for Art Librarians

March 31, 2001

Art Libraries Society of North America 29th Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Organizer: Alexis Curry, Librarian Cataloger, Los Angeles County Museum of Art Research Library

Moderator: Angel Lopez, MLIS candidate and Library Assistant, University of California, Los Angeles

Speakers:

Sherman Clarke, Head of Original Cataloging, New York University, Bobst Library
Kathy Corcoran, Head Librarian, Joslyn Art Museum Library
Maria Oldal, Head of Cataloging and Database Maintenance, Pierpont Morgan Library
Julia Wisniewski, Art Monographs Cataloger, University of Maryland Libraries

Advisor: Daniel A. Starr, Chief Librarian, Technical Services, Museum of Modern Art

Sponsors: Cataloging Section; Museum Library Division

Support: Library Associates

The Subject Cataloging First Aid for Art Librarians Workshop was held March 31, 2001, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. The workshop was organized by Alexis Curry, Cataloging Librarian, Los Angeles County Museum of Art Research Library, and moderated by Angel Lopez, MLIS candidate and Library Assistant, University of California, Los Angeles. The Cataloging Section and the Museum Library Division sponsored the workshop.

Angel introduced the panel and workshop attendees introduced themselves, indicated their level of cataloging experience, and made specific comments about what they hoped to gain from the workshop.

Julia Wisniewski, Art Monographs Cataloger, University of Maryland Libraries presented, “LC Subject Cataloging for the Art Library.” Julia discussed subject analysis in general, and art subject headings strings in particular. Julia provided subject analysis and subject heading exercises that corresponded to various concepts introduced in her presentation. She encouraged a discussion of the possible answers after each set of exercises was completed. Julia’s presentation may be accessed on the Web at: http://www.lib.umd.edu/UMCP/TSD/CATDEPT/firstaid.html.

Sherman Clarke, Head of Original Cataloging, New York University, Bobst Library discussed classification. Sherman explained why libraries classify their collections and gave an overview of various classification systems. Sherman discussed in greater detail Library of Congress classification; he explained LC documentation, outlines of the classification scheme, and classification tables and reserved cutters. Sherman also discussed special problems in classification: when to classify by artist and when to classify by medium; artist’s books; museum pamphlets; reclassifying a collection; and the T classification schedule. Examples of titles and their classifications were given to the workshop attendees; these posed some of the issues in Sherman’s presentation. Sherman’s presentation may be accessed on the Web at: http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/9783/arisna/classif.html.

Kathy Corcoran, Head Librarian, Joslyn Art Museum Library presented her paper on art subject cataloging in the real world, “Many Intricate and Difficult Problems that Torture the Mind: Words of Wisdom for Art Catalogers in the Real World.” Kathy offered practical advice for those working in small art libraries with limited budgets and staff. Kathy stressed the need to make choices and decisions that are “consistent with the purposes of our catalogs and the needs of our users.” She advised the attendees that trying to catalog perfectly can result in fewer materials for library patrons, “When in doubt about the ‘right’ way to catalog, I think it’s better to risk making a mistake, than to leave library resources collecting dust on a ‘problems’ shelf.... “ Kathy gave the workshop attendees a guide to resources for catalogers on a budget. Kathy’s paper may be accessed on the Web at: http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/9783/arisna/corcoran.html.

Maria Oldal, Head of Cataloging and Database Maintenance, Pierpont Morgan Library gave a presentation on the use of special vocabularies. Maria discussed the strengths and weaknesses of using special vocabularies in cataloging practice. Maria then discussed the application of special vocabularies and the maintenance of these terms once they are in a catalog. Maria provided many examples of headings from special vocabularies, some which were used as subject headings, and others which were used as genre terms. Maria also gave an overview of the special vocabularies available to art libraries.


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Services, Museum of Modern Art, New York) spoke briefly about cataloging workflow and dealing with backlogs. He then provided a summary of the presentations and opened the floor for discussion among the panel and participants.