Art Libraries Society of North America, 33rd Annual Conference
Hilton Americas, Houston, Texas, April 1-6, 2005

Handbook of Art Museum Librarianship Participants Meeting
Sunday, April 3, 2005, 7:00 – 8:10 AM

In attendance: Twenty-four participants (writers and reader/advisors) were in attendance at the early hour, plus Paul Glassman, Occasional Papers Editor and Joan Benedetti, Handbook Editor

Recorders: Ann Abid, John Hagood, Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Roger Lawson, and Sharon Wasserman (notes compiled from all recorders).

Coffee and muffins, courtesy of Paul Glassman and Joan Benedetti.

Joan goes over the format of the meeting, and presents an overview of the project so far. Some statistics: there are currently a total of forty-two writers, writing sixty-two essays plus the introduction, and thirteen thumbnails. Of the sixty-two essays, nine will be from librarians in large libraries, twenty-two from librarians in medium-sized libraries, twenty-six from librarians in small libraries, and five from librarians in visual resources collections of various sizes.

Most essays will be due May 20; those writers on the Houston conference committee have been given an extended deadline of June 3. Thumbnail sketches are due on June 3.

Joan introduced Paul Glassman, Occasional Papers Editor. The Handbook will be published by ARLIS/NA as an Occasional Paper. Paul announced this might be ARLIS’ first co-publishing venture, possibly with Scarecrow Press.


Joan asked us now and later to think about the question, “What makes art museum libraries different?” She asks us in our writing to “look forward in our thinking,” since we “want [the Handbook] to endure.” In writing on our topic, we should focus how that issue plays out in art museum libraries, and what is different about them. We should look for trends in art museums and their libraries, and the implications for the coming five to ten years (social and economic trends as well as technologies).

Joan handed out copies of the latest revision of the Table of Contents and summarized a review of the parts and constituent chapters. She also handed out a list of topics for small group discussions, together with names of participants in attendance.

Daniel Starr asked who the expected audience for the book will be. Joan says a broad one: librarians and library school students who may be thinking of taking a position in an art museum library; ourselves, looking for guidance on topics with which we have had no previous experience. Finally, art museum administrators “who might be thinking about the library, either thinking about starting a library or cutting back in the library.”

To further answer the questions about scope, audience, etc., Paul read aloud a passage from the Handbook Prospectus [see p. 1 of the Prospectus, "Intended Audience"].
Joan then led a brainstorming session on “What makes art libraries different.” Some answers, called out:

- distinctive museum collections
- admin. power structure sometimes unclear—who “owns” library?
- curators, and serving curators and other [museum staff? Public?] at the same time
- main clientele is curators, education departments—with more in some museums
- clientele may be shifting—more non-museum/general public clients? Administration encourages this, but staff support to properly service public may not be there.
- more attention to education—or, away from education
- we serve appraisers, art collectors, students, dealers, parents, VIPs, “painting-in-the attic” people, more “cross-over scholars” (interested in social or cultural history as much as “art history”)
- people find us via the Internet, even if there is no specific outreach from the library
- in spite of broad use of art museum libraries, funding and staffing are challenging (Joan reminds us, this is not unique to museums)
- we have tangible collections to support
- the mission statement may be critical—exclusionary or inclusive?

“What makes it unique, coming to work” Joan asked to forward the discussion.

- our tasks are tied to exhibition calendar
- may feel personal relationship to collection (museum?)
- we may be isolated professionally; may need to make conscious effort to reach out to museum staff socially as well as to librarians at other institutions—ARLIS very helpful in this regard
- library collections mirror permanent collection and exhibition program
- collections can be uneven; research collections can be deep
- narrow focus can mean a deep collection
- materials like auction catalogs, artists’ files, exhibition catalogs, sales price info.
- copyright issues?
- exchange programs, especially of exhibition catalogs
- collection growth is dynamic, can be volatile; curators and directors do not necessarily want collection development policies [it’s not in their best interest].
- solo librarians [seem to be many in art museum libraries—even in medium-sized libraries]
- cataloging books versus cataloging objects in museum collections [similarities? differences?]?

Someone asked about bibliographic references. Joan expects citations and suggested readings to be submitted with each essay. Since space in the Handbook will not allow us to be exhaustive in our treatment of topics, bibliographic references should supplement information in essays. Joan will compile bibliographic references into a separate section at the end of the Handbook, but probably there will be separate ones for each chapter topic.

Joan reminded us that photographs are wanted (of our libraries or of items in our library collections).

At this point, we broke into small groups by chapter topics. Participants who found they were the only writer present working on a particular topic, joined with other groups. Discussions, however brief, were lively. Unfortunately, there was only ten minutes left before we had to break so that those wanting to go to the Museum Libraries Division meeting could do so.