Summary:

Shannon Van Kirk, Art and Architecture Librarian, Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, spoke about "Art in Fiction: An Overview, 1876-". Ms. Van Kirk introduced the topic of the session and discussed the research on it that she and Amy Ciccone have been doing in recent years. The two art librarians have been creating an annotated bibliography of mysteries and fiction in art that will be issued by a commercial publisher.

Shannon discovered during her research into fiction catalogs that the subject of art in fiction began during the Victorian period. She and Amy decided to broaden the definition of art to allow them to explore the boundaries of the subject, which they have found includes several sub-genres ranging from forgeries, art restoration, and antiques to Aztec and Egyptian treasures and jewels.

Their methodology has been to read broadly, attend book fairs, conduct research at the Getty Research Institute Library, collect bibliographies issued by book stores, and examine fiction catalogs. Study of the latter resources has shown a steady accretion of subject headings as the topic has developed, which Shannon is attempting to track over a period of time.

Amy Ciccone, the second speaker, led attendees on an intriguing journey through the 30-year correspondence between Dr. Ulrich Middledorf (1901-1983) and Canadian art librarian Sybile Pantazzi (1914-1983) entitled "Art in Fiction: A Collector Ahead of His Time." She has been compiling an annotated bibliography of art mysteries since she began writing a regular column for UPDATE in 1999. Six years later, the bibliography includes more than 1,500 titles and continues to grow.

While discussing her work with colleagues and friends, Amy discovered that the Getty Research Institute Library acquired an Art in Fiction collection in 1984. It had been part of the personal library of the distinguished professor of Italian Renaissance art history, Ulrich Middledorf. The great scholar acquired titles for his collection in several ways, but corresponded for more than thirty years with Sybille Pantazzi, librarian of the Art Gallery of Omtario (then known as the Art Gallery of Toronto) and early ARLIS/NA member. Beginning in 1966 and continuing through Middledorf's death in 1983, Ms. Pantazzi was instrumental in helping him build his collection by finding and sending him books from wherever she was in the world.

The correspondence between this bibliophilic art librarian and world-renowned scholar is rich in detail, delightful in turns of phrase and astonishing in the period of
time it covered. Middledorf's collecting ended in 1980 at 1,980 titles, except for what he and Ms. Pantazzi found to be "worthwhile books." The professor died on February 19, 1983; Ms. Pantazzi died a few months later in July.

Houston bookstore manager, Dean James, was the session's third speaker. James manages Murder by the Book, one of the oldest bookstores specializing in mysteries in the country. He is also a librarian and author. Mysteries he has authored include: *Cruel as the Grave*, *Closer Than the Bones*, and *Death by Dissertation* (2004). This well versed bookshop owner and writer led the audience on a delightful bibliographic tour of his favorite art mysteries beginning with such classics as London author Margery Allingham's (1904-1966) *Death of a Ghost* (first published in 1934). The title is one of Allingham's Albert Campion series and its stylishness, intricacy and wit make it one of the most distinguished in the genre. The author was a contemporary of Agatha Christie (1890-1976) and Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), which led James to mention for former author's *Murder on the Mesopotamia* (first published in 1936) and the latter's *Five Red Herrings* (first published in 1931, issued in the United States as *Suspicious Characters*).

Sarah Caudwell (pseudonym for Sarah Cockburn, 1939-2000) is another highly admired British author of art-related mysteries. Her witty writing, keen observation, dry humor, and settings peopled with characters of genteel manners offer the perfect backdrop for the investigations of Oxford medieval law don Hilary Tamar. The four books in the series include *Thus Was Adonis Murdered* (1981) through *The Sibyl in Her Grave* (2000) and are all told in the first person, therefore never identifying Tamar's gender.

Mary Stewart (1916-) is another favorite author of James. Her title, *My Brother Michael* (first published in 1955) has art content and is written with the author's typical vivid portrayal of place—Greece. The book provides a wonderful "what if" moment in art history that any devotee to the genre will find intriguing. No one can discuss the genre of art mysteries without mention of the prolific and highly regarded author, Elizabeth Peters (pseudonym for Barbara Mertz, 1927+). The author's famous series about Amelia Peabody, a Victorian Egyptologist covers three generations of the Emerson family, a world war, and twenty-five years of turbulent history. The series begins with *Crocodile on the Sunbank* (1975) and continues with the seventeenth volume entitled *Serpent on the Crown* (2005). Peters' Vicki Bliss series (six titles) about the young and glamorous American woman art historian working in Bavaria also has a following with readers of the genre.

James pointed out that Margaret Maron also wrote a few books in the art mystery genre. Her series featuring NYPD police woman Sigrid Harald provides insights into the modern art scene and are perceptively and provocatively written. *One Coffee With* (1981) involves an art historian who is poisoned in a fictional Manhattan college. Historic preservation and the Yuletide season are at play in Maron's *Corpus Christmas* (first published in 1989). Ly. Harald's professional and private lives clash when an art historian is murdered at a party in Manhattan's venerable, art-filled Erich Bruel House.

James ended his delightful exploration of the best in art mysteries with works by six more authors. Laurie King deftly and creatively describes the intriguing relationship between the young and brilliant Mary Russell and the retired, reclusive Sherlock Holmes in a series about the pair that begins with *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (1994) through the seventh entitled *The Game* (2004). King has also written a
series featuring lesbian San Francisco homicide investigator, Kate Martinelli. While not art related, it is one of James favorite series because of its intellectual quality and the way in which the author addresses the role of women and the difficulties they face in daily life. A Grave Talent (1993) won both the Edgar Allen Poe Award for the best first novel by the Mystery Writers Association of America and the John Creasy Award by the Crime Writers Association (Britain).


James ended his discussion with mention of thrillers about art, including Aaron Elkin's Loot: A Novel (1999). It involves art thefts by the Nazis during World War II that are investigated by retired Boston art curator, Ben Revere. Last, but not least, is Daniel Silva's The English Assassin (2002). Silva is an author James considers to be the best among spy novelists. The title is a part of the author's Gabriel Allon series, an art restorer and former member of the Israeli Secret Service who becomes involved in a collection that may have been Nazi loot. James particularly admires the scrupulous research Silva did on the subject and the superbly crafted writing.

James introduced the session's final speaker by adding that Nicholas Kilmer's Fred Taylor series offers readers the most gripping and well-researched art mysteries today. Nicholas Kilmer, a painter, art dealer and author of the Fred Taylor mystery series lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Normandy, France. He is also the Dean of Swain School of Design in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Kilmer has written Man with a Squirrel (1996), Harmony in Flesh and Black (1995), O Sacred Head (1997), Dirty Linen (1999), Lazarus Arise (2001) with Madonna of the Apes due in October 2005.

Kilmer stated that fiction needs to be close to what can be expected to be true. His objective in his books, all of which involve art, is to educate and entertain the non-expert. The book he authored that involved the most art research was Dirty Linen, which offers the reader a complex story about the Turner bequest. A parcel of erotic drawings was discovered in Turner's studio after his death in 1851. It turns up for sale in Massachusetts and is purchased by Clayton Reed, the fictional wealthy Boston collector. Fred Taylor, Cambridge art expert, is hired to authenticate the collection and trace its provenance. It is interesting to note that the book ends with an afterword by art historian, Larry Silver (University of Pennsylvania). The opportunity to meet and learn from both Kilmer and James was a rare treat for ARLIS/NA attendees!