First Exposures: Contemporary Art Exhibitions in Public Libraries

ARLIS/NA
36th Annual Conference
May 1-5, 2008
Denver, Colorado

Cathy Billings
Brand Library & Art Center
Glendale, California
“The end of 1937 saw the beginning of an interesting extension service or venture in adult education – the preparation of an art gallery and exhibition room in the library and the establishment of a definite art program.”

Byrl J. Kellogg
New York Libraries, August 1938
“In accordance with the spirit of democracy, art should not be confined to connoisseurs and the wealthy, but should be brought to the attention of the general public, who are inclined to regard art galleries as sacrosanct.

[There are] great opportunities open to Libraries, especially those Libraries situated in communities where they were the only public centres of culture…to increase their usefulness to the community by holding exhibitions of pictures.”

Arthur Lismer
In “The library and art appreciation in the community”
Ontario Library Review, August 1935
Brand Library
& Art Center
Glendale Public Library
The Survey

• Participants
  – from US and Canada
  – Working in public libraries in a position in which responsible for art exhibitions and related activities
  – 465 valid responses
Response Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunavut</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québec</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dist. of Columbia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Islands</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question Areas

Respondent
Library
Exhibition space
Exhibitions
The art exhibited
The selection of artists
The exhibition program
The Respondents

How would you describe your primary job responsibility?

- Library work: 77%
- Exhibition work: 3%
- Equal parts library & exhibition work: 7%
- No answer: 13%

Do you have an MLIS / LIS Degree?

- Yes: 58%
- No: 41%
- No answer: 1%
Subject Specialty
35 visual arts
57 humanities
65 “other”

Prior experience or training exhibiting artwork, gallery management, or curating?

- 64% of respondents whose primary responsibility is exhibition work have prior experience vs. 35% whose job responsibilities are equal parts library and exhibition work.

Job Responsibility and MLIS degrees

- Library Work
  - 63% have MLIS
  - 37% no

- Exhibition Work
  - 21% have MLIS
  - 78% no

- Equal Parts Library & Exhibition Work
  - 48% have MLIS
  - 48% no
Does your library own and maintain a permanent art collection?

Yes: 41%

No: 57%
MAKE-SHIFT: art is exhibited in the library but not in a dedicated space, perhaps on easels or utilizing other temporary moveable apparatus; characterized by multi-purpose use of the space.

SEMI-PROFESSIONAL: a portion of the library (such as a corridor, lobby, reading room) with space permanently dedicated to exhibitions but not necessarily designed for that purpose; most likely utilizing a modular hanging system and perhaps special lighting; characterized by multi-purpose use of the space.

PROFESSIONAL: a dedicated, single-purpose space intentionally designed or remodeled as a place to exhibit works of art, including professional lighting, hanging surfaces, exhibition specific signage and other features consistent with a commercial gallery or museum space.
### Space Statistics for Professional Settings

#### Square feet
- Range: 95-6,500
- Average: 1,589

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 500</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 500 and 1,000</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>between 1,000 and 2,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>35%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 2,000 and 3,000</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 3,000 and 4,000</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 4,000 and 5,000</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 5,000 and 6,000</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 6,000 and 7,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Linear feet
- Range: 19-600
- Average: 136

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 50</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 50 and 100</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>between 100 and 200</strong></td>
<td><strong>43%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 200 and 300</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 300 and 400</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 400 and 500</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 500 and 600</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 600 and 700</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36% of Professional spaces use moveable walls

17% of Semi-professional use moveable walls
Alice C. Sabatini
Gallery
Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library
### Number of Exhibits in Twelve Month Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>(25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10-12</strong></td>
<td><strong>132</strong></td>
<td><strong>(28%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition is permanent</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Other&quot;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average length of Exhibitions (in weeks)

377 respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 &amp; 2 weeks</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 &amp; 4 weeks</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
<td><strong>(60%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 &amp; 6 weeks</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 &amp; 8 weeks</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 &amp; 10 weeks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 &amp; 12 weeks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who Installs Exhibitions?
(226 respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARTISTS</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT no training</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT no training</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT experienced, experienced</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT experienced, experienced</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If these choices don’t apply…
(239 respondents)

- Contract employees (specialists, professional preparator)
- Volunteers (support groups, local artists)
- Facilities and maintenance staff

**ARTISTS (64%)**
- 111 (46%) say artists exclusively responsible for installation
- 43 (19%) say artists have primary responsibility with minimal assistance/support from staff
The Art Exhibited

Would you describe the art you exhibit as contemporary?

246 out of 465 (53%) respondents said YES

Other media exhibited:

- Fiber / Textile Arts
  - quilts
  - batik
  - needlework
- Sound art
- Photographic arts
- Book arts

"Contemporary Art" as defined in the Thames & Hudson *Dictionary of Art Terms*, 2nd edition, 2003: The art of the present day, but the term is often used to designate art that is currently regarded as avant-garde or in some way experimental.
How would you describe the majority of artists you exhibit?

Other types of artists:
- Students
  - middle school students
  - high school students
  - art school
- Amateurs
- Hobbyists

Geographic Affiliation

- Local: 57%
- State/Provincial: 5%
- Regional: 28%
- National: 1%
- Other: 7%
- No answer: 2%

A great many focus on local or regional artists but may have periodic exhibitions of artists known nationally or internationally.
The Selection of Artists

**FORMAL SUBMISSION PROCESS:**
cyclical process; call for submissions widely advertised; specific eligibility requirements and submission guidelines that must be met by applicants.

**INFORMAL SUBMISSION PROCESS:**
call for submissions not widely advertised; eligibility requirements and guidelines not necessarily well-defined; submissions accepted at any time.

**BY INVITATION ONLY:** artists are invited to submit and/or exhibit.

**EXHIBITIONS HIRED OR LOANED:** organized traveling exhibitions are selected.

The majority of respondents (242) select artists and work using an informal submission process.
Other

- Committees comprised of staff and non-staff
- Art teachers
- Local art guilds, clubs, organizations
- Different staff person(s) (e.g. library director, reference librarian, branch managers, special events coordinator)
- Library Trustees

Who is responsible for reviewing submissions and selecting (or inviting) artists, works of art or traveling exhibitions?
Once an artist has been selected, who curates the works to be exhibited?

- **Library**: 3
- **Library and artist**: 19
- **Artist**: 28
- **No answer**: 6
- **Other / No answer**: 3

How far in advance is your exhibition schedule planned?

- 3 months: 5
- 6 months: 9
- 9 months: 6
- **1 year**: 25 (45%)
- 2 years: 8
- 3 years: 0
- **Other / No answer**: 3

How often are submissions solicited?

- Annually: 39%
- Continuously: 50%
- Other / No answer: 11%
Respondents consistently indicated that artists are required to submit:

- Letter of introduction/cover letter (20%)
- Artist statement (54%)
- Résumé (34%)
- Submission form provided by the library (59%)
- Visual representations of the works of art (79%)

Other requirements:
SASE for return of materials

Accepted formats of visual representation:
- Slides (61%)
- Printed reproductions (73%)
- Digital files (70%)
- Web-based image galleries or artist websites (54%)

14% of respondents used the “other” category to indicate that they accept original art work.

Most commonly submitted formats:
- Printed reproductions (30%)
- Digital files (34%)
The Exhibition Program

- Funding
- Sales / Income
- Insurance
- Publicity
- Programming
Funding

Does the library designate funding for the art exhibition program?

- No: 81%
- Yes: 14%
- No answer: 5%

Does the exhibition program receive funding from a "Friends of the Library" or library support group?

- No: 66%
- Yes: 28%
- No answer: 6%
**Sales / Income**

Are works for sale?

- Yes, at the discretion of the artist: **69%**
- No: **31%**

Does the library or library support group take a commission?

- Yes: **15%**
- No: **84%**
- No answer: **1%**

Only 15% take a commission.

Does commission offset program expenses?

- No: **33%**
- Yes: **39%**
- Partially: **28%**

**Commission %**

- five: **2%**
- ten: **37%**
- fifteen: **11%**
- twenty: **28%**
- twenty-five: **7%**
- thirty-nine: **7%**
- fifty: **2%**
- other: **7%**

15%, or 46 programs take a commission on work sold; what percentage do they take?
Who insures the art work?

- No answer: 15%
- Library: 26%
- Artist: 59%

**Comments:**

Never thought about insurance.

We are still in the process of figuring this out for the long-term.

This is still up for debate!

No insurance arrangements

Artwork not insured, library has security staff to minimize damage or theft.

*Artists are most often not REQUIRED to insure their work but must sign a liability release.*

When library does insure...

- falls under the city/municipality's insurance policy, not designed specifically for works of art.
- is insured by a policy maintained by the foundation/support group.
- city/municipality has a special rider or policy for fine art exhibitions.
Publicity

What types of publicity do you employ to promote your exhibition program?

- **Paid advertisements**: 21
- **Posters and banners**: 232
- **Website**: 283
- **Digital invitations**: 111
- **Hard copy**: 145
- **Press releases**: 359

Most effective:
- **Press releases**: 54%
- **Hard copy invitations**: 18%
- **Website**: 18%
- **Digital invitations**: 8%
- **Paid advertisements**: 2%
Brand Library Art Galleries presents
Photo-Chimera: Ten California Photographers
Other Types of Publicity Employed

• Advertising within the library / in-house displays
• Library calendar of events / program calendars (paper & web-based)
• Library newsletter or magazine
• Local cable television; library weekly television and radio shows
• Artist supplied promo material/their brochures and business cards
• Weekly column (related to the library) in local newspapers
• Radio public service announcements
• Small town word of mouth
• Telephone calls to arts council members
• Facebook
• “Social networking is featuring more and more”
Do you publish exhibition catalogs?

- Never: 84%
- Rarely: 10%
- Occasionally: 4%
- Frequently: 1%
- Always: 1%

(out of 416 respondents)
**Other Programs**

- Artist interview television programs for city TV and local cable access TV
- Artist at Work (demonstration series) - features a new artist each month who conducts two two-hour demonstrations.
- Exhibition related book displays
- Informal "Meet & Greet"
- Humanities programming that ties into exhibition: history lectures, musical performances and cultural programs.
- Art nights or art-walks with other venues in the community.
- “Ongoing series called ARTalk that focuses on the visual arts. Not directly related to the exhibits.”
- In collaboration with museums: “we have an ongoing series of videoconference audio/visual presentations from the Smithsonian American Art Museum.”
- In collaboration with universities: “We work with the Mulvane Art Museum at Washburn University and the faculty of Washington University’s art department to expand on what we offer.”
San Diego Public Library Visual Arts Program
NEIL SHIGLEY

EARL & BIRDIE TAYLOR LIBRARY
San Diego, California

LYNN SCHUETTE
In a World Where Butchers Sing like Angels

February 15 — March 27, 2004
EARL & BIRDIE TAYLOR LIBRARY
San Diego
All exhibit installation photos courtesy of Mark-Elliot Lugo, Library Curator, San Diego Public Library
Issues

The Librarian as “arbiter of taste”

Being taken seriously

Censorship
Conclusion

The focus for public libraries should be on developing standards and guidelines for art exhibition programs that document best-practices. These standards and guidelines would be used by librarians with existing programs, to share with library administration and boards, and by librarians starting new programs, as well as to provide support when issues such as censorship arise.