



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

35th Annual Conference
Sheraton Colony Square, Atlanta, Georgia, April 26-May 1

Session 18: New Voices in the Profession 2: Papers on Arts and Visual Resources Librarianship
Sunday, April 29, 2007 11:00am-12:30pm

Moderator: Sarah Carter, Circulation Supervisor, Indiana University

Speakers: Bryan Loar, Kent State University; John Bowman, University of British Columbia; Claudia Dold and James Ascher, University of South Florida; Claire Dannenbaum, University of British Columbia; Tang Li, University of Maryland

Recorder: Susan Winkler, University of Iowa

Introduction:

Sarah Carter opened the session by welcoming attendees to the second New Voices session. She explained that New Voices was created to feature exceptional academic work by students and new professionals. The session also gave some of the participants their first exposure to a professional conference setting. According to Carter, this year's New Voices panel explored some of the best scholarship in the Art Librarianship field. They analyzed a wide variety of topics ranging from Web 2.0 to tackling the task of discussing a content based indexing system for Chinese landscape images. In order to leave as much time as possible for the speakers to present, Carter concluded her introduction by saying she wished for questions to be saved until every paper had been read.

Bryan Loar, MLS 2006, Ohio State University

Bryan Loar's talk, "*New Forms of Communication: Harnessing Collective Knowledge Through Web Logs*" started with an explanation of Bryan's duties as Senior Site Administrator of the ARLISNAP blog. He described the ARLISNAP blog as a multifunctional virtual space designed to serve Art Librarianship students and new professionals. Loar suggested that blogs are no longer "just online diaries" but places to collect pure knowledge. Loar then listed the many foreseeable uses for blogs, such as a forum to talk out ideas and make group decisions as well as collaboration on various projects. Loar argued that a blog can be used as a professional development tool because there is always an influx of new information and users can forge personal and professional associations with other people that post or comment upon that new information. Blogs also utilize the mentality of "one venue many voices." For example, blogs give users an equal opportunity to share motivational posts and make comments. Loar briefly discussed history and

statistics regarding blogging as an information medium and then described how the ARLISNAP blog was designed. The blog site was constructed with Wordpress.com and RSS feeds along the sides to keep users up-to-date on news information important to their specific needs. Loar also pointed out that the ARLISNAP blog embraces new technologies and software like flickr. Loar ended his paper by suggesting that the ARLISNAP blog represents an online community where students and new professionals share their experiences and thoughts on the events they attend. That collective wisdom comes from both a common thread of art librarianship, and a diversity that comes from going beyond one individual's knowledge. The blog then becomes a powerful tool for collaboration because users can archive the knowledge of the group and redistribute that knowledge to a wide audience. Then the audience can learn from those experiences and capitalize on them.

John Bowman, MLS 2006, University of British Columbia

Bowman's talk entitled "*Communities of Practice in the Visual Disciplines and on the Web 2.0*" began with the idea that we, as art librarians, should discover what information is meaningful to studio, architecture, art and design students. Bowman asked the audience how many of them had a strong grasp or fleeting grasp on the concepts of Web 2.0. A majority raised their hands in the fleeting grasp category. Bowman then gave a description of what the term Web 2.0 means; not only from the "cool applications that do cool things" standpoint, but also the history behind its conception, and the Web 2.0 revolution of the future. Bowman suggested that focusing on the users in the art community can show what these users are creating and how the Internet is being used. He argued that libraries no longer simply provide access, but must also now provide services. He asked, "What does it mean to build services for the digital generation?" He described how links coming from sites actually do hold value and meaning, because there is an actual person behind that link who decided to use that particular link, therefore giving that link a value-laden place in an information hierarchy. He suggested that in Web 2.0 making meanings and relationships explicit is an ultimate goal. When people add the value to the information then services and access get better with that use. Bowman argued that social tagging then becomes a process in which users make sense of words and pieces of information. He asked if this book marking will lead to eventual chaos. Instead, he believes that tagging works well with large volumes of information and communities where information has the same meaning to each of the users, then it is more easily found rather than hard to find. More to the crux of his argument is that little literature exists about what art students do in or with Web 2.0. He suggested that of course students are looking for images and image browsing, but that some students want to browse with concepts instead of subject headings. For example, art students want to search a database of images for the color blue or the emotion of anger. Students want to be able to collect their own resources, in a virtual personal card catalog provided by the library and where the library could and would meet their own idiosyncratic needs. He concluded that in order for art librarians to better serve their patrons, we need to find a way to build a community out of these types of use and be excited about what our students are excited about, and then we can create these types of virtual spaces.

Claudia Dold and James Ascher, MLS Candidates, University of South Florida

<http://www.zephyrwind.org/ARLISpp.ppt>

Claudia Dold and James Ascher, in their paper entitled "*Unlocking the Stories of Serendipitous Cultural Object Collections with Digital Libraries*," detailed a specific project involving the creation of a website providing access to records for a collection of non-book items that were donated to the USF Tampa library. The ultimate hope of Dold was to figure out how the techniques they used might be generally applicable to other special collections with similar issues surrounding collection access. The collection consisted of 149 objects made of glass, stone, metal and clay, believed to be mostly Roman dating from the 1st to 4th century A.D. and found in the Eastern Mediterranean. Because the objects were potentially easily damaged through handling, a digital library made more sense in order for fewer patrons to handle the actual items. By building a digital collection, patrons could access the item records, determine if the item was useful, and then request to see the actual pieces. Dold explained that they had very little information that arrived with the works. She established some lofty main goals at the start which were modified as the process continued. She wanted to identify the objects, their context, define preservation techniques and create some form of digital access. Because she had so many limitations – timeframe, budget, staff, and equipment – Dold and Ascher decided they would put together a representative collection with a sample selection of the objects rather than all 149 objects.

While Dold's responsibilities included discovering the history of the objects, their physical preservation and storage and the actual digitalization via a camera and studio space, Ascher was charged with the duty of creating the architecture of the digital library including the metadata and controlled description. Ascher first looked at existing systems of cultural object classification including CCO (Catalog of Cultural Objects) which was still in draft format, and VRA Core which also wasn't available yet. Instead, Ascher announced that the terms are a mixture of the Library of Congress, Getty's ULAN and AAT. These systems worked well for different purposes, but as a group provided the best overall results. For the architecture Ascher chose Greenstone, a software package designed for digital libraries. Advantages of Greenstone were numerous because it was free software available for download from the Internet, Ascher already knew how to host it and it functioned with OAI. Greenstone also has an easy to use graphical interface and flexible data formats.

Ascher and Dold ended their talk by discussing the various successes and places for improvement with their research. The technological successes included the ease of using digital photographs with text to represent the objects in a 2D platform. Dold figured she could send the images to professors and experts around the world in an attempt to get more information about the works. She did say, however, that she wished she had come up with a better numbering scheme for the photographs to keep better track of the photos. The default numbering system of the camera's software wasn't sufficient. Another snag to the project was that the subject headings included in the various indexing systems were not specialized enough to adequately describe many of the objects. Dold proposed that perhaps

they could submit terms, and have a stronger subject access and term access designed into the architecture.

Ultimately the library officials agreed that Dold and Ascher's project was of significant merit and have agreed to put the entire collection into a digital library format. Now that Ascher and Dold have discovered the successes and better approaches to this project, they will be able to implement these changes for the next incarnation of the library and help other Special Collections librarians to do the same

Claire Dannenbaum, MLIS 2006, University of British Columbia

Dannenbaum's paper "*Seeing the Big Picture: the Integration of Visual Resources for Art Libraries*" was inspired by the destruction of the Colossal Buddha's by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Dannenbaum had worked as a cataloger at UC Berkeley, and 30,000 images from the Stump Collection of World Architecture included documentation of the Colossal Buddhas. 20 of the best images of the buddhas were then cataloged as slides in digital surrogate form via SPRIO. These surrogate images were the primary research material for study of the colossal Buddhas after their destruction. Dannenbaum emphasized the importance of these digital records not only to the art historical community, but also to researchers in other disciplines. The main impetus of her talk was to explain that putting images into an OPAC compatible record form is easy to see on the horizon. She said "Image resources need to be integrated to be meaningful." She described the existing image databases as being surrounded by a vast moat. That moat exists because visual resource curators have to concentrate on their own faculty wants and needs, and those are primarily voiced by people in the art disciplines. By putting images into an OPAC, libraries would create greater access to images that, in the past, would only have been available to a select few who knew how to navigate individual image databases. Most faculty members would know how to navigate a general OPAC format. She argues that yes, the OPAC format may seem old-fashioned, but it is still the primary access point for students and faculty. In explaining how to include the images into the OPAC, Dannenbaum also states that by creating a high profile spot for images, via a library gateway website, or inclusion into federated searching of library resources, a more diverse population of users will arise and librarians could point users to where to find images. Dannenbaum proved this point by looking at 12 catalogs and tracing the availability of images. She discovered that even though some well-known and prestigious image collections were available at these institutions, they were hard to find. She argued that in a situation not unlike electronic journals or e-books, such implementation of images into more mainstream databases would not be that different. Given the interdisciplinary nature of image use in today's academic environment, art librarians need to adapt image access to these types of users. This means librarians need to understand and describe and manage in other relevant descriptive uses in these new venues. Dannenbaum also states that keeping users engaged from remote locations is also an advantage to the "on the web" aspect of today's information user's needs. If standards for metadata and discovery are developed, images can be treated in the

same manner as other library collections and bring the visual resources field into the big picture.

Tang Li, MLS and MA in Art History 2007, University of Maryland, College Park

Tang Li's paper "*Developing a Shape and Composition CBIR Thesaurus for the Traditional Chinese Landscape*" was the winner of the Gerd Muesham Award for 2007. Li's paper traces the potential use of content-based image retrieval in a searchable database of Chinese Landscape paintings. Li used a sample of Chinese landscape paintings from the Song to the Qing periods (960-1911). She reminded the audience that such a database does not actually exist yet, but that her research will help in determining how a CBIR database could be constructed. The theoretical portion of the database would consist of two parts. A part that uses shapes and lines to describe elements of the paintings and a second part that would use certain composition templates to show where each element is located within the painting. The core of the thesaurus would describe each element via object types and the varieties of each type of object. Basically each element of an individual painting would be classified via certain shapes, composition, and lines. Li's database would give classifications for each type of mountain, rock or water element, as well as its relative location to the front of the picture plane. For example, the database would be able to trace the spatial relationships between objects: mountains that are close up or in the far distance would be designated by various shapes and lines. Water would be described using wavy lines or straight lines based on whether the image contained a waterfall or a river. Li also describes the "ling long" rocks, which are unique to Chinese culture, and present a particular problem to the construction of a database. "Ling long" rocks do not have any standardized form because they are rendered in the artist's imagination; therefore Li uses one descriptive geometric shape for all of them. The database would not only account for natural elements in the paintings but also architecture, animals, people and vehicles of transportation. Li then chose a sample of Chinese landscape paintings and analyzed their composition and elements for the audience. She concluded her presentation by saying that the shared features and composition templates could be used in the future to index the landscapes that would apply to museums and libraries that deal heavily with images in Chinese art. Also, additional painting analysis in this manner could further prove that CBIR databases could be useful to user's information needs, but further testing of an actual constructed database could prove this fact.