



37th Annual Conference
Indianapolis, Indiana, April 16-21, 2009

Session/Meeting Name: Hot and Bothered: Erotica in the Library and Museum Context

Date, Time: April 19, 2009, 3:15-5:15pm

Moderators: Ray Anne Lockard

Recorder: Deirdre Spencer

Speakers:

1. Liana Zhou, Director, Library and Archive, Kinsey Institute for Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
2. Rick Storer, Executive Director, Leather Archives and Museum, Chicago, IL
3. Alli Ruth, Librarian, Tom of Finland Foundation, Los Angeles, CA
4. Kevin Madill, Manager of Circulation, Borrower Services, Walter C. Koerner Library. Univ. of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

Introduction:

As the title states, the session explored the topic of erotica and sexuality within the context of libraries and museums although not in the context that many in the audience of art librarians might have expected. Art librarians of academic and museum libraries encounter nudity and sexuality as part of the art historical cannon, but we may not have considered alternative modes of sexuality, or issues associated with collections of this content. Traditional library treatment of sexually explicit material may not extend beyond issues of storage and access. The presentations of this session demonstrated how our institutional duties as collection managers and service providers have particular challenges when the subject of the collection consists solely of erotica. Acquisition, cataloging, access, management, preservation and funding for these functions are not always readily available for managers of private collections. The first three speakers, Liana Zhou, Rick Storer and Alli Ruth addressed collections, their acquisition and handling, while the final speaker, Kevin Madill addressed human behavior within the institutional setting and our responses (and responsibilities) as librarians to address sexual issues when they arise.

1. The first speaker was Liana Zhou; whose talk entitled "The Scientific Pursuit of Erotica" related the history of the Kinsey Institute and its founder, Alfred C. Kinsey who established the private, not for profit organization in 1947. The collections are considered evidence in the research of sexuality, and Kinsey envisioned a library for the interdisciplinary study of sexology, or the study of sex. Library users must demonstrate legitimate need for access to the collections. Zhou presented slides of students, faculty, and scholars at work in the 107,000 volume research library, using the collection that consists of books, magazines, journals, films, videos, audios and archival papers. Slides also represented images from the collection's content, including pop culture, film video, art, artifacts, photographs and archives. Themes of the images included homoerotica, heterosexuality, fetishism, transgenderism and other representations of sexuality. The institute was the recent recipient of a Ford Foundation Grant for Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. A quote from Kinsey is applicable: "We are recorders of facts -- not judges of the behavior we describe". The Kinsey website address is:

www.kinseyinstitute.org.

2. The second speaker, Rick Storer credited the Kinsey Institute for doing the basic work on all kinds of sexuality, and that his institution collects material representing non-traditional sexual behavior, or "leather", the term used by practitioners. Traditional or "vanilla sex" is not the content of the Leather Archives and Museum although they hope to eventually expand their collection beyond only gay male sexual behavior which is currently the bulk of the collection. The museum is a discreet, 10,000 square foot building in a residential neighborhood. The door is locked during business hours and patrons are required to ring the doorbell and answer a few questions by a staff member, including 'how did you hear about the museum?' before gaining admittance. The impetus for the museum's formation was in part the HIV-AID's epidemic that took the lives of thousands of gay men in the 1980's and 1990's, whose history and literature was destroyed by family members ignorant of their lifestyle. Also, people across genders and sexual orientations felt that their lifestyles were not adequately represented in museums and libraries, and wanted a community institution as a repository for their history.

In terms of librarianship, nearly 50% of the books at the Leather Archives and Museum have no OCLC cataloging record, or records that are very poor; thus, a major contribution of the institution to collection management is the creation of a high quality union catalog. The lack of periodical indices are also a problem therefore, the museum seeks grant funding to create indices to key publications. The LA&M collaborates with subject experts in other institutions such as the Kinsey Institute, the Museum of Sex in New York, The Tom of Finland Foundation, the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, and the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, as well as institutions with sexuality collections of note such as Cornell University. Anonymous acquisitions that have little or no provenance are another problem that museums like this face, and oral histories fill the gaps in history and documentation.

3. The third speaker was Allison Ruth from the Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles. Ms Ruth, a library school student works as a volunteer librarian at the foundation where the core of the collection belonged to Tom and Dirk Diener. The Tom of Finland Foundation occupies a house built in 1906 in Echo Park which contains space for volunteers and guest artists. The foundation hosts cultural events and the entire house serves as a gallery. Ms. Ruth performs original cataloging for the collection of art work, artifacts, books, graphic novels, etc. She faces difficulty in cataloging the collection due to a lack of subject bibliography. The Library of Congress subject headings are not yet sufficient to handle the content of the collection. Taschen has recently published a large Tom of Finland volume with a tactile cover. The library is staffed only with volunteers who believe their mission is to give erotic art the exposure it deserves. All staff engages in fundraising efforts on Facebook, and contribute to curating, grant writing and networking.

4. The fourth speaker, Kevin Madill's talk was entitled "Sticky Pages: Library Management and Human Sexuality in the Fine Arts Library". Madill's talk focused on the role the librarian/curator in understanding and providing information and resources on sexuality and culture. Madill, who manages library spaces and collections, says that both are used for sexual exploration. He spoke of content, context and how the internet allows for sexual self-discovery. He spoke of collections, spaces, as well as human behavior and socialization as contributors toward sexual exploration. Sticky pages could become sticky keyboards as libraries move toward online content. In response, professionals and paraprofessionals need to be properly trained to deal with issue of human behavior as it relates to sexuality. A critical response to the subject extends beyond institutional guidelines regarding how to

handle such situations. It must also include an understanding of the role of the librarian as the gateway to information on sexuality and as an administrator of an environment dedicated to learning at a moment in the development of the social subject where the social subject still remains awake to the potential of consciousness through their sexual identity.

5. Questions and Answers

(1.) Liana Zhou acknowledged the board of trustees and thanked Dr. Betty Jo Irvine for her mentorship

(2.) Rick Storer was asked about the doorbell. The answer was that they could not afford a full time person to monitor the door, thus the locked door and doorbell.

(3.) Liana Zhou was asked if the whipping of the half-naked female slave Prue in Uncle Tom's Cabin was reported as an erotic experience, as young boys found National Geographic images erotic. Her response was no and to see her afterward.

(4.) A question was asked for any of the panelists about the impact of the internet and characters such as Xena Warrior Princess.

(5.) Rick was asked about the availability of the museum's content. His response was some of the content from LA&M museum's website was available on CD.

(6.) Kevin was asked for recommendations on how to determine what materials should go into special collections or not. He replied that he was the wrong person to ask.

(7.) Question after the event was asked of Kevin when a librarian should call security. Codified rules and regulations are needed on how to deal with offenders. There should be institutional policies on parameters of behavior.