



Judith A. Hoffberg
19 May 1934 – 16 January 2009

A Tribute to Judith A. Hoffberg

At the request of Ken Soehner, president of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), Betty Jo (BJ) Irvine, Librarian Emeritus, Indiana University, coordinated a tribute to Judith Hoffberg, founding member and ARLIS/NA's first president and executive secretary, during the membership meeting held in Indianapolis on April 20, 2009, at the society's 37th annual conference. The tribute included contributions by Irvine, Laurence McGilvery, Richard Minsky, and William Walker. Following is BJ Irvine's summary of the presentation.

Richard Minsky read a letter that Judy sent to him on February 23, 1975, when she was the Society's executive secretary:

I represent the Art Libraries Society of North America. I publish, edit and print a newsletter for our members, and always include artists' books whenever possible. Could you let us know what you do, whether we can strike up an exchange of some sort, and perhaps I can feature you in our next newsletter in a blurb of some sort. Thanks.

This letter helped to express the amazing range of work that she was performing for the society shortly after its founding.

Larry McGilvery presented the following comments about Judy's memorial service in California that was held on Sunday, February 8, 2009.

On a rainy Sunday in February, a colorful crowd of two to three hundred, mostly artists, gathered at Track 16 Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, to celebrate the singular life of Judith Anne Hoffberg. The overflow spilled out of the wide roll-up doors and were standing under – what else – umbrellas. A listener might have thought that the fourteen speakers all had compared drafts a week earlier; we hadn't.

Everyone knew Judy's role as a writer, editor, curator, and champion of artists' books and mail art, and so many other offbeat orphans, though her role as founder of ARLIS/NA was news to many.

Art critic and curator Peter Frank presided with verve and passion. John Liu, one of Judy's two nephews, spoke movingly of her role in his life, especially after the early death of his mother Esther, who fell to the same leukemia that took Judy, their mother, and a brother who had died at age four.

Joan Benedetti and Susan Moon each recounted eloquently the vital role Judy had played in their lives as young librarians, and Amy Ciccone recalled the early days of ARLIS/NA.

Artist John O'Brien leaned into the microphone to deliver a rapid-fire riff of thank-yous: thank you for exuberance, thank you for wearing colors no one else did, thank you for umbrellas.

In a droll recasting of a classic Fluxus performance, four performers opened and closed umbrellas with mad precision at the direction of a harried conductor.

No one came away without new insights into Judy. How many would have dreamed that our prickly, impatient friend also was a tender and watchful caregiver? Few, until her nephew Jon told us about his mother's last days. When our mutual friend Claire Isaacs Wahrhaftig was bedridden for two months with back problems, Judy flew to Berkeley several times to take care of everything Claire couldn't do.

As we left, we found fortune cookies from the baker who made the ones for Barack Obama. They read, "Let a smirk be your umbrella." It was a fabulous event, and Judy would have loved it more than anyone else.

BJ Irvine read the following contribution from Bill Walker:

Judy, BJ, and I met in 1969 at SUNY, Buffalo, where we were all members of the faculty selected by Florence DaLuiso, head of the arts library at SUNY, for her week-long institute--the first--on art libraries and visual resources. Judy talked about conservation of art library materials and I reviewed my work on revising the Library of Congress "N" classification system for fine arts. In all the topics covered by fellow faculty members during the week, Judy was enthusiastic, responsive, and effervescent. Even during the Buffalo Institute, some of us talked about the possibility of an art libraries society in North America.

Moreover, Judy was very enthusiastic about the new Art Libraries Society (ARLIS) in Britain. At the end of 1971 she received a grant that enabled her to spend two months in the United Kingdom to get acquainted with our art library colleagues there and to see their libraries. She considered the possibility that an American art libraries society might be a chapter of the British original. In any case, we Yanks established our own ARLIS.

We did not meet again until the summer of 1972 when the American Library Association met in Chicago. Between conference sessions, Judy buttonholed nine of us to hear a proposal she was working on regarding a new organization for art librarians. Peter Anthony, from Canada, and I, as participants in an Association of College and Research Libraries roundtable, were sharing a hotel suite to use for hospitality. We met in that suite to hear from Judy about a new art librarians society just founded in Britain called ARLIS. Armed with that information and a copy of the Music Library Association's bylaws as a possible model, Judy led a discussion for the entire afternoon. By the end of that meeting she had set in motion the foundation of ARLIS/NA. The ten of us were later designated the Charter Committee and, as committees are wont to do, we must have thought, oh yeah, that sounds like a good idea, we'll think about it.

Well, while we thought, Judy was acting. The following autumn she produced,

virtually singlehanded, the first ARLIS/NA newsletter and was acting as virtual executive secretary, editor, membership director, publicist, conference planner, and was taking on anything else that needed to be done. Somewhere early along the way she enlisted the help of Amy Ciccone, first as volunteer and later, as funds permitted, on part-time salary. The office for the fledgling organization was in Judy's apartment.

The early structure of the Society was decidedly loose. There must have been an executive board after the outset, probably drawn from members of the Charter Committee; Judy probably appointed them. As I recall, it was not until several years had passed that a really active board was in evidence.

For those ARLIS/NA board members who have sat through recent meetings of the Executive Board which were usually convened several times a year with each meeting lasting the equivalent of a day or two, it may surprise you to know that, if memory serves me, those early board meetings in the first three or four years of the Society's existence consisted of one evening (preferably beginning with dinner) and continuing for several hours afterward that same evening. Maybe there was a second session the next day in some years, but I don't recall. That was once a year, folks!

My recollection of board meetings when I was chairman (later called president) of ARLIS/NA, was that Judy proposed issues or questions, there was discussion, and the board usually concurred with Judy. Judy was, in the best sense, a one-woman band, aided and abetted by Amy Ciccone. For more information about this time and our history, be sure to read Amy Navratil Ciccone's excellent oral history with Judy, published in *Art Documentation*, v.27, no.1, Spring 2008.

In 1976 the British Art Libraries Society held a conference that addressed all aspects of art periodicals. Members Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot co-curated the exhibition on this topic which was hosted by the V&A (Victoria & Albert Museum) library and accompanied by a catalog. Attendance at this exhibition was followed by a three-day conference in Brighton on art periodicals and related issues. Whether they originally intended it to be an international conference was not clear to me, but Judy, not surprisingly, secured an invitation for American and Canadian art librarians to participate, and librarians from several other countries also attended. By then, there was growing interest in forging international links among art libraries.

Ever the entrepreneur, Judy seized on the occasion to lead a group of thirty-nine U.S. and Canadian members of ARLIS/NA to the London/Brighton conference, followed by a tour of several notable sites in England and Wales. After England we flew to Paris for visits organized by Mme. Jacqueline Viaux, the director of what was, in 1976, the only lending library of art books in Paris. Judy was our escort and one of our guides through all of these places.

One of the results of this two-week tour in England and France was our opportunity to become acquainted with our art librarian counterparts abroad and to learn of European library procedures that differed from our own. Another result was our subsequent involvement with IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations, which serves as an umbrella (!) organization helping to provide links among art libraries around the world.

I doubt that all this would have come together if Judy Hoffberg had not been there to inspire us with a vision of international cooperation and affiliation. She was a marvelous catalyst for growth and action in the world of art librarians.

Bill Walker beautifully summed up Judy's extraordinary work to get ARLIS/NA up and running. It was my honor to introduce her at the Banff conference when the Judith A. Hoffberg Award for Conference Attendance was announced. I was so glad that we could honor and remember Judy's contributions during her lifetime. As many of you know, she loved to travel and that energy was a great part of her gift to ARLIS. Her work for ARLIS/NA in the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand was legendary. Another of her passions was artists' books but like the founding of ARLIS, she made her mark by going beyond mere passion. She traveled widely speaking, curating artists' books exhibitions, and working with artists to promote their books, especially through her publication, *Umbrella*.

But most of all, I want you all to know how much it meant to Judy to be honored with the naming of the annual travel award. She loved this idea and shared her joy at Banff during the convocation when she received a standing ovation. Bravo, Judy!

Tribute made by BJ Irvine at the 34th annual ARLIS/NA conference in Banff when the Judith A. Hoffberg Student Award for Conference Attendance was announced.

Judith A. Hoffberg's endeavors on behalf of the art library profession began in 1969 when she was a faculty member at the federally-funded Buffalo Institute for Training in Librarianship, State University of New York. That same year she was program chairman and secretary for the Art Subsection, American Library Association (ALA). Nineteen sixty-nine was also the year that ARLIS was founded in the United Kingdom. During the spring of 1972, Judy traveled to England to attend ARLIS meetings and returned home with enthusiasm for and commitment to having a similar organization in North America.

Previous experiences with ALA, the Special Libraries Association, and the College Art Association all pointed to the necessity for an organization to address the specific challenges of individuals working in the field of art documentation. Thus, in the summer of 1972 at the ALA conference in Chicago, ARLIS/NA was founded by Judy and nine other charter members. At that same meeting, Judy was chosen to be the first editor of ARLIS/NA's first official publication, the *ARLIS/NA Newsletter*, a position which she held until 1977. In that time, the newsletter grew from four to forty pages, later evolving into two publications, *Art Documentation* and *ARLIS/NA Update*. Those early years of the newsletter laid the foundations for the high professional standards and relevance which ARLIS/NA publications continue to represent among colleagues throughout the world.

In 1973, she was elected ARLIS/NA's first chairman, the former title given to ARLIS/NA presidents. From the beginning, she believed the strength of the society would be based on the development of regional chapters. To that end, she traveled to any area that was considering establishing a chapter, and founded the Southern California Chapter which became the first of ARLIS/NA's current eighteen chapters. Her home in Glendale, California, served as the first office for the society's

headquarters. She also recognized the value of an annual conference to link chapters, as well as to bring together those members who were not served by a chapter. As the society's dynamic leader, she organized and directed the first six annual conferences doing everything from organizing sessions to staffing the registration desk.

From the outset, Judy realized the importance of international contacts both for the society and its members. In 1973, ARLIS/NA affiliated with ARLIS/UK & Ireland, and later that year the society became a member of the Council of National Library Associations. A year later, ARLIS/NA became a full member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). In addition, she assisted with the organization of the 1976 International Conference on Art Periodicals, leading a delegation of ARLIS/NA members to London, Brighton, Wales, and Paris. She also was very active assisting with the formation of ARLIS/Australia and New Zealand, and traveled throughout the world participating on panels, organizing programs, curating exhibitions, and lecturing on various aspects of art librarianship, art publications, and artists' books.

For nearly thirty years, she contributed to knowledge about artists' books and curated exhibitions, published articles, presented papers, wrote essays for exhibition catalogues, and published *Umbrella*. She was the recipient of numerous awards and honors including two National Endowment for the Arts Service to the Field awards, Australia and New Zealand Arts Council grants, a Fulbright Foundation research and lecture grant, and was a Fluxus Research Fellow at the Sonja Henie & Niels Onstad Foundation in Oslo, Norway.

As the primary force in the society's founding and its charter member, first chairman, first executive secretary, and first editor, Judith A. Hoffberg was a distinguished and honored member of our profession.

Shermaniablog (<http://shermaniablog.blogspot.com/2009/04/judy-hoffberg-and-early-days.html>)

Sherman Clarke's memories of Judy and the early days of ARLIS/NA.

Obituary in the *Los Angeles Times*:

<http://www.legacy.com/TheIthacaJournal/Obituaries.asp?Page=LifeStoryPrint&PersonID=102975202>