Annual Report 2015
George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award Subcommittee

Submitted by: Karyn Hinkle, 2015 chair
karyn.hinkle@northwestern.edu
847.467.0449 (office) / 646.498.3278 (personal mobile)

• Leadership Update (incoming officers names etc.)

The 2015 Chicago-based subcommittee members are:
Karyn Hinkle, Northwestern University (chair)
Elizabeth Berenz, Artstor
Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, Internet Archive
Alexis Burson, DePaul University
Autumn Mather, the Art Institute of Chicago

Kristen Regina and Viveca Robichaud recruited Karyn to chair the subcommittee in late July 2015, and Karyn recruited the rest of the subcommittee members in August 2015, with advice on numbers of members from past Wittenborn chairs and advice on possible names of members from the Midstates chapter leadership.

• Brief Narrative re: activities, membership, plans, etc.

As our first task in August 2015, the subcommittee revised and updated the award description and criteria, paying particular attention to the electronic book criteria, which had been suggested as necessary by the 2014 subcommittee.

We used the updated description and criteria to craft an award announcement that was emailed individually to 282 North American publishers and posted to the ARLIS/NA listserv on September 18, 2015. Robert Kopchinski at ARLIS HQ was a great help with the mailing list.

The subcommittee received 116 award submissions from 58 publishers by the December 1, 2015 deadline. The chair sent a weekly update of books received to the subcommittee, and the subcommittee members reviewed the titles as they came in all fall, both at their home institutions if available and at Northwestern, where submissions were received and where the complete group of submissions was always available to the subcommittee members.

Shortly after the submission deadline in December 2015, the subcommittee met in person to winnow submissions to a short list of 20 finalists to consider further. By mid-January 2016, each committee member had ranked the list of finalists to indicate their top-5 choices as well as ranking all 20 finalists from top to bottom.

As for the results, two titles appeared on three different top-5 lists, and one of them was a very clear winner in terms of points*: the two exhibition catalogues submitted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art both appeared on three
different top-5 lists, and their **Kongo: Power and Majesty** received a clearly winning cumulative score*, meaning the two subcommittee members who did not include *Kongo* in their top 5 still ranked it very highly.

After the subcommittee unanimously agreed to the choice, we decided *Kongo: Power and Majesty* will be awarded the 2015 George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award. The publisher and author were notified on January 25, 2016.

As of the date of this report (February 12, 2016), the subcommittee’s next tasks include creating a short slide presentation or video to show at the March 11, 2016 conference convocation ceremony (or both, so the conference/award planning committees will have a choice for what will work best at the ceremony), and writing a draft of a press release about the award that ARLIS HQ can release after the conference.

---

* The scoring points represent a very simple combination of the numerical ranking each committee member gave to a title, where lower numbers represent better scores—the possible total for a title ranges from 5 (that would be the best, if every committee member ranked a title as #1) to 100 (worst; if every committee member ranked a title #20).

---

• **ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan**
  - Include description of Action Items
  - Indicate status [of] activity (pending, completed, [in-]progress)

**Action Items:**

1. **Working on the ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan – Goal I’s mandate to “Leverage and promote the art information professionals' skills beyond the library context” (and really all aspects of Goal I):** By corresponding with art publishing professionals in museums, university presses, and trade publishing houses, and by publicizing the award to the rest of the wider world, the George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award remains one of the Society’s most visible ways to promote our skills beyond the library world. It is a pleasure and privilege for art information professionals to receive, review, and promote art information and scholarship through the lens of art publishing each year, and presenting an international award for it is very worthy activity of the Society.
   
   (status: completed)

2. **Working on the ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan – Goal II’s mandates to “Introduce additional mentoring opportunities ... for new professionals” and to “Extend and encourage professional development ... for both mid-career and senior career professionals”:** Recruiting a subcommittee membership is an excellent way to involve Society members at all stages of their careers. Working with a newly retired member of the Midstates chapter leadership, the chair of this year’s Chicago-based subcommittee recruited subcommittee members at the beginning, middle, and highly experienced points of their careers.
   
   (status: completed)

3. **Working on the ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan – Goal III’s mandate to "Build stronger partnerships and programming with our North American, European and international organizations":** While prior years' publisher-invitee lists included mainly American publishers (art museums, university presses, trade publishers), the 2014 committee had expanded the list to include more Canadian publishers, and our 2015 committee invited 20 trade and specialty art publishers from Mexico to submit applications. None of the Mexican publishers sent submissions this year, but we’d love to see some in the future—there are some beautiful art
books coming out of Mexico in recent years. In the future, it may be more inviting to send the invitation letters to Mexico in both English and Spanish. (status: completed for this year, pending for next year)

4. Working on the ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan – Goal IV’s mandate to "Define and articulate our role as stewards of our collections and provide guidance and language to encourage good stewardship": Though it has not been done in the past, we would like to publicize the subcommittee’s list of 20 finalists for the award to the Society membership so that everyone can be more aware of the variety of high-quality submissions received and the trends the subcommittee noticed in terms of trends in art book publishing this year. We will mention some of these in the conference convocation presentation, but would like later to send a complete list of finalists to ARLIS-L. (status: in-progress)

5. Working on the ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan – Goal V’s mandate to “Facilitate the transfer of leadership ... over time by identifying the tools and best practices for record retention of their accomplishments”: As the Wittenborn subcommittee has done for several years now, we have managed our subcommittee’s work this year through ARLIS HQ’s Basecamp subscription. It has been very helpful to see past subcommittee’s documents and workflows, and we are happy to share ours with future subcommittees in turn. It was also helpful, again through long Wittenborn tradition, for the current subcommittee chair to speak on the phone with last year’s chair at the beginning of the year for tips, advice, and more anecdotes (which subsequently get recorded in the Basecamp site). (status: completed for this year, conversation with next year’s chair pending)

• Issues for the Executive Board (concerns, suggestions for additions to Strategic Plan, etc.)

(Note: since these issues apply to the conference itself, we have sent them to our Board liaison and the Awards Committee chair in advance, and hope many will have already been settled by the time the Board meets in Seattle.)

- We are attaching an early, partial draft of a press release about the 2015 award herewith and we would like to request a quote to add to it from the President or another member of the Executive Board (see last year’s press release with a quote from Carole Ann Fabian at https://www.arlisna.org/images/pressreleases/2015/Wittenborn2014.pdf).
- The author of the winning book, Alisa LaGamma, will be in Seattle during the time of the conference, and she would be very pleased to accept her award in person at the convocation ceremony. Is it okay to arrange with the conference planning committee for the author to accept the award at the convocation ceremony and to attend the reception afterwards?
- A perennial question about the Wittenborn Award seems to be whether its announcement at the conference convocation ceremony is meant to be a secret reveal at that moment, or if it’s okay if the winner is something known in advance, so that conference exhibitors and vendors can display the title before the convocation and during conference in the exhibit hall. In a year like this one, when the convocation happens on the very last day of the conference, some vendors or exhibitors may feel a chance to promote or sell the title has been wasted if they are not allowed to promote its award until after it is announced. Thoughts or advice?

• Submit electronically to ARLIS/NA Headquarters: info@arlisna.org
DRAFT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ARLIS/NA ANNOUNCES 2015 George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award

SEATTLE, WA (March 11, 2016) – Kongo: Power and Majesty by Alisa LaGamma, an exhibition catalogue published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was awarded the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)’s 37th annual George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award at the Society’s annual conference held in Seattle, WA, March 8-12, 2016. Established in 1980, the Wittenborn Award honors the memory of George Wittenborn, a premier New York art book dealer and publisher, and is given annually to North American publications demonstrating excellence in art publishing.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition catalogue Kongo: Power and Majesty accompanies a pioneering exhibit on the art of the Kongo, curated by Alisa LaGamma and displayed at the museum in fall 2015. Praised for its variety of objects and widely discussed as a major new study of Kongo’s history of art before, during, and after contact with Europe, the exhibition represented a high mark in the history of African art scholarship and the published catalogue matches its strength. The catalogue includes essays by Alisa LaGamma as well as several other esteemed scholars of African art and incorporates original research by the museum’s conservators and research scientists. The rich bibliography, glossary of Kongo terms, chronology of kingship, and particularly detailed exhibition object checklist further deepen the scholarly value of the catalogue, but the publication remains open, inviting, and accessible to a wide audience of scholars, students, and the general public. The text and illustrations are beautifully laid out, and the newly photographed images of the art objects usefully include multiple views of three-dimensional works and revealing detail shots. The catalogue is a beautiful object in its own right, constructed with the highest production standards for its cloth, paper, and binding. The Wittenborn Book Award committee praised the work’s attention to detail, accessibility of the text, and the high aesthetic quality of the design, and particularly noted the strength of its interdisciplinary and international research, in which the history of art in the Kongo is considered through the lenses of anthropology, art history, history, and sociology. The title demonstrates the heights to which scholarship and publishing on non-Western art are rising, and the full virtues and pleasures a well-published museum exhibition catalogue can provide in 2015.

[quotes from winning publisher TK]
[in 2014 release] Judy Metro, Editor in Chief, National Gallery of Art, says that “….”

[quotes from ARLIS/NA board TK]
[in 2014 release] “… says Carole Ann Fabian, ARLIS/NA President and…

The members of the 2015 Wittenborn Award Committee are: Karyn Hinkle, Northwestern University (chair); Elizabeth Berenz, Artstor; Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, Internet Archive; Alexis Burson, DePaul University; and Autumn Mather, the Art Institute of Chicago.

About the Art Libraries Society of North America

Founded in 1972, the Art Libraries Society of North America is a dynamic, international organization of more than 1,000 individuals devoted to fostering excellence in art and design librarianship and image management in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The membership includes architecture and art librarians, visual resources professionals, artists, curators, educators, publishers, students, and others interested in visual arts information. To serve this diverse constituency, the Society provides a wide range of programs and services within an organizational structure that encourages participation at all levels.

CONTACT

ARLIS/NA Media Relations Coordinator
Email: media.relations@arlisna.org
Telephone: (773) 930-4178
For more information visit www.arlisna.org

# # #