Of, By and For the Artist: The Library as a Venue for Student Creativity

*Experiences at Four Art Libraries: Moore College of Art & Design,*
*Drexel University,*
*Delaware College of Art & Design* and *The Barnes Foundation*

by Judy Donovan
The Alumnae Quilt Project at Moore College of Art & Design

• Began with a need to engage artistic alumnae who didn’t respond to ‘typical’ alumnae events to celebrate 150th anniversary of Moore (1998)

• Alums on the steering committee were textile artists, as was the Library Director

• Library became the coordinating center for the project, which excited current students and faculty.
Mailings sent to all alumnae. Those who chose to participate were sent a ‘kit’ containing an 8” fabric square and the rules for the project:

1. Make an imprint of your dominant hand on the 8” square.
2. Create a 15” block that reflects your interpretation of the theme based on your Moore experiences.
3. Use any medium on the cloth but remember that it will be a quilt!
The Response: An outpouring of Love, Fabric and Creative Benefits

• 192 quilt squares and ‘hand blocks’ were sent in over a six month period, many containing letters about their Moore experience that ended up in the Archives.

• Finished quilt was 10’x 30’ and installed in lobby of the College.

• Project involved many ‘sew-ins’ and about 4 very well attended exhibitions of the quilt in progress in the Library, Cafeteria and Gallery area.

• Quilt ended up being exhibited at a prestigious national quilt show.

• A book was published about the project

• Alums from 1927 to 1997 responded
Just of few of the 192 Hands (including mine!)
Excerpts from the Quilt
As Design Arts Librarian at Drexel, my mission was to “popularize” a library that was not, but headed in a new direction with new leadership.

Collaborated with the Architecture faculty to created a competition/exhibition of Artist Books that interpreted architecture as a theme. This became a regular part of the course and always involved an opening party in the Library.

Collaborated with the Fine Arts faculty to exhibit work on a changing basis in the Library’s underused student lounge.

Curated and hung Drexel’s collection of Japanese woodblock prints throughout the Library.
Delaware College of Art & Design

• Collaborated with Photography faculty to establish a show/sale of work by graduating photography majors.

• Fundraising for framing of work was done by students & faculty soliciting contributions from area businesses. Community residents were invited to attend the opening party.

• Works were hung in the Art Library for graduation event. Students kept proceeds of sales.

• Unsold pieces were kept in library as publicity to showcase talent of students.
In April we held our first exhibition of artworks created by Philadelphia school students who attended outreach classes offered by the Barnes Foundation Education Department.

Their assignment was to create a 3-D version of one of the works they studied while here.

This event was partnered with a reception for the teachers, parents and artist-students.

Response from visitors—many of whom were educators themselves—was tremendous. We received requests for the show to “travel” to other venues.

The display of work in the library raised awareness of our creative programs AND in several cases inspired other institutions to plan similar activities.
What we Learned

Bringing art and creative projects in the Library is benefits everyone

- Changes visitors’ perception to see the library as an extension of the galleries or simply as a creative space. In academic art libraries it visually connects creative students to the library itself.
- Stimulates conversation, discussion and visitation.
- Creates a welcoming & inspiring atmosphere for creative people.