



STATEMENT ON STAFF REDUCTIONS IN ART MUSEUM LIBRARIES AND VISUAL RESOURCES COLLECTIONS – approved 5 Dec. 2013 (Motion #41)

The Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), the international organization for art information professionals, strives to support the advancement of the field and to bring greater recognition of the value of those who endeavor within it. In the face of the recent, troubling rise in staff reductions and closures at multiple academic art libraries, art museum libraries, and visual resources collections across North America, ARLIS/NA argues for greater attention to the risks associated with such developments.

Beyond the immediate, local constraints imposed upon institutions burdened by reduced staffing, the decision to cut art library and visual resources positions holds both lasting and far-reaching consequences. It inhibits and imperils research and scholarship in the arts as a whole. Those working in the art information profession possess the specialized knowledge and diverse body of skills required to establish, organize, and maintain collections that closely reflect the ever-changing information needs of their constituencies. Such knowledge is also applied in the regular interaction with individual users through reference and instructional services. Moreover, through such activities as the development of information and visual literacy principles, cataloging standards; copyright and intellectual property advocacy; participation in regional, national, and international professional organizations; and the ongoing advancement of infrastructures for networked, globally accessible digital collections—art librarians and visual resources curators are contributing not only to the visions of their cultural institutions, but also to the broader progress of human knowledge in the twenty-first century.

It is thus with dismay that ARLIS/NA has witnessed a growing number of staff reductions in the art libraries or visual resources units of numerous North American institutions. These developments ultimately undermine the larger principles and mandates of the institutions which those staff serve: that is, not to simply *preserve* a collection of books, works of art, or images, nor simply to provide *access* to that collection to a community of users, but to actively *further* cultural knowledge and understanding.

Although current economic trends often dictate difficult administrative and fiscal decisions, the elimination of art library and visual resources staff compromises the fundamental educational mission of cultural and academic institutions. Despite these concerns, however, we strongly view these changes as also holding the potential to engage in invigorated, positive discussion with administrators and organizational leaders about the essential value of those who work within academic and art museum libraries and visual resources collections. ARLIS/NA and its membership wish to encourage and seek out opportunities for such dialogue.