

2019 ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award Introduction

Presented online* to Milan Hughston, April 22, 2020

*the Society's 48th annual conference in St. Louis, Missouri was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Remarks by Mark Pompelia (co-nominator)

Dear ARLIS/NA Colleagues,

Thank you for attending this ceremony during what can only be described as “challenging times.” While I regret that I cannot deliver this introduction together in the formal space of a ballroom, there is satisfaction in the enduring strength of the Society that we still join to recognize the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the Art Libraries Society of North America for 2019: Milan Hughston.

With a storied career spanning nearly forty years at leading museums including the Amon Carter Museum and Archives of the Art of the American West in Fort Worth, Texas, and The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Milan is deserving of this award for building important art research collections and handsome and effective library spaces; his practice of collegial stewardship and mentoring of librarians; steering forward-thinking initiatives and collection development areas; and his unmatched skill at securing financial resources to the great benefit of the Society and the profession at large.

None of this comes as a surprise. Milan combines a hallmark personal aplomb and welcoming approach to serving patrons, fostering relationships with colleagues, and in promoting the mission of his home institutions and ARLIS/NA. Collaboration rests at the core of Milan's service and accomplishments: he simply sees the results of mutual and joined efforts as being far greater than the sum of individual work.

One contributor comprehensively wrote, “Mentorship has always been a hallmark of Milan's professional practice, and I was lucky to develop my career under his exemplary leadership. I considered Milan to be the boss I wanted to be someday, one who cultivated a work ethos that valued high professional expectations with a warm, supportive, familial environment. We worked and laughed in equal measure, and I still marvel at how effortlessly he managed that balancing act. In Milan's workplace, talents were recognized and nurtured, and opportunities were created. I quickly learned that I had an advocate for life. In Milan I never saw evidence of an ego; instead, his focus was on facilitating my professional growth and encouraging teamwork.”

Another states, “Milan's keen intellect, enthusiasm, and collaborative instincts made working closely with him a symbiotic partnership, one of the greatest privileges of my professional life.”

Milan's charm and easy approach should fool no one: whether negotiating the creation of inter-institutional shared services models or smashing fundraising goals, Milan identifies a need, sets priorities and achieves them in his determined yet consummate professional manner. For example, his work envisioning and spearheading shared technical services for Fort Worth museum libraries resulted in the formation of the Cultural District Library Consortium. Similarly, as a founding partner in the New York Art Resources Consortium, Milan worked with museum library colleagues to facilitate collaboration and enhance discovery and access to the extensive art research collections at three New York museum libraries. This partnership provided the basis of trust and commitment to go beyond traditional library practice, and to explore some of the more challenging areas of art library collection development: in this case, pilot projects focused on web-archiving the sites and online publications of New York City's vibrant art gallery scene.

Milan's accomplishments in collection development more broadly also bear recognition. He has championed and achieved high regard among art libraries collecting artist books and artist ephemera, rare periodicals, and Latin American art resources. Perhaps most notable is his participation with curatorial colleagues at MoMA in the acquisition of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection—including more than 4,000 archival files with such items as artists' correspondence, notebooks and scrapbooks, as well as documents and photographs related to Fluxus performances, and a reference library of over 1,500 Fluxus-related books and catalogues. These diverse and important research materials demonstrate how Milan helped to guide and shape MoMA's collections, and by doing so helped to establish new areas of collecting in art libraries and reinforce within museum contexts the important relationship between curatorial, archival and library collections.

Milan is an unmatched and invaluable fund-raiser for ARLIS/NA. His leadership of annual conference fund-raising efforts year-over-year have helped ARLIS/NA present the most meaningful and enriching programs to our members. At the same time, he has leveraged relationships with vendors to advance and promote ARLIS/NA engagement with emerging practices of art librarianship. Working with NYARC partners he facilitated the multi-year Sotheby's Institute of Art Research Award that inspired and supported students' creative use of art scholarship and information resources. These fund-raising achievements support specific ARLIS/NA programs, but also add to the wealth of reasons ARLIS/NA continues to be an essential venue for professional development.

In the process of building this dossier with its twenty-three letters of support, many contributors — curator, trustee, protégé, and colleague— were reminded that Milan has never been President of ARLIS/NA. One supporter observed, "In many ways I believe it is because Milan has devoted more of his time facilitating the success of the leadership of others (and thereby the Society) yet wishing for none of the limelight for himself." Another noted that he has instead served as "flagship ambassador for ARLIS/NA and our field." Even so recently as during the 2019 ARLIS/NA Study Tour in Venice, Milan deftly moderated the symposium on building bridges between American and Italian art libraries to a full-capacity international and multilingual audience. I had the pleasure of speaking in that symposium and found it best to follow Milan's deft lead when it came to a translated presentation and questions from the multinational audience, all with a time crunch, a budding heat wave, and the promise of Prosecco. One trustee at MoMA closed her letter, simply, "He is dearly missed at The Museum."

I offer a concluding and timely anecdote from a MoMA supporter from which we can draw a helpful parallel: "I would like to include here in my list of Milan Hughston's laudatory accomplishments one that I recall with particular gratitude. He and a colleague from MoMA prepared a two-day symposium on best practices in museum library science and contemporary trends in art documentation by libraries and archives for an eager audience in Caracas, Venezuela. Their presentation had been planned for mid-September 2001, and after the World Trade Center attack, Milan wondered whether it would be appropriate - or even possible - for them to go. Anticipation of the event was so high in Caracas that they were urged to come, and they were on one of the first flights out after the tragedy. They had an audience of over 200 people in attendance, and their generosity as well as the information they shared retains its impact today."

By now you might gather that this nomination assembled itself. Well, in Milan's case that is almost true. I want to thank co-nominators Jonathan Evans of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and Carole Ann Fabian, previously at Columbia University and now at The Corning Museum of Glass. Both of them former presidents of ARLIS/NA, I am humbled not just in recognizing Milan but in partnering with them to do so. We ask you to join in recognizing Milan Hughston as the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Service Award and welcome him now to deliver some remarks.