

DSA portion at Awards Ceremony
ARLIS/NA, May 5, 2026



John Latour Convocation Remarks

Thank you so much Nicola for this kind and generous introduction. I am deeply honoured and moved to receive this prestigious award. J'aimerais remercier mes merveilleuses amies Hélène Brousseau, Pamela Caussy et Adèle Flannery qui ont proposé mon nom pour ce prix ainsi que mes collègues qui ont rédigé des lettres de soutien à ma candidature. I am also thankful to the members of the Distinguished Service Award sub-committee, chaired by Rebecca K. Friedman, for their consideration, and to the ARLIS/NA Executive – especially Liv Valmestad - for having approved the committee's decision. Thank-you to my partner Pierre-François Ouellette and for my friends and colleagues who are here today for all their support.

To say that I was surprised when I learned about this award is an understatement. It would be more accurate to say that I was stunned and bewildered. Once the initial astonishment wore off, I came to my senses and reacted as anyone would in this situation: I panicked, of course – especially after learning that I'd have to give an acceptance speech to my ARLIS friends and colleagues at this year's conference!

To calm my nerves, I reviewed a list of previous Distinguished Service Award recipients and read many of their acceptance speeches. In no way did this alleviate my apprehension, as the previous recipients were all accomplished, eloquent, and thoughtful art librarians. Reviewing their speeches, I noted that many, if not all the past winners referred to their kind colleagues who guided them over the course of their careers; the importance of ARLIS/NA to their professional growth; and their appreciation for collaborative work – especially as it relates to art and its documentation. I was reassured that, at least in these respects, I held some common ground with my predecessors.

Several librarians, whether they knew it or not, mentored me on my path to becoming an art

librarian. These include Marilyn Berger, Rosemary Haddad, Kathryn Kollar, Danielle Léger, Melinda Reinhart, Judy Silverman, Peter Trepanier, and Murray Waddington to name only a few. Many of them were founding members of the Montreal-Ottawa-Quebec chapter of ARLIS/NA. They led by example, and they all inspired me by their commitment to art librarianship, their dedication to ARLIS, and their years of volunteer involvement in the association.

One of my earliest encounters with ARLIS/NA was as a volunteer at the 1995 annual conference, when it was held here in Montreal. I imagine there are a few people in the audience today who were present at the time and who remember the theme of that remarkable conference: “ARLIS and the Francophone World.” Back then, I was a student enrolled in library school, and I held a part-time job working with Marilyn Berger in the Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art, at McGill University. It was actually Marilyn who “volunteered” my services at the conference, but I was very grateful for the experience. Not long after, I joined the local chapter of ARLIS/NA, also known as MOQ, and met so many wonderful members hailing from libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions. Over the years, it’s been a pleasure and a privilege to work alongside colleagues from MOQ, from across Canada, and from the United States, and to get to know them both professionally and personally.

Since I became a Fine Arts Librarian at Concordia University, I have been contacted each year by two or three students from my institution or from the library schools at McGill University and Université de Montréal – students who would like to discuss a career in art librarianship. Of course, I’m always happy to talk shop! For some reason, I think I make library work look fun – which it can be – but I’m careful also to let them know that it’s a lot of hard work and there is no guarantee that they will find employment in an art library right away. I do encourage students to get as much experience in a library context as they can, whether it’s through an internship, a practicum, or volunteer work. I also stress the importance of joining an association such as ARLIS.

Not only does ARLIS provide students a chance to network with potential employers, it is also a way for them to get to know and to become part of a vibrant community of dedicated art information professionals. In my opinion, active involvement in an association like ARLIS – whether at the local level or with the larger association – is as equally important as employment in a library or a related context. Volunteer work within a library association not only benefits the association, but is also an opportunity for members to acquire new skills and to learn from seasoned practitioners in the field. I also argue that seasoned practitioners can learn a great deal from the more junior members.

For this year's conference, which I hope you will agree has been outstanding so far, I am wearing two hats. In addition to being an attendee, I'm also the Registration and Volunteer Coordinator. This has been a new learning experience for me, and I would like to personally thank everyone who took valuable conference time to help at the registration desk as well as at other conference activities. I am very heartened to see several students and new ARLIS members volunteering alongside some long-time members. I hope everyone's experience of this conference, whether as a volunteer, a presenter, an exhibitor, or a general attendee, will lead them to interesting and rewarding exchanges that they will carry with them for years to come. Merci. Thank you.