



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

**Distinguished Service Award
Conference Convocation Ceremony**
March 31, 2012

Speech for introducing Rosemary Furtak
Presenter, Janice Lea Lurie

It's a great privilege to be here this evening to represent the name of Rosemary Furtak, as this year's 2011 ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award recipient. As we all know, this is one of the highest awards that anyone in our field can receive. And no one is more deserving of this very special recognition from her peers than Rosemary Furtak.

Rosemary wanted very much to be here this evening, but circumstances such as they are, unfortunately prevented her from attending our conference and this ceremony.

However, she wanted to share with you her deep gratitude and sincerest thanks for having been given this award. And also to extend a very special thank you to ARLIS/NA and its President, Jon Evans, as well to the members of ARLIS/NA's Distinguished Service Award Committee, Stephanie Frontz, Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Alan Michelson, Kathryn Wayne, and Margaret Webster as well as the Committee's Chair, Gregory Most.

Over the next few minutes I'll briefly talk about Rosemary's accomplishments, while on the screen you'll be able to see a sampling of some of the artists' book exhibitions that Rosemary had curated over her career at the Walker Art Center. And also a special thank you goes to the Walker's Archivist, Jill Vuchetich, who assembled these images and put the PowerPoint together. As well as a special note of thanks to Jennifer Parker who provided invaluable support for this evening's presentation. Of the 42 installation views that will be shown - it's the first one that is especially significant - it includes a shot of a display case right outside the front door of the Walker's Art Library. It really speaks to that unique relationship between artists' books and the museum library, as well as the librarian also functioning in many ways as a museum curator.

Over the past 29 years at the Walker Art Center, Rosemary Furtak's exemplary contribution to the field of art librarianship has helped to define what it is to be an art museum librarian. Since 1983, her keen eye for actively collecting artists' books and her understanding of their value has become nothing short of visionary.

In the early 1980s, Rosemary was among the few art museum librarians who recognized a fundamental difference between artists' books and others, and who segregated them into special collections areas that would eventually become known as "Artists' Book Collections". The idea that artists' books are different, or as Rosemary stated, they are "books that refuse to behave like other books", was a visionary step, as no well-defined precedents in the early 1980s existed for establishing artists' book collections. Consequently, Rosemary was a pioneer in this area, which later became part of the "collection development" mainstream of the late 1980s and early '90s.

Rosemary's leadership in her field is distinguished by her early understanding of how artists' books related to the special mission and function of the art museum library, as well as the fact that she was among the first to recognize and help define the medium of "artists' books" as a new art form. Her cutting edge shaping of the Walker Art Center Library created a unique brand of librarianship within the art museum environment, which was new, insightful, and engaging. Her foresight to collect artists' books helped to develop an important facet of art museum librarianship, which subsequently emerged in the late 20th century.

Rosemary has also created one of the premier contemporary art library collections in the world. In addition to her daily responsibilities as a librarian, she has been a kind and insightful mentor to numerous interns who later became librarians and visual arts professionals themselves, a voice of encouragement to book artists and their careers, a curator of exhibitions, a volunteer for book arts organizations, an active member of ARLIS/NA, a collector of artists' books, an educator, a presenter, a writer, a good professional colleague, and a friend to all who know her.

It is timely for us to honor Rosemary's exceptional and forward-thinking librarianship, especially since the Walker Art Center celebrated a major 2008-2009 exhibit called *"Text/Messages: Books by Artists"*, which included a substantial number of the 2,000 artists' books Rosemary has cultivated during her tenure as Head of the Library.

And now we will conclude with the following statement that Rosemary wanted to be read on behalf of her acceptance of this award.

Jan Dibbets is a Dutch conceptual artist. The Walker presented a huge solo exhibition of Dibbets work in 1988 and there are several works in their collection. Dibbets was the inspiration for words that I want to share with you this evening. I found a quote from Dibbets after he was given an award in Holland several years ago. And I thought it was so well done that I hung on to it for many years. For the acceptance of the DSA award I changed the words from that quote to reflect the Library community. It's a great honor for me to accept this award and have Janice Lurie say a few words this evening.

And Rosemary's actual quote for the acceptance of this award is this...

"Apologies to Mr. Jan Dibbets who gave a similar speech. Abstract art has a long history: Giotto, Jan van Eyck, Piero della Francesca, Mantegna, Antonello da Messina, Paolo Uccello, Vermeer, Ingres, Cezanne, Picasso, Leger, Matisse, Brancusi, Hopper and O'Keefe." We've catalogued them all. "The language of the true artist is never heard, but always seen." Thank you very much.

And now let's celebrate Rosemary's accomplishments with a big round of applause.