State of Art Museum Libraries 2016

ARLIS/NA Museum Division White Paper

Co-authors:

Anne Evenhaugen, Smithsonian American Art & Portrait Gallery Library
Shaina Buckles Harkness, Dali Museum
Alison Huftalen, Toledo Museum of Art
Nicole Lovenjak, Dayton Art Institute
Mary Wassermann, Philadelphia Museum of Art
Roger Lawson, National Gallery of Art (Editor)

Executive Summary

The art museum library both supports and enhances its museum's mission. Art museum libraries provide authoritative, relevant, and timely research service to their museum constituents and the general public. In many cases, they furnish access to rare, digital, and ephemeral collections, and in doing so, increase the validity and the voice of the institutions they support. As fundamental partners in the art museum's educational mission, librarians forge links between researchers in related fields, to collections across disciplines, and among departments within the same institution. The historic and enduring value of the art library, and the employees who develop, promote, and safeguard its resources, cannot be emphasized enough to the staff, administration and the governing boards of art museums.

Despite their importance, art museum libraries are facing pressures from all angles. The external pressure to make knowledge freely and easily available online means that patrons assume everything is digitized. While ventures such as Google Books, the Internet Archive and the HathiTrust Digital Library do make rare materials available in digital form to a wider public, there is a huge cost to digitization and storage, and only the biggest museums can afford to undertake it. The growing number of images openly available on sites such as Google Images or Flickr provide ready access but have poor cataloging standards, and thus, discovery of the relevant resources is impeded. Libraries still require access to those materials that are not online, and their budgets and building footprints need to reflect that the physical item is still necessary. The effects of the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent recession were especially taxing for museums, who saw their endowments and sponsorships dry up. Limited resources lead to increased internal pressures to validate the cost of collecting, housing, staffing, and maintaining physical resources and spaces. This paper takes a closer look at these constraints in specific institutions and offers strategies to remedy the adverse effects.

White Paper Background

In 2014, members of the Museum Division of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) began to gather data to investigate reports of a large number of lay-offs and detrimental restructuring in the art museum library community. In 2016, the Museum Division and the Society's Public Policy Committee completed work on the *State of Art Museum Libraries* white paper. The paper focuses on libraries that specifically support the research and collections of art museums or art galleries, primarily in the United States. The study does not include general academic art libraries that may share a university campus with an art museum or gallery. Intended for art librarians as well as art museum administrators, directors, and boards, this brief paper discusses the nature of art museum libraries, their staff, and specific issues affecting their work. We conclude with a selection of strategies for dealing with these issues and ways to move the profession in a positive direction.

There has not been a comprehensive effort to collect art library peer data by the Art Libraries Society of North America, though a task force distributed a "Census of Art Information Professionals" as the Society's

first attempt to survey the demographic makeup of the field in spring 2016; the results were not available in time to produce this paper.[1] There have been recent ad hoc surveys that measure discrete characteristics of the art information profession. To illustrate trends and statistics for comparison of the art museum library environment and staffing, we have looked to several individual surveys and reports in the wider field, focusing on the United States, as well as Canada when relevant data was available.

To better understand some of the qualitative problems facing art museum libraries in the United States, the authors conducted a brief anonymous online survey in August 2016 for the purpose of this paper, hereafter referred to as the "2016 MDCS Survey".[2] With 34 current and former art museum library staff responding, a number of intertwining trends emerged. The paper will discuss the background of these trends, illustrated by the case studies, previously published quantitative studies and the recent qualitative survey responses.

---

[1] Brinkman, Stacy. "Invitation to Participate: Census of Art Information Professionals," ARLIS-L post, February 17, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org
[2] See final pages of this white paper for questions and summarized results of the ARLIS/NA 2016 Museum Division Current State Survey ("2016 MDCS Survey").

State of the Field and Current Issues for Art Museum Libraries

The Museum Community and the Role of the Library within the Institution

According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Museum Universe Data File for the Fiscal Year 2015, there are approximately 3,241 art museums in the United States.[3] Art museums account for the third largest discipline, or about 9.8% of the total number of museums.[4] There are approximately 200 staffed libraries embedded in art museums and galleries, as estimated in the ARLIS/NA Museum Division crowdsourced list, "Art Museum and Gallery Libraries."[5] But the museum community has not actively emphasized the role of art libraries within their professional organizations. As Joan M. Benedetti noted in 2003, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), has "long resisted the idea of including museum libraries among the facilities required of a museum for accreditation."[6] In 1996, Esther Green Bierbaum recognized that "less space is given to the library in the AAM Accreditation standards than to any other facility or services."[7] While the AAM does stipulate "archives or libraries available to the public" as one way of a museum fulfilling its educational role, it fails to mention the "library" in relation to any sort of research function.[8] Additionally, unlike other related services (collection documentation, educational public programs), the "library" receives not a single mention in the Association of Art Museum Directors' *Professional Practices in Art Museums* or AAM's *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums.*[9] These organizations communicate and predicate standards of excellence in museum practice, but fail to recognize the importance of libraries within museums.

Art museum information professionals continue to help curators, art historians, and other users further research and scholarships in the arts and cultural sectors to help fulfill a museum's mission in an evolving field. Ithaka's 2014 report on "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians" notes that "[m]useums and other stewards of important primary source collections can help build a discovery architecture for the future of the field by exploring new ways to connect their collections online."[10] Museum libraries typically have a smaller in-house clientele than academic libraries, and curators may have less time to spend in the library than their colleagues in academic departments. Ithaka notes that consequently, "[m]useum libraries typically offer more hands-on research assistance to curators;" because curators may not

---

[3] Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Museum Universe Data File" (2015) https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/museum-universe-data-file Website accessed October 2016.

[4] Ibid. The largest museum discipline is Historical Societies, Historic Preservation, & Historic Houses and Sites (n= 14861 or 45%), followed by Uncategorized or General Museums (n= 8699 or 26%)

[5] Slania, Heather. "Museum Library Usage," ARLIS-L post, April 24, 2015, http://lsv.arlisna.org; ARLIS/NA Museum Division crowdsourced list, "Art Museum and Gallery Libraries", http://bit.ly/1GdCTY9 Website accessed January 2017.

[6] Benedetti, Joan M. "Managing the Small Art Museum Library." *Journal of Library Administration.* 39, No. 1, (2003). p. 25

[7] Bierbaum, Esther Green. "Museum Libraries: The More Things Change . . ." *Special Libraries* 87: 2 (Spring 1996). Pp. 74-75, quoted in Benedetti, Ibid.

[8] American Alliance of Museums, *Accreditation Self-Study* (2014). http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/accreditation/accreditation-self-study.pdf?sfvrsn=4 Website accessed October 2016.

[9] Association of Art Museum Directors, "Professional Practices in Art Museums" (2011). https://www.aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/2011ProfessionalPracitiesinArtMuseums.pdf; Website accessed October 2016.; *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2008).

[10] Ithaka, "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians" (April 30, 2014), 6, http://www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/mig/reports/SR_Support-Changing-Research-ArtHist_20140429.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

be familiar with the newest research resources. Ithaka found they in fact "rely on library staff to supplement their methodologies and substantively assist in their research projects."[11] Scholars researching in U.S. institutions have noted the ever increasing shift towards the digitization of collections, online access, and general openness.[12] However, there is still a heavy reliance on print materials, and art book publishing thrives. Thus, art librarians continue to collect and maintain large print collections, since collecting print copies supports current scholarship and ensures long-term access to material. To illustrate this, many librarians weigh the decisions of retaining or discarding auction catalogs because auction houses may remove content from their websites or later start charging subscription fees.[13] Despite impressions that there is easy online access to all art information, there is still a heavy reliance on providing access to print materials: "physical proximity is still the best guarantee of easy access."[14] This physical convenience is important to consider when decisions are made about where within a museum a library is placed, how easily staff and the public may access resources, and what happens when this physical resource and research support from art librarians is no longer available due to institutional change.

Art museum libraries range in size, but many are small compared to their public and academic counterparts. They tend to serve smaller, more focused populations within an institutional structure where they may compete with other departments for resources such as funding and staffing. As a result, art museum libraries have been regularly required to provide value propositions for their libraries. One librarian noted in the 2016 MDCS Survey that "much of the pressure on our library has been a result of institutional priorities rather than directly attributable to the 2008 [economic] situation...We are perceived as space-intensive and expensive to run, with no revenue potential, and we are vulnerable to the persistent questions about the value of physical libraries in the digital era."[15] The value proposition can prove difficult when the tools and quantitative statistics that are regularly used to measure attendance and material usage are not as useful in assessing the value of the art museum library. Long-term approaches to statistics would facilitate benchmarks for assessment and assist art museum librarians in articulating needs to their art museum administrations.

In the same survey, one urban art library described its experience of merging with the collections staff, creating a new department that encompassed the library, archives, and museum collections. The move was an opportunity that arose from the strategic vision of a new director; the benefits allowed for a new off-site print study room, lab space, exhibition space, capacious storage for archives and museum collections, and an increased presence of library special collections.

---

[11] Ibid, 34.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 32.
[14] Ibid, 33.
[15] Anonymous response. Evenhaugen, Anne et al. "Questions related to the State of Art Museum Libraries" Online Survey [Unpublished data]. Original ARLIS-L post: Evenhaugen, Anne. "Invitation to Participate: Art Museum Library Spaces," ARLIS-L post: September 7, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

Staffing, Required Skills, and Increased Pressure on Roles

In a 2002 survey, Joan M. Benedetti found that of 34 participating art museum libraries, the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff ranged between .50 and 4.00; more than half were solo librarians.[16] All libraries surveyed had at least one MLS degreed librarian, although seven were less than full-time, and in one instance although possessing a master's degree and working full-time, the librarian was a volunteer. In many cases, volunteers and interns supplemented paid staff.[17] Benedetti found that these are in fact not small museums: in terms of operating budgets, these ranged from a high of $25,000,000 to a low $500,000, with the mean at $6,460,000 and the median at $5,000,000.[18] A February 2016 survey, "Art Museum Libraries Space Survey," asked similar questions, and Breanne Compton found that of the 43 respondents, 42% of museum libraries have a single staff member or less, and make do with volunteers. Of these institutions, 22% have between 101-500 full-time employees at their museum, also considered large museums.[19]

Professional librarians in art museums are experts in supporting specialized art research, and these positions require at minimum a master's degree in Library Science. Many museum and academic positions are considered research-intensive and require a strong art background, so art museum librarians often have a second master's degree in an art-related subject. Their job-related duties include collection development, reference, circulation and shelving, cataloging, programming, strategic planning, and budgeting. Karen Stafford's analysis of the job market through an examination of all art library job postings from the ARLIS/NA listserv shows museum job postings accounted for 27% over a recent five year period (2010-2015).[20] Reference and instruction positions were the most commonly posted, 39% of total museum job openings, followed closely by technical services (31%), administrative (16%), archives (8%), and digital librarian (5%) roles.[21] The required knowledge and skills for open art library jobs requiring an MLS degree were previous library experience (79%), followed by communication/interpersonal skills (59%), and digital and technological trends/tools, followed by reference experience (45%) as the most sought-after qualifications.[22] Individuals with both previous library experience and digital image skills are very desirable in the current art library job market.

When museums are faced with downsizing, layoffs of library staff have been easier for administration to justify than cuts to development, curatorial or public relations staff. Museum libraries are increasingly required to function with reduced support for staff, and are forced to rely more heavily on volunteers, interns and temporary contract positions. In the 2016 MDCS Survey, one library described their experience of doing more with less: over the course of a decade, permanent library staffing steadily declined and several

---

[16] 18 libraries had 1 FTE or less; 14 had more staff. Benedetti, Joan M. "A Survey of Small Art Museum Libraries," *Art Documentation* 22, no. 2 (2003): 32.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Crumpton, Breanne. "Art Museum Library Spaces Survey" Online Survey [Unpublished data]. Original ARLIS-L post: Breanne Crumpton, "Invitation to Participate: Art Museum Library Spaces," ARLIS-L post: January 26, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

[20] Stafford, Karen. "Trends in Professional Art Library Job Postings, 2010-2015," *Art Documentation* 35 (Spring 2016): 175.

[21] Ibid, 176.

[22] Ibid, 177.

positions became term-limited, grant-funded positions. This decrease came at the same time the museum-based graduate programs expanded, increasing the use of library materials and spaces.

The 2016 MDCS Survey made clear that the elimination of library positions has been a serious issue for many art museum libraries as they struggle to make ends meet for their collections and services. In 2013, during the period known as sequestration when the federal government slashed agency budgets, many agencies put hiring freezes, voluntary buy-outs and early retirements in place. One large quasi-federal museum library system lost 10% of its professional workforce to buy-outs during this time, including several staff that supported the system's five art libraries. Not all of these positions have been recovered.

Attrition, when the museum chooses not to fill vacancies, has meant existing staff is expected to take on additional projects and roles throughout the museum. While having library staff more involved in cross-departmental activities is positive, it can often result in a drop in productivity for library-focused tasks and needs, from traditional collection development to conservation to shelving. Many library tasks related to physical collections become part of a backlog or cease altogether. When librarians make increased use of the assistance of interns, student workers, and volunteers to maintain acceptable levels of service in difficult times, the overall quality of the service suffers. It may also hurt the case for restoring staffing levels when their administrators are under the impression that professional staff can be easily replaced by low or unpaid nonprofessional help.

Insufficient staffing makes it difficult -- and in some instances impossible -- for museum libraries to maintain open public hours. Decreased staffing has resulted in both reduced public drop-in hours and shifts to appointment-only access, as well as a significant emphasis on care of primary and unique resources, such as archives and rare books, when faced with a choice of how to prioritize access. Librarians in existing roles are being called upon to take on tasks beyond the traditional reference, resource, and bibliographic roles. Art librarians' roles are expanding, as their duties increasingly resemble those of educators, registrars, curators, metadata and digital image experts. Using the ARLIS/NA annual conferences for examples of initiatives that art museum information professionals are engaged in, sessions range from visual literacy education (providing teacher resources and children's programs); rights management roles addressing topics such as copyright research, digitization strategies, public domain images, and revenue generation; electronic art book and exhibition catalog publishing; digital image archives and image recognition.[23]

On a positive note, some museums have chosen to prioritize their art library, and there were several examples of increased support from the 2016 MDCS Survey. A small, single-artist collection recently hired the first librarian in the museum's 35-year history, and the budget to support the library has doubled. Another example from a privately-funded institution showed a thriving staff and library, planning to move into a new purpose-built space for the book collection.

---

[23] Conference session Proceedings at the 2016, 44th Annual Conference (Seattle, WA) included: "Natural Connections Between Museum Libraries, Education, and Visual Literacy;" "What We Talk about When We Talk about "Rights Management;" "E-mania — The Present and Future of Electronic Art Book Publishing" For complete list see https://arlisna.org/news/conferences/570-2016-44th-annual-conference; See also 2015: 43rd Annual Conference Proceedings: Visualizing the New Frontier: Recent Advances in Image Recognition Technology.

Importance of Physical Collections and the Space They Occupy

In both the 2003 "Survey of Small Art Museum Libraries" and the 2016 "Art Museum Library Spaces Survey" librarians consistently noted the lack of space for collections.[24] Museum libraries must manage multifaceted issues of space and accessibility. Despite the increasing availability of online art resources, the museum library's physical collections (books, journals, ephemera, images, and archives) remain essential to supporting critical ongoing research relating directly to the museum's collections and exhibition programs. Lack of sufficient space in stable environments can compromise the physical integrity and usability of valuable or irreplaceable materials. Furthermore, institutional decisions to reallocate existing library spaces to other public or administrative functions inhibits the library's collection development that can be difficult to recover. Unless a museum can undertake an expensive expansion project, the library is often overlooked as a department requiring sufficient space for continued growth. Several respondents to the 2016 MDCS Survey reported drastic cuts to collection development with lack of space being a key reason.

The lack of shelf space also means that librarians are relying more on interlibrary loan (ILL) to borrow books and journals from other libraries to fill short-term needs. Unless working within a consortial agreement, ILL can cost the borrowing library between $20 and $50 per item in loan and shipping fees, sometimes more than acquiring an item outright. Some libraries have implemented a purchase on demand (POD) model, in which librarians only buy titles that are specifically requested by curatorial staff. This method allows for focused purchasing, but will inevitably lead to gaps in the collection, resulting in frustration on the part of researchers and heavier use of interlibrary loan to borrow out-of-print publications.

Visibility and accessibility also play roles in emphasizing the value of physical collections. In many museums, libraries are often located far from galleries and visitors, in restricted-access office space, or even in separate buildings, thereby hampering the library's ability to attract important public clientele.

A recurring theme in the 2016 MDCS Survey was a lack of conservation resources for general collections. Given the choice between allocating money for acquisitions or preservation of existing collections, many art museum libraries opt to buy new books. Binding serials was once a regular part of preservation, but the cost has become difficult for many libraries to justify. Many respondents noted that a museum library can benefit from good relations with the institution's in-house conservation staff for rare book treatments, thus obviating the need to have permanent or contract conservators on the library staff.

Changes in Funding and Access, and Effects on Outreach and Education

Because art museums often face funding issues forcing cuts in staffing, hours, acquisitions, supplies, services, and space, the library must compete with other departments for funding -- or, worse, suffer

---

[24] Benedetti, Joan M. "A Survey of Small Art Museum Libraries," *Art Documentation* 22, no. 2 (2003): 32. And Crumpton, Breanne. "Art Museum Library Spaces Survey" Online Survey [Unpublished data]. Original ARLIS-L post: Breanne Crumpton, "Invitation to Participate: Art Museum Library Spaces," ARLIS-L post: January 26, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

permanent cuts based on successful fundraising. In the 2016 MDCS Survey 10 respondents (29%) noted that direct monetary donations to the library resulted in equivalent reductions in funding from the overall museum budget--reductions that would not necessarily be recovered in subsequent fiscal years. At least one library had donations designated for the library go to the museum's operating budget, without any increase in library funding.[25]

The 2016 MDCS Survey did note that some museum libraries were saved from total acquisition depletions by the fact that they had unrestricted private endowments in place. Others noted that the librarian organized friends' groups or book sales in order to increase library revenue, and that their institution maintained those funds for library uses. A number of art museum libraries have merged with local universities, along with some museums gifting their entire library and/or archival collections to universities or other such organizations. These hybridized organizations have increased libraries' "buying power" for journal subscriptions and databases, print sources, and even library management systems for some institutions. It also provides a greater support in terms of maintenance and conservation for collections.

A question in the 2016 MDCS Survey asked whether art museum libraries had to cut public hours, programming, services, or staff since the 2008 economic crisis. Thirty-seven percent had done so, showing the need to focus more narrowly on their institution's own curators and staff needs. The lack of public access hours can present a significant challenge for museum libraries trying to increase their visibility within the institution and demonstrate their value to the museum. While not common, some art museum libraries have closed altogether. The reason for a library closure, which could occur without warning, can result from a wide variety of factors, but eliminating the library does not eliminate the fundamental research needs they address.

---

[25] Ibid.

Case Studies

The following brief case studies reflect some of the current issues faced by libraries and specifically, art museum libraries, such as closures, restructuring and the increased cost of journals and databases, to name a few. Furthermore, these case studies demonstrate common themes revealed in the survey of art museum libraries conducted in August 2016 for the purpose of this paper, including the cutting of public access hours, increased interlibrary loan (ILL) activity and purchase on demand (POD), as well as hybrid museum-university re-organization efforts.

Baltimore Museum of Art

The Baltimore Museum of Art E. Kirkbride Miller Art Research Library & Archives' (BMA) holdings consist of over 80,000 items. A snapshot from 2000 would have shown a staff of five in the library, but in 2016, the BMA Library and Archives are managed by a single professional librarian. This change was a result of layoffs in 2013 that eliminated the library director's position, leaving only the assistant librarian and a part-time cataloger, with assistance from volunteers and interns. The librarian trains and supervises the cataloger, students and volunteers, which takes up a substantial amount of time. After the layoffs in 2013, a grant was awarded to the library which provided project-based archivists for a period of three years.[26] This enabled public access to the library's holdings to continue, but when the grant ended in January 2016, the lack of staffing meant the library public access hours were eliminated. The library collections remain open to all staff, volunteers, interns, docents, and trustees during regular business hours, and the archives collections are open to the public by appointment. This decision was based on the idea of maintaining full access to collections of materials that cannot be found elsewhere, making the archives a top priority.

According to the current librarian, reducing the library/archives staff has also meant that basic activities such as shelving and stacks maintenance routinely fall behind, and all library services are provided more slowly. Acquisitions activities rely heavily on staff requests (POD) since library staff do not have the time necessary to monitor new important publications notifications in a timely manner. A growing backlog of archives accessions means that any records received after 2013 are unlikely to be available to researchers quickly. Records management functions face similar problems, and many categories of records well beyond their retention period await shredding.

Indianapolis Museum of Art

The Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) Library experienced both staffing and acquisitions budget cuts in recent years. The staff was reduced to two full-time employees, and though the IMA reduced the library staff, it was expected to maintain some public access, resulting in one afternoon per week. The library remains open to museum staff, but the library director must provide advance notice of her work schedule every week and the library is closed if the director is not on site.

---

26 Baltimore Museum of Art. "BMA Completes Major Archives Initiative." Press release, 29 April, 2016.
https://artbma.org/documents/press/nhprc2016.pdf Website accessed November 2016.

Like the BMA, the IMA Library has made the archives collection a higher priority for the parent institution. When the IMA was in the middle of new construction, these archival resources helped administration make informed planning and building decisions by providing blueprints of the original museum and other historical resources for investigations on construction. With recent major changes to the campus and technology infrastructure, the archives have remained a priority. In addition, there has been more interest in digitization, particularly of archival material, for collection and provenance research. But with limited staff, there is a backlog of both archival and library processing; therefore, the priority has shifted to processing current archival resources.

The library with more than 100,000 volumes, also lost two-thirds of its operating budget. The increasing cost of journal and database subscriptions required a substantial reduction in the number of print subscriptions and cancellation of half their database subscriptions. Collection development is now a purchase on demand system based on staff requests, as the current staff hours inhibit the implementation of a comprehensive collection development plan. In addition, interlibrary loan operations at the IMA library are now centered exclusively on borrowing rather than lending due to time and staff constraints.

Corcoran Gallery and College of Art + Design

In 2014, longstanding budget and management problems led to the closure of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. The historic building housing the gallery and the College of Art + Design, as well as the historical archives, including nearly 2,000 boxes of historical documents and hundreds of thousands of architectural drawings, exhibition posters, photographs, and oversized ledgers documenting the Corcoran's rich institutional history, were transferred to George Washington University (GWU); the art collection was given to the National Gallery of Art. Other materials, such as art and artist records, were distributed to other institutions in the city, including the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery Library, and the National Gallery of Art.[27] Although the closure itself was contested and the transition was difficult, redistributing these collections to other institutions ensured increased access and sustainability.[28]

Along with the Corcoran's institutional archives, the Art & Design Collection from the Corcoran is now housed in GWU's Gelman Library. The 30,000 volume collection is maintained separately despite heavy duplication with the existing Gelman collection and contains specialized art and design materials as well as general resources in complementary fields of study. In addition, the collection maintains its own subject librarian, formerly of the Corcoran, to continue acquisitions and to coordinate with both GWU and Corcoran communities to support research and outreach in the library.

---

[27] George Washington University Libraries. "Corcoran Archives Documenting Nearly 150 Years of DC Cultural Institution Come to the GW Libraries" Press release, 9 June 2016. https://library.gwu.edu/news-events/posts/corcoran-archives-documenting-nearly-150-years-dc-cultural-institution-come-gw Website accessed October 2016.

[28] Wolkoff, Julia. "Corcoran Can Disband, Judge Rules." *Art in America News,* 19 August, 2014. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/corcoran-can-disband-judge-rules/ Website accessed November 2016.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Library and Florida State University

The Ringling Museum of Art Library was established when the museum was founded in 1946 and has been in continuous existence since. On July 1, 2000 Florida State University (FSU) assumed governance of The Ringling.[29] It was a major milestone in the Museum's history, one that would help the then struggling museum to establish itself as one of the nation's cultural centers. The library has grown to contain more than 65,000 volumes. Curators and museum staff are its primary clients, but students, independent scholars, and the general public are also served.

The Ringling Library and its archives are under the umbrella of the FSU library system, but they maintain their own collections and dedicated staff. Besides general stability, the Ringling Library has benefited from the merge with FSU by the increased number of database subscriptions and the increased utility of integrating its resources into the online library catalog used by all FSU branches, and the library's holdings are now a part of the global Art Discovery Group Catalogue. In 2011, the museum and university partnered to develop the Museum and Cultural Heritage Studies master's program, which includes a full year internship and professional coursework at the Ringling Museum of Art. The collection development policy of the Ringling Museum Library now has a broader scope to include resources for these new classes. The consolidation has strengthened both the Ringling Library collection and the FSU library collections.

Dayton Art Institute

The Dayton Art Institute (DAI) has seen several budget and staffing fluctuations in its recent history. The library itself was closed to the public in 2009, and today it is unstaffed and physical access is available only to museum staff. In March 2016, the DAI and the University of Dayton agreed to hire a librarian as a temporary consultant to analyze the collection and make recommendations on how to reduce the size of the book collection and improve access.[30] Although this partnership does not guarantee that the DAI Library will exist as a separately staffed and maintained entity after final recommendations have been made, the museum has benefitted from more external collaboration as a result of the partnership with University of Dayton. The University of Dayton and Wright State University have agreed to take certain archival collections and a portion of the books and periodicals. Collections that are otherwise regionally available through the OhioLINK academic library consortium will be dispersed, but museum staff will have access to these consortial materials. The restructuring of the art museum library continues as of this writing.

Milwaukee Art Museum Library

In some instances art museum libraries are becoming more prominent within their parent organizations. The Milwaukee Art Museum announced in 2016 that it would move its art library, archives, and related programs to a nearby historic mansion.[31] The art museum library was established in 1916 and its holdings

[29] John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. "FSU Affiliation" webpage. https://www.ringling.org/fsu-affiliation Website accessed November 2016.

[30] Dayton Art Institute. "The Dayton Art Institute and University of Dayton Libraries Partner for Study of DAI Library." Press release, 20 October, 2015. http://www.daytonartinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/library_study_release.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

[31] Milwaukee Art Museum. "Milwaukee Art Museum announces new museum library at historic Judge Jason Downer mansion." Press release, 2 August, 2016. https://mam.org/info/pressroom/2016/08/4461/ Website accessed November 2016.

include nearly 30,000 volumes and 60,000 art auction catalogues, journals and magazines. The library also holds archives and other institutional papers dating back to 1888.

The use of the library's new location is due to a large unrestricted gift to the museum subject to reassessment after seven years. With the move to the mansion, the library is doubling its space to include reading rooms, study spaces, and a lecture space. Though it is no longer housed in its museum, the library will be able to provide more access than ever before and to create more community partnerships with schools and other local organizations. According to the Head Librarian/Archivist, "we've had spectacular response from patrons interested in helping us move our plans forward. We've taken every advantage to give behind-the-scenes tours which are often full to capacity and have been attended by several past and present trustees, major donors, researchers, the general public and, anyone and everyone frankly. Also timely, we have a new director who is keenly interested in libraries/archives and research, so we look forward to working with her on providing a brand new/high level of access to our patrons."[32] She also emphasized the importance of their library and archives to the future of the art museum and their commitment to ensuring the best access to all patrons.

---

[32] Winter, Heather L. "RE: Info about your move." Message to Shaina Buckles Harkness. 22 November 2016. E-mail.

Strategies for Navigating Issues

The issues facing art museum libraries are complex and varied. Yet it is clear that art museum libraries are adversely affected by cuts in funding and lack of support for their work despite the demonstrated value for the services and collections they provide.

We invite museum leadership to assess the intrinsic role the library plays in a museum's curatorial responsibilities and its educational mission. It is no accident that core book collections were often acquired as part of major art acquisitions in the twentieth century and still serve to inform and place these artworks in their historic and cultural context. Books, archives, and manuscripts are frequently featured in museum exhibitions; curators not only recognize the importance of these works but often collaborate with librarians and archivists in the presentation and interpretation of special collections.

In addition, we encourage art museum librarians to reach beyond their walls to foster collaboration and problem solving. Libraries and arts organizations are especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy, and it is becoming more crucial to increase library-driven fundraising. Fundraising and grant writing is generally seen as the work of a director or development officer, but librarians can be an asset to both museum and library efforts on different levels. Auctions, book sales, and book "adoption" programs offer other ways to raise money for the library. Email fundraising appeals to museum donors could prove useful in both enhancing the visibility of the library to an interested audience and bring in additional funds. Library friends groups can raise both monetary and book donations.

There is great potential for museum librarians to continue their significant contributions to Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) initiatives sponsored by public entities such as the Institute of Museum Libraries and Services (IMLS) and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). For example, the Hidden Collections program sponsored by CLIR has resulted in digital access to artworks, photographs, ephemera, rare books, archives, textiles, and a host of other cultural records housed in museums throughout the United States. These efforts represent important collaborations on the part of museum librarians locally and nationally.

The successful partnership between the Ringling Museum and FSU shows one way in which collaborations among local institutions can benefit all parties. Public libraries, other museum libraries, and local research or ILL consortiums can extend collections, programming, education, and visibility for mutual benefit.

Within their institutions, art museum librarians are eager to lend expertise to the organization and preservation of object data as well as to efforts to reach museum audiences virtually. The New Media Consortium 2013 Horizon Report, Museum Edition notes that library science programs are training students in digital curation, digital preservation and restoration of time-based materials.[33] These pioneering programs put libraries and archives at the forefront of digital preservation planning. In some programs,

---

[33] New Media Consortium. "NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Museum Edition." http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2013-horizon-report-museum-EN.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

students are working with contemporary artists to develop ways to preserve the integrity of artwork, thus assisting curators and conservators in collection care.

In addition, new initiatives have begun to enhance the skills of new and mid-career art information professionals. Despite the fact that libraries, museums, and archives have been curating complex born-digital materials for decades, these institutions "have been struggling to find ways to provide long-term access to content."[34] The National Digital Stewardship Residency (NDSR) for Art (a partnership between the Philadelphia Museum of Art and ARLIS/NA) strives to close this gap and address the growing requirement of digital/technological skills and digital stewardship in art libraries since "training resources for art libraries remain underdeveloped and insufficient."[35] By embedding residents in cultural heritage libraries across the country, the profession hopes to promote responsible digital stewardship in art libraries.

Internal collaborations are essential to the art museum library's existence. It should start from the top, with library staff working to cultivate relationships with museum directors and governing boards, keeping them abreast of collections and projects. Librarians need to find a seat at the curatorial table, as a part of meetings on exhibition and acquisition planning. These meetings not only inform the librarian's day-to-day activities they also strengthen relationships with curators, development staff, museum educators, and the museum administration. Planning complementary exhibitions, developing online exhibitions, coordinating marketing efforts, and hosting exhibition-related programs and events are some of the ways that art museum libraries can further enhance the exhibition program of their institution. Looking outside the research box, art museum libraries often have collections ripe for museum store product design or social media highlights, and library staff with the skills to collaborate with IT departments handling museum-wide Digital Asset Management Systems.

All of these strategies can be fortified by solid data and statistics. Art museum libraries should be able to show usage by visitors and staff, perhaps through circulation records, reference statistics, views of the library webpages or door counters. ARLIS/NA can assist in identifying relevant information to be collected, given context, and leveraged to increase the visibility of art museum libraries' needs. To be more transparent and accountable, professional organizations must support statistical standards and routine data collection for historical tracking; all would be better equipped to report on the state of our field and trends, including library staff restructuring and closures.

---

[34] Rieger, Oya Y. et al., "Preserving and Emulating Digital Art Objects," Cornell University, November 2015: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/41368 Website accessed October 2016.
[35] Philadelphia Museum of Art, "IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Program, Continuing Education Category: 'Art Information Professionals: A National Digital Stewardship Residency Program: Narrative" (January 2016): 2. http://ndsr-pma.arlisna.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Narrative.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

Summary

A Google search of the top ten art museums in the United States will show ten institutions that represent their art research libraries prominently on their websites, with resources used heavily by their curatorial staff and scholars. Achievements in research and publishing are traditional bellwethers of institutional success, and art museum libraries are valuable assets to the art world, necessary to spur, support and archive this scholarly research. But in our post-2008 global financial crisis art world, libraries are nevertheless having to justify their acquisition budgets, their staffing numbers, their use of space, and even their existence to successful and struggling museum leadership alike.

Former Getty director Michael Brand summed up the role and need for art libraries when he said "Looking back...I realize how great a debt I owe to the art librarians who built these collections, cataloged them and made them accessible to me and my colleagues over the years … No individual can amass the scope and depth of scholarship nurtured by our art museum libraries ... even the smallest art museum needs to have access to the best scholarship in their fields."[36]

If museums maintain their commitment to excellence in how they present and share their collections and aim to play a significant role in the cultural community, then the quality of this outreach depends upon the ability of curators, educators, outside scholars, and the public to study, care for, and interpret these collections effectively. Art librarians are, likewise, deeply committed to the crucial role they play as caretakers of the resources -- old, new, print, archival, or digital -- that are intrinsic to the interpretation and stewardship of art. They are vital participants in the dialogues between all those who contribute to the success of a museum and its programs.

---

[36] Benedetti, Joan M. *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*. Lantham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007. pp. ix-x.

Sources Consulted

American Alliance of Museums, *Accreditation Self-Study* (2014). http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/accreditation/accreditation-self-study.pdf?sfvrsn=4 Website accessed October 2016.

Association of Art Museum Directors, "Professional Practices in Art Museums" (2011). https://www.aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/2011ProfessionalPracitiesinArtMuseums.pdf; Website accessed October 2016.

Slania, Heather. "Museum Library Usage," ARLIS-L post, April 24, 2015, http://lsv.arlisna.org

Baltimore Museum of Art. "BMA Completes Major Archives Initiative." Press release, 29 April, 2016. https://artbma.org/documents/press/nhprc2016.pdf Website accessed November 2016.

Benedetti, Joan M. "A Survey of Small Art Museum Libraries," *Art Documentation* 22, no. 2 (2003): 32.

Benedetti, Joan M. *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*. Lantham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Benedetti, Joan M. "Managing the Small Art Museum Library." *Journal of Library Administration* 39, No. 1, (2003). pp. 23-44

Bierbaum, Esther Green. "Museum Libraries: The More Things Change . . ." *Special Libraries* 87: 2 (Spring 1996). pp. 74-75.

Brinkman, Stacy. "Invitation to Participate: Census of Art Information Professionals," ARLIS-L post, February 17, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

Crumpton, Breanne. "Art Museum Library Spaces Survey" Online Survey [Unpublished data]. Original ARLIS-L post: Breanne Crumpton, "Invitation to Participate: Art Museum Library Spaces," ARLIS-L post: January 26, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

Dayton Art Institute. "The Dayton Art Institute and University of Dayton Libraries Partner for Study of DAI Library." Press release, 20 October, 2015. http://www.daytonartinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/library_study_release.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

Evenhaugen, Anne et al. "Questions related to the State of Art Museum Libraries" Online Survey [Unpublished data]. Original ARLIS-L post: Evenhaugen, Anne. "Invitation to Participate: Art Museum Library Spaces," ARLIS-L post: September 7, 2016, http://lsv.arlisna.org

George Washington University Libraries. "Corcoran Archives Documenting Nearly 150 Years of DC Cultural Institution Come to the GW Libraries" Press release, 9 June 2016. https://library.gwu.edu/news-events/posts/corcoran-archives-documenting-nearly-150-years-dc-cultural-institution-come-gw Website accessed October 2016.

Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Museum Universe Data File" (2015) https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/museum-universe-data-file Website accessed October 2016.

Ithaka, "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians" (April 30, 2014), 6, http://www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/mig/reports/SR_Support-Changing-Research-ArtHist_20140429.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. "FSU Affiliation" webpage. https://www.ringling.org/fsu-affiliation Website accessed November 2016.

Milwaukee Art Museum. "Milwaukee Art Museum announces new museum library at historic Judge Jason Downer mansion." Press release, 2 August, 2016. https://mam.org/info/pressroom/2016/08/4461/ Website accessed November 2016.

National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2008).

New Media Consortium. "NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Museum Edition." http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2013-horizon-report-museum-EN.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, "IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Program, Continuing Education Category: 'Art Information Professionals: A National Digital Stewardship Residency Program: Narrative" (January 2016): 2. http://ndsr-pma.arlisna.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Narrative.pdf Website accessed October 2016.

Rieger, Oya Y. et al., "Preserving and Emulating Digital Art Objects," Cornell University, November 2015: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/41368 Website accessed October 2016.

Stafford, Karen. "Trends in Professional Art Library Job Postings, 2010-2015," *Art Documentation* 35 (Spring 2016): 175-179.

Wilson, Terri L. Ed. *The Twenty-first Century Art Librarian.* Binghamton, NY: Haworth Information Press, 2003.

Winter, Heather L. "RE: Info about your move." Message to Shaina Buckles Harkness. 22 November 2016. E-mail.

Wolkoff, Julia. "Corcoran Can Disband, Judge Rules." *Art in America News,* 19 August, 2014. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/corcoran-can-disband-judge-rules/ Website accessed November 2016.

2016 MDCS Survey

ARLIS/NA Museum Division
Current State Survey

To better understand some of the qualitative problems facing art museum libraries in the United States, the authors conducted a brief anonymous online survey for the purpose of this paper, summarized below.

Snapshot of survey and responses:

Open dates: 8/17/2016 - 9/15/2016
Disseminated via ARLIS-L and the Museum Division listservs.
Consisted of 5 primary questions (see below), one open-ended response, and a link to a separate list of museums experiencing issues.
Questions could be Yes/No, but all allowed for qualitative descriptions of a library's experience in a specific area.
34 total responses with varying positive and negative responses to each question. Eleven respondents reported very positive examples of activities in their art museum libraries; six included very negative examples of activities in their art museum libraries.
General issues noted by more than one respondent included:

> Use of more volunteers and interns
> More library-driven fundraising
> Cuts to public hours or services
> Space issues
> Cuts to traditional collection development
> A lack of general conservation
> Hybrid museum-university models

ARLIS/NA 2016 MDCS Survey Questions:

Please give feedback on the following questions related to the Current State of Art Museum Libraries:

1. Have you had to narrow focus to just your own institution's curators (cut public hours, programming, services or staff?)

2. Have direct donations to your library resulted in equivalent reductions in funding of the library from the overall museum budget?

3. Have contractors or consultants taken the place of permanent, professional library staff?

4. Have you been encouraged to shift to "purchase on demand" (POD) or increased ILL rather than purchasing plans or traditional collection development?

5. Have your in-house conservation needs had to focus on rare/valuable items and less preventative care of general collections?

6. Any other feedback? Positive examples welcome!

7. We'd like to know we have a comprehensive list of restructures, lay-offs or closures since the 2008 financial crisis, and also have a few case studies to discuss in detail. Please add any Museum Libraries that you know of that experienced similar issues to this Google Doc: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xK_Gw7ZL3OFFnSnVzZ3iKiKU_Z0zO-RO4Cydn_9eZrI/edit?usp=sharing

8. Please include your email & institution if you have more to share.