

Travel Award Report

I would like to open this report with sincere thanks to ARLIS Ontario for making the Conference Travel Award available and for its particular support for the Banff Conference in 2006.

I'm tempted to call this report "the many hats of Catherine Spence" because I found connections in the Banff programming to so many things I am involved with (professionally and not!). When I got back to Toronto I found myself sending e-mails to a number of colleagues passing along links and notes from various sessions which I thought they might find interesting.

>From architectural theory to book and poster design to medieval manuscripts (only heard about that session) to resources on the Decorative Arts and a workshop on the identification of works of art on paper - this conference offered an incredible wealth of information in a splendid setting, together with a chance to make new professional contacts and reconnect with some people I had not seen since New York (my last National Organization conference). It was also a chance to see some of the work that we have been hearing about for some time including the introduction (in one of the poster sessions) of Jo Beglo's "History of Art Libraries in Canada" - now available online through a link from the ARLIS Canada webpage - do have a look!

I am going to concentrate on one aspect of the conference that I found particularly applicable to my work and my current studies at the Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, Masters level. I have selected the session "Online Access to Exhibition Histories: the Role of the Art Museum Library". This session, moderated by Maria Oldal from the newly re-opened Morgan Library featured presentations by Cyndie Campbell from the National Library of Canada, Deirdre Lawrence from the Brooklyn Museum and Elizabeth O'Keefe from the Morgan Library. All the presentations dealt, in some way with online documentation of institutional exhibition history largely through

the digitization of archival materials and the linking of these materials to the Institutions Online Public Access Catalogue. I work with a collection database in one of my workplaces and this session was fascinating in the way that it showed how different areas of the curatorial/registration/library process could be brought together.

Cyndie started with a review of resources prepared to make accessible, the history of exhibitions produced over the years by the National Gallery of Canada. A project carried on through the early '90s involved the collection of exhibition information from various sources around the Gallery (press photos, press releases, educational material and other administrative files. A broad description of holdings of exhibition records as well as basic information about an exhibition, title, itinerary, dates, organizing curator are now available online. Cyndie then outlined a project undertaken in 2003 which includes the digitization of catalogues and checklists for exhibitions produced by the NGC between 1880 and 1930. These images, together with some photographic images are now linked to the entry for the exhibition in the OPAC.

Moving from retrospective to more current material - As Deirdre Lawrence showed us in her presentation The Brooklyn Museum of Art is also using their OPAC to provide information about exhibitions shown at their institution. They have a list of the museum's past exhibitions with dates available on their OPAC as a separate module to the Digital Collections link. Currently under construction and funded through the Mellon Museum Archives Initiative this page includes links to digitized installation photographs (from installation photographs of the early 1900s (admittedly very few) to very current good quality installation photos of exhibitions currently on view at the museum - something that would be very useful to researchers or people from the exhibition's next venue if they want to see how it looks in its current location). There are plans to add other materials, checklists etc. Another project at the Brooklyn Museum of Art involves the production of a database of checklists from museum exhibitions dating from 1897 to the present, searchable by exhibition title, artist, title etc. Still another planned project will show published references to the Brooklyn museum artifacts.

Elizabeth O'Keefe showed us a prototype developed by the Morgan Library where the OPAC incorporates information about the museums collection as well as the research library holdings. The OPAC provides a link to a database of over 15,000 digitized images from the Libraries collection. The prototype which was formed around the exhibition "Painted Prayers - The Medieval Book of Hours" developed and circulated by the Morgan Library. Calling up the exhibition record in "Corsair" the Morgan Libraries OPAC, allows you to access a listing of the exhibitions contents together with thumbnail images of the works of art included in the exhibition. Manuscripts which are completely digitized (that is have all their images included in the image database can be looked at image by image by means of a drop down menu). There are also links to the label text used in the exhibition, complete bibliographic records for the manuscripts themselves as well as installation photographs and press releases (although this link was broken when I tried it out).

There are plans to repeat this process for other exhibitions and to include other items that would further document exhibitions such as reviews and reaction. This of course gets into the area of copyright (which was also discussed in the Q&A that followed the session). Something like the "Painted Prayers" project could only happen with collection based programming - negotiating permissions for a project like this involving loaned works of art would, I think, be a bit of a nightmare!

A few general highlights from the conference:

Spectacular scenery, great facilities for the conference and for the parties (Welcome Party and the Gala evening). Great exhibits - the silent auction the day the exhibit hall closed was great fun (and very successful). I was able to put my Faculty of Information Studies student hat on and go to a couple of events and sessions directed towards students. The new Student work session was a great idea - I'm not sure how long this has been happening.

I went to the resources for Architecture and Theory workshop and found it absolutely

fascinating, admittedly more in a mind expanding way (there are many ways that architectural theory can be approached in a very interdisciplinary manner) rather than a here are some explorations of resources you might not know about way! This was more than made up for in the Decorative Arts session on Monday where the three speakers reviewed a staggering number of print and online sources for the history and study of Decorative Arts.

I also managed to work in several division meetings including the Canadian Chapter Meeting at 7:30 AM!

There was so much to do I only managed one afternoon off but got to spend it taking a wonderful tour (organized for the conference) of the Whyte Museum and also wandering along the Bow River with the local hikers and dog walkers.

Catherine Spence