



**Art Libraries Society of North America, 34th Annual Conference
Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 5-9, 2006**

**Presentation of 2005 Distinguished Service Award:
Elizabeth O'Keefe's Introductory Remarks
Convocation, Sunday, May 7, 6:30pm-8:30pm**

The Convocation program gives the bare bones of Sherman Clarke's career: art librarian since 1973, ARLIS member since 1975, board and committee member at both the national and the chapter levels, major player in the development of data standards for art information, and founder and coordinator of ARTNACO since 1993. In my remarks, I would like to highlight aspects of Sherman's contribution to ARLIS which cannot be brought out in a curriculum vitae, but which were mentioned again and again in the many letters written in support of this award. I can't read all the letters, but not to worry: Sherman will be given copies to read and savour.

One characteristic that came up in every letter was Sherman's unparalleled knowledge of cataloging and art information:

*"he is the 'go to' guy, or even the guru"
"an art librarian's librarian and a cataloger's cataloger"
"the gold standard of cataloging judgment and knowledge ... the person to whose desk all catalogers made a pilgrimage when in need of consultation on knotty problems"*

This knowledge is always on tap to ARLIS members:

"He has written an article about or participated in a conference session on some aspect of cataloging, metadata, or standards every year since 1990. In addition, he has provided invaluable leadership of the Cataloging Problems Discussion group at every ARLIS/NA annual conference since 1975 and sustained guidance of the Cataloging Advisory Committee."

Sherman is one of those rare catalogers who can demystify cataloging for the non-specialist. According to a grateful non-cataloguer:

One of Sherman's most valuable talents is his ability to speak to those of us who value the application of cataloging standards but would not be able to catalog anything if our life depended upon it. Sherman is a patient and gentle teacher who can explain the most complicated cataloging matters to everyone.

That ability was tested on one occasion, when Sherman

"interrupted one of his frequent European trips to lead a NACO workshop in Rome ... I will never forget the patience with which he explained each concept, slowly, in English, in order to reach a group of catalogers that were struggling, in their second or third language, with new and unfamiliar concepts."

Sherman's ability to build consensus and bring people together was mentioned frequently:

"Unless you sit on a committee with him, you will not understand his ability to quietly listen to comments, and then build consensus and move a group on. Unless you've seen him work in a stressful environment, you will never know how he is able to deflate tense moments and build relationships."

This has earned him a special place in the hearts and the counsels of our VRA colleagues:

"More than any other single individual, Sherman has broken down the longstanding boundaries between art librarianship and visual resources curatorship"

AND:

"Sherman's holistic view of art metadata issues has facilitated a community approach to cataloging bibliographic and image resources "

AND:

"He has fostered contact and cooperation between book catalogers and image catalogers, and initiated fruitful collaborations between two communities that must work together to realize the full benefits of digital access to art resources."

But most crucially for ARLIS and for the world of art information, Sherman has won for himself and for ARLIS a place at the table where data standards are developed:

"he has ... a hand in anything and everything coming down the pipe that affects the organization of art library resources. At the same time, he has fostered a community of art librarian catalogers with which he is in constant conversation. In effect, then, because of Sherman's efforts, every cataloger in our field has been given a voice in national cataloging policy."

It was truly impressive to see the glowing endorsements from non-ARLIS members, including senior staff at the Library of Congress, OCLC, the Research Libraries Group, and those who have served for years with Sherman on various standards committees of the American Library Association:

From the Library of Congress:

"he has been a tireless and effective spokesperson for art cataloging as well as an advocate for the development and application of standards in cataloging and the maintenance of cataloging quality."

From RLG:

We at RLG have relied on his advice over the years on technical service issues and view him as a valuable resource to the library community in general, not just the RLG community and the art library community.

From a long-standing member of MARBI (the Committee on Machine Readable Bibliographic Information which oversees the MARC format)

"Sherman has always held a special place [in MARBI], as both an experienced general cataloger (without the annoying habit of clinging to the details at the expense of the big picture that "real" catalogers often exhibit) and a well-grounded specialist, with all the important issues of his field firmly within his grasp. He never spoke promiscuously--not too much nor too long (and never in frustration), but always with the full attention of his peers. And every comment was garnished, of course, with his wonderful gentle humor.

One of Sherman's greatest contributions to the field of art librarianship was his founding and continued coordination of ARTNACO, the funnel for name authorities to the Library of Congress Name Authority File.

Here is an evaluation of ARTNACO from the perspective of OCLC and the wider library community:

While the creation of those authority records has been an invaluable service to the art library community, I cannot emphasize too strongly their value to the broader library community. ... specialized catalogers bring to their work the knowledge and understanding that comes from years of experience in handling specialized headings, such as artist's names and uniform titles ... general catalogers, especially those in smaller institutions, often have to handle those same kinds of headings without the advantages that specialized knowledge and understanding bring. Sharing that specialized knowledge and understanding via the creation of authority records has helped general catalogers create better bibliographic records and more consistent catalogs for their users and has contributed to improved quality in the large shared databases like OCLC's WorldCat and the RLG Union Catalog.

How does he find time for all this? Well, let me share with you a little-known fact about Mr. Clarke. Sherman never sleeps. When he feels the need to rest his eyes, he suspends himself upside-down from a conveniently placed hook on the wall, and remains in that posture for an hour or so, recharging. Then he unhooks himself, checks his email, reviews a few NACO records, writes up a report on the latest meeting of MARBI or CCDA or PCC ...

Sounds far-fetched? Well, then how do you explain the fact that:

"he is always available with friendly and authoritative answers to desperate cataloging questions, not limited to art and, seemingly, 24/7."

OR:

"Sherman is continuously posting relevant documents on his [web]site to provide us with information and to alert us to developments in name authority work and in cataloging in general."

OR:

"His tireless interest in art literature is evidenced by his 'moonlighting' in several art libraries, helping us catalogue material that would otherwise go into our backlog. I

do not know many people who work full time and then go on to an evening of cataloguing...."

I'd like to close with a few words about Sherman's impact on individual art catalogers. Letter after letter mentioned his collegiality and kindness (what one person described as the "*humane model of cataloging presented by Sherman*"), and his personal encouragement of new catalogers, particularly at the annual conferences. For many of us, the annual conference is our only chance to see colleagues from other parts of the country. It's easy to get immersed in reconnecting with old friends and overlook newcomers. But Sherman has always taken the time to reach out to first attendees. From several accounts, I have chosen one cataloger's description of her first ARLIS conference:

"It had been only a few months since I had joined the staff at [her institution] and I was new to the field of art librarianship. Sherman introduced himself, gave me some advice on which meetings to attend, and invited my institution to join the 10 other museum libraries that made up the Art NACO funnel he was coordinating. I had never had such a warm and helpful encounter at a professional meeting and I was sure it was an aberration. But soon I realized that what I had experienced was simply Sherman: warm, kind, helpful, approachable, wise, and above all, enthusiastic. I will always be grateful to him for welcoming me into the society of art catalogers and guiding me until I found my way."

For helping so many of us to find our way, and for his role as *de facto* ARLIS ambassador to the library and art information communities, we present to Sherman Clarke the Distinguished Service Award.