



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

**Session 16: Promise and Constraints: What Case Studies Tell About National
Art Libraries
Saturday, May 6, 2006, 1:30-3:30 p.m.**

Moderator: Susan M. Allen, Getty Research Institute

Speakers:

Linda Groom, Pictures Librarian, National Library of Australia

Jonathan Franklin, Head of Collections and Data Base Management, National Gallery of Canada Library

Susan M. Allen, Associate Director and Chief Librarian, Getty Research Institute

Recorder:

Deborah Kempe, Frick Art Reference Library

Summary

Ms. Groom's case study was a Visual Arts Forum held in 2004 to identify collaborative projects that could be carried out between the National Library of Australia and Australian arts libraries. As part of its mandate to provide leadership and support to all Australian libraries, the NL hosted forty attendees from art libraries. At the end of the meeting the following needs were identified: a directory of Australian Arts libraries; web access to hidden arts resources; access to websites of individual Australian artists; better access to rights information for artworks; and favorable consortial rates for licensing online resources. Since the meeting progress has been made on some but not all fronts. The Australian Libraries Gateway can be limited to art libraries. Searching "Libraries Australia," the combined catalogues of Australian libraries is free. Disappointment has arisen when generic solutions are applied to specific problems. This leads Ms. Groom to encourage art libraries to focus their collaborative work on projects where they can share data creation and subject knowledge, such as artist files.

Jonathan Franklin's talk began with a musing on the concept of the national art library—is there truly such a term, and is it meaningful in today's swirling maelstrom of globalism and resurgent nationalism? On a practical level, however, collecting will always be easier on a local level, and national mandates exist to some degree in most countries. This is the case at the National Gallery of Canada Library, where its mandate derives from the administrative status as part of a federal institution, the National Gallery of Canada, serving all Canadians. Following in sync with the National Gallery's mandate to collect Canadian art as well as international art, the Library seeks to document the nation's art history and artistic output, while also providing an art reference library which is at the service of both Gallery staff and the wider public. As a result, it is not only the largest art library in Canada, but the

largest collection of Canadian art material anywhere. A result of this sort of focused collecting is a very distinctive collection. As general collections become more homogenous, and ubiquitous material more widely available, collections of this sort will experience a rise in viability, relevance and value. An increasing number of visits to the special collections support this trend. Reference services in French and English, exhibition and publication programs, and a spectacular reading room continue to draw people as well, proving that the library remains very much a social space. However, economic constraints and the lack of a consortial structure for cost-sharing limit the services that can be offered. His closing remarks paid tribute to Chief Librarian Murray Waddington, who since joining the National Gallery of Canada Library in the 1990s, has provided the vision for the Library's role as the de facto national art library for Canada.

Susan Allen reported on the results of a grant she recently received from the Getty Foundation to visit national libraries in France, the UK, and the US. During a three month period in 2006, she met with fourteen librarians at five institutions. In Paris, she met with librarians at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA), a new national institute of art history begun in 2001 by bringing together five existing French art libraries, with the famous Doucet library as the core. A monumental undertaking, the institute has faced delays and setbacks. Some libraries will not physically move for several years. She was surprised to learn that no rare materials will move from the Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts; as a result, these materials are at risk. The French government will refurbish the grand reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the new INHA will get about ¾ of the space; as a new innovation (for France) open stacks will be featured. A huge obstacle to success remains, in that funding has not yet been approved and the process is very slow. Turf wars have been fought over space, especially at the BN site. Staffing levels are low relative to collection size and scope. Nevertheless, substantial progress has been made on this very ambitious project. A single online catalog is in place, a master plan has been approved, and innovative staffing solutions are showing some promise. At the National Art Library of the UK, located at the Victoria and Albert Museum, they continue to undergo reorganization to mixed acceptance by staff and the public. At the time of her visit, the new "keeper," Julius Bryant, was in his post for only a month. The library is known as the Word and Image Department, but Mr. Bryant describes it as a venue, not a department. The prints and drawings study room is part of the venue. A joint project with the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), funded by the Lottery, has established a new RIBA Study Room on site. There is a desire to change the culture, to increase diversity, and to attract more undergraduates. Private funding will be needed for any physical improvements. On her final visit, to the National Gallery in Washington, DC, Ms. Allen met with Neal Turtell, the longtime Executive Librarian. There, the Photoarchive and Slide Library have recently merged to create an image department. In closing, she could not discern any global trends, but she does believe that the future of national art libraries lies in the uniqueness of their special materials.