



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

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

**Session 18: Words on the Street: Graphic Novels and Comics Collections in  
Academic and Art Design School Libraries  
Monday, May 8, 2006, 11:00am-12: 30pm**

**Moderator:** Tony White, Art and Architecture Librarian and Assistant Professor, Pratt Institute

**Speakers:**

Amanda Gluibizzi, Head Librarian, Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University

Annette Haines, Art & Architecture Design Field Librarian, University of Michigan

Sylvie Gilbert, Senior Curator, Walter Phillips Gallery and The Banff Curatorial Institute, The Banff Centre

**Introduction**

Graphic novels and comic book collections have been popular in public libraries for many years. With greater numbers of higher education institutions offering courses and majors in sequential art, the importance of graphic novels and comic books in academic, and art and design school libraries is evident. Keeping current on key authors/artists and titles, and recognizing what will be pertinent to an academic and visual arts audience can be difficult to navigate. *Words on the Street* discusses the importance of graphic novels, comic books, and related products of contemporary culture to the collections of academic, and art and design school libraries. This session focuses on collection development and bibliographic instruction strategies for graphic novel and comic book collections as well as the aesthetics of sequential art. In addition, the panel includes a discussion with a curator of graphic novels and comic books to offer an understanding of the use of sequential art to communicate the messages and concerns of artists.

**Amanda Gluibizzi, Head Librarian, Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University**

*Importance of Graphic Novels to Art and Design Students and Their Use in Bibliographic Instruction*

Student demand prompted the development of a graphic novel collection at the Art Institute of Boston. The library realized that sequential illustration had an important role at the Art Institute. Comic books, graphic novels, storyboards, graffiti, and sticker art are considered sequential illustration. They have a place in the curriculum of the school. The Art Institute focuses its library collection on graphic novels. Graphic novels and comic books work within the confines of more traditional type of

art. Bibliographic instruction at the library of the Art Institute draws comparisons between these mediums and traditional art forms. The typical panel layout of graphic novels and comic books that forms a wider narrative arc is seen in ancient sculpture. Illuminated manuscripts can be compared to graphic novels and comic books based on their juxtaposing of images and text. Nonlinear narration is seen in early painting and current comic books. Japanese Manga comics are directly related to nineteenth-century sources. Contemporary art is also influenced by sequential illustration. Often times, taking the characters of sequential art outside of their original narrative.

*Maus* (1997) by Art Spiegelman was the first graphic novel to reach a wide audience. Since its publication, adult graphic novels have become popular in mass culture. Autobiographical material is a popular topic for these emerging adult graphic novels. This is seen in the work of Craig Thompson (*Blankets*) and Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis I & II*). Other graphic novels stress current events such as *Palestine* (2001) by Joe Sacco. This graphic novel focuses on a struggling Palestine. Graphic novels that use current events as a subject can be used to reach a wide audience, including many people who may not be exposed to them through other media outlets.

The Art Institute teaches bibliographic instruction to students on how to find graphic novel information and how to find information on new graphic novel artists who they are not familiar with. This type of instruction is very helpful for finding independent comics and artists who are often underrepresented. Displays are the most important tool for bibliographic instruction at the Art Institute. The act of browsing graphic novels on display attracts students to new titles and artists.

**Annette Haines, Art & Architecture Design Field Librarian, University of Michigan**

### *Strategies for Developing Graphic Novel/Comic Book Collections*

The University of Michigan Libraries a few years ago did not have many graphic novels and comic books. The graphic novels or comic books in its collection were those that had reached literary status such as *Maus* (1997) by Art Spiegelman. The School of Art and Design hired, Phoebe Gloeckner, a graphic novelist. This faculty change prompted the development of a graphic novel and comic book collection.

Starting a comic collection can be divided into three major steps. First, parameters for the collection need to be established. Second, a policy for acquiring material and collection development should be created. Third, a plan for providing access to the collection needs to be outlined.

Parameters can be developed by talking to the potential users of the collection such as faculty and students. This will also create a support network for establishing such a collection. Other local collections should be examined. In the case of University of Michigan, Michigan State University has one of the largest comic book collections in the World. The University of Michigan did not want to create a collection that would duplicate information found in this excellent locally available collection. For this reason, the University of Michigan decided to focus its collection on independent comics, mini comics, underground comics, photo comics, and international comics.

Acquiring material and collection development are all about establishing permanent funding, making connections, and soliciting gifts. The University of Michigan

received some initial funding to start the collection and later developed a collection development policy for graphic novels and comic books that includes annual funding for purchases. It is important to get to know your local comic book shops and use them as a resource for developing the collection. Comic book conventions also provide an invaluable resource for acquiring hard to find materials. Have no fear of asking for something when developing collections. The University of Michigan provided funding to attend the Le Festival International de la Bande Dessinee comic convention in Angouleme, France, so that the library could acquire international comic for its collection. Accepting gifts for a collection is important. Artists love the idea of having their comics in libraries.

Access is concerned with the cataloging, placement, and preservation of materials. Decisions need to be made on how to catalog comic books. There are two ways. They can be cataloged together in a single category or dispersed throughout the literature section. Decisions also need to be made on where to house the collection, amount of space needed for the collection, and if materials should be rebound. Comics are often published in paperback, making them not as durable as other books. However, rebinding them makes them lose some of their aesthetic value. Rebinding comics also has the function of preventing theft.

**Sylvie Gilbert, Senior Curator, Walter Phillips Gallery and The Banff Curatorial Institute, The Banff Centre**

*I'm Getting Out of Here: Pick-up Trucks and Comic Books*

Sylvie Gilbert is the curator of the exhibition *Comic Craze* at The Banff Centre, which contains comics by Canadian artists. Approximately, 400 comic books are included in the exhibition.

Gilbert discusses what it was like reading, surrounded by animals, mountains, and pick-up trucks, comic books to prepare for the exhibition. She links the pick-up trucks seen in Banff to the reading of the comic books for the exhibition. Pick-up trucks act as a transportation of escape, and escape is a common theme in the comic books Gilbert read to prepare for the exhibition. She questions if owners of pick-up trucks share the same sensibility as comic book artists. She examines the idea of sticker/comic art being painted and decaled on pick-up trucks. She showed example photographs of pick-up trucks in Banff interspersed with images of Canadian comic books from the exhibition to illustrate her points.

**Questions**

**How do you store and house your mini comics?**

[Annette Haines] Rehoused and stored on shelves.

**Is there a difference between French-Canadian and other Canadian comic books?**

[Sylvie Gilbert] There is a difference in production and content. French-Canadian comics tend to be raunchier in content. Once something becomes popular, it is seen all over the place. Examples are abstract single-panel comics seen in Vancouver and comic with raunchy content seen in Montreal.

**Are people looking at comic books as historical research objects?**

[Amanda Gluibizzi] Comics are a new area collecting for the Art Institute. Although, the Art Institute does have a few books published in the 1940s and 1950s warning of the dangers of comics to children.

[Annette Haines] The University of Michigan would want to collect historical materials, but financing is a problem.

**If you are buying a collection for use in an art and design program and to be used down the road for historical research, do you buy two copies? One for circulation and one for preservation.**

[Amanda Gluibizzi] The Art Institute cannot afford to buy more than one copy and is buying things for use by the art and design students, looking at style makers in pop culture that influence trends.

[Annette Haines] The University of Michigan collection is for use and focuses on the students of art and design, some comics are in special collections. Michigan State University holds an archival comic collection.

**What are some of the subject access issues with cataloging graphic novels?**

[Annette Haines] Trusts her cataloger and has not had any problems.

[Amanda Gluibizzi] Art Institute has a general cataloger and not an art cataloger. Graphic novels are cataloged in different places and not in a specific area in the collection. Art Institute library educates students on how to find these dispersed materials.