

DSA: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS FOR JANIS EKDAHL

Chantal Sulkow (nominator)

Good evening. My name is Chantal Sulkow, and I am thrilled to be here introducing Janis Ekdahl, this year's recipient of the ARLIS/NA Distinguished Service Award.

I would like to first thank the members of the Distinguished Service Award Subcommittee, chaired by Liv Valmestad, for their time and hard work. I would also like to thank the 29 colleagues who wrote letters in support of Janis' nomination.

Last year, Janis retired from the Bard Graduate Center Library- and let me just clarify, the BGC Library was Janis' retirement job following her time as Chief Librarian at MoMA, and her time at BGC lasted 16 years- so to be clear, last year, Janis retired from her retirement job - and so this is a perfect moment to recognize her exceptional contributions to the profession of art librarianship. Until last year, I worked closely with Janis. In the time that I have known and worked with her, she has been an invaluable colleague, friend and mentor to me.

Janis' accomplishments are many. Her extraordinary career has spanned nearly five decades. In that time she has built the library collections of three major art libraries, at Vassar, MoMA and the Bard Graduate Center. During her time at MoMA, Janis reached out to artists, galleries, and museums worldwide, forging lasting relationships and opening dialogues that led to greater cooperation and collaboration in art resources. She pioneered new standards for access to art information, and the collections she developed over the years, notably those of artists' books, ephemeral files and rare art serials, now form the basis for scholarly research by international professionals in art history.

I don't have time to review all of Janis' contributions to the field of art librarianship now- and there have been so many- but I do want to touch on her commitment to mentorship.

As New York Chapter Chair in 2015- and this was the second time Janis served as the New York Chapter Chair, as she had previously chaired the NY chapter 22 years before in 1993 - she launched a chapter-based mentoring program to address the needs of members on an individual basis. But on an interpersonal level, Janis has influenced and inspired countless librarians, acting as a truly passionate and enthusiastic advocate for ARLIS/NA and art librarianship. Over the years, she has consistently encouraged early career professionals to pursue a future in our field, and to those more firmly established, she has offered the wisdom and support to grow and move forward.

To illustrate this I am going to read a few quotes from her colleagues.

"Janis clearly saw in me what I did not yet fully realize" writes one.

Another writes, "Without her, I would not have finished school and certainly would not have had a career in art librarianship."

Yet another tells us, “I can claim, and I often do, that my library career began entirely because of her”.

And lastly, one more colleague writes, “Janis is the best public face that the profession of art librarianship could want”- and no statement could be more accurate.

Without a doubt, Janis has been more than generous in sharing not only her experience and knowledge but also her genuine love for the profession. She has been a tireless ambassador for art libraries, for ARLIS/NA and for the New York Chapter.

As it happens, Janis was the catalyst that jump-started my own career. As a library student, I attended one of my first New York Chapter events, held at the Bard Graduate Center. I didn’t know most of the people in the crowd during the reception; I was preparing to slip out, but Janis approached me immediately. She chatted with me and put me at ease, and invited me to come back to see the library. When I returned, she gave me an hour-long tour and introduced me to the staff. A short time later, when I joined the New York Chapter Board, I felt confident taking on the role, since I knew I would be working with Janis, who was on the board at that time.

It is through this - the way in which Janis builds bridges and forges connections between generations of librarians- that she has ensured that membership and participation in ARLIS has flourished and grown.

Of the greatest consequence in my story is the fact that not long after, I was hired to work with Janis at the Bard Graduate Center Library in my first full time professional librarian position. As Janis prepared for retirement, she trained me to be her successor as BGC’s acquisitions librarian. For where I am in my own career, I cannot imagine a greater honor.

Janis has indeed spent a lifetime in the service of art librarianship. And with that, it is now my pleasure to introduce the 2019 recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, Janis Ekdahl.