

LibArt: A Model for Exhibiting Student Art in Academic Libraries

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

In 2010 the University of Kansas Libraries established the Art Advisory Committee and commenced the inaugural year of the Libraries' student art show called "LibArt: Student Art in the Libraries". The LibArt show displays art in a range of media by KU students from any major. Four physical galleries and two virtual displays exhibit student art in public areas of several campus libraries. LibArt is a rotating exhibition which kicks off in the fall semester and ends before finals in the spring semester. Throughout this annual cycle, the committee members manage all aspects of the show: the open call for submissions, promotion, selecting works, installation and deinstallation, judging, and awards. A decade later, the program remains highly popular with library employees, who enjoy seeing new art enliven library spaces, and with students and teaching faculty, who appreciate having an exhibition venue for student art.

CHALLENGES:

PROMOTING THE CALL FOR ENTRIES:

It can be difficult to compete with many other campus advertisements.

- Some current and future solutions: ask teaching faculty to promote participation directly to students in class, faculty could potentially tie participation to class credit, or the committee could choose to offer small prizes to winning artists in future cycles.

GETTING THE ART:

A percentage of the accepted works will not show up during drop-off. Also, some works may not be able to be displayed due to incompatibility with the hanging equipment.

- Solutions include: a series of follow-up emails to student artists, a longer window of time for students to drop off items, and inclusion of a digital "Ready to Hang Guide" in the initial acceptance and follow-up emails.

STORAGE AND SAFETY OF THE ART:

The art needs to be stored in a secure area and stay reasonably safe from damage or theft during transportation and display.

- Storage solutions: coordinating temporary storage spaces in controlled access areas of the exhibiting libraries.
- Display solutions: Art that is large and difficult to transport can either be dropped off by students directly at the exhibiting library, or moved using a library delivery truck. Fragile art is hung away from high foot traffic areas to prevent damage. All works have a strip of Tattle-Tape applied to the back to help prevent theft.

OUTCOMES:

- **INCREASED ENGAGEMENT** with the University Libraries by students, faculty and library employees. Many people visit library branches that they normally would not frequent just to see the art. Some seek out works by a specific artist, such as a friend, family member or student worker, while others want to see the whole show out of curiosity.
- **STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS** with teaching faculty in Visual Art, Design, etc.. LibArt provides an exhibition venue for the art created in studio courses. This relationship could be further strengthened by including exhibit spaces for the media taught in specific programs, such as installation art or ceramics. Relationships with students are also strengthened by welcoming their art into the libraries and acknowledging their artistic achievements.
- **STUDENTS GAIN REAL EXPERIENCE** in exhibiting their art. Students also gain exposure by having their work displayed in highly visible, highly trafficked spaces on campus. As an added result of this exposure, some students even gain sales of their works in the show.
- **CREATIVITY AND DIVERSE VOICES** are invited into the Libraries. Entry into the LibArt show is open to any student on campus, which allows many ideas and viewpoints within a diverse study body to be represented.

Break until January

January

- Send surveys to student artists in the current show and collect feedback.
- Set a deadline for entries to the next show (usually occurs during the first week in April).

February

- Finalize promotion plan which generally includes posters, flyers, table tents, emails, and digital signs.
- Prepare and distribute physical and digital promotional materials.
- Open up the call for entries

March

- Continue to promote the call for entries through outreach and follow-up with past participants.

April

- Close the call for entries.
- Committee members meet to evaluate and select the works to be included in the next show. (Students can submit up to five works, so at least one work from every student is accepted unless it doesn't conform to display requirements, such as works that are too large, heavy, or reliant on equipment that the library does not own. Typically around 80-100 works are submitted and about 85% of the works are accepted to the show.)
- Send acceptance emails to the students.
- Deinstall the art in the current show and organize it for pick up by the students.

THE ANNUAL LIBART CYCLE

September

- Hold the opening reception and awards ceremony.
- Add stickers to the wall labels of the winning artworks to indicate the award received.

August

- Contact judges and coordinate judging of the works in the newly installed show.
- Update the LibArt website with the names of the artists in each exhibition location.
- Email each student artist with the locations of their works.
- Send out invites to the opening reception and awards ceremony.

July

- Install the physical exhibits and activate the digital exhibits.

June

- Create layouts for the art in each gallery space.
- Create wall labels for each work.
- Create updated signs for each gallery.
- Create digital slideshows for the digital exhibitions.

May

- Remind students to drop off works for the upcoming show by the end of finals week.
- Check that new works are ready to hang as they come in.
- Remind students to pick up works from the recently deinstalled show by the end of finals week.

Additional Resources:

LibArt Website: <https://lib.ku.edu/libart>

Ready to Hang Guide: <https://bit.ly/R2HGuide>

Andrea Waldren was previously the Chair of the Art Advisory Committee at the University of Kansas from 2016-2019. She is now a Web Developer for the University Libraries at Virginia Tech and can be reached at awaldren@vtu.edu for questions or comments.