

Exhibiting library books in an art gallery

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Practical considerations for an off-site, collaborative exhibit.

In the past few years we have seen several descriptive articles written by librarians on the organization of library exhibitions.¹ These articles offer advice and ideas geared towards the librarian interested in producing exhibitions in their libraries. The often overlooked alternative to in-house displays is the presentation of library materials outside of the library's walls and out of the boundaries of the college or university campus. Off-site exhibitions require additional planning and considerations yet they offer unique opportunities to expand the library's audience and draw together communities who may not be aware of the library's resources. "Beyond the Book: Artists' Books in Utah"² was just such an exhibition.

Academic libraries house a vast array of materials that lend themselves to exhibition. When defin-

ing "library materials," it is necessary to look beyond the image of a library filled only with books, which are filled only with words. Other books are created as works of art, or as art objects, as in the case of artists' books.³ The Marriott Library at the University of Utah has been collecting artists' books since the early 1980s, at first randomly, and more recently with purpose and dedication. Purchased by fine arts, special collections and acquisitions librarians, the collection of artists' books in the Marriott Library has developed into one of the finest of its kind in the Intermountain region. While I was head of the Fine Arts Division, I came to realize that this extensive collection of artists' books represented a unique category of visual material in Utah; here was a well developed collection of art work produced by regional, national and international artists that was rarely used and little known by the university public and the art community.

Exhibiting this collection of artists' books, then, resulted from the desire to highlight this comprehensive library collection to the broadest commu-

¹Lucy S. Caswell, "Building a Strategy for Academic Library Exhibits," *C&RL News* 46 (April 1985): 165-68; Karen Hinson, "Exhibitions in Libraries: A Practical Guide," *Art Documentation* 4 (Spring 1985): 6-7; Jane Kemp, "Creating Exhibits in the Smaller Academic Library," *C&RL News* 46 (July/August 1985): 344-46; Marjorie Markoff, "More than Information: A Popular Exhibit Shows the Personal Side of Books and Information," *C&RL News* 49 (June 1988): 367-68.

²Finch Lane Gallery, Salt Lake City, *Beyond the Book: Artists' Books in Utah*, March 4-April 8, 1988.

³Artists' books, defined by the above mentioned catalog "...may resemble other books by adhering to a sequential presentation of words or images, but the similarity may usually stop there. The artist may create a sculptural piece, a book in the shape of a fan, an accordion folded piece of paper or a text that uses images and/or text."

nity possible. The Marriott Library, limited in display space and display cases, could not accommodate such an exhibition, so an alternative venue was sought. By collaborating on the exhibition with an artist knowledgeable in gallery spaces and exhibition policies in Salt Lake City, we were encouraged to consider using a venue outside the university for the exhibition. By exhibiting library materials in an art gallery, we could showcase and publicize one of the rich collections of the Marriott Library, not only to librarians and academicians, but also to artists and book artists, local book publishers, booksellers and designers as well as the general public.

In addition to using an alternative exhibition space within the community, we decided to expand the exhibition to include the art community by incorporating books made by local artists. The collections of the Marriott Library could then be integrated into the active art community and artists, bookmakers would be offered a unique opportunity for exhibition of their work.

The reasons for organizing this exhibition seemed valid and timely. But were the reasons compelling enough to interest the library's administration and meet with their approval? Had an exhibition of this type been produced off-site before by the library? Would a gallery find the exhibition proposal valid? If so, how and when would it fit into their exhibition schedule?

These questions cover the first practical considerations which need to be confronted in organizing an exhibition of this type. Library administrators need to evaluate the appropriateness of such a project for their library and need to approve staff time spent away from routine activities. They need to be aware that library materials will be removed from circulation for the duration of the exhibition. The initial proposal is also enhanced if it includes a detailed checklist of materials to be included in the exhibit, the insurance coverage policy of the gallery, and a statement of the gallery's security measures.

Galleries usually require written proposals and slides of at least some of the works of art intended to be displayed. Proposals are submitted at least six months to one year in advance of the proposed exhibition date. The gallery then decides, usually by jury, if the proposal meets their criteria for exhibition. It is appropriate at this point to consider the gallery's source of funding. If the gallery is commercial, it may not be able to or want to exhibit library materials that would not be offered for sale.

The Marriott Library's administration, as well as the Finch Lane Gallery/Art Barn, a non-profit, city-owned gallery, both responded enthusiastically to our exhibition proposal. We were scheduled to present "Beyond the Book: Artists' Books in Utah" one year from the initial gallery proposal. The next twelve months were spent in the real planning of the exhibition and in continually redefining its limitations and outcome. Several initial

questions directed the exhibition's course. What would be its scope? Would it have a theme? Who would be the targeted audience? The scope was inclusive in order to represent all of the various forms and formats taken by artists, books. By using this broad range of material this exhibition served as a comprehensive introduction to artists' books. The anticipated audience was all the local communities interested in books, contemporary art and the book arts.

Local book artists were petitioned to submit their books through a call-for-entry in area newspapers and through the Finch Lane Gallery. Selection of the artists was made by a panel of three jurors which included myself, the co-organizer of the exhibition and a book artist/teacher. We included a wide variety of artists' books (including books created as sculptural pieces, fold-outs, photocopies, multiple-edition books, and so on) while paying attention to originality and quality. Once this selection was made, we selected artists, books from the Marriott Library's collections in both similar and differing formats to broaden and enrich the scope of the exhibition. Above all, it was decided to present the widest variety of artists' books in hopes of touching the largest audience.

As the exhibition developed, other questions and considerations quickly followed. What accompanying written materials should be included or additional programs planned? How much publicity could the exhibition potentially receive? Are there enough people able to assist with these tasks? Most importantly, what sources are available to fund these activities?

Answering these questions added a rich and complex dimension to our exhibition. Up to this point production costs were minimal and assumed by the Finch Lane Gallery, which supplied the announcement flyer, the installation of the pieces, and the catered opening reception. To further publicize the exhibition would require additional funding.

Publicity additional to what the Finch Lane Gallery could offer would potentially reach a wider audience and introduce them to the resources of the Marriott Library and to artists' books. Announcement flyers would be sent by the Gallery only to those on their mailing list; funds needed to be procured to print and mail additional flyers to about 3,000 members of the University public. The Gallery would pay to host weekend workshops (one of their ongoing activities) on papermaking and bookbinding during the course of the exhibition, but a guest lecturer speaking on artists' books could not be funded. And the Gallery had no funds available to produce and print a catalog to accompany the exhibition.

The overwhelming support of the University of Utah and the local art community finally determined the extent of publicity granted to "Beyond the Book: Artists' Books in Utah." Once we had set our sights on securing funding for additional flyers,

a guest lecturer and an exhibition catalog, we applied for, and subsequently received, a matching grant through the Utah Arts Council six months before the scheduled exhibition. The Marriott Library generously provided the matching funds. The flyers were ordered and mailed and a guest lecturer scheduled. Two lectures were presented by a West Coast book dealer who specializes in artists' books and fine press books. The first lecture was geared for a general audience, while the second was targeted for a professional audience composed of local book publishers, sellers, dealers and designers. Topics for these lectures ranged from defining artists' books and their aesthetic appeal to characterizing current collecting trends of libraries and private collectors. Each lecture was well attended, owing to advance publicity through local newspapers and the campus public relations office.

We were also able to publish an accompanying exhibition catalog in the format of a one-page, fold-out artists' book. The catalog not only has outlasted the five-week exhibition but has reached an audience beyond the local region. Producing a catalog required a strict timetable for the exhibition's planning steps and also required the time and coordination of many people. A whole new set of considerations needed attention. Which studio or printing service should be chosen for the catalog? Does the campus have graphic and printing services, or will an off-campus commercial studio better suit the catalog's purposes?

Developing a close working relationship with the art directors is crucial to the success of the catalog. The catalog, which outlasts the exhibition, should insure that the theme and scope of the exhibition are clearly presented. For our exhibition all

of the books had to be selected three months in advance of the exhibition's opening date to allow time for photographs to be taken for illustrations, essays to be written and the design, layout and printing of the catalog to be completed.

Proof that the exhibition was successful in achieving its original purpose of publicizing the Marriott Library's collections and highlighting artists' books and local artists was evident by the high turn-out at the opening reception and by the many reviews that the exhibition received, not only from local newspapers, but also through a radio talk show and television coverage. Many people and offices were vital to the exhibition's overall success, including the library administration, librarians and assistants and several campus offices, along with gallery directors and the untiring energy of the artists involved.

Librarians wishing to undertake an off-site, collaborative exhibition of a similar nature will encounter situations and questions similar to the ones discussed, and undoubtedly several others. Will you be best serving your library and institution by moving one of its resources out of its established parameters? Is your administration supportive? Do you have the time to undertake a major project such as this, and are there enough people willing and available to give of their time and energy to help your vision? By looking closely at a library's collection, assessing user needs, identifying a targeted audience and determining the visual appeal of the materials to be exhibited, librarians are able to create exhibitions as visual statements with purpose and impact, both outside and inside the library's walls. ■■

Issues in library research

Research

The U.S. Office of Library Programs, directed by Anne J. Mathews, has released the first two of three volumes entitled, *Rethinking the Library in the Information Age: Issues in Library Research—Proposals for the 1990s*. These publications are an outgrowth of a study begun by the Office in 1986–1987 to identify researchable issues that might help libraries maintain a position of leadership in an information society.

As part of the study, a series of four meetings was held at which field-nominated experts identified issues they considered most important to the profession: government policy; training for the profession; access to information; archives and preservation; indexing and retrieval of materials; the role of the public services librarian; library funding and economics; libraries and education; information users and needs; and library models.

A series of papers was commissioned to explore these topics. Volume I provides summaries of the

papers and identifies a number of issues and problems that need further research. Volume II is a collection of the complete essays, enriched by reviewers' suggestions of additional research topics. The authors include Beverly P. Lynch (University of Illinois at Chicago), Pat Molholt (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), Richard J. Cox (New York State Archives) and Lynn W. Cox (SUNY-Albany), and Brian Neilsen (Northwestern University).

Volume III, *Rebuilding an Infrastructure for Research*, is in press and will be available later this spring.

Limited copies of the first volume are available from the Office of Library Programs, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20208; (202) 357-6293. Copies of Volume II are available for \$11.00, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; stock no. 065-000-00348-1. ■■