

## 2012 Distinguished Service Award

Presented April 19, 2012 to  
Kathe Hicks Albrecht, American University

### Presentation remarks from Jeanne Keefe and Ann Thomas:

We have both had the honor to have worked closely with Kathe on the VRA Executive Board, the VRA Foundation Board, and the Summer Educational Institute and can attest to her energy, enthusiasm, competence, organizational skills, leadership qualities, and (above all) to her support of and generosity to those engaged with her in forwarding the mission of the VRA. *(Ann Thomas and Jeanne Keefe)*

While working with Kathe on the VRA Executive Board, VRA Foundation Task Force and the VRA Foundation Board, it became increasingly apparent that as a leader she possesses the rare combination of an entrepreneurial mind with the organizational skills, people skills and determination to carry creative ideas through to their implementation. *(Margo Ballantyne)*



Kathe is the consummate professional in her many areas of service for VRA and the VRAF. Her decision-making is constantly based on what is best for the organization. Kathe's devotion and passionate commitment to the visual resources field is what informs her leadership. For the past several years I have had the honor of working closely with Kathe as a partner in all things VRAF. Her incredible energy is invaluable in this realm. In addition, I have always admired Kathe's ability to handle any situation that comes her way with grace and aplomb. She deserves mucho kudos for bringing the SEI to maturity, making it the premier program that it is today. Kathe ... truly deserves our recognition as the 2012 VRA DSA Award winner. *(Elisa Lanzi)*

*EARLY CAREER:* At American University she was an early adopter of digital imaging and an advocate for the university's involvement in the Museum Educational Site Licensing Project (1994-1997). Kathe served as one of three campus coordinators for this digital imaging project funded by the Getty Foundation. She has twice been the recipient of the American University Staff Achievement Award...and in 2002 was given the American University Dedicated Service Award. With colleagues at AU Kathe has received a number of grants for digital imaging projects. *(Macie Hall)*

From the outset of my participation in the VRA, Kathe stood out as a visible and accomplished leader, representing the interests of the VRA at the CONFU hearings and providing critical advocacy at the national level for the fair use of images. I believe her efforts as a CONFU representative and as Intellectual Property Rights Committee Chair played a critical role in helping all of us understand and navigate a world where the use of images was rapidly altered by digital technology. *(Betha Whitlow)*

*TASK FORCES & COMMITTEES:* I was Chair of the Nominating Committee during a challenging period. Kathe was an immense help in recruiting candidates for office during her tenure as a Committee member. I found her knowledge of the membership to be vast, and her insights on the qualities an effective Board member should display to be invaluable. Her thoughtful comments and candidate suggestions demonstrated her focus on the best interests of the Association. *(Ann Burns)*

*PRESIDENT OF VRA:* She also uniquely managed to make the challenges of Board work fun as well as satisfying by encouraging an environment of conversation, collegiality, and civility—qualities that I have tried to emulate in my own leadership roles. *(Betha Whitlow)*

*VRA FOUNDATION DIRECTOR:* As both a Founding Director and Director of the VRAF, Kathe has tirelessly sought to support important projects such as CCO (Cataloguing Cultural Objects) and SEI (the ARLIS/NA-VRA Summer Educational Institute), while implementing funding initiatives such as a professional development grant program. *(Betha Whitlow)*

In the preparation, for instance, of the application for IRS recognition of the Foundation as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, one of the most important required documents was a narrative description of VRAF's activities. "Describe completely and in detail past, present, and planned activities," was how the IRS put it. Consequently, we had to describe not just the plans for VRAF's future activity, but also give an accounting of VRA, its history and purpose, and the relationship of the two organizations. Kathe, with Elisa Lanzi, volunteered for the task, and the lengthy document they produced was so beautifully written that it not only served as the source for much of VRAF's web site materials, but its VRA elements were also used as the basis of a white paper on the VRA developed for the 2006 redesign of vraweb.org. *(Loy Zimmerman)*

*SUMMER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE CO-CHAIR:* On the go from early morning to late evening, Kathe never tired. She was always available to students and instructors to answer questions, solve problems and give advice. Kathe is always willing to put in extra time and

energy. Kathe approaches challenges in a thoughtful and creative manner, taking the time to weigh alternatives and consider other opinions. (*Alix Reiskind*)

*MENTOR PROGRAM:* In addition to the years of dedicated service to on- going development and administration of VRA, Kathe still found time to create opportunities for mentorship and member support. Kathe’s personal mentorship of VRA members is a commonly known fact and includes the statistic that she has volunteered eight out of the thirteen years that the Annual Conference Mentor Program has been in existence. I will never forget the joy and amazement expressed on the face of a young curator attending her first conference when she realized that Kathe, then President of the VRA, would be in her own words, “my very own mentor.” (*Margo Ballantyne*)

*CONCLUSIONS:* Ann and I have had the honor to have worked closely with Kathe on the VRA Executive Board, the VRA Foundation Board, and the Summer Educational Institute and can attest to her energy, enthusiasm, competence, organizational skills, leadership qualities, and (above all) to her support of and generosity to those engaged with her in forwarding the mission of the VRA.

“Truly a woman for all seasons...”

### **Kathe Hicks Albrecht's Remarks**

I am deeply honored to receive the 2012 VRA Distinguished Service Award. This organization has meant so much to me over the years and I cannot imagine a more meaningful recognition. I want to, first and foremost, thank Jeanne Keefe and Ann Thomas for spearheading the nomination. You two have been major influences on me personally as we’ve served together on the VRA Board, the VRA Foundation board, and the SEI Implementation Team, significant commitments that we each made to VRA. I am always very grateful to have you on any project. Thank you, also, to my colleagues who generously wrote letters of support. I am touched by your kind words and delighted that you found me worthy of support for this award. Many thanks go to the Travel Awards Committee for recommending me for this award. I also want to thank my husband Mark who is here today for his ongoing support of everything I do—I hope many of you get a chance to meet him. We travel together through life but we also found ourselves in nearby states this week so he drove down from Colorado this morning to be here today.

I want to speak for a few minutes if I may, about this great organization that welcomed me as a new curator to the profession almost 25 years ago and today has bestowed on me such a prestigious award. VRA is an amazing collective of people who care deeply for the profession and at the same time support and encourage their colleagues. Many organizations are not like that—they are competitive, bureaucratic, and less conducive to supporting individuals within the organization. VRA is quite unique in this regard. This unique quality allows us each to contribute in ways important to us individually, to innovate and develop ideas in a “think tank” atmosphere of collegiality, and to ultimately impact VRA as an organization and the profession as a whole. This semester I’ve been studying contemporary philosophy and systems of knowledge and learned about a form

that occurs in nature called the rhizome. I think of VRA as a rhizome. The rhizome grows in a very non-linear pattern, with each piece or section able to give rise to a new form, and with each section able to grow in any number of directions. There is no beginning and no end to a rhizome. Its growth may seem to have a haphazard pattern as the parts are connected together with no particular hierarchy. But any point can connect to any other point so the whole evolves beautifully and creatively along new paths, incorporating ideas and knowledge learned along the way.

I encourage us all to think of VRA as a splendid rhizome. And remember what I learned early on: That you can make this organization work for you and your career, as you work for the organization. Choose your focus and impact our profession. Is it digital preservation? Copyright issues? Metadata? Education and pedagogy? Developing new VR oriented social networking tools? I was inspired by Todd Carter's Legacy Lecture yesterday on *Tagasauris*. This exciting project is one to which VRA members can significantly contribute. Or is your focus on some aspect of the profession that hasn't yet been found along the rhizomatic pathway? Find that focus and along the way I guarantee you will get to know many innovative, supportive, creative, and brilliant colleagues. As I always like to say VRA as an organization is bigger than the sum of its individual parts, but that is only because of the creative wealth of its individual parts. That's you!

Again, I thank you immensely for this incredible honor and I very much look forward to working with you on future projects and sharing the VRA experience in the coming years.

[Link to full Convocation ceremony on Slideshare](#)