

2013 Distinguished Service Award

**Presented April 4, 2013 to
Elisa Lanzi, Smith College**

Presentation Remarks

Virginia M. G. Hall, Christine Hilker, Mark Pompelia, and John J. Taormina :

It was with great enthusiasm that we nominated Elisa Lanzi for the 2013 VRA Distinguished Service Award. Our nomination dossier contained Elisa's CV, a letter from her department chair at Smith College, and twenty-two letters of support from colleagues around the country, in addition to this text now being read.

The DSA honors "an individual who has made an outstanding career contribution to the field of visual resources and image management... [and]...achieved a level of distinction in the field either through leadership, research, or service to the profession including outstanding innovation, participation, or project management."

We believe that Elisa Lanzi more than meets the stated criteria through her numerous publications, presentations, and workshops on visual resources and image management topics, especially metadata and data standards; her authorship or co-authorship of *Introduction to Vocabularies* (Getty), *Cataloging Cultural Objects* (ALA), two special theme issues of the *VRA Bulletin* on the VRA Core Categories and CCO, and numerous articles; leadership roles and energetic participation in the Visual Resources Association, the Visual Resources Association Foundation, the Art Libraries Society of North America, and other cultural heritage organizations; and high-level contributions to her employing institutions such as Smith College and the Art and Architecture Thesaurus of the J. Paul Getty Trust, and other academic entities. As Christine Sundt notes in her letter of support, "Unquestionably, Ms. Lanzi is everything that the award embodies and exemplifies, and then some."

From her early career days at the International Repertory for the Literature of Art (RILA) and the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) of the J. Paul Getty Trust to her present position as Director of the Imaging Center at Smith College, Elisa has been a national and international advocate for and leader in authority control, data standards, controlled vocabularies, and metadata issues. In addition, as Christine Sundt again observes, "Ms. Lanzi's exceptional and broad grasp of knowledge of information, documentation, and standardization of cultural heritage visual resources and objects contributed to her success as a consultant for several years to many of the most prestigious educational and cultural heritage organizations in the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harvard University, and the Smithsonian Institution."

From 1997-2001 Elisa served as Chair of the VRA Data Standards Committee, when that group was developing the VRA Core Categories and testing its initial versions through the REACH and VISION projects, which she co-coordinated. As Lynda White, a member of the original Data Standards Committee, remembers, "Elisa had the connections to make it

possible for the VRA Core to become an established standard...Elisa knew who could help us test it and used her connections to make the VISION Project happen.”

As the VRA Core developed through its successive versions, the need for a guide for describing, documenting, and cataloging cultural objects became apparent. What would eventually be published as *Cataloging Cultural Objects* in 2006 began to develop in the early years of that decade with Elisa as part of the 5-person core editorial team. Murtha Baca, one of her fellow co-editors, notes: “Elisa’s role as co-editor and indefatigable ‘explicator’ of this manual for library, archive, and museum professionals has been absolutely crucial.” Another colleague on the CCO project, Diane Zorich, explains further: “As the CCO guide was moving closer to its final published state, she recognized that in many ways the effort was just beginning. CCO would need to be packaged with training and support if it were to gain traction, and it would need ongoing maintenance as a standard. It is a sign of her dedication that, after devoting three years of intense, hands-on effort to this time-consuming project, Elisa volunteered to help shepherd it to the next phase of sustainability.”

Elisa has served in many leadership roles in the Visual Resources Association and has given unselfishly to the profession in numerous ways. Her energetic enthusiasm for the VRA and public advocacy for the visual resources profession was justly noted over and over again in her letters of support.

We have already mentioned her important role as Chair of the Data Standards Committee. Recognizing her leadership, management, and organizational skills, the VRA membership elected Elisa President of the Association in 2001. Linda McRae observes of Elisa’s tenure: “As President she initiated a number of improvements, updating out-of-date procedures, mentoring younger members, and bringing in new talent and new ideas to the profession.” Ann Whiteside, a colleague of sixteen years who preceded Elisa as VRA President, says: “Elisa’s passion for VRA combined with her ability to see beyond the walls of the VRA and to envision the impact VRA could have in the broader community of information providers has helped promote VRA and to make the organization known internationally...Elisa was very vocal about the need to reach out beyond the VRA community to other organizations that share similar goals from differing perspectives.” Trish Rose-Sandler reiterates that observation: “She has demonstrated leadership and influence in all of the cultural heritage communities including libraries, museums, and image archives as we all have become richer because of her contributions.”

One of the initiatives that developed during Elisa’s presidency led to the creation of the VRA Foundation (VRAF)—the fundraising, educational, and advocacy arm of the VRA. From 2007-2009 she served as a founding member of the VRAF Board, and from 2009-2012 as the Chair of the VRAF Board. On her involvement with the Foundation, Massachusetts colleague Lynda Reynolds, states: “I am thankful for Elisa’s contribution as a founding member of the VRAF, which to me signifies a notable advancement of the organization to contribute to our broader profession of image management professionals as well as the maturation of the VRA organization itself.”

Beyond the VRA, Elisa has shared her considerable expertise by serving on NEH and IMLS grants review panels, participated on ARLIS/NA committees, has been part of special interest groups in the Northeast Regional Computing Program (NERCOMP) and Museum Computer Network (MCN), and served on advisory groups for ARTstor, the Digital Library Federation (DLF), Research Libraries Group (RLG), Wellesley College, and Vassar College. Eileen Fry notes: “I would like to call attention to her importance as one of our earliest and best ambassadors to the wider community of digital library and museum specialists.”

While Director of the Imaging Center at Smith College Elisa has reached out to Smith’s sister universities (“Five Colleges”) and cultural institutions in the area, working, for instance, on a 5-college digital asset management survey; developing a digital image scholar collection called *Antequam, Mediterranean Ancient Art*; acting as co-investigator of a grant for a digital humanities project called *Historic Dress* for the Center for the Study of Clothing, Costume, Fashion, and Culture; and creating a new digital image collection management system called SnapDragon, which she shared with Williams College. SnapDragon, an FMP-platform, relational database, combines a data structure based on the VRA Core 4.0 while following CCO as a guide for best practices in cataloging and authority control.

Like us, others who know, or have worked with, Elisa are also quick to point out her generosity as a mentor, collaborator, adviser, and friend. Jenni Rodda describes her as “unfailingly gracious, accessible, and always professional.” Kathe Albrecht, who worked with Elisa on both the VRA Executive Board and the VRA Foundation Board notes: “Elisa made each board member feel both effective and supported. She was open to suggestion, willing to personally tackle tough jobs, and able to delegate tasks when necessary—in short, a positive influence throughout her tenure.” And we easily concur with Ann Whiteside when she says that, “One of the delightful aspects of working with Elisa is her sense of humor, and her ability to find something amusing in all situations.”

It was with great pleasure that we put forth Elisa Lanzi as a candidate for the 2013 VRA Distinguished Service Award last October. She exhibits all the best qualities of leadership, collaboration, effectiveness, and professionalism that characterize a DSA recipient. During her long and active career, she has contributed her considerable expertise to the visual resources and image management professions as well as significant time, energy, and care to the Visual Resources Association, making it a better and stronger organization.

In conclusion, we quote Elizabeth O’Keefe, who best summarizes our feelings about Elisa when she says: “Her professionalism, dedication, and service to the society and to art information make her a worthy recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the Visual Resources Association.”

Elisa Lanzi's remarks:

When Margaret Webster called to tell me that my DeLaurier award nomination for Gretchen Wagner was approved, I was thrilled. And then she said, “there’s one more thing,

you will be our DSA this year.” I was immediately filled with awe because an award from one’s peers is the highest paid compliment you can get.



First, I’d like to thank the fabulous nomination crew, Macie Hall, Christine Hilker, Mark Pompelia, and John Taormina. I truly appreciate the challenging work of the Awards committee, chaired by Margaret Webster, and their recommendation for my nomination. The hardest working people in the business, our VRA Board chaired by the incredible Jolene de Verges, has my heartfelt thanks for taking it to the finish line by approving my award. My colleagues, my partners in crime, there are so many of you and especially those of you who wrote the wonderful support letters . . . if I mention even one name, they’ll all come tumbling out, but you know who you are!

I can’t imagine a successful career without the solid foundation of my family, friends, and co-workers. My husband Don, who is here tonight, has always been there, with love and support during those many times I was off and running, from L. A. to New York and everywhere in between. Our son, Reid, was a VRA latch key child, although he must have been paying attention because he knew how to classify his baseball cards. Today he is a fine young man. My parents, Louis and Sally Lanzi, modeled the values we cherish in VRA: a passion for art and culture, a community service ethic, and most important, the joy of working with people on a common cause.

Year ago, when I was VRA President, a colleague from another association asked me, “How does VRA do it? You’re a small organization, but you people produce national standards, have great conferences, do important IP work. What’s your secret?” I told him it was simple. VRA members believe deeply in the cause and we foster a culture of engagement. Furthermore, our secret weapons are collaboration, participation, mentorship, and leadership. I’d like to say a few words about these guiding principles.

First, collaboration. VRA folk understand that collaboration gets us where we need to be. Whether we are part of a larger unit or a one-person shop, we have managed to align ourselves with like organizations and colleagues. The VRA list-serve is brimming with ideas for collaborative strategies that work. We were early adopters and this conference is a fine example of how we seek out partnerships to help move us forward.

Participation: Our numerous committees, task forces, special interest groups, etc. provide opportunities to gain valuable professional experience in a national context. VRA members are not afraid to start something and often it makes a global impact. I was fortunate to be involved with our metadata initiatives (VRA Core and CCO) because I joined a committee. One day I was just a committee member, the next I was giving a paper on CCO at IFLA in Italy. I strongly encourage you to get involved. It is rewarding work and you will make lifelong friendships in the process.

To say that I am enthusiastic about the VRA Mentor program is an understatement. To me, it is critical. I especially like the fact that we mentor up and down, we get partners (both experienced and newbies) and we learn from each other. I just joined the College Libraries and they have recently positioned themselves as a "Learning Organization." Mentoring is a core component of the program. Thank you VRA for mentoring me and providing me with an opportunity to give back.

Leadership: It's challenging, it's personally fulfilling, and it counts. As I look out in the crowd tonight I see so many leaders, past and present. I've served with many of you in VRA and in the VRA Foundation. And new members, let me tell you that VRA makes it easy to step up. I remember a certain coterie of southern gals who gently prodded me to run for VRA President. I've always looked at leadership as a social endeavor, not a singular effort. Recently I watched a TED talk by Fields Wicker-Miurin, co-founder of [Leaders' Quest](#), an organization that brings together leaders from around the world to learn about key trends in their regions, and to explore their role as leaders. Her talk resonated deeply with me and I'd like to end with one of her thoughts.

"[Good Leaders] ... tried to connect worlds they didn't know existed before. They've built bridges, and they've walked across them. They have a sense of the great arc of time and their tiny place in it. They know people have come before them and will follow them. And they know that they're part of a whole, that they depend on other people. It's not about them, they know that, but it has to start with them." TEDSalon London 2009, Fields Wicker-Miurin,
http://www.ted.com/talks/fields_wicker_miurin_learning_from_leadership_s_missing_manual.html

I am deeply honored to be joining the roster of VRA Distinguished Service Award recipients. Thank you, VRA for being part of my life. You made a difference.