Images
The newsletter of the VRA

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Notes from the President
Allan T. Kohl (Minneapolis College of Art & Design)
President, Visual Resources Association

VRA27

I had ample time during a 17-hour drive from Toronto back to Minneapolis to savor in retrospect a very memorable VRA Conference 27. Along with tremendous pride in what we were able to accomplish -- especially given the tough economic conditions that worked against us – I felt a deep sense of gratitude to all of our officers and members who worked so hard to plan and implement the different aspects of our week together. Your devoted efforts paid off in spades!

Though our numbers were down a bit from previous years, the overall mood seemed to me particularly vibrant among those who gathered in Toronto, however tempered by our anxiety over looming budget cuts and concern for our colleagues who had already felt their sharp impact. This was the background against which we began with the Copyright Plenary held at the Ontario College of Art and Design, featuring our old friend Kenneth Crews in dialogue with his Canadian opposite number, the equally articulate Pina D'Agostino from Osgoode Hall Law School at Toronto's York University. We were joined for their informative dialogue by our guests from the Toronto area: faculty and students from Osgoode Hall, faculty and students from the iSchool at the University of Toronto, members of the ARLIS Ontario Chapter, area museum professionals, and several Canadian government officials. Their presence was the result of a special effort to reach out to other constituencies and make them aware of our Association and its work, and it seems to have paid off: the IP Osgoode online law students' newsletter, for instance, has already posted coverage of this event. In the coming weeks, we hope to make a streaming video transcription of the Copyright Plenary available on VRAWEB, especially for the benefit of those of you who were unable to join us in Toronto. Video coverage of lighter conference moments has also been provided by the "Toronto YouTubers," a social networking project facilitated by newcomer Carolyn Caizzi. Watch for further announcements.

A lively post-Plenary reception for our attendees and guests helped to launch a full schedule of sessions, workshops, and special users' groups that informed us about new projects, tools, skills, and applications. Among the many special events, several stand out as particularly memorable. Keynote speaker Michael Edson's inspiring presentation at the Members Dinner resonated with our members who have for years advocated for greater open access to content, and the collaborative building of a richly-populated commons. The success of the Vendor Slam, bringing together our members and vendors in a new format, was due to the imagination and flexibility of all participants. At the Tansey Fundraising Event, Toronto's famed Second City improvisational comedy troupe encouraged us to take a palliative dose of laughter, even as we stretched our individual comfort zones.   The VRAffle bestowed 72 prizes generously donated by our Chapters, vendors, and individual members, garnering nearly $2500 for future travel awards. As the VRAudevillians reminded us, virtue will be rewarded and evil will get its come-uppance – albeit seldom as dramatically as in the rescue of Little Nell from the clutches of Snidely Whiplash by Sgt. Preston and his Trusty Huskies.

A conference of this scope and complexity requires the dedicated and concerted efforts of many people to run smoothly. Your Executive Board would like to acknowledge all who had a hand in making this past week a great success. Here are some of the major credits [cue the John Williams score]:

Vice President for Conference Arrangements Brian Shelburne, flashing the Sheraton Golden Badge of Power, worked tirelessly to make hundreds of scheduling arrangements with our host hotel. Vickie O'Riordan, Vice President for Conference Program, kept track of dozens of events, meetings, and contact people, melding these into a seamless program. Secretary Jolene de Verges created our online registration form, and kept the rest of the Executive Board continually informed as our numbers slowly grew during the weeks leading up to the conference starting date. Treasurer Jane Darcovich worked diligently to keep the budget on track, while having to deal with an ever-fluctuating currency exchange rate. Public Relations & Communications Officer, Mark Pompelia pulled together input from dozens of individuals to generate conference publications and signage, forwarding these in digital form to Toronto for local printing to save on shipping costs. Tom Costello, our destination consultant, was omnipresent, helping us to anticipate and resolve problems before anyone else was aware of them. The staff at the Shertaton Centre Toronto genuinely seemed to enjoy hosting us, and were especially sensitive to our schedule and logistics needs. Membership Services Coordinator, Lise Hawkos kept the registration desk on an even keel, aided by a large number of volunteer helpers coordinated by Anita Regan and Lesley Bell.

The local arrangements committee, led by Canada Chapter Chair, Eric Schwab and native Torontonian Jackie Spafford, was instrumental in making many of the connections that enriched the conference program, as well as providing logistics support. They also researched for the conference website information about a myriad of details, from local attractions to weather forecasts to transit options.   We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Eric for securing facilities at the Ontario College of Art and Design for several key conference events, and we hope that future conferences will be enriched through similar partnerships with nearby educational institutions. Eric's careful planning and thorough preparation smoothly integrated each off-site event into the flow of the conference program. Jackie Spafford organized the Tansey Event and made the initial contacts with the Second City company. Scott Gilchrist coordinated the architectural walking tours, and acted as the Executive Board's "official" photographer. The conference logo was designed by Irene Gotz of the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Development Committee Co-Chairs, Steven Kowalik and Emy Nelson Decker invested considerable time and effort in planning the Vendor Slam and shaping it to meet the vendors' needs. The Birds-of-a-Feather luncheons were organized by Betha Whitlow. Marcia Focht coordinated the Mentorship program, and was gratified to note that more prospective mentors volunteered this year than there were mentees available. The Membership Committee was responsible for the First Time Attendees and New Members Breakfast, where the young professionals who represent the future of our organization had an opportunity to network with their mentors and Association leadership. To top off a memorable week, Empress Patti McRae and her VRAffleRousers (er, VRAudevillians) put it all on the line on behalf of the Tansey fund; every moment of glam represented hours of behind-the-scenes work spent soliciting donations, documenting donors, organizing and staffing the VRAffle tables -- not to mention rehearsing late into each night while others relaxed at the end of a long conference day.

In this year of shrinking budgets and professional development funding cutbacks, we can take special pride that the VRA was able to make available a record twenty-six full and partial travel awards to assist our deserving members in attending Conference 27. Thanks to everyone whose donations contributed to this outstanding level of support. Of special note, Corporate Travel Awards provided by Davis Art Images, Gallery Systems, and Saskia, Ltd. helped make conference attendance possible for deserving applicants, as did the Kathe Hicks Albrecht Travel Award Fund. We also wish to express our gratitude to our loyal conference sponsors, advertisers, and contributors – some of whom have been our generous friends for many years. Archivision and Two Cat Digital provided major donations to the VRAffle. Michael Edson's keynote address was sponsored the ARTstor Speakers' Fund. The VRAffle's grand prize was donated by Scott Gilchrist of Archivision.

One of the highlights of each conference comes as we honor our peers for their outstanding accomplishments. Congratulations go this year to Nancy DeLaurier Award winner Loy Zimmerman for his dedication, guidance, and hard work in establishing the Visual Resources Association Foundation, and serving so capably as the first Chair of its Board of Directors.

Thanks as well to all conference attendees, from new members to old guard, whether named heretofore or not. For a precious few days each year, we are privileged to celebrate our successes, shape our plans for the future, and share our problems and concerns directly with our colleagues, most of whom we know during the rest of the year only as signatures on VRA-L messages. Working and acting together, we have tremendous power to influence our professional environment, and I hope each of you felt that positive energy at work. In the times of economic

uncertainty, we need each other all the more.

Finally, I'd like to give a tip of the Mountie hat and lead a final huzzah for our outgoing Board members who completed their terms of office during the conference: Vickie O'Riordan, Vice-President for Conference Program; and Jolene de Verges, Secretary. Please join me in welcoming our new Board members: Maureen Burns, President-Elect; Heidi Raatz, Vice President for Conference Program; and Marcia Focht, Secretary.

Onward to Atlanta!

Mini-Surveys

More and more organizations are using the internet not only to muster support (and ask for donations), but also to solicit suggestions and feedback from their constituents.

This past January, your Executive Board discussed using a series of brief surveys to poll the membership about issues of common concern on a regular and consistent basis. As most of you are aware, we're going to have to make serious decisions in response to the ongoing economic situation, and I think it's vital for the Board to keep the lines of communication open, and to be as transparent as possible to the membership as we make these decisions.

So we decided to offer you the opportunity to participate in a Mini-Survey ("it'll only take a few minutes of your precious time!") every other month, and for the President to share the results of each survey with everyone in a subsequent issue of the *Images* newsletter. Each Mini-Survey includes three to five questions focusing on a specific issue or aspect of the VRA, with opportunity for at least one open-ended response.

The first Mini-Survey was implemented in February, and generated 84 responses. Two questions dealt with the (then) upcoming Conference 27 in Toronto, and two with next year's Conference 28 in Atlanta. Not surprisingly, we learned that, while many of you (42%) are already making plans to join us in Atlanta, an even larger number of members (43%) are uncertain about their ability to attend. The reasons for this uncertainty were clearly indicated in the responses to a following question: 80% of respondents said that they won't know for some time yet whether they will be getting any professional development/travel funding from their employers during the coming year; 55% were also concerned about their overall conference attendance costs; 39% had concerns about their employment status or job security. These are very important indicators for us to consider as we begin to shape the conference program, schedule, and arrangements for the coming year.

The final question on Mini-Survey #1 dealt with our regional Chapters. The specific issue addressed in this question was whether the VRA should mandate the number of meetings each Chapter should hold over the course of a year; over 55% of respondents thought that each Chapter should be free to decide how many meetings it wishes to hold in a year. As the Board continues to work with the Chapters to implement the Bundled Membership and Chapter Bursary initiatives, this feedback will be helpful in guiding our design of the new proposed model Chapter Bylaws prototype.

The 2009 post-conference surveys (one for attendees, one for non-attendees, and one for vendors) will be active through the end of April – if you haven't yet taken time to participate, just follow the appropriate link on the VRAWEB homepage. Watch for another Mini-Survey shortly thereafter. Your input is important in helping the VRA shape its future while remaining responsive to the needs and concerns of its membership.

Intellectual Property Rights News
Compiled by Jen Green (Massachusetts College of Art and Design)
Intellectual Property Rights Committee

Imagining a Smithsonian Commons: presented at VRA Toronto, 2009 by Michael Edson, Director, Web and New Media Strategy, Smithsonian Institution, Office of the CIO
by Jen Green

This year's VRA annual conference featured a thought-provoking keynote address by Michael Edson, Director of Web and New Media Strategy at the Smithsonian Institution. Edson's talk focused on the Smithsonian Institution's growing effort to "democratize knowledge and

information" by creating a "free and open commons" that would provide easy online access to their vast collections. As a public institution, Edson made clear the Smithsonian's responsibility to provide access to their collections digitally with the same dedication that they have provided free and open access to their collections physically. Although behind the curve a bit (relative to their online content producing competitors such as Google Images or Wikipedia), Edson emphasized the Smithsonian's potential to quickly change this--in order to better serve the institution's civic duty, the institution's mission, as well as the institution's business model. To build a Smithsonian Commons, they are investigating resources like Flickr Commons and Creative Commons, resources that have made major impacts on the information access and sharing landscape. The Smithsonian not only hopes to provide their patrons with the online information that they crave, but they expect that by making materials free and open to the public, users will be encouraged and enticed to visit the Smithsonian's physical spaces as well. The Smithsonian Institution (SI) has already made some images available through Flickr. In what Edson calls a "non-scientific" end-user survey, SI attempts to understand how finding Smithsonian images in Flickr Commons has impacted their users' impression of SI as a whole. They found that: (1) 84% of these users are more likely to use SI images again, (2) 97% are more likely to visit SI sites, and (3) 100% have an "emphatically" more positive impression of SI. These results suggest that making content free and accessible have a direct impact on the prosperity and sustainability of both SI's virtual and physical resources.

As content providers within our educational and cultural institutions, Edson's hopes to improve open and free online access to the Smithsonian's collections strikes a chord within the VRA community, especially as we consider the copyright implications of making our collections available to our users. Many of us provide our local users restricted access to rich databases that we have built to store educational, copyrighted content. However, collaborative and open online image collections are already emerging within the VR community alongside "traditional" institutional image databases. A quick search within Flickr.com Groups retrieves collection built (in collaboration with colleagues, students and/or faculty) by the Visual Resources Association, the Visual Resources Collection at the University of Texas School of Architecture, and the Visual Resources Collection, Art and Art History, at the University of Colorado-Boulder. These collections utilize Creative Commons licenses that allow contributors to reserve all or some rights if they wish. But, as Edson states, the importance of open collections is not in how they restrict, but in what they make available. A digital commons can provide the venue that users are seeking to share the content they have, to collaborate with other users who share their interests, while promoting the valuable collections, resources, and professionals that support users' ability to access and contribute to information digitally.

If you would like to view the Michael Edson's slides from his March 19th presentation at VRA Toronto, follow this link: http://www.slideshare.net/edsonm/vra-2009-1171144

Call for submissions:

The VRA-IPR committee would like to invite authors to contribute to the IPR column of VRA Images. If you would like to submit a copyright-related article for publication in an upcoming issue of Images, please contact Jen Green (jen.green@massart.edu) to learn more!

Digital Scene and Heard
Edited by Jacquelyn Erdman (Florida Atlantic University)
Digital Initiatives Advisory Group

Guest Editor: Susan Jane Williams (Archivision, Inc.)

Digital Objects in the Classroom: Virtual Material Culture Collections at Liberal Arts Institutions

A NITLE-funded workshop and mini-conference held at Vassar College, March 16 and 17, 2009

By Sarah Goldstein (Vassar College Visual Resources Library) and Susan Jane Williams (Archivision, Inc.)

For many years, Arden Kirkland (Costumer for Drama and Film), and Holly Hummel, (Costume Designer and Senior Lecturer, Drama and Film), have been using Vassar's historic costume collection in their teaching. Some of the pieces are very old, and are suffering physical wear-and-tear from the constant use. Like others who teach and work with costumes and material culture objects in the classroom, they decided to develop a digital version of the collection to do some of the class work without having to further damage the items. Arden developed a FileMaker Pro

database to catalog the costumes, and they worked closely with Ginny Jones, an Academic Computing Consultant at Vassar to assist them. The incorporation of technology evolved new ways to engage the students and develop their curriculum. A few years ago they received funding to photograph some of the collection as QTVR files.

While they have grown and developed their database and digital teaching materials, Arden and Holly realized they had far more questions than answers about continuing and improving this work. Because they recognized the need for expanded dialog about these issues with other colleges and museums, Arden, Holly, and Ginny applied to NITLE through Vassar's Development office and thus the workshop was envisioned.   Their aspiration was that through the event they could find some answers, establish new relationships, and build a community to address the evolving world of digitized collections and their role in the classroom. As one of the collaborators in this grant and workshop I was very excited to help with this program.

Participants were encouraged to apply as teams of IT, library and/or faculty from their home institutions. The program was aimed at those who were in the process of or about to undertake a digitization project involving a 3D material culture collection intended to be used in teaching. Participants would attend either a workshop (or "track") on the planning and development of metadata for such a collection, or a second workshop on the photography of a 3D sample object. The workshops would culminate in a panel that addressed the use of digitized collections in the classroom.

The program kicked off with a dinner for early-arriving participants and speakers with welcome remarks by Bret Ingerman, Vice President for Computing and Information Services. This gave the participants and speakers a chance to meet informally before the start of the workshops. The next day, (March 16), there was a breakfast and opening talk by Michael Lesk, Professor of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University. Titled "Expanding Data Collections: It's Not Just Book Scanning Any More," Professor Lesk gave a fascinating overview of the history of mass book scanning and online book use, methods of inexpensive 3D scanning and possible applications, and preservation of data. He illuminated the challenges facing the collection and management of data in the future, while highlighting how important it is to come up with models of cooperation that can help overcome social, economic and copyright issues associated with making more material available widely online.

Afterwards, the group split up into 2 "tracks" or workshops: track 1 participants spent the day working with John Greenleigh, a noted digital photographer, to learn about best practices in shooting objects in QTVR format. Matthew Slaats, the Academic Computing Consultant for Visual Resources at Vassar, assisted John in this workshop. Track 2 participants met with Susan Jane Williams for an introduction and thorough overview of metadata for digital collections.

The participants met up again for lunch with members of the Vassar community who were interested in the themes of the program. After lunch the workshops continued, with a break for tea and further discussion. A dinner was held in the Vassar Alumnae House for the participants, speakers, and members of the Vassar community and featured an entertaining and enlightening dessert talk by Vassar Dean of the Faculty Jon Chenette. Titled "Ants and Elephants: Institutional Support for Learning from the QTVR Source," Dean Chenette asked important questions about the use of QTVR collections in teaching, how to encourage faculty to use and create such collections, and how best to support these endeavors in a fiscally restrained higher education environment. A lively discussion followed Dean Chenette's talk.

On day two, the participants came back together to hear from the panel "Teaching with Digital Object Collections." The group was composed of faculty, librarians and technicians who were already making use of digitized objects in the classroom. They included Vassar's own Arden Kirkland and Holly Hummel; Charlotte Jirousek, Associate Professor, Department of Textiles and Apparel, Cornell University; Hod Lipson, The KMODDL Project, Cornell University; Kathi Martin, Director, Digital Museum Project and Associate Professor of Design, College of Media Art & Design (CoMAD), Drexel University; and Adrienne Witzel, The eLucy Project, UT Austin. It was a unique opportunity to hear about the challenges of creating and maintaining these collections, but also highlighted the often-rewarding outcomes and imaginative types of learning derived from them as well.

A Grou.ps site was created to engage the speakers and participants during and after the program. This wiki will continue to facilitate links to collections, presenter's material, and continued discussion on the topics and workshops. Please feel free to explore it and if you'd like to join, just send an email to Ginny Jones (vijones@vassar.edu), Arden Kirkland (arkirkland@vassar.edu), or myself (sagoldstein@vassar.edu) and we can add you to the

conversation. We also hope to conduct follow-up activities with the participants and use the Grou.ps site to keep on learning as a community.

For more information on the activities of the Digital Initiatives Advisory Group (DIAG) see http://www.vraweb.org/diag/index.htm.

Chapter News
Compiled by Trudy Levy (Image Integration)

Great Lakes Chapter
Submitted by Marlene Gordon (University of Michigan-Dearborn)

The chapter held its annual meeting on March 20 at the Sheraton Centre. Bylaw revision was discussed with emphasis on offering chapter dues through Memberclicks. The Fall meeting will be another joint meeting with the Midwest Chapter. The Great Lakes chapter discussed inviting ARLIS Ohio Valley to the meeting. It was noted that the first meeting of the chapter was held jointly the ARLIS chapter. The workshop grant was awarded to Astrid Otey who attended the workshop, Selling Visual Resources: Educating and Engaging the Educators'.

Texas Chapter
SubmittedBy Katherine Moloney (Amon Carter Museum)

The Texas Chapter is pleased to announce that Katherine Moloney has taken on the Chapter leadership from Mark Pomelia.

Katherine Moloney has worked in various types of libraries for the past 30 years while a military spouse and raising two wonderful young women. She received her Master of Science in Information Services from the University of North Texas in 2003 and was not the oldest person in her class. She currently works as the Teaching Resource Coordinator, a gatekeeper for the thousands of digital images of the Amon Carter Museum permanent collection and manager of the Teaching Resource Center library.