

From Wunderkammer to e-Resource: Promoting Art Information Across Borders in the 21st Century

Collaboration: connecting collections and people

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This presentation will focus on the keys of successful collaboration based on experiences with several New York library collaborations including the Art Museum Library Consortium which led to the development of the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC) and an ongoing collaboration with Pratt Institute's School of Library & Information Studies that has involved students working at the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Public Library and the NYARC libraries. This presentation will also cover ongoing local discussions with the NYC7 Group with a goal to develop programs of mutual interest including digitization and collection development. The presentation will focus on the development and sustainability issues of collaborations between these libraries and will feature images of collections that have been made more accessible through these various collaborations.

Introduction

I would like to thank everyone responsible for inviting us here today. It is a great honor to meet with you all and to have the opportunity to discuss our work. Today I will be speaking about several New York collaborations which the Brooklyn Museum has been involved with and I will focus on key issues related to collaboration. All images shown during my presentation are from the Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives collections unless otherwise noted. First let me say a quick few words about the Brooklyn Museum which was founded as a library in 1823. Known as the Brooklyn Apprentices Library it was the first free and circulating library in Brooklyn and was the nucleus of the Brooklyn Museum. Since those early days the Museum has evolved into the second largest fine arts museum in New York with encyclopedic collections ranging from ancient Egypt up to and including contemporary art.

Image 1 – Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680)– Wunderkammer image from Romani collegii Societatis Jesu Musaeum celeberrimum, cujus magnum antiquariae rei, statuarum imaginum, picturarumque partem ex legato Alphonsi Donini...a secretis, Munifica liberalitata relictum... Amstelodami : Ex officina Janssonio-Waesbergiana, 1678

This image is from a book by Athanasius Kircher, a 17th-century German Jesuit scholar who published around 40 works, several in the field of egyptology. He taught at the Collegio Romani for several years and amassed a collection of antiquities which he exhibited along with some of his own inventions in the Museum Kircherianum – his own wunderkammer.

Our discussions - *“From Wunderkammer to e-Resource: promoting art information across borders in the 21st century”* - gives us a platform to look at our own Wunderkammers – or “cabinets of curiosities” - in a collective sense. These online Wunderkammers are a new form of a “kunstbibliothek” providing unprecedented access to a large and varied audience. Through collaboration we have the opportunity to connect collections in a meaningful way and to connect people who are the creators and the users of the products of our collaborations. As with other types of libraries, art museum libraries have been providing access to their collections for several years. Art museums have been catching up by making their object collections more available to the public in an effort to raise visibility and to enlarge its audience. With enhanced online tools we now have a platform for collection sharing and providing intellectual links between museum objects and related research resources in the library and archives. As a result we are beginning to provide unprecedented access to the collections in our museums, libraries and archives as well as links to other institutions. This new online platform affords us the possibility of closer collaboration inside and outside our institutions and allows us to rethink what we do, what we collect, and how we can do it all in possibly better ways.

Collaboration between libraries is not a new idea but a worthy one that has proven to be productive for many years. For example, starting in the 1970’s the Brooklyn Museum’s Wilbour Library of Egyptology contributed citations to a bibliography entitled *Egyptology Titles* to the University of Heidelberg working in collaboration with Cambridge University.

Image 2 - Heidelberg

This printed bibliography evolved into online resources to support the study of Egyptology and we were delighted to have worked with Heidelberg on this pre-Internet collaborative project to support research.

Image 3 - Nava Atlas Secret recipes for the modern wife: all the dishes you'll need to make from the day you say "I do" until death (or divorce) do you part / Nava Atlas. Simon and Shuster 2009

Now let me say a few words about what I think makes a successful collaboration.

The most successful collaborations are the product of a good recipe which includes pinpointing the best partners for the particular project that you wish to accomplish. One must have a keen sense of what the mission is for your own library as well as the other libraries who are potential collaborators. Each participant should have a shared and equal desire to support the proposed collaboration.

Image 4 – definition of “collaborate”

Image 5 - Recipe for Effective Collaboration

The partners should be able to bring all the ingredients together for the recipe. The core of the recipe is an identified need with a set of activities designed to achieve the project goals:

- *Identified need should be linked to activities and outcomes.*
- *Identify distinct project goals, tasks and methodology.*
- *Define a target audience: Who is in need of the program's services? What is needed?*
- *Develop budget goal and possible funding sources.*
- *Develop institutional commitment to the project that will provide a sustainable plan. Especially critical for the staff involved directly with the project.*
- *Collect data such as user statistics and studies of newly created resources to evaluate and keep the products of the project vital.*

One major opportunity that collaboration affords are ways to identify and possibly eliminate duplication or redundancy of collections and to improve

efficiency. With an economic crisis in our collective midst we are all looking for ways to do more with less.

The following are a few recent examples of collaborations that have involved New York City institutions:

Images: The following images are from older books from the Brooklyn Museum collection that were added to the RLIN/WorldCat database as part of our collaborative efforts.

Image 6 – de Bry

Bry, Theodor de, 1528-1598.

[America. pt. 2. German] Der ander Theyl, der newlich erfundenen Landtschafft Americae, von dreyen Schiffahrten, so die Frantzosen in Floridam ... gethan. Eine vnter dem Häuptmann H. Laudonniere, anno 1564. Die ander vnter H. Ribald 1565. Die dritte, vnter H. Guorguesio 1567 geschehen. Mit Beschreibung vnd ... Contrafactur ... durch Jacob Le Moyne, sonst Morges genannt ... Auss dem Frantzösischen in Latein beschrieben, durch C.C.A. Vnd jetzt auss dem Latein in Teutsch bracht, durch H. Oseam Halen. Auch mit schönen Kupfferstücken, vnd deren Erklärung, alles an Tag gegeben, durch Dieterich von Bry. Franckfort am Mayn, Getruckt bey J. Feyerabendt, in Verlegung D. von Bry, 1591.

The Art Museum Library Consortium was established in 1989. This informal consortium was made up of the libraries of the Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art's Watson Library, Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The sole project goal was to have a coordinated retrospective conversion of each library's holdings into the Research Libraries Network (RLIN), an international bibliographic database now known as WorldCat, as a major step towards each library's entire holdings represented in their own online Library catalogs.

Image 7 - Sanson

Atlas nouveau : contenant toutes les parties du monde ou sont exactement remarquès les empires, monarchies, royaumes, estats, republicues & peuples qui sy trouuent á present / par le Sr. Sanson ... ; présenté a Monseig[n]eur le Dauphin par ... Hubert laillot ... Paris :

Chez Hubert laillot ioignant les Grands Augustins aux deux Globes, 1692

The identified need was to have access to what was owned by each library to lay the path for increased shared resources to support inter-library loan and other library activities. The target audience was all users of these resources working both internally at each of the museums as well as outside users. The task was retrospective conversion with a working methodology to derive as many records as possible from RLIN using a relatively inexpensive process done by staff onsite or by sending records to an offsite vendor depending on each library's records and work areas. Outside funding was crucial to get this project underway. A targeted funding budget was developed and funds were received from major foundations, such as the Mellon Foundation, The J. Paul Getty Trust, as well as federal and state funding sources.

Image 8 - Champollion Panthéon égyptien, collection des personnages mythologiques de l'ancienne Égypte, d'après les monuments; avec un texte explicatif par M. J. F. Champollion le jeune, et les figures d'après les dessins de M. L. J. J. Dubois ...Paris: Firmin Didot, 1823-1825

The actual work began in 1990 and over 200,000 records for older research items were converted by the collaborating libraries by 1992. The work of retrospective conversion continued at each of the libraries throughout the 1990's so that their entire holdings could be represented in RLIN. As a result of this project, many records for items such as rare books and exhibition catalogs were made available to a large group of researchers.

Image 9 – Modern art text by Katherine S. Dreier ; composed by Katherine S. Dreier & Constantin Aladjalov, Soci et e Anonyme - (Brooklyn: Societe Anonyme, 1926)

Data collecting was carried out throughout the project to ensure that the working methodology was the fastest and easiest. User statistics supported

the conversion project as our respective interlibrary loan requests dramatically increased as there was more awareness of the newly added titles to RILIN/WorldCat and respective library online catalogs.

Image 10 – George Catlin [1796-1872](#). Illustrations of the manners, customs & condition of the North American Indians. With letters and notes, written during eight years of travel and adventure among the wildest ... tribes now existing. By George Catlin. With three hundred and sixty coloured engravings from the author's original paintings. : Illustrations of the manners, customs & condition of the North American Indians. With letters and notes, written during eight years of travel and adventure among the wildest ... tribes now existing. By George Catlin. With three hundred and sixty coloured engravings from the author's original paintings. (London : Chatto & Windus, 1876)

The experience from this collaboration taught us about establishing a good working methodology to accomplish the task at hand in the fastest and easiest ways. We all reached our primary goals - and launched our own library online catalogs over time - which was a gratifying experience.

The following images are from NYARC collections:

Image 11 – Frick – Thomas Sully 1783-1872

Incidents in the life of Thomas Sully, chiefly of painting.

(Philadelphia : [s.n.], 1871)

Now let me describe the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC) with current members including the libraries and archives of the Brooklyn Museum, the Frick Art Reference Library and the Museum of Modern Art.

One could trace the nucleus of NYARC back to the Art Museum Library Consortium. In 2003, several representatives from institutions who were previously in the Art Museum Library Consortium came together to discuss auction catalogs since we have extensive auction catalog collections that were duplicated in our respective libraries. This conversation continued and grew to encompass many other issues that our libraries are facing. Don Waters, Program Officer for Scholarly Communications at the Andrew W.

Mellon Foundation, heard that we were having this discussion and invited us to come to the Foundation to discuss our library issues. He recommended that we propose a planning grant to allow us to look at our commonalities and to determine areas of convergence and need. In 2004 we were awarded a grant to start this evaluative process and fortunately this was the first in a series of grants from the Mellon Foundation to support our collaborative work. The scope of the initial Mellon planning grant was to hire a consultant to review current operations and survey best practices in order to formulate a plan for coordinating and perhaps centralizing core activities. The Planning grant also included identification of priorities and activities and to outline areas of prospective collaboration. Here is a brief overview of the NYARC goals:

- Coordinate cost-efficient and sustainable programs;
- Improve access to vastly expanded and enriched resources through technology;
- Expedite and enhance resource sharing services;
- Advance the scholarly, educational and cultural enrichment missions of the four museums;
- Develop cooperative relationships with leading research institutions to support information content and the needs of the broader cultural community
- Provide leadership in the development of innovative and model information service programs.

Image 12- MoMA image Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, 3.C.4. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Quote: Alfred H. Barr Jr., "Research and Publication in Art Museums," [*Museum News*](#) 23, no. January 1 (1946). Reprinted in [*Alfred H. Barr Jr., Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*](#) (New York: Abrams, 1986), 205–13.

After careful study and discussion, it was determined that we needed a shared online catalog to access information in our respective research collections spanning the history of art from ancient to contemporary. In order to accomplish this task we were able to do the following with additional funding from the Mellon Foundation:

1) Recruit and appoint a Project Coordinator/Systems Manager, Lily Pregill, and a Project Assistant, to provide administrative and professional support for programs and projects

IMAGE 13 Arcade

2) Bring key members from our respective staff together to work on common issues such as cataloging, reference and shared resources. This core group, working with Lily Pregill have accomplished many important goals including creation of a shared online catalog, known as Arcade. Arcade represents our own Wunderkammer continually growing with records for books, periodicals, pamphlets and files, auction and dealer catalogs, archives, special collections and electronic resources. Our collective staff continues to work together and we want to thank them for all of their hard work. Without this group effort our collaborations could not move ahead and their assistance and cooperation has been crucial in the development of rich content within our shared catalog.

Image 14 from the Gilded project

3) Begin to digitize parts of the collections to develop more online thematic resources drawn from our respective research collections. The Gilded Age projects are a good example of this effort. This is a multi-year collaborative project to document the New York City art scene at the turn of the 20th century by digitizing exhibition catalogs held at the Frick Art Reference Library and the Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives. The digitized catalogs are now available to researchers worldwide through [Arcade](#) and through a website: <http://gildedage2.omeka.net>

Image 15 NYARC website

4) Launch a NYARC website that announces projects, new acquisitions and plans for the future

5) Expedite access to the collections via expanded Inter-Library Loan and digital scanning

6) Review periodical holdings to reduce duplication as a cost and space saving measure

7) Negotiate discounted access to electronic resources and electronic resource management

- 8) Add records to Arcade for hidden collections within our institutions to provide better access to a variety of resources including archives
- 9) Develop a shared budget to sustain NYARC beyond grant funding

Image: 16 – interns working in our libraries

10) Set up an ongoing intern training program to work on NYARC initiatives in our libraries as a way to accomplish work and provide a way to recruit for the future. In addition to other tasks, these interns are involved in studies to determine how our data can be used to support further projects.

NYARC offers us and our users a multi-faceted approach to dealing with managing our respective research collections and making them available to our users working both internally and internationally. Our next project goal is to begin to capture and preserve electronic resources with hopefully with additional funding from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation.

Image 17 slide from OCLC report re NYC7

Now let me say a few words about a larger group of libraries who are involved in ongoing conversations. This group is known as the New York City 7 (NYC7): Columbia University Libraries, New York Public Library, New York University Libraries and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Watson Library in addition to the NYARC libraries.

The original concept of NYARC was that it would be a consortium made of New York area art museum libraries providing coverage of the art historical landscape. We are also looking beyond the boundaries of our collections to see what other collections in the New York City area provides in terms of broader subject coverage and resource sharing. There are many reasons for this: it is unrealistic to think that one art museum library could hold everything there is published on a specific art topic. As curatorial research has expanded into a larger interdisciplinary playing field, our libraries have had to expand their resources to support research on broader topics that our respective museums are addressing these days.

Collection analysis has also been part of the conversation and supported by a study undertaken in 2008 by OCLC. This study focused on collections primarily held by NYARC to determine uniqueness and overlaps in support

of collaborative projects. Their staff have issued reports which are available on the OCLC website. In a blog entitled **NYARC: One for all, and all for one?**, posted August 22nd, 2007 by

Image 18 – report analysis

Günter Waibel wrote:

The analysis determines the size of the collective NYARC collection, the extent of holdings overlap as well as uniquely held materials. The project also compiled statistics about specific types of materials the consortium holds a special interest in, such as auction catalogs, exhibition catalogs and serials. A comparison of the NYARC holdings was made with the NYC-7 as well as a west-coast peer institution (Getty Research Institute) providing additional context for the findings.

One major surprise that came out of their study is the amount of unique collections held by NYARC in comparison to other libraries:

- 39 percent of the NYARC collection is unique compared to OCLC WorldCat
- 66 percent of the NYARC collection is unique compared to New York Public Library, New York University and Columbia University

Today these conversations continue in an informal way as we all move ahead especially with our own digital initiatives and look for points of intersection and possible areas of collaboration especially in the areas of shared resources and the selection, capturing and preservation of born digital electronic resources.

Image 19: blog re MLEAD-1

Finally I want to talk about our collaboration with Pratt Institute. In 2009, the Brooklyn Museum established a collaboration with Pratt Institute's School of Library & Information Studies (SILS). The need was to provide a training ground for librarians, archivists and those interested in digital initiatives and to fulfill the Museum's mission to make its collections more accessible to the public. This collaboration has been generously supported through federal grants from the Institute of Museum Library Services' Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program that supports programs for preparing information professionals for museum librarianship in the digital age. Three IMLS grants have been received by Pratt Institute to support the following collaborations:

M-LEAD 1 (2009-2011) The **Museum Library Education and Digitization grant** supported Pratt's SILS students to work on several projects at the Brooklyn Museum in the Libraries, Archives and Digital Lab. Their work included creation of bibliographic records for Library collections; inventorying and processing Archives; scanning images and creating metadata in the Digital Lab; assisting with Library Outreach; assisting with research on copyright law, picture research and identification.

Image 20: BVH website

CHART (2010-2013) The Cultural Heritage, Access, Research and Technology grant. This project included an expanded partnership with the Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn Museum and Brooklyn Public Library. The need was to provide access to historic photographs of Brooklyn held by each of the three repositories. A website was created as an access tool for the combined digital assets for this project which has just been launched. We were delighted to have the technical expertise of Lily Pregill consulting on this project which was complex because of the different levels of technology at each participating institution.

Image 21- M-LEAD 2

M-LEAD 2 (2012-2015) The second Museum Library Education and Digitization grant currently supports Pratt's students working on several projects at the Brooklyn Museum Libraries, the Frick Art Reference Library and NYARC projects based at the MoMA Library. These projects include studying the capture and preservation of digital collections, review and cataloging of auction catalogs, review of cataloging backlog and collection analysis in advance of digitization projects.

In addition to getting excellent practical work experience, all the interns involved in these projects have had access to the research collections held in the collaborating institutions as topics for their practicums. They also participate in staff tours of new exhibitions and installations and behind the scenes tours of several departments within the Museums. The grants also include scholarships and stipends that are given to each selected intern directly by Pratt Institute and some funding is available to support staff travel and symposia.

Image 22 – Pratt Symposia

In reviewing all these collaborations, I see that there are some important lessons learned:

- too large a group of partners makes it difficult to move ahead with a focused project. Having a smaller group makes it possible to foster discrete and well developed projects.

- try to select partners who share a similar staffing model and technological framework. Disparities in technological capabilities along with staffing size make it difficult to move a collaborative project along on a timely basis. The partners should have similar missions: public libraries, university libraries and art museum libraries are not usually a good mix as they have different levels of professional staffing and technological assets.

- project focus is essential to the success of the entire collaboration. The hosting institution should take a leadership role and appoint a person to be in charge of moving the project ahead in a timely manner.

Image 23- Information exhibition catalog from MoMA

I leave you with this image as for me it represents our own type of Wunderkammer, the world of information and how we try to harness it and make it available to large and varied audiences. With the right recipe, collaboration can be a great tool to allow us to share our own information resources with all of our users working now and in the future.

Thank you!