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And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — ARLIS/NA 29th Annual Conference

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ARLIS/NA 29th Annual Conference "2001: An LA Odyssey"
Los Angeles, California, Thursday, March 29 to Wednesday April 4, 2001.

Report by **Nina Stephenson** (University of New Mexico) <nstephen@unm.edu>

This year the *Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)* met in Los Angeles for the first time since 1985, but the local chapter assisted by *ARLIS/NA* management handled arrangements and conference planning admirably. The cultural riches of Los Angeles and the dynamic field of art librarianship were showcased with an array of 20 informative program sessions, 57 special interest and business meetings, six workshops, 18 tours and six social events. This smorgasbord assured that no two attendees would have the same conference experience. Still, it was impossible to leave the Los Angeles meeting without a renewed appreciation for that city's architecture, museums, public art, ethnic makeup and fascinating history, and for the incredible (if sometimes vexing) potential for new technologies in our field.

The conference theme, "**2001: An LA Odyssey**" was a fitting moniker for a meeting held in a city renowned for its maze of intertwining freeways, as visitors who lose their way may end up wandering the on-ramps and "fly-overs" of LA's highway network in a contemporary odyssey no less remarkable than **Odysseus'** famed journey. The challenges of today's information morass also evoke comparison with an "odyssey," which the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* defines as "a long trip or period involving a lot of different and exciting activities, especially while searching for something." I am not the only reference librarian who has traversed "a lot of different and exciting" media while "searching for something." And of course, we can't overlook the "moment of dysfunction in the relationship between man and machine"¹ when astronaut **Bowman** decided to dismantle the computer **Hal** in order to survive in **Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey**. Is there a librarian alive today who has not yearned to "dismantle **Hal**" when servers fail and networks crash?

Some programs presented projects and methods for developing, selecting, organizing, accessing and using art-related Websites, as in "'Too Much of a Good Thing?' Selection, Collection Development, and Cataloging of Art/Design Web Sites." In "Classroom Odyssey: Teaching Adventures in the Art Library & Cyberspace," panelists outlined their

strategies for incorporating other library materials with "cyber" resources in their instructional sessions. **Miguel Juarez (University of Arizona)** also described the development of an online teaching portfolio as a means of assessing bibliographic instruction. In "Encoded Archival Description: Protocol and Practice," panelists discussed the pros and cons of using **EAD** to create Internet-searchable finding aids for libraries, museums, and archives.


In "Copyright, Fair Use and the Disappearing Public Domain: What Art Information Specialists are Doing and What You need to Know," panelists grappled with the complicated realm of intellectual property law and the licensing of digital resources, emphasizing implications for arts institutions and artists. **Howard Besser (UCLA)** described the importance of the public domain for artists and scholars, and warned that its reduction through revamped U.S. Intellectual Property laws could seriously hamper scholarship and artistic creation by curtailing satire, reference and re-contextualization. He likened the demise of the public domain to the erosion of public space in the late twentieth, giving as examples "public" shopping malls that are actually privately owned, and the existence of "street cams" that covertly monitor public environments. **Sharon Farb** (also from **UCLA**) outlined the pitfalls and perils of licensing digital resources, and distributed a handout of terms and sample clauses to assist museum and library professionals as they negotiate contracts with publishers and vendors.

Not all of the sessions dealt with the digital orbit, of course. As is the custom in *ARLIS/NA* conferences, many programs and speakers highlighted the host city's artistic history and cultural attractions. The conference plenary session, "Hollywood Design: Decadence, Glamour, Fantasy, Modernism, and Opulence in 20th Century Southern California," featured a very entertaining talk by **Hutton Wilkinson (Tony Duquette, Inc.)** on the American design icon, **Tony Duquette**. In a keynote speech for the membership luncheon, **Janet R. Fireman (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County)** presented a lively view of the history of Los Angeles in "Paradise Los Angeles and Its Evil Twin, Sin City." In "Reconstructing Modernism: Re-

search and Documentation of Los Angeles Architectural Masterworks," speakers discussed the restoration of important buildings in the Los Angeles area, including **Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock (Aline Barnsdall) House** and various residences designed by architect **Rudolph Schindler**. Tours are commonly found on the agendas of many library conferences. For art and architecture librarians, such excursions offer phenomenal opportunities to build subject expertise in specialized areas. With offerings ranging from all-day architectural excursions, shorter walking tours, museum visits, and a "Museum of Neon Art Night Cruise," there was something to suit every schedule and taste, and in many cases, tours complemented the more formal conference sessions.

A variety of workshops also gave attendees the chance to return to work with enhanced professional skills. Among the areas covered were statistics; the use of structured vocabularies in accessing visual information; resources in costume, art direction, film and artists' videos; approval plans; and art library space planning.

A review of any *ARLIS/NA* conference would not be complete without mentioning the many exhibitors who took the time to demonstrate or discuss their products. Many of these vendors and publishers also contributed to *ARLIS/NA* in the form of travel awards, silent auction donations and the sponsorship of conference sessions and special events.

I have attended approximately ten *ARLIS/NA* conferences since the late 1980s, but had not been able to attend since 1998. Although I have always found these annual meetings to be excellent, the quality of the programming continues to improve. Notable additions include the incorporation of poster sessions, and the Silent Auction which generated over \$9,000 for the **ARLIS/NA Conference Speakers Fund**. Plans are well underway for next year's meeting to be held in St. Louis from March 20-26, 2002. This will be the first joint conference of the *Art Libraries Society of North America* and the **Visual Resources Association**. For more information on this and other *ARLIS/NA* activities, please consult the society's Web page www.arlisna.org. 

Endnotes

1. Claire Daigle, "'Just what do you think you're doing, Dave?'" Artists respond to 2001: a space odyssey." *Art Papers* v. 21 (Nov./Dec. '97), p. 57.