Note from the News Editor
Rachel Garbade, Assistant Archivist, The Museum of Modern Art

I am so pleased to welcome you all to the Spring 2024 issue of ARLIS/NA New York News on behalf of our Chair, Emily Walz. First, I would like to proudly introduce the Chapter’s 2024 Executive Board, comprised of a talented and friendly group of New York’s brightest librarians (and one archivist):

Emily Walz, Chair, Librarian, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints & Photographs, The New York Public Library; Jessica Cline, Vice-Chair / Chair-Elect, Supervising Librarian, Picture Collection, The New York Public Library; Billy Chi Hing Kwan, Past Chair, Director of the Library and Archives, New York School of Interior Design; Shea’la Finch, Secretary, Research/Instruction Librarian, School of Visual Arts; Peter Victor-Gasper, Treasurer, Librarian, General Research Division, The New York Public Library; Miguel Rosales, Membership Coordinator, Supervising Librarian, Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library; Joey Vincennie, Programming Coordinator, Reference Lead, Frick Art Reference Library, The Frick Collection; Hannah Fountain, Web Editor, Discovery Lead Librarian, Frick Art Reference Library, The Frick Collection; Rachel Garbade, News Editor, Assistant Archivist, The Museum of Modern Art; Alex Austin, Social Media Coordinator, Student Success and Assessment Librarian, Pratt Institute Libraries; Mackenzie Williams, Mentoring and Student / Early Professional Liaison, Art and Architecture Librarian, Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

Already a few months into 2024, I am in awe of all that the Board has accomplished. Mackenzie Williams recently kicked off the Chapter’s mentorship program, for which many of us serve as mentors. Joey Vincennie and the Programming Committee organized two lively Happy Hours in our own city and Pittsburgh—with more events coming down the pipeline. And, as
Member Updates
Compiled by A.M. LaVey, Librarian for Ukrainian Visual Culture, The Ukrainian Museum


2. A.M. LaVey served as a discussant for the panel “Reclaiming Ukrainian Arts and History,” at the North East Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Conference, New York, on April 6th. LaVey co-curated, with Maria Rewakowicz, the exhibition Ukraine & the Avant-Garde: Books and Works on Paper for the Ukrainian Museum, scheduled to run through May. And, LaVey co-curated, with Bogdan Horbal, a series of exhibitions featuring imagery of the Russian north from the NYPL Slavic and European Collections: Travels through eastern Siberia and Siberian peoples of the Russian North, as well as the upcoming Indigenous peoples of the Russian North: Historical and contemporary imagery to celebrate 125 years of the Slavic division and to run in tandem with the larger library exhibition The Awe of the Arctic: A Visual History.


5. Bridget O'Keefe, Assistant Librarian at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Independent Study Program, published: “Artforum Archive,” in Art Libraries' Society of North America Multimedia & Technology Reviews, April 10, 2024. https://doi.org/10.17613/08h6-nq46. O'Keefe evaluated Artforum’s digital archive, which provides access to virtuosic artwork, criticism, and coverage that spans decades, regions and cultural forms, dating back to its launch in 1962. This review measures the usability, accessibility and discoverability of this sophisticated digital platform that has the potential to facilitate discovery, inspire creative practice, and preserve the lives and legacies of prodigious artists and intellectuals for generations to come. ☞

a group, we have been hard at work drafting Chapter goals, which we hope to share with our members in the coming months. Even more has been happening behind the scenes, too, including Hannah Fountain’s work to secure our email, Alex Austin’s beautiful posts on social media, and so much more!

For me, the highlight of the year was attending the ARLIS/NA Conference in Pittsburgh in early April. I was inspired by the intelligent, thoughtful, diverse, and exciting work being done by members of ARLIS/NA (and especially those from our Chapter). While I did not anticipate witnessing my colleagues hop around the Children’s Museum’s jungle gyms during the farewell reception, it was ultimately a perfectly silly end to a week worthy of the clinking of cocktails! On pages 3-8, you will find a sampling of some of the work our members shared in Pittsburgh.

The other pages are filled with a truly rich panoply of content, including exhibition reviews, a member spotlight, a fellowship report, and snapshots from the aforementioned gatherings. I would like to express my gratitude to every contributor; without you, the newsletter simply would not exist. I am wishing you all a happy and healthy summer ahead! If you have an idea for a future submission, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at rachel.garbade@gmail.com. Thank you so much! ☞
Happy Hour, Brass Monkey

On February 28, 2024, members gathered at the Brass Monkey in the Meatpacking District over drinks and lots of laughter! Images courtesy of Rachel Garbade.

Celine Palatsky Travel Award Recipient
Flannery Cusick, Graduate Assistant, Ricker Library of Architecture and Art

I cannot understate how grateful I am to have received the Celine Palatsky Travel Award for the 2024 ARLIS/NA Conference. I am an incumbent graduate with an MS in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and I also hold a BS from Northwestern University in Art History and Political Science. I am currently a graduate assistant at the Ricker Library of Architecture and Art. And, I previously worked as the Access Intern at the Frick Art Reference Library in the summer of 2023.

This was my first time presenting a conference poster at my first-ever professional conference. “Architecture Publications Run, Edited, and Authored by Minorities in the Field” was well-received and sparked plenty of conversation. But, an unexpected highlight of the experience was meeting my friendly fellow presenters. From lending one another poster supplies to touring each other’s posters, I can confidently say I enjoyed every aspect of the presentation.

At the time of the conference, I had been working on the capstone project of my degree, and my attendance was crucial to the project's development. One workshop, “Transitioning from One-Shots to Embedded Critical Information Literacy,” led by Micki Harrington, was particularly insightful. I collaborated with academic librarians with established careers over implementing embedded courses and explicitly incorporating critical information literacy in instruction. I presented the final product, “Teaching & Learning Menu at Ricker Library of Architecture and Art” in a virtual webinar on May 9th, and I was delighted to see some of my new colleagues in attendance.

Lastly, I was thrilled to reunite with my New York colleagues and to meet some new ones. The team at the Frick Art Reference Library graciously included me on their curator-guided tour of the Frick Pittsburgh, an experience I thoroughly enjoyed and do not intend to forget. I look forward to collaborating with the Chapter further as I graduate this month and start my professional career. 🧡
Member Reports from ARLIS/NA’s 52nd Annual Conference in Pittsburgh

““Oh, Artists’ Books...I Love You, Too...But...” : Considerations for Outreach, Storage, and Access”
Joey Vincennie, Reference Lead, Frick Art Reference Library, The Frick Collection
Giana Ricci, Head, Arts, Performance, and Humanistic Inquiry Department & Librarian for Fine Arts, New York University

On the afternoon of April 3rd, at ARLIS/NA Conference, ARLIS/NA New York members Giana Ricci and Joey Vincennie had the pleasure of participating in a session entitled ““Oh, Artists’ Books...I Love You, Too...But...”: Considerations for Outreach, Storage, and Access” alongside a talented group of art librarians from Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The session’s title drew inspiration from the Roy Lichtenstein painting, Oh, Jeff...I Love You, Too...But..., currently held in a private collection.

Joey’s Takeaways: My first in-person ARLIS/NA Conference presentation (having presented virtually in 2021) proved to be an exceptional experience. It was a delight to meet my fellow panelists for the first time and forge lasting connections that hold promise of future collaborations. Giana, our moderator—whose recent publication* on circulating artist book collections is noteworthy—provided invaluable guidance and support as I developed guidelines for creating such collections in art libraries. I am thankful for the opportunity to further develop relationships within the broader ARLIS/NA community. The session also significantly enhanced my knowledge of best practices for promoting, storing, and organizing artist book collections. My presentation, “Opening the Page: Exploring the Potential of Circulating Artists’ Books,” is now available on Humanities Commons.


Giana’s Takeaways: Moderating this session at the ARLIS/NA Conference in Pittsburgh was such a rewarding experience. As a librarian who is passionate about collecting artists’ books in academic libraries, I benefited greatly from working with the panelists who have each explored this topic in different ways. The recent publication of my co-authored article in Art Documentation on the same topic made the conversation feel even more relevant to me. Getting to work with Joey was an added bonus, as his fresh takes on the subject and willingness to push boundaries within the dialogue always help me to do the same. All four panelists and I expressed interest in collaborating on a publication related to the theme of the panel, and I’m excited to see where that endeavor will take us!
“New Voices in the Profession”  
St John Karp, Assistant Librarian, Horological Society of New York

In April, I was lucky enough to attend the ARLIS/NA Conference, where I presented on the “New Voices in the Profession” panel. I’m currently a graduate student in my last semester of library school at Pratt Institute, so it was a great thrill for me not just to attend a professional conference but also to present at one. It can be a nerve-wracking experience for first-timers (so much so that I tripped over the stage on my way up to speak...), but ARLIS/NA members were very welcoming of new attendees and I soon settled in. My only regret is that it was not possible to attend all of the sessions, many of which were held in parallel. But, I’m also sure that by hopping around between sessions, I developed the tactical skills of a criminal mastermind.

My presentation, titled “Art in Hospitals and Interns in Archives,” was about cataloging artwork within NYC Health + Hospital’s collections. They have one of the largest public art collections in the country, with over 7,000 works, ranging from murals commissioned under the Works Progress Administration to works by more contemporary artists such as Keith Haring and Andy Warhol. I helped catalog this collection for six months as a Collection and Archives Intern. In my conference presentation, I addressed the unique difficulties of this project and how my use of public archives ultimately helped fill in the gaps in information.

The first problem was knowing exactly what was in the collection; the collection has been managed for decades without administrative continuity, resulting in an incomplete and inaccurate inventory. Furthermore, the works are scattered across dozens of medical facilities to which the interns had limited access. How could we catalog works we couldn't see? How could we catalog works we could see but about which we had no identifying information (or incorrect/misleading information)?

The answers to some of these questions were found in NYC Health + Hospitals' extensive public archives. By undertaking a research and digitization project, I discovered select metadata and high-resolution photographs of many artworks for which we previously had little information. Ultimately, by piecing together information from disparate sources, we were able to improve the state of the catalog and, therefore, also the institution’s ability to better care for the collection in the future. Yet, other problems persist, such as how to evaluate art in the context of healthcare and human services, which are ultimately less tractable and remain ongoing concerns.

The presentation was well received and I’m very grateful for the kind words and feedback of the librarians who spoke to me afterwards. For those who missed it, the slide deck and presentation notes are available online at stjo.hn/arlisna-2024. I’m indebted to both the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the Pratt Graduate Student Engagement Fund for providing grants that enabled me to attend the conference. Hotels ain't come cheap, and having funding made a huge difference for a graduate student subsisting on internship money.

“A.I. Among Us: New Approaches to Library Instruction”  
Shea’la Finch, Research/Instruction Librarian  
David Pemberton, Instruction/Periodicals Librarian, School of Visual Arts

How does one teach from a place of uncertainty? On April 5th, we explored the answer to this question at the ARLIS/NA Conference in our presentation titled “Prompting Conversation: A.I. in the Information Literacy Classroom.” We recounted the first year of generative AI library instruction as part of the School of Visual Arts Library's ongoing information literacy program.
Our presentation began with the origins of the AI information literacy program, which coincided with the consumer generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) inflection point of spring 2023, when products like ChatGPT and Midjourney came crashing into the public sphere. Although AI had been looming on the horizon for quite some time—scientists originally coined the phrase for their vision of a machine that could reason, problem-solve, learn new tasks, and communicate using natural language in the 1950s—it was really only then that the concept took on forms (albeit ever-shifting) that not only allowed for, but also called for action. Articles such as “I’m a Student. You Have No Idea How Much We are Using ChatGPT: No Professor or Software Could Ever Pick Up on It” were fueling anxieties. The college essay, the future of commercial arts industries, and the human race itself were all facing an existential threat. At the same time, everything from community forums to casual conversations at SVA was making it clear that academic perspectives on teaching and using AI were diverse and ranged from deep concern to enthusiasm. Naturally, we knew it fell upon us librarians to, if not save the day, at least lend our critical lens to this significant disruption.

Our approach involved a full immersion into news coverage, podcasts, substacks, lectures, panel talks, and town halls; we listened to both enthusiasts and cynics. Just as importantly, we began to use AI tools, especially ChatGPT. We regularly scheduled time to talk with one another about our ideas, questions, and findings. Through this process, we realized that this was still information literacy instruction—a realm librarians are already experts in—just applied to new technologies. Our first presentation (with our colleague Caitie Moore) was delivered to the faculty of the Humanities Department. Before Caitie and Shea’la even finished the presentation, requests for student-facing sessions were coming in from those in attendance.

If you’re feeling hesitant to begin an AI literacy program at your library (as we were), consider defining your role to the students in the inverse. You are not there to deliver an edict (thou shall not) or to judge preexisting usage or knowledge. You are not presenting yourself as an expert or teaching how to use these tools (that is happening in other classes). While every librarian at SVA is free to develop their own instruction sessions, we do agree that the following topics should be addressed:

- To think critically using an information literacy lens:
  - AI is a new form of computing with endless applications across all fields—our focus is simply encouraging critical thinking for creators and consumers of AI content.
- To incorporate AI information responsibly:
  - Generative text is ephemeral and not up to the standards of sustained discourse/scholarly communication. Indicate all uses of AI content as dictated by your style guide (e.g. MLA).
- To use AI as a tool, not a source:
  - The sources of generated text are opaque and the output is subject to hallucination and false balance. Obligated to fulfill the parameters of the prompt, not only does it generate plausibly-sounding falsehoods, but also sugars the delivery with accurate tertiary content; it does work to sell the falsehood.
- To understand the explicit and implicit bias in AI Tools:
  - Generative content parrots systemic societal and algorithmic bias. It can also be employed as a tool to mask bias, for instance, by implying or exaggerating diversity without antecedent in real life.
- To be conscientious consumers of images and text in the new AI reality:
  - “Fake” online content is increasing and becoming more convincing. Information and visual literacy is more important than ever, requiring continued education surrounding these emerging technologies and a healthy measure of vigilance and skepticism.
• To use AI tools ethically:
  o AI text should not be presented as your own original work. AI images should not be presented as if they were actual photographs.

• To encourage lived experience as a source of learning, documenting, and creating:
  o To be able to synthesize and communicate complicated ideas via research and writing promotes lifelong critical thinking skills.
  o It is vital that descriptions and recounts of real-world events rely on first-hand witnesses, especially in journalism.
  o From a macro view, art could suffer from diminishing creative returns when the idea ecosystem relies so much on generative and regenerative output. Don’t forget to go outside and find your sources in society and nature.

When teaching these concepts, retain a radical flexibility of mind. AI is ever-evolving, as are the perspectives around it. Be comfortable in the state of “not-knowing” — to say “I don't know” is resigned and passive, but to claim to know everything about the future of AI is false. To be in a state of “not-knowing” is to be in a process of active inquiry. Embrace “not-knowing” and place emphasis on live critical-thinking demonstrations, evaluating the information together with students as it's presented.

Just as the initial proliferation of the term “fake news” made our work toward information literacy more legible, taking hold of the momentum that generative AI presents is important: both for providing additional avenues for services and for reinforcing what we've always taught. The ever-increasing proliferation of artificial content is turbocharging an already compromised information landscape. This reality heightens the importance of teaching information and digital literacy, applying our existing skill set and instructional frames to this next wave of technology, and doing our part in staving off a post-truth society.

Interested in talking about the intersection of AI and information literacy? Feel free to contact us at: dpemberton@sva.edu or sfinch@sva.edu.


"DIY: Zine-Making in LAMS, For LAMS" (Poster)
Emma Metcalfe Hurst, '23-'24 Kress Fellow in Art Librarianship, Yale University
Marsha Taichman, Art + Design Librarian, Ontario College of Art & Design University

Zines have been a beloved medium for distributing ideas and information for decades. Known for their low-cost and simple production methods, zines have been particularly effective for spreading information within niche subcultures, activist circles, and marginalized communities. Emerging during the pre-internet era and flourishing during the early days of the web, these independent publications have played a vital role in fostering knowledge-exchange and community-building. Over the past thirty to forty years, zines have gained greater recognition as research materials and have found their way into academic libraries, archives, and special collections (LAMS), alongside increased scholarship on acquiring and preserving them. Despite this growing attention, there remains a gap in the literature on zine-making (and makers) in LAMS.

After meeting in a virtual Visual Resources Association (VRA) workshop on developing outreach and programming in libraries through our mutual interest in zines, this gap prompted my co-presenter, Marsha Taichman, and I to explore the following research questions:
Why make zines? How are information professionals in LAMS making zines to promote their services and resources, support research, and enhance teaching and learning? What are the material costs associated with zine production? And what are the challenges and benefits of using and creating zines in these contexts? These questions formed the foundation for our poster DIY: Zine-Making in LAMS, for LAMS, presented at the ARLIS/NA Conference.

Prompted by our own interests and as creative makers ourselves, we found that zines proved to be a fun way to engage and inform new patrons and students returning to university campuses—many for the first time following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. We initiated zine-making initiatives in our respective libraries, Yale University’s Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library and Ontario College of Art and Design University’s Dorothy H. Hoover Library, to welcome students to the library, promote services and resources, and build connections. Our poster highlighted these zine-making initiatives as individual case studies, detailing our research questions, the outcomes of our efforts, and a list of suggested topics for zine creation in LAMS. The poster itself was designed as a zine template and we included our zines as take-aways, providing a tangible example of our work and serving as an introduction to the next phase of our research: a survey on zine-making in LAMS. This survey was inspired by our own experiences with zine-making in LAMS and preliminary research conducted at the Barnard Zine Library at Columbia University’s Barnard College Library, whose holdings include zines that address the library profession and the broader field of information. The survey invites participants to share their experiences with zine-making, either individually or on behalf of their organization, with the flexibility to submit multiple entries—for example, one submission as an independent zine-maker and another representing an organization. The survey also invites respondents to submit up to five digital copies of their zines, which will become part of an open access, digital resource. The final phase of our project will involve making the survey results and digital zine submissions publicly available, with the aim of inspiring zine-making initiatives and connecting zine-makers in LAMS.

The conference poster is available for viewing and download here: https://doi.org/10.17613/01we-1295

“Lightning Talks Session 1” and “Lightning Talks Session 3”
Miyo Sandlin, Instructional Services and Student Engagement Librarian, Fashion Institute of Technology

Miyo Sandlin gave a presentation titled, “The Curious Case of the 1830s Bonnet: Fun with Special Collections for a Global Audience.” It discussed interactive AR (augmented reality) face filters created for FIT’s Gladys Marcus Library’s Instagram account that allowed users to virtually “wear” 2D objects from historic fashion sketches, using our archival materials with Meta Spark Studio. Miyo also presented on “Tips and Tricks to Enhance Video Engagement and Accessibility on your Library YouTube Channel,” which discussed ideas from FIT for making the instructional video content your library creates more accessible and discoverable.
Member Spotlight: Tammi Lawson

Miguel Rosales, Supervising Librarian, Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Tammi Lawson is the Curator of the Art & Artifacts Division at The New York Public Library’s renowned Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. She has been a member of the ARLIS/NA New York Chapter since 2017. Recently, Lawson has been involved in projects focused on the “rediscovery” of Harlem Renaissance artist Augusta Savage. This member's spotlight focuses on Lawson's recent work around this rediscovery.

Miguel Rosales: In recent years, Augusta Savage seems to have piqued the interest of many people. Why do you think this is happening now?

Tammi Lawson: Augusta Savage is one of our most researched artists in the collection. Her works are also the most borrowed. For example, The Metropolitan Museum of Art has borrowed items for their current exhibition, The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism, and the New York Public Library’s location at 42nd Street has a copy of Lift Every Voice and Sing on display. There’s been a steady interest in Savage since the late 1980s when The Schomburg Center exhibited Augusta Savage and the Art Schools of Harlem. That show canonized her contributions not only as an artist but also as a mentor and educator. Artists who are widely acclaimed today such as Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, and Gwendolyn Knight began their careers in one of her schools. Then in 2019, Dr. Jeffreen Hayes curated the exhibition Augusta Savage, Renaissance Woman which traveled widely.
Since the film’s release, I’ve participated in several screenings and panel discussions, including ones at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which coincided with the opening of the *Harlem Renaissance and TransAtlantic Modernism* exhibition, at the Schomburg Center for a Before 5 program, which included an Open archive, and at The Cooper Union, which was Savage’s alma mater.

Journalist Fern Gillespie interviewed me for an article in *Our Time Press*.

Sandra Bookman from ABC’s *Here and Now* also invited me to discuss Augusta Savage.

**MR:** Can you provide us with a timeline of some of the projects you have been asked to participate in?

**TL:** In 2022, Little Brown published a YA book *Augusta Savage: The Shape of a Sculptor’s Life*, for which poet Marilyn Nelson and I collaborated; she wrote a biography in verse and I wrote the afterword.

In October 2023, PBS asked me to participate in a documentary for their *American Masters* series. The film *Searching for Augusta Savage* was released on February 15, 2024, and is now available on their website.

Early this year, The New York Public Library’s Center for Educators & Schools produced a multi-faceted 3D education set that teachers can use to educate their students on Augusta Savage. The *Teacher Set* includes 3D-printed replicas modeled after original artworks in our collection, images of Savage at work, and copies of the 2022 book.

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Journalist Fern Gillespie interviewed me for an article in *Our Time Press*.

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**MR:** Can you tell us about your organization, its mission, and how it relates to your recent work around Augusta Savage?

**TL:** The *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* is one of the research libraries of The New York Public Library. We are devoted to documenting the Black and African diaspora. The Art & Artifacts Division collects, documents, and preserves art and artifacts by and about people of African descent. One of Savage's first schools for artists was in the Schomburg Center when it was the 135th Street Branch. We also have one of the largest collections of artwork by Savage in a public institution.

**MR:** As an art resource professional what do you enjoy most about your job?

**TL:** I feel lucky that I get to work with a collection that is not a dead collection. I enjoy working with the collection and sharing its resources with our patrons. I love that I get to learn a lot from the research that is conducted. I’m engaged with the collection intimately and have also developed relationships with artists that I keep in contact with; many actively send me material to add to their Artist's Files. 🌟
Exhibition Review: *Simon Benjamin: Native Diver*, Swivel Gallery

Whitney Lorenze, Graduate Student, Museum Studies and Library and Information Science, NYU/LIU Dual Degree Program

There is a deeply archival quality inherent to artist Simon Benjamin’s multi-media works, 18 of which were recently on display at Bushwick’s Swivel Gallery in his solo exhibition titled *Native Diver*; this characteristic is not just superimposed through wall text, or the trite product of a heavy hand. Instead, Benjamin’s contemplations of the archives are readily identifiable through observation alone. One can detect both the notion of seriality and the motific emphasis on memory, which is presented as alternately preserved, accumulated, manipulated, and erased. The use of vintage postcards serves as a physical manifestation of this theme, which was further enriched by the accompanying online text. “[T]he exhibition presents a new collection of paintings, sculptures, and collages that expand on the artist’s ongoing exploration of the impact of both visible and invisible histories on current realities… Benjamin’s practice is rooted in research, oral histories, and critical fabulation that work to lyrically complicate the notion of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise for consumption and extraction.”¹ Like those characteristics which relate the works to the archives, these political sentiments are materially and formally embedded.

The most striking work in the exhibition—and, appropriately, the titular piece—is also the one which most eloquently communicates the aforementioned concepts; particularly that of “critical fabulation.” Based in critical archival theory, this is a term coined by cultural historian Saidiya Hartman to describe “the use of storytelling and speculative narration as a means of redressing history’s omissions, particularly those in the lives of enslaved people.”² In the wall work *Native Diver* (see below), Benjamin manifests this concept poignantly, though elegantly and without brutality, through the simple gesture of folding the canvas.

I will back up: the picture—a black-and-white, enlarged silkscreen reproduction of a postcard on canvas—depicts a turn-of-the-century Caribbean coin diver. However, because of that aforementioned gesture, the head and abdomen of the figure are almost entirely obscured. The canvas is folded down the middle, and when viewing the picture head-on, the identity of this man has been omitted. It has not, however, been erased; one can observe the face of the diver by looking at the picture from a sharp angle. So, through the literal act of embodying an alternate perspective, the viewer learns that the work in fact occupies not two, but three dimensions. And the diver, with renewed autonomy, can confront the viewer with his gaze—if we only care enough to look for it. It is notable, also, that the image of this figure has not been slashed with a knife, or blacked out with paint, but hidden in a manner that feels like it almost could’ve been an accident (or claimed to have been one). Such is the manner in which so many stories have been quietly omitted from the historical narrative.

These images of coin divers, according to additional information provided by the gallery’s website, “were printed over and over and widely circulated as postcards in creating an image of the Caribbean as a tropical fantasy.”

Another gallery-provided text elaborates further, “[c]oin divers were young Black boys who swam to the depth of port harbors across the Caribbean to recover coins thrown to them from white North American and European tourists from incoming leisure line steamships.” Some of these postcards are physically present in the exhibition, some folded, others ripped, re-arranged, painted over, and all affixed to the center of unprimed wood panels. Others have been enlarged and silkscreened on canvas, like Native Diver. But in these works, which are grouped together in pairs and respectively titled Giant Diver #1, Giant Diver #2, Giant Diver #3, and Giant Diver #4, the foremost artistic gesture applied is one of duplication instead of subtraction.

All of the works in Simon Benjamin’s Native Diver demand careful contemplation in spite of their aesthetic simplicity. There is someone yelling out under the visual quietude. And perhaps it is due to this contradiction, and the complexity of emotions that it arouses, that the works warrant multiple viewings. Such is the nature of well-composed narratives developed through “critical fabulation”; we want to hear them because they are beautiful, and we want to turn away because of what they mean. It is increasingly rare to encounter artworks which are so successfully both fraught and elegant. In Native Diver, Benjamin presents us with just that opportunity.

4. Ibid.

Exhibition Spotlight: Language, Decipherment, and Translation - From Then to Now, Grolier Club
Deirdre E. Lawrence, Curator and Former Principal Librarian, Brooklyn Museum

Drawn primarily from my personal collection of approximately 2,000 books and prints, and growing, Language, Decipherment, and Translation - From Then to Now reflected my collecting interests, which include the ancient world (especially Egypt), Walt Whitman, art history, photography, and contemporary book arts.

As a member of the Grolier Club, I welcomed the opportunity to present works in this exhibition, which focused on how art and language are intertwined throughout history, starting with early attempts to translate the
Egyptian hieroglyphs and continuing with contemporary artists. Inspired by the 200th anniversary of the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone in 2022, I threaded the idea of art as a universal language that illuminates our understanding of world history throughout this exhibition. A few early works on Egyptian hieroglyphs set the stage, which was followed by a seismic leap in time to books created by contemporary artists, who are interested in language, decipherment, and translation.

Works focused on a variety of languages—some real and some invented—were included, representing a range of typography and printing processes. Subthemes of the exhibition included erasure and redaction, signs and symbols, storytelling, and other forms of communication. Formats included the traditional codex form, collages, prints and scrolls, and sculpted books. This kaleidoscope of images and ideas hopefully inspired consideration of how books provoke and engage with art, language, and history.

Though the exhibition closed on May 11th, a link to the virtual exhibition can still be found here.


Fellowship Report
Noa Ryan, Pratt Fellow, The Museum of Modern Art

For the past year, I have been working in the MoMA Library through a fellowship sponsored by Pratt Institute, where I am pursuing my MSLIS. A major component of the fellowship involves providing reference services to patrons in the library's reading room. Reference in this context is different from the kind of reference I had been familiar with in school or public library settings; patrons of this museum library rarely come in with questions about content or in search of help determining the scope of their research. The users are largely specialist writers, academics in specific art-related subfields, employees at auction houses, art advisors, or representatives of an artist's estate. Providing reference services in a library like this often involves interacting with patrons who already know exactly what they are looking for.
Because boundaries between providing reference and assisting with a patron's research process are well-maintained by department protocols, the focus of reference services lands on supporting user process by providing tips about research methods, access to library resources, and information about the collection (the librarian's domain of expertise!) that may be useful to them. For example, a student writing a thesis was looking for documentation of a particular exhibition, in a large Western European city during the early 20th century, where two paintings were displayed together. This fact was important to their research despite only being mentioned once in a textual source, with no other documentation. The researcher asked me for help, in my role as the reference provider on duty. I gave them information about the art review periodicals in the library's collection that covered the time and place the researcher was interested in and suggested ways to query the catalog so as to return these sources. I also suggested some online resources accessible through MoMA, NYPL, and on the open web that they might consult in the future.

While it was the specific context of a subject-specialized research library that helped me to understand good reference as process- and method-focused, I will gladly carry the reference approach and habits I have developed over the past year into other environments. The same style of reference is particularly suited for K-12 and academic libraries, where contemporary pedagogy similarly focuses on process, method, and critical analysis, placing on these skills a value equal to that of memorizing content. Librarians of all kinds understand this, and the importance of supporting people learn how, rather than what to think and learn. Which is, to return to content and what I’ve learned about the subject the library specializes in, often also the aim of good art. ☺

The New York Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America, an organization that fosters excellence in art librarianship and the visual arts, meets several times a year either virtually or in-person for professional development opportunities, networking, or tours of the various relevant institutions in the New York City metropolitan area.

Chapter programs are great opportunities to meet fellow art library and visual art information colleagues from the area. Members typically include but are not limited to art librarians and visual resource curators, both active and retired, from academic, museum, public, and other special libraries, as well as specialized book dealers and graduate students in library and information science from the New York City area.

To learn more, become a member, or donate to the New York Chapter, please visit our website at arlisny.org, reach out to us at info@arlisny.org, or follow us on social media.

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