

ARLIS/NA Northwest Chapter 2015 Travel Report

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Thank you Northwest Chapter for your support in making my conference attendance possible! While the cost of attending the conference can be quite high for students and new professionals, I believe the opportunities and connections made greatly outweigh the financial setbacks. The past two years attending the ARLIS/NA conferences as a MLIS Candidate offered me the opportunity to glimpse the culture of art librarianship. Now at this year's conference, my third, I was fortunate that several of the sessions, workshops, and great discussions made with colleagues related directly to my work of cataloguing and promoting the artist's book collection at The Banff Centre.

Thursday, March 19

After 16 hours of travel the previous day and before any sessions started, the first day of the conference was a great day to visit The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. It truly was a fantastic experience: a melancholic, hauntingly familiar singing voice could be heard throughout the second floor of the museum. This emotive video piece, [A Lot of Sorrow](#), from Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson shows The National to play their song "Sorrow" repeatedly and continuously on stage for six hours. Coincidentally, Kjartansson was recently at The Banff Centre developing and staging [The End — Rocky Mountains](#) (2010).



The afternoon Fort Worth Architecture Walking Tour, led by architect John Roberts, gave a wonderful introduction to the local sites around the conference hotel: (above, left to right) the Art Deco architecture of the Sinclair Building (1930 - 512 Main St.), the JFK Tribute adjacent to the former Hotel Texas, and Sundance Square. In-between sites, introductions and conversations were had with fellow ARLIS members, including my Conference Networking Program partner. I was a bit concerned about my role as a Guide, based on how recently I graduated library school, but it turned out to be an excellent match; we met several times during the conference. Great discussions were had based our mutual interests in book arts and respective plans to create digital reference tools that increase access and outreach for hidden collections. We learned a lot from each other and we plan to keep in touch.



Conference Networking Program Matches: Jennifer Himmelreich (MLIS Student, San Jose State University) and me at Omni Fort Worth after "Artists' Books [Ever]where!" Workshop

That night I happened to meet four other fellow conference attendees from the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Library of Congress on Molly the Trolley and we decided to try Risky's Barbeque. It was a great opportunity to talk about artists' books and cataloguing non-English items.

Friday, March 20

The ARLIS arranged tour of three Dallas art museums was a special birthday treat for me. I took a very rainy walk through the Nasher Sculpture Center garden and visited the Mayer Library at the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA).

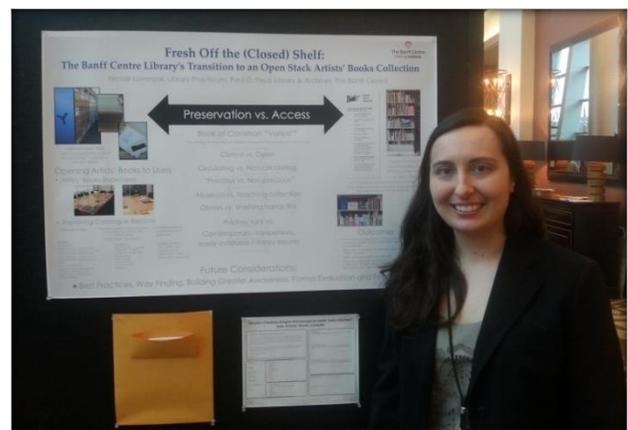
Immediately after the tour, the important and engaging session "Library Services for Working Artists" provided outreach approaches and ways librarians can work with practicing artists—which relates directly to what we do at The Banff Centre (supporting artists participating in arts programs and residencies). Suggesting materials to artists to inform their practice can be difficult. As subject specialists we can also reach out to librarians working in public libraries. Claire Kennedy, the librarian and archivist to artist [John Baldessari](#), gave insight into the daunting task of preserving and managing the collection of an artist who himself in 1970 "cremated" everything he ever made. Billy Parrott illustrated the vast inspiration available from New York Public Library's Picture Collection. It was fascinating to see the creative value of the collection in that it has inspired many famous artists, from Andy Warhol to the designers of *Mad Men*. What I did not realize is that this visual resource of over one million photographs, postcards, illustrations, etc. are available for circulation. He stressed the importance of their assigned subject headings—here I saw some linkages to my work with cataloguing and trying to increase access to our artists' books at The Banff Centre.

The Welcome Reception in the atrium of the Fort Worth Convention Center and the ArLISNAP Night Out at T&P Tavern both provided ample opportunities to discuss with others current projects and struggles as new professionals.

Saturday, March 21

As a cataloguer of artists' books I felt it was important to attend at least one session/ group on this subject. It was a bit discomfoting to realize during the Cataloguing Problems Discussion Group that the same cataloguing issues addressed in library school are still plaguing our discussions. For a fair amount of time we discussed the complications of vocabulary associated with subfield \$e in RDA (curator vs. organizer; artist vs. author). However, what really rang true to me, brought forth by Daniel S. Star, was to consider what *might* be useful vs. immediate value/benefit (i.e. debating over relator terms vs. transcribing table of contents and/or a long Statement of Responsibility).

Poster 2.0 (ARLISpalooza) provided me the opportunity to present a poster: *Fresh Off the (Closed) Shelf: The Banff Centre Library's Transition to an Open Stack Artists' Book Collection* and to learn about other innovative projects from colleagues. It was quite interesting to observe and discuss the polarized responses individuals had to the idea of having a browsable selection of artists' books on open shelves. Reactions ran a full spectrum from negative to positive and plenty in-between. On the one end, a few of our colleagues were shocked and frankly appalled by the idea of artists' books being freely available, with little access restrictions. Understandably, many cited the concerns of theft and wear on materials as primary reasons for not making this leap. Others noted that the vocabulary being developed for the *Artists' Book Thesaurus* by the Book Arts SIG is another valuable way for users to access these often hidden collections. However, others praised and applauded us for releasing these items from their restricted shelving and supporting the main function of artists' books: for users to touch and interact with them. The idea of having open shelves of artists' books and its potential use is really about context; it might not work in every library setting, but I firmly believe that having artists' books available for users to explore supports the intention of this medium and without these extra efforts to eliminate the barriers to access, we risk keeping them hidden.



Poster 2.0 (ARLISpalooza)

Sunday, March 22

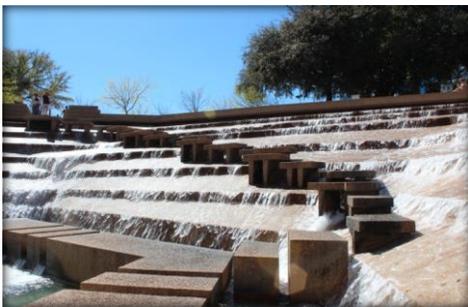
I always look forward to the "New Voices in the Profession" session; it presents a new way of looking at issues within art librarianship. Great ideas for possible adoption included: a quarterly lecture

series that explores the significance of unique collections ("Inside the Vault" at The Ringling Art Library); using an artist's social media sites as a primary source in student research; using social media as a tool for professional development (by following artists, other libraries, etc. to see what they are reading and interested in); and Eva Athanasiu in her 2015 Gerd Muehsam Award Winning essay explored questions that I am personally inquiring about in my practice: "Where do artists' books belong?" and "to whom do they belong?"

Monday, March 23

Both the session and workshop on the last day of the conference were extremely relevant to my current work. "Photographers' Self-Publishing: Contexts for Collecting Contemporary Photobooks" offered advice on contemporary photobook collection development: The International Center of Photography (ICP) operates as a place of balanced curation and production—an embedded makerspace where students can become publishers and even produce books about the library and the research process; Melanie McWhorter, Photo-eye, Book Division, presented on trends within the industry, from crowd funding to book awards, fairs, and fests; Tony White had a brilliant idea to combat the common problem of collecting items with limited bibliographic information at book fairs—to carry a handout and fill in the necessary details at point of purchase. He also raised the issue of terminology which prompted a great discussion: the issue of using both "artists' books" and "photobooks" as terms to describe these items. Personally I do not see the problem in using both; do our users care about this distinction in our catalogues? The idea of keeping artists' books in locked stacks came up in this session as well. Many stood firmly on the side of preservation, noting, it would be best to keep a "\$10 irreplaceable zine or a \$1000+ artist's book" in closed stacks.

The workshop, "Artists' Books [Everywhere]: Creating an Innovative Reference Tool for Your Region" lead by Michelle Strizever was quite valuable given that I am working on [Artists' Books Canada](#) as part of my practicum position. The workshop dealt with many of the questions I have already addressed in trying to create a directory of all the artists' books collections in Canada, including: "what is your project's purpose?" "Will this be an independent, collaborative and/or institutional project?" "What costs do you anticipate?" "What information will you collect about each institution?" "What online platform do you anticipate using to present your project?" "How will you publicize it?" "Where do you see potential issues arising?" However, the workshop turned into something much greater. Many of us expressed an interest in creating a 'meta-directory' as part of ARLIS/NA that would point to all of our independent projects about artist's book collections in our regions; the databases would just need to work well with one another. It was suggested as a possible Book Arts SIG project. This was a great way to end an amazing, inspiring conference. I spent my last afternoon in Texas at the Fort Worth Water Gardens and then the Stockyards.



Philip Johnson's *Active Pool*,
Fort Worth Water Gardens



Fort Worth Stockyards



Fort Worth
Herd Cattle Drive

It was an honor to attend the conference to represent and promote The Banff Centre. I hope our ideas about opening access to artists' books, although contentious, inspire creative endeavors, just like many of my colleagues with their respective presentations did for me. I also look forward to gaining experience in helping the Northwest Chapter execute next year's conference in Seattle.

— Nicole Lovenjak, Library Practicum, Paul D. Fleck Library & Archives, The Banff Centre