

# Editor's Note

For the readers who were fortunate enough to attend the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual ARLIS UK/Ireland Conference, the balmy meeting rooms and lecture halls of London's Architectural Association are now probably a fading memory. As I am writing this at the end of July, however, the events of last week's conference are still actively bouncing around in my mind, and I thought it would be useful to reflect on what I saw as one of its thematic threads: art librarianship as artistic practice.

This thread is apparent in two keynote speeches that beautifully bookended the conference. In the opening keynote to the conference, Pat Christie, former ARLIS UK/Ireland Chair and Director of Library and Student Support Services at the University of the Arts London, called on art librarians to embrace the creativity inherent in the profession. "The art of art librarianship is evident in all that we do," she stated.<sup>1</sup> In the closing keynote, Johanna Drucker, Professor of Bibliographical Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, implored art librarians to be critical when building collections of artists' books. The production value of an artist's book, she said, often seduces the curator into complacency, and art librarians need to be able to assess the conceptual value of the piece as well. "Just because someone can use a straight edge, doesn't mean they have a conceptual edge," she said.<sup>2</sup>

If one took a simplistic interpretation of these two keynotes, one might believe they called librarians to opposite sides of the spectrum: Ms. Christie called the profession to embrace creativity and divergence, while Dr. Drucker called for criticality and convergence. I'm certainly not implying I believe Ms. Christie asked librarians to be non-critical, just like Dr. Drucker didn't ask librarians to be non-creative. However, the overall points they emphasized illustrated the analogy of art librarianship as artistic practice.

Too often, artistic practice is seen as a purely creative endeavor. So when we are discussing art librarianship as artistic practice, it can be easy to get caught up in discussions of creativity and divergent thinking. It is easy to forget that criticality is an integral part of the artistic process. Just as every writer needs to be an editor, every art or design practitioner needs to be a critic. Successful artistic production is a mix of divergent and convergent thinking. Applied to the idea of art librarianship as artistic practice, the need to maintain the balance between creativity and criticality is evident. If we are too creative, we risk our relevance to our various professional institutions and norms. If we are too critical, we risk becoming ruled by the institutions and norms that frame our criticism.

In this issue of *Art Libraries Journal*, we can see the interplay between creativity and criticality in a number of articles. For example, Lerchart Thamtheerasathian, Director of Creative Knowledge Development at the Thailand Creative and Design Center, and a group of co-authors, describe the process of designing new services after the center's relocation. The authors discuss using a service design approach to manage the critical and creative elements of the two-year design process. There are also elements of this interplay in Reference and Instruction Librarian Mackenzie Salisbury's description of her experience innovating library instruction to reach more Masters of Fine Arts students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I also think that *ALJ* Editor Erica Foden-Lenahan exemplifies both creativity and criticality in her review of the second edition of *The handbook of art and design librarianship*.

For readers who did attend the conference, I certainly hope your experience was as rewarding and thought provoking as mine was. The organizers should be commended for putting together such a diverse and interesting set of speakers

1. Pat Christie, "The 'Art' of Librarianship: Art and Design Librarianship as Creative Practice" (Keynote Presentation, ARLIS UK/Ireland 49th Annual Conference, Architectural Association, London, July 26, 2018).

2. Johanna Drucker, "Curating and Complicity: The Special Case of Artists' Books" (Keynote Presentation, ARLIS UK/Ireland 49th Annual Conference, Architectural Association, London, July 27, 2018).

and presenters. Due to all that I experienced at the conference, I've truly been inspired to start considering my librarianship an artistic practice – filled with both creativity and criticality. I'm excited to see you all in Glasgow next year.

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Michael A. Wirtz

*Associate Editor, Art libraries journal.*