

Displays and exhibitions in art libraries

Edited by
Christine Milne
&
Annamarie McKie

ARLIS

UK & Ireland
Art Libraries Society

Cover designed by Rose Roberto

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List of illustrations

The Second Encyclopedia of Tiön, National Art Library

University of Westminster display case

Learning Journals display, University for the Creative Arts, Maidstone campus (2005)

Herbert Read blog *To Hell with Culture* (<http://tohellwithculture.wordpress.com/>)

Image of message board, Sonoma State University Library

Introduction

Based on the experiences of ARLIS members, this publication will look at key areas of exhibition creation in a library context from planning to promotion, finance to feedback. While a body of literature does exist on library exhibitions and displays, the majority is written from an American perspective and is designed for the general library. Here the aim is to focus on exploiting the resources of art libraries in particular, on both their collections and the expertise of their librarians.

There are very few courses currently run for library staff on putting together displays and exhibitions. Those that are available tend to focus on basic skills in display work. Generally they do not incorporate exhibition design skills such as curating, creating storylines, showcase arrangements, to name but a few. It is also interesting that many libraries in art institutions, whether they are museums, art galleries or art colleges do not exploit the wider knowledge of their institutional colleagues. We hope the examples and tips provided by our art librarians suggest new avenues of exploration. To this end we have interspersed thematic chapters with librarians' own case studies. While we initially were thinking mainly of how we exhibit the library's collection within the library, it soon became clear that equally important were exhibitions outside the library and the display of artists' and students' work inside the library.

Firstly we will look at the motivations behind your exhibition – who do you hope to attract and what do you hope to achieve? Once that is established we move to the planning stage – financing and preparing the exhibition (and clearing it up afterwards). The techniques and design section looks at the detailed setting up, including security and safety considerations, whilst the section on promoting your exhibition examines the best ways to attract an audience. Finally there is a short section on evaluating your success before concluding with our top ten tips for a successful exhibition, as promoted at our poster session at the 2008 ARLIS Conference.

There are many general rules that can apply to both smaller displays and larger exhibitions. For reasons of space we have generally referred in the text to exhibitions; the application of these chapters to displays is, however, also implied.

Chapter 1 – Why create an exhibition?

Why do we plan exhibitions and displays? Who are we doing it for? What are we trying to achieve? How does it benefit you, your users and your libraries? Is there another more appropriate way to communicate with your users than an exhibition?

AIMS

The most frequently quoted reason for organising a display or exhibition is to publicise the library collection to encourage greater use. The scale can range from a simple display of new books to promoting a specific collection. London Metropolitan University, for example, uses exhibitions to promote the Materials and Products collection:

‘I organise occasional exhibitions to promote the Materials and Products collection to students and staff... The goals were to promote the Materials Library to a wider audience – illustrating its work within the department and to improve the collection’s coverage of technical textile materials.’

Exhibitions can therefore promote not just the objects within special collections, but also the existing work done by academic and library staff using them. This is taken further by the University of Birmingham, where exhibitions are part of a general strategy to encourage closer liaison between the library and academic departments:

‘There is great potential in developing a future programme of seminars and workshops to support the exhibitions to achieve more involvement both within the Art History department and also within other relevant disciplines, such as History and English.’

Promoting a special collection can therefore go beyond just communicating with your library users. It can encourage a two way dialogue where your library users communicate with you, based on a clearer understanding of the strengths of the library

collection and staff. Politically it can also be important to raise the library's profile as a vibrant, innovative and central resource for your institution.

How far the aims of your exhibition are clarified during the planning stages depends a great deal on your institution's philosophy and procedures, but it becomes harder to evaluate your success (discussed in Chapter 5) if your aims are not defined first in some form. Conversely without some evaluation of past exhibitions, it becomes harder to formulate aims for future exhibitions. Whilst a general aim is usually promotion and publicity, the actual content of the exhibition will form the basis of more specific aims and goals. It is likely that you will have to prioritise different aims for different exhibitions, as part of a general exhibition policy.

The Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD) sums up the human side of the library world by stating that 'our aim was to build on and maintain good relations with our users.'

To that end, perhaps the simplest way to determine the relevance of your aims to your target audience is to form a small focus group and ask them what they would like to gain from the exhibition experience.

AUDIENCE

Exhibitions are a way of communicating with your audience in a more general manner than is possible at the enquiry desk. Your audience can be broadly divided into two groups; those who would be in the library anyway, and those who will come, at least initially, to see your exhibition. For a small display of new acquisitions, your focus will be primarily your library users. The larger the exhibition the broader the scope of your intended audience.

The majority of case studies for this publication come from academic libraries with mainly student library users. Yet this population of students can be subdivided further to focus on specific groups of students, perhaps by course level or by subject topic. Bath University decided it needed to communicate with a specific group of users, so aimed to enhance the visual appeal of the library:

‘We had identified that Graphics students used the library less than our other Art and Design students, so we decided to produce an eye-catching display of unusual book bindings.’

In other cases, such as at the University of Westminster, the aim is to appeal to all library users by showcasing lesser-known areas of the library collection:

‘The Learning Resources Centre at the Harrow campus of the University supports staff and students from a wide range of subject areas, it is not solely an art and design resource. For this reason we try to develop exhibitions that will appeal to all library users, although often the visual qualities of the art and design material lend themselves better to display... The displays are intended as a point of interest, to show off objects or collections rather than to provide detailed information about them.’

Here the Learning Resources Centre underlines the point that displays and exhibitions are part of an ongoing dialogue with library users rather than an end in itself. As a starting point for discussion and development, they are invaluable for providing a strong visual connection to students. Additionally an institution’s staff should not be neglected as an audience, as they are often unaware of their own institutional resources. At the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design:

‘The aim of the exhibition is to make this material more widely known to the academic staff and to encourage them to think of ways that they can incorporate it into their teaching and research.’

In roles where academic liaison is an important part of the job, one picture (or book binding, or interesting artefact) can often take the place of a thousand words. This can have benefits for library staff later, since they often have to make decisions on what is relevant to students without being given the full picture by academic staff.

Yet is it too restrictive to focus only on your primary audience of library users? At Chelsea College of Art and Design its focus was sufficiently unusual to attract interest from the wider academic world:

‘As an example of practice based research connected with an AHRC funded research project, it generated particular interest among the art and design research community. The exhibition also attracted the attention of staff and students working in book arts or with artists’ books, both within and outside the institution involved.’

Not every library will have the space, time or inclination to achieve similar results, but any unique features of your collection are worth considering in a broader academic context.

Similarly at the University of Birmingham displaying the library collection outside the library buildings reached a much wider audience of the general exhibition-going public:

‘The Barber Fine Art Library and Special Collections benefit from the higher profile gained by having their holdings displayed in the prestigious setting of the Barber Institute and seen by members of the public who would not normally enter the libraries.’

Here both the location and the rarity value of the objects had a wide appeal putting the library collection on a par with any museum collection in terms of interest levels. While many library exhibitions may be as interesting, public perceptions of their accessibility when displayed within the library may unintentionally restrict your audience. There is a strong tradition of public access to museums and galleries. Libraries, especially in the academic sphere, are more associated in the public mind with guardianship and restrictions, however erroneous that may be.

The shorter an exhibition, the more focused on one audience you are likely to be. Once you have established who your intended audience is, it is much easier to decide on the structure and aims of your exhibition.

BENEFITS

If the aim of most exhibitions and displays is to publicise the library collection, one of the clearest benefits is to encourage greater use of that collection. This is most clearly shown through small displays of material which can be borrowed, as occurred at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design:

‘Resources used for this promotional display were borrowed leaving gaps in our display. John Ridgway commented “... well, that’s the whole point, what would be the point of a display of items you couldn’t take out on loan...”

This does, of course, necessitate a back-up group of items for display to replace those items borrowed. Larger displays may include a mix of reference items, artefacts and books for loan. Conversely, exhibitions may increase the amount of material in the library, as more publicity about the collection’s strengths may encourage people to donate items. This was the case for the University of Westminster’s archive:

‘At least one member of staff approached the archive with a bequest of material following the exhibition, so the exhibition had a positive impact in increasing awareness of the archive collection.’

A further benefit may be an increased demand for information skills training as London Metropolitan University discovered ‘a successful result is new/increased requests from staff and students for user education and introductions to using the library.’

While inevitably much of the focus on information skills training occurs at the beginning of the academic year, exhibitions can provide the impetus for users to re-evaluate their information needs – or to put it another way, they often don’t know they don’t know things until you tell them.

Many of the examples used discuss exhibitions of library materials, but, especially in art colleges, the library can be the venue for showcasing the work of others. At Cardiff University, for example, displaying student work within the library has the benefit of

making the students feel the library is their space, rather than something more institutional:

‘Winning competition entries were displayed in the Architecture Library for one year. While not constituting a formal exhibition, the display was intended to give a sense of ownership of space to the students.’

This also benefited all staff and users of the library, since it contributed to a more ‘visually appealing library environment’, underlining the aesthetic benefits of a well-designed exhibition for the library.

But what are the benefits for you as librarians? While you may feel you know your collections sufficiently to support your users, preparing an exhibition or display forces you to discover your collection’s strengths and weaknesses. London Metropolitan University found preparing for an exhibition was ‘a good motivating force for acquiring new materials, and developing the collection.’

For a member of staff at the Van Gogh Museum Library, the new experience of creating an exhibition also created a growth of professional skills:

‘For me as a librarian and the keeper of an important collection of nineteenth-century publications on art, organising this exhibition was an enriching experience... by acting more as curator and exploiting the possibilities of the collection.’

Similarly at the University of Birmingham the collaborative approach to exhibition creation, with students, librarians and gallery curators involved, is described as:

‘Very much a ‘win win’ opportunity.. valuable curatorial experience such as editing and writing catalogue entries and exploring publicity and funding issues. They benefit from working as a team, and gain valuable experience in time management and forward planning. The interactive and collaborative nature of the project also produces an enriching exchange of ideas on the topic of the exhibition.’

SUMMARY

Exhibitions can be created for:

- Specific groups of library users
- All library users
- Institutional staff
- Academic world
- General public

The main aims of exhibitions and displays are usually publicity and promotion - of the collection, of artefacts, of ideas and of research. Individual aims depend largely on the content of the exhibition.

The benefits of organising an exhibition or display can include:

- Greater use of the collection
- Rise in user enquiries and demand for user education/information skills training
- Higher profile of library in the institution
- Increased donations to the collection
- Increased visual appeal of the library
- Increased user comfort levels
- Growth of library staff's professional skills

CASE STUDY 1: National Art Library – small exhibitions in the library

by Elizabeth James, Documentation Manager.



The National Art Library (NAL) is a major public reference library, as well as being the Victoria and Albert Museum's curatorial department for the art, craft and design of the book. The library's strength lies in the range and depth of its holdings of documentary material concerning the fine and decorative arts of many countries and periods.

Books are included in many of the museum's permanent and temporary displays, and occasionally there are exhibitions and displays devoted wholly to aspects of the book (e.g. *70 years of Penguin design*, 2005; the *Saint John's Bible*, 2006; *Blood on Paper: the Artist and the Book*, 2008).

Included here are two examples of very small displays held in a space just outside the library entrance (known informally as The Library Landing). There are plans to expand the 'Library Landing' programme into three or four cases over the next couple of years.

The third example is not a case display of relatively 'special' material but an initiative taken by our Serials Librarian, to offer a changing thematic display of magazines and journals just inside the library near the door, as an attractor to browsing and to give people something to look at while they wait for their requested material to arrive - because the NAL is mainly a closed-access library.

Single-case, multi-object display outside Library entrance: 1

Why? The proposal came from an external organisation looking for a new venue for their small annual display. It was sufficiently relevant to our collections, and met an institutional objective to 'support the creative industries'.

Benefits? Agreement for this display motivated a new programme of small displays for the Library and opened a relationship for the library with a relevant creative constituency (bookbinders).

Single-case, multi-object display outside Library entrance: 2

Why? Something was needed that would fit well in the currently available display case and met the objective of using displays to highlight noteworthy parts of the collection, in this case a set of artists' books for which the NAL is the only UK location.

Located outside the Library entrance, the display was available to library users and also to other museum visitors (including outside of library opening hours). It was of particular interest to those interested in bookbinding.

Being a library in a museum, we have the luxury of working with wonderful specialist colleagues. A book conservator agrees the display methods, supports and installs and technical services procure cradles. The interpretation editor vets the text, the printers print it and technicians assist with opening and closing cases.

Benefits? It helps raise the profile of the library's collections and curatorial activities. The collection displays result in research and text that disseminate knowledge and can be re-used.

Display of magazines and journals

Why? There are four displays a year. Display 1 features new subscriptions from the previous 12 months whilst numbers 2 and 4 are topical, usually chosen to tie in with temporary displays and exhibitions in the Museum. Number 3 draws titles from the 'Serials Trawl', a programme of purchases of individual issues to highlight trends in magazine design.

The Library's stacks are closed to the public, therefore the only material directly accessible to visitors is the reference collection. Included in this is a selection of current periodicals, displayed on shelves in perspex folders. This space is limited, so the 'Focus on ...' periodicals displays were instigated as a very simple, rotating supplement to the usual core titles and draw readers' attention to the breadth of the collection.

Benefits? In addition to the stated goals, it is useful for consolidating the Serial Librarian's own knowledge of the collection and keeps collecting policy toward the front of her mind. Problems are largely confined to the shortage of her own inspiration and time.

The National Art Library also runs a 'Book of the Month' programme. This is usually a single item, in a very small case inside the Library, intended to alert our readers to the unseen breadth of our collections, and also to give staff the opportunity of a little display experience to learn the ropes. They are done to proper museum standards even though they are tiny. Since there is a cost-benefit question here the programme is being reviewed. If they can be put on the web additionally in future, it may seem more worthwhile.

Elizabeth James manages the cataloguing of the documentary and book collections of the National Art Library, now part of the Word & Image Department of the V&A. Her research interests include the history of books on the decorative arts, especially the publications of the V&A (her bibliography on this subject was awarded a Library Association Besterman Medal).

Chapter 2 – Planning your exhibition



Learning Journals display, 2005,
University for the Creative Arts, Maidstone campus

What are the benefits to planning your exhibition? Do librarians have the time to do this or can they work with other stakeholders? Who are your stakeholders? Students? Library staff? Gallery curators? Visitors? Researchers?

WHAT ARE YOU PROMOTING?

It is important to identify the reason you are doing the display or exhibition as this will undoubtedly inform the planning cycle. In an art and design college, for example, displays are often timed to coincide with various projects being undertaken by students. Once the project is over, the display may not be as useful. The timing of displays in this setting is therefore crucial to their success. At the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design they schedule promotional displays to tie in with major exhibitions in the UK:

‘In June 2007, BIAD Libraries created a promotional display to coincide with the exhibition at the Barbican Art Gallery, London. The Barbican Art Gallery staged *Panic Attack! Art in the Punk Years* to coincide with two 30 year anniversaries: the Queen’s Silver Jubilee and the release of the Sex Pistols irreverent album *God Save the Queen*. Reactions and responses were noticeable – resources used for this promotional display were all borrowed.’

In a museum or gallery setting, there may be different reasons for putting on an exhibition. At the National Art Library, where access to parts of the collection is limited, they decided to try and showcase items from their famous stack:

‘The Library’s stacks are closed to the public therefore the only material directly accessible to visitors is the reference collection. Our Serials Librarian came up with an initiative to offer a changing thematic display of magazines and journals just inside the library near the door, as an attractor to browsing and to give people something to look at while they wait for requested material to arrive.’

Fundamental to any planning of an exhibition or display is *concept* and *development*. This is natural territory to a curator or designer in a specialist museum or art gallery context. Unlike curators or designers, however, librarians are not in dedicated roles and are often having to juggle front line duties with other bibliographic aspects of their jobs. So quite often this process ends up being rather rushed. Marincola (2006) describes the initial concepts as being represented in a ‘napkin sketch’. During the concept and development stage, a large amount of research, extensive planning and editing should take place. At the University for the Creative Arts, this is explained more clearly:

‘For the Learning Journal Display we came up with this idea of a sketchbook, but could not represent this visually as it would end up being costly. We then decided to photocopy pages of famous sketchbooks and enlarge these for the display...we had these large pages draped on fishing lines from the ceiling ; it looked stunning and it cost very little...The students loved it.’

BEING ORGANISED

At Bath Spa University, the librarian encourages the use of a spreadsheet or diary to enable a rolling programme of exhibitions:

‘If you plan in advance you will have time to do necessary research, write accompanying documentation and signage and to arrange the display itself. Planning in advance also means that your display cases/areas will always be in use and changing (library users notice changes; they tend to walk straight past things that stay the same).’

At Chelsea College of Art and Design, the library keeps an exhibition schedule of all display cases and areas in the library to enable planning for exhibitions of library material as well as student proposals for work to be displayed in the library:

‘We have six display cases, a listening post and two LCD screens that can be used for showing video work. In addition we consider proposals involving any part of the library space and its fabric, including two outdoor terraces which are excellent spaces for large sculptural pieces. Using a planned schedule means that there is never an empty display case. The schedule is particularly useful at degree show time when the number of proposals usually increases. The schedule ensures that everything is on time and allows for alternative exhibitions in the event of unforeseen changes.’

Budget

Ensuring that you have a budget for displays is also important. The British Library, for example, may be able to afford a generous display budget, as it did in 2006 for the very successful Hans Christian Andersen display. However, the reality for most art and design libraries is not quite as grand. This does not mean however that you need do everything on a shoestring. You can create a business case for funding and either ask your own departments for a displays budget, or bid to external organisations like the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) or the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). An example of the latter approach has been used at the University for the Creative Arts, in an initiative called *To Hell with Culture*, an exhibition inspired by its

Herbert Read Archive at Canterbury. Initially the idea had been to host an exhibition in the library space to encourage greater use of this definitive collection of Read's work, but because of the specialised interest that such material might attract, the venture soon attracted the interest of the Galleries Manager at UCA, and the plan changed to a more ambitious exhibition in a dedicated gallery space. Such projects require much more planning and thinking and inevitably involve much larger budgets:

'.....we wanted to encourage a greater interaction with artists themselves, as Read had been such a strong voice in art education... so one idea was to commission artists to engage with the archive...we began to look into new funding streams in order to get this initiative off the ground...these pieces would be key showpieces in the exhibition.'

CHOOSING A TITLE

Thinking of an exhibition title is another key component and one which can develop as the planning process evolves, of course being mindful of copyright where applicable. According to Rowan Watson, Curator of the *Blood on Paper* exhibition at the National Art Library, titles should be: '...snappy and sum up the theme.' Or you might take comfort from the words of Henry Ward Beecher (1851) who said 'words are pegs to hang ideas on.'

If you turn to the advertising industry here, you should start learning the 'art of looking sideways'. Instead of just having the words 'Learning Journals' on a display, you could think imaginatively and replace it with something like 'creative alchemy'. For 'self portrait', you could change the title to *Me, myself and I*, a De La Soul song, but definitely more appealing than the worthy (but dull) self portrait title. Both examples illustrate the idea of attracting your audience and drawing them in to the display area.

Exercise: See if you can come up with a snappy alternative title for these:

Artists' Books

.....

Architecture week

.....

Video art

.....

Walter Crane

.....

Rare Books

.....

Anarchist poetry

.....

TO ARCHIVE OR NOT TO ARCHIVE

Lastly there is the archiving of the material you want to use in the exhibition or display. At the University for the Creative Arts, images are taken of all the displays, to use for future reference and to incorporate into library promotional literature. If you are going to showcase student work, both Bath Spa University and Chelsea College of Art and Design get students to sign a disclaimer, granting permission to use the images and to safeguard against any loss or damage to the art works. At Chelsea, they explain this:

‘Documentation of the exhibitions means our activity within the college as a site for exhibiting is recorded and does not go unnoticed. The archive of proposal forms and collection of photographs of exhibitions and events is a useful record for library staff to see what has been exhibited. This feeds back into our exhibition planning so that there is always variety....’

If you are working in a project team for an exhibition, you can also use Web 2.0 tools to archive your planning and research. An example of this, also at the University for the Creative Arts is the *To Hell with Culture* blog (see *illustration.*), which houses all the research for the Herbert Read Exhibition and is being used to shape the planning and design of the actual exhibition scheduled for 2010. The advantage of using a medium like this is that it allows extra functionality with tools like RSS feeds, picture galleries and ready made categories and links. Thus you can start to see the display or exhibition taking shape visually.



Herbert Read blog *To Hell with Culture* (<http://tohellwithculture.wordpress.com/>)

SUMMARY

- Decide why you want to do the display or exhibition. Don't just shove a few books in a display case and hope that the audience understands your intention.
- It is generally seen as a good idea to book spaces and have a rolling programme of displays/exhibitions.
- Try and find time to visualise how you think the display or exhibition could look. Draw out a 'napkin sketch'.
- Try and get a displays budget so that you can buy props and materials. If you want to think bigger, see if you can get external funding to perhaps employ an artist in residence or commission a piece of work.
- Always choose a snappy title – the key is to engage the audience not put them off.

CASE STUDY 2: Creating exhibitions and displays at the University of Westminster

by Hazel Grainger, Academic Liaison Librarian (Art & Design)

The Learning Resources Centre (LRC) at the Harrow campus of the University supports students and staff from a wide range of subject areas and is not solely an art and design resource. For this reason we try to develop exhibitions that will appeal to all library users, although often the visual qualities of art and design material lend themselves better to display. In the past the items displayed have been from the lesser known areas of the library collections (e.g. Artists' books), but we are now broadening our sources to try and incorporate different aspects of the University. The displays are intended as a point of interest, to show off objects or collections rather than to provide detailed information about them.

In Spring 2007 it was agreed by library and archive staff to exhibit some artefacts from the University Archive in the LRC during the first few weeks of the academic year, timed to coincide with the arrival of new students. The following June there was a major fire on campus that destroyed much of the Art and Design school. The atmosphere was greatly altered as staff came to terms with what had been lost and worked to try and prepare new resources for the upcoming term. Following this the decision was made that it would be appropriate to focus the exhibition on Harrow material, to show a little of the past and 'character' of the campus.

There were two meetings during the summer vacation to view and select material from the Archive. The final choice included aerial photographs of the campus at various stages of its development, private view invitations, degree show brochures, photographs of the Queen formally opening the LRC, and some of students working in the studios and classrooms. Other materials were prospectuses from the different stages of the University's life as a group of technical colleges and polytechnic and magazines self-published by past alumni in their student days.



University of Westminster display case

The display area within the building is located just inside the entrance, near a casual group seating area, and comprises two full height glass sided lockable display cases, each with 3 glass shelves. For the Harrow Archive display, perspex book stands and cubes were used as props to create volume. An A4 sign with the exhibition title and contact details was included, but individual items were not labelled. There was no display lighting as there were no nearby power sources, and there was a lot of natural light so the delicate nature of some items meant the exhibition ran for a few weeks only. It was publicised to staff across the campus via a bulk email, and was a designated place for students to gather when arriving for library inductions. There was no formal route for feedback, but comments received from staff and students were positive, and the number of people who took an interest in the display was encouraging. At least one member of staff approached the Archive with a bequest of material following the exhibition, so the exhibition had a positive impact in increasing awareness of the archive collection.

*Hazel Grainger
Academic Liaison Librarian (Art & Design)
University of Westminster*

Chapter 3 – Exhibition design

Exhibition design should be informative, educational and entertaining, highlighting attractions to new and existing audiences. In libraries, you are not working with a blank canvas. There are the constraints of existing book stock, layout and often limitations of budget. There are also the curatorial and design elements to consider. Venturing into the world of exhibition design for libraries within art institutions brings with it an expectation that the objects displayed will have gone through some curatorial design process. As a consequence, librarians often become designers of an exhibition or display by default. This is not a natural role for many, although it can lead to some rewarding new partnerships with artists and curators within your own institutions. Working within creative environments you may also learn a lot from the world of visual merchandising (aka window dressing), techniques more at home in the retail environment. This chapter offers some tips and advice from those librarians who have ventured into these areas.

RESEARCH

Do some background research for your display or exhibition as a way of getting an understanding of the books/artefacts or ephemera you want to display. This research should be ongoing and will inform the design you end up with and will draw in your audience. A good example of this is the preparation undertaken for the Herbert Read Exhibition at the University for the Creative Arts, scheduled for 2010. Each member of the curatorial team was commissioned to look at an aspect of Herbert Read's life – the key themes selected were anarchy, poetry, art education and art criticism. This research, which is archived in the Herbert Read blog,¹ will then go on to shape the exhibition and the way that the artefacts and books will be displayed to the audience.

Anita Vriend at the Van Gogh Museum describes here how her research informed the choice of props for the *Treasure from the library* exhibition, explaining how the items displayed related to the changes in art in the nineteenth century:

¹ <http://tohellwithculture.wordpress.com/>

‘The assortment of artists’ materials increased greatly in the course of the nineteenth century, partly as a result of painting *en plein air*. This development was demonstrated by displaying old manufacturers’ catalogues – containing paint samples and illustrations of portable easels, paint-boxes, tubes of paint and brushes – which were some of the most eye-catching volumes in the exhibition.’

TELLING A STORY

The storyline can act as a blueprint for your exhibition or display. Creating a storyline involves several elements and according to Dean (1996) should consist of:

- ⇒ a *narrative document* – usually includes information about the exhibition such as knowledge of collections, object provenance and any other identified resources.
- ⇒ an *outline of the exhibition* – this will list the major topics and sub-topics contained in the exhibition theme. Storyboards may well be helpful here.
- ⇒ a *list of titles, sub-titles and text* – choose a title for the exhibition or display. This can set the tone and act as a curiosity ‘hook’. Sub-title texts are rather like newspaper headlines, guiding the visitor through the flow of information and relationships between objects. Label texts give the collection object a voice and should be presented in plain and concise language.
- ⇒ a *list of collection objects* – carefully coordinated with the development of the narrative and outline (above). At this point, the designer’s main function begins. Armed with all the information above, s/he will be able to configure the library/gallery space to maximise the objects and educational objectives of the exhibition or display.

If you just throw a pile of books in a display cabinet without any contextual information or any kind of inter relationship it will not attract your audience. Anita Vriend from the Van Gogh Museum articulates this very well in her dialogue on the *Treasures from the library* exhibition:

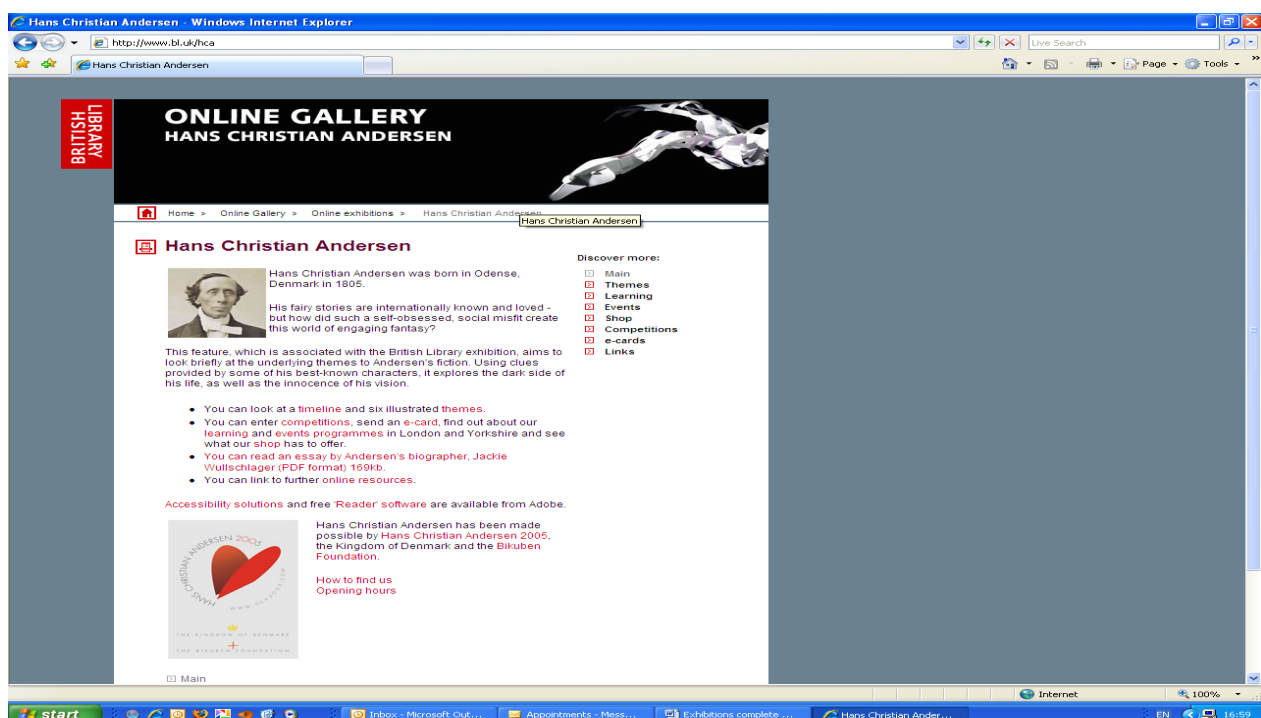
‘It was important to me that the selection should tell the story I had in mind. Visual attractiveness was a key criterion in my choice of books, but I also included un-illustrated material that was interesting for its content alone.’

NARRATIVE

What is the message you wish to convey to your audience? The message becomes a story when it is given a narrative thread with a clear beginning, middle and end. Here, in a review of the *Blood on Paper* exhibition Charles Darwent (2008) illustrates this point:

‘This means the 60 art books in *Blood on Paper* are not the simple homage of one creative form to another you might have thought. All kinds of struggles are going on in the V&A's show, between seeing and reading, intuiting and understanding, between literature and art..’²

This narrative thread can be made more transparent if you have time to develop an online exhibition space. That way the audience can engage with selected areas at their own pace and perhaps in more detail. A good example of this was the Hans Christian Anderson exhibition held at the British Library in 2005 (see below).



Hans Christian Anderson Online Exhibition space, British Library, 2005

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/blood-on-paper-the-art-of-the-book-va-london-820650.html>

NARRATOR

This is what drives the story forward. The narrator can be created using any number of mediums, such as text, graphics, or technology. If we think of text, we may want to think about the importance of labelling or stating the work displayed. As Lorenc (2007) points out:

‘Labels speak to the curator, whose job it is to articulate the reason for an exhibition. When curators don’t use labels, or when the labels are badly written, it may indicate the show was vaguely conceived from the start.’

Labels should explain, expound and explore different aspects of the exhibition or display. Dean (1996) writes:

‘It is essential that textual materials be well designed and implemented with just as much attention applied to detail and quality as that afforded to the other design elements.’

Mention should be made here about accessibility. The whole point of good exhibition design is about improving the quality of the exhibition experience for all your audience. There are some very useful guidelines, for example on the type of text and background to use for dyslexic viewers. Dean (1996) refers to the idea of ‘wayfinders’ which should be clear and highly visible textual information to orientate your audience to your display or exhibition. An example of this at the University for the Creative Arts was the use of a ‘why not follow this line’ arrow on the library floor, which guided the viewer to a display of artists’ books and other ephemera. If budgets allow, he also suggests using audio devices, high-contrast detailed photographs, close-captioned videos, interactive devices, which all help to enrich the learning experience:

‘Writing text for an exhibition is not as simple as telling the visitor everything you know about a subject. The objects in the exhibition are the primary focus of attention. The text that accompanies and explains them must answer questions posed by people viewing the objects.’

Quite often library displays just focus on the book stock and do not incorporate other media to boost the 'experience' for the audience. At the University for the Creative Arts, for example, displays often include moving images or audio work:

'On a recent display on Concrete Poetry, we created a listening booth for students to check out Kurt Schwitters poetry, while *Der Lauf der Dinge* (the way of things) played silently on a loop...'

PATH

This is what gives the story its structure. This is about organising the space into a sequence to help your audience experience the exhibition – it can be arranged around a timeline, theme or hierarchy. In order to engage the visitor, you might also want to think about building up to the story and think about ways to reveal things step by step, rather than showing everything all at once. David Pulford at the University of Birmingham thinks juxtapositions are important here:

'...aim for quality rather than quantity, as repetition would be boring...If there are interesting bindings, they could be included in their own right. You might consider, for example, placing a modern travel book next to an 18th century one to show how things are changed.'

This was particularly the case with the *Blood on Paper: Artists and Books* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2006. The exhibition, which ranged from Matisse's *Jazz* and Picasso's *Deux Contes*, both from 1947, to *The Secret Life of Plants*, (made especially for the show by Anselm Kiefer), did not present a chronological display of books. Instead books were treated as objects and placed to establish their unique visual qualities and resonate with their neighbours. These interesting juxtapositions made for a remarkable exhibition. Even the catalogue, which came in the form of a box catalogue, proved informative and fun to handle. As Marion Arnold (2009), writes in her review of the exhibition:

‘As with books, one goes back and forth, dips in and out of different booklets, and is beguiled by the creativity apparent in the artists’ books and by the imaginative design and seductive imagery in the box.’

Alternatively you may want to think more experientially. At the University for the Creative Arts:

‘The Foundation students were doing a Self Portrait unit. The Library was asked to showcase a few books on the subject...the focal point of the exhibition was the oval mirror in front of which students were encouraged to draw themselves...the final pieces were displayed on a ‘washing line’ in front of the display...passers by the display felt compelled to stop and look...’

CONTEXT

An exhibition does not stand in a void. How the audience approaches and engages with the exhibition is as important as the exhibition itself. Here this is explained well by Michael Glover, the Times reviewer of the *Blood on Paper* exhibition:

‘The single greatest frustration about this show is that almost all these open books are in vitrines, and you can see only one spread. Most of what each artist has done, all that colourful invention, is lost to you, behind closed pages. Luckily, Watson gives me a way out. “Well, a good half of the artists’ books displayed in this show are owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum. And if you go up to the library you can ask to see them”.’

Encouraging active participation by your audience can be very rewarding, particularly when opportunities arise to use the library as a display space, at degree show time. Here, Emily Glancy from Chelsea College of Art and Design explains:

‘One proposal that was a particular success was a collaborative piece of work by BA Fine Art student Claire Mookerjee called the *Library Exhibition Terminal*. Claire made a display cabinet with interchangeable features with an accompanying book trolley and advertised for six Chelsea students and staff to

make work that could be exhibited on or in the cabinet. The book trolley provided the participants with reference texts and material used for research and so suggest to others certain ways of navigating the library space.'

At Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, they created a display around the national *Big Draw* event called *Tempting and Moorish*:

'The display focused on the promotion of our Alhambra Collection and architectural resources....People were invited to be inspired, to allow the past to inform designs for the future, to make use of our rich resources and of a PC to record their drawings...the event was free and listed on the *Big Draw* website.'

THE LIBRARY AS EXHIBITION SPACE

The idea of using the library as an exhibition space has been mentioned in a number of the case studies received. At Chelsea College of Art and Design, where they encourage an active display of student work by means of an exhibition proposal, the librarian explains the type of work that has been displayed:

'These have been wide-ranging; there have been a number of exhibitions of students artists' books and multiples; interactive and collaborative pieces that respond to the fabric and day to day workings of the library; a performance of screaming ; bookshelves wrapped in sheets and a garden grown on the library terrace...'

For those of you, who may be involved in working groups on creating new builds or more innovative learning spaces, it offers a great opportunity to incorporate exhibition spaces within the library. As well as the examples given by Chelsea, there are emerging examples of this: the Saltire Centre ³at Glasgow Caledonian University and the British Library⁴ exhibition space.

³ <http://www.gcal.ac.uk/thesaltirecentre/building/artists.html>

⁴ <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/>

PROPS AND MATERIALS

The Royal College of Art Library believes the way to a good exhibition is to include objects other than books and has had knitted artwork, vinyls, illustrations, wool and even ceramic cups. These 'props' can attract the audience and draw them in to explore the display. At the London College of Fashion, one member of library staff has a background in retail and comments on the usual lack of appeal to a purely text based display:

'So much of the material I see is text (typed and written) which doesn't make for alluring displays, even if the content itself is quite interesting.'

She then goes on to explain 'I think of displays in terms of how I would arrange merchandise from when I worked in retail, keeping things clean and simple...'

If you do borrow some of these techniques from retail, you need to think about *how* you display the books/artefacts you are showcasing. You can use a variety of materials here - Perspex book supports, polyboard, dedicated showcases, fishing line, textiles, boards, etc. There is a useful list of suppliers and products in this area in the appendices.

SUMMARY

- Do background research for an exhibition. It is so important to know about your subject in order to be able to reveal sentient and pertinent exhibits and explanations to tell your story.
- Good design will make your exhibition display more effective by:
 - making it stand out from the competition
 - ensuring its appropriateness to the audience
 - making the best use of the available space.
- Keep things clean and simple; think like a retailer.
- Create focal points and think about juxtapositions.
- Gen up on some curatorial speak. A recent article in the Times describes the origin and role of the curator:

‘The word “curate” comes from the Latin, curare, to take care, and I think that is an important notion. A curator should be someone who builds bridges between people and art, and that can be done in many different ways.’

- Label the books/artefacts being displayed, but do not overdo the information.
- Break up the display by using props and materials.
- Think of ways for the audience to interact with the display
- Ensure the display is somewhere noticeable and well lit, in order to present the work in a deliberate exhibition space.

CASE STUDY 3: Perversity, periodicals and peregrinations: a series of exhibitions in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts

by David Pulford, Barber Fine Art Librarian

This case study offers an exciting twist to the theme of exhibitions in art libraries, as it involves the display of art library materials in an art gallery through partnership between History of Art Postgraduate students, librarians, curators and conservators. The case study is edited from contributions provided by staff and students from each cohort.

Since 2006 postgraduate students in the University of Birmingham's History of Art Department have had the opportunity to work with librarians from the Barber Fine Art Library and the University Special Collections and with curators from the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in mounting a series of annual exhibitions:

Publicity and Perversity: the English satirical print 1750-1950

6 – 15 June 2008

Art and the Periodical: an exhibition of Modern Magazines

8 - 13 June 2007

Travel by the Book: Eighteenth-Century Illustrated Travel Writing

8 - 13 June 2006

The exhibitions have included a mixture of books and periodicals from the library collections and works on paper from the Barber Institute Collection. The first exhibition in the series *Art and Migration: Art Works by Refugee Artists from Nazi Germany in Britain* 11 July - 15 July 2005, which coincided with an *International Conference Exile and Patronage* 11-13 July 2005, did not involve the libraries.

The exhibitions are student-led and library involvement is at the request of the students who have already determined their broad theme. Librarians in Special Collections research the theme within the collections to provide a full range of relevant material and a more specific focus arises through perusal of the material and group discussion at sessions within Special Collections.

Problems can arise if some individuals are more enthusiastic than others or if members of the teams have very different ideas.

Funding over the years has come from the University of Birmingham Graduate School, the Roberts Fund, the Paul Mellon Centre, Junction 49 Fund (administered by the Guild of Students), the Heritage Collaborative Research Network and some from the History of Art Department. The funding available has depended to some extent on the focus of each exhibition.

The exhibitions are held in a teaching room on the ground floor of the Barber Institute, which limits the time the exhibition can be held. Design of each exhibition is influenced by the need to protect fragile exhibits, the desire to make the exhibition space (normally used as a seminar room) look more attractive and by the size of the cabinets. New cabinets have recently been purchased with money raised in response to the programme of exhibitions.

In at least one year the planning of workshops was a condition of funding. Although the workshops have not been well attended, there is great potential in developing a future programme of seminars and workshops to support the exhibitions to achieve more involvement both within the Art History department and also within other relevant disciplines on campus, such as History and English.

The exhibitions have benefited from being featured in the Barber Institute's regular publicity literature and they have also been advertised in local papers, such as the Birmingham Post, the Metro and in local events magazines. Leaflets were distributed across various locations in Birmingham, posters were hung around campus, and the exhibition featured on the Special Collections website.

The success of the exhibitions is evaluated by sales of exhibition publications, recorded numbers of visitors and the responses of people invited to the Private View.

The exhibitions are very much a 'win win' opportunity. Each cohort of students gains valuable curatorial experience, such as editing and writing catalogue entries and exploring publicity and funding issues. They benefit from working as a team, and gain

valuable experience in time management and forward planning. The interactive and collaborative nature of the project also produces an enriching exchange of ideas on the topic of the exhibition.

The Barber Fine Art Library and Special Collections benefit from the higher profile gained by having their holdings displayed in the prestigious setting of the Barber Institute and by being seen by members of the public who would not normally enter the libraries.

As a result of this 'cross-sectoral' partnership between students, librarians and gallery curators the History of Art Department has gained considerable expertise in obtaining funding for research and teaching projects.

*David Pulford
Barber Fine Art Library
University of Birmingham
Sept 2008*

Chapter 4 – Promoting your exhibition

The planning has been done, everything has been carefully displayed, and now the curtain goes up – so how do you get your audience to notice all your hard work?

PUTTING THE WORD OUT

The first step is to use your existing communications routes – how do you normally communicate with library users? Posters within the library (as bright and colourful as possible) or on designated library notice boards within your institution are a good first step. This could be an interesting extra role for a member of library staff with a flair for design. Alternatively, there may be colleagues outside the library but within the same institution whose expertise you can use. At the University of Cardiff 'library colleagues with design, marketing and PR experience facilitated the design and printing of A1 posters.'

Also popular are fliers and leaflets which can be distributed within the library, within your institution or round the local area, depending on the scale of your exhibition.

It is now common to offer an email alert to all library users, using the existing library communication systems. Increasingly students could also receive this on mobile devices like phones and PDAs. While you can't go into much detail on a mobile text alert, it makes a connection that can be explored at the user's convenience. It can also be more than a simple what/when/where announcement – how about an interesting fact of the day culled from your exhibition? London Metropolitan University's exhibition promotional materials included 'emails, posters, webpage [and] message of the day.'

The library website has a crucial role to play in promoting your exhibition. Here you can provide more text, more visual images and more supplementary material. The drawback for initially promoting your exhibition is that users are less likely to check this regularly. Increasingly libraries are using social networking tools to communicate. If your users have a presence on Facebook, it makes sense to go where they are rather than expecting them to come to you.

Of course, with many demands on their attention, it's still easy for your users to miss your exhibition. To draw a parallel with the world of property, physical location can be of key importance here. Much depends on the layout of your exhibition space as the University of Westminster found. It raised the profile of its exhibition by making it the 'designated place for students to gather when arriving for library inductions.' This is perhaps more applicable to smaller displays, which may be located close to enquiry and issue desks, and need less space overall.

These are fairly informal ways to communicate, but exhibitions can also be advertised through institutional routes, both print and electronic. Chelsea College of Art and Design 'advertised the exhibition in university forums, including *Arts London e-briefing*, the main UAL news publication.'

Institutional publications can secure a wider readership than advertising produced purely through the library and may encourage greater liaison opportunities in the planning of future exhibitions. How you advertise is also important in raising the profile of your library as being a proactive and innovative resource. At Cardiff University exhibition of student drawings, close liaison with relevant departments had the result that:

'Winners were photographed receiving their prizes by a colleague from the University's in-house photographic team. This photograph, plus a scan of the winner's drawing, some accompanying text and links to sponsors' websites, was posted on the Library's and the Welsh School of Architecture's news pages.'

This was particularly significant at the University of Birmingham, which held its exhibition within the Barber Institute and was therefore included in the Barber Institute's own publicity:

'The exhibitions have benefited from featuring in the Barber Institute's regular publicity literature and they have also been advertised in local papers, such as the Birmingham Post, the Metro and in local events magazines.'

To attract external interest in local papers and arts magazines, it is useful to send out press releases about your exhibition, particularly handy if the theme of your exhibition

ties in with a topical event or promotion. Use the institution's own Press department if available. Press releases should be succinct and easily digestible – if they are successful, you will be able to elaborate at a later date.

In some cases, such as the Van Gogh Museum's Library, there may already be departments with responsibilities for publicity, who will recognise opportunities for linking with external campaigns:

'The exhibition was publicised in various ways: through the usual channels, that is to say, the museum's Department of Publicity and PR and the campaign to promote Amsterdam as World Book Capital of 2008. Collaborating with the World Book Capital organisation greatly increased the range of our publicity.'

External professional organisations can also be an important source of publicity through conventional advertising and reviews, and also through notices and discussion lists. For the art librarian, the obvious choice is ARLIS/UK & Ireland, but there are many other library and archive organisations which could be utilised. This was an avenue used by the Van Gogh Museum library:

'Colleagues in the library sector were informed of the exhibition through the programmes of their professional organisations and by means of notices posted on various discussion platforms.'

Equally there are many specialist art organisations that both library and institutional staff could use, depending on the content of the exhibition. While not all library staff will be involved in arranging an exhibition, it is prudent to include all front-line staff in publicising it. While they may not have in-depth knowledge of the exhibition's content, they should be able to direct queries to the appropriate staff member and may have useful contacts.

Finally, but just as importantly, how do your users communicate with each other? Word-of-mouth can be important for spreading good (or bad) reviews. Nowadays this can mean both face to face and in online discussion groups. Holding focus groups during the planning stages may alert you to any preconceptions your visitors hold

otherwise you may only hear why your exhibition made little impact at the evaluation stage.

HANDLISTS AND GUIDES

In addition to general publicity detailing what, where, when and the general theme of your exhibition, more detailed guides can also be used both to promote your exhibition to users and to give them more background information. Bath Spa University suggests:

‘Try to tie the exhibition in to your resources (e.g. provide a booklist of related material). This is good publicity for the collection.’

Booklists can take a variety of forms. Simplest is a list of items on display, but why not also consider a bibliography of related texts, maybe annotated by library staff, or a glossary of useful terminology? For larger exhibitions it may be worth outsourcing their design, as the University of Birmingham did, in order to present a professional image:

‘Any publicity materials and handlists need to be ready in good time for printing and distribution. The same applies here in terms of accessible communication. The quality you’re seeking will determine the cost. The events leaflets of the *Illuminating Faith* project were designed by a graphic artist so we incurred additional costs, which I think were worth it, as they were very attractive.’

Birmingham Institute of Art and Design promoted London Fashion Week by providing information packs to support their display. These contained ‘fashion resources – promoted sources we subscribe to and our Fashion subject guide.’ This demonstrates how a new context can increase the take-up of existing promotional material.

As well as being distributed in print within the exhibition, booklists and guides can be sent by email to institutional staff, both to publicise your resources and allow them to refer back to the exhibition within their own teaching.

For larger exhibitions, an exhibition catalogue may be produced, providing information both on all the individual objects displayed and the more thematic material. If much of

the material in your exhibition is text, consider simplifying the display and providing the text in a handout. As Melinda Davies remarks 'text... doesn't make for alluring displays, even if the content itself was quite interesting.'

THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Earlier there was a brief mention of the role of the library's webpages in promoting your exhibition, with the conclusion that people have to visit it before it can be used as a tool for promotion. However it has a much more significant role in supporting and extending your exhibition online. This can range from online versions of exhibition texts and images of objects to more interactive elements such as surveys and quizzes. The websites of museums and art galleries are good models in this respect. Web 2.0 facilities like Flickr can also be used to create a virtual exhibition.

However, less labour intensive benefits of the web extend far beyond the library webpage, through links and online discussion. At Chelsea College of Art and Design 'websites related to the research project that the artist was affiliated to not only advertised the exhibition but offered images of the work and the video.'

Possible links include arts organisations, topical websites, artists and other professional organisations.

PROMOTIONAL EVENTS

Events run in conjunction with your exhibition are a good method of creating interest and building support among potential visitors. Launch events, receptions or private views need not be reserved for big exhibitions but can be as simple as inviting academic staff to a display of new acquisitions. For larger events, it may be possible to secure sponsorship to assist with costs.

Visitors may not be able to take in every facet of your exhibition when they visit. Guided tours allow library staff to present a personal interpretation of the exhibition. At the Van Gogh Museum exhibition 'gallery tours attracted a mixed company of museum-goers and (art) book enthusiasts.'

For a more focused group, such as conference delegates, a more specialised thematic tour might be appropriate. Under supervision there is also the option of allowing a more interactive approach, if items are not too delicate and allowing them to handle certain objects.

Workshops, lectures and seminars related to the exhibition can be productive, especially if organised in liaison with other departments so that there is less pressure on library staff. At the University of Birmingham:

‘In at least one year the planning of workshops was a condition of funding. Although the workshops have not been well attended, there is great potential in developing a future programme of seminars and workshops to support the exhibitions to achieve more involvement both within the Art History department and other relevant disciplines on campus, such as History and English.’

This illustrates that events designed to promote your exhibition will themselves need their own publicity in order to be successful. Competitions and prize draws are another method of attracting attention. At the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, a £20 MovieMail voucher and a DVD player were the first prizes in a draw to publicise the library’s London Fashion Week events:

‘I duly blu-tacked the prize result to a Victoria Street library wall. When the student who had won first prize came in, and having used the place, was eventually walking out of the library, I asked her if she had seen her name on the wall, and she hadn’t. But she was overjoyed to discover she had won, and all her friends nearby were supportive and congratulated her. Since I had helped her by encouraging her a week earlier to complete a draw ticket, I felt pleased myself that someone in one of the smaller libraries had struck lucky.’

Again, sponsorship may make prizes of this kind possible, although Cardiff University found that organising this for their architectural drawing competition did require a great deal of staff time:

‘Whilst ultimately productive, with Pennies from Heaven, Donhead Publishing and Thames and Hudson generously supplying books, the process of identifying suitable publishers, obtaining their support and ensuring they were updated about the competition developments was time-consuming.’

The museum and gallery worlds provide many more examples of promotional events, all of which can be adapted depending on your target audience and the scale of your exhibition. Some ideas to consider are worksheets, theatrical and music performances, themed film showings and handicraft workshops inspired by the exhibition – the only limits are your imagination.

SUMMARY

- Advertise previous and up and coming shows to heighten interest in the space and to illustrate how the space has been used previously.
- Never leave the space empty, as this can put off potential exhibitors. Always have something on display in quiet times e.g. new acquisitions, items from the special collections etc.
- Advertise the space as a bookable space.
- Have a waiting list so that if an artist pulls out you can display something else.

Methods of communicating with potential visitors include:

- Posters
- Handouts/fliers
- Email/mobile phone alerts
- Library website
- Social networking tools
- Highly visible location
- Institutional publications
- Local papers
- Professional journals
- Discussion lists
- Word-of-mouth

Supplementary material available at the exhibition can include a list of items on display, booklists drawn from the library collection, glossaries of terminology, interpretative guides and full exhibition catalogues.

Everything available in print can be also accessed virtually.

- Launch events
- Receptions
- Private views
- Gallery tours
- Worksheets
- Workshops
- Lectures
- Seminars
- Competitions
- Prize draws
- Performances
- Films
- Demonstrations
- Craft worksho

CASE STUDY 4: Student Proposals at Chelsea College of Art and Design Library

By Emily Glancy, Assistant Collection Development Librarian

Library staff organise regular exhibitions of library material as part of the ongoing promotion of collections at Chelsea College of Art and Design Library. Aside from these traditional library exhibitions, the library users are encouraged to see the library as an extension of the studio; a site to engage with, perform in, or rearrange. Installations, displays and actions in the library space are actively welcomed by the library staff. These are arranged by the submission of exhibition proposals. These have been wide-ranging, including a number of exhibitions of students' artists' books and multiples; interactive and collaborative pieces that respond to the fabric and day to day workings of the library; a performance of screaming; bookshelves wrapped in sheets and a garden grown on the library terrace. The exhibitions proposals are open to all students from Foundation level to PhD. Members of university staff are also encouraged to use the library for exhibitions.

There is a proposal form for students to fill in that asks for details of the nature of the proposed work and the dates and duration of the exhibition. Further information such as location within the library space, provision of accompanying documentation, and special requirements or equipment needed are all addressed on the proposal form. An important aspect of the proposal form is that the student signs a disclaimer that allows the library to use images of the exhibition in future publications, which is very useful in terms of promoting the library and demonstrating its involvement with students beyond simply being a place of research activity.

The library keeps an exhibitions schedule of all the display cases and areas in the library to enable planning for exhibitions of library material as well as the student proposals. We have six display cases, a listening post and two LCD

screens that can be used for showing video work. In addition, we consider proposals involving any part of the library space and its fabric, including two outdoor terraces which are excellent spaces for large sculptural pieces. Using a planned schedule means that there is never an empty display case. The schedule is particularly useful at degree show time when the number of proposals usually increases. The schedule ensures that everything runs on time and allows for alternative exhibitions in the event of unforeseen changes.

When a proposal form is submitted the details are discussed between the student and library staff. In most cases it is possible to accommodate an exhibition. Installation and take-down dates are agreed and where necessary, the Librarian will supervise this (e.g. the unlocking of display cases or uploading of files to an LCD screen). Very few proposals are turned down. Those that have been un-realised have tended to involve equipment or arrangements that compromise health and safety regulations (for example the student who wanted to exhibit work based on the film *Fahrenheit 451*).

Copies of the proposal forms are archived with photographs of the installations, performances and events. Students who have produced artists' books or multiples for display in the library often donate their work to the library at the end of their exhibition. In this way, the library benefits twofold; raising its profile in an alternative way amongst the user group and enhancing its Special Collections by having a record of current student practice. This in turn feeds into the User Education sessions held throughout the year, as students are always keen to see what their contemporaries have produced.

One proposal that was particularly successful was a collaborative piece of work by BA Fine Art student Claire Mookerjee called the *Library Exhibition Terminal*. Claire made a display cabinet with interchangeable features with an accompanying book trolley and advertised for six Chelsea students and staff to make work that could be exhibited on or in the cabinet. The book trolley provided the participants with reference texts and material used for research and to suggest to others certain ways of navigating the library space. The exhibition had a private view event during library opening hours and

attracted interest from all library visitors. It was so successful that Claire used the exhibition terminal for her final degree show and invited a further six people to collaborate.

The most important aspects of the student proposal system at Chelsea are:

- Planning
- Documentation
- Promotion

The planning of the exhibitions is vital. This starts from the moment a student hands in a completed proposal form. Maintaining an up to date schedule of exhibitions makes the planning process straightforward. Documentation of the exhibitions means our activity within the college as a site for exhibiting is recorded and doesn't go unnoticed. The archive of proposal forms and collection of photographs of exhibitions and events is a useful record for library staff to see what has been exhibited. This feeds back into our exhibition planning so that there is always variety within our own exhibitions of library material. The documentation goes hand-in-hand with promotion. We promote the current and forthcoming exhibitions and are able to use the documentation to promote the library to new students at the beginning of their course so that from the outset the library is seen as being more than a room full of books.

*Emily Glancy
Assistant Collection Development Librarian
Chelsea College of Art and Design Library*

Chapter 5 - Evaluating your exhibition

How do you evaluate the success of a library exhibition? While some of your audience may have avidly read every detail, others will drift through with no more than a casual glance. How do you decide whether all your work was worth it?

WHY EVALUATE?

The benefits of evaluating your work are threefold:

- Without some evaluation, however informal, you will be unable to determine how well your exhibition communicates with your audience.
- Effective exhibitions will have taken a great deal of staff time and money to plan, set-up and promote. Evaluation is important as a means of justifying that time and money to colleagues and superiors.
- Evaluation, especially when undertaken through a series of exhibitions, can improve you and your staff's performance the next time you create an exhibition and can contribute to their continuing professional development.

However there are many difficulties in providing effective evaluation, the foremost of which being how do you begin, as Bath Spa University discovered 'there were no difficulties in creating it but, after that, the problem of evaluation became apparent.'

WHAT WERE YOUR AIMS?

It is hard to decide whether an exhibition has been a success if the aims you hoped to achieve have not been clearly formulated in advance, as discussed

in Chapter 1. While the content and focus of your exhibition should provide you with more specific aims, some general aims could be:

- Increase borrowing/use of collection
- Educate users
- Build relationship with users
- Raise profile within institution
- Raise institutional awareness

For example, one of Wimbledon College of Art's main aims was that it 'validates that the library is supporting creative learning and strengthens the link between research and practice.'

Once aims have been established, they should be prioritised, which both aids the planning process and establishes the priorities for evaluation. Aims are not necessarily static. They should be reviewed during the exhibition to take advantage of the unexpected.

Certain aims, such as to increase borrowing or the number of visitors to Special Collections, are purely quantitative and are therefore easier to evaluate. If the number of books borrowed or appointments made rises, you can feel your exhibition has been a success. However, you should also take into account any other factors that may have influenced the result – have the students in an academic library, for example, reached the part of their course where they engage in research projects, and would the rise have occurred anyway?

Other aims, such as building relationships with users, can only be determined by more qualitative anecdotal evaluation, which, though more meaningful, can be harder to obtain. Again, your exhibition will only be part of the long term relationship and many other factors will affect it. Another problem is that evaluation normally only looks at immediate reactions to your exhibition. If any visitor realises how useful it was three months later, this won't be recorded.

GAINING VISITOR FEEDBACK

As discussed, quantitative feedback is the easiest to record, as the University of Birmingham found that ‘the success of the exhibition is evaluated by sales of exhibition publications, [and] recorded numbers of visitors.’

Recording visitor numbers is, of course, only possible in a more formal exhibition setting or when viewing the exhibition is part of a larger event. At the London Metropolitan University their exhibition was sited in the conference centre and led to conference delegates touring the library:

‘The conference centre exhibition was a success, with positive feedback from delegates. As part of breakout sessions delegates were offered the opportunity to visit the library, and many took up the offer.’

This emphasis on footfall is more difficult for smaller displays within the library, as was noted at Bath Spa University:

‘The only way was to take note of how many of the supplementary materials were taken. I produced a list of exhibits, and a bibliography from our stock on book design. Only 15 of these were taken, but we used no other methods of evaluation so we don’t know how many visited but didn’t take the written materials.’

If special events are organised as part of the exhibition, their popularity is also a good indicator of your exhibition’s success. London Metropolitan University ‘offered short sessions presenting some of the highlights of the samples to students and staff again with good take-up.’

The first barrier to a more qualitative response is that many visitors will be casual browsers, making it difficult to secure any feedback from them at all. Few of us would welcome a quiz on what we learnt after visiting an exhibition and none of the case studies offered by ARLIS members used formal visitor

surveys as a means of securing feedback. The way forward seems to lie in offering opportunities for more informal user-led feedback, such as frequently occurs in the museum world – this was considered by Bath Spa University ‘I notice that galleries and museums have message boards next to exhibitions, and maybe this would be an idea for future displays.’

Here, is an example from Sonoma State University Library in Sonoma County, California, in which they describe the success of this approach:



Image of message board, Sonoma State University Library

‘We have an interactive bulletin board on the first floor of the library. It gets a lot of traffic because it is near an entrance and the bathrooms. Every three weeks I post a new discussion topic that is socially or academically related. It gets about 800 responses per semester and the sheets of paper have to be changed each week so participants have a blank sheet of paper to write on. Students and staff regularly stop to read the board and participate. The location is high traffic enough that the board is popular but a little out of the way so there is no traffic flow problem.’

This would provide an immediate response from visitors and also allow them to read each other’s responses. The same effect could be achieved through allowing visitors to post their comments on the library website, or through social networking tools, although here the response would be less immediate

unless access is possible within the exhibition. In both cases, negative feedback is just as possible as positive. If this is likely to be a problem, another alternative is a comments box or book, with feedback only being read by library staff.

Another possible source of feedback is the library enquiry desk. If visitors are inspired to ask further questions after seeing your exhibition, a log could be kept of the number and nature of these queries. This also has the advantage of further engaging all library staff in the exhibition, although it would be a matter of personal judgment whether an enquiry was exhibition-related or not.

CRITICAL FEEDBACK

There are many other sources of feedback in addition to actual exhibition visitors. The foremost of these should be your library staff, who will have noted any challenges or obstacles that have arisen during the course of the exhibition. A debriefing session once the exhibition has been cleared away could be combined with some social event to thank them for their hard work. Any changes they can suggest could enrich future exhibitions. This was noted at Chelsea College of Art and Design '*Quadrantes – Quadrants* was a very successful project ... in terms of the curatorial process.'

Also useful is feedback by other librarians outside your institution. It's important to stress that you want an honest appraisal, as many of us will focus only on the positive aspects. This can be an informal discussion with a networking contact, who may gain ideas to take back to their own institution. Alternatively, why not contact the ARLIS/UK & Ireland Education and Professional Development Committee and suggest running a half day visit to see your exhibition? You'll gain informal feedback on the day and the visit will also be written up in the *ARLIS News-sheet*, further publicising your exhibition and your library.

For academic libraries, liaison with academic staff can be invaluable in determining whether your exhibition input has made any appreciable

difference to the quality of student work. They may also be able to pass on student comments made during tutorials and seminars relating to the exhibition, either informally or through a debriefing meeting. For non-academic libraries, institutional colleagues may fulfil the same function

If promotional events have been organised as part of the exhibition, feedback from attendees should also be included. Here it may be possible to include a short written survey depending on the length of the event. Visitors to a full day conference will be more likely to fill in feedback forms than those attending a 20 minute talk on the exhibition highlights.

For larger exhibitions which hope for a public audience, media coverage is a key area of feedback. Much depends on your initial promotional efforts to attract media attention, but once in the public arena you have little control over how you are presented. The Van Gogh Museum's library experienced very positive feedback:

'Treasures from the library was mentioned in numerous professional journals and websites about books and book publishing ... The national newspaper *De Telegraaf* published a detailed review full of praise for *Treasures*.'

It is useful to keep an archive of past exhibitions and audience reaction to them, both for the benefit of library staff and to assist the creators of new exhibitions. At Chelsea College of Art and Design:

'Copies of the proposal forms are archived with photographs of the installations, performance and events. Students that have produced artists' books or multiples for display in the library often donate their work to the library at the end of the exhibition ... This in turn feeds into the User Education sessions held throughout the year, as students are always keen to see what their contemporaries have produced.'

At the University of the Arts, which promotes the use of the library as a display space for student work, they suggest feedback can be part of their professional practice:

‘Encourage the artist to seek feedback from peers and tutors. This will benefit their working practice and highlight the need to test ideas outside the studio...’

What it does also is to bring new visitors into the library and create a demand for the space, factors that can certainly benefit your impact and importance in the communities you serve.

SUMMARY

Evaluation of exhibitions is important to justify your work, improve your performance and establish criteria for success.

The aims established when planning your exhibition are crucial in determining your evaluation criteria. Data gathered to support your evaluation could be quantitative or qualitative, although it is important to consider external factors when drawing conclusions from it.

Methods of obtaining immediate visitor feedback include:

- Sale/take-up of printed material
- Recording visitor numbers
- Attendance at exhibition-related sessions
- Feedback through message boards and discussion threads
- Enquiry desk log of questions
- Comments box or book
- Library blog postings

Other sources of critical feedback include:

- Library staff
- Librarians from other institutions
- Academic/institutional colleagues
- People attending promotional events
- Media coverage

CASE STUDY 5: Treasures from the library of the Van Gogh Museum

By Anita Vriend, Librarian van Gogh Museum Library

The library of the Van Gogh Museum celebrated its fortieth anniversary by holding the exhibition *Treasures from the library* in 2008, the same year in which Amsterdam had the honour of being the World Book Capital. The city thus hosted a large number of events connected with books and book publishing, and the programme included the exhibition mounted at the Van Gogh Museum, which was well received by both press and public.

Guest curator

The library's fortieth anniversary and Amsterdam's status as the World Book Capital gave me the opportunity to act as a guest curator in my own institution. The library of the Van Gogh Museum contains numerous rare books that hardly ever leave the shelves, except when requested for study. The library mainly plays a supporting role, serving as a source of information for research and documentation on Van Gogh's art and works by other artists in the possession of the museum. Although the library had previously contributed to a number of exhibitions, there had never been a show that focused on its holdings.

Treasures from the library offered museum-goers, as well as visitors with a particular interest in books, an opportunity to become acquainted with our surprising collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century printed sources. One reason the library collects old sources is the information they provide on nineteenth-century studio practices. The nineteenth century was a turning point in many respects. New printing techniques made information – both textual and visual – easily reproducible and widely available. The public thus became more receptive to art. The new demand for information was met not only by exhibitions open to the general public, but also by books and periodicals on the fine arts. Artists became widely known through the printed

media. While drawing inspiration and acquiring knowledge of artistic practices from a wide variety of sources, artists also discovered that illustrating books and magazines could be a source of income. That idea gave rise to the exhibition's *leitmotiv*: 'the significance of publications to the art business in the nineteenth century.' The title *Treasures from the library* fits in perfectly with the event 'Een stad vol boeken, verborgen schatten in beeld' (City of Books – Hidden Treasures'), in which the organisers of 'Amsterdam World Book Capital 2008' spotlighted special book collections, including that of the Van Gogh Museum.

The library welcomed the extra publicity provided by the exhibition. Since its move in the mid-1990s from the main museum building to the adjacent villa, the library has literally disappeared from the museum-goer's view. Even though the library has been in evidence for several years on the museum's website, it is not referred to in the public galleries. Nor does the Van Gogh Museum's policy statement for the period 2005-2008 make explicit mention of the library. In view of the forthcoming period, in which the museum intends to seek recognition as a centre of excellence, it seemed an opportune time to bring the library into the limelight.

Broad collaboration

Any exhibition held at the Van Gogh Museum is the product of collaboration between colleagues from a number of departments. This particular exhibition was funded by contributions from the budgets of various departments. To organise *Treasures*, a project team was put together that consisted of the curator of prints and drawings, an educator, a registrar and the librarian. The Exhibitions Department played an advisory role. The venue of the exhibition was the Print Room in the museum's Rietveld Building. This public gallery is the domain of the curator of prints and drawings, so naturally she became the project manager. The educator drew up an educational plan, took charge of the editing and translation of the gallery texts, contacted the designer and planned the activities connected with the presentation. The registrar kept records of the works reserved for the exhibition, arranged for the transport of both the art and the display cases, and drew up a scenario for the installation

of the exhibition. I was entrusted with the content of the exhibition, the selection of works to be displayed and their installation, and the writing of the gallery texts. My conceptual framework of the exhibition, augmented by a Powerpoint presentation of the provisional selection of materials, served as the working document for the project team.

The thematic approach gave the exhibition the necessary coherence. The planning stage was followed by thorough research. Reading the literature took a lot of time, but the knowledge obtained enabled me to refine my objectives. Six sub-themes were singled out: 'Books related to studio practices', 'Exhibition catalogues', 'Art criticism', 'Periodicals', 'Biographies, published letters and manifestos' and 'Artists' books'. On the basis of my research, a well-considered selection was made from the available material, and both the introductory and the explanatory gallery texts were written. The books selected for the exhibition were put aside. Making use of the database of the museum's collection, I chose prints and paintings that illustrated the various sub-themes, and the respective curators gave permission for these works to be exhibited. A display case was placed temporarily in the library depot for purposes of experimentation. This trial arrangement enabled me to devise the guidelines for preparing the materials and installing them in the gallery. For each sub-theme I kept a record of which books and art works were to be exhibited, which works needed framing and which books required supports. I also specified at which page certain books were to lie open.

The educational plan prescribed three kinds of gallery texts: an introduction to the exhibition, six explanatory texts (one for each sub-theme), labels with basic information on all the works exhibited, a select number of which were described in more detail. There was no exhibition catalogue or brochure, but the wall texts and labels were provided in both Dutch and English. The texts were translated into English by a freelance translator who frequently works for the museum.⁵ My gallery texts were edited for content by the curator of prints and drawings and a researcher in the Research Department. The final editing was done by the educator, who saw to it that the presentation would appeal to

⁵ Diane Webb, who also translated this article.

a wide public, but at the same time provide enough in-depth information to rouse the curiosity of our visitors. Occasionally the rough drafts of the texts led to lively discussions. Book presentations generally require more explanation than exhibitions of art, but capable editing ensured that our gallery texts were packed with information yet short and to the point. The team benefited greatly from the knowledge and experience of the two conservation technicians who set up the books and art works in the gallery. They framed the selected prints and prepared the books and periodicals so that they could be displayed safely. Employees of the museum's Department of Facility Management helped to hang the works of art and put the display cases in place, and were also responsible for the lighting. The security systems manager was called upon to ensure that the objects were protected.

The exhibition was publicised in various ways: through the usual channels, that is to say, the museum's Department of Publicity and PR and the campaign to promote Amsterdam as the World Book Capital of 2008. Collaborating with the World Book Capital organisation greatly increased the range of our publicity. *Treasures from the library* was announced in the Van Gogh Museum's 2008 programme booklet, which appeared in the autumn of 2007, and in the 2008 Spring Programme. The staff member responsible for digital communication announced *Treasures* on the museum's website, and a press release written by the press officer was issued shortly before the opening of the exhibition. Colleagues in the library sector were informed of the exhibition through the programmes of their professional organisations and by means of notices posted on various discussion platforms.

Exhibition design

The atmosphere radiated by the show was determined in consultation with a professional designer hired specially for the occasion. For the installation, there were various types of display cases at our disposal. I deviated from the usual practice by deciding not to use lectern showcases in the L-shaped Print Room, preferring instead the display cases originally designed for the exhibition *Barcelona 1900*, held at the Van Gogh Museum from September 2007 to January 2008. A variety of these cases were on hand, which gave me

more latitude in displaying the materials. These cases stand on a steel frame and have a red pedestal or tray that is covered with a sheet of glass or glass hood. This meant that the books could be displayed either standing or lying flat. In addition to table display cases placed against the wall, I chose three tall, free-standing display cases to give the presentation more body.

To support the books we used perspex stands and simple, custom-made aids of plastic foam, acid-free cardboard and Melinex. The supports were concealed as much as possible, so that all attention would be focused on the objects themselves. Placing some of the books and periodicals on thick cardboard made them stand out from the base of the display case, which lent more depth to their presentation.

By following the recommendations of the professional designer, we were able to give the exhibition the right atmosphere and feeling of intimacy. Her advice encompassed the colours used, the necessary blow-ups and sign-posting, as well as the lettering. For the walls she chose two shades of yellow-grey, reflecting the colour of paper. Colour samples were made and tried out in the gallery to determine the colour of the wall boards. The design of the font used for the gallery texts was reminiscent of nineteenth-century book typography. The introductory text was printed on a dark grey background, accompanied by the blow-up of a handsome book cover that also served as the exhibition's logo. The titles of the five sub-themes were applied – in greatly enlarged letters – to the walls above the display cases. The explanation appearing below this in both Dutch and English created the impression of an open book. The classic lettering on a subdued grey background combined beautifully with the straightforward design and warm red tone of the display cases, doing justice to the books, prints and paintings on display.

Content

It was important to me that the selection should tell the story I had in mind. Visual attractiveness was a key criterion in my choice of books, but I also included unillustrated material that was interesting for its content alone.

The section 'Books related to studio practices' included books used by artists

for self-tuition, such as drawing methods and painters' manuals, as well as books on anatomy, perspective and colour theory. An unillustrated, sixteenth-century volume containing remedies for a wide variety of ailments and recipes for paints and dyes – a volume originally belonging to the nineteenth-century library of Arti et Amicitiae, an Amsterdam society of artists and art lovers⁶ – was one of the showpieces in this section. The assortment of artists' materials increased greatly in the course of the nineteenth century, partly as a result of painting *en plein air*. This development was demonstrated by displaying old manufacturers' catalogues – containing paint samples and illustrations of portable easels, paint-boxes, tubes of paint and brushes – which were some of the most eye-catching volumes in the exhibition. A self-portrait of the young Dutch painter Jan Toorop, posing in his studio with an array of painters' attributes on his working table and a shelf of books in the background, put the finishing touch on this display.

'Exhibition catalogues' contained numerous examples of this kind of art publication. The first illustrated catalogue of contemporary art shown in the Low Countries was on display here, as were catalogues of early one-man shows in France. A nineteenth-century Paris Salon catalogue containing an engraved reproduction of a painting now belonging to the Van Gogh Museum was exhibited alongside the painting. This section also featured the only loan to the exhibition: a print of a 'viewing' at Arti et Amicitiae. This sheet, in which the first librarian of the artists' society is portrayed, belongs to the Rijksmuseum.

The 'Art criticism' section outlined developments in art criticism, which progressed from general, descriptive reviews to opinionated critiques and analyses of styles and methods. In choosing the works to be hung on the wall, I had at my disposal the rich collection of 'Salon caricatures' in the Van Gogh Museum's own collection.

The sub-theme 'Periodicals' showed how nineteenth-century artists profited from the rise of the illustrated press. The brisk trade in magazine illustrations

⁶ This art library, which contains numerous old sources, has belonged to the collection of the Van Gogh Museum since 1992.

at that time was demonstrated by a number of examples from the impressive collection amassed by Van Gogh.

The growing interest in the artist and his work became obvious in the section 'Biographies, published letters and manifestos'. Various books containing an artist's personal body of thought were on display. Above the display case, a small selection of four gold-framed instalments of a serialised artist's biography formed a nineteenth-century 'wall of fame'.

The 'Artists' books' rounded off the exhibition. In the late nineteenth century, artists discovered that illustrating books could be a means of expressing their own artistic vision. At the Van Gogh Museum, both the library and the print collection contain fine examples of such *livres d'artistes*. The highlight of this section was Paul Verlaine's book *Parallèlement*, illustrated by Pierre Bonnard.

Activities

Tours and receptions were organised to mark the exhibition *Treasures from the library*. After the opening, the members of staff were taken on their customary tour. The library also liaised with a previously planned series of lectures at the University of Amsterdam called 'Word and image, 1780-1900'. These seminars for students of art history were organised in cooperation with the Research Department of the Van Gogh Museum. The course was given by the Visiting Scholar, Professor Patricia Mainardi of the City University of New York, who came to Amsterdam in April for this purpose. Mainardi examined the nineteenth-century printed image, particularly those forms in which the relation between word and image is the most pronounced, as in broadsheets, caricatures, comics, book illustrations and illustrated periodicals. The lecturer and her students viewed the exhibition in the museum and also took a tour of the library, during which numerous examples of nineteenth-century images were studied.

Throughout the year, unique collections were highlighted by 'Amsterdam World Book Capital'. In May, when the museum library was the focus of attention, special receptions were held in the library and tours of the exhibition were organised in which various colleagues from the Research Department

participated. Two researchers took visitors on an informative expedition through the exhibition. Members of the library's staff and documentation department, as well as the senior researcher in the museum's Research Department, gave introductory talks on the library's collection, the documentation connected with Van Gogh's oeuvre and other works in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum, and the art-historical research carried out here. The participants included a number of colleagues from other libraries, while the gallery tours attracted a mixed company of museum-goers and (art) book enthusiasts. The activities were listed in the programme brochure – 'Een stad vol boeken, verborgen schatten in beeld' ('City of Books – Hidden Treasures'), issued by the organisation of 'Amsterdam World Book Capital 2008' – and in a special supplement of the newspaper *Het Parool*. The library also contributed to the book *Een stad vol boeken. City of books*, written for the occasion by the Dutch author Nelleke Noordervliet.

Evaluation

The exhibition was a great success in every respect. The publicity campaign launched by the Van Gogh Museum and the World Book Capital organisation drew book lovers from all corners of the world to Amsterdam, and *Treasures from the library* was mentioned in numerous professional journals and websites about books and book publishing. Some of the visitors who saw the exhibition in the museum found their way to the villa that houses the library. The national newspaper *De Telegraaf* published a detailed review full of praise for *Treasures*. The exhibition was well received within the museum as well. The director, the Management Team and members of staff were all extremely enthusiastic about the presentation, and for some it was a positive eye-opener.

Naturally there were things that went wrong during the preparations, but my colleagues' commitment and flexibility ensured that problems were solved quickly and easily. The biggest problem I ran up against was the pressure of time as the date of the opening drew near. My estimation of the time I would need to prepare the exhibition alongside my regular work proved overly optimistic. Other problems could be traced to my unfamiliarity with the rules

and procedures pertaining to the initiation and production of exhibitions, and it took some time to find the right people to work out my plans.

For me as a librarian and the keeper of an important collection of nineteenth-century publications on art, organising this exhibition was an enriching experience. I became better acquainted with our collection, thus discovering its strengths and weaknesses. It was also good to leave the seclusion of my library and assume, for a change, the role of the person requesting a service instead of the one providing it. Collaborating with colleagues of various departments was extremely enjoyable as well as inspiring, and I made good use of their creativity and expertise.

The greatest benefit derived from the *Treasures* presentation was the enhancement of the library's image. The exhibition turned out to be an outstanding marketing tool. Indeed, there is no better way of highlighting a library and its riches, for not even museum directors are always aware of the treasures their libraries hold. All art librarians should organise an exhibition at least once in their careers. By acting more as curators and exploiting the possibilities of their book collections, librarians can enhance the status of their libraries.⁷ The good will fostered by the exhibition within the Van Gogh Museum has paved the way for future initiatives. From now on, the seminars given by the annually appointed Visiting Scholar will take place in the library, and there are plans for other exhibitions and for publications on sections of the library's collection. With a view to its future role as an integral part of this centre of expertise, the library will certainly strive to remain in the public eye.

With thanks to the colleagues who made *Treasures from the library* possible and to Hans Luijten for his invaluable advice.

Anita Vriend, an art historian and information specialist, is employed as a librarian in the Research Department of the Van Gogh Museum.

⁷ In 2006, ARLIS/NL organised a seminar on promoting art libraries.

Top Ten Tips

for successful exhibitions and displays in art libraries

1. Less is more - Don't overcrowd a display.
2. What goes with what? -Think about juxtapositions.
3. Annotate - Provide a resource list and email it to people.
4. Create an identity - Pick a punchy title for your exhibition.
5. Connect - Find ways to interact with your audience.
6. Consider having a launch event.
7. Create an annual exhibition programme.
8. Steal ideas - Draw inspiration from bookshops and retail environments.
9. Labelling - Always give relevant information about the work on display.
10. Exhibition design – use the skills of people within your institution

1. Less is more - Don't overcrowd a display.

- Keep things clean and simple.
- Aim for quality, rather than quantity - repetition is boring.
- Select a larger number of books/items than you need, then make your final selection.

2. What goes with what? - Think about juxtapositions.

- Don't assume it's obvious - People often need help seeing what goes with what and why.
- Look at different parts of the book - interesting bindings could be included in their own right.
- You might consider, for example, placing a modern travel book next to an 18th c. one to show how things have changed.
- Don't just see it as a book display – try incorporating sound (via headphones), visuals and film.

3. Annotate - Provide a resource list and email it to people.

- Sending booklists, statements and guides to tutors/sponsors/students can be useful in publicising the library.
- Create a glossary of useful terminology, recommended texts (check museology/collecting sections of our libraries).

4. Create an identity - Pick a punchy title for your exhibition.

- Titles - should be short, witty and interesting.
- Try to sum up the theme – it helps to create an identity for the exhibition and its publicity.

5. Find ways to interact with your audience.

- Should items be behind glass, or objects people can interact with?
- Why not have a comments book?
- Try a display that gets the audience to draw or do something (e.g. use magnetic poetry to get them to create a poem).

6. Consider having a launch event.

- Why not produce a guide to recent purchases and invite lecturers and practitioners for an evening launch.
- The real exhibition could be supported by a virtual exhibition online – try using some of the new Web 2.0 facilities like Flickr.

7. Create an annual exhibition programme.

- Tie in displays with library/college events or local/community events.
- Do displays round national events like *The Big Draw* or to tie-in with major exhibitions.

8. Draw inspiration from bookshops and retail environments.

- Use good props – like Perspex book displayers. (see list of suppliers in appendices)
- Run promotions or prizes, i.e. £20 Moviemail voucher. Look into sponsorship.

9. Labelling - Always give relevant information about the work on display.

- Ensure that all student works are labelled with a name and course attached. Draw up an agreement in writing, and get it signed by the artist. Stipulate that you will keep the art works for a limited period only.
- Captions describing the item are important; include author, title, date, place of publication where appropriate. If relevant a description of the opening pages could be included.
- Informative text panels can introduce the selection and draw attention to their significance and provenance. Delving into the archives may be necessary.
- It is important that the language used is simple and clear without jargon
- Colour and size of type are important.

10. Exhibition design – use the skills within your institution.

- Talk to marketing, finance, alumni and facilities staff. Are there any graphic designers amongst your colleagues/institution's staff.
- Collaborate with academic staff where possible.

Glossary of terms

Acrylic

A thermoplastic of the same type as Perspex or plexiglass, usually transparent.

Ambient light

The actual overall light level of an exhibition environment.

As-builts

Drawings created by a fabricator that accurately represent the elements of an exhibition.

Backdrop

A flat painted, coloured or photographed screen scene behind a display to give an illusion of place or space.

Brief

The instructions issued to the designer by the exhibitor explaining what they want from a project and listing the money and materials available.

Cabinets of curiosities

Private and personalised displays of objects that became a popular pursuit for wealthy European collectors in the 17th century.

Concept design

Development of the basic core story and visual design of an exhibition.

Curator

Person charged with the procurement, care and research of a collection, usually in a museum.

Exhibition design

A business and design concept that utilises analysis of the overall audience experience in the development of exhibition spaces.

Fascia board

The board at the front or leading edges of an exhibition to carry titles, names, etc.

Roughs

Loose sketches of a solution.

Storyboard

A series of vignettes that visually displays how the story will be conveyed in the exhibition as a series of experiences.

Storytelling/narrative

All exhibitions centre round a central storyline that provides an account of events or experiences.

Tender

A process by which a designer will submit a proposal and thereby bid for a contract in competition with other designers.

Visual/perspective

A drawing that suggests three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.

Working drawing

A detailed and scaled constructional drawing produced by the designer for issue to a contractor.

Suppliers of equipment for displays and exhibitions

3D displays

www.3ddisplays.co.uk 01795 532947

Supplier of acrylic stands and cases to retail outlet – book stands, mounts and display cases.

Benbow Group

www.benbowgroup.co.uk

Experienced manufacturers of high quality bespoke display cases.

Britannia Storage Systems

www.britannia-storage.co.uk

High quality glass display cases and cabinets.

Conservation by design

www.conservation-by-design.co.uk 01234 853555

Museum quality display cases and archival equipment.

Demco interiors

www.demcointeriors.co.uk 01933 445300

Book promotion units and display cases.

Displaysense ltd.

www.displaysense.co.uk

Suppliers of showcases, shelf displays, Perspex displayers and acrylics.

Gresswell

www.gresswell.com 01922 454511

Traditional library display equipment, including acrylic book stands, wooden display tables and exhibition-style backboards.

Netherfield

<http://www.netherfield.co.uk/company.cfm>

Suppliers of high standard museum display equipment, especially showcases.

Point Eight

www.point8.co.uk 01384 238282

Specialises in bookstore, library and retail interiors.

Serota Library Furniture

<http://www.serota.co.uk/> 01923 840697

Bespoke furniture makers – produce excellent showcases and special collection book cases.

Shopkit Group

www.shopkit.com

Wide range of display equipment including acrylics and cabinets.

UK Point of Sale

www.ukpos.com 01614 314400

Suppliers of display equipment mostly aimed at the retail trade. Will supply display plinths and stands.

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