

Alison Verplaetse Awarded 2014 Winberta Yao Travel Award

Travel Report

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the ARLIS/NA Mountain West Chapter for their generosity in funding the Winberta Yao Travel Award and to Kay Teel and Alexandria Caster of the Travel Award Committee for selecting me as the 2014 recipient of the award. It is only due to the kindness and generosity of the Mountain West Chapter that I was able to attend the conference, and for that I am extremely thankful. The 42nd annual ARLIS/NA conference in Washington D.C. was a unique and valuable opportunity to connect with and learn from creative and inspiring colleagues in art librarianship in the beautiful setting of our country's capitol. At the conference I was not only able to attend sessions, present a poster, and network with colleagues, but I was also able to acquaint myself directly with the current state of the profession and innovations put forth by its leading professionals.

My first official conference activity was a tour of the Society of the Cincinnati Museum and Library on Thursday morning. As the country's original patriotic organization, the Society and its museum serve to foster appreciation and enhance knowledge of the achievement of American independence. Ellen McCallister Clark, the Library Director at the Society of the Cincinnati, gave our group a thorough tour of the museum's collections and the recently renovated library and archives space. At the end of the tour, Ms. Clark took us into the library vault to see some important and recently acquired rare books and artifacts. It was a great privilege to be welcomed into this space and to see the incredible collections of the Society.

On Thursday afternoon I participated in the Year-Long Career Mentoring Program Workshop. Facilitated by Heather Slania of the National Museum of Women in the Arts and Anna Simon of Georgetown University, this workshop provided the training tools necessary to create and maintain a successful mentoring relationship. Topics of discussion included realistic goal-setting, appropriate expectations for the program, methods of communication, and the benefits of mentoring. This year I am fortunate enough to be able to participate in the mentoring program as both a mentor and a mentee.

Unfortunately, my mentor was not in attendance so I was unable to share invaluable face time with him, but I was able to meet my mentee, who I had previously spoken with on the phone. I am mentoring Anna-Sophia Zingarelli-Sweet, a MLIS candidate at University of Pittsburgh who will be graduating this year. During the workshop, we talked about Anna-Sophia's goals for the year ahead, which included achieving better time management and work-life balance, identifying and exploring further a few key

interests in the field of art librarianship, and, above all, obtaining a job in the field. We also discussed her expectations from me as her mentor. In reviewing Anna-Sophia's goals, I foresee our mentoring relationship being mutually beneficial in that, as I facilitate her efforts toward achieving these goals, I will certainly learn more about myself and my own ambitions. Anna-Sophia and I have committed to "meet" at least once per month over Skype or Google Hangouts for the upcoming year, and I look forward to hearing back from my mentor to commence our relationship, as well. Overall, I see the Year-Long Career Mentoring Program as highly constructive in regards to my professional development.

The sessions I attended the subsequent three days of the conference covered a range of topics. Upon reflection, however, there seemed to be an overarching theme that emerged from talks I heard: interdisciplinary collaboration. I was particularly interested in the projects presented at the panel session, *The Politics of Change: Digital Humanities*. The digital humanities remain mostly uncharted territory for me at this stage, but the speakers at this panel opened my mind to vast possibilities this discipline offers. By employing new media and technology to answer cultural, social, and historical questions, novel discoveries and more satisfying conclusions can be unearthed to existing lines of inquiry and questions only conceivable by these new technologies can be explored. For example, Dr. Michele Greet, Associate Professor of Art History at George Mason University, presented her project, "Mapping Cultural Exchange: Strategies for Locating the Narrative in the Digital World," which explained the process by which her digital humanities project, "Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Interwar Paris" was realized. This project uses geo-mapping to track Latin American artists' activity in France between the 1918 and 1939. Artists' home addresses and gallery showing locations are tagged and dated on an interactive map to illustrate the intercultural influences at play. This project and the others presented were fascinating on multiple levels: not only did these digital tools demonstrate complex concepts much more vividly than traditional scholarly avenues could hope to, but they involved a significant amount of collaboration among faculty, librarians, and other institutional departments. I left this session feeling particularly inspired by the world of possibilities this new type of scholarship presents.

Beyond this panel, I was also very interested in the presentations at the *Creative Engagement for Advocacy: Innovative Partnerships between Artists and Librarians* session. These presentations were a thought-provoking assortment of how different libraries are approaching the concept of engagement, either by reaching out to the artists whose work is held in their collections, engaging patrons of art libraries to better understand their needs, or encouraging members of the community to directly impact

the library environment by contributing to its spaces and collections. In summation, the sessions I attended left me feeling excited about the ongoing evolution of librarians' roles into more involved partners in academic and community pursuits.

On Friday I also attended ARLIS/NA Mountain West Chapter Meeting. Although I had virtually met many of you at the conference this past fall, it was a great pleasure to finally meet many of my chapter's members in person for the first time. It is truly an honor to a part of such a great group of professionals, and I appreciated the warm reception I received. Now that I feel like an established member of the chapter, I very much look forward to becoming involved in committee work and eventually taking on leadership role, as opportunities arise.

Although I was at the conference the day after, the capstone of my experience at the ARLIS/NA conference was the convocation and reception held at the Library of Congress on Saturday evening. It was joy to hear the keynote speaker, NPR's Susan Stamberg, speak to her appreciate for the arts. Celebrating and chatting with a wide variety of the conference's attendees in the grand setting of the Library of Congress's Great Hall was a wonderful and exciting opportunity as well. Once again, I would like to convey my gratitude to the Mountain West Chapter and their great generosity in supporting my attendance at this year's conference. Because of you, I am a more well-rounded, motivated librarian than I was just weeks ago!