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2007 VRA Distinguished Service Award: Maryly Snow

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One might logically summarize the impressive resume of a Distinguished Service Award winner, but we found that an impossible task. Maryly Snow's resume is a stunning document. She has been a pioneer of digital image delivery, an important advocate for rights management for visual resources collections, a historian of our profession, and a remarkably productive person, who is generous with her time and courageous in her convictions. Over twenty people contributed to letters of support for Maryly's nomination—VR curators, librarians, professors, technologists, and consultants—and we want you to hear their voices.

The Pioneer

In 1985, Maryly began work on a database project that evolved into SPIRO – one of the first networked image databases with substantive educational content.

...for most people attending our presentations, this was the very first time they had seen a continuous-tone image on a computer screen. Semi-thoughtful people thought we were crazy. But we knew we were onto something important.
Howard Besser, Professor, New York University

Maryly argued for and was somewhat reluctantly given the go ahead to begin to convert the Department of Architecture's teaching "slides" into a digital collection. "Reluctantly" I say, as the Administration could not grasp the importance of her intentions.

Raymond Lifchez, Professor, UC Berkeley
The SPIRO database is well known...While the interface and the content may be familiar, fewer know of the incredible workflow that serves to continually add images and cataloging information to this rich database.

Jason Miller, Former Library Assistant
Architecture Visual Resources Library, UC Berkeley

Her adoption of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (SPIRO was the first publicly accessible retrieval system using the AAT to extend a search term to its descendent terms at lower levels of the hierarchy), exemplifies two other areas in which Maryly led the way: her early commitment to standards and her pioneering use of hierarchical controlled vocabularies for database searching.

Susan Stone, Museum Informatics, UC Berkeley

Maryly wrote on the concept of a shared image catalog similar to a library catalog. I think she called it a VOPAC, which didn't catch on, but the idea was certainly ahead of its time.
Lena Zentall, California Digital Library

Maryly was licensing content before any of us had considered the concept!...She has also never been complacent or willing to accept a static system. SPIRO has been continuously improved to meet the needs of its users and carefully nurtured by Maryly. Maryly's digital imaging impact has not been confined to SPIRO. When the UC Visual Resources Group decided to experiment with the creation of a union image databank for the UC system, Maryly enthusiastically participated. She was way ahead of the rest of us and brought to this pilot project the lessons learned from SPIRO...

UC Visual Resources Group
Maryly is one of those innovators that we techies love.
Howard Brainen, Two Cat Digital

Her pioneering work in online digital image collections laid the groundwork for slide libraries of the 21st century."

Howard Besser

The Advocate

In addition to identifying key external information for VR professionals (by organizing conference sessions, working on committees, publishing articles, and posting to list serves), Maryly has been an important voice advocating for the needs of our profession in the rights arena.

Mounting the well-known SPIRO project on the Internet for all who could benefit from this resource, brought out questions about what was lawful or not when not even knowledgeable lawyers could agree. Did that keep her from jumping into the dark waters? Certainly not! Maryly was among the stalwart who asked questions, sought opinions, thought deeply, and eventually turned her thought into words—cogent arguments. Through her leadership of the VRA Intellectual Property Rights Committee, Maryly helped gain strength in the ways and means of promoting academic fair use...Her articles and reviews and frequent (published) presentations...are often cited in the literature, even legal literature!

Christine Sundt, Visual Resources Consultant and Educator, Eugene, Oregon

She rolled up her sleeves to work through the issues of intellectual property by delving into old records; she documented the sources of her images and sent out permission requests—acting rather than waiting for the embattled answers.

Barbara Furbush, Getty Villa Research Library

... a consummate visual resources professional who was not afraid to buck the status quo, whether it was in protecting the concept of fair use in copyright...or speaking out about the revolutionizing potential that digital images would have in academia.

Lynn Lickteig, University of Colorado

The Historian

Some may think it odd that an innovator like Maryly is so interested in the historical aspects of our work, but this is consistent with a desire to expand our knowledge and recognizes the inextricable relationship between our work and the scholarship we support. Her reconstruction of lectures by John Galen Howard and Spiro Kostof, a comparison across nearly one hundred years, strikes us as a novel and valuable approach to the history of architectural education.

By re-uniting ...Howard's lecture notes to the lantern slide images he used, she has been able to re-create the lecture series that defined both an influential department and the generations of architects it produced.

Jason Miller, Anshen + Allen

For the past 4 years, Maryly and I have worked together on a project of great importance to our professional community, the North American Lantern Slide Survey. Maryly initiated the idea of the survey...the first attempt...to systematically survey on a large scale the location and disposition of academic lantern slide collections.

Jenni Rodda, Institute of Fine Arts

The Person

As service professionals we admire Maryly's knowledge and her willingness to work hard and aim high. As people we benefit from her generosity and her infectious ability to find the fun in what we do.

As a newcomer to the VRA in 1989, one of my most vivid and impactful memories ...was a conversation I had with Ms. Snow...Speaking with Maryly, coupled with a tour of her slide collection, provided the influence and inspiration I needed to return to my own university and begin a similar project.

Lynn Lickteig

I frequently noticed she was the first to pose a question about a subject near and dear to her at conferences. You would find her in the front row, ready to spring into questions at the end of a session.

Lena Zentall

Besides all that Maryly Snow is a kick to hang out with! Maryly is one of the most alive individuals I know; enticing others to live life at full tilt – like when she tempted three of us onto jet skis the first day of the Miami conference.

Barbara Furbush



DSA Co-nominators Trudy Levy, Henry Pisciotta, and Maureen Burns laud DSA recipient Maryly Snow.

Words Chosen in Letters of Support

Public access and sharing of knowledge are what Maryly's all about.
A place among the all-time top ten mentors and role models in the VRA
So supportive, she is constantly challenging me
Always interested in understanding someone else's opinions
Doesn't have any hidden agendas
Does not ask "Why" so much as "Why not?"
Moves forward with an admirable confidence
So friendly, open and generous
An adventurer. She rides the waves with the dolphins
A colorful character and lots of fun too
Her tenacity is something to behold
I certainly wouldn't want to be on a different side than her in a public debate!
Ability to bring humor into sometimes tense VRA conference sessions
Ms Snow's contributions are legendary

Brilliance. Service. Diligence.
Forever young. A profound influence. A stellar career.
Wit, candor. Ideas.
Competence.
A terrific colleague. A guiding light. A go-getter.
An inspiration. Determination.
Bold, tenacious, dedicated, inquisitive, strong-willed, artistic, warm-hearted.
Encouraging. Energetic. Persistent.
Truly worthy.
Deserving. Deserving. Deserving.
Very deserving.
[all three together:]
Congratulations Maryly Snow!
Maureen Burns, University of California, Irvine
Trudy Levy, Image Integration
Henry Pisciotta, Pennsylvania State University



DSA recipient Maryly Snow



DSA recipient Maryly Snow enjoys her toothbrush bouquet.

2007 VRA Annual Conference

2007 VRA Distinguished Service Award: Snow Remarks

WOW! I am SO honored! Thank you everyone: the VRA Awards Committee, the contributors to my nomination, to Henry, Maureen, and Trudy, for coordinating this effort, and to VRA, all of you, for providing a venue in which individual visual resources professionals like myself can bring our local institutional problems for solution.

The person you describe sounds really hard working and committed, brave, diverse, instrumental. But how can one person do all that stuff? Can someone with those achievements be a well-rounded, whole person?

Of course! Realize that you just heard thirty years of professional activity compacted into a nice, cohesive summary. But real life is never so cohesive or neatly packaged. It's only in retrospect that we can see patterns. Thank you Maureen, Henry, and Trudy for helping me see the patterns you saw: pioneer, advocate, historian, person. I love it! And those patterns couldn't have emerged without the existence of colleagues to support, encourage, listen, and learn.

There were a couple of intentions that guided me over the years, and these I would like to share with you, especially the newer members to our profession.

I understood right from the beginning that no one at my institution would *ever* care about "my library," "my collection" as much as I would. My boss and faculty only wanted me to do a good job, which meant keeping things running so there weren't any complaints. Just do your job, and don't bother us is the impression I had. At the same time, I also recognized that my institution, the renowned and self-esteeming University of California, Berkeley, held itself in high regard, and welcomed additions to its lofty position in higher education.

To me this meant that I could seek to augment, in my own small way, UC's reputation without anyone at UC paying much attention. And this is way before Maureen founded UC Sliders and before the existence of the California Digital Library.

So what? What did this mean to me? I didn't have a committee or advisory board supporting me. No local guidance. So I mulled over issues that came up, problems that needed to be solved, quandaries, knowing that my approach would usually not be questioned. I felt free to make my VR collection the best that I could make it, as I saw fit. So I turned to my colleagues throughout the U.S. for guidance, colleagues in VRA and in ARLIS. What stumped me at work became projects, committee deliberations, presentations, publications. But there was really no one looking over my shoulder close to home.

What my home institution did give me was a procedure and guidelines for professional advancement through a series of graduated pay scales: excellence in primary job responsibility; contributions to the Library, to the University, to the profession. Because my situation was unique on campus, I had some flexibility in how I interpreted those contributions. Luckily, I felt that I did not have to compete with other librarians or with the faculty. And like so many of you, I was in a unique position on campus. Alone, without support. That means you can push boundaries without much push back from your own institution, because your actions, your commitment, your work doesn't threaten or compete with anyone else. Forget that you have boundaries.

But don't be mistaken. I didn't work alone! I did forge some important partnerships. I remember way back in the early 1980s knowing that I needed some campus help to solve a major problem—no catalog. Who would be interested? I didn't know the structure of the huge, complicated bureaucracy that is UC Berkeley so I set out to tell everyone I encountered who might listen to my tale: that my fantastic collection of architectural images needed a catalog, a visual catalog. Eventually, and somehow, I found people within the University whose own interests coalesced with mine, and together we developed SPIRO. So, contrary to this picture of me working in isolation all the time, I also was learning how to get the institution to work for me too. I figured it out as I went along. One step at a time. I never was good at planning and writing long-range planning documents or strategic goals.

I tried over the years to balance a variety of interests and concerns, rotating my focus between my own library, the University Library, the campus, and the system of campuses as well as outside the UC system via the local chapters and national structures of VRA and ARLIS, sometimes cheating them all to focus on my artwork. But just for a while, before continuing the balancing act anew.

One theme that carried me through was "professional." What is a professional? Someone passionate about and committed to their work. I did NOT treat my work as a 9 to 5 job, but as a commitment. I allowed myself to work some long hours when necessary or when I wanted to. But I also consciously tried to balance those obsessions with life after work.

I have been very proud of my VRA Nancy DeLaurier writing award, and now I'm extremely honored and proud to have received your highest award. This is a fantastic retirement gift, a great capstone. I am exhilarated, and humbled, and embarrassed that I have no great vision of the future of visual resources to impart. But I hope you can find some comfort and support from my tale of wending my way.

Thank you again!

Maryly Snow

University of California, Berkeley