

## **2004 Distinguished Service Award**

Presented to Jenni Rodda in recognition of her many contributions to the field of visual resources through demonstrated leadership, research, and publication, as well as her long-term service to professional organizations and institutions.

Presented this Wednesday, 10th day of March, 2004

### **Introduction by Jeanette Mills:**

What I am about to say is essentially what I wrote to the VRA Awards Committee when I nominated Jenni for the Distinguished Service Award.

Jenni Rodda's contribution to the visual resources profession is of the highest caliber. She has been an outstanding leader and mentor for more than a decade, and a participant in the profession for much longer than that. I cannot think of another person in the VRA who deserves this award more than she does.

Jenni's list of accomplishments is lengthy. For VRA alone, she has been vice president, president-elect, president, and past-president. This is a total of six years of leadership at the executive level. She has chaired or co-chaired at least three VRA committees and served on at least two additional committees. Jenni was one of the founding members of the VRA Greater New York Chapter and served as the chapter's chair for two years. After all these years of service to our profession's primary professional association, when many people would be happy to rest on their laurels, Jenni has taken on the task of being the VRA membership services coordinator.

In addition to holding leadership positions in VRA, Jenni has contributed to the profession through numerous articles, co-authorship of the Guide to Copy Photography for Visual Resources Professionals, and acting as editor of a special issue of the VRA Bulletin that addressed professional issues. She also regularly contributes to discussions of a wide range of topics on VRA-L.

While reviewing Jenni's accomplishments with VRA, it would be easy to overlook that fact that Jenni is in charge of one of the largest academic visual resources collections in the country. She has had numerous challenges while working at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, but she has always been proactive in dealing with them. She has even taken the time to help bring together the visual resources and related professionals at New York University so as to improve communication between widely separated collections.

It is clear that Jenni has made many important contributions to the visual resources profession, but there is one form of contribution that does not appear on her resume—her ability as a mentor. I first got to know Jenni in 1995, when she came to interview for the Director of Visual Services position in the University of Washington School of Art. I was the

assistant in the Art Slide Library at the time, and it took only a short time for me to realize that I could easily work with her as my supervisor because it was clear she would both respect and support me in my work. Through convoluted circumstances, she declined the job and I became the Director of Visual Services. When I attended my first full VRA conference the following year in Boston, Jenni welcomed me and introduced me to many people. She nominated me to run for VRA vice president, and she mentored me while we served on the board together. This was extremely important to me because I often felt lost during my first months of conference planning. Since I left the board in 1999, we have stayed in regular contact, and she always is encouraging when we share stories about our work and life challenges. She was a meticulous editor when I wrote an article about leadership for the VRA Bulletin special issue she edited, and she has proved to be an excellent member of the VRA Education Committee, which I co-chair.

I clearly have a personal bias in nominating Jenni Rodda for the VRA Distinguished Service Award, but reading the supporting letters that accompany this nomination makes it clear that I am not alone in my opinion of Jenni's impact on our profession. Here is just a small selection of comments from the letter writers:

Elizabeth (Betty) Antrim: "Under her leadership I enjoyed every minute spent working on VRA business."

Maureen Burns: "Jenni is a professional to the core who has made the field of visual resources a better one to work in."

Linda Callahan: "By her own example, she inspires others to participate in whatever ways they can in this good and worthwhile profession....Her record of service goes beyond distinguished. It has been nothing less than astonishing."

Sherman Clarke: "Jenni has consistently shown leadership in the discussion among the visual resource curators here at NYU."

Leigh Gates: "I was struck then by her imminent good sense and practicality regarding the association, and her inclusiveness to all those in the profession."

Andrew Gessner: "Jenni was always there, always active, and always willing to provide support and advice. Her commitment, professionalism, and stamina have always astounded me."

Rebecca Miller Hoort: "My experience in working with Jenni was that everything she produced, whether an article, a verbal report, or the organizational details of a conference, was of top quality – well organized, well expressed and with meaningful content....She could always be counted on to make good ideas into realities."

Ben Kessler: "During her tenure as president, Jenni provided our organization with firm and able leadership at a time when many of the parameters and definitions of our profession were undergoing rapid change."

Max Marmor: "In addition to satisfying and exceeding the formal requirements for the award, there are the intangibles: Jenni's characteristic generosity of spirit; her abiding interest in the work of her colleagues; and the touch of humor that graces even her critical observations about the profession and the world."

Linda McRae: "During Jenni's tenure as President of VRA she served us all with solid, responsible leadership, and calm and quiet dignity."

Patti McRae: "Not to be overlooked are her magnificent collegiality, humility and ability to share her vast experience without at the same time intimidating the happy recipient of her expertise."

Christina Updike: "I must state that my own professional growth has been enhanced by the experiences I have had working with Jenni."

Margaret Webster: "She has long served as a role model and leader par excellence for all of us who are currently active locally, regionally or nationally in the visual resources field."

Karin Whalen: "She served as President of the VRA with distinction and authority, but also with graciousness and good humor....She is a true advocate and bridge builder for our profession locally and nationally and is equally effective as an advocate for the professional woman."

Jenni, you deserve this award so much. I will give you a copy of the nomination packet so you can read it all later.

### **Jenni Rodda's Remarks:**

When John Taormina called to tell me that I would be this year's Distinguished Service Award recipient, I was stunned. "Whatever for?" I said. As those of you who know me are aware, I am seldom tongue-tied; I certainly was then. I am very honored to be here, and to thank all of you for this presentation. I am also honored to join the list of previous DSA recipients, who are the respected members of our profession. My deepest thanks to the members of the Awards Committee, and to those colleagues who wrote in my support.

"Distinguished" is defined as "marked by eminence, distinction, or excellence; see FAMOUS." I'm not particularly famous, certainly, and any "eminence" to my person is of the éminence gris variety. As many of you know, I don't tend to take myself very seriously. I'm the one running around conferences in my sneakers, drinking way too much coffee, taking a rather jaded view of just about everything. My work, however, is another matter, and it is deeply gratifying to know that so many others noticed. It is particularly gratifying to have one's work recognized by one's peers.

There are many wonderful people in our profession who have lent guidance, encouragement, an occasional knock upside the head, a nudge in the right direction, commiseration, multiple cups of coffee, a great deal of laughter, and long-standing

friendship, whom I would like to take this rare opportunity to publicly thank. These are the most important people I have encountered in my professional life; over the many years of our work together, we have often become friends as well as colleagues. So, to these special people, a special thank you:

Norine Duncan, who gave me my first job as a slide library assistant, when I was an art history graduate student at Brown. Nori taught me the basics of organizational hierarchies and the beauty of natural language labeling. If not for Nori, I would not have gone in to the profession.

Janice Sorkow, my boss at the MFA, who in 1980 was already working to link text and images on-line. From Janice, I learned that you really can develop working relationships with high-level museum curators and academicians, even across the perceived chasm between "staff" and "administration."

Brent Maddox, who somehow convinced me that running for Vice President back in 1993 was a good idea. I wonder where Brent is now!

Tina Updike, who was President during my first year as VP. Tina continues to teach me many things about professionalism, project management, and where Elvis might be now, but the most important thing I have learned from Tina is how to encourage someone to go beyond themselves. Sometimes, all it takes for someone to do wonderful things is a little encouragement, and a hand up.

Jeanette Mills, who I'm glad to see has forgiven me for nominating HER for VP a few years ago. Jeanette does all kinds of varied and interesting things beyond her work (ask her about her trip to Antarctica later); hers is a stellar example of the well-rounded life. She also outdid me as VP by planning her wedding at the same time she was planning one of our conferences.

Sherman Clarke, who has taught me that no matter how cold it is in New York City, it's never too cold to wear sandals. His creative thinking and interest in images have helped bring about many wonderful collaborations, both within NYU and beyond.

Max Marmor, who, when I cavalierly mentioned I thought we should submit a proposal to CIHA in 1992, said "Sure, why not?" That off-hand comment over lunch led to VRA's participation in the Berlin conference of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art, and to what was at the time the largest grant the Association had ever received--\$5,000 from the Kress Foundation.

Lynda White, who I know made an extraordinary effort to be here this evening. Lynda and I are both white-knuckle podium grippers. From Lynda, I have learned to speak gracefully, clearly, and above all, succinctly, if only so the lectern doesn't end up as kindling.

Ben Kessler, the Greater New York Chapter member who lives the farthest west. Ben and I joke that we are from the Jurassic Period of image curatorship. Ben taught me the great

value of collegiality and collaboration—the ability to put out the candy dish, and still be treated as a professional. Ben is a great line dancer, in addition to his other skills, as he showed at the San Antonio conference in 1995; he and James Monteith and I had probably the most fun you can have planning a conference the day the three of us timed elevators in New York hotels before the 1997 conference.

Luraine Tansey, the Ur-curator at the Institute of Fine Arts , and without doubt one of the guiding lights of the profession. I wish Luraine could be with us this week, if only so we could see what kind of beach glass sculptures she's making now!

John Taormina, who taught me just about everything I know about editing—then encouraged me to go out and do it myself. John's also the ultimate sounding board, a colleague who is unafraid to tell me when he thinks I'm completely wrong.

Mark Pompelia, master of design. I had the distinct pleasure of encouraging him to take over the Writing Awards Committee, one of his first leadership roles in the Association. Mark has grown a great deal the last few years; I'm honored to think I might have played a small part in that.

Andy Gessner, probably the only person I know more jaded than I am (must come from living in New York all these years). Andy has been able to keep me laughing for as long as I've known him; when he was at Columbia , we frequently compared notes on our most difficult patrons, which helped us both deal with them more productively.

Karin Whalen, she of the sharp eye and sharper pencil. First time I met Karin was at the New York City conference in 1994, when she turned up at the registration desk looking for a bottle of Jack Daniels. She was Treasurer during my tenure as President, and her hard work helped keep the Association in the black.

Leigh Gates, who is the only person I know able to transcribe lawnmower noises into meeting notes. Leigh is without doubt one of the most gracious people I know. Her collaborative abilities distinguish her work. I put her good nature to the test the year she was Secretary and I was VP, and the registration desk just happened to be in our hotel bedroom.

Maryly Snow, with whom I've had the pleasure of working on the North American Lantern Slide Survey these last two years. That project has been one of the happiest experiences of my recent professional life.

My staff at the Institute of Fine Arts , especially Jason Varone, our web master, and Nita Roberts, our photographer; and all the student staff who have worked through my office. From them, I have learned to manage change, in all the best ways. Since many of our student staff graduate, become faculty—and end up working with all of you, I hope that I have instilled in them enough respect for the profession that they are easy to work with by the time they get to you.

A last, but certainly not least, thanks to my husband, Adam Loory. Adam, a cheerful soul and the guy I followed across the Pacific in a rather small sailboat (utter lunacy that was; I was still on the Board then, too), is my partner through life and my best friend. Without his support and encouragement, I'd've gone crazy years ago.

The list is much longer, but I didn't want these remarks to end up sounding like an Academy Awards acceptance speech (which it does enough already). That list is pretty humbling as it is! Let me close by encouraging those of you new to the profession, or new to VRA, to begin building the network of colleagues it takes to make wonderful things happen, here, now. Volunteer for a committee position; contribute to listserv discussions; develop a collaborative project. Write an article—even if your job description doesn't require it. Walk up to someone you don't know, and introduce yourself. The Association is as vibrant as its members. If I've accomplished anything in my career, it is only through working with all of you! Thank you.