

2003 Distinguished Service Award

Presented to Margaret N. Webster 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 9th day of April 2003, by Elisa Lanzi, VRA President, Jenni Rodda, VRA Awards Committee Chair, Eric Schwab and Lynda White

The Visual Resources Association annually honors an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the field of visual resources. Nominees must have achieved a level of distinction in the field either through leadership, research, or the development and management of a particular visual resources project. Consideration is also given to those who have shown outstanding innovation, participation, or service to the profession.

Presentation

The VRA Executive Board decided this year that it might be appropriate for someone close to the Distinguished Service Award recipient to present the award at VRA in Houston. The committee felt that this would allow for a special perspective. Because I have that special perspective, I have been asked to present the 2003 VRA Distinguished Service Award to Margaret N. Webster for her extensive service to the profession. As someone who works closely with Margaret on a daily basis, I can tell you the last thing she would want is to be singled out by her colleagues for any kind of special recognition. This is because Margaret has always looked at the visual resources profession as something that we all contribute to. Anyone who is familiar with Margaret knows that she is self-deprecating when she talks about her own contributions to the field. All I can say to Margaret is, this will be over in about five minutes so you'll just have to deal with it!

Margaret's nomination was based upon the established record of her accomplishments and the testimonials to her leadership abilities found in letters from professional colleagues sent to Lynda White and myself. Margaret has spent three decades in the field of visual resources and her efforts go back to the very inception of the VRA. One writer remembered that "for over twenty years Margaret has been a voice for the promotion of the institutional philosophy of the VRA in her active leadership within the organization at regional and national levels...." Margaret has shown leadership by serving as a member or chairperson of numerous committees, participating on executive boards, presenting and publishing her research, sharing her experience in workshops, mentoring budding professionals, and contributing to the development of practical tools for cataloging and professional status that have significantly benefited both VRA and ARLIS members. One supporter summed up Margaret's outlook very succinctly, "Margaret's work within the image profession has given her a broad range of skills and experiences that she generously shares with all her colleagues."

A common theme in many of the letters of support we received was how many professionals at all levels in our field view Margaret Webster as a mentor. As one supporter said: "Margaret's ability to coax the best from people while teaching and providing guidance operates at every level." Personally, I am proud to work with Margaret. When I was offered my current position at Cornell University five years ago, I jumped at the chance to work with her as Assistant Curator. I was aware of Margaret's reputation in the visual resources field and knew that I would learn from her by working with her on a daily basis. She has broadened my horizons and helped me develop professionally in ways I could never have imagined. One way in which she has done this, is by consistently going to bat for her staff; she has always insisted that her staff continue their education, which includes being active members in both the Visual Resources Association and ARLIS/NA.

Margaret is keenly aware of the importance of training and developing younger professionals in our field so that the profession continues to grow in new and exciting ways. This can only be done through mentoring and the promotion of our professional status, which Margaret has made a priority throughout her career. She has served on or chaired four committees, for both VRA and ARLIS/NA, dealing with professional status issues. She was chair of the first Joint Task Force on Visual Resources Professional Issues, contributing many chapters to the jointly published Guidelines for the Visual Resources Profession produced by this committee. Her role in this effort was critical as she was largely responsible for the "Criteria for the Hiring and Retention of Visual Resources Professionals." The "Criteria," since 1995, have been the benchmark for hiring and promoting visual resources professionals. In addition, her diligence was essential in devising and analyzing the survey on professional issues produced by the ARLIS/NA-VRA Joint Visual Professional Issues Task Force. Margaret also participated in developing a workshop on writing job descriptions, part of a total of twelve presentations and publications on this crucial topic, including Library Schools in Canada and the United States: Educational Opportunities for Careers in Fine Arts & Visual Resources Librarianship.

As a result of Margaret's undying commitment to the development of the visual resources "professional," many VR practitioners attribute their own professional growth and credibility to her contributions. One supporter wrote: "One of Margaret's major accomplishments was as chair of the Joint Taskforce on Visual Resources Professional Issues. I had the opportunity to work with her on this taskforce and I know how important her leadership, determination, and dedication was to achieving a very important and most valuable objective in the form of a document that could be used to elevate the professional status of visual resources professionals. The ... 'Criteria...,' established a benchmark for defining visual resources positions, particularly within academic settings where they were often not ranked on a par with equivalent library positions. In her long and distinguished career, this single document may be her most outstanding and long-lasting contribution to the profession."

Another area in which Margaret has made critical contributions has been standards for cataloging and digital images. She has served on the VRA Data Standards Committee since its inception and participated actively in work and discussions leading to publication of the

VRA Core Categories, version 3. She has presented the results of her study and thought about cataloging and indexing issues through eight conference sessions and publications. This work coincides with her pioneering efforts on digital imaging at Cornell. She participated in the MESL and VISION projects with the Getty, both of which were early tests of standards. One supporter noted that she was "a moving force behind the VISION Project which served as a pilot for the VRA Core Categories 2.0 and led to the revision to version 3.0." Another states that her "keen insight into the thorny issues of representing the built environment as metadata are invaluable. Without her, we would not have had a Core and we would not have had the VISION project." And another: "She seemed to be ever available, tireless, and always able to come up with a solution to a particularly knotty problem."

Margaret's latest adventure has been the new VRA strategic plan. She worked with co-chair Kathe Albrecht and the task force during six months to produce "an extensive strategic planning document, which can serve as a blueprint for the future growth and development of the Visual Resources Association." Margaret was described as "not only insightful and brilliant, but also diplomatic and a joy to work with." And again, "Margaret's leadership and collaborative skills helped to guide the [task force] members through a complicated process."

The Awards Committee noted that, "although the VRA Core, the "Criteria," MESL, VISION, and numerous other projects were mentioned in the letters, surely the Guidelines for the Visual Resources Profession and the first joint ARLIS/VRA conference in St. Louis last year, best exemplify her efforts over the years." A conference co-planner stated that Margaret was "incredibly organized, detail oriented, willing to listen, punctual and no-nonsense. Her wry sense of humor enlivened ... situations and her innovative and relevant suggestions greatly contributed to the success of our joint conference." Another co-planner "witnessed first-hand how Margaret took on the responsibility earnestly and with great integrity." And another: "The organizational work that went into making this conference a success was enormous, and I know, from my unique perspective, that a great deal of the credit for this goes directly to Margaret." A colleague and participant in that conference put it best: "Perhaps more than anyone else in our field, Margaret has worked to bridge the functional and philosophical gap that has existed between our two most representative professional organizations. The foundation of the VRA over twenty years ago was a necessary declaration of independence, but the trajectory of technological change has obviated many of the signature traits that made us stand apart. For years, Margaret has served on numberless joint VRA/ARLIS committees, seeking common ground between the two ends of an increasingly interdependent working environment. Her efforts in this regard culminated in the planning of last year's highly successful joint conference in St. Louis." Without Margaret's vision of what could be, and her dedicated effort, this joint gathering would not have been possible.

Last but not least, it should be noted that Margaret also has a day job. She has managed the Knight Visual Resources Facility in the College of Architecture, Art and Planning at Cornell University for over thirty years. One colleague noted: "I have witnessed her collection grow over the years (now over 450,000 slides) and have envied the new facility that she created. It is a beautiful space that is welcoming and efficient, has pleasant workspaces for both

patrons and staff, and had a spectacular, stainless steel circulation desk long before Frank Gehry's Bilbao Museum!"

As one supporter suggested, "We, as visual resources professionals, are all beneficiaries of Margaret's contributions to the field, her hard work, and her advocacy for professionalism in visual resources." A member of the Awards Committee stated, "I believe that Margaret has 'raised the bar' for all of us and it is people like her that have helped the Visual Resources profession become just that, a profession."

Congratulations Margaret! Thanks for listening. See you at work on Monday.

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