

VRA remarks for Nancy De Laurier Award

Thank you, Elisa, for your remarks, and for presenting this honor to me this evening. I am amazed at the statements from colleagues from VRA and SAH. It is incredibly gratifying to know that something one works on and believes in so deeply is appreciated by so many other people as well.

I find it hard to say how much this means to me. I was completely surprised and then thrilled when Margaret Webster called me with the news that I was being given the Nancy De Laurier Award from the VRA. Since the phone call, I've reflected on that moment, and on my surprise and delight, and that is what I want to share with all of you.

My work on SAHARA was born out of a strong belief that as visual resources curators and librarians, our roles are shifting dramatically. That is, our roles in terms of both how we do what we do and the what we do - the what being to build collections for scholarly use and research. As many of you are aware, our changing roles as professionals has been something that I've been thinking about and talking about for a long time. When I took on the role of working with the Society of Architectural Historians to build SAHARA, it was because I wanted to test out a model of both collection building and a model for how we, in our roles, integrate into the life of scholars and researchers and students. I wanted to see if my thoughts were valid, to see if we could imagine a new way of working, and a more integrated way of working in our academic institutions. At the time we began work on SAHARA, I was working at MIT and when I talked with our university librarian about wanting to spend 40% of my time on SAHARA, my argument was focused on how we need to test the new roles that we in the library and visual resources communities keep talking about; and that in the arts and architecture, the shifts in library roles would not be exactly parallel to those in the sciences; and that this was an opportunity to see what digital scholarship in the arts and architecture might be about. MIT agreed to support this work because the institution was in the process of rethinking roles of all librarians and visual resources curators and, I believe, I was proposing something MIT library administration could

support. Having the opportunity to work across four organizations – an academic institution - MIT, a scholarly society - SAH, VRA, and ARTstor as technology partner to build SAHARA was an opportunity that I felt was an opportunity for me personally, but also for my colleagues in VRA. It was the opportunity to bring different pieces of our daily work together in a project that had the potential to help us all re-think our roles.

One of the most important aspects of all this has been the Visual Resources Association. I believe that the VRA was fundamental to my becoming the professional I am through the professionalism of the association and the many different kinds of support VRA offers to members. The VRA first provided me with a culture in which I could learn what I needed to know to be a visual resources curator. It also provided me with an extensive network of colleagues with whom to work, and from whom to learn. Through my time in this association, I have collaborated with many of you - on committees, on sessions, on panels, on projects, and as President. Each of the activities in which I have participated in through VRA has fed directly into my work as a visual resources curator earlier in my career, and still feeds into my work today, which is now focused on leading a library, working closely with faculty, working on digital library issues, working on copyright problems, and thinking about how I can continue to grow professionally. The skills I use now I gained through my VRA membership and through working within VRA and with so many of you.

I believe that as we have all worked through the transition to digital images, and as we work in a digital world, we have come to understand even more fully the importance of collaboration, within our institutions, outside our institutions, and within this association. That sense of the importance of collaboration can be viewed as a trajectory- the first time we tried to share a cataloging template, which led us to develop standards and guidelines for our cataloging; the development of image presentation tools - MDID for instance, was developed by a member of this organization, and supported by many of our institutions; the development of the many

different shared cataloging tools that people in VRA created and nurtured; and the development of ARTstor within and about our community. This has all been a continuum of progress and shared development of our profession and collaborative skills.

While we in the VRA were building these incredible skills and deep knowledge base, the scholarly community began to look at collaborative scholarly work in the online environment. So that when the Society of Architectural Historians wanted to build an archive of visual content, based on scholar's images, they recognized that a collaboration with visual resources professionals would be invaluable, or perhaps I should say critical, to their project. I feel that the collaboration we have built with the SAH is another step in the trajectory of collaboration. This time, however, we are stepping into the realm of collaboration with scholars, who are the drivers for intellectual work in academic institutions. Some of our colleagues have been members of the SAHARA Editorial Board, and one thing we have all agreed is that it is a true collaboration between scholars and visual resources professionals and librarians because we all bring domain expertise to the project.

One of the most gratifying parts of my work with SAHARA was the outpouring of support from so many of you in VRA. When I began approaching people to get their interest in working to support SAHARA, the response was excitement and an eagerness to see how to make SAHARA something transformative. When we had our early editorial meetings, there was a complete balance in the number of librarians and scholars working together at the same table, discussing metadata fields, the use of metadata fields, editorial workflow issues; we tested the first instance of SAHARA together, and we built a level of trust amongst and across our domains that was and is inspiring.

I will always be appreciative of the individuals who have participated with me in working on SAHARA to date. I am grateful to the many conference organizers over the last five years who have provided space and time in conference schedules for not only sessions, but SAHARA

meetings, so that the work continues. Again, this is evidence of the commitment of VRA to support our work as professionals and to help us each grow and move in new directions.

SAHARA at this point has had a good beginning and it will continue, but requires commitment from all of us as well as SAH. I encourage you to talk to anyone connected with SAHARA to see what your level of interest might be.

I am so proud to be a member of this organization, and honored to have been mentored and encouraged by so many of you through the years. Thank you so very much for this honor tonight.