

Collaboration between the National Library of Australia and Australian arts libraries

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In May 2004, the National Library of Australia held a Visual Arts Forum, largely in response to concerns raised by members of the arts libraries society in Australia and New Zealand, ARLIS/ANZ. Many of these concerns may be shared by members of ARLIS/NA. They include a need for a good directory of arts libraries, a need for better access to the hidden resources of arts libraries such as vertical files, and a general feeling that the constraints inherent in being a small library with a small budget were preventing arts libraries from realising much of the promise of new technology, specifically the promise of the Internet and digitisation.

The Visual Arts Forum took the form of a one-day meeting with over 40 attendees from ARLIS/ANZ libraries, the National Library and other stakeholders such as the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools. It is now two years since the Forum, and a good time to assess its outcomes. On the whole, it is fair to say that it produced some notable achievements, some improved understanding, and some disappointments. The whole process of the Forum is also an interesting case study in the relationship between a national library and a body of small libraries, and a chance to assess the expectations that each had of the other.

At this stage, I should declare that I am wearing two hats. In 2005 I became President of ARLIS/ANZ, and so have the privilege and responsibility of representing the views of arts libraries in Australia and New Zealand. I am also an employee of the National Library of Australia, and have been so for over 20 years. Before taking on responsibility for the Library's collection of art works and photographs, I worked in the area of the Library that provided services to other Australian libraries.

To represent this I have actually brought two hats with me. This beret represents the art libraries – it's small, it's stylish, it has I think visual appeal, and it does its precise job, of keeping the top of the head warm, very well. It was harder to find a 'national hat' to represent the National Library. In the end I decided on this one – the kind of hat traditionally worn in the Australian outback. The corks are meant to ward off bush flies. This hat is appropriate – it's broader, more all-encompassing, and has some effective ... infrastructure.

You might be surprised that Australian arts libraries should turn to the National Library for help, rather than to the other large institutions, such as universities, art museums, and government departments of which they generally form a part. In the Australian context, however, this was a reasonable thing to do. The National Library of Australia was established by an Act of Parliament; one of the things the Act requires the Library to do is provide leadership

to Australian libraries. One of the main ways supports Australian libraries is through National Bibliographic Database, recently relaunched as Libraries Australia¹.

Since March this year, incidentally, searching on Libraries Australia has become free of charge, so it is a good link to add to your library home pages if your users ever need Australian material.

The National Library also compiles directory information about Australian libraries, has participated in subject gateway projects, has organised collaborative access to digitised material, and regularly hosts meetings to discuss national issues.

ARLIS/ANZ also had a proud record to bring to the discussion table. Despite its small membership, generally between around 200 personal and institutional members, ARLIS/ANZ had produced a *Directory of Arts Libraries and Resource Collections in Australia*, published in 1983² and an updated directory, published as *Indexing the visual arts in Australia: a survey* published in 1991³. An online successor, called *Ariadne: Finding art information in Australia and New Zealand*, which was placed on the web in 1998 and withdrawn in 2001 when its updating strategy proved unsustainable.

Some ARLIS/ANZ member libraries had also done heroic solo work – for instance the Art Gallery of New South Wales Library had mounted its database of the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Art Prizes⁴ on the web. The University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts had also mounted AustArt database⁵ which indexes over 120 art and design journals.

But these efforts, though wonderful, were nowhere near meeting the web-fuelled expectations of Australian arts library users. So the National Library convened the Visual Arts Forum in May 2004 with a number of issues to address. The issues were summed up by ARLIS/ANZ member Jill More as

*... the visual arts librarians were seeking ways to take advantage of developments in digital technology and the web environment, and to gain support for individual arts libraries in their attempt to make their resources available to end users and researchers.*⁶

Specifically the issues were:

¹ National Library of Australia. Libraries Australia <http://librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au>. Accessed 28 April 2006.

² *Directory of Arts Libraries and Resource Collections in Australia* edited by Susan Maddrell. North Sydney, N.S.W. : Australia Council for the Policy and Planning Division, c1983

³ Jill More. *Indexing the visual arts in Australia: a survey*. 1991. Sydney: ARLIS/ANZ and the University of NSW College of Fine Arts, 1991.

⁴ *Archibald, Wynne, Sulman and Australian Photographic Portraits Prizes database* at http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/lib/prizes_database. Accessed 27 April 2006.

⁵ *AustArt index* at <http://austart.library.unsw.edu.au/AustArt>. Accessed 27 April 2006.

⁶ Jill More. *Visual Arts Forum: introduction in ARLIS/ANZ journal* no. 57, June 2004, page 14.

- the need for a directory of Australian arts libraries
- the need to provide web access to hidden arts resources
- the need for better access to the websites of individual artists, designers and architects
- the need for better access to rights information about art works
- the cost of purchasing of online resources.

Many ARLIS/ANZ members saw the first four issues as potentially resolvable through the development of a national arts portal or gateway⁷. At the time of the Visual Arts Forum, I was not ARLIS/ANZ president, and attended the Forum as a National Library staff member. I knew that the Library was not in favour of an arts gateway, and watched with some fascination as the Library and ARLIS/ANZ, with great courtesy and negotiation skills on both sides, worked through this at the Forum.

I will, later in this paper, go into some detail as to how these differing approaches were resolved, but first I'd like to set the debate in context by making some comments on the types of portals or gateways that exist on the Web.

Subject gateways have been defined as

*A Web-based mechanism for accessing a collection of high quality, evaluated resources identified to support research and/or learning in a particular subject discipline*⁸

With a stretch, this definition allows even the 'Favourites' list that you have probably compiled in your own web browser, to be a Gateway. Take a bow – we are all Gateway creators!

The next simplest type of gateway is the 'links' page often created by libraries, even very small libraries. One Australian example is the list of links to Australian visual arts websites compiled by the School of Art Library at the Australian National University⁹. These types of gateways have fairly assured futures, because they are relatively simple to maintain. And they are usually created by a single institution, often a single hard-working reference librarian, and so do not need to support the overheads of co-operation.

The third type of gateway is the medium-sized co-operative gateway. These begin with grant funding, and with enthusiasm from a loose coalition of organisations. They have a relatively narrow focus, which makes them potentially very useful to their target audience but also very vulnerable to changes in their audience. After a few years of activity, they may face uncertain futures. One Australian example was the MetaChem Gateway, which was established in 1998 to provide a single access point to chemistry information for Australian researchers, and

⁷ For example, a portal was suggested by Andrew Wells, University of New South Wales Librarian, in a letter to National Library of Australia Director-General Jan Fullerton, dated 15 November 2002

⁸ National Library of Australia. Australian Subject Gateways Forum: Overview. www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/sg. Accessed 28 April 2006. Accessed 25 April 2006.

⁹ Australian National University. Australian Visual Arts Websites. http://anulib.anu.edu.au/subjects/creative_arts/subjects/austvisres.html. Accessed 29 April 2006.

which quietly faded after 2002. A current example is AusStage¹⁰, which has done a fantastic job in compiling event listings of Australian theatrical performances, but is currently seeking support from sponsors to continue its good work .

The fourth type is the federated gateway. These gateways are generally just a new method by which an organisation fulfils one of its long-term responsibilities. They may be co-operative, but if so the co-operation preceded the idea of the gateway and the co-operative framework is often at a senior level, for instance the heads of state government education departments. They have broad subject areas. They have recurrent funding and are often government funded. Australian examples include CAN, the Collections Australia Network, a 'gateway to over 1500 museums, galleries, archives and libraries throughout Australia'¹¹ and EdNA, a gateway for teachers and others in the education industry¹².

It seemed clear to those attending the Visual Arts Forum in May 2004 that the type of gateway that some Australian arts librarians envisioned was a 'Gateway of the Third Kind', a medium-sized co-operative gateway, the most challenging and riskiest type of gateway to implement. And it also became increasingly clear during the Forum that resources to support such a gateway were not available. ARLIS/ANZ itself does not have any paid staff or an administrative structure that can support long-term projects. The parent institutions of arts libraries could have joined together in a bid for grant funding, but wisely no-one suggested this, probably because they were all too aware of the sustainability problems when grant funding expires. The National Library's role in relation to other Australian subject gateways had been limited to short-term support for demonstrator projects, convening information-sharing fora and promoting standards.

So the Forum took a step back from the idea of a gateway and looked instead at the building blocks of the problem. I think this was exactly the right thing to have done, from both a strategic and a practical point of view. After all, a gateway implies a gateway to something, and in many cases the 'something' needed a lot more work before anyone thought about building an entry point to it.

The most important of the 'building block' problems that the Forum and its subsequent working groups examined in detail was the need for web access to hidden arts library resources. In particular, to exhibition and sales catalogues, and to vertical files and ephemera.

(At an ARLIS/ANZ conference in Australia in the 1990s the term 'guerrilla resources' was coined for these, but I prefer the term 'hidden resources' so as not to distract you with images of us up gum trees with machine guns.)

I think that hidden resources are also an issue for the members of ARLIS/NA. Articles that define the problem include one in *Art Documentation* in 1995 by Paula Baxter with the

¹⁰ AusStage: gateway to the Australian performing arts. <http://www.ausstage.edu.au>. Accessed 28 April 2006.

¹¹ CAN: Collections Australia Network. <http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/> Accessed 28 April 2006.

¹² EdNA Online: Education Network Australia <http://www.edna.edu.au> Accessed 28 April 2006.

challenging title *North American vertical file database: dream or possibility*¹³. And you have made considerable achievements in this area, with the *Artists in Canada* database of vertical files¹⁴ being an impressive example.

In our part of the world, the problem was defined by the survey done in 2003 by the National Library of Australia in preparation for the Visual Arts Forum, which noted that of the 37 arts libraries that responded to the survey, fourteen held extensive collections of sales and exhibition catalogues, nine held vertical files of artists biographies, eleven held press clippings files. Most of these resources were not recorded in online catalogues. In a nutshell the problem was summed up by one of ARLIS/ANZ's New Zealand members, Catherine Hammond, as

*It is these types of material that research has shown are vital to visual arts researchers yet are the least likely to be accessible*¹⁵

Although this problem is well understood by the members of both ARLIS/NA and ARLIS/ANZ, it is not well understood by the wider library community. The kinds of documents that are in our vertical files and collections of sales catalogues and ephemera are referred to in other contexts as 'grey literature'¹⁶. Grey literature receives considerable attention, with regular international conferences, and government interest because of its usefulness for business, science and military intelligence purposes. In the seven international conferences held so far, however, the grey literature in arts library collections does not get a single mention. I find this surprising given that the grey literature in arts libraries is such a significant source of information, not only for academics and students, but for professionals such as curators preparing exhibitions, and even, if they knew about it, for art investors. In seeking resources for dealing with the hidden resources of arts libraries, we do need to alert wider audiences to the problem. Arts librarians could certainly introduce a bit of colour into the grey literature field!

To return to the Visual Arts Forum. The arts librarians at the forum were seeking a simple method to create bibliographic records for artist files and arts ephemera, and to make these records accessible beyond their own library catalogues. The National Library proposed a generic solution – that arts libraries create records for these on Libraries Australia. As an outcome of the Forum, the National Library put guidelines for the bibliographic description of non-book resources in visual arts collections on the Web¹⁷.

¹³ Paul Baxter. *North American vertical file database: dream or possibility* in *Art documentation*, Spring 1995, pages 3 - 4.

¹⁴ *Artists in Canada: a list identifying the location of files on Canadian artists*, managed by the Canadian Heritage Information Network. <http://daryl.chin.gc.ca:8000/BASIS/aich/user/www/sf> Accessed 24 April 2006.

¹⁵ Catherine Hammond. *Indexing the visual arts in New Zealand: a survey* in *ARLIS/ANZ journal* no 60, Dec. 2005, pages 7 – 22.

¹⁶ For a definition of grey literature see Dominic J. Farace *Foreword to Perspectives on the design and transfer of scientific and technical information: third International Conference on Grey Literature, Jean Monnet Building, Luxembourg, 13-14 November 1997: GL '97 proceedings*. Amsterdam: GreyNet, 1998.

¹⁷ National Library of Australia. *Guidelines for the Description of Non-Book Resources in Visual Arts Collections*. <http://www.nla.gov.au/librariesaustralia/manuals/nonbook.html> Accessed 30 April 2006.

The guidelines included cataloguing templates. The Library also, as an outcome of the Forum, offered a training course on creation of bibliographic records for Libraries Australia; the course was held as a workshop at the ARLIS/ANZ conference in Sydney in 2004.

I mentioned earlier that some of the outcomes of the Forum were seen as disappointing. This was one of the disappointments. Many of the arts librarians attending the workshop on adding bibliographic records to Libraries Australia commented to me later that they felt it was too generic. And no-one, to my knowledge, has used the templates that the National Library placed on its web site.

In essence, this comes down to one of the perennial issues in the relationship between national libraries and large consortia on the one hand, and groups that have a specialised focus on the other. The specialised groups have specific problems; the national libraries and consortia offer generic solutions. Steering a path between my two hats here, I would suggest that arts librarians have to meet the challenge of analysing generic solutions to find a way to adapt them to their needs; and national libraries and consortia need to communicate their generic solutions in a more flexible way.

One example is the presentation of the minimum level record requirements. The example given by the National Library in the *Guidelines for the bibliographic description of non-book resources in visual arts collections* is this:

Example of minimal level record

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001      000021200330
005      19991123160729.0
008      991123s1999      iaua      000 0 eng d
020      °a0787263214
040      °aVDU °beng °cVDU
100 1    °aEversman, Sharon.
245 10   °aMolecular and cellular biology : °blaboratory
observations
Biology 102 / °cSharon Eversman, Carol Johnson.
250      °a4th ed.
260      °aDubuque, Iowa : °bKendall/Hunt , °cc1999.
300      °a79 p. : °bill. ; °c28 cm.
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To an experienced National Library cataloguer, this looks very basic, the kind of thing you could knock up in a couple of minutes. To many arts librarians, it looks quite scary. The two views could probably be reconciled if the record was presented in a way that showed only the data that you needed to enter, excluding the system-generated and default data, and displayed the tags as English words instead of numbers.

Still, librarians are very resilient; if one attempt at communication falters they will quietly keep on trying. And that is what has happened since the Forum, with some good signs of success.

The State Library of Victoria, for instance, has started to add bibliographic records for its artists files to Libraries Australia¹⁸.

Though the State Library of Victoria is a large library, they are doing this particular project with very limited resources, which makes it a good model for smaller arts libraries. The brief records are being created by reference staff, not cataloguers. In a smaller library this work might be done by volunteers. The reference librarians enter the records into the Library's ILS, using a template. The template is in MARC format but the reference librarians don't need to understand MARC to use the template. In many cases they enter little more than the artists' name; the rest of the data is supplied automatically. It is proposed to load these records to Libraries Australia by a batch process. The first test records are already on Libraries Australia; here is an example.

Record Id: 28526567 (Australian Library Collections)

Title: [A.E. Jarrett : Australian Art and Artists file].

Series: [Australian Art and Artists file](#)

Contents: Files contain material such as art exhibition catalogues, invitations, press clippings, media releases and/or other ephemeral items relating to Australian artists and galleries.

Subjects: [Jarrett, A.E.](#)
[Artists, Australian -- Exhibitions.](#)

Language: English

Libraries that have this item: [State Library of Victoria \(VSL\)](#) 1106422 held

It is important, if you are ever negotiating the loading of this type of data to a consortium database, to remind everyone involved that artist files are unique resources. If, for instance, the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of Victoria both have artists files on A.E. Jarrett, the contents of those files will be different. The minimum data requirements of large databases are designed to allow matching and merging of differently-sourced records for the same item. With records for unique items, there is more room to be flexible: considerable room in my view to negotiate around minimum data requirements.

The State Library of Victoria example is one case in which the important hidden resources of an arts library are being made more accessible, with relatively little pain. Two other examples were initiated by ARLIS/ANZ as an organisation.

In considering the issue of access to hidden resources raised at the Visual Arts Forum, ARLIS/ANZ faced the question – had we as an organisation done all that we could to help members with this problem? Most of the problem was due to lack of resources, and ARLIS/ANZ had surplus money in the bank. So it seemed a good idea to put the money and the need together. In 2005 we announced a grants program, targeted at projects that would

¹⁸ Eric Gamon. *Artist file project at the State Library of Victoria: better access to guerrilla resources* in *ARLIS/ANZ journal* no. 60 Dec 2005, pages 36-40.

make arts resources publicly available through the Internet. From a number of very good proposals, we were able to fund two:

- Research Library of Art Gallery of New South Wales. A\$8000 for the preservation and digitisation of the Research Library's newspaper clippings for 1905 to 1921
- Auckland Art Gallery Research Library. NZ\$4,400 for a project to scan the Gallery's exhibition catalogues from the 1950s and 1960s. This project will make a number of important art essays available online including writings by Colin McCahon.

These projects will be completed during 2006, at which time ARLIS/ANZ will evaluate the results to see if we wish to continue the grants program. It is very likely that we will.

And lastly, prompted by the writing of this paper, I found a low-effort way to get records for my own section's artists and photographer files on to the Web. We will use a method similar to that of the State Library of Victoria, though starting with an Excel spreadsheet list rather than a template.

These projects - at the State Library of Victoria, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Auckland Art Gallery Research Library and the Pictures Branch of the National Library - might have gone ahead even if the Visual Arts Forum had not occurred. But it is unlikely that they would have gone ahead with such an emphasis on making the results so widely available, through the Internet or Libraries Australia.

The projects are more significant than their size. They each demonstrate different approaches to addressing the problem of hidden resources in arts libraries, so they have the value of providing examples for other Australian and New Zealand arts libraries to follow.

After the issue of access to hidden resources, the next most pressing issue raised at the Visual Arts Forum was the need for a directory of Australian arts libraries. There was some interest in the model provided by arlis.net¹⁹ in the United Kingdom. This very useful directory of over 250 arts libraries was established by the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, with grant assistance from the British Library and a higher education funding program, the Research Support Libraries Program. Maintenance is done by the staff of the National Art Library when they have time.

Arlis.net was one model. The National Library proposed a different model, which was another example of a generic solution to a specific problem. The National Library has maintained Australian Libraries Gateway²⁰, a directory of over 5000 Australian Libraries, since 1998. By limiting a search of this directory to a 'library type' of art, you can narrow the directory to 96 Australian libraries that include substantial art holdings.

¹⁹ Arlis.net directory and periodicals database. <http://www.arlis.net/> Accessed 25 April 2006.

²⁰ National Library of Australia. Australian Libraries Gateway. <http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/index.html> Accessed 26 April 2006.

There were still some minor concerns – the Gateway’s search facility needed some enhancements, a small number of relevant libraries were not listed and some of the entries were not up to date. However these types of issues are likely to plague any directory. ARLIS/ANZ members were also keen to avoid a situation where they had to update a second, specific directory, as well keep their entries up to date in the Australian Libraries Gateway, so the Library’s solution was accepted. The Library plans to redevelop the Australian Libraries Gateway as part of Libraries Australia, and deliver improved searching in the process. I think this solution to the need for a directory of Australian arts libraries is a very good one.

I will touch briefly on the other issues raised at the Visual Arts Forum. The issue of better access to artists websites has been addressed, to some extent, by the National Library’s Pandora database²¹, which catalogues and archives the content of selected Australian websites. ARLIS/ANZ members can recommend sites for inclusion in Pandora. One problem remains - the reluctance of some artists to put their images on websites - but this is outside the scope of the National Library or ARLIS/ANZ to address.

The second last topic, rights information, is a huge topic in its own right. Rights information is a mixture of

- copyright information – whether a work is in copyright and who the copyright owner is – and
- permissions information – for instance whether the owner of manuscript material is happy for it be made publicly available.

The permissions information is specific to the institution holding the, say, manuscript material. You might think the copyright information was more objective and could easily be created in a co-operative way, but in fact there are, as you would know, many grey areas - for instance with orphaned works, uncontactable copyright holders, disputes or vagueness among family members who have inherited copyright.

Given this complexity, it is no surprise that there is no easy co-operative solution to the need for better rights information, and that the Visual Arts Forum made little headway on this topic. There is however, for Australian libraries, a glimmer at the end of the tunnel. The National Library started a project this year to develop a Rights Management System for its own collection material, which will pioneer a number of issues so that we can at least provide advice to other libraries on how to do it, or perhaps with hindsight how not to do it!

The last issue, consortial purchasing of database access, is an issue that preceded the Visual Arts Forum by many years. The issue - small libraries, large prices – is not confined to art libraries. In December 2004, several months after the Visual Art Forum, the National Library brought together another forum from all library sectors to discuss the need for consortial purchasing. This has led to a Request for Tender process²² - the RFT will be issued in a few months – which it is hoped will provide better options for Australian libraries to access costly databases. None of the proposed databases are subject specific – again a generic solution to

²¹ National Library of Australia. Pandora: Australia’s web archive. <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/index.html>
Accessed 30 April 2006.

²² National Library of Australia. National licensing proposal. <http://www.nla.gov.au/nlp/> Accessed 1 May 2006.

a specific problem – but arts libraries will benefit with more affordable options for databases such as those of major Australian and international newspapers.

On the arts specific side, as a result of the Visual Arts Forum, the National Library arranged for the library of the Art Gallery of South Australia to access Grove Art Online for a trial period through CASL (the Council of Australian State Libraries). The Art Gallery library investigated whether being part of a CASL deal to purchase Grove Art Online would bring the price down to a level that the Art Gallery library could afford. Sadly the Grove Art Online price proved to be still beyond the Art Gallery library's means. Jin Whittington, librarian at the Art Gallery of South Australia, does however see other positive outcomes from the Visual Arts Forum:

I welcome the innovative move by the National Library of Australia to allow arts libraries to access various databases such as RLG, OCLC and SCIPPIO through its Libraries Australia gateway on a pay-per-search basis, with the billing handled through their Libraries Australia subscription²³

The Visual Arts Forum of May 2004 focussed on practical issues. The decisions the Forum made were however, with the benefit of hindsight, also good at the strategic level. The world of online delivery is moving so fast that it is not cost-effective for groups of small libraries to set up their own directories or gateways. Arts libraries will contribute more to society by investing in data creation, whether they are scanning rare exhibition catalogues or cataloguing artists files. Gateways will come and go; good data will stay forever.

In summary, the Visual Arts Forum produced some disappointments, better understanding, some very useful projects and a good strategic outlook. Like most libraries, Australian arts libraries are still not meeting the web-fuelled expectations of their users, but are making solid achievements in this direction, and we have much of which to be proud.

²³ Jin Whittington, Art Gallery of South Australia Library. Personal communication to Linda Groom, 28 April 2004.