Managing the Small Art Museum Library

Joan M. Benedetti

SUMMARY. Small art museum libraries are among the most administratively challenging of special libraries—and the most rewarding. Managing this most glamorous of research venues as the solo professional or with minimal assistance inevitably tests the librarian’s deepest personal and professional reserves. He or she constantly weighs the desire to serve a highly attractive clientele—curators, art educators, docents, collectors, artists and independent researchers with the reality of what one librarian can do. Technology has an enormous impact on libraries and on art historical research, but small libraries struggle to pay for it. Services are possible today in small libraries that were available in only the largest institutions a decade ago. Although our OPACs can work “24/7,” human beings cannot. Solo art museum librarians love their jobs but are in constant danger of burn-out. By managing themselves, they will keep their morale and their professional standards high.

KEYWORDS. Small art museum libraries, solo librarians, one-person librarians, art museum library management, museum library management

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INTRODUCTION

There are museum libraries; there are art museum libraries. And then there are small art museum libraries. This paper looks primarily, though not exclusively, at art museum libraries run by “solo librarians.” Also known as “one-person librarians,” or OPLs, it turns out these brave folks work in museums of many sizes, but the term refers to a situation in which they are “the only librarian (or only professional librarian) in a library or information center.”

For the past five years, I have worked as a cataloger in a large art research library in a large metropolitan survey museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Before coming to work at LACMA, I was for 21 years the Museum Librarian at a much smaller, more specialized museum, the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM), just across the street, but a world away in terms of funding and staffing.

Not surprisingly, my experience as a professional librarian in these two settings has been very different. In some ways, my experience at the large, fully staffed and supported library at LACMA has put my years as a one-person librarian at CAFAM into perspective, giving me an enhanced appreciation of the special qualities—and problems—of the small art museum library. I decided to seek out the experiences of others working in these settings, and to report here on the patterns and principles that might emerge.

WHAT IS A SMALL ART MUSEUM LIBRARY?

In March/April of 2002, as background research for this paper, I conducted a survey focusing on small art museum libraries, drawing on a volunteer sample from the membership of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), initially from the e-mail list of the Solo Librarians Discussion Group. One of my underlying assumptions was that small museum libraries would be found in small museums. However, as survey data came in, it became clear that small museum libraries are not necessarily found in small museums, and some medium-sized and larger museums housed libraries staffed by solo librarians. Some of these were among the oldest museums in the United States and some of their libraries, if measured by collection size, could not be called “small libraries.” A few of the librarians in these facilities were the survivors of a larger professional staff that had recently been cut back; others have been solo librarians for a decade or more.
A recent article in *Museum News* (March/April 2002) written by Ron Chew, Executive Director of the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, gave me a different perspective on the definition of “small” as it applies to museums:

The exact number of small museums is unknown; the count varies according to the source. . . . According to the AAM [American Association of Museums] Small Museum Administrators Committee (SMAC), a small museum has a budget of less than $350,000. However, the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services sets the cut-off point at $250,000. . . . AAM estimates that there are more than 8,200 museums in the country, a majority of which can be considered small. . . . In the opinion of Roger Lidman, director of the Pueblo Grande Museum in Phoenix, “AAM is not on small museums’ radar, and they are not on AAM’s radar.” He argues that there are nearly 16,000 museums in the country, most of which are small, far more than AAM accounts for. He bases this figure on a 1997 survey of state museum associations (summarized in a report that he co-authored called *Are Museums Ready for the Year 2000*, published by the Museum Association of Arizona).

Small museums are not alone in being ignored by the AAM; museum libraries are likewise “not on their radar,” and they have long resisted the idea of including museum libraries among the facilities required of a museum for accreditation. This was noted in 1977, in an unpublished Master’s Paper, written by Lynne Ann Waldruff in partial fulfillment for a Master of Science in Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

As directors cut budgets and staffs, the art museum library may feel particularly threatened because of the relative lack of importance that the museum profession has placed in its work. . . . In the checklist [*Museum Accreditation: Professional Standards*, 1973] utilized by the American Association of Museums visiting committee evaluating museums requesting accreditation, there are only three questions out of 170 involving the library and reference tools available. The library is not specifically mentioned as one of the main areas of concern. . . . An inadequate library has not been listed as a reason to table or reject accreditation of a museum.
Almost twenty years later, Esther Green Bierbaum reported the situation had changed very little:

Documentary evidence suggests that the museum community itself gives museum libraries short shrift. For example, less space is given to the library in the American Association of Museums (AAM) accreditation standards than to any other facility or services. The 1992 AAM survey of 8,179 American museums included one question about library facilities, burying it in section E.57A, “Public Programs [Museum Accreditation: A Handbook for the Institution. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1990]. The six questions of the institutional evaluation form (out of more than 100) that are directed to library facilities emphasize research support and collection organization. Museum libraries do not yet appear to be an overwhelming concern for the museum profession.8

This seeming reluctance by the AAM to give more than the most cursory acknowledgement to the value of museum libraries may not be rooted in a lack of respect for museum libraries per se. It may reflect more of a desire to encourage even the smallest museums to come under the AAM umbrella—or it may be that libraries are just “not on their radar.” The reality of small museum life is that, for museums under a certain budgetary and staff size, the provision of professionally directed library services will not be possible unless the museum is lucky enough to find a professional librarian (perhaps retired) who is willing to volunteer. In this kind of marginal situation, the volunteer is not necessarily a “scab,” taking a job that would otherwise be a paid position. If the volunteer professional is worth his or her salt, they will think creatively about how to steer the museum toward professional standards, utilizing interns from the local library school if possible, perhaps writing some grant proposals, possibly involving the museum in a library consortium, doing all they can to prepare the museum for hiring a professional librarian when its needs have outgrown a volunteer operation. Esther Green Bierbaum, in her second edition of Museum Librarianship9 provides an excellent list of “Staffing Alternatives” when a museum cannot afford a full-time professional librarian. Her suggestions ensure that there will be input from a professional librarian even when one cannot be added to the permanent staff.

In all, then, the small art museum librarians (all ARLIS/NA members) who participated in my survey are mostly not from museums that
would be considered small. I asked respondents to report not only their library’s budget, but that of the parent organization as well. Although one-third of the respondents did not answer this question, of the two-thirds that did, only one worked in a museum whose budget was under $1,000,000. The median museum budget reported was $4,750,000 and the responses ranged from $500,000 to $25,000,000. Yet in all but two of these cases, these were libraries with one professional (or less) and no more than 1.50 support staff.

Small art museum libraries are among the most administratively challenging of art libraries—and the most rewarding—though not monetarily. Two respondents to the survey commented they would recommend it to “anyone who could afford it.” Managing this most glamorous of research venues as the solo professional or with minimal assistance inevitably tests the librarian’s deepest personal and professional reserves. Solo librarianship, once one has committed oneself to a particular venue, is usually a labor of love. A professional librarian in a small art museum library weighs constantly the desire to serve a highly attractive clientele—which will include curators, museum educators, docents, artists, collectors, teachers, and independent scholars—with the reality of what one librarian, however energetic and highly trained, can do. A love of the subject matter and a respect for the clientele and the institution that employs them can ease the daily political, technical, personnel, and funding challenges of working in a small art museum library.

After working for five years in a large, fully supported library in a museum with over 50 departments, including 12 separate curatorial departments, I look back on my years as a solo librarian at the Craft & Folk Art Museum and see clearly that I miss most of all two things: being a part of almost everything that went on at CAFAM—or at least knowing about it; and being able to shape the collection and the programs of the CAFAM Library. A very important plus—for small libraries and for small museums—is the ability to see relatively quickly the results of your personal efforts. Working at CAFAM was a struggle, but those of us on the staff who persevered could see clearly where we wanted to go. In the long run, we achieved a remarkable amount of success—and we had a good deal of fun doing it.

**WHAT’S SO SPECIAL ABOUT WORKING IN AN ART MUSEUM?**

I would like to review some general aspects of the art museum as a library venue before focusing on the situation of the solo, or mini-
mally-staffed art museum library. These are characteristics of almost all art museum libraries. For anyone whose primary subject interest is in art or art history, the very idea of working in an art museum is exciting. Librarians with art degrees are no different, and most of the art museum librarians who participated in my survey responded with enthusiasm to questions about art museums as places to work. In response to the question, “What is distinctive about working in an art museum library?” here are some typical comments:

- You are always surrounded by art, which feeds you even when the work is overwhelming.
- I like working closely with curators to have a sense of what is going on in the museum world in general through my work in the library.
- Close involvement with other areas of the museum, opportunities to interact with artists and curators, immersion in subject matter I’m passionate about.

There are two major characteristics of art museums that set their libraries apart from other art libraries. The first is related to the purpose of museums, which (according to the AAM Professional Standards for Accreditation, 1989) is “essentially educational or aesthetic . . . and to own and utilize tangible objects, care for them, and exhibit them to the public on some regular schedule.”¹¹ The primary purpose of the museum library, therefore, is to support research concerning the museum’s objects, as well as those it may not own but exhibits, by providing information on those and related objects as well as pertinent information on their cultural context, and the creators of those objects. Related to the support of the museum’s objects (usually referred to as “the permanent collection”) may be provision of images of those objects, and provision of information (usually through auction catalogs) about their purchase.

It is important to remember that no matter how many other functions the library may take on (supporting docents and education programs, archiving museum historical documents,¹² serving independent scholars and other members of the public), the primary justification for the art museum library collection is support of the museum’s object collections and/or its exhibition programs. This focus justifies the library’s existence in many ways: Even if the museum staff, for example, is relatively small, a library collection commensurate with its object collections in size and depth is appropriate. Because it is a research library, it will weed its collection very little; the bibliographic history of the museum’s objects and their cultural context will likely grow in value with age. Of course, at the
same time that one builds the library collection to reflect the collecting and exhibiting program of the museum, some attention must be paid to what Anna Dvořáková at the North Carolina Museum of Art calls “the slow, purposeful development of a high-quality research facility.”¹³ This would include development of “the reference collection and other valuable research resources which the library will not be able to afford once they are out of print. This category includes catalogues raisonnés of important artists . . . and other titles which are out of proportion to the library budget, but of indisputable importance.”¹⁴

Placing the mission of the library directly in support of the museum’s object collection and exhibitions makes it an integral part of the museum’s operation, and keeps it in close collaboration with its primary clients, the curators. The curatorial function is the second major characteristic of art museums that sets their libraries apart from other art libraries. In a classic essay on the subject of how “The Art Museum Library Serves the Curator,” Grace McCann Morley, then Curator, Cincinnati Art Museum, wrote in 1933:

... as a direct aid in all study and research, the museum library is absolutely indispensable to the curator. On its resources he must depend for the careful preparation and documentation that are the groundwork and background of all museum work. . . . from the curator’s point of view the library is the very heart of the museum. It is the repository of his most indispensable tools. Books stand next in importance to the art works themselves in the operation of any Art museum. Without their help, the systematic arrangement, and complete identification of art objects proper to museum display and study collections would be impossible, for this work is done according to the accumulated knowledge and experience of a fellowship of scholars past and present, whose findings are available to all in printed form. The library is the coordinating, organizing, and preservative agency, as well as the active seeker of knowledge, through which the curator can tap without unnecessary loss of time and energy the numberless sources of information. . . . For its work the Art museum library deserves recognition and every facility that can add to the realization of its ideal of efficiency. Above all it deserves an adequate staff to perform the exacting tasks set it. [Italics added]¹⁵

Lucky the art museum librarian who has even one curator so articulate in their appreciation! Curators may sometimes take their museum
libraries for granted, but they will normally be people with research experience as well as museum experience, and the more research experience they have, the more they will naturally tend to support the library. They will not be very demanding in terms of reference queries; they will usually know exactly what publications they want. For this reason, they will be supporters of increased acquisitions budgets. If budgets are limited, they will want to make extensive use of interlibrary loan.

However, even curators will not always understand the operation of the library. It becomes extremely important, therefore, for the museum librarian to encourage the museum staff to become invested in the value of the library. They become invested as they discover it, use it, and see its potential to make their work more efficient. New curators (and other new staff) should be invited to tour the library and see some of the special collections, get instruction on use of the OPAC, how to order ILLs, routing of periodicals, and other special staff services. The museum librarian should attend all general staff meetings and take every opportunity to informally advertise library collections and services as they relate to museum collections and projects. If possible, they should also attend curatorial meetings so that they can stay ahead of curatorial concerns and matters related to the object collections and exhibitions.

Curators and art librarians are natural allies, and a librarian’s education and activities should reflect that. In addition to the library degree, art museum librarians should have either an undergraduate or second master’s degree in art history. They should be active in professional organizations, writing papers and giving presentations. They should also consider joining organizations outside of the library profession, such as the AAM or one of its regional affiliates, or the CAA (the College Art Association), if for no other reason than to receive their publications, which will keep them aware of issues important to museum staff. When those organizations have meetings nearby, the librarian should consider going. As noted above, the AAM, in particular, could benefit from a more visible librarian membership. In any case, the librarian’s interest and enthusiasm for the museum collection, its exhibitions, and other projects preoccupying the museum staff should be a reflection of a collegial situation. If possible, the museum librarian should report to the director of the museum without an intermediary. The library department should be seen as equal to other museum departments, such as education or curatorial. If this kind of access to the director is not possible, the library should be under the umbrella of the museum department that does the most research concerning the museum’s objects and/or exhibitions, which is usually the curatorial de-
partment. The librarian’s supervisor should, in any case, be someone in a position of power in the museum, who values the library.

In museum venues (as in most special libraries), the librarian’s supervisor will not be a librarian. This situation is not all bad: A curator or museum administrator will be likely to bow to the librarian’s expertise concerning internal library procedures. They will be bottom-line oriented, wanting the library to run smoothly and efficiently and to meet the needs of its clientele. It may, of course, be more difficult to explain to them an operational need (justifying new technology, for example). A way must be found to talk about what happens in the library in a way that museum professionals can understand. For example, avoid library jargon. A librarian is a kind of curator: Talk about collections and access, visitors and users—not “patrons.” This will put the library in the same domain as the museum.

Trust must also be developed between the library and the museum staff. Much of the information about museum collections and exhibitions is proprietary. Art museums are blatantly competitive with each other in terms of collection building, funding, and programming. Although collaborative projects between art museums are more common now than they once were, they are still the exception. There are also issues of privacy when it comes to dealing with potential donors to the museum, especially donors of objects. The art museum librarian (who has been taught in library school the importance of sharing information) must know when to be discreet in providing information to researchers who are not on the museum staff. If the librarian is not seen as trustworthy, they will certainly not be allowed into curatorial meetings, and they won’t gain the respect of non-librarian colleagues on the museum staff.

The museum librarian would do well to realize that there are aspects of “show business” to museum business. This is seen most obviously in the mounting of special exhibitions and the media “blitz” that accompanies the occasional blockbuster. But all exhibitions have theatrical parallels. The gallery is a kind of theater and great attention is paid to the design of the space, the choice of colors, the flow of one “scene” into another, the lighting, and the “script” (the label copy or audio tour). Exhibitions have opening nights (perhaps more than one), an exhibition has a “run,” then is “dark” while a new “show” is mounted. Media reviews of exhibitions can make a big difference in museum attendance and, therefore, in museum revenues. An appreciation for this situation will heighten one’s sense of being part of the museum “ensemble.”

To the media and the public, the artists are usually the stars, especially if they are living artists. But inside the museum—and, for col-
leagues at related museums as well—the curator will probably be a star, especially if they have an established track record of mounting successful exhibitions or of attracting stellar donations. The curator has star status because they possess the most direct power *vis à vis* the museum’s primary mission: to “own and utilize tangible objects.” In a collecting museum, the curator researches and recommends objects for purchase, and researches and proposes exhibition ideas, writes the catalogs, oversees exhibition installations, and in general, holds sway within all but the largest of art museums. That the librarian can be a colleague of these heavenly creatures may sometimes seem impossible, but it is important that museum librarians refrain from becoming either star-struck or intimidated. Good, efficient bibliographic assistance to curators (as to all museum staff) in an atmosphere of collegial service to the museum is what is needed. Although the museum environment can sometimes be politically charged—and the librarian must not be politically naïve—the goal must be to stay out of political storms in order to best serve the museum as a whole for the long run.

There are many ways to establish collegial rapport between the librarian and museum staff. In all but the largest museums, opportunities abound for librarians to become involved in projects and events outside of the library and outside of their role as librarian. If one is a good writer or editor, one might involve oneself in the museum’s publications. If one has design or carpentry skills, one might help with exhibition installations. If one has good ideas and good relations with the director in a museum with a small curatorial staff, one might even occasionally be able to curate an exhibition or at least act as a producer (hiring an outside curator). Frequently, librarians volunteer or are called upon to act as information services coordinator, setting up various computer systems for the museum or developing the museum’s website.

All of these things can be very tempting—especially if one is paid for them—but beware: They are inherently dangerous for a solo librarian or one that has a very small staff. Because these non-library tasks are much more visible—even glamorous—than day-to-day library work, it is possible that they will start to take priority. The best solution is to do these things outside of library hours. The calling of librarianship is demanding and in a small library must remain the main priority.

**THE CURRENT LITERATURE ON ART MUSEUM LIBRARIES**

Considering that a majority of art librarians have at least one degree in art history (in addition to their library school degree) and considering
the centrality of art museums to the study of art history, it is somewhat surprising that so little has been written specifically on the subject of art museum libraries. Lynne Ann Waldruff commented on this in her Master’s Paper written 25 years ago; why is the state of the literature so little improved since then?

In the last 15 years, less than a dozen or so articles have been written on the topic of art museum libraries; of those, most were either histories of individual libraries, or focused on one aspect of service or collections. Only one overview has appeared, the brief, but well-articulated _Art Documentation_ article by Anna Dvořák cited earlier. That piece, as well as the essay by the curator, Grace McCann Morley, whose “love letter” to librarians was quoted previously, deserve to be reprinted in a compilation devoted to art museum libraries. Monographs exist on art libraries (though surprisingly few), museum libraries, special libraries, and even a few on small museum libraries, but I could find only one published monograph devoted to art museum libraries, and it is strictly a bibliographic list that includes no commentary. In addition, there is the above-mentioned unpublished, but well-written, 1977 Master’s Paper based on a survey by Lynne Ann Waldruff.

Perhaps even more striking is the absence of discussion on the specific characteristics of art museum libraries within the few general texts on art librarianship. Lois Swan Jones’ _Art Libraries and Information Services_ (Orlando, FL: Academic Pr., 1986) is the only one that includes a section on “Kinds of Art Libraries.” One and one-half pages in this section are devoted to art museum libraries. Both sets of ARLIS/NA Standards have sections devoted to art museum libraries. _Facilities Standards for Art Libraries and Visual Resources Collections_, compiled by ARLIS members and edited by Betty Jo Irvine includes statistics related to art museum libraries. The others assume that information about art libraries in general will be sufficient no matter what the venue, and they tend to stress collection development matters and, to a lesser degree, organization of the collection, rather than issues related to the specialized clientele, purposes, and problems of art museum libraries. For more pertinent information, one can turn to the literature on special libraries and museum libraries, but so far these publications have not been written by art librarians and assume a greater availability of literature on art museum libraries than is actually the case. Several books on museum careers include sections on the museum librarian.

Of course, the more general literature is helpful, especially that published by ARLIS/NA, ARLIS/UK, and the SLA (Special Libraries As-
The growing body of work on the so-called “OPL” is also of special value to the solo librarian. But in all, the body of literature on art museum libraries remains inadequate. This may be because the population of art museum librarians is small in proportion to art librarianship as a whole, though in ARLIS/NA, the Museum Library Division is one of the largest (over 250 members); only the Academic Libraries Division (over 300) is larger. I suspect the dearth of art museum library literature is mainly because art museum librarians have less time than their academic counterparts to devote to extracurricular tasks like professional writing. It doesn’t help that art librarianship is taught at only a few library schools, and that the pay scale in museums is lower than that of academic art libraries. Also, some academic librarians face “publish or perish” ultimatums in regard to tenure. This motivation doesn’t exist for most museum librarians.

WORKING IN THE SMALL ART MUSEUM LIBRARY

The great thing about the solo or small art museum library job is that you get to do everything. The awful thing about the solo or small art museum library job is that you have to do everything. Solo librarians may be exhausted, but they are never bored. If they tire of doing one sort of thing, selecting or ordering books for instance, they can easily and with complete justification, switch to something else, such as going over the serials subscription list, writing up volunteer job descriptions, training a volunteer or an intern, sorting some exhibition slides, preparing a decent reserve shelf, answering a reference query, working on the budget, helping the curator who needed their materials “yesterday,” finishing the grant proposal whose deadline is Friday, or working on the cataloging, the backlog of which only grows bigger. Management as a solo librarian essentially means managing yourself.

Besides the usual professional tasks, there are other jobs the solo librarian gets to do that one doesn’t hear about in library school: shifting books, packing up interlibrary loan requests, checking out books, reshelving, refiling, even, occasionally, sweeping and vacuuming. One survey respondent said, “Don’t plan on keeping your hands clean; there’s lots of active work to do in the small staff library!”

Why, in spite of all this, and in spite of relatively low salaries and low budgets, in spite of running out of space, in spite of a substantial amount of job insecurity, did so many art museum librarians confess in the survey that they “just love” their jobs? Here are a few answers to the survey
question, “Would you recommend working in a small art museum library to another librarian?”:

- Yes, I have freedom to structure my time as I see fit; opportunity to work closely with the larger organization.
- Yes! This is a fascinating job that I personally find highly rewarding. The duties here utilize many skills learned in the various other jobs I have held; this is equivalent to running your own small business. Also due to the small staff size, many more menial tasks have to be performed.
- Absolutely! But someone with lots of LIBRARY experience, not just art history experience. Failed art historians do not successful librarians make, in my opinion. And you really have to know your (library) stuff to hold your own with the PhDs. Being the only library professional in a sea of other types of professionals, I have to not only explain what it is I do, but why I am doing it.
- The clientele is well-educated, very polite, and quite appreciative.

Of course, not everyone was so positive. Here are some more cautious comments:

- If you can afford to work in a small art museum library, I’d recommend it.
- I would have to think long and hard about it. Our museum is very volatile financially and the library has usually been the target of staff cutbacks when we are struggling financially. It is not a very stable situation.

When asked “What special qualities are required of the librarian in a small art museum library?” words like “flexibility” and “stamina” were most often mentioned:

- Ability to represent the library to everyone—the public, museum staff, and other librarians. The ability to handle budgets, human resource issues, and other administrative tasks in addition to traditional library skills.
- Subject knowledge; fondness for the subject; personal involvement with some aspect of the subject. And for a one-person library: strength, stamina, and great determination!
- Must be self-directed; able to work alone much of the time, yet able to collaborate with other museum staff. Must be resourceful, both
with research and with limited budgets. Must be good at managing your time and your work. Must be able to direct volunteer staff.

- Ability to juggle many responsibilities and tasks; diplomacy; ability to focus on long-term goals.
- Patience; flexibility; political savvy.
- Subject knowledge a dead heat with advocacy skills—the ability to make the library a well-used resource.
- You must have the initiative to start a project and the resolve to follow through and actually get it done. The only pressure I have to “get things done” most of the time comes from myself. Therefore, creating a new initiative is not enough; you must also be a self-motivator to keep the momentum going.
- You’ve got to learn to deal with some pretty high maintenance patrons—diplomacy and good manners are a requirement!
- Flexibility, strong organizational ability, and an abundant amount of energy.
- Courage!

As is clear from these comments, working in a small art museum library takes an essentially entrepreneurial spirit. It means always being pro-active and assertive in service to your museum, assessing a need, figuring out a solution, and going for it—with the blessing, of course, of your supervisor, if it is something that will affect anyone outside the library. It is wonderful to be able to go directly to an office supply store, or a library catalog, and get what you need immediately, rather than putting in an order to a purchasing department and waiting a week or more. It is not so wonderful to pay for things out of your own pocket and worry about how soon—or whether or not—you will be reimbursed. But for the creative individual who “can afford it” and has “an abundant amount of energy,” seeing your ideas in action relatively quickly can be very rewarding in all but financial terms.

And speaking of money, even a one-person library needs it, and what librarians sometimes forget is that you have to ask for it. Just because it hasn’t been given to you, doesn’t mean it is not available. One survey respondent did not know she even had a budget as such until the survey motivated her to ask. This is where the librarian’s relationship with the museum’s director (or other supervisor) is critical. Budgeting is normally a process of give and take and the library must compete with other museum departments. Our best argument in the financial battle is that the library supports the museum as a whole, and this is the concept—with back-up statistics—that will best justify a realistic budget request. But
since you may have to give as well as get, you must have a good idea of what your priorities are: what is indispensable, what can be negotiated, and what can be postponed, if necessary.

In preparing for budget meetings, think about the library in the context of the museum as a whole. What is the total museum budget as compared to the library budget? What is the total museum staff as compared to the library staff? In many cases, the museum budget and staffing are huge in comparison to that of the library. Is the staff size of the education department or the curatorial department very much larger than that of the library? Perhaps you can make the administration see the inequity. However, you can do this only if they can see the benefits clearly. Highlight the budgetary items that contribute most directly to the quality of life of the museum staff: routing journals, doing interlibrary loans, getting the library catalog online so that it’s available from every staff member’s desktop; providing scanned images from the museum’s collection; providing subscriptions to databases—if you can afford them or get them through a consortium arrangement. Make sure you are valuing the library’s services appropriately within the context of the museum as a whole. If you don’t believe in what you are doing, you won’t be able to convince anyone else.

The library must be seen not only as the excellent research collection and service that it is—or could be; it must also be seen as contributing to the positive, serious image of the museum. Remind the administration of how great it is to be able to show off the library to V.I.P. visitors. (Or how great it would be if the library had the new shelving or the renovation that is needed.) Though the museum library primarily serves the museum staff, it can be useful for museum public relations as well. Have you been keeping those statistics? Remember, record and communicate to the administration the number of requests for information that have come into the museum and have been referred to the library instead of bothering the administration or the curators. Many of the calls we answered at the Craft & Folk Art Museum Library came from people who had called the general museum number, not having had the faintest idea that the museum had a library. Save your more interesting e-reference questions and include them in your annual report. Solicit “love letters” from the patrons for whom you have performed some out-of-the-ordinary services. (You’ll also need them to include in any grant proposals that you write.) Remember that sometimes what is simplest for us is extremely impressive to a research novice. Sometimes those novices are on the museum staff—they may even be administrators!
SMALL ART MUSEUM LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY—IT’S THE TECHNOLOGY, STUPID!

Technology has had an enormous impact on libraries and on art historical research. Ease of distribution and manipulation of images and text have made services possible today in smaller libraries that were available in only the largest institutions a decade ago. But it has taken a while for the benefits to trickle down to small museum libraries. Although computers have been in use in large libraries for much longer than they have been in use in all but the largest museums, it is only within the last few years, with the widespread use of the Internet and the World Wide Web, and lower prices of hardware and software, that computers have become commonplace in small museum libraries. Scholars in museums, just like scholars in academia, have had a long computer learning curve. Most of us working in museum libraries today still spend some portion of almost every day teaching staff and docents to use the computer catalog.

The computer was supposed to save time, but in libraries—as elsewhere—we are continuously surprised by how much busier we are now than in years past. A large part of the problem is that technology has made it possible to do a lot more. We expect (and are expected by our administrators) to do much more in 24 hours than was even dreamed of 10-15 years ago. If we have computers at home—and most of us do—it becomes even harder to draw the line between the job and private life. Our OPAC may be available “24/7,” but the people working in the small art museum library cannot be—even if they were to give up their personal lives. Setting priorities is still a human job—and more important than ever.

Although the overall cost of technology is going down, it is a relatively new part of the budget for many small libraries. Most libraries have had separate budget lines for computer services, but some are now re-thinking this. Perhaps database subscriptions should be an acquisitions item. Some very good news is that all of my survey respondents have at least one computer in their libraries with Internet access; some have many more. The ability to access listservs such as ARLIS-L and the ARLIS/NA website has had a very positive effect on the solo librarian’s morale, to say nothing of their ability to do reference or to catalog. Solo librarians can now be in touch with any number of listservs or individual colleagues, no matter how distant, instantly and at no cost, to get online advice about virtually anything—vendors, equipment, security issues, copyright, OPAC software—or any number of traditional librarianship is-
sues. The ARLIS-L archive, accessible from the ARLIS/NA website <www.arlisna.org>, is a treasure-store of professional information.

Most of my survey respondents had only recently purchased or installed OPAC software; some are still in the process of deciding what to buy. All who have (or will soon have) OPACs are planning for them to be available on museum staff desktops and ultimately on the web. Some have already accomplished this. A wide range of OPAC software products are in use. Of 20 respondents who have or who are planning to buy OPAC software, 16 different programs were reported. Some who have not been able to afford OPAC software and subscriptions to cataloging utilities have come up with ingenious methods of utilizing the Internet and word processing or spreadsheet software to create home-grown computer catalogs. Several libraries acquired their OPACs as part of a consortium contract. All who participated in the survey use their computer to achieve some level of automation for reference or acquisitions or for obtaining catalog copy, even though they may still be filing catalog cards.

Eighteen of 34 of survey respondents have frozen both their manual catalogs and shelflist card files—or never had either. Three plan to freeze both when all their records are transferred to their OPAC. Five have frozen their catalog, but keep their shelflist in card form. Eight are maintaining all their card files. Now that the Library of Congress and most major research libraries in the world have their catalogs on the web, it is relatively easy to copy a catalog from these sources instead of subscribing to OCLC or RLIN. This practice has a down-side, however, as many non-L.C. records are non-standard or of dubious quality. And of course, having to re-key information, or even cutting and pasting, is much more time-consuming and error-prone, than batch-downloading from a cataloging utility. In some cases, the inability to move forward with automation may simply be inertia brought on by solo librarian overload. It takes time to do the research necessary to project costs and analyze benefits. OCLC and RLIN both offer many economic options. The benefits are amazing and—once your system is in place—quite cost-efficient—especially if you are willing to stop buying or typing and filing cards.

Grants are available at least for the initial phases of library automation. Museum administrators like the idea of making museum library catalogs available on the web—once they get beyond the cost of digitizing records. It is another attractive web service the museum can offer—and it is publicity for the museum as well! Another possible option is to join a local consortium. Consortium members who get cataloging
free (or for a modest fee) in exchange for access to their catalog records were among the happiest of the survey respondents.

What is becoming universally understood is that with the new accessibility of library catalogs on the web, standards are now more important than ever. The importance of the MARC format cannot be over-estimated. Librarians who purchase OPAC software (or construct local catalogs using database software) that cannot create MARC records are borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. All of those non-MARC records will have to be converted at some point in the future, in some cases, re-keyed. Don’t forget a basic tenet of automation: If your system is well-designed, it allows you to never have to repeat yourself–and that includes never having to correct mistakes more than once. Automated records are more accurate records. But the solo librarian must be realistic. Consider this from The Best of OPL II:

...we should dispel the myth that using MARC necessarily means using full MARC records. The key to MARC is the tagging of fields, which makes it possible for the data in specific fields to be easily recognized and transferred from one database to another. Bibliographic records are broken down into dozens of fields and subfields, but the fact that MARC permits such a high level of specificity doesn’t mean that it requires it.

Equal in importance to the use of the MARC format is the use of standard authority files. For most art libraries, this means use of the Library of Congress Name Authorities and Subject Headings. This has not been easy for small libraries because LC authority files have been available only by subscription through a cataloging utility such as OCLC or RLIN and, as has been mentioned, libraries with relatively small budgets have been slow to take advantage of these services. Authority records contain much more than the authorized form of a name or subject heading. They also include essential cross-references as well as additional information helpful in determining the correct name or best choice of subject heading.

My experience of transferring records from CAFAM’s OPAC to LACMA’s is instructive. The CAFAM OPAC software, though modest in price, had allowed me to download and create MARC records. These were easily converted and transferred to LACMA’s OPAC; however, the CAFAM OPAC software did not allow me to download LC authority records, and it had no alternative way of providing cross-references. Provision of cross-references is especially important in special
libraries that must use some alternative vocabularies, as I did in the CAFAM library because the terminology of craft and folk art is so problematic. (For example, LC still uses “handicraft,” which is anathema to any serious craft artist.) At CAFAM, I had created a Rube Goldberg system of cross-references by adding them as 690s (local subject) to catalog records. Now I am having to correct many of the CAFAM records to bring them into conformity with the LC and AAT standards used by LACMA.

As of July 1, 2002, the Library of Congress has enabled searching of both its name and subject authority files free of charge on a trial basis. This is a monumental, historic step in the creation of an equitable cataloging environment, friendly to less wealthy libraries and supportive of national standards for libraries of all sizes. The next—and equally important—step toward equity must be the availability of affordable OPAC systems, compatible with all basic standards, so that all libraries and users can participate fully in the benefits of 21st century technology.

**THERE ARE NO SMALL ART LIBRARIANS . . .**

Librarians working in small art libraries, regardless of budgets, need to start thinking big. The Internet and the World Wide Web make this more possible than ever before. Think of the importance of your museum and how it deserves better, more accessible documentation. Think of the value of your library collections and how their cataloging records should be shared with other libraries—and with researchers far from where your museum is located. Even though you can’t afford all the technology you need now, you deserve to be heard. You can participate with your professional colleagues online, if not in person, to lobby for more affordable cataloging tools, bibliographic indexes, and other databases.

Think creatively—and cooperatively. If a consortium doesn’t exist in your region, perhaps you can start one on a small scale with a local college or art school. Above all, join with other art librarians in your area: in ARLIS/NA, in SLA, or in ALA. Attendance at professional meetings is not only good for you and good for your library, it’s excellent publicity for your museum. Use your interlibrary loan system—or your acquisitions budget—to borrow or purchase some of the professional literature cited here or elsewhere in this volume. Think like an entrepreneur. If your museum won’t pay for professional memberships or give you travel funds to attend meetings, you may need to use some personal funds, if you can possibly af-
for it, as a professional investment in yourself. Don’t forget—travel awards are available (and sometimes go begging) from ARLIS/NA and SLA. You need all the help you can get—to make the job you have better—or to look for a better job. Your art museum librarian colleagues will be glad to help you. Don’t hesitate to ask.

NOTES

1. This study was inspired and encouraged by members of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) Solo Librarians Discussion Group, led by Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Librarian at the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe. I am especially indebted to Eumie for her assistance and advice during the course of preparing the survey. Ken Soehner, Head, Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Immediate Past Chair, ARLIS/NA Museum Libraries Division, was also very supportive. I want to acknowledge the help of LACMA staff: Head Librarian, Deborah Barlow Smestad, for her keen copyediting eye and substantive suggestions and Program Specialist Anne Diederick for her interlibrary loan skills.


3. The Craft & Folk Art Museum closed at the end of 1997 and its object collections were sold at auction at Butterfield & Butterfield Fine Art Auctioneers, Los Angeles. Its library was given to the L.A. County Museum of Art Research Library (LACMA paid for the cost of the move) and its archives were given to UCLA’s Arts Special Collections. CAFAM reopened under the auspices of the City of L.A. Cultural Affairs Department in 1998. A short history of CAFAM and a description of its library collections can be found on the LACMA website www.lacma.org. Click on “Library/Research” and then on “Edith R. Wyle Craft & Folk Art Museum Library.”

4. The survey form was sent to 30 museum librarian members of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) Solo Librarians Discussion Group and then to 20 additional museum librarians who responded to an announcement posted on the ARLIS/NA listserv. Of 50 forms distributed, 34 (68%) were returned. The survey results can be obtained by emailing the author at: benedetti4@aol.com. I wish to thank the following survey participants, who gave me permission to use their names: Debby Aframe, Anna Brooke, Lynda Bunting, Lois Crane, Sam Duncan, Lu Harper, Phil Heagy, Genni Houlihan, Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Regina Kammer, Maryann Kempthorne, Mary E. Mallia, Sally McKay, James Mitchell, Mary Mormon-Graham, Melissa Nicoud, Patrice O’Donoghue, William A. Peniston, Karen Schneider, Cheryl Siegel, Maurya Smith, Jim Soe Nyun, Rebecca D. Steel, Heather R. Stuart, Rina Vecchiola, Sharon Wasserman, Matt Wiggins, Cary Wilkins, and Tom Young. Five others asked to remain anonymous.

5. Standards for Art Libraries and Fine Arts Slide Collections, Occasional Papers No. 2 (Tucson, AZ: Art Libraries Society of North America, 1983) includes definitions of “small,” “medium,” and “large” art libraries which, though somewhat arbitrary,
were useful for the purposes of this study. For art museum library collections, “small” is defined as “up to 20,000 volumes”; “medium” as “20,000 to 80,000 volumes”; and “large” as “over 80,000 volumes.” A later ARLIS/NA publication, *Staffing Standards for Art Libraries and Visual Resources Collections* (Raleigh, NC, 1996), which largely supersedes the 1983 *Standards* doesn’t include definitions.


10. Sixteen (47%) of the 34 “Small Art Museum Libraries” survey respondents have held their present positions for over five years; of these, 12 (35%) have been at the same job for over 10 years and five of these (14.7%) have over 20 years’ tenure. On the other hand, 18 respondents (53%) have held the same position for less than four years and half of these (27.5%) have worked in their present position for less than two years, suggesting a relatively high rate of turnover until a librarian has held a position for more than four years.


12. Twenty-one survey respondents, or roughly 2/3 of those surveyed, have responsibility for their institution’s archives. Although librarians are not usually trained as archivists in library school, we often take on this job and train ourselves through reading or taking workshops offered by ARLIS/NA or SAA (the Society of American Archivists). The task of collecting contemporary institutional materials, especially in a small museum, is relatively easy. As queries to the library often concern past exhibitions, it is useful to have these files close at hand. An article written by Maureen Melton, archivist at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, “Preserving Love’s Labors in the Museum Archives,” *Art Documentation* 15 (1996): 1, 7-9, is informative and entertaining.


14. Ibid.


21. Museum Librarianship. An older work, but still useful, is a different publication with the same title, Museum Librarianship, a compilation of essays edited by John C. Larsen (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1985); three of the nine essays and the preface are written by art museum librarians, but the text is general with discussion of specific types of museum libraries avoided.

22. William A. Burns' Your Future in Museums, Rev. ed. (NY: R. Rosen Pr., 1967): 79-83, is a good overview, but needs to be updated; a more up-to-date but shorter discussion can be found in Museums: A Place to Work; Planning Museum Careers, by Jane R. Glaser with Artemis A. Zenetou (NY: Routledge, 1996): 104-105; Museum Careers and Training: A Professional Guide, by Victor J. Danilov (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) includes multiple references to librarians, archivists, and preservationists and is a very thorough guide to museum careers, including salaries and training programs.


24. ARLIS/NA Salary Survey 1990: 8-9. In comparing all respondents and in comparing only respondents working with “primarily traditional collections,” academic salaries were substantially higher than those of museum staff. However, it is interesting to note that when respondents who were responsible for “primarily visual collections” were compared to those responsible for “primarily traditional collections,” this difference disappeared; in fact salaries of museum staff working with primarily visual collections as compared to academic staff working with primarily visual collections were the same or slightly higher than their academic colleagues.


27. An excellent new text on authority work that will be of use to anyone working with authority files is Maxwell’s Guide to Authority Work, by Robert L. Maxwell (Chicago: American Library Association, 2002).