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Most issues of the Art Libraries Journal cover a wide spread of relevant subjects, but some focus on specific themes, such as digitisation or museum libraries, or more contentious topics such as copyright or charging for services. Certain issues are devoted to aspects of art documentation in a particular country or region.

The majority of the articles in the Art Libraries Journal are specially commissioned from leading art librarians and other specialists. Conference papers from around the world are also published, including a selection from the IFLA Art Libraries Section sessions each year.

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Developing NYARC: the New York Art Resources Consortium

Stephen Bury

NYARC is a consortium of New York art resources, initially including the libraries of Brooklyn Museum, the Frick Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. The Metropolitan was not part of the Arcade (integrated libraries system) programme funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and withdrew its designation as a NYARC entity in December 2010. This article gives a brief history of NYARC and examines whether it achieved its aims of sharing resources, making them more accessible to the public, and saving money.

It is rare for art libraries to hit the headlines of a major newspaper. But on the 14 March 2010 the New York Times ran a story (in its Arts Special section) on the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC), entitled ‘Groundbreaking partnership unites decades of research.’ Four of New York’s museums – Brooklyn Museum, the Frick Collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art – had combined their forces to share resources, make their holdings more accessible to the public and to save money. The very existence of NYARC and the promises of deep sharing that it held out were part of the attraction of the position of Andrew W. Mellon Chief Librarian at the Frick Art Reference Library, which I took up in May 2010.

History of NYARC

The origins of NYARC have been rehearsed elsewhere. In 2003 discussions on auction catalogues between some representatives from institutions in the Art Museum Library Consortium, including Brooklyn Museum, the Frick Collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, led to a discussion of other common problems and possible solutions. Don Waters, programme officer for scholarly communications at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, recommended that they should apply for a planning grant. This allowed for the appointment of Jim Neal, Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian of Columbia University, as consultant. His report of 2005 defined the objectives of NYARC:

- [to] advance the scholarly, educational and cultural enrichment missions of the four museums
- [to] improve the productivity of core library users (curators, conservators, educators at the four museums)
- [to] expand the efficiency and effectiveness of the four museum libraries and archives in terms of services, operations and space
- [to] support the information content and service needs of the broader arts community.

Neal’s planning document still remains a useful roadmap for NYARC.

In 2007 Brian Lavoie and Günter Waibel of OCLC Programs and Research made a study of the NYARC collections. Within the Arcade libraries 83% of items were held by one library, 13% by two, 2% by three and less than 1% by four libraries. An external comparison with OCLC’s WorldCat revealed that 40% of the NYARC aggregate collection (excluding auction catalogues) constituted a unique resource in the WorldCat environment, whilst compared to New York Public Library, New York University and Columbia University, 66% of the NYARC collection was a unique resource.

Waibel and Dennis Masse from OCLC facilitated a series of conversations of this wider
New York group including NYARC, known as the NYC-7. Their report focused on four main areas: privileged access, collection development, a shared public view of collections, and shared infrastructure. It recommended useful ground rules for the working groups:

- For any of the suggested working groups you choose to convene, if at all possible, we recommend that participants be stakeholders at the AUL (Associate University Librarian)/Senior Staff level. We believe multiple strands of conversation can move forward more quickly if they do not depend on the availability of directors.

- Working group participants should be given an explicit mandate by their directors to turn ideas into actions. Every participant in a group discussion should have a clear idea that the vision pursued by the group has been sanctioned, and what the institutional parameters of a commitment would be.

- We recommend that the NYC-7 retain a dedicated facilitator to schedule working group meetings, and keep the process moving.

Meanwhile, in April 2007, three of the NYARC partners, the Frick Art Reference Library and the libraries of the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, applied for and received a grant of $669,000 to bring their individual online catalogues into an integrated system over two years. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library withdrew from the bid because of worries over sustainability. The Arcade database includes such specialist art resources as Brooklyn’s spectacular Wilbour Library of Egyptology, through 18th- and 19th-century auction catalogues at the Frick, to artists’ books at the Museum of Modern Art and Brooklyn. Arcade allows a seamless search of all three libraries in one go, but you can also choose to search special collections and individual libraries. As of December 2010, there are 760,000 bibliographic records.
890,000 item records, 400,000 authority records and 10,000 records enriched with tables of content. It also has links to recent acquisitions, bibliographies (e.g. provenance research), digital collections, and library and art world blogs and electronic newsletters. Arcade is both a mechanism for resource discovery and also a practical tool for making collection development decisions.

2010 has seen the consolidation of Arcade and the addition of new features, such as the Web-bridge open-URL resolver which has enabled the linking of citations to full text and an ‘Expand this search’ feature: an API enables links to HathiTrust digital content, although that raises the ethical issue of associating the NYARC copy with an external copy, which may not quite be identical. There has been increased marketing of NYARC through the distribution of postcards, creation and expansion of a NYARC website, and Web 2.0 activities. A browser search plug-in for Firefox and Internet Explorer was created – there have been 2700 downloads of this since June 2010.

And we have been preparing for the new environment that we all face – how to cope with the born digital. The materials that the NYARC libraries collect – auction catalogues and price lists, catalogues raisonnés, exhibition catalogues and private view cards – are increasingly born digital, and if our institutions are to remain relevant in the future we have to work towards coping with these new formats. But there have been other challenges, namely the increasing disconnect of the Arcade three from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library, resulting in the request in December 2010 from the Head of the Watson Library at the Metropolitan that it be no longer considered a NYARC entity.

Although stating that they were happy to continue existing collaborations and willing to consider future collaborative projects bilaterally or multilaterally. A Strategic Planning day at the end of January 2011 will consider the new landscape and the way forward but the three Arcade members have stressed their determination to intensify the collaborative partnership. Arcade and NYARC are now synonymous.

How successful has NYARC been in its three main aims: to share resources; to make them more accessible to the public; and to save money?
Resource sharing

There are two main aspects of resource sharing – a shared collection minimising duplication and redundancy, and the services such as interlibrary loans that enable the materials to be circulated amongst the institutions that share the collection.

The NYARC 'collection' depends on informal collaboration and the notification of fringe or out-of-scope titles of monographs and serials to the other institutions. When budgets were cut in 2009 the libraries were able to map their cuts of journal titles against those of the other collaborating institutions: the Arcade catalogue makes this easier and faster, as materials on order are visible in the catalogue. And likewise with electronic resources which can be managed centrally. Retrospective resource sharing is the next step – the four institutions have runs of auction catalogues and periodicals in common, and it should be possible to work out who should keep what and where. De-selection is always controversial, so there needs to be robust and rapid document delivery, and transparent de-selection criteria that take into consideration incomplete holdings, binding processes that have removed advertisements, subscription inserts and annotations.

We will also explore shared off-site storage: currently the Frick Art Reference Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library use the same storage facility – and we suspect that we may be storing two copies of the same item there. Sharing one copy is perhaps the ultimate in deep sharing.

The resource sharing in terms of getting the item to the researcher proved a little easier: 'Non-returnables' (perhaps conjuring up for the UK researcher non-deposit bottles) are documents scanned or photocopied for the requester at a different institution, and they may be mediated or direct. This was in place for the NYARC institutions already, as it was for hard copies, where loanable, except between the Frick and the Metropolitan: this was put in place in June 2010 and extended to auction catalogues. Rolling this out amongst the NYC-7 was the next step. Visits of the relevant NYARC staff to the inter-library loan sections took place, which allowed them to see how they worked and how they packed and sent off materials. The Frick was worried about the number of New York University loans it might have to service, only to discover that the algorithm that New York University used put the Frick early in the string of identified locations, and this could be easily adjusted. Another issue was the 'library-use only' restriction on some loans: museums have traditionally regarded curators' offices as part of the library; and this had to be finessed. All NYC-7, with the exception of the Metropolitan Museum, use the delivery services of METRO (the Metropolitan New York Library Council), which has made resource sharing relatively easy. More problematic is enabling walk-in borrowing for non-institutional researchers – the three non-NYARC libraries have recently agreed a protocol for this and it is hoped to extend this to NYARC researchers in the future.

Making resources more accessible to the public

The Arcade website is the central tool for resource discovery, but the public needs to know of its existence. The presence of the metadata in WorldCat and the federated search of arthlibraries.net help the experienced researcher, but New York has a large cultural industries sector: NYARC needed to reach the auctioneer, the dealer, the conservator, the valuer, the art journalist, the designer, the artist as well as the curious. A set of postcards was produced and distributed to a list which included local galleries and
Arcade: one day soon they will link to the digitised photographs.

Thanks to some good press coverage there is wide public knowledge about NYARC, and amongst museum staff it is especially high, and the collaboration of art museum libraries is seen as a precedent for museums to do the same.

Saving money

Calculating how much Arcade has saved for its partners is a complex activity as there are so many intangibles. Without the Mellon grants the NYARC institutions could not have afforded the innovation that they have undergone since 2004, but this is very hard to cost out. Staff benefit from working closely with colleagues in other NYARC institutions: common practice is evolving, as staff meet regularly as Directors, the User Group, the Technical Contacts Committee and the Resource Sharing Committee. A staff wiki documents agreed procedures and workflows.

Recently, NYARC purchased Bookeye 4 Knowledge Imaging Centers for each of the libraries dealers in the vicinity of our institutions. Bonhams agreed to include the card in two of their auction catalogue mailings. A whole barrage of website postings, blog and Wikipedia entries were aimed at a new readership: spikes in the hits on Arcade and NYARC can be traced back to these events. Google Analytics show that there were 139,000 unique visitors to Arcade in 2010, a 9% increase on the previous year.

However, there are still hidden collections that need exposure, and the link between museum objects and the relevant literature contained in the NYARC partners' libraries is not yet there. There have been a few incremental steps in digitising and making available certain categories of material: the Frick and the Metropolitan Museum have digitised their collections of Knoedler Gallery and Macheth Gallery exhibition catalogues, whilst the Frick and Brooklyn have received a METRO grant to digitise New York exhibitions of the Gilded Age, held at clubs, societies and associations. The Museum of Modern Art transferred its collection of artistic works photographs to the Frick Photoarchive, the artist-level records have been batch-loaded to
Conclusion

Collaboration can often seem a good thing in itself. NYARC has gone beyond that rhetoric, but it has taken patience and adjustments of institutional agendas and priorities to make NYARC work. The overall verdict is that the collaboration has been worthwhile and has brought institutional infrastructure and staffing expertise up-to-date. It has now met its first serious challenge, and the three remaining partners have reinforced their commitment to work together in future, especially given the rapid changes in art historical scholarly communications. How NYARC can offer associate membership to other New York art resources (and elsewhere) is under active consideration.

References

5. Ibid., 14-15.
8. HathiTrust is the digital repository set up in 2008 by several American university libraries involved in mass digitisation projects to archive and share their digitised collections. See http://www.hathitrust.org/.

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