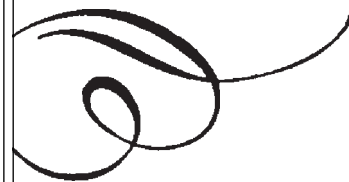


**ART IN THE INDIANA
STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
WHY HAVE ORIGINAL ARTWORKS
IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY?**

by Carol Jinbo & Christopher Mehrens



Why have original artworks in an academic library? One could very well pose the question; doesn't original art work belong in a museum rather than in a library? In answer to this question, we would respond that one of the primary goals of the Indiana State University Library is to provide a welcoming atmosphere and that "fine art" contributes to this environment. More importantly, we want to have an environment that is conducive to creativity and intellectual endeavor.

The above question is certainly not new. In 1914 an article appeared in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* titled "Pictures in Public Libraries."¹ In this article the anonymous author draws attention to a survey of over 100 libraries conducted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The following is a summary from this report:

Of 132 libraries replying to inquiries from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, sent out in June of the Present Year [1914], it was found that fifty-seven have separate exhibition rooms for the display of pictures, and that forty display such collections, not in a special room, but in corridors, or other rooms pressed into this service. Thirty-nine libraries reported that they do not make exhibitions—five because of their proximity to museums of art, three because of lack of material, two for lack of room, and one because of a clause in the will of donor forbidding it.²

As the author observes, the responses offered by the libraries demonstrated the "growing demand" on the part of the communities of that day for works of art and further, that "the work of the artist and artisan holds something of value, even when expressed only by reproductions of the original."³ In the case of libraries serving a community with a major art museum, the author cites the following passage from the *Providence Magazine* for March 1914, "it is to be remembered that it is not well for a public library in a city which contains a valuable art museum...to compete with the museum, in the field of works of art."⁴ This, however, is not the case with Terre Haute and with the University Library.

Indiana State University's student body comes predominantly from an area of approximately 150 miles around the city of Terre Haute, which is chiefly comprised of rural Indiana and Illinois. Exposure to fine art is limited for most students since the closest major art collection is 60 miles away in Indianapolis. Students are afforded the chance to see and experience fine art in Chicago and St. Louis art museums and art galleries but these are over four hours away.

As an institution of higher education we feel that we owe our students and patrons exposure to other means of communication other than the traditional. We want them to be creative. We want them to think outside of the box. As visual people well realize, the scientific method is not the only means of acquiring knowledge and that viewing an art work is an intuitive means of acquiring information.⁵ According to Edward Goldsmith, "our conscious intelligence enables us to understand superficial issues - but deep and really important ones can only be apprehended subconsciously by our intuition, and by our closely related emotions."⁶ He further writes, "[o]ur sense of aesthetics is closely related to our intuition and, like intuition, is an important means by which we apprehend and understand our relationships in the world around us."⁷

You might ask; isn't comfortable furniture with ornamental objects just as effective in decorating the library and making the atmosphere welcoming? After all, it's much more cost-effective than acquiring and displaying original art work. One could also ask; why have any art displayed at all? In response, experiencing original paintings, sculpture, and other art is quite different from seeing mass produced poor art reproductions. As observed by David Swanger, in his article, "Dumbing Down Art in America," it is the aim of art education to nurture originality in students.⁸ It could be said that by displaying "pseudo" or easily accessible art in the library environment we run the risk of contributing to the intellectual and creative demise of our students. As Swanger writes, such art is "so conventional and predictable...it is an insult to the intellect and imagination."⁹

Creative individuals often cite the influence of art on their lives. For example, Henry Winkler, universally

known for his creation of the persona of “The Fonz” on the television series “Happy Days,” noted the profound influence that art had upon his life. The well-known actor, author, producer, director, and Yale graduate, in an address made at the American Library Association’s 2005 Annual Conference, remarked that “art is the pillar that gives children a point of view” and that it was the “river of arts” which brought him to be where he is today.¹⁰

Beyond creativity, art may also serve an ethical and aesthetic function as well. Edward Goldsmith relates an observation made by Ananda Coomaraswamy, who wrote that in traditional societies, “aesthetic means beauty and moral goodness. It expresses truth in terms of what is proper in thought (philosophy), action (ethics) and design (art). What is considered proper and right... the sanction of beauty or of aesthetics derives from the principle of order deemed inherent in the nature of gods or of the universe as well as some expression of that order in rules or canons of form and design, prescribed by tradition and authority.”¹¹

Gregory Cajete has noted that even in primitive cultures and previous societies “art was an integral expression of life, not something separate” from being a human.¹² “The goal of life was not just egoistic self-indulgence but rather to contribute to what was everywhere the ultimate continuity and integrity of the cosmos itself, on which human welfare and indeed human survival ultimately depends.”¹³

The question remains, are we transformed and affected by our physical environment? If there is nothing on the walls surrounding us, one thinks of the atmosphere as being very stark and sterile; an environment devoid of humanity, much like a prison cell. When artwork is added to the environment it implies that another human being is trying to communicate with the viewer. In this case, the artist imparts their ideas to the viewer without using the written or spoken word. The method of communication is quite different, utilizing color, line, form, texture and balance to elicit a visceral reaction.¹⁴ This reaction, in turn, enhances the intellectual experience.

Art serves a multiplicity of goals, for as Keith McPherson relates “whether “reading” page-bound printed text or visual text (e.g., film, photographs, paintings, drawings, charts, graphic arts, maps, graphs), people make sense of various text by creating their own unique set of mental images. Often these images expand the reader’s understandings as they coalesce with, build upon, and recreate images from previously read text.”¹⁵ Every viewer of an artwork will have their own interpretation and mental images of what they are viewing from another viewer. It is in this manner that we decide whether we like the work of art or not, in other words if that particular work of art “speaks to us.”

In the Indiana State University Library, the art displayed is in a constant state of flux. It should be noted that the majority of art displayed on campus belongs to the university’s Permanent Art Collection and comes under the auspices of the university’s curator of art. Periodically the curator transfers works to and from the building to other buildings on campus. Such actions, therefore, have a profound effect on the university community, for it is constantly being exposed to fine art in a variety of contexts. Art works for the collection are by artists from the university community (both faculty and student),¹⁶ the region, the nation, and the world. They are acquired from a variety of sources including art galleries, private collections and auctions. Many of the artists represented are found in major museums.

While the scope of the permanent art collection is quite broad, emphasis has been placed on the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁷ Media runs the gamut and includes paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and three dimensional works. Artists represented include Richard Anuszkiewicz, Leonard Baskin, Claes Oldenburg, Salvador Dali, Willem De Kooning, Max Ernst, Jacob Lawrence, Fernand Leger, Rene Magritte, Joan Miro, Phillip Pearlstein, Pablo Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, Bridget Riley, Diego Rivera, Joseph Stella, and Andy Warhol, among others.¹⁸

Some of the more notable pieces of the collection are: Joseph Stella’s “Smoke Stacks” (1914)¹⁹, which was loaned in 1994 to the Whitney Museum of Art in New York for a retrospective of the artist’s work; Jacob Lawrence’s “Celebration of Heritage,”²⁰ which was recently accessed in 2005; and “Pop Artist” Claes Oldenburg’s “London Knees: Positions of the Knees,”²¹ which was accessed in 1971. The library has been fortunate to have had on display, at one time or another, Andy Warhol’s “Flowers”²² (1965); Philip Pearlstein’s “Girl On Empire Sofa”²³ (1972); and Leonard Baskin’s “Hydrogen Man”²⁴ (1934). The library was visited by both Pearlstein and Baskin, who were both very pleased to find out that their works were being displayed in the library.

In conclusion, we feel that the art displayed in the Indiana State University Library serves both an edifying and aesthetic function in our environment. While it creates a welcoming atmosphere for our patrons, we also feel that it passively stimulates creativity. Because of the University’s geographic location, the library takes on an added role of displaying original art to a public that would otherwise have to travel a distance to visit a museum. So we return to the original question; “why have original artworks in an academic library?” At our library the display of art serves an important purpose: which is to promote “the educational and research missions” of the university “by providing the collections, services and environments that lead to intellectual discovery, creativity, and the exchange of ideas.”²⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ Anonymous, "Pictures in Public Libraries," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 9/9 (September 1914), 194-196).

² Ibid., 196.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 194-95.

⁵ Edward Goldsmith. "Art and Ethics." *The Structurist* 41/42 (2001/2002), 37.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ David Swanger, "Dumbing Down Art in America," *Art Education* 46/3, Critical Reflecting (May 1993), 52.

⁹ Ibid. In this passage, Swanger draws upon reflections in his book, *Essays in Aesthetic Education* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Alberta Comer, "'The Fonz' Thrills at Closing Session." *ALA Cognotes Annual Conference Highlights*, Chicago (July, 2005), 1.

¹¹ Ananda .K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 16-7. Cited in, Goldsmith, "Art and Ethics," 38.

¹² Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountains: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press, 1979), 149. Cited in Goldsmith, "Art and Ethics," 38.

¹³ Goldsmith, "Art and Ethics," 38.

¹⁴ For an in depth discussion of this concept see, D. K. Dooling, *A Way of Working* (New York: Parabola Books 1986, 1979).

¹⁵ Ellin O. Keene and Susan Zimmerman, "A Mosaic in the Mind: Using Sensory Images to Enhance Comprehension. In *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 123-43. Cited in Keith McPherson, "Visual Literacy and School Libraries," *Teacher Librarian* 32/2, Research Library (December 2002), 58.

¹⁶ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/facultyworkslideshow.htm>; and <http://gallery.indstate.edu/studentworkslideshow.htm>.

¹⁷ One of the earliest of the artists found in the collection is Francesco José Goya y Lucientes ["Goya"] (1746-1828), well-known for his painting, "Third of May, 1808" (1814). He is represented by the etching "Los Proverbios" (accessed in 1971) and by the etching "Las Camas de la Muerte" (accessed 2005). See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/franciscodegotha.htm>.

¹⁸ For a good overview of the collection, please see the ISU Permanent Art Collection website: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/index.htm>.

¹⁹ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/josephstella.htm>.

²⁰ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/recentacquisitions.htm>.

²¹ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/claesoldenburg.htm>.

²² See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/andywarholslideshow.htm>

²³ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/philippearlstein.htm>

²⁴ See: <http://gallery.indstate.edu/leonardbaskinlideshow.htm>

²⁵ <http://library.indstate.edu/level1.dir/library.dir/mission.html>