

4-1993

# A Survey of the Information-Seeking Practices of Artists in the Academic Community

Kay Downey

*Kent State University*, [mdowney1@kent.edu](mailto:mdowney1@kent.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kent.edu/libpubs>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Downey, Kay (1993). A Survey of the Information-Seeking Practices of Artists in the Academic Community. *University Libraries Publications*. Paper 195.

<https://digitalcommons.kent.edu/libpubs/195>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at Digital Commons @ Kent State University Libraries. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Kent State University Libraries. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kent.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kent.edu).

## ABSTRACT

Factors which contribute to information-seeking patterns among artists within the academic community are characteristic of the nature of the discipline as expressed in the images they produce. The artist is a non-traditional library user whose primary informational sources are non-verbal, image documentation. Although the artists surveyed express the need to obtain such information from the library, they do not perceive their efforts as successful due to bibliographical barriers related to image description. The large majority use the library most for arts journals and arts reproductions, and also use their personal libraries more than any other source. It is indicated here that librarians engaged in providing informational services to this community must focus on creating organizational and descriptive systems appropriate for the location of image documentation.



Master's Research Paper by  
Maria C. Downey  
B.F.A., Kent State University, 1980  
M.L.S., Kent State University. 1993

Approved by

Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

A SURVEY OF THE  
INFORMATION-SEEKING PRACTICES OF  
ARTISTS IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

A master's Research Paper submitted to the  
Kent State University School of Library and Information Science  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Library Science

By

Maria C. Downey

April, 1993





TABLE of CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Need for the Study.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	2
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
The Nature of the Discipline	4
Patterns and Objectives of Arts Research	5
Bibliographic Tools	7
Communications Sources	10
User Studies	11
III. METHODOLOGY.....	16
IV. CONCLUSIONS.....	18
Analysis of Data	
Recommendations for Further Study	
Appendix	
1. COVER LETTER.....	26
2. ARTIST QUESTIONNAIRE .....	27
REFERENCE LIST.....	29



CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The creative process by which artists accomplish their work involves discovery, analysis, interpretation, and expression. As with all methods of study in the humanities, it is a trial and error process whereby each new work is the culmination of individual experience, the cultural heritage, and societal trends (Garfield 1980). For the studio artist the result of this process is the art object or an image document. It is the primary medium through which the artist communicates ideas.

The organization of image information presents a unique challenge for librarians because visual images are a unique form of communication. It is the "lack of natural connections between words and objects, [which] forms the central difficulty of linking art objects and related information." (Stam 1988, 118). One example of this would be in the area of classification schemes which, created for the general library, are inappropriate for the art library collection. Museum libraries and independent art school libraries may adjust this system to accommodate their individual needs. However, in the centralized library catalogers must often conform to a system that gives less than ideal results. For this reason, among others, information barriers are created making it difficult for the user to locate the desired art documentation.

Information professionals are making progress in finding solutions to the difficulties of information retrieval in the arts. User studies which focus on the information-seeking behaviors of art historians have been particularly helpful in the process of creating better systems of access to art documentation. However, it would be desirable to examine how

all members of the arts community use libraries, including the artist.

### Need for the Study

Although there is a significant amount of literature addressing the informational needs of art historians, there is little which surveys the informational needs of the artists themselves. The few studies which were found were conducted in the decentralized art school libraries of Great Britain during the seventies. Although these studies have been helpful in determining the ways in which art students use libraries and the types of materials they require, it is the centralized library which is most prevalent in U.S. colleges and universities and there is no information which describes how artists make use of these facilities. A better understanding of the information-seeking practices of these artists could assist librarians in their service to this highly valued, yet often undersupported portion of our community.

### Purpose of the Study

This study examines how artists acquire information relevant to their work, as well as establishes a base from which to conduct further study.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study artists will be defined as "that group of individuals who are employed in the construction of pictorial and/or plastic arts" (Blazek and Aversa 1988). They are members of the academic community who are skilled in the creation of visual arts which include, but are not limited to, the areas of crafts, graphic design, and the fine arts.

Because art information is dominated by image documentation, it is assumed here that although the motives and method of art inquiry may vary among art historians and studio

artists, the materials sought after are often alike. By using the information available pertaining to art historians and libraries, it may serve as a point of departure for the examination of artists and their library use. Therefore, studies from both groups will be reviewed in a comparative manner in order to establish a basis for specific inquiry into the information-seeking practices of artists in the academic community. Since effective library service depends on understanding the users' informational needs, it is necessary to take the artist into consideration when organizing the image documentation to which he refers and creates.

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of the Discipline

Factors which contribute to information retrieval are characteristic of the nature of the discipline as expressed in the body of literature it produces. In one study concerning citation indexing, Eugene Garfield has illustrated some basic differences by comparing research objectives in the hard sciences and the humanities (Garfield 1980). He observes that although both the scientist and the humanist share a common heritage in the search for truth, the fundamental nature of research differs. Scientific works are superseded by new findings; new knowledge replaces the old and in this sense adheres to an evolutionary process, whereas the humanist takes into account the whole of human experience so that his research can be characterized as "...cumulative: Plato exists today alongside Kant, Whitehead, and A. J. Ayer" (Garfield 1980, 41). Here the basic difference in research methodologies is attributed to the scope of study, where the scientist prioritizes recent information and the humanist refers to the entire spectrum of human achievement.

The academic artist, as a member of this community of humanities scholars, is also concerned with the whole of human experience. The works of Picasso do not supersede the works of the renaissance masters or the ancient Egyptians. From a historical perspective, works of art reflect and contribute to the whole of human experience and creation. Associated with this is the aspect that arts documentation depicts a broad range of concepts. It integrates in its content aspects and ideas of one or more disciplines which include areas of both the 'hard' and 'soft' sciences. Subject scope and historical reference are significant factors which determine the organization and retrieval methods of humanistic works; however, the

distinguishing factor which separates art from other disciplines is the form of the document itself. Images are the unique method by which the artist communicates and images are the central focus of artists and art researchers. It is the relationship of the written word to the aspects of the image which dictates the effectiveness of information retrieval among art researchers. If these aspects are ill described, inappropriately organized, or omitted in various catalogues and indices, as is most often the case, then researchers must resort to other methods of 'creative searching' to find needed material (Jones 1990).

#### Patterns and Objectives of Arts Research

It is from the vantage point of the art object that the art historian conducts his studies. The art object is the primary source of information for the researcher and he relies on the written word about the object to examine and interpret its context. Richard Brilliant, in an essay regarding the need for the reconstruction of traditional art reference tools, discusses the relationship of art objects to information in this way:

[Art historians] must begin their study of an object with some form of 'It looks like...' and then seeks to find other objects and images which compliment the proposed resemblance. ...then they must look outwardly to those existing collections of comparable images and forms...these are (1) objects in museums, in galleries, and private collections that physically accessible; (2) archives of photographs or other forms of two dimensional reproductions such as microfiche, video-discs, and even photocopies; and (3) illustrated publications. (Brilliant 1988, 122).

However, Brilliant goes on to say that such focus cannot be exclusive. The historical fact and character of art objects need

to be demonstrated by showing a

connection between this object and that time and place. Historical research if done properly, denies the isolation of the object and posits a nexus of objective, historical associations, acceptable to others with access to the same supporting information, properly presented to them by the scholar (Brilliant 1988, 122).

These statements describe the primary objectives of art historians as well as the need for scholarly application of the written word to the image. In summary, the art historian begins with the art object under scrutiny, then looks to understand its context through secondary information, and finally interprets the object for a contemporary audience (Stam 1984).

In a recent essay written by Dierdre Stam (Art librarian, Catholic University of America, and executive director of the Museum Computer Network) the characteristics of arts research are described in another comparative analysis of scientists and art historians. She states that while both the scientist and the researcher look for documents relating to a known entity, the arts researcher also looks to the document, its nature and purpose, as primary evidence of historical fact. Therefore, the task of the art librarian is to not only direct his patrons to information regarding the "time and place" of the art object but also to information relating to the "aspects" of it as well (Stam 1991).

Another characteristic of arts research is described in the results of a survey in which the information-seeking patterns of art historians was studied (Stam 1984). Conclusions describe the

research patterns of the participants as a diverse activity where the process seems to be as much intuitive as systematic. It is a highly subjective form of study where the search itself is as important as the location of the material and that accidental discovery is a usual phenomenon in their research. This unconventional approach to scholarly research is explained in literature which discusses the skepticism of artists with regard to technical progress. The artists "anti-scientific" inclination is evident in much of our 20th century art which depicts revolt against technology and the dehumanization of man (Walter 1991). Because arts communications uses a multiplicity of approaches, information distributors need to diverge from conventional systems of materials organization and develop systems that will reflect the multiplicity and richness inherent in the nature of the discipline.

In her research summary she quotes Irving Lavin who poetically illustrates the character of arts research as "a natural science of the spirit" (Stam 1984, 212). The problems posed for the information scientist when contending with arts information stem, to a great degree, from the subjective nature of the arts. The difficulties in organizing art information are compounded by the special need for extensive and precise terminology structures, authority control and standardization for effective access.

### Bibliographic Tools

Because the method of communication of images and written words do not naturally form a connection, it becomes difficult to

prepare bibliographic sources which will effectively direct the library patron to image information. According to Stam,

The vocabulary necessary to describe the work of art evolves as part of the research process; the object itself does not naturally suggest the words that should be used to characterize its aspects. Most information systems, including those used for art, are basically verbal in nature - at least their retrieval methods depend upon the word (Stam 1988, 118).

In recent years significant developments in the construction of bibliographic tools for the arts have been realized, primarily in the form of terminology and meaning. Two major projects addressing these emanate from the Research Libraries Group (RLG): the first being the extensive authority work manifested in the Art Literature International (RILA) database, and the second in the Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) (Art & Architecture Program Committee-research Libraries Group) for its subtle hierarchal structure and subject classification (Culbertson 1991).

Although the stabilization of terminology is enormously helpful for information retrieval, this by itself is not entirely corrective. As was previously indicated, it is not enough for the art historian to simply analyze the subject matter expressed within a document. In many cases the subject content is only of peripheral value. The art historian is more likely to be concerned with the nature of the document itself or the aspects of its content. In bibliographic organization the term

aspect...differs from traditional subject indexing in that it indicates a professional judgement about the category of the document under consideration. Subject indexing focuses on the thing or topic discussed within



the article...[aspect] corresponds to major approaches to art historical material, and is designed to alert the reader to material supporting (or reflecting) these various approaches (Stam 1991, 127).

Locating art information according to the aspect or the nature of its content is as of yet a difficult task for the art historian when confronted with standard bibliographic tools. In order to evaluate the context of an art object the art researcher relies on sources, both primary and secondary, which can be unique in their representation of various points of view.

Examples of many of these can be found in Lois Swan Jones' Art Information; research Methods and Resources (1990). This publication presents an excellent overview of many of the research tools available to arts scholars. It outlines commonly used sources for the beginning researcher such as art encyclopedias, art historical surveys, serial and museum publications, as well as sources intended for the professional researcher which include iconographical research sources, works in the areas of art form and style, archival materials, and information regarding major arts research centers. Many of these materials and sources have unique characteristics and although this publication attempts to be comprehensive, the scope of arts documentation is too broad to be contained in any one volume. Art historian Jeffrey Weidman of Oberlin College, Ohio, writes in an extensive review essay that Jones' publication is an excellent tool for art scholars. He, at the same time, frequently suggests a host of related sources which may be added in later editions (Weidman 1990). This simply illustrates the extent to which art reference sources are many and diverse.

Bibliographic sources used to decipher the meaning and context of art objects and the progressive developments in their structure and organization represent a major portion of resources available to art scholars.

### Communications Sources

Although librarians are frequently consulted by art scholars, they are not primary contacts when it regards work related research assistance. Instead relative information is acquired through various communication channels, both formal and informal, with individuals such as colleagues, art dealers, and students (Stam 1984; Keaveney 1986). One study which focuses on the research styles of this group explains this as follows:

The library and its services can be seen both as offering indispensable access to research material and as obstructing that access through restrictive or inefficient practices. The gathering and organizing of bibliographic references may be done with systematic tools such as indices and library catalogues, but timely information is often gleaned through informal contacts with colleagues (Bakewell 1988, 37).

Essentially, this scholar is saying that ineffectual library service stems from inefficient bibliographical tools as well as the lack of pertinent arts knowledge on the part of the librarian.

An interesting article entitled "In Search of Other Galaxies: Librarians, Scholars, and Their Overlapping Orbits" (Martinez 1990), addresses the problems of creating effective cooperative systems among relating art institutions and individuals. Art historians use a diverse pool of resources, many of which exist

outside the traditional art library. An example of this was described by tracking the information seeking path of one particular art scholar whose search took her from the archives of American art to a remote business library and a Masonic temple. The trek was mapped by informal communications with other researchers, librarians, archivists, and print curators, among others. She noted that these communications came about by "serendipitous and accidental conversations" (Martinez 1990, 4). Her conclusions indicate that a primary difficulty in connecting the varying arts collections is the lack of communication between historical societies and associations as well as the lack of initiative to catalog and enter records in formalized networking systems. Underlying these comments is the concept that art information in all its diverse manifestations and originations is necessarily of importance to those who are in the profession of supplying useful information to the art scholar.

### User Studies

As was stated in the introduction, user studies which profile the artist are virtually non-existent, outside of a few case studies which were conducted in the UK during the seventies. Some information about art students as library users can be extracted from an essay written by Derek Toyne, art school librarian, regarding the function of an art school library.

He states that an art library for the fine arts school can only be justified if it contributes in some positive way to

creating art (Toyne 1977). He describes the users as basically having two separate yet interrelated motives for seeking art information from the library. First, there is the practical aspect involving the artists' technical activities, such as gesso applications to a canvas or chemical substances used in printing processes. The second aspect is more elusive and involves the presence of a substratum of interests which act as a 'springboard' for their creative drives and inspirations. He contends that the art library should give stimulus and support to the whole spectrum of the students' work as well as teach the fundamentals of documentary research. He observes that on many occasions the library resources are influential in the propagation of the artists' interests and that in his experience, if adequate library service is provided for the artist, evidence of the information supplied is frequently recognizable in their work.

The studio artist is observed as an infrequent library user who, when they do make use of the facility, appear to be compulsive browsers. They are prepared to find something unexpected which may assist the creative work in which they are engaged (Pacey 1982; Jones 1986). they are interested in 'how-to' information as well as visual images. Art students use the library as reservoirs of images, visual information, example and stimulus. Written texts are of secondary importance.

Art historians on the other hand are frequent library users, who depend heavily on their personal libraries as well. They, like the artist, require image formats and prefer those reproductions

found in books and journals. Their primary sources of information are the art object itself and other primary archival documents which correspond to the object of study. Their methods of information gathering appear to be similar to those of the artist in that they involve both systematic and intuitive seeking behaviors.

As was earlier stated, written texts for the art student are of secondary importance. Art students tend to use the library in an 'academic way' in connection with the historical element in their coursework. The artists look to the library for information on currents trends in journal or exhibition catalogues. They often require references outside the field of art such as books on anatomy. They tend to overlook other valuable resources which may be of use to them. While studio artists utilize various types of art-historical works, they also need information relating to competitive exhibitions and legal aspects of the art field.

Other information relating to reading materials which is of interest to artists was found in an Arts Magazine column entitled "Books in Artists Lives" (Jones 1991). This was simply a bibliographic listing of titles submitted by reputable artists. Included in this listing are books that have retained lasting significance in the artists' lives. Common to nearly all of the bibliographies are the frequent listings of books regarding religious and philosophical content. Many of the titles listed include works of complex intellectual studies concerning the human condition, spirituality and poetic discourse.

Secondary sources used by art historians include literature relevant to theoretical issues and biographical. These are works which describe the cultural context or the meaning of a work of art. They make use of general bibliographical tools such as Books in Print and Art Index but less commonly use RILA or Art Bibliographies Modern and almost never use computerized databases. Sources can range from subjective to scientific.

The information-seeking activities of art historians are generally private endeavors making little contact with professionals outside of their own institutions. They depend on contacts with those colleagues within their own institutional network, but seldom regard librarians as part of their informational reference group. They seek assistance from librarians only in connection with procedural matters such as interlibrary loan.

Conclusions from the art school user studies state that the library has a significant role to play in the development of creative works, if the library is accessible to the artist. The researcher maintains that the function of the library for artists is distinctly different from that of the art historian. Accessibility for the artist requires that the library act as an adjunct to the studio and that the activities seen in the decentralized art school library would not have taken place in the centralized facility. It is also emphasized that although the library may house the appropriate materials in its collection, unless these are promoted they will be underused (Jones 1986).

Timely library service, efficient bibliographical organization, appropriate sources and local accessibility are all familiar factors which contribute to the gainful use of the library. These elements, when deigned for the special needs of the art community, have a direct relation to library use and effectiveness. Pacey concludes that "the practicing artist...can get by without libraries; they will 'get by' far better with libraries, but the libraries have to be put in their way" (Pacey 1982, 54).

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires used in studies designed for the art historian were used as a model for this inquiry. Modified for the studio artist, the survey questions request information regarding the types of library resources, individuals and facilities which are of value to their work as artist and/or instructor.

The population consists of teaching staff (both full and part-time) and graduate students, all of whom are part of the Kent State University community within the School of Art. The roster of qualifying individuals was obtained from the School of Art administrative office. All participants from the above described group number 53 (38 faculty and 15 graduate students). All received a survey questionnaire for completion.

The questionnaire asks both closed and open-ended questions in order to confirm or disprove common perceptions as well as illicit additional information which may have been overlooked. The questions ask for the following types of information: what resources are utilized, who refers them to the needed resources, and where the materials are acquired. Questions numbered 1 and 2 confirm eligibility and delineate the separate groups of artists. Areas designated for commentary and remarks were included as an information generating device. All questions are specific to the artist's work related interests.



All survey forms were distributed to the artists via the Art school office mailbox stem and collected by the secretary to the director. Upon completion the data was analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and a comparative analysis of the commentary.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

#### Analysis of Data

Conclusions drawn from this study may not be generalized due to the low response rate of the artists surveyed and the fact that only one university was polled. The same questionnaire was submitted to the group on two separate occasions with the highest response rate being 33% or numbering 17 out of 53. Data collected from the best response are used as such to serve as a directional for further study as well as to determine some common factors of interest to this group of artists.

In order to determine the types of informational materials the artists use, a list of nine general categories of resources was supplied to them. They were asked to identify those sources which were of use to them in their work and instructional activities. Among these nine categories, art journals and artist reproductions were the most widely used. Exhibition catalogues and art history resources are moderately used, references sources, biographical resources, mass media, and technical manuals are used minimally. Computer databases are not used at all (see Table 1). A few of the respondents offered additional information regarding the use of 'non-art' materials of scientific or literary nature. These other categories include novels, physics and history texts, some anecdotal information, printed samples from vendors, scientific

and other specialized journals dealing with perception, language, etc., and anthologies of critical essays.

Table 1.  
Artist's Use of Bibliographic Resources by Type.

Resource type	f	%
Arts journals	15	88
Artist reproductions	14	82
Exhibition catalogues	11	65
Art history resources	10	59
Reference sources	5	29
Biographical resources	3	18
Mass media	3	18
Technical manuals	2	12
Computer databases	0	0

The participants were also asked to supply a list of literary resources which were of significance to their work. The request was designed to illicit information regarding the general content of the information important to the artists' work. Nearly all cited arts journals, both general and according to their own disciplines. The citations submitted by graphic design and crafts artists had an emphasis on technologically oriented art texts,

visual reference sources pertaining to symbolic images, with some general philosophy related literature. Some of these titles include, The Role of the reader: exploration in the semiotics of texts by Umberto Eco (1979), Dictionary of symbols by Carl G. Liungman (1991), Typography: a manual of design by Emil Ruder (1967), and Paul Rand; a designers' art by Paul Rand (1985). In contrast, the fine artists more often cited those works which deal with the theoretical aspects of perception, ideology, and monographs of various artists, with some mention of technical sources. Some examples of these are The anti-aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture by Hal Foster, ed. (1983), Perspective as symbolic form by Erwin Panofsky (1990), Art and visual perception: a psychology of the creave eye by Rudolf Arnheim (1974), and Iconology: image, text, ideology by W.J.T. Mitchell (1986).

With regard to user facilities, 88% of the artists surveyed depend heavily on their personal libraries for work related information. Second to this the artists use gallery exhibitions for pertinent information. Libraries of all types are used moderately by most of the artists surveyed (see Table 2). Other facilities mentioned include book stores, workshops, and the Art School Library of the Cleveland Institute of Art. Comments from the artists indicate that they depend on libraries for current information found in journals and periodicals. They expressed a desire to use the library resources more extensively but felt unable to extract pertinent data from existing collections, particularly in the academic library.

"Although the most expensive journals and periodicals regarding art and design, are the most valuable to me as a teacher as well as an artist, I cannot commit as much of my earnings as I would like to subscriptions to these publications. I need the highest quality color reproductions rather than xeroxes of data."

"I would like to see an 'art library' in the School of Art building."

"...libraries are often useless for the visual artist, it seems it's always too much or not enough...I use a lot of my own references."

"It would be intensely more helpful to have a fine arts library with sections for painting-drawing-architecture-etc. I use the Mayfield CC Public Library all the time because I can 'browse' - come across a book by 'accident' -The Kent [State University] library is frustrating-because you need to know what you're looking for to find it!"

Table 2.  
Frequency of Artists' Use of Facilities to Acquire  
Work-Related Information.

Facility	Extent of Use							
	Very often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Personal library	15	88	2	12	0	0	0	0
Gallery exhibitions	3	18	9	53	4	23	1	6
Public library	4	23	7	41	3	18	3	18
University library	4	23	6	35	6	35	1	6
Art library	6	35	3	18	2	12	6	35
Museum library	2	12	6	35	6	35	3	18

Colleagues are the primary individuals with whom the artists consult for work related information. They sometimes consult with art historians and art school support staff but make infrequent use of the academic librarian for needed information (see Table 3). Only one artist cited an additional information provider as a print house vendor who supplied him with print reproductions.

Table 3.

Frequency of Communications with Information Providers.

Information providers	Extent of Use							
	Very often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Colleagues	5	29	9	53	3	18	0	0
Art historians	0	0	8	48	4	23	5	29
Art school support staff	3	18	5	29	4	23	5	29
Academic librarians	0	0	4	23	7	41	6	35
Public librarians	0	0	3	18	6	35	8	48

Most interesting to this study were the artists' general comments concerning libraries. Many expressed the desire to use the library resources but felt unable to extract pertinent data from existing bibliographic tools such as the Kent State online public access catalog, Catalyst.

" Usually I'm looking for visual reference or visual information in the form of photographs (b&w, color), illustrations, diagrams, or other. The Catalyst provides very little information about the kinds of images a book has (or the content of the images). Important Info. - A. How many images a book has (of each kind) B. What kind of images (diagram, photography, illustration, b&w or color) C. The content of the images."

They expressed an interest in various reference tools such as specialized indexes and computer databases but were not familiar with specific sources or their availability.

"There is a new technology which is used to record visual images - optical disk, I believe. This computer system will probably eventually replace slides. It would be great to have access to exhibition catalogs. Is there an index? Are they available through interlibrary loan? -A sheet outlining the subsections of the Dewey decimal system for art books would be helpful for library users. I like to browse but don't always know what section to go to."

A significant proportion of this group expressed a desire to browse the collection but found it too difficult and ineffective within the extended collection and organizational structure of the Kent State Library. They emphasized the importance of "accidental discovery" when searching for art information.

Current arts information and quality reproductions are a priority for most of the artists, particularly for contemporary works of art. None of the artists commented about the need for directory information or sources regarding competitive exhibitions or arts associations.

Findings indicate that the academic library is underused by artists due to various types of barriers, indelible reference tools, and inconvenient organization of materials, among others. Future studies which focus on the discovery of plausible options available to the artist will create better access to the rich store of resources available to him as well as encourage a wider use.

### Recommendations for Further Study

Due to the skeletal participant response to the questionnaire survey, another method of inquiry is recommended for further study of this user group. A variety of academic institutions need to be studied for a more objective conclusion as well as a more direct approach to this community of artists, such as interview, observation, and/or bibliometric analysis. The tendency for artists to prefer browsing for materials at their shelf location rather than scanning the item possibilities through bibliographic tools is an interesting characteristic of their search strategy which needs further exploration. Other aspects of information seeking behavior among artists such as frequency of informational requests and success rate of found items, what the artists considers a successful search, and how artists categorize arts information according to its content are all points of inquiry which need to be addressed in subsequent studies.

Although it is generally accepted that a decentralized art school library is preferable, it may be helpful to consider other options on an experimental basis as a linking mechanism between the art school and the main library. For example, catalogue terminals or other types of reference materials accessible to the art students and faculty at the art school itself may serve as a type of library adjunct to the art school.

One other factor which may need to be taken into consideration when inquiring into the research habits of artists, is that studies of this nature may not fit neatly into the established model of



empirical study. The artist who, unlike the typical academic scholar, prefers to communicate ideas through images and thrives on 'accidental' discovery, cannot by extension be considered or expected to be a traditional library user.

The information professional, who has an interest in wanting to know about the information needs of his community, must acknowledge these characteristics, however unconventional, and attempt to provide library service accessible to its users. Continued study in this area will help librarians in their efforts to design effective bibliographic tools and materials organization structures for artists seeking information within the academic community.

APPENDIX I

COVER LETTER TO THE ARTISTS  
OF THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF ART

School of Library and Information Science  
(216) 672-2782  
Fax 216-672-7965



P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

---

Information-Seeking Practices of Artists in the Academic Community

November 5, 1992

Dear Artist:


As a former KSU art student may I ask your help with a research project I am conducting as part of the requirements for my master's degree in the School of Library and Information Science? The study focuses on information retrieval of artists, the type of information used, and how it is acquired. Very little is known about the information needs of artists, making it difficult for libraries to serve this portion of the academic community. The enclosed questionnaire elicits data from all faculty and graduate teaching assistants working under the divisions of Craft, Design, and Fine Art.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed as you do not need to sign your name. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose to not participate in this study or if you would withdraw from participation at any time. While your cooperation is essential to the success of this study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at 673-2008 or Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research advisor, at 672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University you may contact Dr. Eugene Wenninger, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, at 672-2070.

Thank you very much for your cooperation; it is much appreciated. You may return the questionnaire to the School of Art Office, c/o Tonia Bledsoe, within the next two weeks.

Sincerely,

  
Maria Downey  
Graduate Student

APPENDIX II

ARTISTS QUESTIONNAIRE

**SURVEY OF INFORMATION-SEEKING PRACTICES OF  
ARTISTS IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY**

1. Status

- Full-time faculty
- Part-time faculty
- Graduate teaching asst.

2. Division

- Crafts
- Design
- Fine Art

Listed below are some examples of informational resources. Indicate those you use most often for instruction or professional work.

- 3.  reference sources (directories, indexes, etc.)
- 4.  technical manuals
- 5.  computer databases & related literature
- 6.  artist's reproductions (slides, photographs, plates, etc.)
- 7.  arts journals
- 8.  biographical resources
- 9.  mass media (newspapers, radio, etc.)
- 10.  exhibition catalogues
- 11.  art history resources
- other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate how often you acquire work related information from the following locations.

	very often	some- times	rarely	never
12. university library.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. public library.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. art library.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. personal library.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. museums.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. gallery exhibitions....	_____	_____	_____	_____
other (please specify)_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Indicate how often the following individuals supply you with information utilized in your work.

	very often	some- times	rarely	never
18. colleagues.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. art historians.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. academic librarians.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
21. public librarians.....	_____	_____	_____	_____
22. art school support staff..	_____	_____	_____	_____
other (please specify)_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

(pg. 2)

23. In the space provide below list the literary resources which have most significantly influenced your work as an artist. (List specific titles if you know them).

---

24. Optional. If you have any additional comments about how libraries can better serve the information needs of artists, please feel free to comment below or on an additional sheet.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION. Please return the completed questionnaire to Tonia Bledsoe, art school office, within the next two weeks.

## Reference List

- Bakewell, Elizabeth and Marilyn Low Schmitt. 1988. Object, image, inquiry: The Art historian at work. Santa Monica, California: Getty Art History Information Program.
- Blazek, ron, and Elizabeth Aversa. 1988. Accessing information in the visual arts. Chap. in The Humanities: A Selective guide to information sources. 3rd ed. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Brilliant, Richard. 1988. How an art historian connects art objects and information. Library Trends 37:2 (Fall ~~1988~~): 120-29
- Corkhill, Cynthia, and Margaret Mann. 1978. Information needs in the humanities: Two postal surveys. Sheffield: Centre for research on User Studies, University of Sheffield.
- Culbertson, Margaret. 1991. A Portrait of cooperation in the fine arts. Resource Sharing and Information Networks 6 (2) : 29-34
- Garfield, Eugene. 1980. Is information retrieval in the arts and humanities inherently different from that in science? Library Quarterly 50 (January): 40-57
- Jones, Lois Swan. 1990. Art information: Research methods and resources. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. Dissemination of information. Chap. in Art Libraries and Information Services. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, Inc.
- Keaveney, Sydney Starr. 1986. Contemporary art documentation and fine arts libraries. Metuchen, N.J., & London: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Martinez, Katherine. 1990. In search of other galaxies: Librarians, scholars, and their overlapping orbits. Art Documentation (Spring): 3-4
- Pacey, Philip. 1977. Art library manual: A Guide to resources and practice. London & New York: Bowker.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. How art students use libraries--if they do. Art Libraries Journal (Winter): 24-30

- Toyne, Derek. 1975. Requests at Falmouth School of Art. ARLIS Newsletter (September): 7
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977. A philosophy for Falmouth. Art Libraries Journal (Winter): 24-30
- Stam, Dierdre C. 1984. The Information-seeking practices of art historians in museums and colleges in the United States. D.L.S. diss., Columbia University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. Tracking art historians: on information needs and information-seeking behavior. Art Libraries Journal 14 (March): 13-16
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. What about the Mona Lisa? Making bibliographic databases more useful to art historians by classifying documents according to the aspect of art object(s) under consideration. Art Documentation (Fall): 127-30
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. Introduction to Linking art objects and art information. Library Trends 37:2 (Fall): 117-19
- Walter, Nadine. 1991. Computerization in research in the visual arts. Art Documentation (Spring): 3-12
- Weidman, Jeffrey. 1990. Art information: Research methods and resources: A Review essay. Art Libraries Journal 15 (April): 19-31