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Informing Visual Poetry: Information Needs and Sources of Artists

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[A longer version of this article was written as a seminar paper for an independent study under the guidance of Dr. Carole Farber at the University of Western Ontario. It was also presented as a poster session at the ARLIS/NA Annual Conference in New York, April 2004. The full version of the paper, with a transcript of the artist interview and an annotated bibliography, may be found at <http://www.geocities.com/xelazulu/>]

Introduction

This study began with my curiosity about the role of information in the creative work of artists. I brought to my research the assumptions that artists are professionals, and that their work is creative; I also brought the high value that I place on artists' work and on creativity. My hypothesis was that artists may differ somehow in their information needs and uses from other professionals, such as physicians, engineers, and lawyers. I wanted to understand whether and how the nature of artists' work might influence the way they seek information, and the kinds of information they seek. As I began to explore the literature, my curiosity was thwarted first by the limited amount of research within the library and information science (LIS) field about artists or other creative workers, and second by the nature of the research available. My hypothesis evolved into a critical one about the nature of the research in the field. I quickly came to believe that the information-seeking behavior studies were rife with unidentified assumptions which distorted their results. Therefore, my research followed two streams: the first, to find out what has been done in the LIS field and try to come to grips with why I find the existing research so unsatisfactory; and second, to find out through a case study what an artist's information needs and sources in relation to her work actually are.

Critical Literature Review

As I mentioned, there is very little research about artists in the library and information science field. In her key 1996 study "The Information-Seeking Behavior of Artists: Exploratory Interviews,"¹ Susie Cobbleddick demonstrates this and attempts to begin to fill the gap. According to her 1995 statistics, there were 921,000 professional artists in the United States. According to 1996 Canadian statistics, there were 73,105 creative and performing artists in Canada, with an additional 73,530 creative designers and craftspersons.² Cobbleddick makes the point that there are likely many more artists who go uncounted because they make their living by other means. As she says, "If only because of their sheer numbers, artists deserve the attention of information professionals; yet their information needs have been

neglected..."³ Donald Case and others confirm this lack of research about artists,⁴ and my own survey of the literature did not prove otherwise.

Assumptions and Biases

There is more research about art historians than artists, perhaps in part because, as academics, art historians are more easily accessible to the LIS scholars and academic librarians who might engage in this type of research. There is often a convenience bias in the research, with informants being selected from the pool of library-using teachers, students, and academics who are all easily available to the researchers, who invariably have an academic and/or library affiliation. There were six studies of artists that I could find (Cobbleddick, 1996; Layne, 1994; Stam, 1995; VanZijl, 2001; Frank, 1999; Oddos, 1998). Of these, only three (Cobbleddick, VanZijl, and Frank) actually sought data from artists themselves. The others got their information primarily from art librarians. Of the three that talked to artists, Cobbleddick surveyed and interviewed four American artists on the faculty at the same college, Van Zijl surveyed 123 South African artists, most of whom teach at secondary or post-secondary institutions, and Frank held focus group interviews with 181 undergraduate visual arts students at a Minnesota college. They all focused on how artists use libraries rather than any broader information-seeking context.

The fact that the research tends to be done with informants who are conveniently situated in the academic world and who are library users was just one of the biases and assumptions that were revealed to me in my survey of the literature. The scope of the research about artists was narrowed to their information-seeking within libraries only. The assumption of these researchers is that the library is the primary place where artists do (or should) seek information. There is also a tacit assumption that there is a correct way to use libraries, and a strong thread of belief that artists deviate from this correct usage. They are therefore considered to be inadequate and inefficient library users, usually characterized as *browsers*: "Artists may not start out knowing exactly what image they need; they will want to be able to browse among many images..."⁵ "Although they are infrequent users of the library, when these patrons do come, they often like to browse the collection for ideas."⁶ Other art librarians report that:

Artists expect to be presented with the 'perfect' answer to their queries...Others observe that artists have little patience for reference tools. They do not know how to use indexes and

they have little interest in learning; they don't have the time, they don't come with the skills, and some artists can't even read well, aren't particularly verbal, and might even have reading disabilities...Frequently they do not understand the nature of the information given them. Catalogs are more of a hindrance than help to artists who just do not think of art the way that the Library of Congress does.⁷

And exactly who does think the way that the Library of Congress does? There is a stereotype of artists as somehow less able to function in the everyday world, and perhaps even less intelligent than most. "Speculation about the intelligence of artists is hardly new. Plato, Aristotle, and their contemporaries did not have a high opinion of the visual arts or those who practiced them."⁸ Although studies have found artists to be at or above the norm in intelligence tests, and most artists are highly educated people, these perceptions persist. It is almost as if artists were considered "problem patrons" who are not particularly welcome in art libraries. If it is indeed true that artists do not use libraries as librarians think they should be used, we have two choices as information professionals: we can disparage them and take it upon ourselves to teach them prescribed library usage, or we can look at what their information needs and patterns are, and learn from them.

It has been recognized elsewhere that perhaps libraries' systems of organization are not the most beneficial for all users:

It is taken as a given in library and information science that the organization, description, and indexing in indexes, catalogs, and reference books contributes to the successful and speedy retrieval of information by users. Do we know that it does this in fact?...Stoan (1984) has argued persuasively that the model librarians have developed of information searching in academic libraries bears little resemblance to actual research techniques used by scholars and their graduate students.⁹

Sara Shatford Layne suggests that user-informed cataloging and organizational reform is both desirable and viable.¹⁰ Susie Cobbleddick and Polly Frank both approach the information needs of artists from the artist's point of view, although remaining firmly within the library milieu. While Cobbleddick focuses more on *what* they search for, Frank investigates *how* student artists use the library. She finds that, indeed, one of the main strategies of these young artists is browsing, and wisely suggests: "Librarians will need to get beyond questioning whether or not student artists should browse, recognize that some do, and enhance their ability to do so."¹¹

There is an assumption that art librarians know what artists need and want, and how they go about looking for it. In a 1994 survey conducted to determine artists' library use patterns, Deirdre Stam chose to send questionnaires to art librarians rather than to artists because artists, "...like other users, seldom can provide the kind of reasoned information on their needs and use that translates directly into improved service."¹² Experience working with artists, as well as empathy for them and their work, may indeed give art librarians a good sense of artists' information use and needs in the library, but as Stam herself states, it is still an indirect approach. If we really want to know about artists, shouldn't we ask the artists themselves? Furthermore, it has been observed that the main users of art libraries are not studio artists, but art historians, professors, and

academics (Jones, 1986; Collins, 2003; Oddos, 1998; Rose, 2002). "The information needs of artists are too diverse to be addressed solely within the confines of art librarianship."¹³ So perhaps art librarians still have much to learn about the ways of artists. Perceptions such as the following prevail: "Artists may also want to browse among images at random, seeking for serendipitous inspiration."¹⁴ "Thoroughness is not characteristic of their approach in the way that it is in other scholarly endeavors. Artists are compulsive browsers. They need to 'paw through' materials."¹⁵ It is widely agreed that artists like to browse, yet browsing is consistently mentioned as if it were a flawed information-seeking technique, and an inadequacy on the part of the artists.

Methodology and Discourse

The nature of the questions asked of the artists limits the answers they can provide. Survey questions in particular limit the range of possible answers. Closed question surveys such as the one used in Carol Van Zijl's study¹⁶ shape the range of possible answers into a narrow stream that cannot extend beyond the researcher's experience or imagination. This may be useful in some instances, for very specific purposes, but it does not allow for any understanding of the depth, complexity, and idiosyncrasy of human behavior. "The survey method ... has proved to be very popular, and when properly used is capable of producing path-breaking contributions. But it is not always appropriate in all library or information-use situations, and it is disturbing to see it being imposed indiscriminately on situations that can be better studied using other methodologies."¹⁷ Cobbleddick, who did some interesting research in her in-depth artist interviews, only conducted the interviews in an effort to design a survey instrument for artists. While her survey is a vast improvement on the typical user questionnaire, it is still laden with librarianly and objectivist assumptions. Her survey is designed around the concept of information as *thing*, or at least as something obtained from things, and a large proportion of the "thingly" information fulfillers that she includes in her survey questions are the province of the library (i.e., journals, catalogs, books, slides, films). John Budd traces the intellectual history of LIS in his book *Knowledge and Knowing in Library and Information Science* and points out how strongly biased the field is toward the scientific/objectivist viewpoint. We came by this viewpoint honorably, along with Descartes and most of the rest of Western civilization; however, we do seem more tenacious than others in holding on to it. It is characterized by the treatment of things as quantifiable, decontextualized objects of study, whether they are people, books, or behaviors. "Of course LIS practice does not consist entirely of objectified reductions, but objectification is too common to ignore."¹⁸ When a survey is designed using objectivist categories and language, informants have little choice but to fit their needs and behavior into the available categories, whether they are accurate representations or not.

Questions asked from a library-centered perspective may solicit answers about library use, but the seeking and use of information among artists, other professionals, and indeed most people, goes far beyond the library. These studies demonstrate the limitations that Brenda Dervin has identified in disciplinary discourse communities. As she says, "we work within insular discourse communities."¹⁹ The limitations of language and

discourse, and hence of available perceptions and interpretations of reality and thought, shape and severely curtail our research. This critique is also made by Lucas Introna, who points out that the structure and type of discourse within an institution perpetuates its truth and disallows other contextual possibilities. Interpreting Foucault's thought on discourse and power, Introna claims: "Each institution or society has its 'regime of truth,' its 'general politics of truth'... This means that in an organizational setting certain topics or perspectives just do not come up as contextual possibilities."²⁰ If the language does not exist (or is not in use) to say it, it cannot be said. It has been suggested that "...being accepted within a discipline requires consistent displays of allegiance to a discipline's orthodoxy in how narratives are constructed, in assumptions, in methods, in status hierarchies, and in doctrinal knowledge."²¹ LIS is not alone in accepting limiting conformities—academic disciplines are defined and recognized, hence accorded value, by their discourse, and many succumb to the phenomenon called "recipe research." Dervin suggests interdisciplinarity and a dialogic narrative-based interview methodology as ways to move beyond these limitations; Introna suggests contextualization and hermeneutics.

"Most studies of information seeking (and indeed virtually all of those studying information *use*) have made no explicit claims to theory. Instead, most of them have been administrative in nature, concerned with collecting data for the purpose of improving operations in information agencies such as libraries."²²

If we want to discover what artists really do to inform their work, we will not find out through research shaped by the library-centered user study template. It is my contention that much information-seeking behavior research is rooted in user studies that are more closely related to market research than academic social science research. Commercial motivations are explicitly cited as the purpose for some information-seeking research. "Commercial database vendors were already developing services tailored to particular professionals but lacked understanding as to whether such services would actually meet the real-life need of daily practice."²³ This may also explain why the studies tend to be concentrated on higher income professions. User studies are motivated not by intellectual curiosity about human behavior and meaning, but by a desire to better serve library users in concrete terms, which can be a slippery slope into a desire to push information products. The studies, with their aim of quantifying information needs and objectifying them into something that libraries can fulfill, are motivated by the perhaps unspoken desire to move product: to increase usage of services, books, periodicals, and databases, thereby justifying the expense of libraries to increasingly corporate-minded organizations and boards. This represents a serious misstep both in libraries as institutions for the public good and in LIS research.

Praxis

Budd makes the connection between LIS discourse on customer service and the commodification of information:

The customer service premise necessitates a reconception of LIS and of everything related to the profession, including the content which we provide access to. It is grounded in a claim

that there is a diminishing of the use value of information in favor of information's exchange value. The content and the service related to it are objectified, and their meaning is defined by their value as objects. The danger is that the services offered by libraries and information agencies, including the access mechanisms we design, are not seen in terms of the knowledge enhancing potential they represent. Instead...as a commodity.²⁴

As a commodity, information's value is diminished to its exchange value. Its potential, its use value, its value as a social good, all are subordinated to the concept of exchange value. The praxis to which libraries have traditionally adhered has been informed by an ethical stance in favor of free and equal access to information. "The nature of professional practice implies judgments of obligation that lead to actions based on principles of equal access to information, balance in library collections, and mediation between information seekers and content."²⁵ Without making a conscious or explicit decision to change the ethics that traditionally inform library practice, the profession seems to be increasingly infiltrated by creeping commodification. Capitalist values are, of course, pervasive in this society, and it is only natural that information providers who both serve and are part of the society should begin to shape their practice in accordance with them. However, my point is that it is very important to be aware of such a shift in praxis. It is important to consciously choose the ethics/values/theories that inform practice. Changing ethical and theoretical ground should be explicitly acknowledged rather than left unspoken and unchallenged; this, I believe, is the work of academics as well as other researchers and information providers. "We must continually remind ourselves that LIS has a social meaning as well as a technical application."²⁶ I have to agree with Budd that a praxis approach to research and practice is what is required. "What is needed in LIS is much more attention given over to the meanings that, first of all, inhere in the things we do and the things we say and, next, are to be sought and found by us ... At the heart of a discussion about meaning is a genuine acceptance of reflexive practice, of a consciously interpretive and intentional approach to praxis."²⁷

My intention was to begin research from a slightly different set of assumptions than those that I found in the literature. I have little interest in the objectivist stance, or in subject/object hierarchy, and even less in attempting to reify and quantify human experience and meaning. In the creation of understanding, we are always engaged in the hermeneutic task—interpretation—whether we acknowledge it or not. As an interpretive framework, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic circle makes sense to me because it is contextualized, historicized, iterative and dynamic. The circle cuts through dualistic thinking. "It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter."²⁸ It insists that we acknowledge our prejudice, our historicity, and it resists stasis and objectification. Most important, it is about questioning: questioning one's own foreknowledge, "prejudice" and contextual position, but also interrogating outward in order to develop understanding and meaning.

The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things and is always in part so defined. This places hermeneutical work on a firm basis. A person trying to understand something will

not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something.²⁹

I am not alone in using the hermeneutic circle as a framework in which to think about and interpret research related to information-seeking, as Introna, Budd, and Case all make extensive reference to it.

My own bias, as may be clear, is a preference that informants speak in their own words about their processes and what is important and meaningful to them. I prefer to let the information gathered, the “data,” speak for itself rather than shaping it with librarianly assumptions and survey instruments. “The received view among many information seeking researchers...is that more meaningful research—if not actual progress—can be attained through shifts in theoretical orientation (toward the more phenomenological, contextual, and hermeneutic) and by a more qualitative emphasis...”³⁰ Of course, I cannot escape my own context and prejudice, and my actions of selecting, omitting, asking, or staying silent will shape the research. However, my research is meant to be dialogic, in both form and spirit. By questioning both outward and inward, in an iterative and incremental movement, understanding emerges from my interaction with the artist and the text produced. Still curious about what informs an artist’s creative work, and finding only limited answers in the existing research, I decided to do some qualitative research of my own.

Artist Interview

As exploratory and preliminary research, I decided to do an in-depth interview with a practicing professional artist. The case study is limited, of course, in that it is unique and cannot be generalized. However, the strengths of an interview in ethnographic depth and in its contextualized, narrative-based and dialogic nature at least partially make up for these limitations. Information behavior is highly subjective and idiosyncratic, and to portray it otherwise is to falsify it to some degree. “It must be remembered that the information search is a highly personal one and does not always follow universal patterns.”³¹ One person’s behavior is both unique and at the same time not so different from that of other people. As Case points out in regard to the researcher of one information-seeking case study: “The more important point is that she is not trying to generalize her findings to the entire population of securities analysts. Rather, she is exploring a basic aspect of human information behavior. We do not have a strong reason to think that this particular person is radically different from all other human beings.”³² I am interested in what Case calls “*phenomenological* interviewing, intended to uncover the meanings and intentions of the person studied—to see reality in the unique way that the respondent sees it.”³³

I tried to enter into the artist interview with minimal assumptions of what “information” consists of, and designed it to be as open-ended and conversational as I could. I wanted to be led by the artist, to follow her cues about what is important to her work, rather than putting my own information needs and my presumptions informed by academic research first. I was not entirely successful in this, since I had to insist on my point of

view in order to get her to talk about anything other than the actual creative process of making art. For example, she resisted talking about concrete technical issues, the processes of documentation and dissemination of her art, and the business side of it, because she does not give these things the same weight of importance and meaning as the work of creating pieces of art. All of these kinds of information that she considers secondary are only present in the data because I insisted on asking about them.

I have known the artist for several years, and I am very familiar with her work. I have even, at times, shared studio space with her, and worked alongside her. Because of this foreknowledge, I am at a perceived advantage in interpreting her words and providing background information that fills the gaps in the interview.

The artist was at a one-month residency in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains where I reached her by telephone. The tape-recorded interview lasted for forty-five minutes, with two follow-up phone calls that were not recorded. Establishing rapport was not an issue because we know each other quite well. She was more than willing to talk about her work and her creative process. After the interviews were complete, I selectively transcribed them. I let the transcript sit for while, then went back to it and read it carefully several times. During the readings I did a rudimentary coding of the work, watching for the main themes that the artist brought up, and for repeated words, phrases, and ideas. I checked back with the artist to see whether my reading made sense to her, and it did. The main themes that emerged about what informs her work were:

1. Natural environment
2. The work itself
3. Relationships
4. Self-inquiry
5. Attentiveness

To summarize briefly, the natural environment, particularly remote and wild places, is the main source of information for her work. She gathers sensory information from the environment—the colors, textures, smells, sounds, temperature, a sense of space and light, the view of a landscape—and directly or indirectly uses this information in the creation of her abstract paintings. She thinks of her work as “visual poems” that reflect the experience of being in a certain physical location. The landscape provides her with inspiration and ideas, but also in very concrete terms with colors and visual patterns that she translates directly into her work.

The work of art in process is the other most important source of information to this artist. The sensory information that she receives from the work in progress, and her interaction with the materials she uses—paper, oil sticks, various mark-making instruments such as brushes, sticks, and so on—tell her all she needs to know in order to progress with a piece. She ascribes the emerging work of art agency, autonomy, and almost its own voice, perceiving it as something coming to life that is in active communication with her. This dialogue or collaboration with the work is her main source of information: “What I need to know is what the piece tells me, it’s not like I can go look up anything. I can’t know anything from a book or a resource, I have to know from the piece...I get ideas from the work.”³⁴

The artist perceives her work to be about and derived from relationships. She develops a relationship with the piece she is working on, which is a manifestation of her relationship with the materials, colors, and sensory data that go into its creation. The work is an abstract representation of her relationship with the world, and especially with the natural landscape. It also has its own internal relationships of color and form, which emerge from her communication with the piece during the creation process. Once completed, the work moves into its own autonomous relationship with the world. Furthermore, her relationships with other artists, living and dead, feed her work in different ways. These include the inspiration of reading the writings or viewing the work of famous artists, and the technical assistance and advice about galleries she receives from artist friends. Her work is both about and informed by relationship in many senses of the word.

Although the artist seeks and receives much information from outside sources such as the environment and relationships, she privileges self-inquiry. Her communication with her work in process is, to some degree, an externalization of her own inner inquiry. She has come to believe that what is important to know does not come from outer, authoritative sources, but from paying attention to her own experience and her own internal processes. "I think the common understanding of information is that it is something you get from somebody else. But we get information from ourselves, and I think we tend to overlook that kind of information, and we don't give it as much precedence as the information we get from others."³⁵ Recognizing herself as the most important generator of knowledge, the artist's consistent self-inquiry has resulted, among other things, in the creation of two of the key objects that she uses in her work: her sketchbook (in which she sketches, keeps notes, and writes) and her color strips (visual records of the colors she uses and creates).

Finally, the artist values attentiveness as a source of information. While she attributes a great deal of agency and autonomy to her work, she presents herself as playing a fairly passive role. Her main strategy of information gathering is simply paying attention, being attentive to the world around her and her movement through it. By paying attention and being receptive, she gets subtle information about light, color, space and sound that feed her work. By paying attention and keeping her ears open, she hears about galleries or individuals who might be interested in her work. She maintains a receptive stance, open to accident, to experimentation, and willing to engage with whatever comes her way. Although it may be described as passive, true attentiveness and openness to the world around and within is something she has practiced for a long time. It is not an easy thing to maintain.

As additional sources of information, she depends on art magazines, in particular the ads at the back, for information about grants, shows, residencies, and galleries. Her residency at the time of the interview was one to which she applied based on an advertisement in the back of *Art in America*. She researches factual details in books, and she always has her dictionary close at hand to check words for her titles and her writing. She uses art company catalogs and peruses art supply stores for new products and technical information. Finally, she has absorbed a lot of technical, practical and other information through immersion in the established practice at institutions where she has worked, such as an art museum or art college. She does occasionally visit libraries, usually public, and usually when she is

traveling and needs a place in which to read and write, or to check her e-mail. She has a deep appreciation of libraries; however, she is a much more frequent visitor to bookstores where she reads and sometimes buys art magazines and the occasional biography or theory book.

Discussion

Interestingly, I discovered that this piece of research supported a lot of Case's conclusions, especially: "Information seeking is a dynamic process"; and "Information seeking is not always about a 'problem' or 'problematic situation.' Some information-related behavior is truly creative in its origins."³⁶ I recognized after the interview that I had developed a conception of information-seeking as a kind of problem-resolution or gap-filling activity. I had assumed information-seeking was an action motivated by a perceived need, by a lack, rather than a creative process motivated by curiosity, pleasure, or sensory feedback. In spite of my best intentions, I walked into the interview with the scholarly category of "information need" reified in my mind by the reading I had done in the field. Furthermore, in spite of my recognition of the complexity of human behavior, on some level I really wanted the "information need" to be simple, identifiable and resolvable, so that I could point it out and discuss it easily. My problem-orientation came from two sides: the lack-motivated need assumed by information-seeking research, and the problem-creation that Getzels proposes is central to creative work:

The crucial step, one to which little attention has been paid, is how a situation where there is no problem to be solved gets transformed into a situation where a problem ready for solution exists. What needs to be examined is not only how artists solve problems they are already working on, but how they envisage and then formulate such problems in the first place.³⁷

As it turned out, the artist perceives and portrays her work in neither of these ways, but rather more along the lines of how Case describes creativity in relation to problem orientation: "Creativity springs from the ability to abandon, at least temporarily, the problem orientation of the reactive-responsive mindset."³⁸ She does not conceive of her work or her creative process in terms of problem, neither as problem-creation, nor as a lack that is fulfilled. Rather, it is a dynamic process of perception and expression, a dialogue with the world and her materials. To her it is very joyful. The only time she talks about her work as problematic is when a piece is nearing completion, and she cannot quite get it right, or she experiences some uncertainty about it. Her work is a problem to her only when it is nearly done, or done, and it does not work. I, as the observer, can identify problems and needs that she has, such as the need to find good brushes, the need to have high quality slides made, and the problems of gaining recognition and financial remuneration, which are partially solved by the need to find out about granting agencies, residencies, and galleries. But this is my perspective, my language, not hers. To her, her work (both in process and in completed form) "...feels very peaceful to me. It feels like to me it has some joy in it, some celebration of joy and peace, because I'm at peace when I'm able to do work..."³⁹

The phrase "information-seeking" somehow oversimplifies the creative process, reducing it to a technical problem. The term does move away from the objectified, thingly nature of

"information" alone without its accompanying action/process-oriented "seeking," but not quite far enough away. It is still contaminated by the disconnected coldness of the word information. The artist did not like the word: "Information sounds too technical."⁴⁰ To her the word implies stasis and external authority. This is contradictory to her creative process which is highly personal, self-reflexive, and characterized by process and sensory feedback. She perceives the process of finding out what she needs to in order to do her work as moving, relational, organic, dialogic and iterative.

Interestingly, and quite unexpectedly, her description of her creative process echoes my earlier description of the hermeneutic circle. This indicates to me that it is an apt metaphor for framing research about creative work. While there is always a problem with having to set limits and define terms in order to study any phenomena, I think "information-seeking" is less than an ideal concept to use in the investigation of what informs an artist's creative work. Her processes are fluid, interrelational, dynamic, and creative; they rely on the action of creating understanding, rather than finding pre-existing information. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is more appropriate to engage with it from the hermeneutic standpoint, which is closer to how the artist herself engages with it: "The work itself is a movement that is back and forth, relating, moving, expanding, coming back, and so is my work in getting the work in the world."⁴¹

Conclusion

What are the information needs and sources of artists? There is no simple answer to this question. Information-seeking is a creative process that begins and ends outside of the walls of any library. Those of us who work within the library world do not necessarily have a complete understanding of the process for artists, or any other user group for that matter. It is difficult to measure these qualitative processes by quantitative measures. The only way we will gain the understanding we need in order to be truly user-centered rather than prescriptive is by talking to the artists themselves. It is my opinion that we constantly need to question our motivations and our assumptions about who our patrons are and what their needs are, and consciously choose our opinions and actions, in order to truly enact the values of the library and assist its users.

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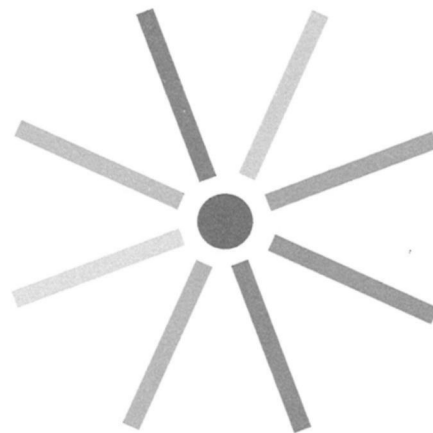
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