The Himmelfarb Library Annual Art Show: Celebrating the Creative Abilities of Faculty, Staff, and Students

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Purpose

Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library at the George Washington University has held an annual art show since 1989. Students, staff, faculty, and clinicians from the School of Medicine and Health Sciences; the School of Public Health and Health Services; the School of Nursing; the L.C. Lewís Hospital; and Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library are invited to submit artwork to be displayed throughout the first floor of the library in month-long displays. The talent of the artists is celebrated at an opening reception where light refreshments are served and students, staff, and faculty mingle and view the art.

Process

Marketing:
- Listserv messages
- Library blog entry and Facebook post
- Announcement in electronic library liaison letter
- Hospital intranet
- Electronic display boards in library and academic building
- Fliers in library, academic building, and hospital
- Poster in building lobby

Submission:
- Artists drop off artwork at reference desk
- Complete form: contact information and affiliation, title(s) and medium of artwork(s), permission for photographs of work to be taken for the Virtual Art Show, permission for photographs of artwork to be used in marketing materials, signature and date
- Works are numbered with sticker and recorded
- Maximum of three pieces per artist

Reception:
- Shopping for food and beverages
- Table on first floor of library with refreshments
- Mingling/viewing of artwork

Physical Display

The physical display of the art is on the first floor of the library. The space has large tables for group study, computers, a printing station, and circulation and reference desks. On the morning of the opening reception the following actions are taken:

- Permanent artwork on display in the library is taken down and put into onsite storage
- Books are removed from the library's display case
- Tables are brought up from the basement
- Easels are assembled

Art show items are arranged throughout the first floor with fragile or very small items placed in the display case and larger items mounted on easels and on the walls. An artwork is arranged, staff add a label near (or on) each piece listing the artist's name and the title of the work.

Online Display

Since 2008, the library has posted an online version of each year's art show called the Virtual Art Show. Participants may grant permission to have their artwork included in the online exhibition and the majority do so:
- 2008–2009: Virtual Art Show built with Adobe Flash
- 2010–2012: Virtual Art Show built with JonDesign's SmoothGallery (a JavaScript application)
- 2013: Digital images of works (and born-digital items) deposited in library's institutional repository; all exhibits from previous years retrospectively deposited into it

The library's Health Sciences Research Commons (HSRC) is powered by Bepress Digital Commons software which includes built-in image gallery and slideshow capabilities. By depositing works in HSRC, the library is able to attach metadata to works and improve discoverability while permanently archiving them.

Challenges

Marketing:
- Involves two parts: advertising for acceptance of submissions of art and advertising opening reception
- Begins 7 weeks before date of opening reception in April
- 2 weeks to advertise call for submissions
- Weeks for participants to submit artwork
- 1 week to prepare pieces for display
- Advance planning required in order to post and print materials in time
- Reaching all members of the library community is difficult
- Hospital staff not as accessible as they are infrequently in academic building
- Submissions come in during the final days before deadline
- Difficult to know until late in the process if there is an acceptable number of submissions

Space and Proper Display:
- Nails already in walls are only permanent fixtures for hanging work
- Heaviest pieces need to be on nails; having enough available requires foresight
- Other arrangements need to be made for placement if there are not enough nails
- Problem is exacerbated when most submissions are brought in before the opening reception
- Consideration of rotating art on display if space issues arise
- Remaining artwork displayed with temporary adhesive strips; propped up on a table, or placed on easels
- Unframed art best suited for hanging with adhesive strips
- Art has fallen down due to failure of adhesive strips
- Need for improvised display techniques for unique pieces is high
- 24/7 library hours can lead to patron disruption while arranging and setting up

Digitizing Artwork:
- Documentation for art that has been approved for Virtual Art Show begins once reception is over
- Photographs taken with digital camera
- Library has Harris Health Sciences Research Commons (see "Online Display" above)
- Some pieces challenging to capture in photographs, most notably those with a glare caused by picture frame glass
- Photographs can require taking artwork down and putting it up again; inconvenient for art displayed with adhesive strips
- Time-consuming to get a decent photograph and many are re-taken

Online Virtually Art Show

The online art show helps to promote the span of the show. In addition, the online art show fosters a sense of community between all members of the library and medical academic arena. The Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library Annual Art Show fosters a sense of community by sharing art and as an avenue for networking with members of the library and medical academic arena.

Creative Commons Licensing:
- Notice of copyright currently is provided for each image online in the form "[year] [artist]"
- Participants may grant permission to have their artwork included in the online exhibition and the majority do so. Participants may grant permission to have their artwork included in the online exhibition and the majority do so.
- Move to create and use Creative Commons license which can be applied through a pre-populated metadata field.

Outcome

Library art shows serve as an opportunity to share and celebrate the talents outside of the health sciences and as an avenue for networking between all members of the library and medical academic arena. The Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library Annual Art Show fosters a sense of community by sharing art and as an avenue for networking with members of the library and medical academic arena.

Art Show helps to promote the visibility of the library, not only through art show marketing efforts but also by attracting new and returning patrons to visit and view the art.

Future

- Increase in Participation
- Market library services to new patrons and those who are infrequent or rare users
- Lowered participation rate found in faculty status, so existing library relationships with faculty should be utilized to expand participation
- Medical residents are under-represented
- 2013 was the first year advertising on hospital intranet
- Some hospital staff artists indicated that it was their first time visiting the library

Survey:
- To date, no research conducted on art show
- Feedback and suggestions by artists could help to improve art show process and implementation
- Surveying library community on the effect of the art show could justify art shows or other special events at other libraries

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References