

**to** Gordon Arnold, Caroline Bagenal, Leonie Bradbury, John Colan, Laura Tonelli  
**cc** Kimberlee Cloutier-Blizzard, Cheri Coe, Thorpe Feidt, Tim Harney, Sally Seamans  
**from** John McVey  
**what** notes from joint Gallery-Library Committee meeting, 24 September 2008  
**when** 26 September 2008

These draft notes are directed to those who were present at the meeting, and cc'ed to others on these two committees who were not present, and to Sally Seamans. I have sought to organize our discussion for clarity, and have generally not indicated who said what. Corrections and augmentations are invited and will be incorporated into a final draft.

Members of the Gallery and Library committees met with no agenda beyond discussing "common and complementary areas of interest." The idea for a joint meeting was prompted by the start of work toward a Master Plan governing the College's facilities. We met in the Design Seminar Room (H-309), which was well suited to the occasion.

We focused on shared principles having to do with the assets associated with the library and gallery: their status, accessibility, curatorial issues. While these principles may seem theoretical, they have very practical implications in terms of procedures, staffing and space. Systems, staffing and procedures are no less important a part of our infrastructure than is physical space where planning for the future is concerned, and it is with that future that we are now concerned.

The assets include : the library's collection of books, serials and (via the Image Library) images in slide and digital formats; the library's provision of external resources like EBSCO and Artstore; prints and artifacts now held by the gallery; and the gallery's own documentation of and materials related to exhibitions and artist talks (in digital but primarily physical form, e.g., slides). The College's own archives come into this picture, but are currently maintained elsewhere by the Administration.

After some collective stammering, we started with artifacts.

We noted that there is some ambiguity in our community about the status and purpose of some assets, particularly art works. These materials, specifically those that come into the library and gallery as gifts, are assumed (by most of us) to be potentially useful to the educational mission of the College. We recognize that not all gifts are useful in this way. For example, the library receives boxes of books; many of these are duplicates or are determined by the librarian to be unsuited to the library's collection development needs. These materials are disposed of in book sales and other ways. But for those materials that are catalogued and put on our shelves, protections are in place. These materials will remain accessible to our community until they are deaccessioned as part of systematic "weeding" projects to ensure vitality and relevance of the collection.

It appears that we may not have a similarly thorough, and broadly understood, set of policies and procedures with regard to art works and other artifacts that are held by the Gallery. We believe that a common set of principles, policies and (where appropriate) procedures might usefully be developed for library and gallery holdings. We think that we can initiate work in this direction.

Potential donors should be confident that any gift to the College's library or gallery will be treated according to their initial understanding. It should be routine in processing of such gifts to determine whether they are "restricted" or "unrestricted," for example, and if the former, to detail their intended use.

The creation and implementation of policies and procedures would better equip us to accept and even seek out gifts in future, and also to identify materials, such as artists' personal archives, that might one day form part of our Special Collections. We are the only art school on the North Shore, where numerous artists have worked over the years, and continue to work. Montserrat College of Art would seem to be a logical home for at least some materials relating to the North Shore artist community. In the absence of policies, procedures, curatorial expertise, and suitable facilities, we are not ready yet to contemplate becoming a repository of such material, but we can certainly lay the groundwork for it.

*infrastructure implications : special collections/seminar room(s), curating*

There has been some talk of developing a "rare books" room, that might include climate-controlled storage space, as well as a seminar room for viewing rare or easily damaged materials, including artists' books, examples of fine printing, prints, and even the College's archives. (The Library has begun to acquire books and journals, and is now contemplating developing a collection of artists' books and other examples of printing and binding, to support our new Book Arts program and the courses associated with that program. These latter materials, especially, may be fragile and/or otherwise require special storage and handling, and viewing in a secure environment.)

A separate idea has been to develop a "prints" room, for the storage and viewing of prints, for example as part of a drawing class.

We recognized the overlap of these two concepts. A climate-controlled storage space might serve both the library and gallery, as well as the College's own archival needs.

We further recognized, however, that a room cannot alone make materials accessible to our community. Materials need to be catalogued, maintained, interpreted and, where necessary, repaired. All of this adds up to a curatorial function. In our discussion, we recognized that either Gordon Arnold or Cheri Coe would be capable of cataloguing the College's archival materials. This is one area in which we could move forward almost immediately, perhaps by means of a course release (in Arnold's case). We also discussed the potential for enlisting interns, perhaps from the College's envisioned "arts management" program, or from beyond Montserrat (e.g., the Simmons GSLIS program) in the process.

The College Archives were discussed at some length; they are crucially important, need to be catalogued, and probably need to be augmented, perhaps by approaching current and former instructors, and our own alumni/ae, for materials. Sadly, the College Archives have been somewhat neglected, and have no permanent home.

The idea of an auditorium or lecture hall came up, but was not pursued at length during this meeting.

*digital assets*

Leonie described the Gallery's archive of materials relating to past exhibits and artist talks, including videos of talks that Ethan Berry has made. These materials constitute a unique asset of the College, but one that remains to be developed and made accessible. Again, there is a need for curating. There is some long-term potential for linkage with both the Library and Image Library (see "subsequent discussion" below).

*other assets*

We needn't be only consumers of information; as artists, designers, illustrators, scholars, intellectuals, we generate it too. The example was made of Laura Tonelli, who we imagined might have a personal archive of slides of Etruscan art and architectural ruins. But surely many of us have assembled visual collections over the years. Naturally, our personal scholarship is our own intellectual property, not the College's. Yet means and arrangements

— including technical and curatorial support — might be found whereby some of our material could be made available to others, in the Montserrat community and potentially beyond it.

*subsequent discussion*

Tonelli and McVey subsequently and informally talked how some technical support might be made available to support digital curating of some archives. This might take the form of a “visual resources” equivalent to the “academic communications and development support” position that was tested in Spring 2008, under the Office of the Dean. The position might provide assistance to the Gallery, Library and Image Library, while possibly helping to identify ways to make resources in these various settings compatible with each other, at least from the user’s perspective. A newly-minted holder of an MLIS (Master of Library and Information Science) degree might be what we’re looking for.

*summary and looking forward*

It might fairly be said that this first joint Gallery-Library committee meeting revealed some interesting areas of commonalities. Both the Gallery and Library exist to support the learning and teaching that go on at Montserrat. They offer complementary resources. Some of these resources, e.g., books, prints, other artifacts, raise common curatorial, storage and viewing issues. There are also potential linkages in terms of digital resources.

The concept of a “collection” needs to be developed and promulgated in the College, to secure a better basis — infrastructure of principles and procedures, curatorial support, and physical space — for the future development and use of our collections.

We did not schedule a next meeting, nor assign ourselves work relating to these themes. Library Committee continues on its two-year project to understand Library and Image Library circumstances now and in the future, and to provide some visions for the future. The inclusion in our thinking of Gallery issues promises to enrich our work.

Should the next Library Committee meeting be solo, or again a joint meeting with Gallery Committee? Are Wednesday lunchtime meetings good?

What dates work and don’t work?

What next?