

Information world of visual artists

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The information world of South African visual artists was investigated. It was found that artists need a variety of information sources. The most pressing problems are a lack of information about local artists, lack of training in the use of information retrieval tools and a lack of co-operation between information-providing bodies.

Inligtingswêreld vir visuele kunstenaars

Die inligtingswêreld van Suid-Afrikaanse beeldende kunstenaars is ondersoek. Daar is bevind dat kunstenaars 'n verskeidenheid inligtingsbronne benodig. Die belangrikste probleme wat ondervind word, is die gebrek aan inligting oor plaaslike kunstenaars, gebrek aan onderrig in die gebruik van inligtingherwinningshulpmiddele en swak samewerking tussen inligtingverskaffers.

Introduction

Visual artists have diverse information needs extending far beyond the field of art. Although they need various types of art literature, artwork and all sorts of media and information on art and art-related subjects, they also need information in various other disciplines. Visual art is surely amongst the most interdisciplinary of the subject disciplines. The information needs of visual artists have been described as “omnivorous and eclectic” (Stam 1994:276). Opdahl (1986:13) writes that artists need a great deal of background information to understand and create art works. They require information from the fields of, for example, cultural history, religion and philosophy for this purpose. Dane (1987:30) found that artists also delve into poetry, fiction and the social sciences. In a series of articles on “Books in artists’ lives” in *Arts Magazine* (Jones 1991a; Jones 1991b), lists are given of influential books in certain artists’ lives. These results show that artists have a wide range of interests. The books which influenced them most included mainly modern classics in English, French and German, esoteric literature, poetry, books about other artists, philosophical works, gender studies, dictionaries, encyclopaedias,

classic children’s books and books on sex.

Although the visual arts are taught at many South African schools, colleges, universities and technikons and although there are many practicing artists in this country, the information requirements of this professional group have received little attention from local researchers. Information services and libraries thus base their services on what are perceived to be the needs of artists rather than on what artists really require. Although valuable services are provided throughout the country, not all information needs of the visual artist are properly met.

The key problem addressed in this study (Van Zijl, 2000) was to determine the needs of visual artists and their information-seeking behaviour. The purpose of the study was to develop a model for improving service rendering to the group. The following sub-problems were studied:

- (a) What are the information needs of visual artists?
- (b) In what ways, and where, do they look for this information?
- (c) Do the information needs of different categories of visual artists and art historians differ and do factors like academic qualifications,

affiliation, age, gender, and cultural and ethnic background affect their information-seeking behaviour?

- (d) How do artists locate the visual information (or images) they require?
- (e) How can information services to this user group be improved?

Research methodology

The researcher carried out a cross-sectional survey as the empirical part of her master's studies at the University of South Africa to investigate these problems. The instrument used was a self-administered questionnaire (Appendix A).

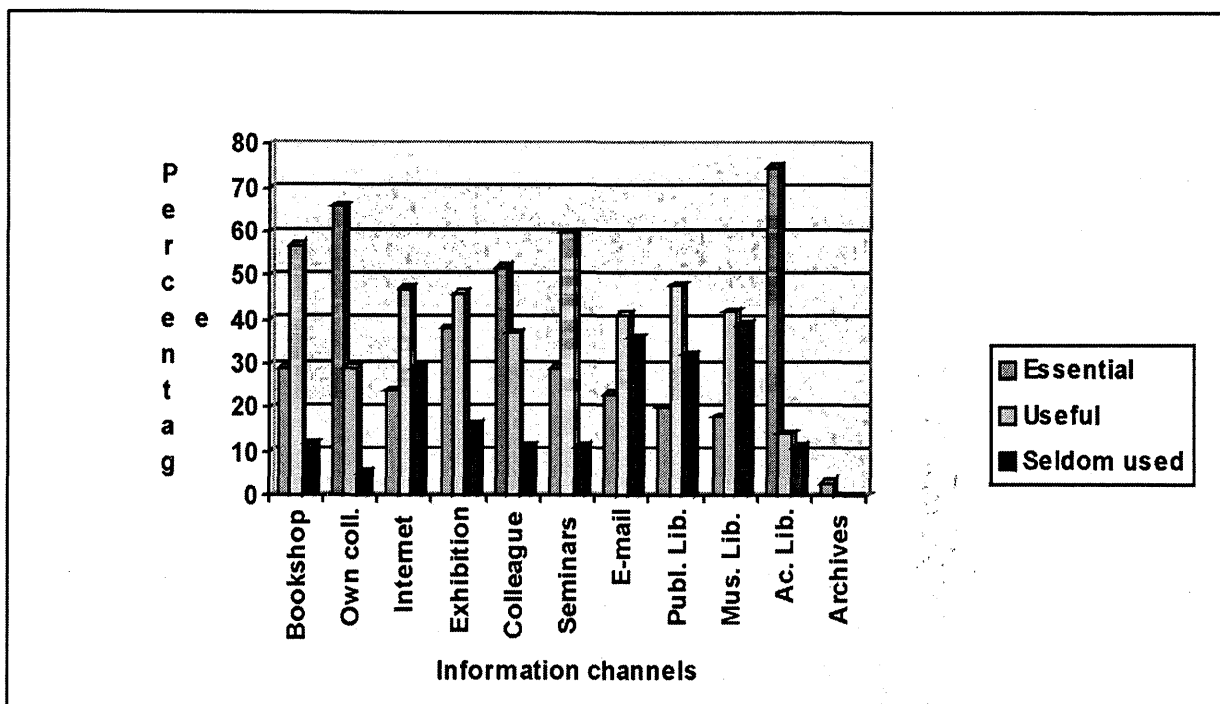


Figure 1
Importance of various information channels

The research population consists of the more information-literate visual artists in South Africa (that is, those who would have ready access to libraries, art galleries and other information-providing services). The sampling frame includes lecturers in all branches of the visual arts in universities and technikons, art teachers in South African high schools and members of art societies. Questionnaires were distributed to art lecturers whose names had been forwarded to the researcher by the secretaries in the art faculties concerned, registered members of the South African National Association for the Visual Arts (SANAVA) and to a

randomly selected sample of secondary school art teachers. A second questionnaire was sent out three weeks later to those who had not responded to the first questionnaire.

Out of the 286 questionnaires distributed, 123 were returned. The response rate was thus 43%. Two institutions inexplicably had a nil response rate. One was a university offering degrees in the fine arts up to the doctoral level, and the other was a technikon, which offers diplomas in fashion design but no other branches of the arts.

Although the researcher had hoped for a better response rate, the questionnaires returned cover most categories of visual

artists, and there were enough respondents to allow for a comparative, in-depth study of the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of visual artists.

Preferences for various channels of information

Many of the ordinary information needs of South African artists are met through the various formal, semi-formal and informal information services such as academic, museum, school or public libraries, bookshops and own private collections. It was, however, found that no coordinated

infrastructure exists to provide for the more specialized information needs.

In figure 1 it can be seen that the information channel considered essential by the majority of respondents (74,8%) is the academic library. The channel that is the second most important is the artists' own private collection of information material (65,9%) and this is followed by "personal communication with colleagues and other artists" - the so-called invisible college (52%).

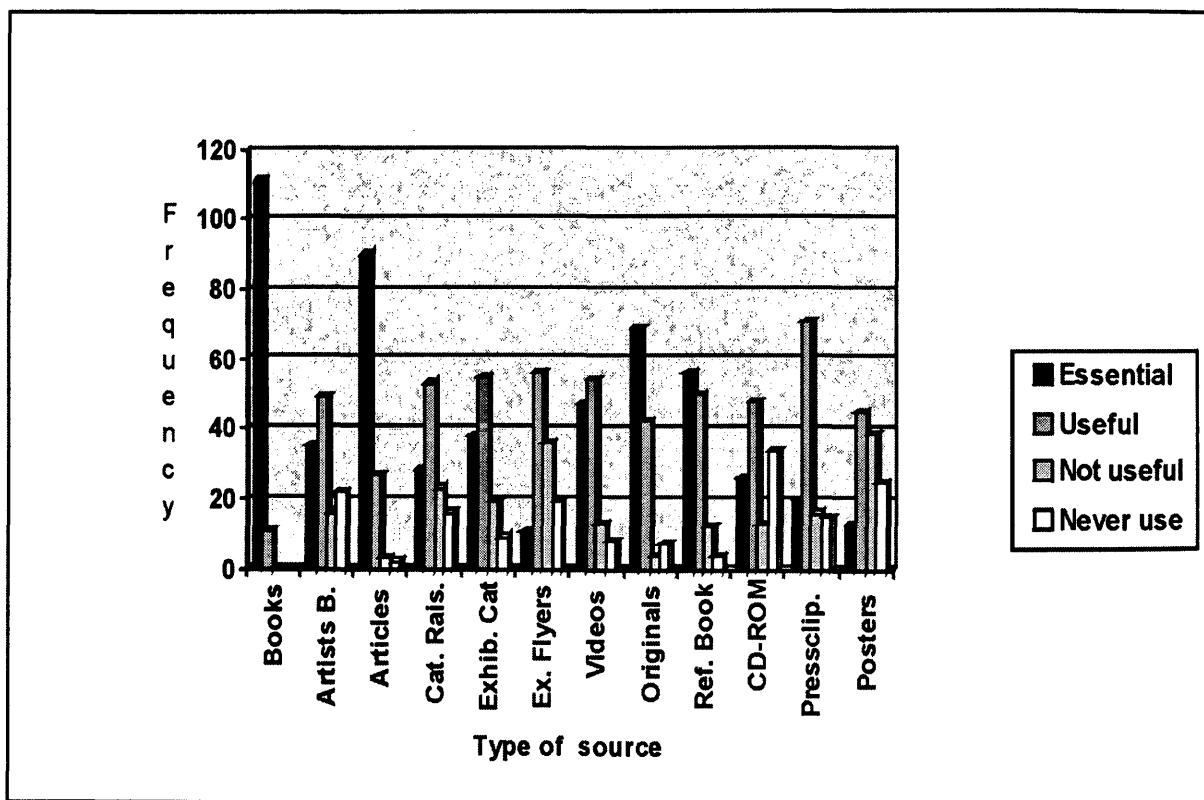


Figure 2
Preferences for various types of information sources

The information channel that was considered the most "useful" was "meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops" (60,2%). Also important to visual artists are bookshops (56,9%), public libraries (48%), the Internet (47,2%) and "exhibitions in art galleries or art museums" (45,5%).

The "seldom or never used" category tells its own story. Museum libraries appear to be the most ignored part of the information infrastructure for visual artists. In this category, 39% of the respondents state that they have little need for this type of library.

It is interesting to note that not all of the respondents are devoted to the Internet. Several (28,5%) of the respondents seldom or never use this channel and another 35,8% seldom or never make use of "electronic communication with other artists or scholars using e-mail, electronic lists, newsgroups, etc." Previous research findings give the impression that electronic information sources are becoming increasingly important to artists. Van Zijl and Gericke (1998:28-29) discovered in their survey of art lecturers at a technikon that electronic media are considered important, especially to younger artists and those involved in graphic design and the applied arts. They found that, listed in order of preference, the Internet, electronic lists and CD-ROMs are popular with these artists. The Internet, in particular, proved to be an essential source of information to this group.

It was found that South African libraries, in particular academic libraries, provide valuable information services for artists. These provide information media such as books, journals, exhibition catalogues, reference books and audiovisual material. They also provide information retrieval tools such as library catalogues or Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), indexes and databases and open shelves through which artists can browse. Some libraries also house slide collections and provide access to CD-ROM and online databases to help artists find the information they require. The study revealed that the formal information system in South Africa is held in high regard amongst visual artists.

Preferences for various types of information sources

Figure 2 shows the relative importance of the different categories of information sources for South African artists. In order of preference, the information sources of choice are books, journal articles, original works of art, reference books, audiovisual material, exhibition catalogues and press-

clippings, artists' books, CD-ROM databases and artistic ephemera such as exhibition invitations, pamphlets, etc. This follows trends found to prevail internationally by other researchers.

Books

Books were found to be the most important medium for artists in Europe and the U.S.A. by Jones, Chapman and Woods (1972:151), Broadus (1987:117), Watson-Boone (1994:206) and Cobbledick (1996:349). Other studies found that they were the second most important medium (Guest 1987:168; Van Zijl & Gericke 1998:27). Watson-Boone's (1994:206) study revealed an overwhelming preference for books amongst her respondents; 72% preferred books whereas only 21% preferred journal articles.

The so-called "artist's book" contains writings and images produced by the artists themselves. These were found by other researchers to be particularly valuable to artists because here they can find documentation on the artists' thoughts, opinions and personal philosophy regarding art (Opdahl 1986:13). Keefe (1988:259) defines artists' books as:

... workbooks or notebooks: ideas jotted down as notes in text or illustrations, documentation of performance, sculptural books, and books which make use of the sequence of pages to make a succession of images.

Journals

Journal articles have also been found by other researchers to be important information sources for artists. Van Zijl and Gericke (1998:27) found in their survey that these were the preferred information sources for artists. Bates, Wilde and Siegfried (1993:21) discovered that when artists limited any searches by a specific information medium, in the vast majority of cases they limited searches to articles in

preference to other sources. Cobble Dick (1996:355) found amongst the artists she interviewed that when they need to keep up with recent developments in their fields, they choose to consult articles or to draw on the experience of their colleagues.

Audiovisual and electronic media

Because of the importance of visual material to artists, they have been found to rely heavily on reference works, both art-related and more general interdisciplinary reference works. This was confirmed in the survey under discussion in this article. Stam (1995:23- 24) found that books like H.W. Janson's *A History of Art*, Gardner's *Art through the Ages*, *Contemporary Artists* and *Contemporary Photography* were widely used. Lönnqvist's (1990:201) study revealed that humanities researchers have a high regard for encyclopaedias.

Several bibliographic databases are now also produced on CD-ROM. Sykes-Austin (1991:13) carried out a survey relating to the print and CD-ROM versions of *Art Index* and found that users showed a convincing preference for the CD-ROM version because they found it faster and easier to search.

Previous researchers confirm that artists need audiovisual material such as videocassettes that depict the works of other artists and also show how other artists create their works of art (Opdahl 1986:13; Stam 1995:24).

Exhibition catalogues

Although the respondents in this study showed only a limited interest in exhibition catalogues, these were found to be popular sources amongst visual artists abroad. It must be said that foreign exhibition catalogues are often much more extensive in scope than those produced for South African art exhibitions. This could account for the decrease in interest in these sources of information in South Africa. Exhibition

catalogues in general often contain colour reproductions of some of the works of art included in the exhibition, critiques by art critics and biographical information about the artists. In the case of contemporary artists, catalogues are often the first documentation of their work, and they are therefore crucial primary information sources. Several researchers have found that exhibition catalogues are highly rated by artists as essential sources of information (Lönnqvist 1990:197; Stam 1995:24; Cobble Dick 1996:356).

Ephemera

Closely related to exhibition catalogues is the ephemeral material that relates to the visual arts. This has also been found in other studies to be extremely valuable to artists in their quest for information. The National Art Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, for example, collects items like private view cards, exhibition handouts, flyers, newspaper review and artists' obituaries (Rodgers 1999:10). Pacey (1980:29) discovered that ephemera such as posters and invitation cards, press clippings, exhibition flyers and tickets to artistic events, are of great value to artists. These, too, are difficult to find and retrieve, and are usually collected in vertical files in libraries and information services (Robertson 1989:33). However, South African artists do not share the views of artists abroad relating to the value of ephemera as sources of information.

Factors influencing information needs and behaviour

Visual artists in South Africa have a wide range of non-art-related interests. The survey showed that 77% of the respondents seek information out of curiosity or personal interest. Therefore, interdisciplinary collections are needed in order that their creativity can be stimulated and so that all

the facets of their research can be accommodated.

In order of popularity from the most to the least used, South African artists use mainly the following methods for finding information: conducting own searches using library catalogues or databases, browsing, asking a librarian for help, following up citations, the Internet and asking a friend or colleague for assistance.

For locating images, they use (again in order from the most to the least used) indexes in books, slides, exhibition catalogues, the Internet and photograph archives. They do not make very much use of image and CD-ROM databases for this purpose. To a lesser extent they use exhibition ephemera, journals, films and private collections.

This study revealed that certain independent variables have an influence on the information needs and information behaviour of South African visual artists. Gender, age, ethnic group, qualifications, the institutions to which the artists are affiliated or their work milieu, branches of art, lecturing field or field of interest, for example, have a decisive influence on their information-seeking patterns. Although the generalization of the predominant information needs and typical information-seeking patterns of the various groups of artists as revealed in the data analysis, cannot be seen as true for each individual artist in each group, it provides valuable points of departure for rendering information services to visual artists. Each of these variables is examined in more detail below.

Gender

It was found that male artists are the more adventurous information-seekers. This group was found to display the greatest curiosity and showed a greater interest in subjects like science, political studies and religious studies in relation to their artistic pursuits. Technological innovations such as e-mail and the Internet seem to hold more

fascination for male artists than for female artists. Female artists, on the other hand, have more conventional information needs. Women artists as a group are more interested in bookshops as information channels and are more likely to seek predominantly art-related material. Subjects in which female artists are more interested include literature and poetry, psychology and gender studies.

Male artists are more likely to ask librarians to assist them when they need information. In keeping with findings about their information needs, they are the more likely to use electronic mailing lists and bulletin boards, and are greater users of the Internet and images databases when they are looking for reproductions of works of art.

Female South African artists are browsers, and rely more heavily on their friends and colleagues to help them find information. The female artists are more inclined to use slide collections and exhibition catalogues to find images. One area in which computer technology is involved and in which female artists show more interest than do male artists, is that of using databases and indexes to find information.

Age

The research showed that younger artists are more inclined to use state-of-the-art technology and information sources. They are more interested in the Internet and e-mail, and are more likely to use artists' books, which are newly emerging art forms and information sources. These artists are more motivated to seek information to satisfy their curiosity and have a wide range of interests in different subject fields. Younger artists are not very interested in public libraries as sources of information. Older artists display more traditional needs, are more motivated to seek information about techniques and materials, and show a tendency to browse in bookshops for material. They rely heavily on their own

collections and have a greater need for studying original works of art. Older artists have a greater need for information in journals and in museum libraries than do the younger ones. The more senior group of artists is less interested in the Internet and conferences or seminars as information channels.

The artists who are below 30 years of age have the most confidence in their information-seeking skills. They have the highest percentage of respondents who believe that they are successful in searching for information on databases and indexes and also in finding exhibition catalogues. It was found that this group was the least likely to look for images on image databases. The below 30 group has the widest circle of participants in their information-seeking activities. This group relies greatly on friends, e-mail friends, family and supervisors to help them find information. Lecturers in this group also rely on their students for this purpose.

The 30-39 years age group is the least confident group in finding the information they require. They show the lowest faith in their ability to search on databases and to find exhibition catalogues. This group of artists relies heavily on students as partners in information-seeking activities and on friends and e-mail correspondents.

The 40-49 years age group has interesting and diverse information-seeking patterns. Although artists in this group do not use the Internet very much as a rule, they are amongst the greatest users of electronic lists and bulletin boards as a means of finding information. This group relies heavily on the formal, traditional information-provision channels and tends to ask librarians and museum staff for assistance in finding information. They are also amongst the artists who are the most likely to visit galleries and attend exhibitions abroad if there are artworks there they would like to see.

The 50 years and older group displays essentially the same information behaviour

as the 40-49 years group, with a few additions. The artists in this group are more likely to use image databases and photograph collections or archives for finding images.

Home language or ethnic group

English-speaking respondents rely heavily on their personal collections of information material and tend to be less concerned about the contemporaneity of material. Afrikaans-speaking artists show a greater need for information for research and authorship purposes (writing material with the view to publishing) and for inspiration for their artistic activities. This group also uses journal articles more than do the other groups. Black artists are interested in information about techniques and materials. They are not heavily reliant on books and do not build up private collections of material. This group is relatively more interested in cultural studies than are the other ethnic groups. Asian artists demonstrate a need for information for research purposes.

The English-speaking Caucasian artists are the most frequent users of exhibition catalogues for finding images and they experience few difficulties in finding the images they require, whilst the Afrikaans-speaking Caucasians are the greater users of image databases.

Artists who speak another European language have the most success in finding images and tend to use exhibition catalogues and image databases to find reproductions of works of art.

Black artists do not like to browse and experience problems in finding images. This group is the least likely to use exhibition catalogues to find images. They rely fairly heavily on information technology as a means of finding information.

Qualifications

Artists with technikon qualifications display little interest in studying original works of

art and value reference material and audiovisual sources highly. Artists with postgraduate qualifications rely on their personal collections for information and are the most likely to use information in languages other than English. Their interest in reference material is not very pronounced. This group of artists needs information for artistic inspiration.

Work milieu

The study revealed definite differences in the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of university lecturers, technikon lecturers, school teachers and members of SANAVA.

University lecturers

University lecturers as a group are more likely to seek information for teaching, research or for purposes of writing books or articles than for artistic inspiration or out of personal interest or curiosity. They use journal articles, exhibition catalogues, press-clippings and original works as information sources, but do not experience much need for audiovisual material. University lecturers make more use of foreign language material than do the other groups. Older material is valuable to them and they tend to show a preference for art-related materials. This is also the group that finds archives valuable information sources. Overall, university lecturers find their information in the old tried-and-tested places.

University lecturers have the most varied information-seeking patterns. They use databases extensively, especially *Art Index*, *Art Abstract*, *ABM* and *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*. They are also the most successful in finding what they want on these databases. This group of artists is the most likely to ask librarians for help, search the Internet and to follow up citations in lists of sources as means of finding information. In their information activities, they rely on friends, colleagues, e-mail

friends, electronic lists and bulletin boards to a greater extent than do the other groups. They are the only group who expressed interest in exhibition catalogues as tools for finding images and are also the most successful in finding exhibition catalogues. They use slide collections and image databases as ways of finding images, although this group shows the least confidence in their ability to find images.

Technikon lecturers

Technikon lecturers are less conventional and have information needs that differ quite decisively from those of university lecturers. Although important motivations for seeking information are teaching, lecturing, research and authorship, they are also strongly motivated to seek information out of curiosity or interest or when needing a muse for their artistic pursuits. Technikon lecturers show the most interest in electronic communication sources such as the Internet and electronic mail systems and for conferences and workshops. This group shows much less interest in visiting galleries and attending exhibitions than do university lecturers. Out of all the groups, these artists are the least likely to use press-clippings to find information. In keeping with their tendency to use modern media for finding information, technikon lecturers show more interest in artists' books, CD-ROM databases and more recent material. These artists have a wide range of interest in other subject fields.

Technikon lecturers as a group are more inclined to use image databases. The bibliographic database they use most is the *Design and Applied Arts Index*. Although this group of artists relies greatly on librarians for assistance they are the least likely group to ask for help from art gallery or art museum staff.

Teachers

Secondary school art teachers appear to be less familiar with the information sources used by lecturers. This makes their information needs more narrow. The art teachers appear to seek mainly information about techniques and materials. They also like to attend exhibitions and conferences to gain information. Out of all the groups, this one shows the most frequent need to visit public libraries as places housing artistic information. They also make extensive use of reference material and of mainly art-related material. Teachers showed a very limited interest in e-mail as a means of finding information.

Secondary school art teachers show a particular penchant for using *World Painting Index*, *Art in Time* and *World Art Catalogue Bulletin*. When it comes to finding images, they are most likely to use photograph archives and slide collections. Although this group of artists likes to visit galleries to find information about South African artists in particular, they do not experience much success in finding exhibition catalogues. They rely heavily on friends and colleagues for help in finding information.

Members of SANAVA

The members of SANAVA are largely driven by curiosity and a need for information about techniques and materials. They use bookshops and rely on their personal collections of information sources. These artists also attend exhibitions to study original works of art and contact colleagues when they need information. E-mail is not very important to this group of respondents. This is the only other group to show an interest in artists' books as information sources and the need for older material from a wide subject field - including science.

The members of SANAVA rely heavily on art galleries and gallery-related information services for meeting their information needs. They consult art museum

staff and often visit galleries when they need information about South African artists. As was seen with the art teachers, however, they are not very sure of their ability to find exhibition catalogues when the need arises. This group of artists is the most likely to go to a gallery or art site abroad to find a work of art that is important to them. These artists follow up citations in lists of sources as a means of finding information. Databases and indexes are not very important to the members of SANAVA and friends and colleagues are of little value to them in this regard.

Lecturing field or field of interest

A clear distinction can be drawn between art historians and those involved in the fine arts on the one hand, and those who lecture in or practice the applied arts on the other.

Art historians

The art historian group is driven less by a motive of curiosity, than it is by the demands of research or authorship. They also require information about techniques. This group experiences a need to find relevant images, as is seen in their interest in attending exhibitions, and using exhibition catalogues, press-clippings and other art ephemera and *catalogues raisonnés*. It is interesting to note, however, that they are amongst the groups who show the least interest in museum libraries. These art historians use foreign language material and older information sources and express the most interest in information about South African art and artists.

Art historians reveal the most interesting information-seeking behaviour. They are the most frequent users of databases and are also the most successful in searching these. They like browsing and are inclined to follow up on citations in information sources. They rely more friends and colleagues than other artists do, and make extensive use of slides. Art historians

use CD-ROM and CD-I databases as well as exhibition catalogues for finding images, more than do any of the other categories of visual artists. They are also the most successful group when it comes to locating exhibition catalogues.

Applied artists

Applied artists (i.e. those who rely on technology to create their art, such as graphic designers and photographers) show an interest in information for research or writing purposes and as a way to learn about techniques or materials. Their personal collections and the help of their colleagues are very important to them. It was found that these artists seek out new information channels and use the Internet and e-mail as information sources. The group of artists that shows the least interest in using museum libraries is the photographers. The applied artists as a group tend to prefer recent material.

Artists in the fine arts like to use *Art Index* and *Art Abstracts* and tend to use exhibition catalogues to find images. Sculptors are the most successful group when it comes to finding exhibition catalogues.

Textile and jewellery designers do not use databases and indexes to any large extent, and textile designers like browsing through shelves to find information.

Graphic designers are enthusiastic users of *Design and Applied Arts Index* and are very successful in their searching of databases. They like to browse for information and to use citations. This group is the least likely to consult friends and colleagues for help in finding information. They find CD-ROM databases useful in finding images.

Photographers have information-seeking patterns that differ from those of most other artists. They do not like to use databases and indexes and are not very successful in searching on these. They do not like to browse for information and do

not rely on friends or colleagues for information. They are more inclined to find their information from information services in trade and industry than in art galleries and libraries.

Shortfalls in the provision of information to artists

The findings of the study indicated several problem areas which need attention in order to ensure that visual artists will be able to make optimal use of information resources and that their information needs are satisfied.

Access to information sources and works of art

It was found that access to exhibition catalogues, images and online facilities like the Internet and e-mail connectivity is very limited amongst South African visual artists - even those who lecture at tertiary educational institutions. Databases in the form of CD-ROMs or those provided through online access are available to only a small number of artists. It is mainly the artists who lecture at universities and technikons who have access to such databases and all other artists have very little opportunity to enjoy the benefits that these databases afford to information-seekers. This, in fact, means that the vast majority of artists in South Africa seldom or never have access to these information media.

Although South African artists usually manage to find reproductions of works of art they require, access to images could be improved. The value of slide collections and photograph archives for finding reproductions of images should be given more attention by information-providers. Many South African libraries and information services that allegedly cater for the needs of artists, do not house such collections.

Information awareness

Artists seem to be largely unaware of resources and information services, especially those provided by the formal information sector. This study showed that many of the services, which artists said were not available in their libraries, were in fact provided.

It was revealed that many of the respondents are not aware of many of the tools, which are available to help them find the more elusive information. Information retrieval tools like the Internet, image, bibliographic and textual databases and bibliographies of exhibitions are beyond the reach (and, in many cases, the ken) of most South African visual artists and art historians.

South African artists do not seem to know about the considerable range of databases that have been created to meet their information requirements. The art librarians contacted indicated that it is mainly the databases available through Sabinet, including OCLC's *FirstSearch* and *Index to South African Periodicals* that are used, as well as those included in *EbscoHost*. A few others are also subscribed to, such as NISC's *South African Studies*, *Nexus*, and *Design and Applied Arts Index*, but not many others. It is doubtful whether the majority of these artists have ever been exposed to databases such as *World Painting Index* or *World Art Catalogue Bulletin*. Even the more common databases such as *ARTbibliography Modern* are beyond the budgetary capabilities of most South African libraries and information services. The lack of art-specific databases in South Africa is a factor that seriously limits the artists in this country. An effort should be made on a national level to ensure that all the more important databases are available in South Africa and that agreements exist to make these available to art researchers and artists nationwide.

In many cases the artists are not aware of information about South African art,

which is available (albeit inadequately), but most artists do not know where and through whom they can find such information. Museum libraries, for example, and several academic and public libraries, have gone to great lengths to collect clippings about South African art from newspapers and periodicals. It is clear from the empirical study that artists are in general not aware of these services.

Information skills

Another area in which the information needs of South African artists are not really met is in the field of training. Artists would benefit greatly from training in the use of these sources of information - something that is not offered to artists in a concerted manner. It was found that visual artists prefer to look for their information themselves. It must follow that training in the use of the various information retrieval resources would be very valuable to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these aids to finding information. A failure to offer such training will deprive artists of essential expertise in finding the information they require.

Librarians and other information workers must actively promote training programmes to ensure that artists derive the maximum benefit from their information searches. Artists in general are not very confident about their database searching ability. This calls for proactive action on the part of librarians as far as training is concerned.

Cooperative services

The need expressed by many of the respondents to view original works of art, needs to be dealt with in a more coordinated manner by information services. Exhibition organizers should market their exhibitions more widely and access to catalogues from such exhibitions should be disseminated more effectively amongst the information services. Of particular concern is a lack of

retrieval tools for finding information about South African art and artists.

Each information service appears to be working in isolation in attempting to meet the needs of its users as well as it can with the resources it has at its disposal, but the sources and services fail to serve all the expressed and unexpressed needs of these artists. No attempt is being made to combine resources, knowledge and services to meet these needs. No body exists in South Africa to evaluate the national cache of information sources and information retrieval facilities provided for visual artists in this country, nor are the gaps in service rendering to South African visual artists ascertained. Although there are various projects underway to develop databases about South African art and artists, none of these is readily available to any artist or art historian who needs this information. No single body has taken the responsibility of ensuring a more coordinated gathering and disseminating of information about South African art. This means that the majority of South African artists lack such information.

It is imperative that the various partners in the formal information infrastructure operating for South African artists, communicate more effectively with each other - possibly under the auspices of a formal society so that the needs of artists can be met. Media such as expensive databases or valuable print or electronic information sources should be shared between institutions and care should be taken that the most important resources are available on a national level.

Facilities required by South African artists

Information services in South Africa should give some thought to the equipment and facilities required by artists. An effort should be made to provide facilities such as photocopiers, and especially colour photocopiers, for artists. Additional requirements are computers, video monitors

and even possibly light tables. What would be of value to artists in museum libraries in particular would be digital or other cameras or some means of making prints of the works of art in which they have an interest. Information workers should pay some attention to arranging library material in such a way that it will make sense to the artists and ensure that there is adequate signage to point the artists to the right shelves.

Information about South African art and artists

The most urgent cause for concern is the lack of awareness of and access to information about South African art and artists. Although several agencies like university and museum libraries are making considerable strides in providing access to information about South African art, this responsibility has not been conferred on any agency in particular. All attempts to provide access to such information have been started on the initiative of the agencies themselves and not as part of a coordinated national programme. A coordinated project is the only way to ensure that all important artists and art movements in South Africa have been adequately researched and documented. For the benefit of the South African art world and also because of the national responsibility of keeping a record of its own information, this state of affairs should not be allowed to continue.

The South African government, assisted by prime gatekeepers of art information such as the museum librarians, gallery curators, the National Library and the art faculties in universities and technikon must formulate a policy which will ensure that South African art is documented in a way that will ensure that information is available about all important art and artists. Too many South African artists could live and die without leaving any written or graphic record of their existence and their art.

It is also essential that those agencies that are currently working on the creation or maintenance of databases covering South African art should get together to ensure that all aspects of this field are covered in these databases. These agencies do not appear to be working in a coordinated fashion. South Africa and the rest of the world need to know about the South African art scene.

Conclusion

In this study the needs of visual artists were identified. Visual artists' needs for various sources and preferences for categories of information channels were dealt with. Differences between art historians and applied artists were indicated. The influence of gender, age, ethnic group, academic qualifications, work milieu and lecturing field or field of interest on needs and information-seeking behaviour were discussed. The most important problem areas in information services to visual artists were identified and possible solutions indicated.

In order to address the critical problem of a lack of information about South African art and artists, art librarians and academics in art departments at universities and technikons should start to involve themselves in the creation of information about South African art. Librarians and academics should at least be documenting local exhibitions and the artistic output in their own areas. As the potential beneficiaries of improved information services, South Africa's artists would be well advised to make their needs known to the agencies that exist to provide them with the information they need for their academic and artistic pursuits. Unfortunately in this case, what they do not know about your needs can, in fact, hurt you.

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