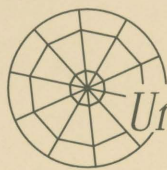


# Gatherings

WINTER 1998

No. 17



University Libraries

WESTERN  
MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY

## A Picture is Worth— A Thousand Uses

By Miranda Howard Haddock

[Miranda Haddock was appointed Visual Resources Librarian at WMU in May 1997. She holds a M.A.L.S. degree from Dominican University (formerly Rosary College) in Chicago and a M.A. from Northern Illinois University, De Kalb. Prior to coming to WMU, she was on the library staff and a member of the faculty at Columbia College in Chicago.]

Consider *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) by French painter Eugene Delacroix. Traditionally, this image of a bare-chested woman wearing a Phrygian cap and carrying the French flag surrounded by the battle weary has been discussed in art history courses. But, her image does not have to stop there. It can be used to illustrate concepts in other disciplines as well.

French literature is the first subject that may come to mind. *Liberty* is a fine example of how the French visualized the Revolution. Late eighteenth century history is another field that might use this painting as an illustration of the various economic classes involved in the French rebellion. A costume history professor might use the painting to demonstrate types of men's garments worn during this time period in France while a professor of classics could show that the classical view of feminine beauty is a timeless ideal at least through the mid-1800s. Assigning a set design project? Use *Liberty* as an example of a scene for *Les Misérables*. Liberty's Phrygian cap could be a topic of discussion in a semiotics class, or the picture could stimulate a philosophy of aesthetics discussion. Even further, English professors might find Delacroix's painting useful in illustrating and reinforcing the concept of allegory to students. By now you get the picture (or pictures): visual resources enhance every class and

a single picture may enhance many areas of study and research.

The University Libraries has a little known treasure trove of such resources for the classroom. The Visual Resources Library in 2213 Sangren is a newly established center of services and resources. The special collection houses over 80,000 35 mm. slides for classroom use. The majority of the images depict fine art objects such as painting, sculpture, drawing, and photography. Visual cultures from the western hemisphere as well as Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania are well represented. Images of architecture, furniture, costume, and decorative arts can also be found in the VRL. And, slides can be checked out just as one might check out a video, a book, or a recording to use in a class.

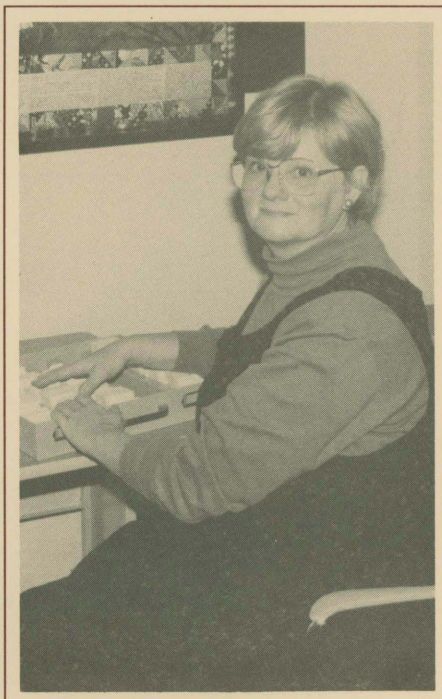
The concept of a visual resources collection is not new. Many visual resources facilities cropped up in colleges, universities, and museums during the 1920s when

glass lantern slides began to be widely used to illustrate art history lectures. Most of these facilities, including the first at WMU, were housed in art departments; art faculty were the primary users. By the early 1950s, lantern slides had given way to color 35 mm. film slides. The number of slides offered by the facilities, wherever located, increased as the color in slide film became more stable. Today, slides continue to be widely used to illustrate lectures and presentations.

Usually, each academic visual resources collection reflects what has been taught over the years that it has been in existence. Areas pertaining to an institution's significant departments are often the best represented. WMU's collection is similar to those found elsewhere in this regard. Two of the most complete areas of the collections contain broad selections of art from medieval manuscripts and architecture, echoing the University's international program in Medieval Studies. Paintings from western and Asian sources are also well represented, and reflect the broad base of the Department of Art's programs.

The Visual Resources Collection has been a part of Western Michigan University Libraries for less than a year, but its placement within the Libraries means that the resources are available to all faculty members. Until June of 1997, the collection had been maintained by the art department, and art professors were the primary users. Although art emphases may continue to dominate the use, the potential value to faculty from the departments of History, English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Medieval Studies, and Comparative Religion is obvious, and is already reflected in use during the last six months of 1997. Only three months after placement within the Libraries, almost 2,000 slides had been circulated to faculty other than those from the art department.

Providing and maintaining so many



One View: Miranda Haddock

Continued on page 6



## A Picture is Worth...

*Continued from page 1*

images is a multi-faced task. There are a number of activities that occur behind the scenes of the Visual Resources Library. After slides are made by staff or purchased from vendors, they are inserted in plastic and glass mounts so that they can be used repeatedly with a minimum of wear. Since slides are constantly exposed to the heat of a projector light, the images are masked with a special heat reflecting tape. Preservation is also aided by cleaning slides after use, and storing them in archival cabinets. The items in the collection are accessioned, labeled, and filed in a specific order so that they can readily be found again. Of course, a logical slide arrangement also means that their use is promoted since the more orderly a collection, the more users discover its many topics and breadth.

The VRL is staffed by a librarian especially recruited for the position, a slide library specialist, and five student workers who are engaged in acquiring, preserving, arranging, and circulating the slides as well as advising users as to the nature and value of the resources. They have also undertaken the creation of an electronic catalog. When completed,

slides will be cataloged and the data entered into an imagebase so that users can easily identify an image needed to illustrate a presentation. Slides in the electronic catalog will be indexed by subject as well as creator, title, and medium. The catalog will also direct users to the location of the slide in the collection by listing a call number for that image.

Whether explaining the difference between a buttress and a flying buttress in industrial design by use of slides of Speyer and Chartres cathedrals, or recreating the devastation of the Great Depression of the 1930s through photographs by Dorothea Lange or Walker Evans, slide resources are invaluable. Describing the pristine nature of our National Park system is visually reinforced by the unmatched photographic vistas of Ansel Adam's Yosemite, and Buddhist and Christian aesthetics can be effectively illustrated by the images of sculptures of Buddha and Jesus Christ. When discussing the findings at medieval sites in England, Sutton Hoo can be geographically identified on a map, or, if studying black Americana, the paintings by Archibald J. Motley and Faith Ringold realistically depict a culture as do Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, which "speak thousands of words" to the students of Women's Studies. The possibilities of the Visual

Resources Center are unlimited if faculty, staff, and students want to see more clearly the history of our civilization through the eyes of illustrators, painters, photographers, cartographers, and others who have captured our world in graphic detail.



No. 17, Winter 1998

*Gatherings* is published triannually by the Friends of the University Libraries, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, 49008-5080. Contributors to this issue include: Sharon Carlson, Acting Director, Archives and Regional History; Gordon Eriksen, Assistant Professor Emeritus, University Libraries; Miranda Haddock, Head, Visual Resources Library; Paul Maier, Professor, History Department; and Lance Query, Dean, University Libraries.

EDITOR: Laurel A. Grotzinger  
[laurel.grotzinger@wmich.edu]  
DESIGNER: Mary Shane  
PHOTOS: Neil Rankin, Galen Rike

---

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

---

Dwight B. Waldo Library  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5080

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
Permit No. 478

