AMICO Librarians User Group Meeting
ARLIS/NA Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA
March 17, 2000

Attendees:
- Subscribers
1. Amy Ciccone, Librarian, University of Southern California
2. Leigh Gates, Librarian, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
3. Tom Greives, Librarian, Arizona State University
4. Miranda Haddock, Librarian, Western Michigan University
5. William B. Keller, Librarian, University of Pennsylvania
6. Barbara Prior, Librarian, Oberlin College
7. Laura Schwartz, Librarian, University of Texas at Austin

- Members
8. Ann Abid, Librarian, Cleveland Museum of Art
9. Jacqui Allen, Librarian, Dallas Museum of Art
10. Amy Lucker, Librarian, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
11. Carol Rusk, Librarian, Whitney Museum of American Art
12. Patricia Barnett, Librarian, Frick Reference Library

- Additional
13. Christina Huemer, Librarian, American Academy in Rome (potential subscriber/member)
14. Daniel Starr Librarian, Museum of Modern Art (special liaison between AMICO and ARLIS)
15. Martha Mahard, Librarian, Harvard University

Observers:
16. Ricky Erway from Research Libraries Group
17. Jennifer Trant from AMICO

Facilitator:
18. Kelly Richmond from AMICO

Background

Prior to the ARLIS meetings, AMICO invited a dozen users of the AMICO Library from both contributing and subscribing institutions to an informal discussion at its offices in Pittsburgh. In the end, others came as well making the largest group that could fit into the AMICO conference room! The discussion was transcribed verbatim, but this report is a distillation of issues raised by the conversation, not a blow by blow account.

The meeting was opened by Jennifer Trant, AMICO Executive Director, who welcomed the attendees and reviewed the questions she hoped the discussion would address:
  What is the AMICO Library (to you)?
  How should we tell people about it?
  How do we help people to learn about it?
  What could the AMICO Library be – in three years time?

At that point she introduced Kelly Richmond, AMICO Communications Director, who chaired the meeting. This synthesis raises issues under the headings of the four leading questions, which is not always the sequence in which they were addressed.

What is the AMICO Library?

1) *Source of Information*
Issue – Authority: Miranda Haddock (Western Michigan) reported using AMICO to answer all sorts of art related questions that come to reference, including verification of names and spellings. The limitations of AMICO, and subsequently of ULAN, LC Name authorities and other sources, as our authority files were then discussed. This led to discussion of the process by which museums contributed data to AMICO and how AMICO indexed and validated that data to create a more consistent database. Overall, the value of authorities, especially name authorities, was unquestioned. The benefits of supporting access by whatever names were know to users and used by the museums was agreed.

2) *Source of Images*
Issue – Collections Development: Christina Huemer (American Academy in Rome) asked if AMICO eliminated duplicates, and there was some discussion of why not and the benefits of multiple representations of works. This opened the more general question of the development of the AMICO Library. William Keller (UPenn) asked if AMICO tries to shape what members contribute. This provided the opportunity for librarians from member museums to reflect on how their institution makes decisions about contributing content to AMICO which in turn revealed that the librarians have not been involved in what has been seen as a curatorial decision. Laura Schwartz (University of Texas at Austin) expressed concern/confusion over the "image coming soon" message and what it meant since she found it frequently. Leigh Gates (School of the Art Institute of Chicago) asked how can faculty get things into AMICO? Discussion of specific request mechanisms for getting works into Library. In general, the importance to end-users of being able to request specific works for future years, and getting feedback on their requests, was acknowledged.

3) *Source of Rights*
Issue – Contemporary Rights: Amy Ciccone (USC) asked about how AMICO clears rights for Picasso (and other modern artists). It was agreed here and in subsequent discussions that a valuable thing AMICO does (both for members and subscribers) is acquire rights for educational licensing. The fact that users know the rights apply to all AMICO content is important. The potential for members to contribute contemporary content (for artists represented by ARS) knowing AMICO will obtain rights was seen as very valuable.

4) *Potential Benefit to Members*
Issue – Library as a Server for Members: A question arose whether members were, or were likely to begin, using AMICO as an image server. Leigh Gates noted that the Art Institute staff can only see, online, those images on AMICO. Amy Lucker believes BMFA won't come to see AMICO as its image server because it has many images that are not in AMICO and some richer images than it provides AMICO. But the possibility that this was one value of AMICO membership should be seriously considered. Others present realized that AMICO allows in-house users access they often do not have on local systems.

Issue – Library as Surrogate Collections Database: Pat Barnett (Frick) noted that many AMICO member institutions don't have a collections management system and that AMICO was helping in her institution both to create a sense of that need and to get the curatorial and library side working together. The absence of collections systems in many other member institutions was noted and similar value was imagined for them.

Issue – Catalyst for Involvement of Museum Librarians with Collections: Ms. Rusk (WMAA) concurred. Martha Mahard (Harvard) asked if it would generally improve relations between curators

and librarians. [discussion followed about attitudes of the two professions to public dissemination of information on collections] A discussion of how internal data is transformed to the AMICO spec and how mapping decisions are made inside. Again there was a sense that librarians would do this better (more consistently) if they were involved. The potential of using the AMICO Library to consciously forge closer ties between the curatorial side and reference services within the museum should be explored.

How Should We Tell People About It/Help Them Learn About It?

1) *Target it*
Issue – Audiences: Daniel Starr (MOMA) emphasized value to graduate students, but there was a counter sense that undergrads were in fact the essential component because they pay the bills. This group didn't see much rationale in K-12 (not surprisingly). Pat Barnett imagined three or four different descriptions for different audiences. Getting beyond the art world – to general humanities. Sense that it needs a clientele which demands it – otherwise the libraries won't get it. There is no consensus about whether AMICO is or should be aimed at Graduate/Undergraduate or School users but a clear sense that these users have different needs that should be examined and then addressed separately rather than attempting to solve them in one way.

2) *Teach it*
Issue - Need for User Training: What AMICO could do – help everyone with user education stated by Ms. Haddock. Leigh Gates – disappointing use to date by both faculty and students. Barbara Prior (Oberlin-OhioLink) ditto. Gates sees it as valuable in public settings. Prior asks for an overview of what's in it – that would help. Three years out they would like to train more faculty. One suggestion was to train interns who knew the library. Perhaps AMICO could play a role? Exploring backlinks to campuses through summer intern opportunities is a useful idea to pursue.

3) *Expose it*
Issue - Local Source Integration: Amy Ciccone. How do local slide collections (including digitized ones) relate to AMICO? Demonstrate how this is done elsewhere. Also, use AMICO integration to contrast aspects of local data – perhaps the rights will not be as clear, doubtless the data will be different. The value of having AMICO throughout campus should not be underestimated. Lead with this as a strong selling point, since slide collections typically are not. But then it is important to get people on the campuses more aware that they have access to the resource, so that it will get used (and justify itself in the eyes of the librarians). Lots of paths from the library home page etc. This relates to our current project to create posters for subscribers to post, but other methods should also be considered (stories in the campus newspaper when the resource becomes available…etc.).

4) *Study it*
Issue – Use Data: Amy Ciccone asks (but she's from a university!) How could museums get data on uses? What interest do they have in how much individual works are used? Others discussed what kinds of searches could be enabled by distributors, beyond the functionality implied in AMICO data – by color/size/subject content/iconography etc. There was general agreement that gender of artist/time range and geographical data provided by AMICO needs to be better exploited. It may be that model searches should be illustrated on the distributors sites and/or AMICO public site.

What could it be?

1) *More Usable*
Issue - Tools: Lots of specific (metaphorical) requirements were mentioned such as electronic carousel, easy software for course web site construction, quick request for publication forms, K-12 interface, style indexing, interaction between scholars and museums – discussions of attribution for

instance. Some discussion of whether tools to make AMICO more useful to the museum curator/registrar – including exhibition planning – could be envisioned. Maintenance of a wish list and some links to prototypes would probably help. AMICO could model some tools on its public site too.

2) *More Integrated*
Issue – Navigating between Licensed Sources: Daniel Starr imagined functionality to navigate between different licensed resources (BHA, Dictionary of Art), but Ricky Erway resisted and suggested using authority terms in each file. Starr's point endorsed in subsequent discussion. A pilot demonstration was suggested. The future significance of this, as more of the literature becomes electronic, stimulated some speculation about persistence and rights. The need for shared methods to address common data across different resources needs to be addressed and demonstrations would be very useful to get the academic world excited about the possibilities.

3) *More Complex Multimedia*
Issue – Enhance the Experiential Quality of the Data Itself. More in-depth notes. More 3-D images. Complex multimedia, images taken before/after restoration etc. Many different types of multimedia content were wanted – initially perhaps AMICO could indicate to users where to find specific types of content and we could illustrate the types and use feedback from users to stimulate museums to offer more of each kind.

Incidental Business Issues for AMICO

1) Clarify Roles of Players
This group, and others no doubt, do not understand that the AMICO Library might look different and contain different information when obtained from different distributors. The users in the room were not using the same AMICO Library or interface – some were OhioLink users and others used RLG. This issue will become more important over time. AMICO needs both to regularize the distributor relationships so that differences are limited to presentation, and make its strategies clearer to users served by different distributors.

2) Clarify Relation to other Image Sources
Lots of questions about how AMICO relates to all other resources and projects they know of… Keller on relationship with AIC, others on Grove, etc. etc. While the other resources are changing, a set of FAQs emphasizing aspects of AMICO that we feel may contrast with similar initiatives would help.

3) Give Users Groups More Opportunities to Meet
Participants enjoyed being able to discuss these issues between members and subscribers and universally wanted to repeat the opportunity at future ARLIS conferences and elsewhere. Probably these should be organized as open invitation users group meetings with a basic progress report at the beginning and free wheeling discussion. We might also begin considering a newsletter for members and subscribers – in electronic form if not in hard copy. The desire to feel that they are participating and helping to shape AMICO is widespread.