



VRA Bulletin

Volume 49
Issue 2 *Fall/Winter*

Article 1

December 2022

VRA Baltimore Awards: Exceptional Contributions to the Visual Resources Field in 2022

Maureen Burns

IMAGinED Consulting, moaburns@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://online.vraweb.org/>

Recommended Citation

Burns, Maureen. "VRA Baltimore Awards: Exceptional Contributions to the Visual Resources Field in 2022." *VRA Bulletin*, vol. 49, iss. 2, article 1 (December 2022). Available at: <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/219>

VRA Baltimore Awards: Exceptional Contributions to the Visual Resources Field in 2022

Abstract

One of the highlights of every Visual Resources Association conference is when individuals or teams of information professionals are honored for distinguished achievements or outstanding career contributions at the annual awards ceremony. As a multidisciplinary organization dedicated to furthering research and education in the field of image management, these awards shine a light on leading-edge efforts and accomplishments in the educational, cultural heritage, and commercial environments. They are bestowed to acknowledge and celebrate VRA's highest achievements. This article details the accomplishments of the 2022 award winners: Jolene de Verges, Distinguished Service Award; Afsaneh Najmabadi, Nancy DeLaurier Award; Lael Ensor-Bennett and Kendra Werst, Nancy DeLaurier Award; and Allan T. Kohl, Special Honorary Life Membership. The awards process is also outlined along with the support provided by the VRA Awards Committee. VRA members are encouraged to nominate colleagues for these special honors.

Keywords

Visual resources, advocacy, collaboration, professional development, professional status, awards, VRA Equitable Action Committee, Nancy DeLaurier Award, Distinguished Service Award, New Horizons Travel Awards, Honorary Life Member Award, Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran, Community Hour, VRA Awards Committee.

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Maureen Burns is Director of IMAGinED Consulting.

With special thanks and acknowledgment for ongoing work to VRA's Awards Committee: Sarah Beck, Maureen Burns, Linda Callahan, Dawn Feavvour, Marcia Focht, Ann McShane, Summer Shetenhelm, and Margaret Webster.

One of the special highlights of every annual Visual Resources Association (VRA) conference is when individuals or teams of information professionals are honored for distinguished achievements or outstanding career contributions.¹ As a multidisciplinary organization dedicated to furthering research and education in the field of image management, these awards shine a light on leading-edge efforts and accomplishments in the educational, cultural heritage, and commercial environments. They are bestowed to acknowledge and celebrate the highest achievements in the visual resources profession. The following awards were presented at the 40th Annual Conference in Baltimore on March 31, 2022.

Distinguished Service Award (DSA)

Distinguished Service Award recipients have achieved a level of distinction through leadership, research, service to the profession, outstanding innovation, participation, or project management.²

2022 Distinguished Service Award Recipient: Jolene de Verges



Figure 1: Jolene de Verges (photograph provided by award recipient)

Jolene de Verges, Southern Methodist University's (SMU) Director of the Jake and Nancy Hamon Arts Library, has served twice on the VRA Executive Board, as Secretary (2007-2009) and President (2012-2014), and as Co-Chair of the Strategic Plan Task Force (2016-2017). On the VRA Board, de Verges' noteworthy combination of innovative vision and gentle pragmatism helped guide the Association toward new partnerships, areas of programming, administrative procedures, and investment policies to promote the Association's financial health. She helped raise VRA's visibility by strengthening relationships with like-minded organizations and shepherding the creation of a new International Chapter. A model collaborator in resource-sharing projects, de Verges oversaw VRA's formal affiliation with the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) and supported their

SAHARA project.³ She helped expand VRA's programming to support emerging areas of practice and scholarship such as digital humanities, visual literacy, and video. Under her leadership, the VRA created the External Speakers Fund which provided additional incentives to attract new, non-member conference presenters in order to diversify the perspectives shared at VRA's annual conferences.

This tireless work for VRA has only been surpassed by her stellar professional career and educational experience – she holds advanced degrees in library and information science as well as art history. De Verges currently is the well-respected director of the SMU's Arts Library, overseeing a staff of subject librarians, special collections, and access and operations staff. She previously held library and visual resources positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Smith College,

¹ *Visual Resources Association*, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vraweb.org/>; *Baltimore VRA 2022*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vraweb.org/2022-baltimore/>.

² *Jake and Nancy Hamon Arts Library*, Southern Methodist University Meadows School of the Arts, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.smu.edu/Meadows/About/Facilities/HamonArtsLibrary>.

³ *SAHARA*, Society of Architectural Historians, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.sah.org/publications-and-research/sahara>.

the Worcester Art Museum, and Quinsigamond Community College. De Verges' generous spirit of mentorship has extended to many emerging professionals and students.

De Verges richly deserves the DSA for her vision, leadership, mentorship, service, and dedication to the field of visual resources. John Trendler, current VRA President, stated: "I had the distinct pleasure of serving on the Executive Board during Jolene's presidency. She presided with compassion for the Association; calmly moving initiatives and discussions with grace and agility. Congratulations to Jolene on this well-deserved award."

Nancy DeLaurier Awards (NDL)

The Nancy DeLaurier Awards (NDL), named for one of the pioneers of the visual resource profession, honors distinguished achievement in the field of image management. "Achievement" is measured by immediate impact and may take the form of published work, oral presentation, project management, software development, technology application, website creation, or other outstanding effort.

2022 Nancy DeLaurier Recipient: Afsaneh Najmabadi



The first NDL award went to Afsaneh Najmabadi, Harvard University's Francis Lee Higginson Professor of History and Women, Gender, and Sexuality, for founding, guiding, developing, and sustaining the Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran (WWQI) digital archive.⁴

WWQI focuses on collecting and making available digital images of Qajar era (1796-1925) primary source materials that were created by or are relevant to the lives of women, or that address issues of gender during this period. In 2009, after several years of developing the idea for WWQI, Najmabadi, along with four other Qajar scholars (Nahid Mozaffari, Dominic Brookshaw, Naghmeh Sohrabi, and Manoutchehr Eskandari-Qajar), received WWQI's first major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Since then, Najmabadi has been the Principal Investigator for the project and provided overall leadership for all aspects of WWQI. In addition to setting the work's intellectual direction and supervising the activities of the project, she has led the efforts in developing and maintaining relationships with external collaborators (particularly museums and archives) and has carried out a portion of the work with individual families who have donated to the archive. She also manages the Harvard-based portion of the work.

The WWQI digital archive uses digital technology to overcome the challenges of geography, politics, and ownership to piece together a richer, more nuanced, and complete picture of the transformative Qajar era. For these extended efforts, which have significantly enhanced research and teaching in Iranian history and many other disciplines – resulting in the inclusion of 214 collections, 10,266 texts, and 51,331 images in WWQI – the VRA was honored to bestow this award on Professor Najmabadi.

⁴ *Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality*, Harvard University, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/>; *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*, Harvard University, accessed October 31, 2022, <http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/>.

2022 Nancy DeLaurier Recipients: Kendra Werst and Lael Ensor-Bennett



Figure 3: Kendra Werst and Lael Ensor-Bennett (photographs provided by award recipients)

The second NDL award was bestowed on Lael Ensor-Bennett, Johns Hopkins University’s Curator in the Visual Resources Collection, and Kendra Werst, formerly Williams College’s Assistant Visual Resources Curator, now a flower and vegetable farmer at Bluebird Meadows in Hurdle Mills, North Carolina, for their foundational work with the VRA Equitable Action Committee (EAC) and the innovative *Community Hour* programming.⁵

In response to growing calls for a “diversity committee” in recent years, Ensor-Bennett and Werst stepped up to form VRA’s Equitable Action Committee.⁶ As co-chairs, Ensor-Bennett and Werst gathered a diverse group of VRA members to accomplish the following: identify actionable initiatives; support equity and inclusion as well as underrepresented and minoritized members; educate and empower VRA members on topics related to accessibility and disability inclusion; and advise the Executive Board on matters related to equity. They have demonstrated dynamic leadership abilities, shown a welcoming spirit of collaboration, and developed important equity guidance for VRA as well as pertinent, accessible programming.

One of the most important programs implemented under Ensor-Bennett and Werst’s leadership is the ongoing *Community Hour* discussion series. These gatherings are low pressure virtual meetings that have allowed VRA members across the country to address pressing matters and check in on one another throughout the pandemic and beyond. It has created a space for members to talk about local challenges and to support one another. EAC programming has covered everything from critical cataloging to accessibility and equity in online instruction; from unionizing to mutual aid; from salary transparency to institutional responses to Black Lives Matter. Many sessions have invited both VRA member experts and external authorities to discuss a wide range of timely, pressing topics. The EAC has also worked with Visual Resources Emerging Professionals and Students (VREPS) to provide programming specifically addressing concerns for those who are just starting their visual resource careers.⁷ They take extensive anonymized notes for their programs, ensuring

⁵ *Visual Resources Collection*, Johns Hopkins Department of the History of Art, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://arthist.jhu.edu/visual-resources-collection/>; *Visual Resources Center*, Williams College, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vrc.williams.edu/>.

⁶ *Equitable Action Committee*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vraweb.org/about/committees/equitableaction/>.

⁷ *VREPS*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vreps.wordpress.com/vreps/about/>.

privacy for attendees while inviting those unable to join *Community Hour* gatherings to still participate.

For founding the EAC and establishing a spectacular model for how to support colleagues in an efficient and inclusive manner, Ensor-Bennett and Werst richly deserve one of VRA's highest honors. As their nominator, Andrew Wang stated, "They've truly breathed new life into VRA by providing leadership opportunities, representing some of the most marginalized members of our community both within and beyond VRA, and modeling ethical practices within our profession."

Special Honorary Life Members Award (SHLM)

Special Honorary Life Memberships are awarded to individuals, designated representatives of an institution, contributing, or patron members by the VRA Executive Board in recognition of eminent distinction in any of the fields of the Association's purpose. Honorary Life Members are not required to pay dues and have all the privileges of individual members.

2022 Special Honorary Life Membership Recipient: Allan T. Kohl

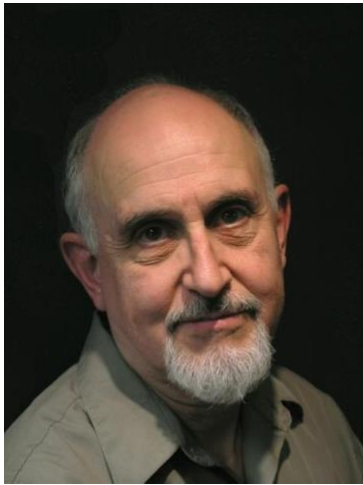


Figure 4: Allan T. Kohl (photograph provided by award recipient)

The 2022 Honorary Life Members Award was presented to Allan T. Kohl, Minneapolis College of Art & Design's Librarian in charge of Visual Resources and Library Instruction, in recognition of generous philanthropy, outstanding service, and career-long dedication to the field of visual resources.⁸

Kohl is a familiar face in the VRA with an extensive service record and a big conference presence, as witnessed at the Baltimore 2022 conference and many before it. But what makes him extraordinary is his heartfelt devotion to VRA and that he has no intention of slowing down. Kohl continues to keep his hand in many VRA activities by choice. Among his numerous accomplishments are: extensive service on the VRA Board, committees, task forces, etc.; support of conference activities, especially fundraising activities and entertainment; major philanthropy in funding the *New Horizons* travel awards for many years; progressive research, scholarship, presentations, and publications; and valuable open resource development with *Art Images for College Teaching*.⁹

This Honorary Life Members Award came at a perfect time in Kohl's career to acknowledge his extraordinary dedication, terrific service, many kindnesses, and abundant generosity to VRA. It provided a way to demonstrate the gratitude of the Association and its members for his herculean efforts over many years. Kohl has now received the full VRA awards trifecta – Distinguished Service, DeLaurier, and Honorary Life Members Awards – and is so very deserving of them all.

Congratulations were extended to all of the 2022 VRA award recipients at a festive wine reception immediately after the awards ceremony in Baltimore. The conference was a hybrid experience due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, allowing VRA members to attend the awards ceremony remotely or to access the recording.¹⁰

⁸ *Library*, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.mcad.edu/campus-info/library>.

⁹ *Art Images for College Teaching*, University of Michigan Library, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/aict?page=index>.

¹⁰ *VRA 2022 Awards Ceremony and Celebration*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/695217755/4cad3357a2>.

2023 Awards Cycle

The VRA Awards Committee asks the membership and like-minded professionals to consider the people and projects that have influenced their work and take the extra step of nominating them for these awards.¹¹ Although nominations have to be initiated by Visual Resources Association members, the nominees need not be members of the organization. VRA recently lowered the annual fees to become a VRA member to make membership as accessible as possible, and has discounted rates for student, retired, unemployed, and first-time members.¹²

The awards cycle starts every year with an online scouting form (the link is shared with the VRA membership) where people can informally make suggestions for potential awardees.¹³ The VRA Awards Committee considers these ideas and communicates directly with anyone who completes the scouting form. Often these suggestions are then turned into formal nominations, although VRA members do not have to complete the scouting form to nominate colleagues or projects. Any VRA member can create a dossier for consideration once the official call for subsequent nominations is announced. The Awards Committee members will communicate with any nominators to help support their efforts. The required dossier consists of a cover letter from the nominator(s) describing the nature of the achievement, the candidate's curriculum vitae, letters from colleagues (quality, not quantity, is suggested) and any other supporting documentation. After a review of all the nominations, the VRA Awards Committee sends their award recommendations to the VRA Executive Board for final approval.

The VRA Awards Committee members are available to assist with all aspects of this process to support the efforts of any nominators, who also have the option of being included in the conference awards ceremony. The awardee is celebrated at the annual conference awards ceremony and provided with a copy of the nomination dossier as well as receiving financial remuneration, a free year of VRA membership and/or gifts, depending upon the award.

The VRA Awards Committee welcomes ideas about how VRA members might be acknowledged and celebrated for the important work that is being accomplished in the field and encourages open communication and collaboration.¹⁴

¹¹ *Awards Committee*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vraweb.org/about/committees/awards-committee/>. The general email for the VRA Awards Committee is vra.awards@gmail.com.

¹² *Membership*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://vraweb.org/membership/>.

¹³ *VRA Awards Scouting 2023*, Visual Resources Association, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSexCYTy1fM3Q1jjPkKWjILrNCWXX6E1X1Dwi4JrVxlNdv5Cww/vi^{ew}form>.

¹⁴ With special thanks and acknowledgment for ongoing work to VRA's Awards Committee: Sarah Beck, Maureen Burns, Linda Callahan, Dawn Feavoyour, Marcia Focht, Ann McShane, Summer Shetenhelm, and Margaret Webster. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the Committee members with questions, ideas, or suggestions.