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VRA Awards Recipients & Recognition Presented at the 41st VRA Annual Conference, San Antonio, Texas

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Abstract

The Visual Resources Association (VRA) presented four awards to sixteen deserving individuals at the 41st annual conference in San Antonio, Texas on September 27th, 2023. The group of 2023 awardees includes students, retirees, career-long VRA members, and brand new faces.

The 2023 recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award is Greg Reser, University of California San Diego's Art Library Image Cataloger/Metadata Specialist (retired). Jenni Rodda, Manager of Digital Media and Computer Services at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (retired) is a new VRA Honorary Life Member. The 2022 Internship Award recipient was Sagan Thacker of Asheville, North Carolina. The 2023 Internship Awardee is Marco Lanier, a graduate student at Simmons University in Boston. Twelve individuals were selected as recipients of the 2023 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Ezekiel Amari McGee, Gina Caprari, Charlie P. Coffey, Jennifer Galipo, Joan Jocson-Singh, Peter Kaiser, Gina Palumbo, Mimosa Shah, Molly Schoen, Michelle Schweickart, and Warner West.

Keywords

Visual Resources Association (VRA), Awards Committee, honorary, awardees, Distinguished Service Award, Honorary Life Membership Award, Internship Awards.

Author Bios

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The Visual Resources Association (VRA) presented four awards to sixteen deserving individuals at the 41st annual conference in San Antonio, Texas on September 27th, 2023.¹ In addition to long-standing awards, the VRA introduced a new award in 2023, granting membership to both first-timers and existing members who needed financial assistance to retain their membership. Encompassing all four award categories, the 2023 awardees include students, retirees, career-long VRA members, and brand new faces.

The 2023 recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award (DSA) is Greg Reser, University of California San Diego's (UCSD) Art Library Image Cataloger/Metadata Specialist (retired). Jenni Rodda, Manager of Digital Media and Computer Services at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (retired) is inducted as a new VRA Honorary Life Member. The 2022 Internship Award recipient was Sagan Thacker of Asheville, North Carolina. The 2023 Internship Awardee is Marco Lanier, a graduate student at Simmons University in Boston. Twelve individuals were selected as recipients of the 2023 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Ezekiel Amari McGee, Gina Caprari, Charlie P. Coffey, Jennifer Galipo, Joan Jocson-Singh, Peter Kaiser, Gina Palumbo, Mimosa Shah, Molly Schoen, Michelle Schweickart, and Warner West.²

Distinguished Service Award (DSA)

Each year, the VRA honors an individual who has made an outstanding career contribution to the field of visual resources and image management. Recipients of the DSA have achieved a level of distinction in the field either through leadership, research, service to the profession, outstanding innovation, participation, or project management.³



Figure 1: Greg Reser, recipient of the Distinguished Service Award.

Greg Reser

The 2023 DSA was presented to Greg Reser, University of California San Diego's (UCSD) Art Library Image Cataloger/Metadata Specialist (retired). Reser began his career as a visual artist teaching at Palomar College, then took the position of Metadata Specialist in the [Library at the University of California, San Diego](#) where he was instrumental in the transition from teaching with 35mm slides to using digital images. As Linda Barnhart stated in one of the UCSD supporting letters, "I still thank my lucky stars that Greg came to my department . . . he was a tremendous asset in terms of metadata expertise as well as a warm and wonderful human being. . . . His work at UCSD made a significant and positive difference in our Digital Library program."⁴ In addition to his exceptional UCSD work, Reser was a key advisor who actively participated in the University of California Visual Resources Group

¹ Visual Resources Association, "VRA Organizational Awards and Recognition event," October 31, 2023, <https://vra2023.sched.com/event/1Nohx/vra-organizational-awards-and-recognition-event>

² Visual Resources Associations, "Announcing the Recipients of the vrcHost Membership Awards," October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-recipients-of-the-vrchost-membership-awards>

³ Visual Resources Association, "Awards, Distinguished Service Award," October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>

⁴ Linda Barnhart to VRA Awards Committee, in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

planning and building the UC Shared Images project in Artstor.⁵

A member of the VRA Southern California Chapter, Reser enthusiastically took on a leadership role as the chair and made important contributions to two CaVraCon regional meetings.⁶ He contributed to many VRA working group reports, including the 2015-16 Professional Status Task Force, the 2017 Online Learning Task Force, and the 2017 Cataloging and Metadata Practices Survey Report.⁷ As his nominators Jackie Spafford and Sonja Sekely-Rowland said, “It is hard to imagine where our field would be today were it not for Greg’s innovations, energy and generosity. His are the definition of ‘career contributions,’ with an ongoing impact and a legacy that others will continue to learn from and build on for years to come.”⁸

Reser’s VRA home base was the [Cataloging and Metadata Standards Committee](#) and he spent untold hours doing elaborate web design for the VRA Core cataloging examples. He took on leadership of the VRA Embedded Metadata Working Group in 2008, researching and developing a suite of valuable online tools, including the VRA Adobe CS4 and CS5 File Info Panel in 2010 and VRA Panel Export-Import Tool in 2012. He learned ActionScript and JavaScript coding and built plugins for Adobe Photoshop and Bridge, providing the visual resources community with access to free, functional, self-service tools for embedding metadata in images and using the fully described images for teaching.⁹ This research and development work was documented and supported over the years through the [Metadata Deluxe Wiki](#), hands-on workshops, international presentations, and one-on-one consultations. His collaborative work on the VRA Core to RDF Transform Tool was an important demonstration of the ability to take VRA Core 4 data from a flat CSV spreadsheet all the way to RDF with linked open data.¹⁰

Reser deservedly earned the Nancy DeLaurier award for his embedded metadata work in 2013 and is now being acknowledged for his full career contributions.¹¹ As Sheryl Frisch’s supporting letter explained, “Through Greg’s leadership, hard work, and diligence, embedding metadata in images has become an accepted practice. . . . The embedded metadata tools are truly a star in VRA’s constellation.”¹² Even after his 2019 retirement, Reser continued to support these tools and break down complex concepts related to metadata, mapping, and data migration. His generosity in sharing his time and knowledge and providing assistance to colleagues is legendary.

In his response to the DSA award, Greg explained his motivations: “VRA projects seemed like a game to me. Crosswalking schemas, writing JavaScript, manipulating a massive spreadsheet was really just about solving a puzzle. It was a creative challenge, one that brought me a lot of joy. And that’s what I really wanted to do: make work joyful and engaging while producing something useful to solve a problem. People say you should ‘Enjoy the process’ in whatever you are doing. Yeah, in order to do that you need to work with enjoyable people – people who inspire you to do more than you imagined you could. I never thought I could write code, but because of my VRA colleagues, I became determined to figure it out in order to make our projects work. And that turned out to be a lot of fun (once it was finally working).” Greg insightfully stated, “I think the tangible

⁵ Greg Reser, “Greg Reser’s Curriculum Vitae,” in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

⁶ Sonja Sekely-Rowland and Jackie Spafford to VRA Awards Committee in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

⁷ Betha L. Whitlow to VRA Awards Committee in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

⁸ Sonja Sekely-Rowland and Jackie Spafford to VRA Awards Committee in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

⁹ Greg Reser, “Metadata Deluxe Wiki,” last edited April 2021, <http://metadatadeluxe.pbworks.com/w/page/20792238/FrontPage>.

¹⁰ Sheryl Frisch to VRA Awards Committee in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

¹¹ Visual Resources Association, “Awards: Nancy DeLaurier Award Recipients,” accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>.

¹² Sheryl Frisch to VRA Awards Committee in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2023.

‘products’ of our profession play a critical role in bringing our principles and higher aspirations to everyday experience. Usable, sharable output, like guidelines and tools, are necessary to implement things like data standards, property rights, critical cataloging and accessibility. We have to make these things real.”¹³

Honorary Life Membership Award (HLM)

Special Honorary Life Memberships are awarded to individuals, designated representatives of an institution, contributing, or patron members by the Executive Board in recognition of eminent distinction in any of the fields of the Association’s mission. Honorary Life Members are not required to pay dues and they have all the privileges of Individual members. These are particularly special and rare awards, given only occasionally.¹⁴



Figure 2: Jenni Rodda, recipient of a Visual Resources Association Honorary Life Membership. Photo credit: Jason Varone.

Jenni Rodda

An Honorary Life Membership was presented to Jenni Rodda in recognition of her diligent leadership, generous mentorship, and outstanding, career-long dedication to the field of visual resources. Rodda was the Manager of Digital Media and Computer Services at the [Institute of Fine Arts, New York University](#) for 36 years, having only recently retired. Beyond this remarkable career, she has an extensive record of service to the VRA: two positions on the VRA Executive Board – Vice President and then President; chair of the Nancy DeLaurier Writing Award Committee and the Slide and Transitional Media Task Force; co-chair of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA) Liaison Committee, Awards Committee, and Digital Humanities SIG; and active member of the Education Committee, SEI Implementation Team, and Publications Advisory Group. She was a founding member and three-time chair of the Greater New York chapter.¹⁵

Rodda has been a conference participant, speaker, and session organizer or moderator for the Visual Resources Association, the Art Libraries Society of North America, and the Southeast College Art Conference annual meetings almost every year going back to 1992. She also was the VRA liaison to the Art Libraries Society and moderator of its Visual Resources Division. Rodda

¹³ Greg Reser, “Reser DSA Speech,” transcript of speech delivered at the VRA Annual Conference Awards Ceremony, September 27, 2023, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64839bcb007bd907faf40da2/t/6532b6a7953c0c2277b3ec43/1697822375346/Reser_DSA_speech2023.pdf.

¹⁴ Visual Resources Association, “Awards: Honorary Life Members Award,” accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>.

¹⁵ Jenni Rodda, “Jenni Rodda’s Curriculum Vitae,” in HLM Nomination Dossier, 2023.

published extensively in the [VRA Bulletin](#), for example, sharing the 1996 VRA proceedings from CIHA, then guest-editing special themed issues on “Professional Issues in Visual Resources” and “The Digital Transition: Perspectives from Art Historians.” In 1996, she co-authored [Special Bulletin No. 11: Guide to Copy Photography for Visual Resources Professionals](#).¹⁶ No wonder Rodda’s many accomplishments to the visual resources discipline were recognized with the VRA Distinguished Service Award in 2004.¹⁷

In her response to this award, Jenni said, “My career has been unusual, I suppose, in as much as I stayed at one academic institution for much of my working life. NYU was my professional ‘home’ across 5 decades. But it was VRA that gave me the tools to adapt as the profession changed and evolved, and the needs of image-based scholarship changed and evolved. We worked together, VRA and I, moving from photographic prints to lantern slides to 35mm slides to digital image records; from manual slide projectors to carousels to PowerPoint and Zoom. During conferences, there were long conversations with colleagues about image quality and image preservation and image description and image organization and image use that crossed media boundaries from film to digital, still- to moving- to mapped- to 3-dimensional images. This was an immeasurable help to me and to my career, and to the careers of my friends and colleagues.” She went on to say, “speaking, writing, leading, mentoring, learning. These are the skills I honed through VRA. I hope the Association benefitted from my work; I know I benefitted from being a VRA member.”¹⁸

This Honorary Life Members Award comes at a perfect time to acknowledge Rodda’s extraordinary dedication, terrific service, and many kindnesses to the VRA and all its members. After pointing out her affinity for sailing, John Taormina, the nominator, stated, “Whether on a sailboat, at the ballet, in a museum, or in a botanical garden, Jenni will now enjoy all the privileges and distinction due to being named our latest Honorary Life Member.”¹⁹ The award provides a way to demonstrate the Association’s gratitude for Jenni’s wonderful efforts over many years.

Internship Awards

The VRA provides an [Internship Award](#) every year and two of these awards were highlighted at the 2023 San Antonio conference. This award supports the education and practical training of new information professionals in visual resources and image management. It is generously funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation with a grant of \$4,000 to support a period of internship in archives, libraries, museums, visual resources collections in academic institutions, or other appropriate contexts, as well as professional development opportunities. Recipients also receive a one-year complimentary student membership in the VRA.²⁰

¹⁶ John Taormina to VRA Board in HLM Nomination Dossier, 2023.

¹⁷ Visual Resources Association, “Awards: Distinguished Service Award Recipients,” accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>.

¹⁸ Jenni Rodda, “Rodda HLM Speech,” transcript of speech delivered at the VRA Annual Conference Awards Ceremony, September 27, 2023, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64839bcb007bd907faf40da2/t/654e480e90f80a17f350ab73/1699629070291/Rodda_HLM_speech2023.pdf.

¹⁹ John Taormina, “Rodda HLM Nomination Speech,” transcript of speech delivered at the VRA Annual Conference Awards Ceremony, September 27, 2023, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64839bcb007bd907faf40da2/t/654e47f1da4bc465baf93339/1699629042126/Taormina_HLM_speech2023.pdf.

²⁰ Visual Resources Association, “Internship Award,” accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/internship-award>.

Sagan Thacker

VRA's 2022 internship awardee was Sagan Thacker of Asheville, North Carolina. Sagan supported the development of the Black Mountain College Museum's collection management system, the museum's first online portal, creating increased public access to the collection. They documented new workflows and standards, reviewed data and media imports, addressed media migration errors, and conducted user testing that provided feedback to software developers.²¹

Marco Lanier

The 2023 internship awardee is Marco Lanier, a graduate student at Simmons University in Boston. Marco's proposed project seeks to digitize a selection of visual resources from the collection of the *Gay Community News (GCN)*, a Boston-based newspaper reporting on LGBTQ+ life and issues across the U.S. These images will be made accessible to a wider audience through [The History Project's](#) digital collections platform. A series of panel discussions about *GCN* will be held in collaboration with the Massachusetts Historical Society.²²

vrcHost Membership Awards

This year, the VRA introduced new [Membership Awards](#) sponsored by [vrcHost](#), a company that offers comprehensive solutions for the Madison Digital Image Database (MDID) – installation, integration, hosting, customization, and software development – while also serving as the exclusive agent for the [Archivision](#) Research Library, which provides professional architecture and art photography with rich metadata for educational purposes. These Awards provide a year of individual VRA membership, including regional chapter membership. The goal of these awards is to engage new members in the organization and to help existing members who might need financial assistance retain their VRA membership.

Twelve information professionals were selected as recipients of the 2023 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Ezekiel Amari McGee, Gina Caprari, Charlie P. Coffey, Jennifer Galipo, Joan Jocson-Singh, Peter Kaiser, Gina Palumbo, Mimosa Shah, Molly Schoen, Michelle Schweickart, Warner West, and an anonymous recipient. The VRA welcomes these new and continuing members to the Association and looks forward to their participation in the field of visual resources.²³

Conclusion

The VRA's Awards program is administered by the Awards Committee, currently comprised of Sarah Beck, Maureen Burns (Chair), Linda Callahan, Dawn Feavyour, Marcia Focht, Ann McShane (Board Liaison), Allie Scholten (VREPS Liaison), Summer Shetenhelm, and Margaret Webster. This group designs the application process, solicits nominations, helps members prepare their nomination materials, reviews awards dossiers and applications, makes formal recommendations to the Board, follows their recommendations on the physical and monetary

²¹ Visual Resources Association, "Announcing the 2022-2023 VRA Internship Award Recipient," September 8, 2022, <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-2022-2023-vra-internship-award-recipient>.

²² Visual Resources Association, "Announcing the 2023-2024 VRA Internship Award Recipient," September 12, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-2023-2024-vra-internship-award-recipient>.

²³ Visual Resources Association, "Announcing the Recipients of the vrcHost Membership Awards," August 15, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-recipients-of-the-vrchost-membership-awards>.

portions of each award, and presents those awards at the Annual Conference.²⁴ While this is a lengthy list of tasks when written out, the nominations are always fascinating and the Committee makes the process light work.

In spring 2023, the Awards Committee received a proposal that became the vrcHost Membership Awards, furthering the kinds of recognition available within VRA. It is the hope of the Awards Committee that this broadening of recognition will help inspire a VRA that recognizes our colleagues at all stages of their careers. Reading dossiers for the highest awards the VRA offers quickly reveals that the VRA is full of exceptional people, both nominees and nominators.

Work in the service profession, whether in visual resources or otherwise, is easy to ignore into invisibility. As a professional association primarily composed of service workers, it is a worthwhile practice against that invisibility to look for the good people and good things in our professional lives and make them known. The Awards Committee encourages VRA members to actively participate in the work of the organization and to acknowledge the people and resources that have made your professional life better and more meaningful.

Congratulations to the very deserving 2023 VRA Awards recipients and sincere thanks to their generous sponsors and thoughtful nominators.

²⁴ Visual Resources Association, “Awards: How do awards work?”, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>.