

June 2025

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Recommended Citation

McShane, Ann. "2024 VRA Awards Recipients & Recognition: Presented at the 42nd annual conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota" *VRABulletin* 52, no. 1 (June 2025). Available at: <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/261>

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Abstract

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The 2024 recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award (DSA) is Meghan Rubenstein, Curator of Visual Resources & Lecturer, Colorado College. Members of the Trans Metadata Collective were awarded the Nancy DeLaurier Award in recognition of their role in the research and development of “Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources.” Fourteen were selected as recipients of the 2024 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Charlie Coffey, De’Ivyion Drew, Madison Ferrell, Diego Roberto Irigoyen, Ariell Lomax, Kaylie Longley, Liz Miller, Meina Naeymirad, Elisabeth Narkin, Sureshkrishnan Ramakrishnan, Spencer Roberts, Isis A. Serna, Amanda Smith, and Marsha Taichman.

Keywords

Visual Resources Association (VRA), Awards Committee, awardees, Distinguished Service Award, Nancy DeLaurier Award, Membership Award

Author Bio

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The Visual Resources Association (VRA) presented three awards to twenty-four deserving individuals at the 42nd annual conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 10th, 2024.¹ This group of 2024 awardees includes students, retirees, career-long VRA members, and brand-new faces.

The 2024 recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award (DSA) is Meghan Rubenstein, Curator of Visual Resources & Lecturer, Colorado College. Members of the Trans Metadata Collective were awarded the Nancy DeLaurier Award in recognition of their role in the research and development of “Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources.”

Fourteen were selected as recipients of the 2024 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Charlie Coffey, De’Ivyion Drew, Madison Ferrell, Diego Roberto Irigoyen, Ariell Lomax, Kaylie Longley, Liz Miller, Meina Naeymirad, Elisabeth Narkin, Sureshkrishnan Ramakrishnan, Spencer Roberts, Isis A. Serna, Amanda Smith, and Marsha Taichman.²

Distinguished Service Award

Each year, VRA honors an individual who has made an outstanding career contribution to the field of visual resources and image management. Recipients of the Distinguished Service Award (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

Meghan Rubenstein

The 2024 DSA was presented to Meghan Rubenstein, Curator of Visual Resources & Lecturer, Colorado College. In the ten years since Meghan started working at Colorado College and joined VRA in earnest, she has helped in nearly every corner of the organization. “Aside from serving on the Board as Public Relations and Communications Officer, she has also served in a leadership capacity in the Mountain West and Plains Chapter, the Travel Awards Committee, the Solo [Special Interest Group], Regional Workshops, and the Summer Educational Institute. She continues to serve the Board directly as Communications Technology Advisor.”⁴ She is also a VRA Mentor and participant in many VRA committees and initiatives.

While Meghan’s work in VRA is far-reaching, it is also often behind-the-scenes. Many in the field of visual resources share the experience of the behind-the-scenes worker. Places like the Equitable Action Committee Resources List⁵ and the *VRA Bulletin*⁶ reveal real and current issues of invisibility and lack of recognition in our field. One small way to address this is to look closely at the work being done around us and recognize that labor. Nominators Lael Ensor-Bennett and Jeannine Keefer noted that “[t]he

¹ Visual Resources Association. “VRA Awards + Recognition Lunch.” <https://vra2024.sched.com/event/1drT9/awards-recognition-lunch>

² Visual Resources Association. “Announcing the Recipients of the 2024 vrcHost Membership Awards.” <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-recipients-of-the-2024-vrchoost-membership-awards>

³ Visual Resources Association. “Awards, Distinguished Service Award.” <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>

⁴ Ensor-Bennett, Lael. 2024. “VRA 2024 DSA Nomination Speech.” https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64839bcb007bd907faf40da2/t/671697139955481e685d5df8/1729533715357/NOM_DSA_speech2024.pdf

⁵ Visual Resources Association Equitable Action Committee. “Visual Resources Association Equitable Action Committee Resource Guide.” Last updated January 31, 2025.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PG3rX9jccr21e60FsOdFPr3PxURUjUXw9S0fIDh3Et4/edit?usp=sharing>

⁶ Lucarelli, Carolyn, and Betha Whitlow. 2023. “The Life Cycle of Visual Assets: Advocating for the Profession.” *VRA Bulletin* 50, no. 1 (June 2023). Available at: <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/article/view/232>.

VRA survives by the dedicated individuals who care about the organization so much that they are willing to dedicate their nights and weekends to making sure everything runs smoothly from backstage.”⁷ Further, “[o]ne need not be a member for 20+ years to demonstrate worthiness for the Distinguished Service Award.”⁸ John Trendler wrote in support of Meghan’s nomination that, “[b]eyond her technical skills, Meghan’s willingness to help others and her ability to inspire those around her are truly remarkable. She has a knack for explaining complex concepts in a way that makes them accessible to everyone, and she’s always there to lend a hand when someone needs it. Her patience, kindness, and calm demeanor make her a joy to work with.” Now is the right time to recognize Meghan’s impact on the VRA.

In her acceptance speech, Meghan provided an important closing message about the power people have within professional communities. “VRA is full of possibilities. Our profession is constantly, and sometimes rapidly, changing. That is reflected in the composition of our membership. We, as members, have a say in the direction of VRA. *We* serve on the Board and on committees. *We* create and dissolve special interest groups. *We* develop and improve upon professional standards.”⁹

Nancy DeLaurier Award

The Nancy DeLaurier Award (NDL) is named for one of the pioneers of the visual resources profession. It honors visual resources professionals for distinguished achievement in the field through their published works, oral presentations, project management, software development, or other outstanding efforts. Originally conceived as a Writing Award in 1997, the NDL now recognizes many forms of achievement in the field.¹⁰

Trans Metadata Collective

The 2024 NDL was presented to nine named members of the Trans Metadata Collective for their work in the creation of “Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources.” First planned in 2021, the Trans Metadata Collective works to “develop a set of best practices for the description, cataloguing, and classification of information resources as well as the creation of metadata about trans and gender diverse people, including authors and other creators.”¹¹

This nomination was put forward by VRA’s Equitable Action Committee in support of their mission to “advance and support an equitable, diverse, accessible, and inclusive association.”¹² The creation and distribution of thoughtful best practices documentation like “Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources” is an important part of advancing a better association and profession.

Elias Larralde’s letter in support of the nomination clearly outlined the timeliness of this award. “The resource is a crucial document for many different stakeholders in our field, most importantly the Trans

⁷ Lael Ensor-Bennett and Jeannine Keefer to VRA Awards Committee, in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2024.

⁸ Jeannine Keefer to VRA Awards Committee, in DSA Nomination Dossier, 2024.

⁹ Rubenstein, Meghan. 2024. “VRA 2024 DSA Acceptance Speech.”

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64839bcb007bd907faf40da2/t/671696fcd4b2a0310c9ef32e/1729533692943/Rubenstein_DSA_speech2024.pdf

¹⁰ Visual Resources Association. “Awards, Nancy DeLaurier Award.” <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>

¹¹ The Trans Metadata Collective, Burns, J., Cronquist, M., Huang, J., Murphy, D., Rawson, K. J., Schaefer, B., Simons, J., Watson, B. M., & Williams, A. (2022). Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources (1.0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6686841>

¹² Visual Resources Association. “Equitable Action Committee.” <https://www.vraweb.org/equitable-action-committee>

individuals and subjects that are often hidden in collections around the world.”¹³ Maureen Burns shared a similar sentiment, noting that, “...tireless work is clearly evident— coordination, research, discussions, writing, development, review, and dissemination— making this project very deserving of the 2024 DeLaurier Award.”¹⁴

While nine are named as authors and awardees, there are several unnamed contributors equally worthy of recognition for this achievement. In taking the time to recognize this work, please also consider our colleagues who face danger that prevents them from taking credit for their own work. It is an important reminder of how the labor of marginalized people is further obscured.

vrcHost Membership Awards

This year VRA ran a second round of [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.

Fourteen information professionals were selected as recipients of the 2024 vrcHost Membership Awards, including Charlie Coffey, De’Ivyion Drew, Madison Ferrell, Diego Roberto Irigoyen, Ariell Lomax, Kaylie Longley, Liz Miller, Meina Naeymirad, Elisabeth Narkin, Sureshkrishnan Ramakrishnan, Spencer Roberts, Isis A. Serna, Amanda Smith, and Marsha Taichman.¹⁵

Conclusion

VRA’s Awards program is administered by the Awards Committee, which in 2024 included Maureen Burns (Chair), Marcia Focht, Linda Callahan, Sarah Beck, Summer Shetehelm, Ann McShane, and Liz Gadelha (Board Liaison). This group designed the application process, solicited for nominations, helped members in preparing their nomination materials, reviewed awards dossiers and applications, made formal recommendations to the Board, assembled the physical and monetary portions of each award, and presented those awards at the Annual Conference.¹⁶ While this may seem like an extensive list of responsibilities, the nominations are always interesting and the collaborative spirit of the Awards Committee makes the process efficient and rewarding. VRA is a community full of exceptional individuals doing exceptional work.

Service work, whether it be 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 invisibility to look for the good people and good things in our professional lives and make them known. I hope you will take this announcement as a reminder to do just that.

Finally, congratulations to the very deserving 2024 VRA Awards recipients and sincere thanks to the generous sponsors and nominators.

¹³ Elias Larralde to VRA Awards Committee, in NDL Nomination Dossier, 2024.

¹⁴ Maureen Burns to VRA Awards Committee, in NDL Nomination Dossier, 2024.

¹⁵ Visual Resources Association. “Announcing the Recipients of the vrcHost Membership Awards.” October 21, 2024. <https://www.vraweb.org/news/announcing-the-recipients-of-2024-vra-awards>

¹⁶ Visual Resources Association. “Awards, How do awards work?” <https://www.vraweb.org/awards>