

Curator's Toolbox  
*Jackie Ben-Efraim*

**Description:** Today, more and more librarians' jobs seem to be merging with that of a museum curator. Jackie learned the basic curating skills at AJL's 2012 convention in Pasadena. In this presentation, she will share the forms and spreadsheets she depends on to organize all the different aspects of her exhibits.

**Jackie Ben-Efraim** has been the Special Collections Librarian for Ostrow Library, American Jewish University, since 2007. As well as cataloging and preservation duties, she is responsible for creating exhibits using items from the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center three times a year. Jackie coordinates online and print ads and conference exhibits for national AJL, as well as working for her local chapter – AJLSC.

## Slide 2

- Curating is 20% flair and imagination and 80% administration, collaboration and management. You need to be able to think ahead and see around corners. You cannot make a successful exhibition without the 20%, but you can ruin a great idea if you cannot bring an exhibition together.  
Nicholas Serota, Director, Tate, London.
- **Notes:** In today's presentation I will provide you with the tools to coordinate the 80%.
- I use several documents to keep track of the different moving parts of my exhibit and I will be happy to email them to you after the conference.

## Slide 3—Let's take a moment to complete the 20%

- Exhibits can be based on:
  - o Historical periods
  - o Biblical verses
  - o Geographic location
  - o Holidays
  - o Famous person
  - o Psalms, songs
- **Notes:** It is obvious that you would need to first have a creative idea about the theme or a title for your exhibit. At the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center, the theme is created after I meet with the

library director, the reference librarian, and occasionally I get input from the curator of art gallery. In order to come to a decision, we have to consider what are the rare or unique items in our collection that would be visually appealing and interesting intellectually. Since I put together 3 exhibits a year, we also consider what holidays will be observed during the exhibit's timeframe.

#### **Slide 4—Get inspired from art and songs**

- Pictured: wall art wordle from Hollywood and Jerusalem invite
- **Notes:** Since I need my exhibits to be eye catching, I am always making a mental note, or taking a picture on my cell phone, of something that inspires me. Sometimes it's the way items are displayed in a store, sometimes it's a word cloud on a restaurant wall, and sometimes it's an piece of art.

#### **Slide 5**

- Pictured: Erella's piece as the inspiration for Women of Valor and Marlene Rubinstein's piece memorializing her family who perished in the Holocaust

#### **Slide 6—Right window facing elevator**

- From Torah Tales, fall 2016
- Bereishit - Creation of Man  
Genesis 1:26  
And God said, "Let us make man in our imange, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over the animals and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth."  
Artist: Hillel Smith
- **Notes:** Once you have selected your subject, you probably need to get approval from a supervisor, board director or a committee that oversees the exhibit space.
- I find that preparing a brief power point is the best way to convey my concept, and sometimes the alternative ways of presenting the material. You have to cover the **PUNCH LIST**

### **Slide 7—Center Window facing elevator**

- Noah  
Genesis 7:1-2  
And the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen as a righteous man before Me in this generation.  
Of all the clean animals you shall take for yourself seven pairs, a male and its mate, and of all the animals that are not clean, two, a male and its mate.  
Artist: Will Deutsch

### **Slide 8—Left window facing elevator**

- Lech Lecha  
Genesis 12:1  
And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.  
Artist: Hillel Smith
- **Notes:** Compare Abraham stories in the 3 major faiths

### **Slide 9—Sperber right window**

- Vayeira  
Genesis 18:12  
And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have become worn out, will I have smooth flesh? And alos, my master is old."  
*Sarah Laughed by Will Deutsch*

### **Slide 10—Sperber center window**

- Toldot  
Genesis 25:26  
And after that came out his brother, and his hand took hold on Esav's heel; and his name was called Ya'akov; and Yitzhak was sixty years old when she bore them.
- Pictured: [year] Jacob and Esau

### **Slide 11—Sperber left window**

- Vayeshev  
Genesis 37:3  
Now Yisra'el loved Yosef more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colours.
- Pictured [year] Joseph
- **Notes:** Does "Coat of Stripes" translation work better? It's what's written in the Hebrew.

### **Slide 12—Right window facing circ desk**

- Va'era  
Exodus 7:10  
And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, "Go in, Speak to Pharaoh, King of Mitzrayim, that he let the children of Yisra'el go out of his land."
- Pictured [year] Moses and Aaron

### **Slide 13—Right window facing circ desk**

- II Samuel 6:5  
And David and all the house of Ysra'el played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of cypress wood, on lyres, and on lutes, and on timbrels, and on rattles, and on cymbals.
- Pictured: [year] David

### **Slide 14—First you make a spreadsheet...**

- Spreadsheet timeline for Bread and Salt, to be exhibited Fall 2017
- **Notes:** Anyone who has worked with me in my library or at AJL knows that I love spreadsheets to organize information. The first spreadsheet that you need to make is a timeline. The timeline serves two purposes: it sets for the goals that need to be achieved by certain dates and you can also use it to keep track of the amount of time you work on a project should you need to do so for your supervisor. If you prefer getting calendar pop ups, you could organize your timeline in a calendar on your phone, computer or even a paper calendar

### **Slide 15—It's all about the books**

- Spreadsheet of books, languages, dates and pages to be displayed from Threads that Bind, fall 2014
- **Notes:** The main emphasis of my exhibits is, of course, the books in the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center. I make a spreadsheet of the titles, OCLC numbers, barcodes, pages to be displayed, height and width of the volume so I know how much space it will require and the highlight of the volume. I select what I think will be enough titles to fill the exhibit space, plus a few extras because I'm never sure how the space might look with all of the titles, a book might not be suitable for display due to damage, or there can be a last minutes change in your overall design. For example, I received an Omer counter right before Pesach and had to shift my exhibit to accommodate it.

### **Slide 16—Sometimes, I need to include verses to reference**

- Snippet of verses used in Wisdom: The Tree of Knowledge, winter 2015
- **Notes:** Often I only have one verse for an entire exhibit, but sometimes I have a dozen different verses, so I keep track of them in a document that looks more like a Word Doc. This is just one section of a multi page document from which the verses were chosen. I need to choose the verses before I search through our bibles so I can select a bible that has an illustration on the page across from the verse.

### **Slide 17—Where will I put them?**

- My floor plan won't win any drafting awards, but I can clearly see the size of each display window and can fill in what items will be in each case.
- **Notes:** I have a diagram of my exhibit display cases, with the precise measurements. I take this page and lay out where each book, text panel and piece of art will sit. I use my original power point as a roadmap for placement of my items, but nothing is set in stone until I actually set up the exhibit. This step is crucial because I only have a week in between the take down of the last exhibit and the installation of the next exhibit.

### **Slide 18—Call for submissions**

- Create a format you can reuse for each exhibit
- Seeking small works, either new or old, on the theme of Woman of Valor for an exhibit at the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center at American Jewish University between January 23, 2017 through May 23, 2017
- **Notes:** When I use artwork that is not owned by AJU, I put out a call for submissions using this form. It doesn't have to be fancy.

### **Slide 19—Provide an outline for the information you need in order to consider the work.**

- DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS September 30, 2016.
- Works must be in watercolor, print, assemblage or acrylics. Any works of assemblage should use PVA for adhering materials in order to comply with restrictions of display items in a rare book room.
- Works should be approximately 12" x 12" or of a similar size.
- Attached are the verses for the prayer *Woman of Valor*. The goal is to have one piece of art to compliment each verse. Inasmuch as the prayer begins with "A woman of strength who can find? For her worth is far above pearls," the color theme will be pastel colors with a pearlized finish in keeping with springtime.
- **Notes:** Just need all of the pertinent details in a concise format. Once you've designed it, you can use it again and again by just tweaking a few lines.

### **Slide 20**

- Email [jbenefraim@aju.edu](mailto:jbenefraim@aju.edu) a jpeg of the work and include a brief artist's statement (7 paragraphs).
- Items will be selected to compliment bibles in the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center.
- All work must be properly framed and/or ready to hang. If works require specific hardware, it must be provided when work is delivered. At the jurors' discretion, work that is dirty, in disrepair or otherwise deemed unfit for display may be excluded from the show.
- Members of JAI who are in good standing are eligible to submit their works at no charge.

- Artwork will not be marked "For Sale" during the exhibit. However, the artist may provide a small advertising brochure to be distributed to visitors.

### **Slide 21—Condition reports**

- Pictured: "Flowers" by Eyal Sherman, a paraplegic mouth painter who was featured in the exhibit Art and Healing through Creative Expression, spring 2015
- **Notes:** When receiving artwork, museums routinely fill out this 4 page form which records information about the artwork which is useful for planning the set up if the piece is only to arrive the day before the opening. It is usually filled out by the artist or lending institution. You fill out the last page with the condition of the item at time of return.

### **Slide 22—Artist agreements**

- Signed before and after delivery
- **Notes:** Even if I don't use the Condition Report, I always have my artists sign this document, which also allows us to use photos of the artwork for promotional purposes.

### **Slide 23—Certificate of insurance**

- This document is vital any time you display an item that is not part of your institution's collection. It is so easy to get, just call your insurance agent, answer a few questions and the agent fills out the form at no cost.

### **Slide 24—Standard facilities report**

- **Notes:** You will need to fill out the 25 page Standard Facilities Report if you are borrowing an item from another institution. It is best to have your facilities manager prepare the main portion of this document in advance so you aren't rushed when you need to turn this in ASAP. Although most of the questions are straight forward, and many will pertain to the details of your upcoming exhibit, you might not know off the top of your head the minutia of your alarm and fire suppression systems, etc.

### **Slide 25—Emergency preparedness**

- **Notes:** A part of the Standard Facilities Plan is an Emergency Preparedness plan. This topic alone would fill a session, so suffice it to say I'll include the format in the packet of documents I will email AJL members, but you should listen to my presentation [HURRICANES, EARTHQUAKES AND FLOODS, OH MY: Protecting Library and Archive Collections by Making a Preparedness and Response Plan](#) as a podcast from our Houston conference

### **Slide 26—Don't forget your bottom line**

- **Notes:** Make an itemized accounting of expenses incurred by you if you need to be reimbursed or if required by your libraries budget.

### **Slide 27**

- Budget continued

### **Slide 28—Mounting tools**

- Pictured: spreadsheet of what I have on hand, examples of the frames and stands

### **Slide 29—LAST ONE, you're done!**

- After you've completed your exhibit, post a link at the Smithsonian's website for archived exhibits (see handout)
- Any questions?