

# Art To Go - Iowa City Public Library



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Iowa City Public Library



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## Background

Iowa City Public Library (ICPL) has had its Art To Go collection since 1965. At that time, it consisted of a few framed prints that were donated by a patron; today, it contains about 400 items, consisting of framed reproductions of well-known works as well as a unique collection of original art created by local artists. It is one of the most popular collections the Library offers.

Like many public libraries, a large part of our mission is to support lifelong learning through the provision of resources that inform, entertain, and enrich the lives of our patrons. The decision to add art to the more standard collections of books and audio-visual materials was a relatively easy one for the Library, as Iowa City has a vibrant and active arts community that includes individual artists of all kinds, numerous galleries and frame shops, an annual Arts Festival that attracts thousands of visitors, and the University of Iowa School of Art and Museum of Art. For ICPL, the art collection is seen as a natural extension of our commitment to provide people with access to materials that are enjoyable, intellectual, and which help to develop some type of literacy.

The items in the collection are available to any patron with an ICPL library card, and two items can be checked for two months at a time; there is no charge associated with check out. New items are added to the collection every year, with funds coming from the annual budget and gift monies from the Library Board and Library Friends Foundation. There is one Librarian who oversees the collection.

## Objectives

The Art To Go collection has two primary objectives, related to the Library and the community it serves.

- To develop visual literacy and expose patrons to different types of art, comparable to a listener using recordings to learn about music; the collection should provide a way for people to learn about, appreciate, and explore art.
- To support the arts community by purchasing works created by local artists, which serves several purposes: it encourage patrons and Iowa City residents to get to know and appreciate the work of area artists; it helps artists gain exposure to a wider audience; and it helps to preserve works that might not otherwise have that opportunity.

## Audience

While our main audience is, of course, current and potential library card holders in the Iowa City area, we also acknowledge that there are particular patrons the collection might be suitable for: people who want to “try out” a particular piece or type of art before making a purchase; people who want to enjoy art in their home but cannot afford to; those who want to learn or instruct about art; and those who simply want to decorate a bare space or have art that isn’t permanent.

## Process

The art collection is treated similarly to other collections in that there is a collection plan that outlines its purpose and guidelines, but it is also unique in many ways.

- **Adding items to the collection**

Between 15 and 25 items are added to the collection each year, in one of two ways. For the posters (reproduction prints), a Librarian picks 10-15 items that are by well-known artists or representative of a particular school or movement of art. Posters can be found on many websites, and while you can order from them, the Library chooses to have a local framer or art store order them, as they already have existing accounts with many poster suppliers.

Original art is added by means of an annual contest, the Art Purchase Prize, where the Library solicits original works from local artists. Artists can enter two works, and most types of two-dimensional art are accepted. There is an Art Advisory Committee (made up of six community members who work in some arts-related capacity and volunteer their time) who works with the Librarian to judge the entries, and then make the final selection, generally resulting in the purchase of 5-10 works. We try to time it so that the posters and original art are added about six months apart, so that new items are being offered on a regular basis.

Both types of art are matted and framed at a local shop, put on display for a month in the Library, and then go into circulation. By the time they come off display, there are usually several holds on the works.

We occasionally receive donated works that could go into the collection; because our collection is robust and space is limited, we generally only add gifts that have a local connection. As with the contest, gifts are considered by the Art Advisory Committee.

- **Maintenance of the collection**

Due to the nature of the collection, there are some issues with damage and wear-and-tear. Frames get dinged up, Plexiglas gets dirty and scuffed, paper backing gets torn. This kind of damage is tolerated to some degree without needing to be fixed, as the cost would be prohibitive. More serious damage, such as when a frame breaks or the work itself is affected, is dealt with based on how old the item is, how often it circulates, and whether it is a poster or original art. Works are repaired if warranted, removed if not; there is also a 'purge' list of items that don't circulate a certain amount that results in works being removed each year. Ours is a no-growth collection, so it's just as important to remove works that aren't going out as it is to keep adding new ones.

- **Storage and circulation of the collection**

Art can take up a lot of space! The Library stores the art in two ways, in bins and on the walls. These are located in an area that has a lot of patrons walking past it, but that also provides space to view and maneuver the works. The collection is open-access, so interested people can go through the items at will and take what they want. Patrons are also able to browse the collection in our catalog, as all of the items have records that include a unique call number and material designator (so one can browse just the art) titles, subject information, size and material descriptions, and pictures of the work. Patrons can also place holds on items while they are checked out.

We protect our art as best as we can, knowing that we cannot control how it is handled once it leaves the Library; frames are made of sturdy wood or metal, the works are all covered with Plexiglas, we only use wire hangers on the back, and we limit the size to no smaller than 12"x12" (you probably won't lose it or put it in a book return bin) and no larger than 36"x36" (that's pretty big, but you can still carry it and fit it in your car). Our Library uses a RFID security system, and all items have a security tag on them, in addition to multiple labels on the back.

## **Marketing**

ICPL is lucky to have a dedicated team of employees who work on public relations and marketing in many ways: we promote on our website; we have a newsletter that goes out twice a year to every Iowa City resident, informing them of Library programmes and services; we have staff that do regular social media updates; Librarians have a blog to highlight parts of our collections; our graphics team that creates logos, posters, fliers, bags, pins, bookmarks—you name it!—to help publicize and promote; and we send employees to a local radio station each month to chat on the air. If the timing is right, we use many of these methods to promote the art collection, especially when new items are added and

when we are soliciting works for the contest. The city also operates a media release email system that residents and local news agencies can have access to, and we use that to good effect. Similarly, if your local paper has a calendar or news section that you can contribute to, we've found that doing so often leads to phone calls from reporters looking to get a little additional information; the art collection has been featured in the local paper as well as the University student-run paper several times, and was recently the feature of short television piece.

Oddly enough, though, posters and fliers seem to be very effective for the Art Purchase Prize; we put a large, colour poster on the Library bulletin board in the entry way, along with a stack of entry forms, and then take smaller fliers around town to the art supply stores, galleries, coffee shops, bookstores, the university buildings, and other local shops—anywhere you think an interested artist might notice it.

Finally, the collection itself is in many ways the best way to market. Placed in a prominent place, patrons are sure to notice the large, colourful works and be drawn to them; this is the case for the collection in general, and new works being added. Pair the art with a display of your art books—instructional and representational—and you've got a nice demonstration of how the Library can entertain and educate at the same time.

### **Relevant statistics and information**

- 387 items in the collection at current time
- Budget for fiscal year 2014 is \$4,800, \$2,100 from operating budget, \$2,700 from gifts (this does not include money for repair, which comes from a general collection fund)
- Budget for Art Purchase Prize is \$2,700, for works and framing
- Budget for posters is \$2,100, for posters and framing
- 66% of the collection is checked out on average, at any time
- 47 works of art were entered in the 2013 contest
- 8 works were purchased at a cost of \$1,092 and framed at a cost of \$1,014
- 13 posters were purchased and framed in 2013, at a cost of \$2,175