

Client/provider relationship: Library as client and art students as provider

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Abstract

What started as a discussion about how to bring more art into the library developed into a valuable collaboration with faculty and students that brought murals into the architecture library. The arts and architecture librarian reached out to one of the painting professors to discuss showcasing student work in the branch library, and the result was an elaborate mural project. The librarian worked with two professors in the Department of Art and Art History and their students in fall 2017 to bring this artwork to fruition. This article covers how the project developed and how it resulted in creating an inviting space to inspire learning.

Keywords

- collaboration
- outreach
- spaces
- academic
- fine arts

Initial Outreach

The student mural, *Fragments from the Library of Babel*, on display in the Hight Architecture Library at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte), was the direct result of a conversation about bringing more art into the library. As the new arts and architecture librarian in late 2016, one of my primary mission was to increase the number of art exhibits in library spaces and to highlight student artwork as part of their scholarship production. As part of this mission, my colleague Jenna Duncan, the visual resources lecturer for the College of Arts + Architecture (COA+A), arranged a meeting with the gallery director (at that time) for the COA+A in the spring semester of 2017. We discussed how to best utilize library spaces, including the main library J. Murrey Atkins Library and the branch library Hight Architecture Library.

Specifically looking at the architecture library, which is located in Storrs Hall as the School of Architecture's building, there were spatial constraints related to high ceilings and high walls. As part of my research, I explored art installations at other libraries and found the faculty-led student piece entitled *Reflection* at The Robert E. Kennedy Library at Cal Poly State University (Kammermeyer, 2013). Initially, the former gallery director suggested methods for hanging temporary exhibits in the alcove space. However, she also suggested a more permanent painted installation as a way to utilize the high ceiling and walls in the entryway. She even suggested faculty members I could contact who had a reputation of being collaborative. One of these faculty members was Maja Godlewska, a professor of painting; she responded immediately and suggested a large-scale mural that would be well-suited as a project for her class the following fall semester. She also suggested using PVC board instead of painting directly on the walls in case we wanted to change the installation at some point. In turn, she brought in Erik Waterkotte who teaches print media and mixed media. The result was two studio art classes working on a joint mural for the library starting in fall 2017. The entire process took almost a year, starting from the initial outreach to the final installation. When entering the architecture library, visitors now see an inviting mural composed of brightly decorated boards along the two high walls.



View of the east wall in Hight Architecture Library showing the student mural after its installation.



View of the mural on the west wall. Photograph submitted by Maja Godlewska.

Following the initial faculty buy-in, the next step was to submit the proposal to the dean of Atkins Library and for the teaching faculty to reach out to the dean of COA+A. Since the final creation would reside in the architecture library, the library took the lead with funding the project. I coordinated meetings with the faculty, the library dean, and the library business manager to discuss the needed budget for materials. The dean for the college also contributed to the project, which allowed the students to test designs by printing large-scale mock-ups and the final printed designs. We encountered some differences in the spending process that we were able to overcome through communication. Members of the college were accustomed to requesting funds as needed while the library expected to issue an approved sum at the beginning of the project. As the subject librarian, I was able to act as a go-between for the two groups, and the solution was to move the entirety of the approved funds to the college so they could dispense the funds as needed. My role also required that I act as an intermediary again when the project required

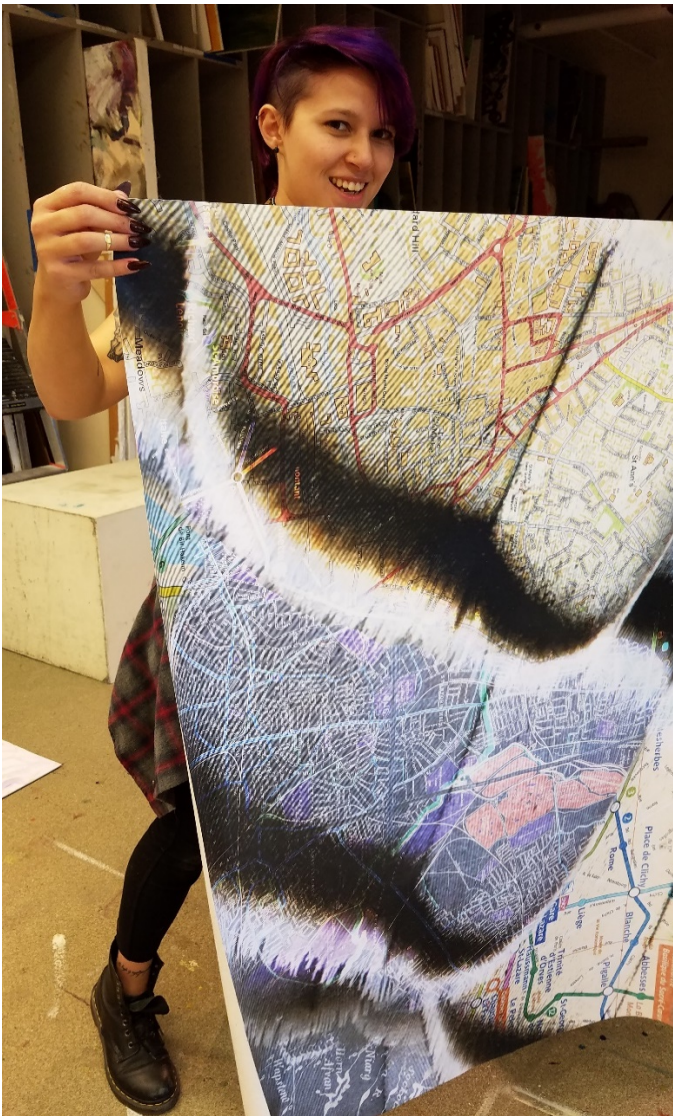
additional funding. In preparing for the installation, facilities staff from both the library and the university decided that scaffolding was necessary. In addition to paying for the scaffolding, extra funds were needed pay staff from Facilities Management to build the scaffolding and hang the pieces. Communication and an understanding of the differing procedures were critical during this process.

Working with the Art Classes

The two classes involved in the project were ARTR 3162 (Print Media 3: Lithography, Digital and Mixed Media) and ARTP 3161 (Mixed Media). There was a total of ten students registered for these classes. These courses were both intermediate studios intended to explore conceptual problems using color drawing media, painting, collage, lithographic printmaking techniques, and other alternative and traditional graphic methods. The students came from a variety of academic backgrounds, including art education and theatre as well as fine arts. Consequently, they brought varying artistic skills, such as painting, printmaking, and experience with Adobe Photoshop. Although this was a highly collaborative project, each student brought an individual perspective and skillset that was shared with the rest of the group. During the reception and artist talk for the mural, art student Philip Cherry said that working with the other students who had a variety of skills helped him “get past the barriers that you have as an artist because you don’t know certain techniques” (Balla, Cherry, Maguire, Petrauskas, & Biesheuvel, 2018).



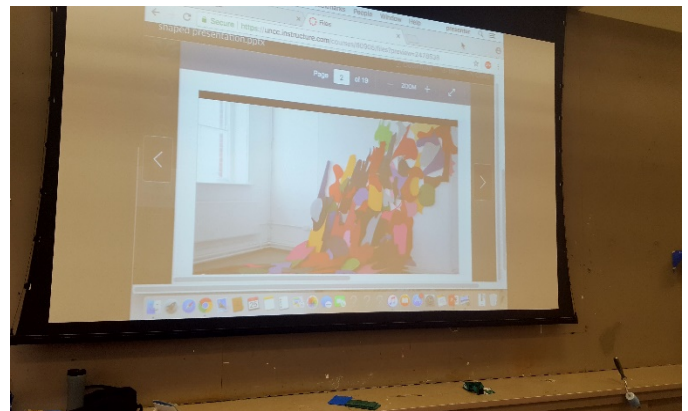
Collaboration between students was integral for the success of the mural. Seen here (clockwise) are student artists Myrthe Biesheuvel, Philip Cherry, and Aoibhin Maguire. Photograph submitted by Maja Godlewska



Student Kianna Balla holding a printed test image. The map imagery is evident in this piece. Photograph submitted by Maja Godlewska.

The syllabi for both classes required the same readings in order to encourage discussions and inform the students' work. Students began to think about the multiple functions of a library based on their readings, and they discussed how their designs could accommodate those functions. Two notable readings included *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard and *The Library of Babel* by Jorge Luis Borges. The latter reading even inspired the title of the mural. The students in both classes read several articles as well, and one article posited that the library is a system, which then led them to consider what other systems exist in the world and how those systems operate. The students considered naturally existing systems like those in the human body and in the environment. However, they also looked at manufactured systems

like roads and maps, especially since they were designing for a space in the School of Architecture. They also wanted to combine the abstract with the representational, as seen with leaves and maps versus the colored shapes and brushstrokes. You can see this iconography influence both the drafts and final design. The students also looked at work by several established artists who created murals and other types of installations. For example, the large-scale wall drawings of Sol Lewitt provided inspiration. Ultimately, all of the students wanted the imagery and colors to excite visitors using the space and to inspire ideas and help make connections. However, they understood that a library was also a space of quiet reflection and inquiry so they did not want their design to be overwhelming and distracting. The students were mindful of both the physical and functional space. All of these examples and readings were available through the course management system Canvas.



Photograph of class website in the class management system Canvas. Screen shows one example of work by other artists that the students studies for inspiration.

Students visited the architecture library throughout the semester in order to see how their work would fit in the space. They took several photographs and created mock-ups. The students considered both the restraints of physical space related to the size and height of the walls and the functions of the space for the students and faculty who use it. Alison Petraukas, an art education graduate student in the class, explained during the librarians' visit to their studio that they first asked themselves what the purpose or purposes of a library are. Their answers ranged from making connections (with other people and between ideas) to creating a sense of community. They also

associated the library with research and scholarship in whatever form that takes. The students asked the librarians for their definitions of a library during this class visit, and Associate Dean of Public Services Stephanie Otis agreed that creating a sense of community was a central function of a library.



Discussion between students and librarians during a visit to the studio.

Originally, the professors assigned each class its own wall to decorate while working in tandem with one another. The intention was to create a cohesive art piece while working as two groups. As the project progressed, the availability of time began to change these groupings. The students adjusted their collaborations based on their schedules, and this

simple step opened up greater possibilities for sharing ideas and techniques.



Students working in the studio to paint and cut pieces for the mural. Photograph submitted by Maja Godlewska.

Both classes came into the architecture library for their final exam and critique. Since they created the mural using multiple PVC boards, they brought several of those pieces to the library in order to envision how the artwork would function in the space. The faculty and students considered issues like natural and artificial light and debated about how it would affect viewing the work. The session consisted of discussions with faculty, other students, and myself about placement and groupings. We also documented

this part of the process through photographs and short videos. Some of the videos are viewable on YouTube through a [playlist](#) in addition to being archived on the library server. The students arranged and rearranged the pieces on the floor to decide which groupings worked well and which did not. They discussed the aesthetic aspects of the groupings but also physical limitations with the two walls. This exchange was an integral part of their scholarly discussion.



The classes held their final critique in the architecture library. Prof. Godlewska and student Allison Petrauskas discuss the arrangement of the mural pieces.



This photograph shows Prof. Waterkotte documenting the final critique with his camera as the students discuss how to combine the mural pieces.

Installation

There was a delay in the installation because of time constraints. The faculty realized that they would not have time during class and instead focused on getting the pieces ready for hanging the following semester in spring 2018. In preparation for the final installation, the faculty and students conducted test runs during class to determine the logistics of hanging the pieces and to decide on a placement order. The

faculty incorporated these test runs into studio time. The installation was an ongoing process, as we had to work through the logistics, which meant that the mural installation was delayed until March 2018.



Prof. Godlewska tests how to arrange and hang the mural.

Given the height of the walls, the library eventually needed to bring in the services of Facilities Management. They originally coordinated with a staff member from library facilities, but complications arose when the staff member was out of the office for an extended period. Working with the faculty and a designated staff member from Facilities Management, we determined that scaffolding was the only option to safely hang the mural since the building's elevators would not accommodate the automatic lifts. While this was an additional cost, the library determined it was

necessary to provide additional funds. Considering how complicated designing for the installation became and how laborious the actual mechanics of hanging the mural was, it made sense for the faculty to move the installation beyond the end of class time.



A test piece was hung to determine installation method and stability.

Once staff installed the scaffolding, the next step was to get all of the pieces moved to the architecture library and decide how to hang them. Several students from the class were able to participate in the installation process. They worked with the faculty to decide the arrangement and combination of the pieces. The faculty excelled in including the students in the decision-making process, and it became an extension of the classes' scholarly conversations. The professors and students had a draft design for the layout of the mural pieces, but the layout evolved once they began to hang the pieces. Professor Waterkotte shared that the height of the walls and the light coming in from the large window influenced the design alterations during the installation. They played with the mural pieces once they were in the space and even reversed some of them. Kianna Balla, a theatre major who worked on the mural and helped with the installation, described part of their thought process during the installation. According to Balla (Balla et al., 2018), they asked themselves, "What colors help accentuate this piece or that piece?" She explained that she had a different visual perspective of the mural pieces while she was standing on the ground and Waterkotte was standing on the scaffolding. She described each piece as having a life of its own. We also documented this process through [photographs](#) and [video](#).



Prof. Godlewska and Chris Shores from University Facilities hang the mural from on top of the scaffolding.

Reception and Artist Panel

In order to celebrate the creation and installation of the mural, I organized a reception and student artist panel in the architecture library. This programming was important since the mural was the students' visual form of scholarship and their research product. Five of the students (Kianna Balla, Philip Cherry, Aoibhin Maguire, Allison Petrauskas, and Myrthe Biesheuvel) who created the mural spoke about their work, and faculty and staff from both the library and the college attended. The event allowed the students to discuss their approaches to the project, what they thought worked, and what they would do differently. Part of this process included discussing how they worked with both the limitations and opportunities offered by the library as their client. Student Philip Cherry noted that the assignment offered "very structured expectations and space but a lot of creative freedom" as well (Balla et al., 2018). They shared all phases of the project from its original inception to its installation. They also discussed how their original designs were literal interpretations of a library with stacks of books including some books with wings drawn on them. According to Balla, they "realized that if you're stressed out while studying, you don't want to look at the thing (books) you trying to study" which could contribute to the students' anxiety (Balla et al., 2018). As the project progressed, they took a more open and expansive approach to representing a library. As noted, their readings strongly influenced their changing ideas.

Throughout the talk, the students also explained how they benefited from working with the librarians as real-world clients. This scenario with space requirements, a budget, and client input helped them

to prepare for their careers as artists. In order to address the space requirements or limitations, they students discussed the demanding nature of having to work with a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional level. They agreed that it was challenging to imagine how the colors, shapes, and combinations of the mural pieces would work together one on the wall. As a result, they rearranged some of their original groupings and decided to hang some pieces at varying angles. Student Aoibhin Maguire noted that the surrounding environment influenced the mural arrangement. She explained that they “realized that the large trees seen through the window would be important to how the artwork was perceived so they printed out images to see how it would look in the context” and adapted their designs based on this placement (Balla et al., 2018).



Members of the Library and the College, including both Dean Moore from Atkins Library and Dean Lambra from College of Arts & Architecture, attended the student artist talk.

As part of the outreach for the reception, I worked with the director of library communications and public relations and with the graphic and UX designer to create programming material and announcements. Ryan Miller, the graphics and UX designer, created promotional material and permanent signage that explains the work. He incorporated imagery from the mural into both the promotional material and the signage.

We attempted to record the presentation, and a staff member from the communications office at the college took the lead. However, the background noise and dim lighting made the recording unusable. Thomas Crocker, the technology and multimedia production coordinator, joined Atkins Library after the reception and tried to salvage parts of the video. Unfortunately, editing software cannot fix the audio and video. For similar events in the future, we will

manage recordings in-house in order to avoid a similar outcome. In the meantime, we are exploring alternatives, including interviewing students still at the university or in the Charlotte area. We will then record these interviews in the architecture library with the mural visible in the background. I have also sent the proposed interview questions to students who have graduated and no longer live in the area. Their responses will be archived in the website about the mural.

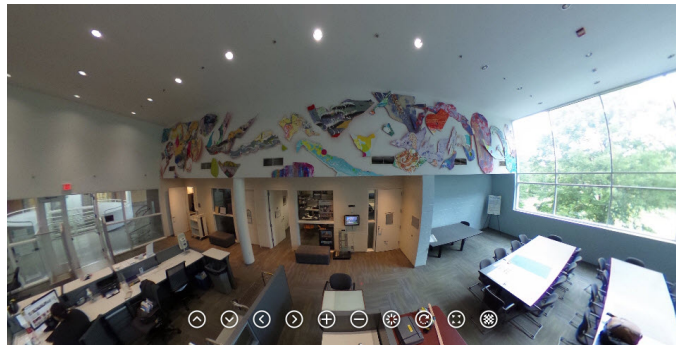


The library's graphic designer created a reception announcement incorporating imagery from the mural.

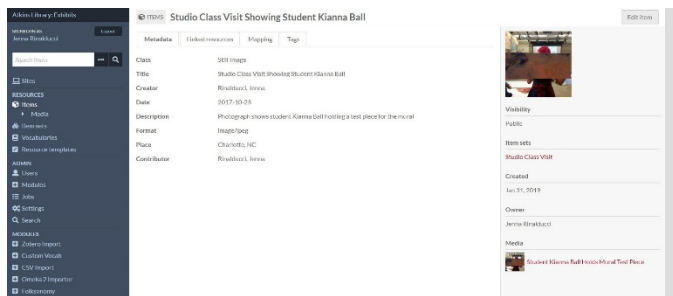
Online Presence

The [website](#) is currently being constructed using the Omeka S platform and is publicly visible. It will eventually detail the entire process of creating the mural. Throughout the semester, participants documented the progress with photographs and videos. These files are currently being stored in university's cloud storage space, and they are steadily being uploaded to the library server and Omeka platform. The website will primarily include photographs, short videos, and text documents. In addition to my photographs, I will include images submitted by faculty and students. Text documents will include the courses' reading list, written interviews, artist statements, and partial transcriptions of the class visit and the artist panel. A [timeline](#) will also be a prominent feature on the site. It will track the year it took to bring the mural to fruition, from its inception to the unveiling. The technology and multimedia coordinator also created a 360° view of the mural since the work spans two walls and is impossible to see all at once. I will embed [this view](#)

into the website to help online visitors understand the space the mural resides in. This combination of visual materials and text will provide a framework for better understanding the project and the steps involved. The website is also an opportunity to highlight the unique scholarship created by art students since their work does not always fit into the traditional definition with research papers and experiments.



Screenshot of the 360° view of the mural created by Technology and Multimedia Coordinator Thomas Crocker.



Screenshot of the Omeka S site created to archive and highlight the library mural.

Final Thoughts

Collaboration was a prominent theme throughout the project. The students discussed the same readings, shared ideas, learned about different techniques from each other. In addition to the students' collaboration, there was collaboration among the departments within the Library and with the COA+A. As a result, there were two primary stakeholder groups. One group was the library. This group included members from various library departments.

- Library Administration
 - dean of the library
 - business officer
 - public relations officer
- Research and Instructional Services

- arts and architecture librarian
- Technology and Digital Services
 - graphic designer
 - technology and multimedia coordinator

The other group drew from the COA+A. This group included the following members:

- College Administration
 - dean of the college
 - business service coordinator
 - members of the communications and external relations team
- Department of Art and Art History
 - painting professor
 - mixed media/print media professor
 - ten students enrolled in their classes

Ultimately, the library was able to act as the client in this exchange, and the students were able to play the role of provider.

Reflecting on the project after its completion, there were several things that worked well and other things that we would do differently. An early issue was the handling of the budget and ordering supplies. The library required a total amount at the beginning of the project, but the art faculty were accustomed to spending as they progressed through their project. Once we realized that the two department operated differently with submitting purchase requests, the library business manager was able to shift the approved fund to the COA+A so that they could spend the funds as needed. The installation also presented budget issues since scaffolding was eventually needed. Once library administration approved the additional funds, we were able to focus on hanging the work. However, this step proved to be complicated. The main tasks were maintaining communications and coordinating schedules between the art department and facilities. I often acted as the intermediary between the groups in the beginning.

Overall, these hurdles proved to be worth the effort. This collaboration took me out of my usual activities with instruction, reference, and collection development and provided a rewarding experience. It also strengthened the relationship between Atkins Library and the COA+A, as well as the Department of Art and Art History.

This project highlights the unique research and teaching undertaken in the COA+A, reflecting the intersection of design and intellectual curiosity. The library provided the students real-world applications for their scholarship. It also allowed librarians to be fully immersed in the research and teaching of these students. Ultimately, the final project unified the scholarship of both fine arts and architecture students in their shared college. In turn, it has created an inviting space to inspire learning.

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Media Links embedded in article

- Playlist:<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxHqKcr86TO44gX1mCQueen8AWdhpdcZni>
- Photographs:<https://exhibits.uncc.edu/s/babel/page/mural-installation>
- Video:<https://youtu.be/5vmUbA8z3hE>
- Website:<https://exhibits.uncc.edu/s/babel>
- Timeline:
<https://exhibits.uncc.edu/s/babel/page/timeline>
- View:<https://theta360.com/s/poPcXyE89zWgP408j9tntlLge>