

2020 Courier Workshop

I was privileged to attend the two day 2020 Courier Workshop at the Modern Museum Art Museum of Forth Worth on March 12-13, 2020. The workshop was led by Kathy Richmond who is the Registrar at the Museum of London and former chair of the UK Registrars Group. Her experience spans across the registrarial spectrum and includes work for the Tate and Royal Armouries Museum. Kathy, along with Desirée Blomberg (Group Manager, Exhibition Coordination & Loans, Moderna Museet and Board Member, Nordic Registrars Group) and Wendela Brouwer (Head Registrars Office, Rijksmuseum and Chair, Nederlandse Registrars Group) developed the Courier Training Framework in order to promote best courier practice in museums and galleries. Workshop attendees were provided with the Courier Training Framework, Courier Manual, a template for courier scenarios, a template for a courier questionnaire and instructions on how to bring the training to life as well as a PowerPoint template for conducting future training.

The first day of the workshop involved walking through the Courier Training Framework to understand all the parts and pieces of the training program. Day one commenced with the history behind the training development. The main takeaways from the history portion were: it is designed to be conducted by those who have courier experience; the program is free to use but must be used in a not-for-profit manner; the program is customizable to adapt to various institutions, and museums should consider conservators, art handlers, shipping agents, registrars, etc... when tailoring the training.

Initial discussions addressed what is a courier and why one is needed. Discussions also included what is bad and good courier behavior. Bad behaviors include being abusive to staff, packing personal effects in a crate, being intoxicated while on duty amongst other things. Good couriers tend to exhibit awareness of their surroundings, flexibility, and graciousness, are knowledgeable about all aspects of the process, and are confident. The many interactive activities throughout the day encouraged participation and collaboration. Kathy used a tool called Direct Poll where the attendees could all respond to poll questions using their smart phones. I was surprised to learn that the majority of attendees had never received any formal courier training thus demonstrating the need for the Courier Training Framework and the workshop. Another activity had the attendees in pairs discussing what they hoped to learn from the workshop. One of the most beneficial activities was that of developing various courier scenarios that involved problems and then working together in small groups to solve the problems and learn the best ways to respond. There was also a great role-playing activity where one member of the group was the registrar and the other the courier coming to install a piece. Each was given background information on their character which would impact the installation process. It was fun and engaging and really helped all of us think outside the box!

The second day involved administering the training (after having learned the parts and pieces). Other attendees volunteered to administer certain sections of the training giving them a chance to practice. Being someone who has never been on a courier trip and is relatively new to the collections management field, I found the second day provided the most meaningful information for me. The added personal experience tidbits from those seasoned professionals who administered the training were invaluable to the novice. Perhaps the most helpful section during the second day was the session led by Masterpiece International. They covered from start to finish what to expect at the cargo terminal and gave practical tips and advice as well as excellent visuals so we all had a clear understanding of what to anticipate. I personally came away with a whole page of notes on processes and procedures inside the cargo facility and courier etiquette on cargo freighters.

Overall, I highly recommend this workshop. This training framework is well researched and developed. It was invaluable to be able to network with other collection specialists and to learn from those who are seasoned couriers. As a speaker, Kathy was friendly, engaging and easy to follow. She made the experience profitable as well as enjoyable. As a first-time courier, I think I would have greatly benefited by taking day two of the workshop before day one. Perhaps in future workshops, there could be the option for brand new couriers to be trained on day one and then learn the most effective way to give the training on day two. This was my first ARCS conference or workshop, and the attention to detail by those who planned everything was much appreciated.

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