

Library Society

Carley Demchuk, AB'09 (right), who is considering either a Ph.D. in art history or a career as a surgeon, took a break from doing oncology research to explore gifts from the Library Society with Professor Mehring



PHOTO BY LLOYD DEGRANE

Founding Voices and *Primary Structures* —Gifts from the Library Society

When Christine Mehring, associate professor of art history, taught a class on abstraction and design in the winter of 2008, she wanted her students to have access to the catalog of the 1966 landmark exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*.

“*Primary Structures* was the single most important exhibition in American art of the 1960s,” Mehring said. “It defined Minimalist sculpture as a new tendency and as a movement in art focused on the relationships between object, viewer, and space.” Five of her 25 students would have benefited from using the catalog for their research papers, and Mehring herself was studying the exhibition as part of her research on Minimalism.

Learning of this need, Nancy Spiegel, the Library’s bibliographer for art and cinema, located a scarce copy of the catalog and put in a successful proposal for funding to the Library Society. As a

result of the Society’s generosity, the catalog is now readily accessible in Special Collections, where students in Mehring’s upcoming fall quarter seminar on American Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd will be able to use it. And Mehring’s mentee, Carley Demchuk, AB ’09, is consulting it for a presentation she will make while holding an internship this summer at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

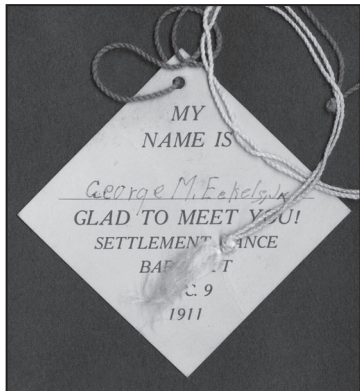
“*Primary Structures* is a telling example of the way in which a catalog of contemporary art becomes a primary, historical source document,” said Mehring. “Looking at it, you see that the actual exhibit was much more expansive than people think, and that artists and art historians since have developed a much more narrow view of Minimalism.”

Collecting such catalogs is invaluable for research in art history. “We want to be able to go back to the

www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/libra/

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Library

Spring at the Library



From a University of Chicago scrapbook kept by George M. Eckels (S.B. '16), 1911-1914, Virginia Eckels Malone Family Collection

such collections more readily discoverable (page 4). The Malone Family Collection (pictured above) and the papers of the Hyde Park Historical Society cast light on history that is close to home, while other collections come from cultures that span the globe, from the Soviet Union in the 1930s to the transnational work of Professor A. K. Ramanujan, a poet, translator, linguist, and folklorist.

I hope you will visit the Library this spring, to join in the discovery of local and international history, as well as contemporary art and science.

With warmest regards,

Philip M. Burno
Library Society Chairman

Founding Voices

Continued from reverse

contemporary moment,” Mehring explained. “Magazines and catalogs have become our primary materials.”

Mehring frequently invites Spiegel to meet with prospective graduate students when they visit campus. They are deeply impressed, Mehring reported, when she explains how often Spiegel is able to obtain specific resources that faculty and graduate students need for their research and teaching.

Notably, the Library Society’s generosity allowed Spiegel to acquire a second item for Mehring as well: *Autobiography Sol LeWitt 1980*. The late LeWitt was “a founding voice and practitioner of so-called Conceptual Art,” Mehring explained, a movement that “in many ways paved the ground for a revival of artists’ books.”

As the Library Society awaits the 2011 opening of the Mansueto Library (see *Libra* page 3) and the beautiful new Special Collections Research Center exhibition gallery recently approved by the Board of Trustees (page 2), we are delighted that the Library’s program of exhibitions continues in other spaces.

In Regenstein’s lobby, an exhibit celebrating the first National Preservation Week runs from May 8 to 16, together with a colorful collection of poster works by Japanese artist Tadanori Yokoo, on display through June 19. Visitors to the John Crerar Library can learn about scientific advances in environmental building design in the Atrium through October 1 (page 6).

Meanwhile, the Special Collections staff is hard at work processing archival collections, such as a gift of family papers from the Estate of Virginia Eckels Malone. Recently published finding aids are making

Mehring plans to use *Autobiography Sol LeWitt 1980* when she teaches core courses, as she expects College students to be able to relate to autobiography as a genre and to learn from the way in which LeWitt subverts its classic conventions. The *Autobiography* documents every item in his home exhaustively and absurdly, arranging them linearly, without narrative, ostensibly giving equal weight to each object.

“And yet books are in the center,” Mehring observed, pointing to the photos of LeWitt’s bookshelves in the *Autobiography*’s center spread. “They’re at the heart of the project. There certainly is some meaning to that, as absurd as the overall collection may be.”

Because of the Library Society and the Library, books such as these are available at the heart of the University of Chicago campus.

Member Spotlight

Gail Pinc McClain

Library Society Membership Chair Gail Pinc McClain acquired her lifelong love of books from her parents. Her mother would conduct research for her book clubs by taking the entire family on expeditions to local museums and zoos. And, unusually, Gail has fond memories of her childhood bout with the measles—because her father read her a portion of *Northwest Passage* every night, until the book was finished and the measles were gone.

In high school, Gail developed an interest in Eastern European and Russian literature, which was cemented when she worked for George V. Bobrinsky, Sr. in the 1950s. During a meal at the Quadrangle Club, Professor Bobrinsky told Gail that, while growing up in Russia, his father and Leo Tolstoy had been friends and neighbors, and that he had been able to listen in on their conversations. Having just finished reading *War and Peace* when she learned this, Gail was fascinated.

The pleasure of personally connecting with books and of discussing them with interesting people in an environment that invites dialogue are what led Gail to work to reinvigorate the Library Society in 1982 when she was the Library’s director of development. It is also what has kept her committed to the Library Society more than 25 years later. Gail remembers that fewer than 20 people attended her first meeting, in contrast to the 90 who typically attend now.

Continuing to grow the membership is Gail’s passion, and she firmly believes that “our best sources for finding new members are our current members. They understand the importance of the Library Society.” If you know someone who is interested in joining the Library Society, please contact Barbara Palmer-Bostick at bbostick@uchicago.edu or 773-702-7695.