

Visual and Performing Arts in Libraries: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Visual and performing arts can transform people's understanding and appreciation of the world. The American Library Association affirms that visual and performing arts can be a powerful component of library services and collections. A community's right to access, view, create, and participate in the arts offered by the library is as important as the community's right to access any other content.¹

Both physical and virtual library spaces may be used by the community to interact with artistic content and programs. Many offer facilities for users to create their own art. Works of visual and performing arts may be temporary exhibits, permanent installations, programs, or part of a library's collection.

Libraries are encouraged to be intentional in including diverse voices, be it through books in many languages, performances, or exhibits from many cultural traditions. These actions reflect the library's commitments to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In developing library exhibits and programs, libraries should present a broad spectrum of opinions and viewpoints as codified in the Library Bill of Rights, Sections I and II. Libraries should not avoid developing exhibits or programs because of controversial content or because of the beliefs or affiliations of those whose work is represented. Libraries do not endorse the viewpoints of the artists, the owners, or the exhibitors whose work is represented in their collections and programs. Libraries also do not endorse

¹ For the purposes of this interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, as it pertains to visual and performing arts in libraries, visual art is defined as follows: Visual art is created or designated by an artist, with the implication of manufacture, and aesthetics, or the ability to affect the human senses in some way. Ultimately visual art is a product involving the artist's creativity, the viewer's perception, and a representation of the culture and time in which the work was produced. Visual art has visual properties (whether or not it is seen) and some aspects of the formal elements of art – line, shape, color, form, texture etc. Art can serve personal, political, and aesthetic functions including personal expression, social, historical or political messaging. It may enhance day-to-day living, and/or create visual delight, as well as challenge the status quo. Visual art can be a vehicle for profit or investment, but primarily the arts play a vital role in our ability to communicate ideas of all kinds to all people. Performance art is defined as physical movement, placement or theatrical activity involving people in defined space, with the explicit or implicit application of direction, choreography or curatorial planning or design. Performance Art may include aspects or elements of music, dance, mime, and acting, with or without attributes of professional or amateur stagecraft. "As with the visual arts, performance art may either confirm or challenge cultural familiarity and often celebrates the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion as much as it serves to entertain the viewer.

the beliefs or viewpoints of topics that may be the subject of library's visual and performing arts exhibits and programs.

Gallery or performing space may be made available for use by community groups or individuals. Libraries should formulate a written policy for the use of these areas to assure that space is provided on an equitable basis to all that request it.

Written policies for gallery or performing space use should be stated in inclusive rather than exclusive terms. However, as with any meeting space, a publicly funded library may restrict space usage to "strictly "library-related" activities, provided that the limitation is clearly circumscribed and is viewpoint neutral"¹. Policies and publicity should be written to encourage use of library group spaces by a broad range of organizations and individuals.

The library should provide a welcoming and content-rich environment for youth to engage with library resources or to create their own creative projects. The Library Bill of Rights consistently upholds the rights of youth to receive information in libraries and to participate in library programs and services². As such, youth's access to visual and performing arts within the library should not be curtailed in any way whenever possible.

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) specifically requires public libraries and schools seeking e-rate discounts for internet connections to install content filters to block two categories of visual images unprotected by the First Amendment: obscene images and images of child pornography. A third category, "harmful to minors," must also be filtered for minors under the age of 17. These three categories have specific legal definitions, and libraries participating in e-rate programs should take appropriate measures to filter what is covered by this law. Because filters consistently over- and under-block images, they can be especially problematic when attempting to access information on visual arts. Library policy should therefore encourage and allow library users to ask for filtered websites and content to be unblocked with minimal delay and with due respect for user privacy. Libraries should consult the Filtering interpretation for more information on CIPA³.

All art in the library's permanent or exhibit holdings are an integral part of the library's collection. Collection development policies should include the collection of or access to art. When the library plans exhibits or performances, the selection should consider the entirety of the communities served and should provide a diversity of points of view. Library performances or visual images should not be restricted based on content.

The library's policies for arts-orientated programming, group meetings, and exhibits should be readily available to the public. Behavior policies should not be used to limit access to art or performances in the library⁴. If users object to art in the library, there should be a method of recourse, similar to a reconsideration policy, for expressing their concerns.

1. "[Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)," Adopted July 2, 1991, by the ALA Council.
2. "[Library Bill of Rights](#)," Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.
3. "[Internet Filtering: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)," Adopted June 30, 2015, by the ALA Council.
4. "[Guidelines for the Development of Policies and Procedures Regarding User Behavior and Library Usage](#)," Adopted January 24, 1993, by the Intellectual Freedom Committee; revised November 17, 2000; revised January 19, 2005