Smithsonian Libraries Hires Head of Special Collections

Smithsonian Institution Libraries is pleased to announce the new Head of the Special Collections Department, Lilla Vekerdy. Vekerdy has more than 20 years of experience in rare books preservation and management, most recently serving for 17 years as a rare-book librarian and course master at the Washington University School of Medicine’s Bernard Becker Medical Library in St. Louis. She will oversee the Libraries’ special collections in all 20 branches, most notably the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology in the National Museum of American History and the Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History in the National Museum of Natural History. In addition, Vekerdy will curate exhibitions and thematic rare-book displays, coordinate all activities involving the Libraries’ special collections and work closely with fund-raising and donor development activities for the Libraries.

Originally from Hungary, Vekerdy has lived in the United States for 17 years. She earned a bachelor’s of art in literature, linguistics and library sciences, a master’s of art with a teaching certificate in literature and linguistics and a master’s of library science, with a concentration in early prints and manuscripts from the Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary. Vekerdy has also completed doctoral studies in medieval, renaissance and early modern history at St. Louis University in St. Louis.

At Washington University, Vekerdy managed nine historical rare-book and journal collections and taught college classes on the history of medicine, focused primarily in 16th-century studies. Vekerdy has published three scholarly books, three book chapters and eight historical articles. She is currently active as president of the Archivists and Librarians in the History of the Health Sciences and a member of the American Association for the History of Medicine.

Vekerdy describes her new position at the Smithsonian Libraries as a watercolor: something without too defined lines, just myriad impressions. Her goal is to make the Libraries more visible to the world; she said, “The library systems at the museums initially grew behind the exhibit and research programs. Many people are unaware of the Smithsonian’s libraries because they have stayed behind the scene. Now we want to be in the forefront, to let the unique elements of libraries shine, not be in the background.” Vekerdy plans to take an active approach in opening the libraries to the general public, scholars and researchers. Her outreach efforts will extend to an audience of many ages, such as the Libraries’ patrons and donors, readers, museum visitors and the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center kindergarten class.

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