***In Situ* and in Cyberspace: the Art Library and Art-Historical Research in the Twenty-First Century**

In Situ et dans le cyberspace : la bibliothèque d'art et la recherche en histoire de l'art au XXI^e siècle

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In Situ and in Cyberspace: the Art Library and Art-Historical Research in the Twenty-First Century

Kathleen Salomon

Distinctive by the nature of their collections and the aura surrounding their subject matter, art libraries are exceptional places. Traditionally they have been stimulating places to interact with collections and quiet places to think and write, and moreover the specialized nature of the materials often housed within an art library has very often required attentive physical care and use in a controlled space. Over the past few decades, user expectations in art libraries have shifted, primarily due to digital technology. Today's custodians and users of art libraries are well positioned to reconsider with perspective and vision the collections, services, and the places libraries occupy in the practice of art history, both physically and intellectually – indeed the very definition of an art library for the twenty first century.

A few years ago, Hubertus Kohle published his vision for the art library of the future.¹ As one might expect, that future art library (of 2022) has every imaginable technological capability that could be useful to a scholar, including on-demand printing of books and objects, virtual exhibitions that could be developed and shared, and 3-D viewing capabilities for art objects around the world. Notable in his description is that the idea of the art library as a place to conduct research and produce results – though with different tools, resources, and outcomes – remains. But how that library is defined, both inside and outside of its physical space, and where it begins and ends, is a focus of new consideration. In tandem with being a locus for scholarly production, the imperative for a library to facilitate exchange, connections, and collaboration by developing and hosting spaces, both physical and virtual, is becoming ever more critical to the work of the art historian, both *in situ* and in cyberspace. As different as Kohle's library of the future is from existing art libraries, there is a

correlation between such future visions and those from the past. The challenges faced by the Getty Research Institute Library, since the realization of a vision first outlined at the cusp of the digital era thirty years ago, provide a framework through which to consider art libraries and their relationship to the practice of art-historical research.²

Connecting in the art library

A secular monastery for thinking. A crowded auditorium for scrutiny and debate. A place to connect a “truly informed collection of materials with productive and imaginative intellectual work.”³ These concepts shaped the design and development of the new Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in Los Angeles, California (now The Getty Research Institute or GRI) in the last quarter of the twentieth century (fig. 1).

In all aspects of planning for the new research institute, the aim was to bring together a large library of resource collections – support literature, images, and stimulating primary documentation – in an exceptional building that would as a whole enable and engender a variety of unique research experiences for visiting scholars and Getty staff through its innovative architecture, design, and services. Far away from the established centers for art-historical study in Europe and on the east coast of the United States, a major new independent art research library and institute in Southern California would fill an important need. Its unusual setting in a major new arts complex on a chaparral-covered hill, within the stark white and glass round space designed by architect Richard Meier, signaled the originality of its concept. The Research Institute's first director Kurt W. Forster suggested that instead of having a traditional reading room aiming to represent all knowledge laid out in a deterministic pattern, the entire Research

1. Richard Meier, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 1998.

2. The Aby Warburg Library, in Hamburg, in 1926.

3. View of the library of The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Institute and library would be more like “a prism than a monolith [where its]...activities and purposes are refracted throughout and not solidly and simply present in one place.”⁴ In the library, then, multiple paths/ideas/possibilities would refract from the various assemblages of materials contained in its various spaces. This metaphor gave particular weight to decisions about the location of the materials, given that the new building’s open stack areas were designed to hold only a small percentage of the library’s vast book and journal collections. It articulated the challenge of deciding what would be placed on the open shelves, and what would instead be held in storage vaults and only hinted at by the essence of what one could see on open access. While broadly emulating Aby Warburg’s ideals regarding the relationship of materials to one another, the “law of the good neighbour”, making “inspired connections”, and the importance of placement on a shelf (fig. 2),⁵ the modern problem of space limitations in the new GRI library was now counterbalanced by the developing potential in library technologies. In the final plan for the library, an incomplete cylindrical shape wrapping around a core of light⁶ was placed adjacent to a square, providing more than one

path leading into the library, allowing researchers to use as much or as little as they needed, by offering multiple access points along the way into smaller areas of open book stacks, a periodicals room, a special collections reading room, and a browsable photo archive.

Expectations for discovery

By the time the Research Library opened its doors as a part of the new Getty Center in late 1997, everything about the three floors of the library was geared toward connecting and inspiring the fortunate reader with library materials (fig. 3). Over the next decade, as the Research Institute established itself further, use of the library and archives increased dramatically, bringing in an expanding international community of in-residence scholars and registered readers. At the same time, the way in which the library’s collections were being used and perceived by both users and staff was slowly shifting. As staff workloads grew heavier due to increased use and acquisitions levels, the vision of having open stacks that would constantly be nurtured and refreshed by dedicated bibliographers was no longer sustainable, and, with few exceptions, the open stacks grew more outdated each year. As a result, in just a decade those book stacks so carefully curated to encourage connections and represent the library collections in microcosm, were used less frequently than initially imagined as more and more important materials were housed remotely. Certainly, once researchers realized the depth and currency of the collections not available in the open stacks, some lamented the inability to fully browse physically and experience the serendipity of discovery. In the age of remote storage in libraries of all manner, the meaning of “discovery” was changing and the introduction of increasingly sophisticated online tools promised to unite collections virtually, if not physically. And in more recent years displaying titles together on a virtual “shelf” to simulate open-stack browsing is possible.

During the same period, online full-text resources on one’s desktop became more prevalent and consequently a growing number of the art journals so painstakingly processed for the open stacks just a few years prior were no longer being consulted at all. Taking note that Google’s digitization strategy in selected academic libraries did not include the bulk of early art-historical texts

located in specialized art libraries, the GRI began developing its own plans for book digitization. Finally, with the advent of so many images available on the web, the necessity of the traditional photo archive for image research was uncertain as usage declined.

At the GRI, conventional use of the library was subtly changing and over time it appeared less important for both staff and users to consider the physical adjacencies of collections. Yet, even with the availability of full text resources, a program for digitization on-demand where possible, and increased borrowing abilities through interlibrary loan, scholars were still coming to the library. Like so many of its art library peers, the GRI was and remains primarily non-circulating and requires most users to read materials on site. Even when the library committed to digitizing the early literature of art history from its holdings, the barriers set by copyright and resource requirements would continue to make bringing every relevant print volume online impossible. New art-related titles continue to be published in print and acquired by the thousands each year, and for the most part they still are not being made available digitally by publishers, primarily due to the complex copyright laws surrounding images in books.⁷ Ironically, as the library's reach has become more global and as more of the GRI's holdings are made available online, more art historians from more locations, particularly from non-western areas, are traveling to California in order to consult the constellation of specialized art books and journals not readily available in their home countries.

Discovery in the archive

At the same time, through online discovery tools and digitization, an international awareness of the GRI's unique collections of archives and other materials was growing and the potential for discovery within them was immense. A cache of letters, a particular sketchbook, an annotated photograph, a find in a dealer's stockbook, or a description of a destroyed object that has never before been published have traditionally been the kind of discovery that can build a scholar's career. The excitement of making such a find in the middle of some other documents, or perhaps cataloged separately but never really used before, has often been equal only to the fear of being scooped by another researcher before publication. The demand from potential users to

digitize more of the specialized archives is high, yet only a relatively small portion of the unique materials have been scanned, again due to copyright concerns and/or the heavy resources necessary for both pre- and post-production staff and equipment. Therefore, most of the materials that have been digitized tend to serve only as an introduction to the larger archival collections, and are an invitation to come and view more in person. When a remote user requests scans from a box of documents, a decision might follow to digitize the entire collection, if feasible, and put it online. Putting all or a cohesive part of an archive online serves the library's overall goal to provide free and open access to its holdings and thereby expands its reach beyond its walls. However, these seemingly straightforward and altruistic decisions on the part of the library can call into question the very notion of discovery for some scholars, who argue against premature online exposure of "their" findings.⁸ The ethical dilemma of acceding to such demands risks diminishing the tremendous potential for innovative research that is inherent in sharing archival collections broadly online. What was once the privileged territory of the relative few who could travel can now potentially be opened to anyone with an internet connection. Whether one first encounters a document in the archive or online, perhaps it is not the fact of the discovery, but rather what is done with the information – how it is interpreted, what questions are asked, what connections are made, and debates begun (in short, how the ideas refract from the items) – that will have the greatest impact on scholarly debate.

Connecting collections

When materials are made broadly available online, what it means to discover something changes and the potential for connections among documents increases exponentially. The visions developed in the late 1980s for how research would be conducted in the GRI's new art library seemed to anticipate the online world it would soon embrace. The metaphor of a prism carries through to cyberspace, with its infinite refractions that are the permutations from the online sources. In both its physical and virtual environments, the library is an active facilitator encouraging new modes of research and unexpected outcomes.

4. View of the Labrouste reading room, Paris, Library of the French Institute for Art History (INHA), 2016.

Where in the past an art bibliography, like a library, might suggest pathways for new research, valiantly but impossibly attempting to capture the collective output of a field that each year grows ever more interdisciplinary and global, today many of those pathways, and often the resources themselves, are found online and in various ways and forms.⁹ Projects like the collaborative Getty Research Portal bring together the corpus of art-historical literature online.¹⁰ The nascent PHAROS project surrounding the millions of documentary photographs housed in photo archives worldwide would do the same for image research.¹¹ Archives that have been dispersed across oceans can be united online.¹² And today's emerging International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) and associated developments of online viewers and other tools are poised to provide easier comparative study and endless opportunities to unite or re-unite materials, particularly image and textual collections, on a grand scale with significant consequences for art-historical research.¹³ Searching across collections, comparing images or texts among them, and mining the data within them, inspires creative exploration and discovery of connections and trends in art history.¹⁴

Access and art-historical research

Art historians negotiate research through the points of access that are available to them – access to artworks, access to images, access to documents, access to publications. Selecting, acquiring, preserving, and providing access to research materials for art-historical study have been traditional roles for the art library in which they are housed. Nearly two decades into the twenty-first century, engagement with the research materials of art history is a hybrid of traditional research and more innovative methods.

No longer tied solely to the collections within the art library's building, in many ways librarians and art historians are now reinventing their relationship to the art library, whose role in art-historical research remains multifaceted. The largest and most well-resourced art libraries still collect actively, taking the long view that these materials in their original format will still be needed in the future, be that in hard copy or born digital. Art historians still expect to visit the art library and connect with materials. The new INHA Salle Labrouste, set to seat many hundreds of readers per day amidst close to 250,000 materials in open stacks, acknowledges this perceived requirement among researchers in France (**fig. 4**).¹⁵ Similarly, researchers working at the Getty Research Institute may still desire some of that traditional monastic ambience for reading, for thinking, for looking, and for writing. But today, when archival research is frequently about taking photos on one's mobile device for later consultation rather than for careful study in the archive, when so many books are housed in storage, and when reading books and periodicals may be often done online instead of in person, art libraries are also increasingly encouraging and facilitating collaborative scholarship, teaching, and the development and production of new resources among scholars and staff.¹⁶

Art history still requires people connecting with materials and with each other to produce new scholarship. Technology has forever altered the landscape. The art library of the future will be a place for connecting in-person and using the physical materials, as well as one that hosts collaborative environments in cyberspace, where a variety of collections online and the data sets created from them will be the focus for group projects, publications, and discussions. There will still be a crowded auditorium for scrutiny

and debate, but with the capability for real-time streaming, global interaction, and simultaneous seminars around the globe that will, in effect, push the walls out tenfold. At the Getty Research Institute, the physical library spaces so carefully imagined and crafted only three decades ago will most likely change accordingly – more seminar rooms, more flexible spaces for using unique materials and creating resources of all kinds with highly evolved technology integrated throughout will eventually replace many of the open stacks. Still, ideas will refract from the library collections, wherever they are located and however they are discovered, connecting materials with productive and imaginative intellectual work, both *in situ* and in cyberspace.

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1. Hubertus Kohle, "Die Kunstbibliothek der Zukunft. Eine Vision," in *AKMB-news*, 18/2, 2012, p. 3-8.
2. Concurrent with the development of the new Getty library and research institute, another of the Getty Trust's new programs, the Art History Information Program, conducted a research study to determine what kinds of automated tools and resources might be useful for art historians: Elizabeth Bakewell, William O. Beeman, Carol McMichael Reese, *Object, Image, Inquiry: The Art Historian at Work*, Santa Monica, 1988.
3. Thomas F. Reese, "'Taking sail': Kurt Forster's Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities," in Nanni Baltzer *et al.*, *Art History on the Move: Hommage an Kurt W. Forster*, Zurich, 2010, p. 263.
4. Harold M. Williams *et al.*, *The Getty Center: Design Process*, Los Angeles, 1991, p. 142.
5. Ernst Gombrich, Fritz Saxl, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography with a Memoir on the History of the Library*, Oxford, 1986, p. 327. See also "The Warburg Institute Library: Description and Services," The Warburg Institute, London, <http://warburg-archive.sas.ac.uk/library/description-services/#c307> (viewed May 28, 2016).
6. Kurt Forster *et al.*, unpublished document, "The Concept and Role of the Resource Collections at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities," July 20, 1988, p. 6, in *Getty Research Institute Librarian Anne-Mieke Halbrook Records, 1971-2000*, Getty Research Institute, IA60001.
7. The GRI currently acquires approximately 18,000-20,000 newly-published print volumes a year. To put that in context, in 2014 approximately 90% of Yale University's yearly acquisitions of art-related books and periodicals were print publications. Sarah Falls, Holly Hathaway, "The Art of Change: The Impact of Place and the Future of Academic Art Library Collections," in *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 21/2, 2015, p. 190, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2015.1031259> (viewed March 25, 2016).
8. At the GRI this is an ongoing source of debate. Presently the policy is to embargo a "discovery" planned for publication for one year before publishing online.
9. See http://www.getty.edu/research/institute/development_collaborations/fab/ (viewed May 28, 2016).
10. See <http://portal.getty.edu> (viewed May 27, 2016).
11. See "Kress President's Message", online: http://www.kressfoundation.org/about/presidents_message (viewed May 28, 2016).
12. See <http://ema.smb.museum/en/home/> (viewed May 7, 2016).
13. See <http://iiif.io> (viewed May 15, 2016). Particularly relevant are the Biblissima project, see <http://www.biblissima-condorcet.fr/en> (viewed May 28, 2016), and the Digital Cicognara Library, see <http://cicognara.org> (viewed May 28, 2016).
14. See Johanna Drucker *et al.*, "Digital Art History: The American Scene," in *Perspective*, 2, 2015, p. 2-13, doi: 10.4000/perspective.6021 (viewed April 25, 2016).

15. Sébastien Gaudelus, Martine Poulain, Lucile Trunel, "The Renovation of the Richelieu Building: A Future Centre for Art Researchers in Paris," in *Art Libraries Journal*, 36/1, 2011, p. 13, online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0307472200016734> (viewed October 7, 2016).

16. See Matthew P. Long and Roger C. Schonfeld, "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Art Historians," in *Ithaka S+R*, April 30, 2014, online: <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-the-changing-research-practices-of-art-historians/> (viewed October 7, 2016).