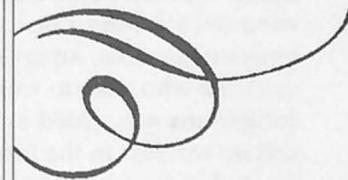


CHANGES AND ISSUES IN AN ART MUSEUM LIBRARY

by Ursula Kolmstetter



There are different kinds of libraries on the visual arts - art school libraries, divisions in college and university libraries, divisions within a public library, gallery libraries, museum libraries, and others. In this article, I will focus on the Stout Library of the Indianapolis Museum of Art and its development in the last decade. It is a good example of the development of museum libraries in general.

INTRODUCTION

As an art museum facility, the library of the Indianapolis Museum of Art focuses on the encyclopedic art collection of the IMA while providing general information about art and art history, from ancient to contemporary. The library supports the research needs of the museum with regard to potential acquisitions, upcoming exhibitions, and the interpretation, conservation, and publication of works of art from the museum collection. In addition, the library serves students, appraisers, researchers, collectors, docents, and the general public who do research on the museum collection and in the visual arts in general.

The library collects, organizes, and preserves materials in traditional as well as electronic formats. The library holds over 100,000 items and is continually growing: books, exhibition catalogs and museum publications; magazines and periodicals (more than 485 titles); auction catalogs from around the world going back to the 1800s; bulletins and annual reports from art museums worldwide; artists' files; online databases and resources, and much more.

Actively engaged in collecting, the library adds more than 1,800 book titles each year through purchases, gifts, and exchanges. The library subscribes to more than 230 art magazines and periodicals from around the world including *Ars Orientalis*, *Connaissance des Arts*, *Print Quarterly*, *Textile History*, and *Weltkunst*. The library's subscriptions to the major auction catalogs of Sotheby's and Christie's are important sources of information on what is happening in the art market and on future sales. Many more catalogs from smaller auction houses and galleries are also

maintained. More than 1,300 catalogs are added each year. As the only regional library offering access to current auction house catalogs, the library is an ideal reference source for appraisers and collectors of fine and decorative arts.

Extensive information files are maintained and are available on individual artists. They contain pamphlets, information on gallery openings, and newspaper clippings on more than 29,000 visual artists worldwide, including more than 3,800 Indiana artists.

The library also subscribes to several online databases such as the Art Index, the Grove Dictionary of Art, several auction databases, and others. Visiting the "Art Reference Library" link on the IMA's website, users can find under "Internet Resources" numerous useful links on the visual arts from "Art Dictionaries" to "Careers in the Visual Arts" to "Timelines in Art History" which the library continually "collects" and updates.

NEW SPACE PLANNING

The museum with its different entities including the library was built in 1970. By 1995 the library started to run out of space to house the continually growing collection. Some compact shelving units were added in the reading room. Five years later, as the museum started to plan a major addition, it became obvious that the library also needed a larger space. Because the Stout Library is often used by the community and researchers, we wanted to plan and design the library with the growing collection in mind as well as with enough space for reference and a quiet research area. Of course, the new space also had to be approved by the ADA.

We invited a library space consultant to help with an overall library plan. It is very important to have a clear understanding of the needs of a museum library and its users. For example, museum libraries often have a small staff. Therefore, every public space has to be as visible as possible for the protection of the collection.

Since the future space was reduced by one third of what we asked for, we decided to house the entire collection in space saving compact shelving units in

order not to limit the space to the many library users. The public area is now wrapped around the compact shelving area on three sides with offices adjacent to the public area. The entire north side is opened by large windows allowing a beautiful and serene view to the museum gardens. An art study room was added for students who wish to work in groups. Space for future exhibitions was added as well. Although the museum will be wireless in the future, the entire library still needed to have computer outlets as well as public computers. A glassed-in room for (color) copier and printer is located across from the reference desk. This makes the operation of copying quiet, yet the person staffing the reference desk is able to observe and assist users if necessary. The space was completed at the beginning of 2004, and the library was the first department of the museum to move into its new location.

COMPUTERIZATION

To computerize the collection and make it available to a broad audience was another goal. The Stout Reference collection is a niche library with holdings not found elsewhere in the region with significant value to the local community. However, many residents were not even aware of the museum library's existence.

Computerizing a library collection is a large undertaking that, without outside funding, would be almost impossible. Because of collaboration with Marion County Public Library (MCPL), in 2000 the IMA Library received a very generous grant from the Indianapolis Foundation. MCPL and the IMA library created a consortium and integrated the collection of the IMA's library into the MCPL online catalogue, thus offering access to a large collection of visual arts material. With MCPL's distribution power, the holdings of the Stout collection are made available to a large audience, locally, nationally, and internationally. Since "we went public", the IMA library had many more visitors coming to the library for reference and research. Simultaneously, interlibrary loan requests also increased substantially. Because the library staff is small, we were forced to limit interlibrary loans to other museums and research libraries.

OUTREACH

Whereas museum libraries in the past were more internally oriented, it has become necessary for museum libraries in general to become more community-oriented if development through funding is desired. The IMA Library was one of the first museum libraries to reach out and become widely accessible to the community by offering extensive opening hours and offering a variety of workshops to the public on collecting and researching art and artists. When, in May 2005, the museum reopened after extensive construction,

special opening events were held. Several open houses were held and regional librarians as well as college and university art instructors and their students were invited to view the new library. In this way they were made aware that after construction, the library and its extensive resources were available again.

It is also important for a museum library to be visible within the institution. Library staff offer sessions to museum staff and docents (trained volunteers who give tours on the collection) on how to search databases, and offer bibliographic instruction accompanied with hand-outs. Also, the library sometimes receives materials that are already in the collection through exchanges and donations. To raise money to augment the collection and for more visibility, these items are sold regularly in the library. On occasion, we offer sales (50% off), giving museum staff members the first pick. This program has become very popular.

Hosting interns in the library on a regular basis is another way to reach out to the community. IU Bloomington/Indianapolis offers a MLS (Master of Library Science) program across the state. The IMA library is particularly interesting for students with an additional Art History/Fine Arts background who would like to do an internship.

EXHIBITIONS

The latest outreach program that we started is an exhibition of artists' books created by local students of the Herron art school. The exhibition was designed by another group of Herron students taking courses in museum exhibit design. Sending specially designed invitations to museum patrons who are particularly interested in prints and drawings made the opening reception a success. Students invited friends and relatives to see their work on display in a museum setting. It is of particular interest to the Indianapolis Museum of Art to create more connections with the Herron School since the Museum separated from the Art School in 1970 after a long association. More exhibitions are being planned.

MISSION STATEMENT

Because mission statements are a good roadmap to follow, we created the following statement as a guide several years ago, and continue to follow it:

The mission of the Stout Library is to collect, organize, and preserve material pertinent to the museum's collections, and to provide services in response to the information needs of the museum staff as well as the public at the highest level attainable within the means of the Library.

<http://www.ima-art.org>