

# editor's note

Libraries have always been places of the mind – a place to read, reflect and learn. Just as importantly, the *space* that a library occupies can have a profound effect on readers and art libraries often have a special relationship with the architecture they inhabit.

The art library as a place – as an aesthetic as well as an intellectual experience, was the undercurrent that coursed throughout the IFLA Art Libraries Section Satellite Meeting in summer 2016 in Chicago, Illinois – *The Art Library as Place: Building on the Past, Building for the Future*. The articles in this issue of *Art Libraries Journal* are all derived from presentations at that meeting in Chicago, and we have endeavoured to maintain the rich and alluring visual aspect of the presentations.

Art libraries worldwide certainly grapple with issues common to all libraries, but they also seem to have challenges that are more visual; more aesthetic in nature. Many of the art libraries presented here coexist with historically significant buildings, some have sought for decades and even centuries to find a permanent home of any sort, others struggle with renovations and changing modes of research and service to patrons. The libraries and collections illuminated all have a strong sense of 'place,' they all strive to respect and venerate history in both collections and spaces, while still meeting the changing needs of contemporary researchers.

Many of the libraries profiled have used the renovation of historic structures as the catalyst to re-evaluate services to patrons. The library of the Rijksmuseum emerged from a ten-year renovation project and three years of assessment as part of an entirely new department. Renovations also allowed for introspection and assessment at the Forney Art Library and the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris, dramatically changing the services and composition of the libraries. Three of Spain's most important museum libraries have all undergone renovations in the past decade, and have collectively re-examined how the needs of their users are met. Sometimes natural forces conspire to alter or change a library – the centuries-old Villa Manin in northeast Italy grew into a centre for the preservation and restoration of the region's cultural heritage following the devastating 1976 earthquake.

Libraries often need to conform to architecturally significant structures – and to the ideas of important architects. Louis Kahn's two great museums include libraries imbued with his precepts on books, reading, and museums.

The need for adequate space to house an art library is not a new endeavour for institutions and is one that the Library of the National Gallery of Ireland is still facing almost a century after its founding. Sometimes the right space is found in an unlikely location, as is the case of the Fleet Library at the Rhode Island School of Design, housed for the last decade in space classically designed in 1919 as a bank. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts Research Library in Moscow is in the middle of converting an early 20th-century apartment house to include a new library with a collaborative approach to object research.

These libraries have all embraced the needs of 21st-century art historians and students while grappling with, adapting, adopting, and thriving in significant architectural spaces. They have kept the library as a place of the mind, but have also preserved the nature of art libraries as an aesthetic place.

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