

MAKING THE MOST OF ART RESOURCES : A COMMON GOAL FOR THE ART LIBRARY AND THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN MUSEUM

By Ana Paula Gordo

1. The evolution of the Portuguese art institutions and the role of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

In the course of the 20th century several political changes occurred in Portugal that affected its economical, social and cultural development. The change from monarchy to the republican state (1910) introduced a new period in politics, with secular and democratic features that influenced the cultural life of the country. That time marks the beginning of the growing in number and in importance of the museum institutions, as well as other art institutions, in the field of education and research, therefore starting to raise the need for art libraries.

The new republican regime, however, evolved in a political and economical instability that led to a military *coup d'état* in 1926, resulting in a dictatorial regime that lasted until 1974. During this period of almost half of a century there was a recession in the cultural and educational policies, that is characterised by low scholarship rates and by institutions generally lacking funds and duly prepared staff, and suffering from inadequate and decaying accommodations. During this period Portugal is a peripheral country structurally dependent on the colonies, living in a very isolated way that produced very negative effects on what should have been the normal development of an European country.

After the April Revolution, in 1974, the country began to make slow but decisive progress in the cultural domain: the schooling was extended from 4 to 9 years, contributing to the increase of the number of students in higher levels of education. This growing demand has also contributed to diversify the range of courses available, as it is the case of industrial design, graphic design or photography, just to mention some areas in the art fields.

Simultaneously, the already existing art schools – namely in architecture and fine arts – become more dynamic and renovate and diversify their programmes of studies, thus pushing the modernisation and development of the existing libraries.

On the other hand, the significant improvement of the country's economic situation, together with the rise in demand and in quality requirements by the public of cultural institutions, lead to the establishment of new administrative structures for cultural activities, such as the Ministry of Culture, within which several new organisations were born to promote and develop activities in the various art fields. All these new cultural bodies have contributed to improve and expand art related activities and, consequently, the need for and the establishment of new art libraries.

Established by Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, the *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* is a permanent Portuguese Foundation, with headquarters in Lisbon and having, presently, branches in Paris and London. Its purposes are charitable, artistic, educational and scientific and its activities are to be realized wherever necessary and adequate, although the majority of cultural initiatives take place in Portugal.

Being a private, very wealthy and dynamic institution, the *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation* was the stronghold for cultural activities during the 50 years of dictatorship. It was the only organization with the capacity and means to create and develop important projects and activities in several artistic areas such as music, dance and art exhibitions, including the establishment and maintenance of two art museums - the *Gulbenkian Museum*, housing the Founder's precious art collection, and the *Modern Art Center*, housing a modern art collection – and an *Art Library* as well, being the best provided art library in Portugal – by the amplitude and richness of its collections, professional staff, technological and funding means – assumes a key role and has a potential for leadership in all matters related with the improvement of art libraries in Portugal.

2. The Museum and the Art Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

- The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum

Inaugurated in 1969, in its present premises, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum was created to fulfil one of the major wishes of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian: to gather under the same roof the 6 800 works of art he had collected and bequeathed to the foundation he had established in his will. Besides being an extensive art collection, comprising items from as early as 2800 b.c. up to the twentieth century, it is exceptionally well preserved and diversified.

Calouste Gulbenkian was born and lived his early years in Turkey, and this is probably the reason why the collection is particularly strong in the art of the Near and Middle East, especially the art dated from the spreading of Islam throughout those regions. Therefore, the art of Persia, Turkey, Syria, Caucasus, Armenia and India - from the period of the Mongol invasions of Genghis Khan to the end of the eighteenth century - is richly represented in the collection by many ceramic and

glass works, rare carpets, costumes and other textiles, illuminated books and book bindings, tiles, lacquer doors, and a remarkable item of white jade.

In the field of European art, Calouste Gulbenkian also gathered a wide representation of fine arts, as well as decorative works of art, coming from many European countries and covering a large period, from the eleventh to the twentieth century. A good example of such coverage is the collection of ivory diptychs and triptychs, namely French.

The collection of paintings comprises a significant number of works, which are shown together with works of sculpture and decorative arts, from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Artists such as *Carpaccio*, *Ghirlandaio*, *Rubens*, *Van Dyck* and *Rembrandt*, just to mention the Flemish, as well as *Turner*, *Fragonard*, *Quentin-Latour*, *Corot*, *Rousseau*, *Millet*, *Degas*, *Manet*, *Monet* and *Renoir*, or *Rodin*, are represented in the collection.

In such a short presentation it is not possible to review, even briefly, all the different domains covered by the Gulbenkian art collection, and many of them are not referred, such as tapestry and furniture. Nevertheless, I could not leave without mention the special case of the *Lalique* collection. Having been a great admirer and close friend of *René Lalique*, Calouste Gulbenkian brought together 169 works by this artist, thus raising a truly remarkable collection that is considered as unique in the world.

- The Art Library

The origins of the Art Library are closely related to the establishment of the *Gulbenkian Museum*, with the initial main purpose of giving support to the museum staff activities. Later on, in 1969, the Foundation decided to open the Library to the public, thus contributing to fill the gap in art information services and providing for a better usage of the documentation resources. The Library evolved expanding the collections and improving the professional services, especially during the 90's.

A first general reorganization was initiated in 1993, since when the Library assumes a policy for collection development that is primarily targeted for Architecture and Visual Arts. As a result of such a policy, the Library is nowadays able to provide a consistent, thorough and systematically updated offer of information in the prioritized areas, whatever the nature or format of documents.

Both its size and the population it serves make this the largest art library in the country. The Library holds over 140 000 monographs and two thousand periodical titles, 200 of which are current subscriptions, including the most important journals being published in the field of Visual Arts. Serving a population of about nine thousand registered users, the Art Library services are recognized as being essential

to the activities of very many institutions, particularly those involved in education, research and artistic production.

Simultaneously, the Library keeps on updating other subject areas of the holdings that are complementary to Visual Arts, though according to selection criteria that restrict acquisitions mainly to reference sources. On the other hand, the Library maintains regular activity in the preservation and conservation of the whole holdings, this being vital to continue to respond to the needs of those researchers that approach the Library to use earlier collections, that are in some cases unique, in a variety of subject areas such as History, Literature, Iconography or Music.

Furthermore, the Library is building up new strategies to make the most of such historical resources, by making them more accessible by new technological means that improve usability without compromising conservation. It is the case of the Calouste Gulbenkian private library, which is partially hold by the Museum and partially by the Art Library.

- The Calouste Gulbenkian private library

Among the several important special bibliographic collections hold by the Art Library, the Calouste Gulbenkian private library is a especially important and emblematic collection, not only because it is the Founder's library. More relevant is the fact that it is the library of an important art collector and an example of what could be at his time one of the best collections of books on art. Besides, it is also a collection that illustrates the art of the book, thus remaining nowadays a significant resource for the history of the book and an invaluable source for bibliophiles.

Developed between 1899 and 1951, the Calouste Gulbenkain private library comprises a significant collection of works from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, both manuscript and printed, most of them being so rare and precious that make them museum items on a par with other works of art.

Gulbenkian divided his library into two main sections: one dedicated to the books on art, called by him "Documentation" and developed mainly in his capacity of art researcher; the other, devoted to evolution of the book itself, raised by him as a book collector.

The so called "Documentation" consisted of numerous books on the history of art, archaeology, painting, sculpture, ceramics, furniture, gold and silver work, textiles, coins and illuminated manuscripts. It also includes catalogues of museums, private collections and exhibitions, as well as magazines and journals on art. This part of his library is therefore invaluable now for any one wishing to study the Gulbenkian art collection.

Besides, this section also contained general literature, together with books on history, travel, gardening, flowers and birds, thus testifying the variety of interests of the owner.

The second section, consisting of items illustrating the art and evolution of the book, covers Eastern and Western works from the twelfth to the twentieth century, manuscripts as well as printed books. The part devoted to the early works is especially important.

From the East came splendid manuscripts, illuminated drawings, miniatures and bindings, namely from Persia and Turkey. The most famous manuscript is the *Anthology* made up of thirty six works of prose and poetry, which were copied in 1410 and 1411 for the Governor of Shiraz.

As examples of craftsmanship in the West there are some remarkable manuscripts - English, Flemish, French, Dutch and Italian - from the 12 to the 16 centuries as well as lovely Paris bindings of both manuscripts and printed books of the 16 century. Some examples are:

Book of Hours in Haarlem dialect, 15th century

Book of Hours of Marguerite de Clèves, early 15th century

Book of hours of Isabelle de Bretagne, one of the best works of the Master of Bedford

Breviary of Duke Hercules of Ferrara, circa 1500

Book of Hours of Alfonso III, Duke of Ferrara and Modena, 16th century

Apocalypse, copied and decorated in England, 13th century.

In what concerns later works this section includes a wide variety of books, ranging from 1500 up to the present century, that are notable for many different reasons: as illustrated books, as special editions of superb quality, or as examples of fine bindings in shagreen, morocco or calf, with inlay, gold lettering and delicate tooling.

The most valuable part of this section consists of French books of the 18th century. Some are illustrated with original drawings by *Boucher* and *Gravelot*; others are magnificently bound, with decoration by artists as *Meunier* and *Derôme*. The 19th and 20th centuries are also well represented by, among others, books with excellent art nouveau bindings by *Meunier* and *Marius Michel*, and various fine books with illustrations by *Steinlen*, *Jouve* and *Lefèvre*.

3. Integrate access to different art resources : the strategy for the future

The major part of this important collection is not easily accessible for preservation reasons. The items held by the Museum are not part of its permanent exhibition, because they are especially fragile. In what concerns the part held by the Library, most of the items are available only by special authorization, for similar reasons.

However, the need to provide integrated and complete access to this collection, no matter where the resources are, is a concern with new perspectives, if we think about the possibilities brought in by technology nowadays. And this is true not only for similar materials, like books, but also for the linking of different types of materials and different kinds of information retrieval mechanisms, as it is the case of library catalogues and museum databases.

As a matter of fact, both the Art Library and the Museum provide services to a common audience, at least in what art research is concerned. Therefore, there is plenty of work to do, in many ways, to improve global access to art resources and thus increase its value for end users.

The case of the Calouste Gulbenkian private Library will be just the beginning of a new relationship with the Museum activities, and it will be a first and easy step: the idea is to bring together again, virtually, what is physically scattered. And also to provide digital access to the items themselves by means of digitisation.

The usefulness of the project is easy to understand, but its meaning reaches far beyond: two different universes – the Library and the Museum - for so many years working apart because of differences in technical jobs and standards, will start to join efforts for the betterment of services provided. The strategy in mind is to link library and museum resources.

From the Library point of view, and in what the Library technology allows, such links will be part of the future information processing. That is to say, we consider that the Library has currently the means and the know how to drive forward this strategy and play a leadership role.

As a matter of fact the Art Library is undergoing an important transformation, particularly evident in technological terms, with the implementation of a new integrated library management system - Horizon - a solution among the best of its kind available in the international market, acquired in 1997. On the other hand, creating and making available its own digital resources fosters the Library's goal of both disseminating information and preserving documents. In 1999 a digitization programme will be launched, primarily focused on unique and rare materials as well as on other items having conservation problems that require urgent alternative copies.

Besides the improvement of the traditional library functions, the new system leaves open the way for further developments, such as integrating multimedia information resources and Internet services, as it is the case of providing a Web/Z39.50 gateway for the Library Catalogue.

In what the mentioned strategy of integration concerns, future plans include the enhancement of the Catalogue by adding links to multimedia networked files of any kind, wherever they are, in order to provide direct access to them through the Catalogue. These files may be, among others, the images of museum collections related to particular bibliographic records; and such bibliographic records may refer to works held by the Library or to resources available on the Internet that the Library decides to select and include in its own Catalogue.

A further step may be the reciprocal link from the Museum database, especially pertinent if it becomes a public resource; or, even better, the building of a common search interface for both databases.

Of course I am not sure that all these prospects will become a reality, at least in the short term, and probably some of them will change with time and the evolution of technology. But I believe that the underlying strategy is the right one, not only for the improvement of different departments within the same organization, but also among organisations, either at a national or an international scale.

This trend to recognize and support the integration of services provided by libraries, museums and archives, has already been materialised by the launching of several initiatives by official bodies, namely at the level of the European Union. It is, therefore, important that we begin to undertake whatever practices are within our reach.

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