

## **A DANISH MUSEUM ART LIBRARY: THE DANISH MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ART LIBRARY\***

**By Anja Lollesgaard**

### **Denmark's library system**

Most libraries in Denmark are public, or provide public access. The two main categories are the public, local municipal libraries, and the public governmental research libraries. Besides these, there is a group of special and private libraries.

The public municipal libraries are financed by the municipal government. The research libraries are financed by their parent institution; in the case of the art libraries, that is, ultimately, the Ministry of Culture.

Most libraries are part of the Danish library system, that is the official library network of municipal and governmental libraries, and they profit from and contribute to the library system as a whole.

The Danish library system is founded on an extensive use of inter-library lending, deriving from the democratic principle that any citizen anywhere in the country can borrow any particular book through the local public library, free of charge, never mind where, or in which library the book is held.

Some research libraries, the national main subject libraries, are obliged to cover a certain subject by acquiring the most important scholarly publications, for the benefit not only of its own users but also for the entire Danish library system.

### **Danish art libraries**

Art libraries in Denmark mostly fall into one of two categories: art departments in public libraries, and research libraries attached to colleges, universities, and museums.

### **Danish art museum libraries**

In general art museum libraries are research libraries. Primarily they serve the curatorial staff in their scholarly work of documenting artefacts and art historical

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research for organising exhibitions and writing exhibition catalogues. Secondly they serve external scholars and students of art history.

In Denmark there are different categories of art museum libraries:

By user group:

- Museum staff only
- Public access
- Public lending

The libraries of the major Danish art museums provide public access to the collections, but only the library of the Danish Museum of Decorative Art is a public lending library.

### **Danish Museum of Decorative Art Library**

The library of the Danish Museum of Decorative Art is at the same time a research library and a public library of art and design. It serves the curatorial staff, art and design historians, designers and craftsmen, students, and the general public. The library has always been – and is still – a public lending library.

### **Users, collections**

In Western Europe the libraries of the museums of decorative art were established in the last part of the nineteenth century - in close connection with the museum and the purpose of the museum. These libraries are distinguished from other museum libraries by collections and by user groups. So is the case in Denmark.

The purpose of the library originates in the foundation of the museum some 100 years ago. The library's aims were educational and oriented at a broad public. Together with the museum's collection of artifacts it should provide the public – i.e. designers and craftsmen - with the finest examples of crafts, art and design from antiquity to the present day as well as from foreign countries – all of this in order to improve contemporary taste and quality of design.

This was to be done not only through books, but equally through models, that is pattern prints, drawings and photographs, in the print and drawing room.

By studying the art of earlier times, the founders of the museum wanted to promote a symbiosis of fine art, crafts and industry, with the aim of beautifying articles in everyday use.

### **Collections, archives, current trends**

The Danish Museum of Decorative Arts took the example of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as other Western European museums at the

same period. The pattern collections in the library were meant to supplement the collections of artefacts. From the beginning the library acquired several collections of pictorial material intended as direct inspiration for production. Teachers and pupils would look at patterns and make freehand copies from books, woodcuts and Danish artists' original decorative drawings. And still today designers and students make use of the material in this way.

Recently, the research in Danish design history and the wish to document Danish design, called for an expansion of the Danish documentation collection of the library.

Design history is changing its focus. From exclusively dealing with the samples, the aesthetic and the artistic values of design, the research of today examines the subject from a multiple angles, such as ethnology, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, economy, communication and mass media theory.

This makes new demands to design collections of libraries and museums. In order to meet this challenge, the Art and Design Library of the Danish Museum of Decorative Art is establishing a collection of designers' drawings archives. And also today we try to follow the example at the National art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Museums of decorative art are no longer aiming at unique artifacts. The conception of «decorative art» today also compasses ordinary things from daily life. Consequently, the library is not including only literature on taste, but also sketches of, say, ordinary lamps and furniture for the archive of the prints and drawing collection.

Whereas a «collection» used to consist of selected examples of high artistic value, the archive collection of today aims at greater breadth and a certain level of comprehensiveness in order to illustrate and document the history of a firm or the oeuvre of a designer.

In terms of collections the library also profits from its users. Craftspeople and designers are valuable mediators for acquiring unique materials, and they are valuable benefactors, donating old and new publications, difficult to obtain through ordinary sources

#### **Demands from the users to the library**

The library of the Museum of Decorative Art has several purposes. Some of them are:

- Serving the museum staff
- Serving craftspeople and designers
- Serving art history researchers

Providing the Danish public with literature and information in decorative art, industrial and graphic design  
Research in decorative art, industrial and graphic design  
Collecting posters  
Collecting drawings and designs by Danish artists  
Documentation of Danish craftsmen and designers for Danish art history  
Maintaining and developing online catalogues for different collections  
Co-operation with colleague art libraries on the project of «Denmark's Virtual Library»

The multiple purposes put different demands on the library.

In terms of acquisitions of books:

for researchers:

scholarly publications, primarily in the form of texts, illustrated with pictures

for craftsmen and designers (with no scholarly education nor purposes):

models for learning and for inspiration,

examples of craft items and techniques,

examples of products and designs,

primarily through pictures, accompanied by texts.

In terms of library catalogue entries

- for researchers:

classification and verbal subject indexing according to art historical terminology,

- for craftspeople:

classification and verbal subject indexing by techniques and material

translation of title and contents into Danish for books in other languages.

In terms of professional assistance from the librarian, the two main categories of users have different backgrounds:

Researchers:-

literarily oriented, familiar with library subject systems, skilled in proper spelling, knowledge of foreign languages.

Craftspeople and designers:

visually oriented, unfamiliar with subject systems, little knowledge of foreign languages

few skills in spelling, need the librarian's understanding and capability to «translate» their needs for visual information into the library system of textual information.

In terms of information technology:  
Training, and maintenance and development of services.

### **The training and qualifications of art librarians**

The Royal Danish School of Librarianship offers courses for all kinds of library employees. Art librarianship as such is not included in the four year course, except for a one term optional course in visual media, introducing art history and information structures of the subject area, but the school offers one week post-graduate courses in art history and contemporary art. This is all to little. As art library employees, librarians in general lack knowledge of art. Consequently, they must acquire it through personal interest and enthusiasm.

Librarians are generally devoted to the ideals of librarianship, the promotion of culture and information among all people regardless of educational and cultural background.

The librarian provides the art library with systematic skills, and a service-oriented approach to all fields of work in the library.

While some staff employed in the Danish research libraries are graduates of the four year librarianship course, others are university graduates. They may chose to take the two years post-graduate course in library and information science, but it is not compulsory.

The research librarian provides the library with art historical expertise, valuable to the selection of materials.

The different approaches of trained librarians, and of research librarians, to the library tasks, deriving from their different educational backgrounds, constitute at its best an ideal basis for co-operation.

### **Research in Danish art libraries**

Some research libraries are themselves research institutions, research being part of the employment of the researchers, and there is a prominent tradition of research and publication activity, generally focussing on material in the institution's collections or in the subject area of the library. Research activities by art librarians provide the art libraries with inside information and enhance the library's position as a highly esteemed centre of culture and information.

### **Research and publications in the Danish Museum of Decorative Art Library**

The academic staff conducts research in the history of decorative art, industrial and graphic design and take an active part in the exhibition activities of the museum. The chief librarian is a leading design historian in the country, and is promoting

research in Danish and Scandinavian design by editing the annual journal «Scandinavian Journal of Design History».

Danish design is an area closely associated with the concept of Danish culture throughout the world. Along with Danish art, Danish decorative art design ought to be publicised and made the subject of exhibitions. Information and research are absolutely necessary to meet the requirements.

### **Danish Museum of Decorative Art Library - Meeting point**

Thanks to the varied collections of the museum and the library, the library is a meeting point for craftsmen and designers, for art and design history students and researchers.

The specific character – deriving from the multiple purposes and user groups - gives the library a very special atmosphere. It puts high demands to the staff's professional level and personal involvement and is consequently a challenging and stimulating place of work and centre of culture and information.

### **Museum libraries**

The museum library serves the museum staff primarily, but must inevitably answer the question: «Is the library part of the external activities of the museum ? Is the museum willing to pay for it ?» This question may cause a fundamental conflict to the museum library in relationship with the museum. Who pays, and who profits? Will the museum pay for the library's involvement in the library system ?

To the museum management library activity is not the primary objective of the institution, and the library may in some cases suffer from lack of understanding in library matters.

The library seems expensive to the museum management, expenses to professional librarians, to acquisitions, and not least library automation systems.

But the museum usually acknowledges the enduring values of the library, its professional handling of information, and the systematic skills of library professionals.

The museum library is the natural place for the museum guest to visit in order to throw light on the artefacts and the exhibition concepts of the museum. It is the museum's meeting place with its enthusiastic users, and it is the important centre for backing up the activities and the purposes of the museum.

Danish design is an area closely associated with the concept of Danish culture throughout the world. Along with Danish art, Danish decorative art design ought to be publicised and made the subject of exhibitions. Information and research are

absolutely necessary to meet the requirements. If the museum wants to keep up with the research within its field, it is absolutely necessary to have a library, that can provide the information.

Anja Lollesgaard  
Library, Danish Museum of Decorative Art  
Bredgade, 68  
1260 Kobenhavn  
Denmark  
tel.(45) 33 149452  
fax. (45) 33 113072  
e-mail: anj@dkim.dk