



A Gentle Authority

Citation

Ackerman, James. "A Gentle Authority." Harvard Library Bulletin 23, no. 3 (June 2013): 7–8.

Permanent link

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James S. Ackerman

PRIOR TO ITS RECONSTRUCTION WITHIN OTTO HALL, THE READING room of the Fine Arts Library overlooked Prescott Street and had a similar rectangular conformation to its successor. A door in the center of the short, Broadway side led to the Print and Drawing Collections. On the opposite end, windows looked out on a wooden framed house on the site later occupied by Carpenter Center. Upon my arrival as a faculty member in 1960, I was given one of the very dark offices, next to that of Sydney Freedberg, on the side by the museum court in space later remodeled as an exhibition gallery of prints and drawings.

The librarian, E. Louise Lucas, exerted a gentle authority over the library departments. She was widely known for her book, *The Harvard List of Books on Art*, first published in 1938 and later in several revised editions that became a bible for art librarians throughout the country in the pre-Internet period. The photographic collection, rather antiquated, was expanded mostly in the area of Italian Renaissance art at the urging of Professor Freedberg. The slide collection consisted primarily of 3" x 4" lantern slides—Miss Lucas didn't approve of the little color ones that some faculty members insisted on acquiring—and the growth of that collection was not well controlled for quality. I don't know whether she was the creator of the FA book and periodical catalog system (bypassing the standard Library of Congress one that was reinstated recently). She was succeeded by Dr. Wolfgang Freitag, a scholar who brought a new order into the organization and participated in the establishment of what was called "the troika," a collaboration among the library, the Fine Arts Department, which at the time had thirteen senior members, and the Fogg Museum, then directed by John Coolidge. These three areas slowly drifted apart after the academic tensions of the sixties and seventies. The current era began with planning of the Sackler Museum, which provided space for the Rübél Collection of Asian Art and for the new Aga Khan Program leading to a major expansion of holdings in books, periodicals, and photographs of Islamic art.



Louise Lucas and Museum Director John Coolidge at Lucas's retirement party, May 1, 1964.
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