



## “Dwelling with books as stones”

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## “Dwelling With Books As Stones”

Lisa Pon

I WAS SITTING IN THE LIBRARY. YES, I WAS. THE BOOKS HAD NOT LONG been on their shelves, for the Fine Arts Library itself had only recently opened: it was 1992 and the FAL was as new as the incoming first-year graduate students, of which I was one. But unlike Walter Benjamin unpacking his library, I felt no “mild boredom of order” in the shelved reference books. Instead I delighted in the sequence of spines all aligned on the new grey shelves of the expansive, luminous reading room. The wooden chairs, high-backed and hard-bottomed, unlike the leather thrones at Houghton Library, were uncushioned (so as to discourage sleeping, we were told) and placed around the long wood tables in the center of the space.

Many mornings I chose not to sit at one of those communal tables, secluding myself instead in one of the small nooks between the short reference shelves that lined the sides of the reading room. There at the end of each one was a single desk the same grey as the shelves, and my favorite cubby was lined with various reference editions of Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*. Sitting there, I could reach out my hand and grab a volume of the critical edition edited by Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini. This extraordinarily useful set has the texts of both editions published during Vasari’s lifetime running in parallel at the top and bottom of each page. It allows the young student and the seasoned scholar alike to compare the two texts, published in 1550 and 1568, with ease. In many ways, that nook was, to quote Benjamin again, my “dwelling with books as the building stones,” and I spent many hours in it. I read Vasari there, and also in the Fine Arts Library stacks two levels below, and in Houghton. In my second year, I wrote my qualifying paper on Vasari there. That essay became one of my first publications; my most recent publication on Vasari just appeared in the *Boletín del Museo del Prado*. In the dozen years since I graduated, I’ve read Vasari in many places and also in the nowhere of the Internet. Each time, part of me returns to that nook in the Fine Arts Library, disappearing inside, as is only fitting.

# Contributors

JAMES S. ACKERMAN is Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus, Harvard University.

GLAIRE D. ANDERSON is Associate Professor of Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

SUSAN ANDERSON is Curatorial Research Associate for Dutch and Flemish Drawings, Harvard Art Museums.

PERSIS BERLEKAMP, PHD 2003, is Associate Professor of Art History, University of Chicago.

FRANCESCA BEWER is Research Curator in the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard Art Museums.

KATHRYN BRUSH is Professor of Art History, Department of Visual Arts, University of Western Ontario, Canada.

ELLEN P. CONANT is an independent scholar.

HARRY COOPER, PHD 1997, is Curator of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art.

JAMES CUNO, PHD 1985, is President and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust.

WALTER B. DENNY, PHD 1971, is Professor of Art History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

EMINE FETVACI, PHD 2005, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Boston University.

SHIRIN FOZI, PHD 2010, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh.

WOLFGANG FREITAG was Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1962 to 1989.

JEFFREY L. HORRELL was Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1992 to 1998 and currently is Dean of Libraries at Dartmouth College.

ADEN KUMLER, PHD 2007, is Assistant Professor, Department Art History, University of Chicago.

MELISSA BECK LEMKE is Image Specialist for Italian Art, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art.

MEGAN R. LUKE, PHD 2009, is Assistant Professor, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Southern California.

KATHARINE MARTINEZ was the Librarian of the Fine Arts Library from 1998 to 2010 and currently is Director of the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

CHRISTINE MEHRING, PHD 2001, is Associate Professor in the Department of Art History, University of Chicago.

JOHN E. MOORE, PHD 1992, is Professor of Art, Smith College.

ALEXANDER NAGEL, PHD 1993, is Professor of Fine Arts, New York University.

PETER NISBET is Chief Curator at the Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

LISA PON, PHD 1999, is Associate Professor, Department of Art History, Southern Methodist University.

SCOTT REDFORD, PHD 1989, is Professor in the Department of Archaeology and History of Art, Koç University, Istanbul.

MELISSA RENN is Senior Curatorial Research Associate, Harvard Art Museums.

CLAIRE ROBERTS is Senior Lecturer in Art History, University of Adelaide.

WILLIAM W. ROBINSON, PHD 1996, is Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings, Harvard Art Museums.

ERIC M. ROSENBERG, PHD 1992, is Associate Professor of Art History, Tufts University.

JOHN M. ROSENFELD, PHD 1959, is Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of East Asian Art Emeritus, Harvard University.

HAO SHENG is Wu Tung Curator of Chinese Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

SEYMOUR SLIVE is Gleason Professor of Fine Arts Emeritus, Harvard University.

MIRIAM STEWART is Curator of the Collection, Division of European and American Art, Harvard Art Museums.

DENİZ TÜRKER is a PhD candidate in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University.

MICHELLE C. WANG, PHD 2008, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Art History, Georgetown University.

HENRI ZERNER is Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University.