



## A small entreaty

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# A Small Entreaty

*Seymour Slive*



Reading room, Fogg Art Library, December 1959.  
21 x 25 cm. 182 H267 6Fn(i) 26g.

I HAVE INDELIBLE MEMORY OF HALCYON DECADES DURING THE LAST HALF of the twentieth century, when students, faculty, and staff engaged in what then was called “Fine Arts” and now labeled “The History of Art and Architecture” immediately knew what was invoked, when they heard friends or colleagues speak of “the troika.” At 32 Quincy Street during those years the noun had nothing whatsoever to do with the Russian vehicle drawn by three horses abreast. It initially referred to the Fine Arts Library (which, thank heavens, has not changed its name), to the Fine Arts Department, and to the Fogg Art Museum, with the Busch-Reisinger as one of the latter’s curatorial departments. Though then as now all three had their own budgets, it

was virtually impossible to think of them as independent entities, much less to think of them in terms of the Harvard administrative and financial idiom as “tubs resting on their own bottoms.” The three were inextricably linked.

The Fine Arts Library of course served the university at large but its primary function was to fulfill the needs of the department and museum. For its part, the museum gladly opened its doors to all members of the university as well as the national and international communities; however, its principal charge was to operate as a laboratory for teaching art history at all levels to Harvard and Radcliffe students. As for the department, it continuously worked hand in glove with the other two parts of the troika.

Today, despite the vast expansion of the museum, which along with the Busch-Reisinger now incorporates the Sackler Museum and the Straus Center for Conservation, as far as I can see there has not been one iota of change in the mandates of the three entities dedicated to art history at Harvard. Therefore, to underscore an inextricable relationship and for old times’ sake, I entreat that the tradition of using the word *troika* in discussions of them be resuscitated.

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