CASVA
Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

Shared Assets: The Search for Knowledge

Scholars seek quite specific things when they gather in a research institute, no matter where they come from or what they investigate. In the twenty-first century they hope for time to think productively, uninterrupted by daily demands. More precisely, they choose to leave home, often at some sacrifice, in anticipation of the intellectual stimulation provided by new colleagues and a new environment. They also anticipate that the basic tools for research will be available, whether "string and sealing wax" as at the original Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) at Princeton, or the computer technology that followed, based on work done at the IAS. In most cases institutes also offer proximity to research materials unavailable or difficult to access elsewhere. Fellows coming to the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) are no exception. As the first residential center dedicated to advanced research in the visual arts in the United States and the first in a national museum anywhere, CASVA has responded to the expanding expectations of the past thirty-five years and strives to remain open to future directions and needs.

Thanks to Robert H. Smith, former president of the Gallery, the establishment of scholars' housing near the Gallery consolidated CASVA's character as a residential community. Fellowships supported by private funds make it possible for some twenty-four members to be in residence at the Center in the course of a year, and the work of some forty scholars is supported every year. In addition to informal gatherings, a program of shoptalks, colloquia, symposia, and lectures, including the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, has provided intense opportunities to share ideas, problems, and achievements in the study of world art since CASVA's founding.

Washington, DC, has few rivals with regard to resources for research. Just as the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Villa I Tatti relies on the museums and libraries of the city of Florence and the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA) can draw upon the cultural wealth of Paris, CASVA has, at its doorstep, research resources of global importance, beginning with the Library of Congress and including many specialized repositories. Like these and other institutions, the Gallery and CASVA have also invested purposefully in developing research collections that reflect the distinct character of the institution. As the Gallery celebrates the new Tower galleries and the renovation of exhibition spaces, CASVA marks its thirty-fifth year in the other half of I. M. Pei's East Building, designed specifically to house the Center in close proximity to the National Gallery of Art Library. Many CASVA fellows share with the curatorial staff a commitment to the interpretation of the Gallery's collections, and the expanding holdings in modern and contemporary art housed in the East Building will certainly stimulate critical responses and research. CASVA continues, however, to have a special relationship with its close neighbor, the library.

In an earlier article for *The Bulletin*, Neal Turtell, executive librarian, linked the establishment of CASVA to the development of the Gallery's library from a small collection of books in the West Building to the national research center it is today. Discussions among the Trustees in the late 1960s concerning the new research institute recognized the need for a more comprehensive collection, housed in the projected building, which would also serve the entire Gallery and the general public. When Turtell became head of the library in 1986, the collection included some 150,000 volumes, a relatively small number of journal runs, and about three hundred rare books. Encouraged by Franklin Murphy, then chairman of the Board of Trustees and himself a bibliophile, Turtell expanded the rare book collection to roughly twelve thousand volumes. The list of journals now reaches almost three thousand. Overall, the library includes almost half a million volumes. This number, probably second only to the art libraries at Harvard and the Getty Research Institute and comparable to those at Princeton and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, includes the libraries of several scholars closely associated with the Gallery and with CASVA, including Rudolf Wittkower, Wolfgang Stechow, Wolfgang Lotz, Carl Nordenfalk, and Harold Wethey, all former Samuel H. Kress Professors. Working with and for CASVA researchers, the library has developed extraordinary holdings in the history of architecture and urbanism, emblem books, regional guides, festival decorations, and theories of color and perspective.

If the size and quality of its book collections place the Gallery's library in the top five nationally, the growing image collection of some fifteen million items takes the very top spot. The Gallery has made the acquisition of images (both analog and digital, and including early photographic albums and reproductions of works of art and architecture) a priority, and the department of image collections is becoming

a magnet for other important image archives in danger of disappearing in the wake of digitization.

The library is committed to digitization for broader access and preservation, but digital resources need to be curated and exploited if they are to have value for research. Just as CASVA and the library have worked together to strengthen collections of printed material, both are now collaborating with digital resources. On the CASVA website *The History of the Accademia di San Luca, c. 1590–1635: Documents from the Archivio di Stato di Roma* (hosted by the Gallery at *www.nga.gov/casva/accademia*), artists' bibliographies link to the library catalog. With the addition of a mapping function to the site, visual materials that illuminate the history of the Accademia are being integrated, including digitized rare guidebooks to the city of Rome from the library's collection. These mapping features are also being utilized in relation to the art collections, and the Gallery's website is successfully linking knowledge bases across the entire institution.

Digital media can spread information at the speed of a keystroke, but for data to be transformed into knowledge it needs to be understood, interpreted, and tested. Research institutes will need to participate in this work of deeper understanding and critical interpretation. This year, CASVA welcomed a dozen emerging scholars from China (fig. 1). They had been invited to the College Art Association meetings by the National Committee for the History of Art in preparation for an international congress to be held in Beijing this year. In the digital world, such congresses remain important for networking and a more effective and direct exchange of ideas. The meeting at CASVA, with the collections and especially the library as its focus, provided a dazzling example of the potential for such exchange.

For the Chinese scholars, several of whom study early printed Italian art treatises online, Neal Turtell, along with rare book librarian Yuri Long, pulled out some of the rarest volumes. Holding a book, turning its pages, and feeling its weight and dimensions are different experiences from viewing it as an image on a screen. Turtell presented these treasures almost as architectural constructions, or even sculptural objects, and called attention to the importance of pagination, signatures, endpapers, and the combination of words and images on a page in early European book production. Especially exciting for these visitors to handle was Luca Pacioli's *Divina proportione* (fig. 2), a rare work published in Venice in 1509 with woodcut illustrations designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Such texts can be shared through digitization, but in a rare book collection it is possible to share the experience of a material object made more than five centuries ago. Both forms of knowledge, virtual and physical, together with, in this unique case, Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci in the Gallery's collection, are essential for new research. Through sharing diverse assets constructively, the National Gallery of Art Library and CASVA are furthering the mission of the Gallery to foster an understanding of works of art at the highest scholarly level.

• Elizabeth Cropper, *Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts*

Fig. 1. Xian Zairong, a visiting Chinese scholar, studies Luca Pacioli in the rare book room, February 8, 2016. Photograph by Rebecca Clews

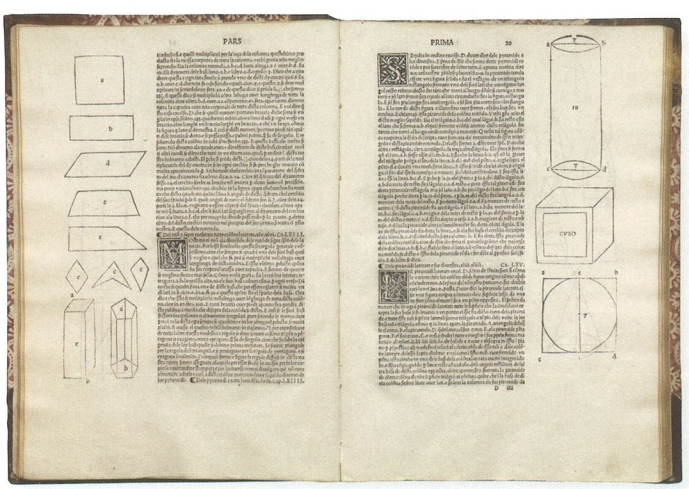

Fig. 2. Luca Pacioli, *Divina proportione*, 1509, National Gallery of Art Library, J. Paul Getty Fund in honor of Franklin Murphy