



Editorial

For Geert-Jan Koot

In September 2021 Geert-Jan Koot retired from his post at the Rijksmuseum after thirty-three years' service. From a background as an art historian, Geert-Jan succeeded Else van der Vossen-Delbrück as the head of the Rijksmuseum Research Library in 1988. It was on his initiative that the first steps towards implementing digital services and collections were taken – the library was the first department in the museum to acquire a modem. He also oversaw the transition to a computerized library catalogue, which consigned the old bound catalogue cards, known as the 'Leiden booklets', to history. From then on, visitors were able to consult the library's catalogue on computer screens in the reading room. Thirty-three years and one pandemic later we now take it for granted that we can browse the library catalogue in a totally hybrid way remotely from our armchair, and immediately place a request to scan an article of part of a book.

I first met Geert-Jan at a seminar of the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) in the Rijksmuseum in 2017. At the end of what must have been a long day for him as an organizer, he took the trouble to talk to me at length about the collection and the major challenges faced by the Rijksmuseum Research Library. It was as if he had sensed that the time had come to teach a new generation the tricks of the trade. In the years that followed our paths crossed repeatedly and I had plenty of time to hear Geert-Jan talk about the collection as the curator of the library collections. It was the role he had taken on with dynamism and a great deal of expertise in 2016, after the library was merged with the Collection Information and Study and Reading Room sections into the new Research Services Department.

For the last thirty-three years Geert-Jan has been responsible for forming the Rijksmuseum Research Library's collections. In the first twenty-eight of them he did this in addition to his work as head of department. In the last five years in which he was working as curator of the Library Collections, he was able to focus more exclusively on expanding the collection. As a result, the library has acquired magnificent books about art history, while at the same time the collection has grown in scope. More space has been created, for instance, for colonial history, slavery and other historical subjects that may previously have received less attention in an art-historical library. A number of the most important acquisitions facilitated by Geert-Jan during his time as the head of the library department and curator are discussed in this issue of *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* by colleagues who were sometimes closely involved with their acquisition.

Building a relevant and internationally significant collection, in line with the needs of researchers and keeping up to date with current events, will remain a major objective in the future. The Rijksmuseum Research Library also faces a number of difficult challenges: the digitization of the special library collections and the further development of the hybrid library are just two of the most important items on the agenda. The link to the chirruping, screeching modem that was used to make contact with the outside world in 1989 was swiftly made. In the third decade of the twenty-first century, we are also looking for innovative technology to form links with collections, to provide data with context and listen to stories in many voices. Geert-Jan has taught us that to do this you really have to keep working on a living collection that can give direction to the debate for researchers and the public alike.

Alex Alsemgeest
Curator of the Rijksmuseum Library Collections