



Sijn Wetenschap en Kunst vaak met
elkaar in strijd
Hier is de Wetenschap der Kunst een zaal gewijd

Editorial

From Research Library to Research Services

Object-based research and the Rijksmuseum share a long history. When the architect P.J.H. Cuypers was asked to design a national museum in 1875, he seized the opportunity – unasked – to add a very substantial library to it. It was not part of the original building specification, nor was there a particular collection that had to be housed. The architect’s motive was probably to reflect the scientific ideals of the nineteenth century in which the integration of art and science and the study of art in an empirical manner were becoming a significant factor in art history. Since then, there have been 142 years of continuous and intensive investment in the Rijksmuseum’s library and it is to be hoped that many more will follow. The objective remains to collect as much information as possible about the collection that the Rijksmuseum acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits on behalf of the Dutch people.

But a library alone is no longer enough to support object-based research in a museum. The professionalization of museums in the twentieth century has led to the expansion and development of other collections and other areas of expertise, such as collection registration, collection documentation, archival and research data – and the will to open up all this data and expertise and share them with the public. The rise of the Internet, the mass digitization of the collection and the growth of data-driven research in e-humanities and data science have meant that the complexity of digital data curation that has to be addressed in the twenty-first century is increasing rapidly. An additional important focus for the Rijksmuseum lies in researching how visual search, artificial intelligence and semantic data can contribute to an innovative interaction with the collection. This is why the Rijksmuseum decided in 2016 to consolidate the various departments working with information and collection data into one new department called Research Services. The desire to be able to better support research inside and outside the Rijksmuseum in an interdisciplinary and innovative way explains why, from now on, library data, collection data, documentary material, archival and research data will be approached systematically together.

A museum is not just a building with a collection of objects – it is also a valuable, immensely rich collection of data. Both should be open to give everyone the chance to relate to it and tell their own stories. It is also in linking people with art and history through information and data that the Rijksmuseum’s challenge and opportunities lie.

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Fig. 1

Wall decoration in the museum library with a maxim by J. Verdam: 'Though science and art are often in conflict, here is a room dedicated to the science of art', 1885.