

**Art Libraries Society of North America 32nd Annual Conference  
Roosevelt Hotel, New York, NY - April 15-21, 2004**

**Session XVIII: Modernizing Libraries  
Monday April 19, 2004**

**New York Public Humanities and Social Science Library, New York, New York**

**Moderators:**

Lee Robinson, Art & Architecture Department, The New York Public Library  
Vincenzo Rutigliano, Art & Architecture Department, The New York Public Library

Session Speakers:

Brian Regan  
Angela Giral  
Jacob Alspector

Recorder:

Mike Thornton, Art & Architecture Department, The New York Public Library

On Monday, April 19th ARLIS members gathered in the lower auditorium of the New York Public Library. Old cut stone walls reminders of the library distant past as the Croton Reservoir were the perfect prelude to the topic of modernizing public library spaces. Speakers Brian Regan, Angela Giral and Jacob Alspector presented on the challenges encountered when modernizing the Neo-Classical libraries of the Morgan, Columbia's Avery, and The New York Public, Center for Humanities and Social Science Library.

**Dualities that Don't Dual: the Morgan Library Renzo Piano Project**

Brian Regan Deputy Director of the Morgan Library presented on his experiences planning for the Morgan's renovation and expansion. Regan spoke philosophically about the contrasting identities that define landmarked Art Libraries. Through modernization how does one create a space that integrates modern technologies and yet not distract from the scholarly and historical ambiance contributing to the Morgan's identity? One answer to this question manifested itself in task of merging the separate buildings the Morgan currently occupies into one cohesive structure. Regan shared Architect Renzo Piano's proposed solution to create a set back modern façade that will allow access to the entire library but not divert attention from the historical buildings of the Morgan. Regan is writing a book about these experiences and others due for release in 2006.

**Columbia's Hidden Campus**

Angela Giral, retired Director of Columbia's Avery Library, presented on her perspectives and beliefs concerning the Avery's modernization. For the Avery, modernization meant not only looking forward to the possibilities of the future but also considering its challenges in the past. Sharing photos of the Libraries almost bare bone beginnings to an active crowded college library. Through these images issues of space and its uses in the library became clear. Since the Avery was denied physical expansion the architects went underground. This solution among others like turning storage rooms

into research study spaces helped the Avery achieve the breathing room its demanding lifestyle so dearly needed. Contrasting architectural design photos featuring the design aesthetics of the Avery's new rooms against photos taken by Giral herself, which featured the same rooms, only packed with students at work! Giral reminded the audience that in the end the goal of modernization is not just to make a better space but rather a better

library and as Giral said "Libraries are best with people in them."

#### Integration of Digital Technology at New York Public Library's Research Libraries Aesthetics and Concerns

Jacob Alspector concluded the presentation, Alspector's firm Alspector Anderson Architects was tasked with the job of building the new Science, Industry and Business Library known as (SIBL). In his presentation Alspector discussed how the design of SIBL influenced the modernization of the Humanities and Social Science library known as (HSSL). For HSSL the aesthetic goal was, as Alspector said, to "seamlessly merge the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries". One example of how this idea became a reality concerned the reading tables at HSSL. Original to the building, they required refitting for computer stations and internet hook ups. The impact of these new features was kept minimal by using materials like brass plates for the hook ups to stay consistent with the material choices of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Material selection and their effect on the overall aesthetics and permanence of a building are a key element to Alspector's design

philosophy. In concluding his presentation Alspector discussed how the design of SIBL took its cues from the materials that comprise HSSL's details. For example the hard woods, marble and durable metals. All these materials have a high permeability and require low maintenance. In looking at the design elements that make older libraries great and lasting places and then applying that to modern structures, Alspector has successfully redefined the possibilities behind library creation and modernization. Currently working on New York University's Bobst library, Alspector and his firm continue explore and set creative standards for library modernization.