

# Past is Prologue:

## Historic Art / Contemporary Responses

On May 3, 1937, a new library opened at the University of Oregon, and on October 23, 1937, the building was formally dedicated. Now called the Knight Library, the building has been described as a monument to the Depression-Era WPA public works programs which financed its construction. With its historic art and architecture, Knight Library is widely regarded as ranking among Oregon's best examples of integrated design, and its importance has been recognized by inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

The UO Libraries receives a substantial number of requests for information about the historic Knight Library's architecture and art. We also receive occasional complaints, particularly concerning the content of the murals in the east and west stairwells.

In 2017, the Knight Library Public Art Task Force was formed to provide the community with better documentation about the historic building and to identify opportunities to respond to the art while upholding the university's values of intellectual freedom and artistic expression.

The first project of the task force was the creation of a comprehensive guide to the library's art and architecture. This online resource, *Historic Knight Library: Art and Architecture*, describes the building, the art that adorns it, the people who created it, and the historical contexts in which the various works were created.

The next phase of the task force is to enable presentation of contemporary responses or countervailing reactions to the works. The task force is designing a collaborative process for inviting and commissioning a selected number of original, creative works (e.g., two-dimensional art, digital videos, essays, critiques, research projects, etc.) from the UO community. In early 2018, there will be a call for artworks, essays, and other proposals related to the art of historic Knight Library.



[Historic Knight Library: Art and Architecture  
researchguides.uoregon.edu/historic-knight](https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/historic-knight)

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