

What's to be done about art provision in public libraries? Diligent readers will be struck by the fact that, in this issue of *Art Libraries Journal*, Clive Phillpot, writing of Great Britain, and Anne Lise Rabben, writing of Norway, make exactly the same point – that while art libraries' societies have been successful in representing and developing art library services to specialists, they have been less successful in securing improvements in the provision of art documentation and art information in public libraries. In both Britain and Norway this has not been for want of trying; a major obstacle to progress, certainly in Britain, has been and remains the absence of specialist art librarian posts in public libraries – an absence, that is to say, of professionals whose role would surely lead them to join ARLIS; an absence, then, of ARLIS members through whom ARLIS could operate with comparative ease.

Clive asks – by way of putting the suggestion forward – whether ARLIS/UK & Ireland has 'published recommended lists of art reference books [etc]' to guide selection in public libraries. Well, in France, the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information has published Nicole Picot's excellent manual *Les Collections d'art dans les bibliothèques: guide pour la constitution d'un fonds*, intended for newly appointed art librarians and for librarians responsible for art provision in public libraries. It includes lists of recommended reference books, bibliographies, journals, etc, together with much practical information and advice¹. Here is one model of what can be done. Because people are practitioners as well as consumers of the arts, it might be useful to add lists of recommended *practical* art books. In addition, since public libraries have a *local* function (and so that their art shelves shouldn't look too much alike) it would be well to offer notes of guidance on acquiring documentation of local art (including exhibition catalogues, clippings, etc). A good many years ago, Danish colleagues produced a manual for use in public libraries with the emphasis on loan collections of slides, prints, and original works of art². While, sadly, it may now be unrealistic to expect public libraries to provide such a diverse range of materials, advice could, and should, be offered to public libraries on cooperating with and seeking assistance from specialist art libraries in the area. Meanwhile, in Britain, ARLIS/UK & Ireland has made representations to an ASLIB Public Library Review, and it is to

be hoped that this initiative will be followed by others of which the production of some kind of manual or guidelines might be one³.

Through our international networks – including *Art Libraries Journal*, ARLIS-L, and the IFLA Section of Art Libraries, we can identify common problems and look for solutions. As we approach the 21st century, it may be that art librarians worldwide should respond to Clive's challenge to us to look beyond the relatively easy task of providing specialist services to specialists and to attend to the needs of people at large. Would it be timely to make this the theme of an international conference, and to try to combine the spirit of 'Art libraries for the people'⁴ with a problem-solving agenda?

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This issue of *Art Libraries Journal* highlights art library associations, and art libraries, in several countries, Clive Philpott's aforementioned remarks being part of some late reflections occasioned by the 25th anniversary of ARLIS/UK & Ireland. The next two issues will include papers received by the IFLA Section of Art Libraries at last year's IFLA Conference at Havana. They will be followed by a special issue of *Art Libraries Journal* devoted to art libraries in South Africa.

References

1. Picot, Nicole. *Les Collections d'art dans les bibliothèques: guide pour la constitution d'un fonds*. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou Bibliothèque publique d'information, 1993. (Collection Dossiers Techniques, 90. ISBN 2 902706715. 150F. Reviewed by Philip Pacey, *Art Libraries Journal* vol. 19 no. 2 1994 p.33-34
2. Bibliotekarforbundets Kunst Faggruppe. *Medd. Blade* [special issue]. 1980. Reviewed by Ian Sheridan, *Art Libraries Journal* vol. 6 no. 4 1981 p.79-80
3. Varley, Gillian. 'ARLIS/UK & Ireland submission to the ASLIB Public Library Review'. *ARLIS News-sheet* no. 110 September/October 1994 p.5-6
4. 'Art libraries for the people' was the theme of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries Pre-conference at Brighton, U.K., in August 1987. Papers were published in *Art Libraries Journal* vol. 12 nos. 3 and 4, 1987. The title of the Pre-conference was borrowed from an earlier paper by Clive Phillpot in *Art Libraries Journal* vol. 10 no. 4 Winter 1985 p.3-11.