

EDITORIAL

A large, black headline in Barcelona's *el Periódica* neatly summarized a rather unusual day: 'TROMBA Y CAOS!' ('DELUGE AND CHAOS!'). It was Tuesday, August 24, 1993. While the heavens unleashed a wall of rain that flooded the streets and Métro system, knocking out electricity throughout Catalonia, snug and safe in the international conference centre 30 to 40 art librarians gathered for their meeting on 'Education for Art Librarianship', organised by the IFLA Section of Art Libraries as part of the 1993 IFLA Conference. It was our good luck that the meeting room was on the outside of the building with doors and windows onto a balcony that in the absence of air conditioning let in a little fresh, damp air, and natural light. The lack of electricity threatened our customary reliance on visual images, but art librarians are used to anticipating hazards that can scuttle a media presentation. All our speakers who were using overheads had thoughtfully brought with them paper versions which allowed the session to progress almost normally. Out of several IFLA meetings scheduled to be held simultaneously, ours was probably the only session that actually carried through as promised. It is sobering, perhaps to reflect that when electricity is withheld, the rhetoric about electronic information services and superhighways all at once seems meaningless, even absurd. For the conference speakers who had hoped on that Tuesday afternoon to unveil new databases (as was the case with one of my Toronto colleagues) the vulnerability of these new products to total inaccessibility is all too real.

In Barcelona we discovered that many of us are 'self-made' librarians. And we learned that in many countries, and in many languages, the terms 'art librarian', and 'art library' don't exist. It was Rossella Todros who initially described her surprise at finding, when she began her current career, that she was an 'art librarian'. She knew she was a self-made librarian. Others in the room reported similar experiences. Many had come out of an art making or art history background, and their searches for employment had led them to accept positions in art and architecture libraries. Like Rossella, they suddenly found they were 'art librarians'. When we learned from Betty Jo Irvine about the dual graduate art history/library science program at Indiana

University, it was easier to appreciate the tremendous variations in academic background that art librarians bring to their positions, often depending upon where they come from.

One of the chief delights of an international conference is to find oneself surrounded by congenial colleagues whose work experiences and environment are different from one's own. Only a dyed-in-the-wool chauvinist could fail to be receptive to the differences, or to question in a positive way cherished assumptions about professionalism, for example: what makes an 'art librarian'. From the papers and discussion at our session, clearly 'art librarians' have come to their positions by an extraordinary variety of routes that may or may not have involved academic training in librarianship and/or sophisticated computer skills, acquiring degrees in art or architecture, or a dozen other disciplines, practising as an artist, and apprenticing in a library setting. Any of these experiences may be part of our education for art librarianship – not just courses, workshops and conferences that offer classes and papers on the familiar topics that engage us all. Among those of us who teach formal courses in art librarianship, or art research methodology, is there anyone who would suggest that our very competent colleagues who have arrived by very different routes, often involving no librarianship training of any kind are in any way lesser art librarians?

No one who participated in the Barcelona session would, I think, deny that conferences, courses and workshops that educate individuals in aspects of art librarianship are desirable, nor that there should be more of them. And all would agree that our art libraries societies should encourage and sponsor educational programs. However, our profession does not need librarians who simply participate in such programs, picking up credentials that stamp them 'art librarian' but still bring only a '9 to 5' level of commitment to art and to their work. They are neither welcome into our profession, nor can they rightfully stand beside our colleagues who, lacking paper 'professional' qualifications, still function indisputably as outstanding examples of the species 'art librarian'. An art librarian is committed to art 24 hours a day. There is no substitute.

The seven papers given at the conference

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have been revised and expanded by their authors for publication. The papers are followed by an edited version of the discussion that followed. This was only made possible by heavenly intervention: as the papers concluded, electricity suddenly was restored which meant that the microphones were 'live', permitting audiorecording to proceed as planned. The contributions of 20 speakers from 12 countries guaranteed a lively, and undoubtedly representative airing of views on our topic for the afternoon: 'education for art librarianship.'

Mary F. Williamson,
Fine Arts Bibliographer,
Scott Library,
York University,
North York,
Ontario,
Canada

Editor's note:-

Mary Williamson, who moderated the 'Education for Art Librarianship' forum, has also been responsible for editing the material from that forum which constitutes the substance of this issue of *Art Libraries Journal*. I am very grateful to her for her considerable efforts.