

EDITORIAL

Over the past few years I have obviously given considerable thought to the international role of art librarians particularly in relation to participation in international meetings such as the 1988 IFLA Conference which has just been held in Sydney. This was the first time IFLA had come to Australia, and certainly the first time there had been an international meeting of art librarians in the region. As the dust clears and I find myself relaxing a little in the relative peace of "after IFLA" my mind turns naturally to reflection on the purpose and effect of such conferences. Why do we work so hard to organise meetings which last for a few days and are suddenly over?

As I flicked through the rather large piles of paper which I had accumulated before and during the Conference I discovered that the answer, for me, could be summed up in the general theme of the Sydney Conference, "Living together: people, libraries, information", which the Section of Art Libraries chose to interpret in an international sense with an accent on the Asian-Pacific region.

In the age of the supersonic jet, the satellite computer link and the facsimile machine it is a truism to state that the world is growing ever smaller and that we cannot operate in isolation, ignoring the ideas, achievements and problems of our neighbours. Yet, how often we still manage to do so, allowing ourselves to become buried in the everyday business of living and working (though for art librarians I like to think that these two activities are synonymous), oblivious to events and developments in other parts of the globe – or even on our doorsteps. It is frightening to think at times of how much enjoyment we can miss if we fail to take advantage of opportunities for the sharing of ideas and efforts. Worse still is the effect such blindness can have on our effectiveness as professional art librarians. Not only does a self-imposed narrowness of outlook reduce the quantity and quality of information we can provide, it also lessens our effectiveness as people in whom human, and humane, qualities should be highly developed and who consequently have the ability and, in my view, a duty to further international understanding.

The activities of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries at the Sydney Conference were, I believe, most successful in promoting an increase in such understanding. For many participants this was their first experience of an international meeting of art librarians. This

resulted in a very high level of enthusiasm and a refreshing thirst for information which is sometimes lacking among more blasé groups for whom international meetings are a common-place or another dose of "the mixture as before".

Papers presented originated from Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, the USA, Canada, the USSR, Japan, India and Papua New Guinea. Delegates came from all directions and, although the representation from Europe was understandably disappointing, the range of ideas and debate was impressive.

A few themes emerged clearly as being of common concern. In her Keynote paper Professor Antje Lemke picked up a theme mentioned briefly in Trevor Fawcett's 1987 Keynote paper, that of art archives. After an inspiring survey of the present state of art archival collecting she referred to the Information Trinity of "museums, archives and libraries" serving the arts. This theme was picked up by John McPhee, Senior Curator of Australian Art at the Australian National Gallery, who painted a vivid picture of the hurdles to be overcome by the intrepid art historian/curator and called on librarians to work with curators in locating and securing our valuable archival resources. These two papers are to appear in a future issue of this journal.

Our session during the main Conference concentrated on networking and indexing in art libraries. It proved to be an eye-opening session for many of us, with developments in Japan, North America, Mexico and Russia raising new possibilities for techniques and topics to be considered in relation to our own work. As these papers are reproduced in this volume I shall not enlarge on them here.

Two other themes of particular interest to this region, isolation, and the need for sensitivity in dealing with the art and beliefs of indigenous populations, also raised much interest. In relation to isolation, the value which participants placed on contact with fellow professionals in the arts, in libraries, and in publishing, became clear.

For most of us the most valuable aspect of the Conference was the opportunity it afforded to meet and share ideas with colleagues seldom, or never before, met face to face in spite of years of contact and mutual help. This is perhaps one of the aspects of professional life in this part of the world least understood by those of our colleagues who live and work in long established centres of art historical research. Regardless of the level

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art historical research. Regardless of the level of development of countries in this region, we are all dominated by the "tyranny of distance". Colleagues in other countries are far away and seldom met, a fact which will be understood by all, but for us the same applies to colleagues within our own borders. For this reason, the excitement of an international gathering is heightened by the excuse it gives for far-flung compatriots to gather to welcome the overseas visitors.

The Sydney Conference is over. After such a rich and stimulating experience how do I fill in the vacuum? What vacuum? Since the end of the Conference I have been busy reading and writing letters exchanged with the friends, old and new, who attended the Conference, and have also been delighted to greet many delegates whose post-conference wanderings brought them to my doorstep. In any case, we have already started planning for Paris in 1989

Margaret Shaw,
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Erratum

The review of *Visual Resources* in volume 13 no. 2 quoted subscription rates of \$120 (corporate) and \$80 (individual). The correct rates are as follows:—

- \$120 corporate subscriptions
- \$80 university/academic subscription
- \$40 individual subscription
- \$28 special rate for members of the Visual Resources Association

We apologise for any confusion or misapprehension caused by this error.

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