

For many people the word 'archives' conjures up something as dry as dust and infinitely remote. Archives are the province of the most scholarly of historians. Yet interests in local or family history have led many people to discover the relevance of archives as a preserve of one's *own* history, while others, who would never think of approaching an institutional archive, nonetheless accumulate personal and family papers, letters, diaries, scraps of autobiography. Often such personal or familial archives will also contain photographs; sometimes, paintings or drawings, if only the work of children. If the concept of private archives of this kind is brought together with a realisation that 'everyone is a special kind of artist'; if at the same time we recognise the uniqueness of individual experience and the contribution made by people of all kinds to community and to history; then personal and private archives, institutional and public archives, and also, *art* archives, can be seen to be related: archives, as much as museums, are repositories of records of human experience in all its diversity; they belong and should be accessible to us all.

One way in which archival material can be made more accessible without risk to the material itself is via microform publication, the benefits (and drawbacks) of which are well enough known. Inspired by Paula Chiarmonte's 1983 survey of microform collections in American art libraries,¹ ARLIS/UK & Eire has produced a union list of microform sets: microforms of single monographs or of serials are not included, and thus the union list is founded on the capacity of microfiche to reproduce *whole collections* of material, including both archives and original works of art.² Sadly, however, the publication turns out to be more a list than a union list; as the compiler, Chris Nichols, observes in his introduction, 'It is worryingly apparent that most sets are not held by any UK or Eire art library'; in many cases, then, no location (not even the National Art Library) can be assigned. Therefore, and because there is 'no legal requirement to send copies of new microforms to the copyright libraries', it is 'virtually impossible for researchers to gain access to them in this country'. Clearly *cost* is a significant factor: inevitably the price of microfiche set which represents an extensive collection is beyond the reach of many libraries in hard times, however economical per

frame and in spite of the wealth which the collection offers. Thus for example, a highly desirable set such as MoMA's *Artists' Scrapbooks*, at £2,250 has found only three buyers in Britain.

And so this so-called union list is, rather, a list of omission and of inadequate resourcing. As such it has its value: for, says Nichols, 'hopefully, the identification of gaps of UK holdings of microforms will lead to a determined effort on the part of those libraries with responsibility for national collecting to improve acquisition in this important area'. The list has the potential to contribute to a national strategy, and in this role it may lend itself as a model to other countries. Indeed, I am reminded not merely of Paula Chiarmonte's aforementioned survey but also of her impassioned plea, to the IFLA Section of Art Libraries at Munich in 1983, for an *international* approach to microfiche – a plea which was linked to Sven Sandström's vision of the 'universal availability' of art research materials. Although undoubtedly over-ambitious, the ensuing project proposal (which emphasised images rather than archives, and which included both slides and videodiscs in its terms of reference) still makes inspiring reading.³ The discrepancy between reality (as represented for example by the ARLIS/UK list) and a vision which is as applicable to archives as it was, and is, to artefacts, challenges and haunts us.

Access to archives themselves depends in part, as Antje Lemke reminds us, on public knowledge of their contents and whereabouts, and thus, on the availability of finding aids. Here again, inspiration can be found by looking into the past, notably to AICARC's admirable *Documentation of modern art: a handlist of resources*,⁴ which was altogether more substantial than its modest subtitle implied. Published in 1975, it cries out to be updated and enlarged; but more than that, its example calls for an international directory of *all* art archives – an equivalent to the *IFLA Directory of Art Libraries*. Although not a task for the IFLA Section of Art Libraries to undertake on its own, this is surely something which the Section should be campaigning for and offering to contribute to. For, apart from its innate usefulness, a directory of this kind would be a major step towards a 'federation of repositories . . . accessible worldwide', while the work of compiling it would inevitably bring

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together archivists, art librarians, and museum personnel, in a joint effort which would itself constitute a valuable cooperative network and promote 'rapprochement' between our three professions.

References

1. Chiarmonte, Paula. 'Microform collections survey in the fine arts research libraries'. *Art Documentation* December 1983 p.173-176.
2. *ARLIS Union list of microforms on art, design and related subjects*, compiled by Chris Nichols. ARLIS/UK & Eire, 1988. 40p. £5.00 (£4.00 to ARLIS/UK & Eire members), from: Pat Christie, Epsom School of Art and Design Library, Ashley Road, Epsom, Surrey KT18 5BE.
3. *IFLA Section of Art Libraries Newsletter* no.9 October 1983
4. Sandström, Sven editor. *Documentation of modern art: a handlist of resources*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup (for AICARC), 1975.