The emptied shelves of Rachel Whiteread's installation *Untitled (Book Corridors)*, exhibited in London last January, poignantly illustrate the damage censorship can do to library collections. This issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* opens with Olga Sinitsyna's article on the Soviet censorship of both art documentation and of the arts overall; she analyses the material which was kept in the "special stacks" of the All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature, which were opened to the library staff only a decade ago, in an attempt to understand the logic behind the banning of apparently harmless material.

This Moscow library, one of the largest in Russia, is both a research and a public library, whose art department serves some 100 readers each day. Continuing the public libraries theme, Amanda Duffy aims to lift the gloom felt by visual arts librarians working in local authorities in the United Kingdom, highlighting the opportunities as well as the threats currently facing them and giving practical advice about adaptation to a changing environment. Remarkable similarities can be found in Anne-Marie Bertrand's paper on public libraries in France, where impressive new buildings frequently offer shorter opening hours than their predecessors, charging is on the increase, and even the dramatic growth in the staff numbers employed shows signs of having peaked. The new generation of French municipal libraries, offering stock in many media and now referred to by the collective name "médiathèques", reflects the success of the first such library, the Bibliothèque publique d'information in Paris, which broke new ground when it opened in 1977 by interfiling its multi-media stock in one sequence on open access shelves.

At a time when public libraries are reducing their specialist information provision in the visual arts it is well worth looking at other available sources of information. Anneke Kerkhof describes not only her own "double" library, the Fondation Custodia/Institut Néerlandais founded by Frits Lugt, but also some of the many other libraries in cultural centres in Paris. These offer a great wealth of resources, but are still surprisingly little known or exploited by people seeking art documentation. Another rich but hidden resource is revealed by Michiel Nijhoff, who plans to make his library, that of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, accessible to a much wider public than usually expects to use museum libraries.

A number of contributors to the *ALJ*'s 1998 survey asked for articles on technical aspects of the work of art librarians. In response, this issue includes four such contributions, beginning with Jeremy Rees's outline of the development of digital interactive publishing in the visual arts, and his assessment of the probable future for offline digital resources in the cultural field. Doug Dodds describes ELISE, a European project investigating the feasibility of developing a European-based text and image service, and comments on the value to a major UK art library of collaborating with institutions from other disciplines. Mike Stapleton, in his outline of another European project. Aquarelle, shows how the documentation and primary data produced by museums and other cultural organisations can be shared, giving multilingual information access and retrieval across a range of media. Potential users of the prototype produced during the project include museum curators, art dealers, architects and planners, publishers and, of course, students and researchers. ELISE and Aquarelle have together involved a total of seven European countries, reaching from Greece to Ireland.

Art librarians searching for a way to make their visual collections available to a wider user group, without endangering them through overhandling, will find Oliver Vicars-Harris's summary of the resources needed in his imaging project valuable. He gives the background to the making of COLLAGE, an image database recently launched on the Internet, which opens up to the public much of the visual material held by the Corporation of London's Guildhall Library and Guildhall Art Gallery.

The number and variety of electronic information projects in the field of art documentation, and the opportunity they present of universal accessibility, contrast with the era of censorship in Russia's recent past (where the collapse of totalitarianism was itself hastened by electronic networks) and with present challenges faced by some of our colleagues in the day-to-day provision of library services to the public. France, which led the way in popularising ready access to information technology, offers us a model of best practice in its médiathèques – but we need to remember that information services need professionals and professionals need funding.

EDITORIAL