

The 2nd European Conference of Art Librarians, the proceedings of which are about to be published in a substantial volume,¹ featured some thirty-four papers; nominally, its theme was 'Art periodicals', yet it would appear that papers offered were accepted almost regardless of topic: certainly the theme was interpreted broadly. In terms of the sheer quantity of papers received, the conference echoed the first (Geneva) conference of 1985 which received even more papers; in terms of the type of material included (or, more crucially, *not* included), these two conferences can be seen to have created a precedent for the third, to be held at Florence in November, where the subject of exhibition catalogues will come under scrutiny.

In sharing quantities of information about library systems, collections, and materials, these conferences may well be establishing a secure common ground as a foundation for future dialogue and cooperation between European art librarians. Involving as many delegates as possible as speakers has obvious merits, both in terms of facilitating attendance and extending participation. Without doubt, the European conferences have succeeded in initiating and sustaining a considerable momentum. But is that momentum leading anywhere except, inexorably, to the next conference? Has not the time come when these conferences should both *widen* and *focus* their vision? I have in mind a *widening* of vision to encompass art librarianship as a whole and in all its diversity, throughout Europe, and a *focussing* of vision to clarify purpose and identify goals.

I am prompted to make this suggestion by both a success and a failure of the Amsterdam conference. First the success. A major achievement of this conference was to inspire certain delegates who were subsequently instrumental in founding ARLIS NORDEN. Yet there is no hint of this outcome in the conference proceedings. Clearly, it came about as the result of the spirit, as distinct from the formal content, of the conference. Secondly, the failure. Beth Houghton contributed a paper on "Journals of art librarianship: their international role". Here was a paper addressing a topic of direct professional interest, addressed to an audience of European art librarians for whom that topic poses particular questions; as she so often does, Beth deliberately set out to stimulate discussion, and to elicit a constructive and helpful response, not by provocation but by invitation; not, that is, by nailing her colours

to the mast, but by carefully opening the subject up and making space for different viewpoints. Yet the paper was not scheduled in a way which enabled it to be adequately discussed. An opportunity was lost.

Conferences are well known to be more than the sum of their papers. What happens between and around formal presentations can be of the greatest value; the balance of papers, discussion, and conviviality can be vital to the success of a conference, as can the choice of papers which can stimulate discussion and thus contribute to an integrated, purposive event. The organisers of the Geneva and Amsterdam conferences are to be congratulated on what they have achieved; whatever happens next will be easier because of the groundwork which has been done, the contacts which have been made, the network which now exists. The organisers of the forthcoming conference at Florence have taken a step forward in setting aside a whole day, immediately before the main conference, with the declared aim of launching an association of Italian art librarians. Dare I suggest that future European conferences of art librarians should adopt a different model and a new agenda? The *model* I would recommend is that of a focussed conference, comprising fewer papers each one of which is carefully chosen to stimulate and guide discussion and perhaps to steer the conference towards a particular conclusion – resolutions, recommendations, proposals for action. And the *agenda*? The agenda should be nothing less than the development of art librarianship throughout Europe. Particular topics to be considered would then include some at least of the following:

- the training of art librarians.
- the aims of art libraries: what and who are they for?
- the fostering of links between art librarians of all kinds (including those who are not employed in major national and academic libraries).
- the development of associations of art libraries and art librarians of all kinds, including, possibly, an ARLIS/Europe.
- the extending of links into more countries and not least into Eastern Europe and the USSR.
- the role of such conferences, and of European art librarianship, in the worldwide context represented by the IFLA Section of Art Libraries.²

There is plenty to talk about, plenty to do.

EDITORIAL

Indeed, in spite or because of the fact that European civilisation is encrusted by its past, librarianship in much of Europe is currently underdeveloped: thus the way is open for art librarians to lead by example. And let's not forget the topic of journals of art librarianship, a subject in which the present writer, as editor of the *Revue de Bibliothèques d'Art*, the *Zeitschrift für Kunstbibliotheken*, and the *Revista de Bibliotecas de Arte*, has a particular interest.

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The theme of this issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* derives from Edith Crowe's vigorous conference paper and its call for more attention to be paid to art "outside the mainstream". The mainstream, so far as art libraries are concerned, can be taken to mean an approach to, predominantly, Western art, and a clientele comprising (for the most part) art scholars, and others, who are instrumental in *defining*, or whose interests are defined *by*, that approach. The power and responsibility of art librarians to "redefine the mainstream" is now very much on our professional agenda, and deserves consideration worldwide but not least in mainland Europe where (but for the artoteks) art librarianship appears to be particularly closely identified with "mainstream institutions".

References

1. *Art periodicals/Periodiques d'art/Kunstzeitschriften: 2nd European conference of the art libraries of IFLA. Amsterdam, 13-17 October 1986.* 278 pp. Available from: Koos Wynia, Vrije Universiteit Bibliotheek, Postbus 7161, 1007 MC Amsterdam. Dfl. 80.00
2. If the European conferences would concentrate on European solutions to European problems, this would define their role in such a way as to minimise any possibility of their being seen as a rival attraction to the Section of Art Libraries programmes at the annual IFLA Conferences – wherever the latter happen to be held. If we are serious about internationalism, we must accept the principle that wherever IFLA meets, art librarians should meet also; if we have learned to see the world's art as a whole, then we will recognise that every centre is an *art* centre.