

The articles in this issue of *Art Libraries Journal* speak of the extraordinary dynamism of Quebec cultural life over the past three decades. Pride in history, region and language, and generous government funding to education and the arts, contributed to an abundant and vibrant academic and creative environment. Art information professionals saw evidence of such proliferation in the flood of publications and documentation entering their institutions, and in the increased demand for research support services in the visual arts. Publishing flourished, collections grew, standards were developed, services expanded, technology embraced. A post-war blossoming was of course in evidence throughout Canada, but the accomplishments in Quebec have been particularly urgent and visceral.

Our profession itself matured and thrived during this same period, becoming more complex, more specialized. We assumed leadership roles in the areas of automation, preservation and resource-sharing; we formed active professional organisations and established alliances with our colleagues in such fields as visual resources, archives and museology.

Now, in the 1990s, in Quebec, in Canada, and in much of the Western world, we see the work of both creator and custodian constrained by severe reductions in government funding (indeed in Canada all publicly-funded programmes and institutions are under rigorous scrutiny). Our roles as stewards of public collections and managers of information are being redefined – not always by ourselves, and not always with vision.

Subsequent to reading the articles for this Quebec issue, my attention was drawn to a recent paper by Michelle Gauthier, head of the Médiathèque of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. In 'Museum Libraries: an endangered species?'¹, she reflects upon the current fiscal reality which has resulted in the closing or reduction in services of museum libraries in Quebec and across Canada. Her message is prescriptive – that our profession must assume a higher-profile, more aggressive, activist role as information manager in our institutions; and her message is proscriptive – that institutions

must not forget their responsibilities to their public and to the education and research process.

The situation described by Michelle Gauthier suggests a different picture than that conveyed by the accomplishments described in this issue of *Art Libraries Journal*; it is a situation which is in many ways both a denial of and a threat to such past achievements and current ambitions; but it is in fact the imperative that drives our programmes and defines our scope at this time. Michelle Gauthier's article reminds us that vigilance and perseverance are required of our profession if we are to maintain the generosity of our mandates and contribute significantly to the cultural life of our communities. Associations such as ARLIS/UK & Ireland and publications such as this *Journal* are indispensable as never before. It is gratifying to see the Quebec work described herein given permanent record and international exposure.

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Reference

1. Gauthier, Michelle. 'Museum libraries: an endangered species?' *Muse* vol. 13 no. 3 Fall 1995, p. 50-53.

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