

# EDITORIAL

The present issue of *Art Libraries Journal* focuses on the evolution of and current concerns in art librarianship in Canada. It brings together the contents of a panel discussion held in the context of a recent joint meeting of two regional chapters of ARLIS/NA: ARLIS/MOQ (Montréal/Ottawa/Québec) and ARLIS/NA Ontario. This joint meeting came about as part of the initiatives, by the National Gallery of Canada, and its Chief Librarian, Murray Waddington, to develop a more coherent national and regional support among Canadian art libraries, and to stimulate their development.

Eight presentors from different parts of the country took turns to address several key issues: the context in which Canadian professional affiliations were forged and developed; the groundswell of a critical mass, a literature of Canadian art and architecture made manifest by the recent pioneering bibliographic work of Loren Lerner and Mary Williamson, *Art and Architecture in Canada*; challenges to the continuity and integrity of collection management embodied in the conflicting imperatives of financial cutbacks on the one hand, and the growing research demands of academic and museum programs on the other; the changing fundamentals of visual arts research and the concomitant advancements in the retrieval, transmission and dissemination of visual information; the increased visibility of the national service mandate of the National Gallery of Canada, and of its Library; and last, but certainly not least: a perceived need for a national art information strategy for Canada.

Ken Chamberlain, the retired Head Librarian of the Emily Carr College in Vancouver spoke of the efforts, some twenty years ago, to define the early framework for Canadian librarians working in art libraries, to assert their status as professionals, and to ally them with the newly created ARLIS/NA in a statement of continental solidarity. By choosing membership in ARLIS/NA, a professional wholly devoted to the specialized concerns of art librarianship, over the affiliation with the more broadly-based, but home-grown groups such as CASLIS (Canadian Association of Special Libraries and Information Services) and CLA (Canadian Library Association), Canadian art librarians made an important statement about the

professional context in which their work was to be rooted.

Mary Williamson, Fine Arts Bibliographer from York University in Toronto focussed on the pressing need to extend the current coverage of Canadian art literature in the largest possible number of abstracting and indexing services, and to seize upon the sophisticated retrieval technologies in order to index historical literature of Canadian art – from specialized art journals to commercial newspapers. Auction catalogues and small exhibition catalogues, for example, have not been properly explored in form-specific bibliographic tools. As the coverage of a variety of published formats has increased, the growing necessity to improve access to a rich field of archival *fonds* has also become imperative.

Jo Beglo from the National Gallery of Canada spoke of the innovative strategies for the evaluation, interpretation and preservation of collections, and their synthetic role in the development of comprehensive collection policies. She stressed the curatorial responsibility of art librarians, and their impact on the emerging new models of collection building, built upon a growing partnership between scholars and information specialists.

The current changes in visual arts scholarship itself were adumbrated by Loren Lerner from Concordia University in Montreal. The evolving standards of the vocabulary of art, the role of computer technology in location, description and retrieval of art information; and increased communication amongst art researchers by means of electronic networks have profoundly affected the nature of scholarly discourse. These factors have not merely influenced the new directions in art librarianship: they have often stemmed directly from it.

Karen McKenzie, Chief Librarian of the Art Gallery of Ontario, one of the pre-eminent institutional research facilities for Canadian art, addressed the geographical inequity of specialized collections in Canadian art and architecture in her paper entitled 'Regional or national centres of excellence: the unofficial and endangered Canadian art resource'. The historically based dichotomy between personal and institutional commitment has been exacerbated in many cases by undulating levels of support, and by the simple virtue of contin-

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ued territorial isolation. A vital task is to make administrators more aware of institutional holdings, and of the attendant obligation to perpetuate, and build upon, the outstanding resources that have been clearly identified in reference mega-tools, such as *Art and Architecture in Canada*.

In her paper 'National Strategy for Canada', Linda Bien, Head of the Concordia University Fine Arts Slide Library, voiced concerns of the Canadian visual resources professionals, an active community whose interest in the new technologies has spurred a number of important initiatives. Prominent amongst the most pressing issues in the advancement of these professional concerns, she cited the following: a clearly formulated, country-wide strategy for developing a full-scale Canadian artist authority tool or tools; a concerted effort to make Canadian iconography integral to any tools developed to describe art objects and their surrogates; a proper funding for retrospective conversion and imaging; and finally, a need to resolve the implications of Canadian copyright restrictions involving visual material.

As Murray Waddington pointed out, the increasingly dynamic, visible stance of the National Gallery of Canada is intended to facilitate the mapping out of the national art library collections policy, and to promulgate new, closer, relationships between information seekers and providers. The National Gallery is in a unique position to forge links with international art information programs on the one hand, and with regional and local networks on the other.

It was Bob Foley from the Banff Centre for Continuing Education who seized upon the earlier discussions to call for the creation of a Canadian national forum on art librarianship which could address issues of representation, communication, professional expertise and intervention, all in the context of developing a valid national strategy for visual arts research and information. Even though such a call might sound like going back full circle to the deliberations of Canadian art librarians in the early 1970s, it is being addressed to a very different audience: a cohesive professional group which has helped transform the old, fragmented, picture of Canadian art librarianship.

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Editor's note:-

Much of the editing of this special issue has been undertaken by Peter Trepanier, the Deputy Editor of *Art Libraries Journal*. The abstracts at the head of each article were prepared by Marcia Sweet, Senior Reader Services Librarian, National Gallery of Canada.