

In his regular column 'Publications News' in the *ARLIS U.K. & Eire News-sheet*, Simon Ford recently drew attention to two books among the current spate of writings questioning the role of museums, *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*, and *Museums, objects and collections: a cultural study*¹.

Museums are neither 'passive' nor 'neutral'; they are active agents in the 'shaping of knowledge', selecting what is to be remembered and influencing how it is remembered; their approach to their own or other cultures is likely to represent and then to reinforce a particular point of view. While the phrase 'the new museology' no doubt means many things to many people, one ingredient is the museum profession's growing awareness that, in their selection, interpretation, and presentation of objects, museums have responsibilities to society at large and should seek to represent a multiplicity of viewpoints.

The 'new museology' is paralleled, as Simon Ford points out, by the 'new art history' which (among other things) is broadening the delineation of art history beyond the mainstream and the masterwork. But, he asks, 'what is the new librarianship? And where could it come from? Where is our *Libraries, books and collections: a cultural study* and *Libraries and the shaping of knowledge?*' Meantime, *ARLIS/U.K. & Eire* has adopted the theme 'The new art librarianship' for its next annual conference.

Some key books have in fact been around for quite a while. They include James Thompson's *Library power* of 1974², which was reviewed by the present writer³ and which gave me the title of an essay, 'Art library power'⁴, and Ronald Bengé's *Libraries and cultural change* of 1970⁵. So far as art librarianship is concerned, the *Art Libraries Journal* has repeatedly advocated a 'new art librarianship' without, however, adopting this term, so much so that a substantial anthology could probably be culled from our pages. The theme – of the positive, pro-active exercise of the art librarian's responsibilities – is continued in this issue, in which Mary B. Davis champions the right of North American Indians to interpret their own art; it follows that art librarians should not be content simply to stock their library shelves with the most readily available texts on the subject, authored by non-Indians, but rather, should be instrumental in highlighting and provid-

ing access to – and in encouraging the growth and publication of – this other body of writing.

Some years ago a number of prominent art librarians received long letters from an art historian in Italy who believed that in attempting to challenge the traditional attribution of a Sienese fresco he had become the victim of 'selective' indexing of journals in a major art library. Some of us were perplexed as to how to respond, but the individual concerned, with a colleague, was given the opportunity to address the 2nd European Conference of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries in 1986, and their text was subsequently published with the other conference papers⁶. Now *Library Trends* has published a thoughtful, authoritative article by John Swan, which explores the ethical implications of this case, including the 'lack of response of librarians'⁷. We are chided, but gently and with considerable sensitivity and understanding; it is acknowledged that those approached may have hesitated to act 'because of a lack of clarity (from a distance, anyway) about what the evidence proved and just what they were to do about it', while an 'ethics of collegiality' – recognised to be 'a genuine ethics' – disinclines professionals in such circumstances to condemn their colleagues too hastily. Yet Swan detects signs that 'librarians are beginning to see that their role cannot be limited to that of passive shepherds of documents and data', and he concludes with a sentence which could serve us well as a motto for a 'new' – or not so new? – art librarianship:

The difficult truth is that librarians must be both neutral champions of access to all points of view and advocates for the important views that are suppressed or unrepresented.

Following her retirement, Mary Ashe has stepped down from the Deputy Editorship of *Art Libraries Journal*, a post which she has held since the Journal was re-launched in 1986. We have been honoured, and encouraged, by her support. The new Deputy Editor is Peter Trepanier, Head of Special Collections at the National Gallery of Canada at Ottawa. Peter has of

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course already made his mark on the *Journal*, as the instigator and guest-editor of our special issue devoted to art librarians as artists, and we are delighted to welcome him as a member of the editorial team.

Notes

1. *ARLIS U.K. & Eire News-sheet* no. 98 September/October 1992, p.7.

Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Pearce, Susan M. *Museums, objects and collections: a cultural study*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992.

2. Thompson, James. *Library power*. London: Bingley, 1974.

3. *ARLIS Newsletter* no. 21 December 1974, p.27-30

4. Pacey, Philip. 'Art library power'. *Assistant Librarian* no. 68 June 1975, p.96-

100; reprinted in *A Reader in art librarianship*. Munich: K. G. Saur, 1985, p.11-17.

5. Bengé, Ronald C. *Libraries and cultural change*. London: Clive Bingley, 1970.

6. Moran, G. and Mallory, M. 'Selective' card cataloging (or in-house screening of periodical indexing) of art history articles in authors' files, and the potential effects of this 'selectivity' on the bibliographical entries relating to specific art historical problems: a case study'. In *Art periodicals: papers of the 2nd European Conference of the Art Libraries of IFLA*. Amsterdam: Overleg Kunsthistorische Bibliotheken in Nederland, 1988, p.123-132.

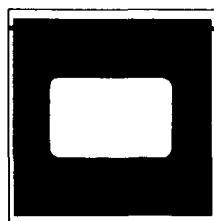
7. Swan, John. 'Ethics inside and out: the case of Guidoriccio'. *Library Trends* vol. 40 no. 2 Fall 1991, p.258-274.

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