

EDITORIAL

In November 1994 Philip Pacey, editor of the *Art Libraries Journal*, offered art librarians in South Africa the opportunity of contributing to a special South African issue.

After many years of isolation from our colleagues both nationally and internationally, this offer gave some of us the chance of working together on what we have found to be an exciting and liberating project.

Contributions were sought from a variety of libraries and institutions and although initially daunting, editing the articles has proved to be a learning experience for all concerned. Josephine Andersen, Garton Bouwer and Solvej Vorster have spent many hours editing the articles and would like to acknowledge all the assistance received from Karel Schoeman of the South African Library, Joe Dolby, Assistant Director of the South African National Gallery, Ulvard Andersen and many other friends and colleagues.

The encouragement and support of Philip Pacey and the connection with ARLIS/UK & Ireland is a privilege which we hope to maintain.

For the librarians from the Western Cape, this involvement subsequently proved to be the first substantial group endeavour of an association which had begun a little more than a year previously. It was on the 16th of March 1993 that Garton Bouwer from the Central Art Library in Cape Town initiated a meeting with art librarians in the Western Cape with the intention of forming a regional association. This group is developing under the name Art Library Forum (ALF), and it is with great expectations that the participants look forward to an association with ARLIS/UK & Ireland.

There is also desire for a South African association of art librarians and attempts are at present being made to form one.

Greatest among the challenges facing us is the tyranny of indifference, inherited from the past, which has proven both painful, persistent and seemingly impossible to overcome. But now, at this time of rapid and momentous change within South Africa, a window of opportunity has opened through which we can see the possibility of establishing closer links with other libraries and institutions devoted to the visual arts.

Faced with an apparently indifferent society, sections of which were in the past even hostile to the value and role of art in the community and hence the relevance of art libraries and related information resources, we are thankful and proud to have survived and often flourished.

South African art libraries have yielded as little as possible to economic pressures and institutional neglect in the preservation of their resources and have, to the contrary, often increased the size and scope of their collections and the range of services offered to the community. To do good by stealth was more than just a religious exhortation for librarians, but a way to ensure the growth and development of the collection.

The pursuit of excellence at whatever cost, first in building dynamic and representative library collections of world culture, and secondly in reflecting the achievements in the visual arts of all South Africans, are some of the motivations behind the founding of ALF.

Desire for contact with art libraries in other countries and the wish to inform them, not only of our continued existence but also of our ambitions for the future, are what have dictated this attempt at creating a first South African issue of the *Art Libraries Journal*.

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