

The proofs of the last issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* were checked *en plein air* during a blissfully calm Channel crossing on a golden autumn afternoon, and later on the overnight Naples Express as it pulled out of the Gare de Lyon. Next morning my eyes could hardly keep themselves open after a restless night; following the coast south from Genoa, it was as if one's eyes were opened and shut, opened and shut, as the train alternately burrowed into ridges then emerged to cross steep valleys, until bending inland it ran alongside the Carrara mountains glowing softly in the sunlight of a perfect All Saint's Day.

This European issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* includes some other traveller's tales in addition to featuring the activities at Florence, the goal of the journey evoked above. That the third European Art Libraries Conference was such a success was due in no small part to the active group of Florentine art librarians who (as delegates discovered when they dipped into the contents of their conference packs) had already achieved the publication of a handsome directory of Florentine art libraries which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. For them in particular the conference held out hopes of the launching, with their colleagues, of an Italian art libraries association; that nothing decisive was achieved, beyond an agreement to meet again, may have been less disappointing for them than for some of us who were participants and onlookers from elsewhere and who hoped to share in a moment of triumph. Instead we must be grateful for having had the chance to participate, though momentarily, in a process which Eve Leckey assures us is slow but sure.

To launch an art libraries association in a country where librarianship itself has not yet achieved complete maturity as a profession was never going to be easy; daunting as the challenge undoubtedly is, Italian art librarians have the opportunity to lead by example, to establish themselves in the vanguard of Italian librarianship. In doing so it is to be hoped that they will inspire fellow art librarians in comparable situations elsewhere in Europe.

But 'che cos'è una biblioteca d'arte?', as Rossella Todros asks in her preface to the Florentine directory. It is a good question, and it reminded me of another journey three months earlier, when during a family holiday in Denmark I was delighted to meet members of Kunstfaggruppen and to visit two of the public libraries – popular and accessible –

from which they operate. In Europe as elsewhere it is perhaps vital to keep in mind the variety of 'art libraries' from which art library associations derive their strength: not all of them in 'grandi istituzioni legate all'arte', but every one in its own way a source of information and of inspiration. Indeed, it sometimes seems to me that it is in those libraries where art exists cheek by jowl with other subjects, where it has to stand up for itself and earn its keep, that its relevance to everything and to everyone is most reassuringly self-evident.

Three papers from the Florence conference (two of them in their English rather than their original versions) are included in this issue of the *Art Libraries Journal*; a fourth (by Jack Robertson) will appear in the next issue, which is to be devoted to archives and primary sources. A separate publication, including all of the Florence papers in the languages in which each was presented, is expected to appear later in 1989.