

EDITORIAL

For those of us who, as a result of attending the IFLA Conference, found ourselves in Moscow during that historic week last August, it was easy enough to know what we were *against*; even as we pinned badges of the Russian flag onto our lapels, hardly knowing what they represented but adopting them as *the* symbol of opposition to the coup, we could not know what might follow; insofar as we were *for* anything it was probably the reinstatement of a *status quo* which was itself a state of flux in which the only constant had been the presiding figure of Mikhail Gorbachev. Now, not directly by the mercifully short-lived coup, he has been swept aside by change; the Soviet Union which played host to us in August no longer exists.

What this means for the libraries we visited or heard about is only gradually being determined. With the demise of the USSR, the Lenin Library and the All-Union State Library of Foreign Literature have become the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture within independent Russia, and have been retitled, respectively, the Russian State Library and the All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature. It is not yet known whether their future role will encompass any responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the Commonwealth of Independent States, or whether they will simply serve as the national libraries of Russia. Other "national" libraries and library networks of former republics now find themselves to be national libraries, and national library systems, of independent nations: it is perhaps fitting that this issue of the *Art Libraries Journal* should feature, in addition to libraries in Moscow and St Petersburg, the former republic of Byelorussia, now a nation in its own right.

Yet to be decided is the future of "Informkultura" – a major but flawed initiative which, on the face of it, has potential to be adapted to the needs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, but which would need to make better use both of information technology and of information itself (too little of the information painstakingly compiled by participants in the scheme was subsequently disseminated through the network). Much may depend on clarification of the role of the Russian State Library under its new Director, Mr Philippov, since "Informkultura" depended on the Lenin Library for support.

Sadly, it would be totally unrealistic to

anticipate the emergence of an ARLIS/CIS in the foreseeable future. Many of the art librarians from within the USSR who were present at Moscow were meeting each other for the first time. As described by one of them,

there isn't any art libraries association or any other organization which coordinates their functioning. There are museum libraries, which serve only the museum staff and some specialists, who have to get special permission to use them. And there are some public and research libraries with good or bad holdings of art books and other materials, which may have or not art departments . . .¹

What is common to all of these art libraries is an acute shortage of money, and especially of hard currency to enable the purchase of art publications (including journals) from other countries. If anyone reading this is able to offer any kind of help, or to enter into exchange arrangements, and would like to be put in touch with suitable recipients or partners, please contact me (Philip Pacey)

The contents of this special issue of *Art Libraries Journal* include some but not all of the relevant papers presented to the IFLA Section of Art Libraries Workshop at Moscow. I have excluded material on "Informkultura", which has recently been the subject of a report in these pages.² I have reluctantly excluded Dmitry Pertsev's paper on museum databases. I have also omitted the paper by American librarians Kasinec and Davis, presented in their absence, which – if in an earlier form – had already been published in *Art Documentation*³ following its presentation to the ARLIS/NA Conference in February 1990. I have subjected the original English versions of papers by Russian-speaking colleagues to, in some cases, heavy editing; I can only hope that any gains in readability have not been achieved at the expense of content and meaning. (One word which I have left undisturbed is "album", used, in some instances though not invariably, to denote a book consisting primarily of plates.) Inconsistencies in transliteration are also inevitable, in spite of careful checking in the limited time available. My apologies

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to any author who feels that his or her text has been badly treated.

References

1. Private correspondence
2. Lapteva, T.I. and Tikhonova, L.N. "Informkultura: an information system for culture and art in the USSR". *Art Libraries Journal* vol.16 no.1 1991 pp.17-19.
3. Kasinec, E. and Davis, R.H. "Materials for the study of Russian/Soviet art and architecture . . ." *Art Documentation* vol.10 no.1 Spring 1991 pp.19-22.