

ART LIBRARIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE: SELECT, COLLECT AND CONNECT

Report on the IFLA Art Libraries Section open session at the World Library and Information Congress, 27th August 2009, Milan

This year saw a varied international range of presentations from Scotland, the Russian Federation, India, the United States and Italy. These demonstrated innovative ways of exploiting the rich heritage of library collections, often through developing and delivering services in an online environment. Thought provoking questions were also posed about contemporary challenges and the appropriate way forward for the initiatives outlined.

Bruce Royan and Celia Curnow, Director and Editor of this project, submitted a paper on 'The Virtual Reconstruction of Lost Heritage: the Hamilton Inventories Project'. Hamilton Palace is the most famous house in Scotland and was demolished in the 1920's. Several hundred year's worth of collected art treasures were scattered throughout the globe through the sale of much of the contents of the house prior to its demolition. This project aims to re-unite this collection in a networked environment through the presentation of original inventories, transcriptions and digital images of art objects online.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/201-curnow-en.pdf>

Ada Kolganova from the Russian State Art Library and Anastasia Guy from the St Petersburg Theatre Library spoke on 'Heritage Received and Multiplied: Russian Art Libraries as Collectors and Translators'. They outlined the varied histories of their institutions as well as giving a flavour of their collection's coverage and use. They discussed the problems of continued additions of unique material to their collections as well as the challenges posed by digital material.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/201-kolganova-en.pdf>

Dr Sanjeev Kumar and Nandini Dutta from the National Institute of Fashion Technology in New Delhi talked about 'Weaving a Knowledge Tapestry of Traditional Crafts for Modern Fashion Designers: an Indian Experience'. They explained the central role of traditional crafts as a source of inspiration for contemporary designers. Part of their organisation, the National Resource Centre, collects and preserves heritage resources through ICT applications. The National Digital Repository preserves endangered traditional skills from extinction, supports a process of revival and gives these skills a central role in contemporary fashion design.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/201-kumar-en.pdf>

Thomas Hill, from Vassar College in New York State, introduced 'The "Library Café": Distributing and Archiving Local Culture Through a Podcasted Library Interview Programme'. His basic premise is that most academic output reaches a very limited audience and librarians can have a role in tackling this. His weekly radio broadcast consists of interviews with academics and artists and demonstrates that they can be very eloquent and accessible when discussing their work. He also outlined the relative cheapness and simplicity of the technology required. The audience limits of radio broadcast can be overcome using the internet and the model could equally be transferred to video recordings.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/201-hill-en.pdf>

Jan Simane raised a series of challenges for the cataloguing of rare books in his presentation 'The Rare Book Project of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz'. In his institution the contents of their rare books are always more important than the beauty of an edition or its rareness. Existing cataloguing practices are generally inadequate for the needs of art history researchers. He suggested that co-operation between specialized art research libraries, possibly under the aegis of the Art Libraries Section of IFLA, could significantly improve the situation in a manageable way. Results from such a project would be widely disseminated and linked in a networked environment, thus avoiding the pitfalls of many earlier co-operative ventures.

<http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/201-simane-en.pdf>