

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE «LIBRARIES IN THE MUSEUMS - MUSEUMS IN THE LIBRARIES» AND THE 2-ND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE IFLA INTERNATIONAL ART DOCUMENTATION ADVISORY GROUP 15 - 23 MAY 1999, MOSCOW - ST.PETERSBURG.

By Olga Sinitsyna

In May 1999 a significant international conference was organised in Moscow by ARLIS/Mos with the generous financial support of the "Open Society" Institute (George Soros Foundation). The conference brought together about 150 participants from more than 20 Russian cities and more than 60 institutions. The organisers were honoured to host the international group of distinguished professionals in art librarianship from Australia, Denmark, Portugal, the UK, and the USA. It was the first conference of such a scale, devoted to specific problems of the art and particularly, museum libraries. The conference attracted not only the art librarians, but art historians, museum curators, administrators, managers, publishers, producers of the electronic products and others. The organisers did their best to draw attention of the museum directors and librarians from all over Russia. They collaborated with the Ministry of Culture of Russian Federation, ICOM, mass media and local government.

Conference sites

The Conference was hosted by the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, State Tretyakov Gallery and M. I. Rudomino Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow and a post-conference round table will took place in St. Petersburg at the Hermitage library, bringing together more local museum librarians.

Objectives

The museum libraries even in the most favourable situation are scarcely regarded by the museum administration as one of the most important division within the museum structure. It is their everyday job to remind about their importance, their precious collections, their informational resources, their specific *library* needs. For some reasons these libraries are as well isolated from the rest of the libraries community: small staff, closeness to the public, different supervisors at the authoritative institutions. Their holdings are mostly very particular - tightly linked

to the subject of the museum collections; very often the holdings comprise various types of documents - archival, library and museum objects. Thus tremendous informational treasures kept in these libraries stay unknown, concealed to the public, being used by the narrow circle of the museum staff and few «outsiders» - specialists in the field. At the same time the experience and skills of the museum librarians are rarely recognised and shared.

These problems of the museum libraries are international indeed. And the international art libraries community has worked out certain methods of handling them. However due to some serious circumstances Russian museum librarians have found themselves isolated from the rest of the international libraries community, with few exceptions they are unable to attend the utmost international libraries forums, like IFLA General Conferences and other special conferences. There are still few who can afford subscription to professional periodicals in the field of librarianship and information science, get an access to electronic informational resources or to the foreign materials. Still very urgent is the lack of foreign language skills among the museum librarians. This is true not only regarding Russian provincial museums but the museums of the two capitals either.

The museum libraries' collections are sometimes not sufficiently recognised and valued even by the curators of their home institutions. Sometimes even the specialists happen to be not aware of the real treasures kept in the library stacks. It is in Russian tradition that museum libraries were closed to the general public even though in many cases the museums might be the only local cultural centres and it is obvious that the library information might well alter to the visual impressions of the museum visitors.

It is very typical that museum administration doesn't pay enough attention to professional development and growth of the library staff. It is crucial taking in account rapid development of informational technologies and standards and permanent necessity to update the librarians' knowledge and skills. This updated knowledge and awareness in recent professional and technological development may become vital at the moment of purchasing a new bibliographic software and proper hardware or while working on strategic planning.

On the other hand different libraries often keep in their holdings various museum objects such as: prints and drawings, posters, photographs, sketches, artists' books, etc. This kind of library material requires peculiar treatment and handling in all senses: cataloguing, storage, conservation, circulation, and advertising. Very often such collections are poorly catalogued, not sufficiently studied, not listed in the international inventories, not really valued. Fairly frequently there are no national

library standards for cataloguing such materials, sometimes the combination of museum and library cataloguing standards is required.

On their own part the foreign colleagues experience some serious problems in collecting the information on Russian art collections, exhibitions, recent publications, professional activity of the museum libraries and other art libraries in Russia.

The main goals of the conference:

- to raise the statute of the museum libraries in Russia,
- to attract attention to their place and role within the museums' structures
- to reveal the real treasures kept in their collections
- to involve the resources of Russian museum libraries in the global informational environment
- to involve Russian art librarians into the wide spectrum of international activity - various international programmes and projects, primarily to that of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries.

Topics and themes proposed for discussion and presentation at the conference:

- making the collections of museum libraries accessible to general public;
- information on the museum libraries collections;
- new technologies for museums and libraries;
- museum libraries on the Web;
- different aspects of handling museum objects in the libraries collections;
- exhibition catalogues in the libraries;
- «artists' books» - what is it?
- how to organise and navigate information resources;
- co-operative projects of museums and libraries as the informational and educational centres;
- fee-based services and fund-raising in the art libraries;
- digitisation of the images, copyright issues;
- call for joint programmes, projects, publications, data-bases, exchange of information;
- national and international associations of art librarians (IFLA Section of Art Libraries, ARLIS of different countries and regions, Art Libraries Sections within the national library associations)

30 papers delivered at the conference covered most of these topics and were simultaneously interpreted into English or in Russian. For many speakers it was a unique opportunity to introduce their collections and in some sense to reveal the

hidden or unknown treasures kept there. It was a great chance to get acquainted with the activity and collections of the art libraries abroad.

Special attention was paid to introducing the activity of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries by Russian representatives in its Standing Committee and thus to encouraging more Russian libraries to register as its members.

Special events

There was a range of special exhibitions prepared for the Conference participants: recent electronic products in the field of arts, current Russian periodicals and the best recent publications, an exhibition of the artists' books.

During the conference an extended list of libraries and museums visits was offered to the participants (in Moscow and St. Petersburg) which enabled them to get acquainted with collections, resources and perspectives of that institutions.

Effectiveness

Russian museum librarians from all over the country got a rare chance to talk and discuss their problems with the most distinguished experts in art librarianship from Europe, USA and Australia, representing the IFLA International Art Documentation Advisory Group. Personal contacts, we believe, would help to build bridges between Russian art librarians and their foreign colleagues. If not for the conference, the Russian museum librarians wouldn't get such a chance elsewhere in the current financial circumstances. It is most unlikely that many museum librarians would be able to attend big international forums if not in Russia. At this conference they've got a good reason to analyse and revise their home activity comparing it to the international experience and to think about either nearest or distant perspectives. Both Russian and international participants took a good lesson from each other. That seems to become an important component of the continuous professional education.

Another part of the project dealt with organisation of the meetings of the IFLA International Art Documentation Advisory Group before and after the conference. These meetings were aimed to work out strategic and practical recommendations for the work of the Art Libraries Section of IFLA in general and for the forthcoming IFLA General Conferences in particular. The first meeting of this Group in Lisbon in 1998 demonstrated how fruitful it is to work in the format of brain-storming sessions within the small group of world experts and how helpful its recommendations were while preparing the Art Libraries Section meetings at the IFLA Conference in Amsterdam soon after. It was agreed to arrange such meetings

annually and it was our honour and pleasure to host this group of distinguished experts in Russia.

Acknowledgements

The organisers express their deepest gratitude to all those who took their time and efforts to participate in the conference and especially to those who contributed to the agenda, to the interpreters and to the technical-support staff. The conference wouldn't be possible without support of the Administration of the institutions that were mostly involved: Ekaterina Genieva - Director General of the Library for Foreign Literature and President of the "Open Society" Institute in Russia, Irina Antonova - Director of the A. S. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Valentin Rodionov - Director of the Tretyakov Gallery, Pavel Khoroshilov - Deputy-Minister of Culture of Russian Federation. Special thanks to the "Open Society" Institute and its programme "Culture" for professional and financial support of the project and personally to Mikhail Gnedovsky - director of the programme "Culture" and Elena Zelentsova - chief curator of the cultural programmes.

Olga Sinitsyna
M.I.Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign
Literature
Nikolo-Yamskaya St.,1
Moscow, 109189
Russia
tel/fax (095) 915 3552
fax (095) 915 3637
e-mail: olgas@libfl.ru