

EDITORIAL

The response to the questionnaire distributed to readers of the *Art Libraries Journal* (which is analysed elsewhere in this issue), although generally supportive, highlights one or two aspects of Editorial policy on which there are conflicting views.

One of these concerns the perplexing question of languages. Although the *Art Libraries Journal* remains a predominantly English language publication, its policy is to publish as well contributions in French, German, or Spanish (which with English are the 'official' languages of IFLA). It was perhaps unfortunate that, by coincidence rather than intent, the questionnaire was distributed with a special issue of the *Journal*, much of it written in Spanish. It is evident that some, principally but not exclusively British, respondents would prefer an English-language publication, albeit with summaries in other languages. This is not a new complaint; some of those who over a number of years have favoured a readership survey probably expected such a view to emerge. It has not emerged decisively as a majority view, even among English-speaking readers, and especially if it is assumed that most or all of those with a strong opinion have taken the opportunity to express it; nonetheless it demands consideration.

The argument is advanced that

The use of foreign languages and the concept of internationalism in the *Art Libraries Journal* seem to have become bound together. The one is not a condition of the other . . . The point of being international in aim is to communicate. English is the principal language in the academic, business and scientific worlds. However much English speakers 'ought' to be better at languages, the ALJ is not a language tutor. It is a journal whose aim should be to share knowledge. [U.K. respondent]

The legitimacy of the argument for regarding English as an international language is affirmed explicitly by a Japanese and a South African respondent, and implicitly by individuals in Belgium, Germany, Holland, and Norway who indicated a preference for an English-only publication. However, this approach contrasts with the following:

I think we English speakers need to work on reading other languages. [U.S. respondent]

and with this:

I welcome the greater range of languages of the articles even though I personally have difficulty with my limited abilities in this direction. But as most of us have access to dictionaries . . . it can be most rewarding working through the greater range of experience and attitudes articles written in the author's own language offer. [U.K. respondent]

These last sentences capture the spirit which informs the current policy of the *Art Libraries Journal*, a policy which is related to the *Journal's* passionate commitment to cultural diversity. Acceptance of English as a *lingua franca* is in fact a feature of that policy; as mentioned above, English is the principal language of the *Journal*, and all articles *not* written in English are preceded by an English summary. It is possible to make no more than a feeble gesture towards the linguistic richness of human civilisation, but to do that is surely better than to endorse the tyranny of a single language? To the extent that English is widely understood, this is partly due to imperialism and colonialism, and to the continuing use of English as a tool of cultural imperialism; if some of these arguments can also be applied to French and Spanish, yet can those of us who are Anglophones truly divorce ourselves from an arrogant and chauvinistic past (and its survival into the present) without deliberately adopting a humbler attitude to our mother tongue? But also – as many British people have realised with 1992 approaching fast – English is emphatically not *the* language of Europe, quite apart from vast areas of the rest of the world; it must be significant – and significant not least of progress still to be made – that relatively few replies to the questionnaire were received from non-English speaking countries, or from mainland Europe, and none at all from France. The question of languages is a difficult one; this Editor (English, with only a modest grasp of French) is comforted by the view of an American reader, that

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the balance achieved in recent years is 'just right'. Nonetheless requests for fuller English summaries of articles in other languages have been noted sympathetically.

Another point, clearly articulated by just one respondent, but which has certainly occurred to others, requires an Editorial response.

I can understand that papers from Third World countries, and from Eastern Europe, would receive preferential treatment, but some are very poorly written . . . There is a need for academic and professional standards. [Canadian respondent]

The *Art Libraries Journal* has always sought to sustain high standards and will continue to do so. However, 'standards' are not necessarily always universal in every respect; standards defined within certain societies can be inappropriately applied to others, and can be used, consciously or otherwise, as a measure of cultural supremacy. This we must try to avoid. Further, the fact that some articles may seem 'poorly written' can be a direct consequence of inability to publish material in an author's own language. Under its present Editorship, the *Art Libraries Journal* will continue to place a high value on relevant information emerging from countries from which information is especially scarce; neither standards, nor language problems, will be tolerated as a barrier to the sharing of that information widely and urgently. Also, this *Journal* will continue to endeavour to encourage art librarianship wherever it may flourish; if a decision to publish seems likely to provide encouragement where encouragement is needed, this consideration may be given higher priority than adherence to standards.

In the last few years the *Art Libraries Journal* has at last become the international forum that it was founded to be. To the British respondent who observes that the 'emphasis seems to have drifted away from U.K. art libraries', it can only be said that, no, the emphasis has not drifted, it has been very deliberately, strenuously and painstakingly wrenched away from U.K. art libraries – and yet this has not been done by rejecting U.K. contributions but by actively seeking material from elsewhere. The *Journal's* purpose is to serve art

librarians throughout the world, so that its readers can say of it

Me parece un instrumento muy útil para poner en contacto e informar de los problemas comunes a los bibliotecarios de arte de todo el mundo. [Spanish respondent]

At the same time, the *Art Libraries Journal* belongs to its readers, any and all of whom can influence and change it – even in spite of editorial policies, for this is editorial policy too – by contributing to it.