

reviews

Editor's note

With this issue of the *Art libraries journal* the Reviews Editor, Barbara Polowy, completes a 10-year period in that role, to which she added the duties of Deputy Editor in 2006. I would like to thank her for her unstinting support throughout the decade, both in delivering the reviews copy and for her advice on the formatting of references and much else besides.

I am delighted to say that Barbara will continue to compile and edit the annual Bibliographies update (see p.42 of this issue); she welcomes submissions for suggested inclusions from readers around the world, in order that it remains as comprehensive as possible.

Kraig Binkowski, Chief Librarian of the Yale Center for British Art, takes over as Reviews Editor from the next issue, and I am delighted to welcome him to the ALJ team.

Gillian Varley
Editor, *Art libraries journal*

Small books for the common man: a descriptive bibliography

Edited by John Meriton with
Carlo Dumontet

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Before zines there were chapbooks and pamphlets, and many of them. They shared the zine's ephemeral nature but tended to have larger print runs and poor survival rates. Many appeared in ever-so-slightly variant editions, so that keeping track of them has been a daunting task for collectors and bibliographers. These publications covered many

topics and were aimed at many audiences. One large body of them, meant for children, is honored in a collection housed in the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and is the focus of the very large *Small books for the common man: a descriptive bibliography*.

Each of the bibliography's 761 entries includes a spectacular amount of valuable and easily accessible bibliographic information. The bibliography is organized first by place of publication, then by publisher, and then by publishing-format variations. Each of its pages is devoted to a single book, and most listings include a representative reproduction. For each book there is a short title (e.g. 'Jack Sprat'); full title in line-divided standard bibliographic format; paper and binding description; notes (e.g. comments on author attribution, dating data, imposition variations, and provenance); bibliographic references; and collection details at the National Art Library. The end matter includes an impressive glossary, statistics on printers, paper sizes and imposition schemes, and an outstanding bibliography of supporting source material.

The editors of *Small books*, John Meriton (former Deputy Keeper of the V&A Museum's Word and Image Department) and Carlo Dumontet (formerly the National Art Library's special collections bibliographer), have further rewarded us with a thoughtful, stimulating analysis of these materials describing 'book-making and book-trade patterns based on the bibliographical facts evinced from this catalogue'. Here we learn, not surprisingly, that many of these works were marred by 'inferior paper, crude illustrations, battered type, and poor presswork'. One typographical surprise: these publications continued to use the *f*-like long *s* well beyond when it had fallen out of favor, no doubt for reasons of economy, the same reason that the volumes also tended to be printed with worn, damaged type and woodblocks.

Despite the bibliography's many fine attributes, there is room for improvement. Physically, it is covered with a glossy black paper that shows every scratch and blemish. One also wishes that the illustrations, charming as they are, were a bit larger – some are under 4 cm. square. Most problematic of all is the manner in which the major headings are