

## THE AKMB – ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT DER KUNST- UND MUSEUMSBIBLIOTHEKEN

*Laura Held – (Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland / Bibliothek, Bonn)*

### What is AKMB?

It might help our international colleagues to explain that AKMB is a kind of German ARLIS, an organisation which services German art and museum libraries. Altogether the AKMB (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunst- und Museumsbibliotheken – The Art and Museum Libraries' Working Group) comprises 164 corporate and 69 personal members (2003/03). Although these include large and powerful institutions like the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich, most of our members work in "One or Two Person Libraries" (OPLs). Our website ([www.akmb.de](http://www.akmb.de)) and mailing-list have proved very useful in helping to promote contacts between members. But even in 2003 we are still having to send out invitations to our annual meeting, the "Herbstfortbildung", by "snail mail" because some colleagues still have no regular internet access.

### Why is AKMB necessary?

#### Its history, and other related organisations in the library sector

The AKMB was only founded in 1995. The reason can be found in the particular topography of German art and special libraries. Until the end of the 1980s art and museum libraries in Germany and German-speaking countries in Europe looked to two institutions for support and active interest: the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Spezialbibliotheken (ASpB) and the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunstbibliotheken (AKB).

The ASpB (The Special Libraries' Working Community) was founded in 1946. This sees itself as the representative of special libraries in industry and government, and of research institutes in all fields of knowledge. One of its most important tasks is to organize a special biennial conference. Between 1981 and 1991 and again in 1997 and in 2003, papers dedicated to art libraries were included in the conference programmes. That said, art and museum libraries are of secondary importance in the ASpB and have their own very special problems and issues. Thus around the start of the 1990s art and museum libraries felt it necessary to set up their own organisation.

### AKMB & AKB

#### What is the difference?

An organisation for art libraries called the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunstbibliotheken or AKB (The Art Libraries' Working Community) was set up as

early as 1964. This group, described in more detail in the article by Rüdiger Hoyer, consists of seven art libraries, which organise an annual meeting and whose members co-operate in the acquisition of academic literature in the field of fine arts, with the help of funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The group has also invited the university libraries of Heidelberg and Dresden to participate in its work as these two libraries are responsible for the fine arts in the German university libraries' co-ordinated acquisition programme.

Following the re-unification of Germany, library workers, mainly from the former GDR, expressed a great need for mutual advice and support between art and museum libraries. The AKB received numerous enquiries with regard to the everyday management of art and museum libraries. But until 1992 there was no way of joining the AKB because the organisation had neither statutes nor any procedural rules. Consequently the AKB decided at its annual conference in 1992 to set up an enlarged working group with its own statutes and rules of procedure. "The Art and Museum Libraries' Working Group" (AKMB), as its name indicates, was intended not only to accommodate more members than the AKB itself, but also to represent a wider constituency. In 1993 interested persons and institutions were invited to Leipzig for a preliminary meeting at the annual German library congress (the so-called Bibliothekartag or "librarians day", which normally runs for the course of a week). At this meeting a committee was appointed to establish the AKMB which was finally launched in Berlin in February 1995.

#### The aims of the AKMB

- The AKMB has laid down the following goals:
- To coordinate and cooperate in improving the efficiency of major libraries in areas like acquisition, cataloguing and user services in art and museum libraries
  - To develop and provide information on new working techniques
  - To formulate and represent particular interests
  - To support the professional development of librarians by offering courses, seminars and conferences
  - To exchange experiences, information and communication
  - To offer consultation and advice for library and documentary tasks

- To cooperate with related associations and institutions such as museums, archives, information and documentation services
- To develop and maintain international contacts.

### Running the AKMB Internal organisation

A board of seven persons is elected for a period of two years. In collaboration with the Initiative Fortbildung or IF (see below) the board organises courses, seminars and conferences appropriate to improving the work of art and museum librarians, cooperates with related institutions like the German Council of Museums and formulates and represents the interests of the art and museum libraries. Last year we organised help for colleagues affected by a major flood disaster. We have also joined other institutions in pressing for a re-formulation of the new law on intellectual property rights that not only takes into account the rights of the owner (often an editorial or publisher), but also the rights of (art) library users to free or low-cost access to information and images.

### AKMB international

Another of the board's main duties is to develop and maintain international contacts. There have been several mutual study trips. In 1995 German AKMB members visited Paris, in 2000 British colleagues visited German art and museum libraries and in 2001 AKMB members visited London art libraries and archives. Further mutual trips are planned to the Netherlands/Belgium and to countries in Eastern Europe. Since 1998 members of the AKMB board have participated in the ARLIS/UK & Ireland annual conference, and in the IFLA Art Library Section since 1997. There are both official and informal contacts between the AKMB and the ARLIS of North America, the ARLIS/UK & Ireland, French colleagues in the Association de Bibliothécaires Français, ARLIS Norden, ARLIS Netherlands, ARLIS Flanders and Greek colleagues. In March 2001 an international colloquium, featuring representatives from six national or supra-national art and museum library organisations, took place in the Kunstbibliothek Berlin. This was jointly organised by the AKMB and the IF (see below). Experiences were exchanged and future co-operation and projects were planned. We hope to continue the mutual exchange and information.

### AKMB meetings

The AKMB organises annual meetings (the so-called "Herbstfortbildung" or autumn advanced training course) to promote its members' professional skills by means of lectures and to enable them to take advantage of a more personal exchange of information and experiences. Another annual

meeting called Allegro & more (Allegro is the name of the most used cataloguing software in art and museum libraries) concentrates on data processing in art and museum libraries. This takes place regularly in November or December in Wolfenbüttel – in 2003 for the 10<sup>th</sup> time! And last not least during the annual Librarians Conference, ("Bibliothekartag") which normally takes place in Spring, the AKMB holds its annual general meeting often in combination with a programme of lectures. Apart from these annual meetings, there have been a series of special courses, workshops and meetings on special subjects, mostly together with the IF (see below).

### AKMB content

The themes of lectures and discussions at the annual meetings reflect the activities of the AKMB. In 1996 they dealt with alphabetical cataloguing and acquisition in art and museum libraries. In 1997 the focal point of the conference was subject indexing – especially the benefits of using the German Authority File for Subjects, i.e. Deutsche Schlagwortnormdatei (SWD). In 1998 the AKMB focussed on the preservation of printed materials in art and museum libraries, and once more on subject indexing. In May 1999 the activities of European art library organisations and international standards were presented in the context of the "Bibliothekartag". The "Herbstfortbildung" in September focussed on building up collections in art and museum libraries.

In 2000 "new management and organisation forms in art & museum libraries" were discussed and in 2001 the subject of the "Herbstfortbildung" was: "Who's afraid of the digital future? Acquisition and provision of electronic resources in art & museum libraries". In 2002 lectures on German art libraries in Europe were held at the "Bibliothekartag" in spring, and the "Herbstfortbildung" dealt with "marketing and voluntary work in art and museum libraries". Lectures on experiences with retrospective conversion were scheduled for the "Bibliothekartag" in April 2003. For the "Herbstfortbildung" we plan to focus on "how to survive with less money whilst trying to improve services at the same time". Considering the dismal financial situation of most of our funding bodies (local authorities, regional corporate bodies, states etc.) it is no accident that the title of our next annual meeting in 2003 in Dresden is: "Doing more with less". Another subject will be the legal and practical aspects of book lending for exhibitions.

### AKMB specials Specialist groups within the AKMB

Several specialist groups have been set up to discuss topics on day-to-day librarianship and to define objectives for the future work of the AKMB, i.e.

to prepare courses and seminars or specialist group discussions. Group members offer professional advice to all AKMB members and external partners (i.e. library schools and formation centres). The following groups are already in existence: Data Processing, Cataloguing, and Museum Libraries.

#### *Data processing*

The data-processing group was founded in 1996. Its first act was to issue a questionnaire on the use of software in art and museum libraries. This was analysed and evaluated in 1997/98 and resulted in a series of courses entitled "Internet tools for art and museum librarians", which were given in 2000 and 2001. Our links for art and museum librarians are being continually updated on the AKMB website. In 2002 the group completely revised its website, re-launching it with a new name and a new design.

#### *Museum libraries*

Sometimes libraries seem to be the best-kept secret within museums. But many research projects, exhibition plans, exhibition catalogues and holding catalogues are dependent on the work of museum libraries. In addition to books they often manage other media, photographs, prints and manuscripts. Consequently there is a special need for discussion and support. Amongst the special courses we have offered has been a course on how to preserve and restore precious books and stock, and a course on best practice when exhibiting old books and manuscripts etc. Another of the group's aims is to improve coordination processes between museum libraries and departments responsible for documenting their objects. Here the emphasis is on using identical or compatible electronic filing systems.

#### *Cataloguing group*

A cataloguing group was set up in 1996. The group played an active part in discussions on new cataloguing rules (Regeln für die Alphabetische Katalogisierung, RAK2) and is now active in debates on the possible introduction of AACR2 (as opposed to RAK2) into Germany. Another focal point is the specific cataloguing needs of art and museums libraries (i.e. artists catalogues, exhibition and auction catalogues). This aims to prevent the implementation of different rules in each particular institution, something which makes data-exchange more difficult.

After three very busy and successful years (1996-1999) the "Acquisition" and "Subject Indexing" groups have ceased activities for the moment. Nonetheless they still offer professional advice to colleagues.

#### **Further training**

##### **AKMB and Initiative Fortbildung (IF)**

In order to fulfil the aims of the AKMB it cooperates with the "Initiative Fortbildung für wissenschaftliche Spezialbibliotheken und verwandte Einrichtungen e.V." ("The Initiative for Advanced Training in Academic and Research-Oriented Special Libraries and Related Institutions", or IF) to initiate, organise and participate in congresses, workshops, meetings, study tours and in-house training and also provides assistance in finding trainers, partners, organisation professionals etc.

The significance of continuous advanced training in the rapidly, often unpredictably, changing workplace demands increasing attention. A well-grounded professional degree no longer guarantees long-term career perspectives: creativity, innovation and flexibility are the pre-conditions for success. A broad spectrum of knowledge and skills must be achieved and kept up-to-date in order to maintain employability.

Continuing education is especially important where traditional training programmes are insufficient to prepare workers to deal with professional day-to-day demands. This is often a reality for art and museum librarians and information workers in special libraries.

The IF focuses precisely on this goal. It was founded in direct response to the closure of the German Library Institute and with it, the Consultancy Office for Special Libraries. In some respects the IF sees itself as the logical successor to the Consultancy Office.

In accordance with its own preamble and "using the innovative potential inherent in every transitional situation" the IF interprets the traditional concept of advanced training much more broadly than in the past. In addition the range of target groups has been expanded to include professional workers in archives, information centres, museums, special libraries, etc., as well as information brokers and colleagues who are currently unemployed and seeking to acquire new skills in one of the various areas of information work.

Input and feedback from continuous interaction with the target groups and an additional market analysis enables the IF to pin down the topics and issues necessary to produce high-quality advanced training programmes. The IF also provides a barometer to pick up on new professional ideas and developments, including those from abroad, re-interpreting them for use in the German context, and thereby promoting collaborative ventures. The goal is not just to fill the gaps left by inadequate or outdated training but also to enable participants to qualify for duties in new contexts, to stimulate innovative thinking and action, to practise new models of be-

haviour and much more! In short, it specifically strives to facilitate lifelong, strategic learning.

The IF works in close cooperation with the AKMB. We both share the same view: "Interesting times lie ahead for libraries, museums and archives, because they will be playing an active role in a knowledge-based society. As steadfast protectors of the past and present, their modern technologies and forms of presentation, their collections and their competence all serve the needs of culture, education, science and the working world now and in the future".

#### **AKMB publishing AKMB News**

The "AKMB news" is just one of the projects which resulted from the AKMB's first year of work. The AKMB news, which has received favourable reactions from fellow-workers, is published three times a year in an edition of 600 copies. It is edited by an editing team and the board of the AKMB. The news reflects the activities of the AKMB by publishing relevant articles, i.e. AKMB conference lectures, news from the wider field of art and museum librarianship – archives, documentation centres, digital collections etc. – and reports on the international scene of art and museum libraries. Another objec-

tive is to promote cooperation and contacts between members and to offer tips and hints for daily work. There have also been special editions featuring the work of artists like Jenny Holzer or Thomas Huber.

#### **AKMB and the future Future plans**

The AKMB's sources of income have so far been derived from sales of the AKMB news and from donations. For the future we plan to improve our marketing and attract sponsorship both for the news and for the AKMB. Our aim is not only to be able to offer professional courses and training with the help of the IF, but to provide a solid foundation for the daily work of our colleagues by means of information and networking, and to give voice to our views on political decisions which concern our work. These include such issues as intellectual property rights, the privatisation of cultural and librarian services, severe budget cuts in culture and the consequent neglect of our cultural heritage.

Two years from now we hope to celebrate our tenth anniversary in the continuing conviction that the AKMB has been able to improve and facilitate the work of colleagues in art and museum libraries, archives and documentation centres.

*English version: Roy Kift, Kunst und Kultur  
Übersetzungsdienst, Castrop Rauxel*