



ICME
ICOM
international committee
for museums and collections
of ethnography

ICME NEWS ISSUE 89 FEBRUARY 2020

ICME,
INTERCOM &
ICOM AZERBAIJAN 2020
CONFERENCE
BAKU

Call for Papers

COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENTS AND
NEWS / EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES:
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS / ARTICLES

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WORDS OF WELCOME

from the new President of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography (ICME) – Ralf Čeplak Mencin (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Slovenia)



Dear ICME members!

I'm happy to introduce you to the 89th edition of ICME News! It's been quite a while since the last ICME News No.88 in July 2019. We have been reorganising after I took over from Viv Golding as President, Jeremy Silvester has taken over from Jen Walklate as the editor of the newsletter and Agnes Aljas has taken over from Mario Buletić as our Webmaster. I would like to thank them all for their years of hard work and sacrifice. I am happy that Tihana Nalić will continue to work on the graphic design for the newsletter and believe that the new editorial team will continue to make ICME News an important source of news and debate.

We have all had a lot to reflect on since the 25th ICOM General Conference and the 52nd ICOM/ICME Annual Conference in Kyoto, Japan which was a great success! More than 4500 participants from 120 countries and regions gathered to discuss and exchange ideas and experiences. The huge attendance, great opening ceremony, brilliant keynote speakers, excellent venue in a wonderfully vibrant city made the Conference a beautiful experience. The conference culminated in a five hour long deliberation on the adaptation of the new definition of museums. By common accord, the decision to postpone the vote until June 2020 was made. ICME was able to support six young museum workers

as Fellows and this newsletter includes their reflections.

The theme of the ICME 2019 Conference was *Diversity and Universality* with sub-themes: Decolonising Museums to Promote Citizenship and Social Cohesion, Collaboration to Safeguard Indigenous Knowledge, Design and Learning Conversations, Memory, Affect and Belonging,

Exploring Cultural and Social Identities and shorter Perchakucha Presentations. ICME's 2019 conference theme encouraged reflection on the ways in which ethnographic museums, through their research, conservation, exhibitions, marketing and programming can engage diverse audiences to achieve a better understanding of what unites human beings around the globe, without eliding their differences. The 2019 ICME Conference had five keynote speakers, 23 presentations and 68 participants from 27 different countries. ICME published a Programme, abstracts and speakers' biographies and practical informations for conference venues in a 40 page booklet. On Thursday, September 5th we organised a joint off-site meeting with the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music (CIMCIM) at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) -which also hosted an ICME reception. The AGM was held during the Conference (on 2nd September, 2019) and elected the new Board: Ralf Čeplak Mencin – Slovenia; chair, Peter Ride – United Kingdom; treasurer, Jeremy Silvester – Namibia; ICME News editor, Rema Zeinalova – Azerbaijan, secretary, Agnes Aljas – Estonia; webmaster, Abd El-Rahman Othman Elsayed – Egypt; grants and Chiedza Nyengetera Zharare – Zimbabwe, grants.

Last but not least I would like to announce and invite you to our next ICME Conference which will be held jointly with the International Committee for Museum Management (INTERCOM) and ICOM Azerbaijan in Baku, Azerbaijan on October 14.–16th, 2020. The title of the Conference will be: *Transforming collecting policies in Museums; the need for leadership and societal responsibility*. You will find further information about the 2020 Conference in this newsletter.

Ralf Čeplak Mencin, ICME chair

ICME, INTERCOM & ICOM AZERBAIJAN JOINT CONFERENCE

Transforming Collecting Policies in Museums: The Need for Leadership and Societal Responsibility

October 14-16, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan

Discover Azerbaijan - A Land of Fire!

Do you wish to see a new land at the doorstep of Europe and experience a totally different culture? The conference is a good chance to visit Azerbaijan as a new travel destination!

Azerbaijan is a country located in the South Caucasus region, at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. The country is famous for its ancient and rich history with a landscape containing details from every period of time. Traces of numerous cultures such as the Mesopotamian, Scythians and Medes can be found, and many other cultural influences brought from both East and West have left their mark.

Azerbaijan is also called the 'Land of Fire'. There are several beliefs about the origin of this nickname. According to certain historians, it comes from the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism practiced in the region and its Fire as a symbol of God's wisdom. Near Baku, there is the *Ateshgah* fire-worshipping temple



Ateshgah - Fire Temple

dating from the 17th century. However, other people argue that the country is called the 'Land of Fire' due to the landscape. For example the *Yanardag* Mountain near Baku, produces a flame of constantly burning natural gas that creates an incredible spectacle.

Azerbaijan is the country which is being increasingly modernized. The mixture and harmony of antiquity and

modernity create an unforgettable journey. In recent years, Baku has become an important venue for international sporting and cultural events. It hosted the 57th Eurovision Song Contest in 2012, the 2015 European Games, 4th Islamic Solidarity Games, and hosted the final of the 2018–19 UEFA Europe League. Since 2016 Azerbaijan has also hosted four of the races on the Formula 1 circuit.



Baku

Baku

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, also known as the "City of Winds", is the largest commercial, cultural and scientific center in the Caucasus region, and the largest port on the Caspian Sea. As the cultural center of Azerbaijan, Baku is home to about 30 museums that preserve the country's national culture and identity.

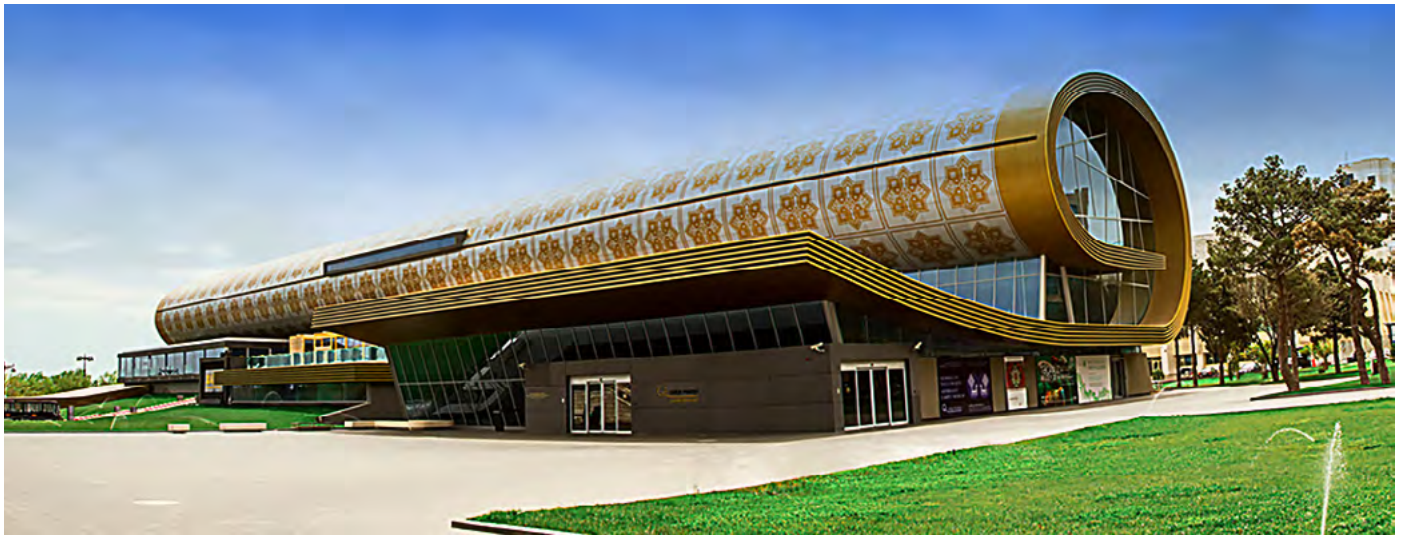
In Baku, one can visit many interesting museums – the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum, National Art Museum of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev Center, Icherisheher Museum Center, and Baku Museum of Miniature Books, which is the world's only museum of miniature books located in the old part of Baku.



*Shirvanshahs' Palace (above)
Maiden Tower (on the right)*

The ancient architectural sites in Baku - Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower have also been inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List.





Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum

Conference venue

The conference will be hosted by ICOM Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum at the museum's building situated close to the Baku National Seaside Park.

The museum, established in 1967, opened its first exhibition in 1972, at the 19th century Juma Mosque located in Baku's Icherisheher (Old City). From 1992 the Museum was located in the Museum Center (former Lenin Museum). In 2014, the museum moved into the modern building resembling a rolled carpet and designed by the Austrian architect Franz Janz.

The exhibition of the museum demonstrates the history of Azerbaijani carpet weaving, flatwoven and pile carpets, traditional costumes and embroideries, and hammered copper wares widely used in everyday life. The museum also displays the collection of traditional women's and men's jewelry.

As one of the main storage spaces for Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, the museum is a research, training, cultural and educational center which holds international exhibitions, symposiums, and conferences.

For more information, please visit www.azcarpetmuseum.az

Tours

During the conference, the participants will be offered tours in Baku museums.

Additionally, the programme will include three options for post-conference tours:

- Absheron (Mardakan Castle, Atashgah Fire temple, Yanardag/Burning Mountain);
- Sights inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List:
- Gobustan National Historical-Artistic Preserve, which is famous for the ancient rock drawings;
- Sheki, the ancient city of handicrafts (Caravanserai, Khan's Palace).

The full Conference programme will be announced in April.

Useful information

Visas

To simplify the visa procedure, one can apply to the "ASAN Visa" online system to get the electronic Standard Visa (within 3 days) or Urgent Visa (within 3 hours, regardless of non-working days and holidays). For detailed information, please visit: www.evisa.gov.az

Flights

For air travel, Azerbaijan Airlines operates regular flights to Baku Heydar Aliyev International Airport from many countries, for details please see www.azal.az.

Accommodation

The suggested hotels will be within maximum 15 minutes walking distance from the conference venue, Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum. The list of the proposed hotels will be posted on

the following websites:

<http://icomaz.az/az>

<http://icme.mini.icom.museum/>

<http://intercom.mini.icom.museum>

Travel within Baku

In Baku, you can use the following transport systems: metro (underground/subway) and bus.

To make use of bus or metro, you need at first to purchase BakiKart from transport terminals. The card price is 2 manats. This card can also be used for the Airport shuttle service.

The cost of one way by bus is 0.30 manat or 30 gapik (coin version of manat) in the radius of 10 kilometers, but it can be higher for a long distance.

The price for going to or from the airport is 1.30 manat.

The metro is a very practical transport, trains run every two or three minutes. Fares are cheap, 0.30 manat or 30 gapik per ride. The trains operate from 6:00 am to 12:00 midnight.

There are many app based taxi services available in Baku. You can check Uber, Bolt and Taxify mobile riding apps. To know the directions from one location to another one, it is advisable to use [maps.google.com](https://www.google.com/maps)

Registration

Foreigners or stateless persons temporarily staying in the Republic of Azerbaijan for more than 15 days (as well as when they change their place of stay) should apply to the management of the place he/she stays (hotel, sanatorium, rest home, boarding house, camping, tourist base, hospital or other similar public places) or the owner of the apartment or other place of accommodation in order to get registered upon place of stay by the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan without paying any state fee.

For more information, please visit:

https://migration.gov.az/home/booklet_content/606

ICME, INTERCOM & ICOM Azerbaijan Joint Conference

October 14-16, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan

Transforming Collecting Policies in Museums: the Need for Leadership and Societal Responsibility

CALL FOR PAPERS

Deadline for submissions:
31st March 2020

Notification of acceptance:
15th May 2020

Session 1: Decolonizing Museums: Restitution, Repatriation & Healing

Session 2: Museums and Ethnotourism

Session 3: Leadership and Museum Management for Our Times

The Boards of ICME, INTERCOM & ICOM Azerbaijan are pleased to announce the call for papers for the joint conference to be held at the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum (the oldest and biggest carpet museum in the world) in Baku between October 14th- 16th 2020.

We live in a complex, confused and fast changing world. Museums are very important cultural and social institutions and must respond to and reflect these changes. Museums are responsible for making their visitors and the wider society con-

scious of current debates through their actions, exhibitions, events and activism. The challenges of decolonizing museums, engaging with ethnotourism and providing museum leadership that enables museums to address important contemporary issues are relevant, and provocative themes for our Conference. The themes all confront the role of our museums in our time and the future. If decolonizing the museum means repatriating objects what does this mean for our collecting policies? How do ethnographic museums engage with the increasing tourist demand for "experiences" with real people? How should the management of museums plan for the future and change their practices and governance structures to respond to new expectations? We invite you to participate in this challenging debate!

The main aims of the conference are the following:

- To open a dialogue between scholars of Ethnographic and other museums and to offer a platform for the presentation and discussion of recent research;
- To highlight the significance of the concepts of Decolonizing Museums,

Ethnotourism Management and Leadership and Museum management for our times;

- To facilitate a global dialogue on these themes by bringing together museum professionals from all around the world,
- To critically engage with existing theories and methodologies and to provide a platform for the presentation of new research and initiatives that will help us to tackle these core issues and the ways in which we might transform the concept of 'collecting' that has defined museums for decades.

Conference participation

Scholars and museum specialists from around the world are invited to submit their proposals for contributions that will speak to one of the three themes: Decolonizing Museums, Ethnotourism Management and Leadership and Museum Management. Graduate and doctoral students are also encouraged to submit their proposals.

Each session will be opened by a keynote address of invited speakers whose CVs and topic descriptions are available below.

Session 1: Decolonizing Museums: Restitution, Repatriation & Healing

INTERCOM Keynote speaker: Hans van de Bunte, Project Director Sarawak Museum Campus, Kuching, Malaysia, started his professional career in museums in Amsterdam and Leiden. Presently he lives in Kuching (Borneo), heading the Sarawak Museum Campus Project. He is leading the project's successful development to realize by the end of 2020 a new museum complex. The new museum will have a curated 6,000 m² exhibition, a conservation centre with collection storage facilities and the complex will include the renovation and refurbishment of 3 historic museums and gardens. A new business plan and ordinance will provide the museum with a new management framework for ensuring a 21st century way of working. Hans believes strongly in building on local talent by nurturing and training staff to work with international museum standards. He believes in coaching leadership by creating an environment for colleagues and institutes to work together and share knowledge. During his working life he has been leading the curation of multiple exhibitions, often working with intercultural teams. Besides his Board membership of ICOM INTERCOM, he is a member of the Asia Europe Museums Network (ASEMUS) Executive Committee and partook in one of the ICOM working groups for the new museum definition.

In his Keynote he will address the urgency of dealing with colonial 'orphaned' collections and his experience in connecting them with their source communities. He will argue how giving authority to the source communities will benefit the knowledge development of the "orphaned" objects and create pride within the local communities. During his years at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and now at the Sarawak Museum in Borneo, he has been playing a managerial role in assisting and leading from different positions in the complex processes to reconnect historic collections with their origins.

Session 2: Museums and Ethnotourism

ICME Keynote speaker: Kamani Perera, gained 30 years professional experience as a Librarian and is presently working in the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka. A master degree graduate in information management (MIM), University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and visiting lecturer to Sri Lankan universities. She is a regular speaker at international conferences and has spoken in many countries, including India, Thailand, Japan, Egypt, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Finland, Jordan, Bhutan, Germany, Ireland, France, USA, and UK. Ms. Kamani Perera argues that *Cultural and heritage tourism (ethnotourism)* is defined as travel directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage and ac-

tivities that truly represent the stories and people of the past and present. This concept has received much attention during the past decade. Cultural and heritage tourism (ethnotourism) is one of the best parts of the tourism industry as it is a more powerful economic development tool. It has been revealed that museums are now playing a major role not only in the wider sphere of arts, but also within tourism and leisure. Museums can no longer sit back and expect that people will start queuing up. The role of museums have changed and they need to attract larger audiences. Session 2 will illuminate the different problems connected with the Ethnotourism Management in museums around the world.

Session 3: Leadership and Museum Management for Our Times

INTERCOM keynote speakers: Carol Ann Scott and Lizzy Moriarty

Dr Carol Ann Scott is the Executive Director of Carol Scott Associates Limited based in London, UK. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Her work has focused on leveraging museum and heritage value to maximize their impact through strategic planning and positioning, audience research and development. She had extensive experience as a senior museum professional having worked at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (Australia), the Museum

of London (on the London Museums Hub Olympic Project) and the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, Canada. She has most recently worked as the Senior Evaluator on the (SARAT) project.

Ms Lizzy Moriarty is the Non-Executive Director of Cultural Innovations Ltd. and a freelance museum and cultural heritage consultant. Cultural Innovations is a leading, international, cultural and heritage consultancy dedicated to the visioning, planning and development of museum and cultural heritage experiences, working with clients across the globe. Ms Moriarty's previous experience includes working as the Head of Touring Exhibitions at the Natural History Museum and International Engagement Manager at the British Museum in London. Museums need leaders who can grasp the realities of the present and build visions for the future. As we start a new decade, INTERCOM is making a step-change to focus on their role in supporting museum leadership. The session is divided into two parts. In the first part of the session, we define our terms - what is leadership and what is its relationship to management? This is followed by a presentation of the findings from a 2020 INTERCOM survey which has sought to build a global picture of the issues facing museum leadership across regional differences.

In the second part, delegates will be invited to focus on specific leadership challenges in their region and in general. Empowering and inspiring demoralised staff who are facing competing objectives with scarce resources – these challenges require skilled leadership. This will be an opportunity to discuss what support is needed, where the gaps are and what role INTERCOM can play in supporting current cultural leaders and developing emerging leaders.

Submitting a proposal

ICME, INTERCOM & ICOM Azerbaijan invite proposals for contributions that relate to one of the three themes of the Conference. Presentations can be made in two forms:

1. **Paper /Power point presentation**
(15 minutes)
2. **Flash presentation**
(20 slides in 8 minutes)

Proposals should include the following information in English

1. International committee, No. of ICOM membership
2. Which programme theme you are applying for and the preferred form (paper /Power point presentation / Flash presentation)
3. Title of submitted presentation
4. Abstract (do not exceed 300 words)
5. Name(s) of Author(s)
6. Affiliation(s) & full address(es) & email address

7. Support equipment required
8. All submissions must include a 100-word bio with a photograph of each presenter.

Please send proposals as soon as possible as a Word Document attachment to the e-mail: **icom.azerbaijan.secretariat@gmail.com** with the subject reference "ICME & INTERCOM proposal (your name)".

The proposals will be evaluated by the Joint Conference Committee of ICOM Azerbaijan, ICME and INTERCOM

Follow the news about the conference on websites:

<http://icomaz.az/az>
<http://icme.mini.icom.museum/>
<http://intercom.mini.icom.museum>

Committees will offer a grant for one or two presenters who are their active members. The call will also be published on the links above.

ICME AND THE MUSEUM DEFINITION DEBATE

ICOM has established a new Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials Committee (MDPP2). The new President of ICME, Ralf Čeplak Mencin has been invited to be a member of the Committee and is inviting ICME members to share their views and comments with him.

Members are reminded that the current ICOM definition of a museum, which was last revised in 2007 reads:

*A **museum** is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and*

intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

A new definition was proposed at the Tri-annual Conference in Kyoto in 2019 which read:

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

The Conference voted for further consultations and discussions to seek greater consensus (with the possibility of further amendments to the definition) before a final vote on adopting a new definition. Please submit any comments to ralf.ceplak@etno-muzej.si

MY EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN

Blanca María Cárdenas Carrión
(National Autonomous University of Mexico)

There is a lot to say about a trip to Japan. But, considering that this was a special trip, I will gladly share some of the highlights of my experience at the 25th ICOM General Conference in Kyoto, Japan. I had the opportunity to join the Conference as an ICME fellow and as a young professional, and consequently, my trip turned into an once-in-a-lifetime event consisting of different activities and moments:

Networking

One of the main highlights from my trip was the possibility to meet people from a lot of countries and museums around the world. During the entire week of the Conference I had the permanent feeling that we were doing something important by creating a good example of a “contact zone”, optimal for intercultural dialogue.

I was not alone: five more ICME fellows joined the Conference and I'm still overwhelmed by the opportunity I had to share experiences, ideas, and knowledge. I discovered that even though we had different academic backgrounds and worked under very particular conditions, we shared many of the same problems, uncertainties and, most of all, a passion for museums.



America in the National Museum of Ethnology-Minpaku, Osaka

Meeting other ICME members and professionals with successful careers in museums has given me a renewed enthusiasm for my personal projects. ICME and CIMCIM had a joint off-site meeting at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) on September 5th; that was an incredible day for networking and to get to know –with a deeper approach than an ordinary visitor- a very important museum in Osaka. The title of this joint meeting was “Diversity & Universality”, one of the central concerns of anthropological theory for over a century, yet a significant one when it comes to specific issues in modern life. I had the chance to talk with CIMCIM members from



Leaflets and work documents for the ICME-CIMCIM joint off-site meeting in Minpaku, Osaka

Chad and we found that, regardless of their differences with Latin America, we have similar ways of addressing cultural diversity in our museums.



ICME members: Viv Golding, Wentao Hu, and Blanca Cárdenas



Visit to the Byodoin Temple

Touring

The pre-conference tour to Nara was the very first thing I did in Japan. Between sacred deer and a lot of tasty food, we visited many temples and the Nara Palace Site Historical Park. The Nara Palace Site Museum gives a very entertaining introduction to the historical buildings, the archaeological excavations, and an amazing explanation about the palace's reconstruction.

Near the end of the General Conference, all participants were also able to choose a specific excursion near Kyoto. My choice included a visit to the Byodoin Temple, the Tale of Genji Museum

and Iwashimizu-Hachimangu Shrine. In this short trip we could learn about Uji's tea (*matcha*) and Japanese literature, but mainly we felt the artistic and spiritual essence of Japan.

Learning

The program of the General Conference included conferences, workshops, keynote speeches, plenary sessions, panels, social events, etc. No matter how hard we tried, it was impossible to participate in all the sessions. Hence, I really enjoyed talking to other ICME fellows in order to learn more about their specific experiences; we talked about curatorship, decoloniz-



Nara Palace Site Historical Park



The Tale of Genji Museum

ing museums, repatriation of ethnographic collections, communities and their participation in the exhibition designing process, and, mainly, about the debate around the proposed new ICOM definition for museums.

We all had different perspectives on this. Someone argued that the new definition seems too vague and long. Somebody else argued, that it is still a European ideal of what a museum “should be”. In my opinion, the new definition proposal contains many concepts that make it complex and multifaceted. Nevertheless, according to the voting in the General Assembly, we still have more time to discuss and search for the main features that distinguish museums as “Cultural Hubs” and “The Future of Tradition”.

What's next?

I would like to express my deep gratitude to ICME-ICOM for the grant, but mainly for the countless memories and the interesting things I experienced. There is a big challenge on becoming a young researcher and finishing a PhD dissertation, but these grants allowed us to experience the excitement of a conference devoted to museums and collections.

I will keep working in Mexican museums with my own academic perspective as a postgraduate student. I hope to meet all ICME members again in the near future and to keep on sharing.

from the top:

*ICOM Extraordinary General Assembly at the Kyoto International Conference Centre
ICOM posters at the subway station
Debate around a new ICOM definition for museums*



A WEEK IN KYOTO. QUESTIONING THE DEFINITION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS

Camille Faucourt, Curator in charge of Mobilities and Interculturalisms collections, Mucem, Marseille, France.

Buzzing, vibrant, thrilling. That was what the main hall of the Kyoto International Conference Center felt like during the last ICOM General Conference in Japan. With its 4,500 attendees, it gave me, as one of the ICME fellows, an unrivaled opportunity to connect with colleagues from museums worldwide. To connect, to discuss, and to re-think our role as professionals taking care of ethnographic collections in museums. Indeed the 25th conference was an intense time of debate regarding the new museum definition suggested by the committee for the Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials. It was also one of the focuses of discussion during the ICME sessions.

What struck me during the four ICME sessions (the last one being at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka) was the diversity of the ethnographic museums presented and interpreted by the speakers. The multiplicity of names used (“cultural anthropology museum”, “society museum”, “ecomuseum”, “memorial museum”) was in itself revealing.

Intertwined with the question of “what” the museum was labelled were questions about “who” they were for and “what for”.

Ethnographic museums and collections are generally considered as institutions keeping and exhibiting objects considered as witnesses of social phenomena, past or present, occurring in diverse societies or communities. Exhibited, these objects are supposed to show and explain to the visitor cultural expressions in their local or global environment, in all of their diversity. This was, broadly, the definition of Minpaku that was given to us by its Director General, Yoshida Kenji. And it was indeed relevant, regarding the galleries of the museum we visited afterwards, each dedicated to one continent and its peoples. But after that, we still needed to consider the “who” and “what for” questions, which were brilliantly addressed by the contributors.

Every contributor made the same core argument: ethnographic museums

are changing and trying new ways to collaborate with their publics. A major shift, which began a few decades ago now in a few museums, is now widespread. Scholars and curators are not the only “experts” anymore. Communities’ members can also contribute to the museum’s activities, from the collecting of objects to the design of exhibitions, education programs, etc. This new game of powers has to be balanced and negotiated by the different actors. The restitutions cases in Namibia presented by Dr. Jeremy Silvester were a good study case in that regard. The processes involved in the returns allowed for mutual learning and the building of new relationships between museums and the individuals and groups involved. I strongly believe in this idea of a museum as a community builder engaging people with its collections in order to create a true shared heritage, tangible and intangible. But Dr. Silvester did not omit the “what for?” question: more than the wrongs of the past, it was the relevance of the objects in a contemporary situation which drove the restitutions.



*A European religious tradition under the Japanese eye.
European pilgrimages souvenirs showed in the Europe Gallery, National Museum of Ethnology-Minpaku, Osaka. ©Camille Faucourt*

Indeed, why are museums becoming more and more inclusive? The challenge is how to do it correctly, without inducing cultural objectification, or rigid identity classification, as Roberta Altin explained. One of the (many) seductive answers offered during ICME sessions came from Dr. Christina Kreps' keynote, "*Staying with the trouble*". *Thinking beyond universality and diversity*. Dr. Kreps pleaded for an "emotional museum", able to connect cultures, to generate

empathy and make visitors aware of themselves but also of their place in the world, both cultural and natural. In two words, the task of museums is to "make trouble". The concept convinced me as it is, in a way, what I am trying to achieve in my day-to-day activities at the Mucem (Museum of the Europe and the Mediterranean civilizations) in Marseille, France, a port still marked by its close relationships to French colonies in the past.

A lots of questions discussed during the sessions are still unsolved or will emerge in the future. This constant questioning of our practice as museum's professionals or researchers was, without a doubt, one of the main interests of this week in Kyoto. I hope to soon continue the debate with Yunci, Blanca, Jiyea, Ali, Jaanika, Rema and others who have been wonderful companions through an unforgettable Japanese experience.



ICME pre-conference trip to Nara - group photo in front of the Nara Palace Site Historical Park (left) and at Todaji Temple (right)

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS AND NEW FORMS OF HUMAN DIVERSITY

Jiyea Hong (University of Chicago)

The 25th ICOM General Conference was held in Kyoto, Japan, from September 1st to 7th, 2019, under the theme Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition. More than 4,500 participants from over 120 countries and regions gathered in this conference to share ideas and experiences. It was a special year for ICOM as it held the 34th General Assembly to discuss a new definition for the museum, after the definition adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, in 2007.

ICME also held its 52nd ICOM-ICME Annual Conference under the theme

Diversity and Universality, where topics around de-colonizing museum, supporting indigenous communities, and representing diversity were passionately discussed. I had the opportunity to participate in this exciting event as a 2019 ICME fellow. I express my great gratitude to the fellowship committee for giving me this chance.

The keynote and panel discussion 'Thinking, Designing, and Working Beyond Diversity and Universality' was presented by Dr. Christina Kreps and designer Tim Ventimiglia. Both speakers addressed the future of

ethnographic museums by confronting the legacies from the past and attending to issues of the present. Kreps' speech 'Staying with the Trouble: Thinking Beyond Universality and Diversity' brilliantly addressed both ICME's annual theme and the current issue of museum identity. Bringing in Donna Haraway's idea of "staying with the trouble" through finding partial connections rather than rigid universalities, her idea of diversity is not the opposite of "universality" but demands constant efforts of paying attention to the things that connect people together.



Scene from Extraordinary General Assembly where the new museum definition was debated and decision taken to postpone the decision on a new definition.



ICOM excursion - at Makazu pottery factory

I understand Kreps' diversity as necessitating creativity. For instance, I imagine an ethnographic museum that goes beyond the textbook forms of "diversity" that is predominantly based on the world-map-like image of difference between continents, nations, and cultures, rigidly bound and coherently defined. Instead, I imagine it to be attentive to countless ways human beings connect with each other and with other species: migrations and border-crossings, colonial legacies and historical traumas, environmental disasters, the ecological importance of caring for other species, or, alternatively, the debate about benefitting from laboratory animals used for important medical interventions. I imagine this museum helping its visitors find new ways to bond and engage with each other. Ventimiglia's design of the recently reopened World Museum in Vienna provides a model for making

the museum space critically and openly reflective of its own past not only through its artifacts but also through the space itself.

The ICME conference was held jointly with the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music (CimCim) at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka. I was taken by the Minpaku's special exhibition *Regnum Imaginarium: Realm of the Marvelous and Uncanny*. In this exhibit, imaginary creatures of diverse cultures around the world are exhibited under a spatial theme that binds them together, such as *aqua*, *terra*, and *aer* (the Latin terms for water, earth and air). The artifacts not only include traditional cultural objects but also a virtual reality exhibit. *Final Fantasy XV* is a contemporary version of an imaginary creation, showing the continuous

works of the human imagination. I found this exhibit fitting for this year's theme of the conference, representing diverse cultural creations around the world without structuring them under geological or institutional difference, but searching for the common threads spoken by the artifacts.

This year is my first year of engaging with ICOM-ICME, and the fellowship provided me a wonderful chance to learn more about ethnographic museums and ongoing discussions among museums. It gave me a unique opportunity to explore the role of museums in our society together with the wonderful people sharing the same interest. The ongoing discussion on a new museum definition shows that museums still have much to contribute to humanity. I look forward to future engagements with ICME activities.

A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE AND UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES!

Ali Mahfouz (Director, Mansoura Storage Museum, Ministry of Egyptian Antiquities, Egypt)



Visitor center at Nara-Nijoojiminami

I was very fortunate to be one of the ICME Fellows for 2019 to attend the 25th General Conference of The International Council of Museums conference "ICOM KYOTO 2019 Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition" which was held in Kyoto, Japan in the period between 1 to 7 September 2019. It is tough to find words to express the many ways in which this conference was unusual for me. Without a doubt, the ICOM Kyoto 2019 conference was fertile ground for the confluence of civilizations,



ICME preconference trip to Nara

cultures, and sharing experiences. A considerable number of museum and cultural heritage professionals from all over the world attended with over



Welcome panel at Kyoto station

than 4000 participants. I was so lucky to be one of them. For me, it was my first time to attend the ICOM General Conference as well as the first time to be in Japan, although, despite the long-distance, the return from this fellowship was strong and rich.

The day after my arrival in Kyoto, I traveled to Nara city, which was impressive as it has a lot of historical sites, museums, and green landscapes. All the museums, historical sites, and castles that I visited in Japan

had a unique style that distinguished them from those I have seen in other parts of the world.

It is always important to learn about the traditions and cultures of any country that you visit, and Nara was the best place to experience Japanese culture. I was particularly impressed by the visitor center in Nara-Nijoo-jiminami. There was an extraordinary commitment to performing the history of Japan for children. I had many ideas which were inspired by this visit and which I will now introduce for the children who come to visit my museum.

Although I have attended many conferences, workshops, and training courses in different countries, the ICME Fellowship will be a milestone in my career. I got used to Japan and the people from the very first day and I felt that within a few hours, we had become one family. During the conference, I met cultural heritage professionals and colleagues from all over the globe and we made new friendships and I have unforgettable memories. The opportunity to experience a new country and obtain new knowledge has definitely affected me positively in both my professional and personal life.

The ICME sessions were vibrant. The sessions dealt with many of the problems faced by ethnographic museums around the world, such as the management of ethnographic collection management across the



ICME Fellows, from left: Rema, Jaanika, Camille, Ali, Blanka and Jiyea



Panel discussion on the proposed new museum definition for ICOM

globe. I was very interested in attending the sessions on “Decolonizing Museums to promote Citizenship and Social Cohesion”, “Memory, Affect and Belonging” and “Collaboration to Safeguard Indigenous Knowledge”.

The sessions gave me the knowledge on how ethnographic museums can play an integral role in deepen the social sense of belonging to our heritage through the collaboration between museums and communities, as well



Japanese Umbrella at International Conference Center (ICC Kyoto)



Kiyomizudera temple



Umm Kulthum corner at National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka

they shed the light on the challenges that the indigenous and modern communities are facing under the threats of conflicts, globalization and industrialization, and how can museums help in safeguarding and shaping the identity of their communities. I was very excited to attend the discussion sessions about changing the museum definition. The decision on the new definition was postponed to the next meeting, but there was a lively and stimulating debate.

The Conference was very carefully organized, and the social events were organized very well, and the venues and performances were awe-inspiring. The experience was pure Japa-

nese - food, music, and everything. I enjoyed it. The fact that the Conference succeeded in showcasing and celebrating Japanese culture was very befitting and added another chapter to ICOM's history.

During the ICME and CIMCIM off-site meeting, I enjoyed our visit to the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, which contains one of the largest ethnographic collections in the world. In this museum, I saw the soft power of the museum in creating mutual understanding and rapprochement among people. I got to learn about many cultures from different people around the world. I was thrilled when I saw the Arab singing lady, Planet of

the East *Umm Kulthum*. She was born several kilometers from my home in Egypt but had her own corner in this museum. As the director of the Storage Museum in Egypt, I was also lucky enough to be able to visit the storage area in the National Museum of Ethnology. I have obtained new perspectives about preventive conservation, collection care, storage, and databases.

Finally, I cannot find the words to express my gratitude and appreciation to ICME for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the vast and active network of great professionals in ICOM Kyoto 2019.

TOWARDS FUTURE-ORIENTED MUSEUMS

Jaanka Vider (School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford)

The theme of the 2019 ICOM General Conference was "Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition" with the ICME sub-theme being "Universality and Diversity". Under such headings, over 4,000 participants debated questions that cut across key issues and daily workings of museums globally. For those of us active in museum ethnography, many of the questions raised have been a staple for over thirty years with the shifts towards collaboration and sharing of curatorial authority being noted in James Clifford's seminal *Routes* that suggested 'contact zones' as a kind of mission statement for ethnographic museums.

"A mission statement for a contemporary museum" was one way in which the proposed new museum definition was described during the conference. Having only joined ICOM in the previous year, I was not overly familiar with the debates and discussions that had been happening on this topic over the past years. The plenary session on the second day was my first proper insight into the Museum Definition debate. I listened with interest to the rich ideas and research that underpinned the proposed definition.

After opening remarks by Suay Aksoy and Jette Sandahl, Richard West Jr. emphasised the urgency and necessity



Panel discussion on the proposed new museum definition for ICOM

of reflecting diverse knowledge systems in museum work. Coming from an urban planning perspective, Nirmal Krishnani then proposed that in order to truly move forward we must do away with thinking of museums in terms of past and present and instead imagine them as interfaces with the future. We heard from George Okello Abungu about the power of heritage and the inherently political nature of museums, which means we should not create pretenses of neutrality. Shose Kessi's talk on decolonial psychology and the role of public art in the movement was a stark reminder of the colonial pasts of most museums and

how activism was essential to opening up museums as forums for diverse debates. Finally, Margaret Anderson and Lauran Bonilla-Merchav spoke of a new generation of visitors and museum-makers for whom the existing definition simply does not work arguing for the need for a new roadmap to acknowledge and engage with the challenges posed by climate change and global inequalities.

This diverse and committed panel was for me one of the most inspirational moments. I watched how the voices of those long marginalised were heard, loud and clear, on the main stage of the



Presentation of the new Ainu museum in Hokkaido

main hall by hundreds of participants. Yet, I felt that these voices were quickly muffled by those that exist in and benefit from existing structures of power. Immediately there was a request to postpone voting on the definition, commenting that a change is needed but that it is a process that might take a long time and there is a need to find common ground to give ICOM a new identity. The following day, two roundtable discussions took place - one in support of a new definition and one in support of a delay in voting. I was able to attend the second of these and witnessed, to my utter dismay, five white men telling the audience how we should be "moderate" and "wise", shy away from revolutions, how a definition must remain utilitarian as it is now and offering thinly veiled ridicule of the proposed definition as "avant garde" and "not a definition at all."

Francois Mairesse concluded the official presentations by evoking the "tradition" behind the existing definition and arguing that it was disrespectful to overhaul existing definitions rather than build incrementally on previous work.

This is where I would like to return to the themes of the conference - both the "Future of Tradition" and "Universality and Diversity" imply that we should try to bring these strands together. It sounds promising and as Christina Krep said in her ICME keynote (quoting Nicholas Thomas), museums seem to have the capacity to do this. Yet, in practice universality and tradition are implicitly if not explicitly understood within dominant knowledge systems, internalised and institutionalised in museums. In order to truly embrace diversity, accept the decolonial agenda, and tackle key challenges

of the Anthropocene, we need to work with diverse traditions and ontologies, most of which may have never been part of museums' fabric before.

Perhaps we should abandon the notion of a definition for its reliance on exclusions, gatekeeping, and promises of objectivity and neutrality and adopt a mission statement instead. I hope that at the next meeting, we will move the conversation forward decisively rather than worry about ICOM's external image. I worry that if we do not, ICOM will alienate "diverse" views it argues to embrace. Commenting on institutional and disciplinary boundaries as "border police" in academia, Linda Tuhiwai Smith noted in her Sociology Review Annual Lecture in London this year that many interesting conversations happen in the hallways but these remain in the hallways. Likewise, the triannual ICOM conference offers unique opportunities to speak to and share views with a huge number of colleagues while on a bus excursion or in a food queue but as brilliant as these moments are, they will not move urgent conversations forward with speed. To do so, I believe we should take to heart Lonnie Bunch's comment from the Museum Debate Plenary. He said that he has been urged to wait all his life with people saying that the time for change is not quite ripe yet. I agree with Bunch that there will never be enough time, what we need now is an aspirational, future-oriented reflection of the profession. And it certainly looks like the future of museums is ethnographic (Kavita Singh, 2013).

ICOM KYOTO 2019: A SPRINGBOARD TO A NEW ROLE

Rema Zeynalova, Chief Specialist, Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum

Every three years, ICOM's General Conference gathers the international museum community around a theme chosen by museum professionals. The General Conference is based on scientific discussions with ICOM's International Committees, on administrative sessions during which the General Assembly and the Advisory Committee set up the guidelines of the organization, and finally, on forums based on the international museum-related events. This year's theme was *Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition*.

Thanks to ICOM-ICME (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography) for its generous fellowship, I was one of six awarded fellows who were given the opportunity to attend the 25th ICOM General Conference, which was held in Kyoto, Japan from 1st – 7th September, 2019.

On 1st September 2019, a day before the opening ceremony of the 25th ICOM General Conference, we had an exciting pre-conference tour to Nara organized by the ICME 2019 Conference Team (special thanks to Keiko Kuroiwa). During the trip, we visited the Nara Palace Site Historical Park,



ICME Fellows, from left: Rema, Jaanika, Camille, Ali, Blanka and Jiyea

which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was the site of the Imperial capital in Nara from 710 to 784 AD. Nara, the ancient capital of Japan, is full of historic temples and shrines. One of the impressive temples we visited in Nara was Kofukuji Temple. This temple, with its breathtaking five-storey pagoda, is known for having the second largest wooden pagoda in Japan. For me, one major appeal was the fact that those temples and shrines in Nara are home to friendly deer who love to be fed rice crackers by tourists.



Sacred deer of Nara

According to Japanese legend, deer are messengers of the gods and they are, therefore, regarded as sacred. Overall, the trip to Nara was impressive as it was like a study trip, where we had a chance to explore and discover the local heritage.



Opening Address by Suay Aksoy, President of ICOM

The opening ceremony of the 25th ICOM General Conference was held at the Kyoto International Conference Center on 2nd September. Over 4,500 participants from 120 countries attended and participated in the conference, which brought together museum professionals from around the world to share their experience and ideas. The ceremony was opened by Suay Aksoy, President of ICOM and attended by Crown Prince Akishino and Crown Princess Kiko, Ministers, MPs and the Mayor of Kyoto.

A Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma, and a Brazilian realistic photographer Sebastião Salgado, as well as a Chinese contemporary artist Cai Guo-Qiang, gave three keynote speeches titled *The Age of the Forest*, *A Brazilian Am-*

azon Forest Initiative, and *My Museum Years*. I was particularly impressed by Sebastião Salgado's speech. His speech was more than a presentation. It was a call to develop new and creative forms of protection and sustainable management for the Amazon region.

ICOM ICME's 52nd Annual Conference was held under the title *Diversity and Universality* as a part of the 25th ICOM General Conference. From 2nd to 4th September, the conference had seven sessions and 20 papers tackling various focuses. The

Some papers analysed the diverse approaches that museums have developed to safeguard Indigenous heritage and communicate with objects. Other speakers discussed how design and creativity might be employed to prompt learning conversations in museums and during outreach sessions, with a range of diverse objects. The diversity of papers and speakers helped me, in particular, to benefit from the discussions. I think it was a great experience to understand other cultures away from us.



Keynote speech by Sebastião Salgado

presenters gave interesting presentations on methods used by museums to engage with diverse audiences and gain a better understanding of what unites human beings around the world, without eliding their differences. This may be through research, conservation, exhibitions, marketing and programming.

A new president of ICME and board members (to serve for 2019-2022) were chosen at the 52nd ICME Annual Meeting held in Kyoto. It was one of the highlights of my life as I was elected as Secretary of ICME. Since the next ICME's annual conference will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, I presented a paper about the upcoming 2020 conference.



Four of the seven members of the new ICME Board for 2019-2022. From right: Chair, Ralf Ceplak Mencin; Agnes Alijas, Rema Zeynalova, Jeremy Silvester. Missing in the photo are: Peter Ride, Chiedza Nyengetera Zharare and Abdelrahman Othman; on the right: Presentation about 2020 ICME's annual conference in Baku, Azerbaijan

On 5 September 2019 I attended the ICME & CIMCIM Joint off-site meeting at the National Museum of Ethnology (also known as Minpaku), Osaka & Hotel Hankyu Expo Park. During the meeting, participants enjoyed inspiring guided tours of the storage, permanent, temporary and special exhibitions. We were guided by Dr Taku lida (Professor of the Museum).

During the ICME & CIMCIM Joint off-site meeting, two keynote speakers, Professor Yoshida Kenji (Director-General - National Museum of Ethnology), and Mr Shima Kazuhiko (Assistant Director - Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments) presented their experience of past and present ethnographic museum practices. Professor Yoshida Kenji emphasized that the role of the ethnographic museums and collections is now more important than ever. This is to establish a world where, while respecting diverse cultures, we will be



Dr Taku lida, professor at Minpaku, gives a talk about the museum's storage facilities



Exploring the special exhibition, Regnum Imaginarium: Realm of the Marvelous and Uncanny, at Minpaku

able to live together by bridging the gap between different cultures.

Founded in 1974, the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (Minpaku) is an Inter-University Research Institute, housing a research center and a museum. Minpaku is a museum where you can learn about the different cultures of the world. When you go around the galleries, you can learn about different cultures and beliefs and become familiar with them. There are exhibitions organized by continent, such as Oceania, America, Europe, Africa, Asia. As a researcher focusing on Azerbaijani carpets at museums around the world, I was happy to discover that the museum also has Azerbaijani carpets in its collection. I want to thank Dr Taku lida for offering me an album of the Azerbaijani carpets during the meeting. I look forward to a fruitful cooperation with this museum in the near future.



National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka



View from permanent exhibition at Minpaku



A group photo of the participants of the ICME & CIMCIM joint off-site meeting held at the Minpaku Museum, Osaka & Hotel Hankyu Expo Park

On 6th September, many exciting excursions were organized by the ICOM Kyoto 2019 Organising Committee for all the participants of the 25th ICOM General Conference. I chose to visit Maizuru, a port town with a fascinating history, located on the scenic Maizuru Bay. After World War II, Maizuru was a principal port for returning Japa-

nese detainees from continental Asia for over 13 years. Today, Maizuru is a central district headquarters for the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. In Maizuru, we visited the Repatriation Memorial Museum, which narrates the experiences of Japanese soldiers who were detained in the former Soviet Union after World War II. Here we met

a senior citizen aged 98, who was an intern in Siberia during World War II for four years. It was very impressive to see how the museum presents the warm welcome shown by Maizuru residents towards the returning soldiers and proclaims the value of peace to the world. Our next two destinations in Maizuru were The Red Brick Museum and

Tanabe Castle Museum. The Red Brick Museum was built in 1903 as a torpedo warehouse by the former Navy. It is the only museum in the world where you can see bricks from all over the world, including the four great civilizations of the world, ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and Greece.

Tanabe Castle Museum was built by the warlord Hosokawa Yusai in the late 16th century. The restored castle gate is now used as a museum, where visitors have the opportunity to wear samurai armor and join a tea ceremony. As a tea lover, I was excited to join and learn more about the role of the tea ceremony in Japanese culture. The Japanese tea ceremony is not just about drinking tea. It is a meditation, a spiritual event, an appreciation of taste and beauty. You have to shut out the world and focus on the present moment, the sound of boiling water, the aroma of the tea, the texture of the tatami floor and the silk kimono (which is absolutely fantastic). Basically, the tea ceremony is a cherished part of Japanese culture. It is a celebration, not just of tea, but of life. It is a cleansing of your thoughts and a refilling of your soul. I was just amazed by this entire experience.

On 7 September, one of the essential plenary sessions at the 25th ICOM General Conference, which I attended, was a discussion about the proposition of a new museum definition. Terms included in the proposal, such as "democratizing" and "polyphonic



Experience of the Japanese Tea Ceremony



Kimono experience



Vote showing the decision to postpone the adoption of a new museum definition

spaces for critical dialogue", were challenged as not specific enough to reflect the diversity of the growing role of museums on a global scale. The proposed definitions was criticized by some speakers as reading like a cluster of general mission statements rather than providing a practical description.

Concerns were also raised around funding implications in countries where governments might use the new definition to justify withdrawing financial support for museums. Updating the definition was widely considered as necessary in principle. However concerns about the draft alternative, voted on at the end of the conference, led the majority to call for a longer period to review and revise the definition. After a profound and healthy debate among ICOM members, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM therefore decided to postpone the vote on the new museum definition.

The social events at the General Conference provided a better understanding of Japanese culture and society. I joined the social events and visited Nijo-jo Castle; Kyoto Botanical Gardens; Garden of Fine Arts Kyoto; Kyoto Institute, Library, and Archives; Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art; Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts; Heian Jingu Shrine; Fushimi Inari Shrine; Hosomi Museum and Kyoto National Museum. Visiting many cultural places allowed me to explore the different aspects of Japanese heritage.

Overall, the 25th ICOM General Conference was enormously beneficial for me as I got new ideas and experience. I also made new friends, expanded my professional network, and built new relations with museum professionals across the world for future projects and collaborations.



UNESCO World Heritage Site - Fushimi Inari Shrine



View from exhibition at Kyoto National Museum

RESTITUTION. IT'S NOT SO EASY: OBSERVATIONS FROM A "COUNTRY OF ORIGIN"

Werner Hillebrecht

It sometimes feels as if an avalanche has been triggered. European museums – particularly in Germany, but also elsewhere – receive additional (mostly third-party) funding to conduct provenance research about their collections from Africa, Asia, America, and Oceania. There is no lack of generous declarations about the willingness to return objects with a “background of violence”. There is also no lack of sweeping declarations that all these objects do not belong to European museums and have to be returned wholesale. But how? And where to? And to whom? The devil lurks in the details.

One principle should be stated from the outset: Restitution claims are justified. The return of objects is long overdue. But how to deal with it in practice, is a different matter altogether. The problem can neither be solved by wholesale demands, nor by well-meaning declarations of good intentions, but only through very concrete investigations and actions. And then it becomes obvious that matters are not as clear-cut or easy as assumed.

Let us consider the line of defence taken by some museums: objects should be returned when there is a “background of violence”. I would like to consider this argument by looking at a concrete category of objects from Namibia: The *omakori* (singular: *ekori*), the traditional leather head-dress of Herero women, before it was replaced by the textile *otjikaiva* which is now commonly considered the “traditional head-dress”. The National Museum of Namibia has only three partial specimens of these eye-catching objects with their conspicuous upright “ears”, and it seems possible that these are fairly recent replicas. European museums, especially in the former colonial power Germany, have dozens of them. Most of these objects had already been “acquired” before the genocidal Namibian colonial war of 1904-1908. The same is true for the artfully carved wooden milk pails of this culture. Does this mean there was no “background of violence”?

One can of course argue that the entire history of colonialism consisted of

structural violence, whether military or not. But what about the objects that travelled to Europe before formal colonisation – that is, for Namibia, before 1884? Because there are also many objects in European museums that fit this category.

One cannot make progress in this debate with formulized arguments and periodization to set limits on repatriations. One is also poorly served with an ethnocentric essentialism which postulates that African objects have no rightful place outside the continent because they are only to be seen and owned and understood by the “societies of origin”. With such concepts one arrives very fast at, and very close to, the ideological premises of apartheid which postulated irreconcilable cultural “racial” differences, and negated the common origin and heritage of humankind and a shared humanity. South Africa introduced a system of separate ethnic homelands in Namibia based on such arguments as an alternative to Namibian nationalism.



Ovaherero women wearing Ekoris and leather capes (Photo: National Archives of Namibia, 01827)

The real issue is that a European collection frenzy accumulated cultural objects, while at the same time colonialism and its global precursors and agents, Christian mission and trade, destroyed the economic and cultural foundations that provided the preconditions for their production and use. This becomes evident in a central argument of the colonial collectors, namely that they would “save” material culture from disappearing. What was destroying the culture? The *omakori*, and the leather capes of the Herero women with their decorative ornaments from iron beads perfectly illustrate what happened. Why have they disappeared from Namibia? It was never simply because they went “out of fashion”. The missionaries zealously tried to replace the breast-revealing leather capes with imported cotton dresses which not only conformed to their ideas of modesty, but could also be profitably imported. However, the missionaries had little success until colonialism delivered a decisive blow and destroyed the roots of the livelihood and religion of the Ovaherero: their cattle and pastoral production.

The Director of the Rhenish Mission Trade Society, F.A. Spiecker, claimed in 1905, during the genocide that: **“What the trade did not achieve, and what also had by and large been denied to the mission - namely to sever the Herero from these ignoble ties of servitude to their cattle - has in a certain sense been achieved by the rinderpest, which occurred**

around the turn of the century in those countries and for the large part annihilated the large and rich herds of the Herero [...] But still even this Ordeal of God seems not yet to have had the intended effect; for I have been assured that the unrest starting in January last year has largely been caused by the fact that neither the traders nor the German government bodies showed a proper understanding for the intimate ties binding the Herero to his holy cattle.”

The German government then executed this “Ordeal of God” much more efficiently, not only by the wholesale expropriation of land and cattle of the “rebellious” Herero and Nama, but also by a law simply forbidding any further ownership of cattle. Missionaries achieved an unprecedented wave of conversions and leather clothing disappeared. In this context a number of questions can be asked.

Where did the costly leather for the cape come from? How would the knowledge of how to make them be passed on? Where would people find the time, once compulsory wage labour was enforced by law, to do the laborious tanning, sewing, and ornamenting? And why continue to carve the beautiful milk pails after the genocide? The women still had to milk the cows, but the milk and the cows were the property of a white farmer, who provided tin buckets for this purpose. The farmer might have been the one who bought or obtained a remaining

carved container to decorate his sitting room – or to sell to a museum. In legal language, that would have then been called a “legitimate sale”.

Under these circumstances, one has to consider whether an *ekori*, even if it was not robbed in a war situation but bought with mutual consent by a trader or missionary and sent to Europe, may *bona fide* stay there, or whether it rather bears witness in its “country of origin” to lost skills. A return could provide an inspiration for renewed artistic production. Alternatively, and, I would argue this can also be rightfully considered, the object might stay where it is – but not languishing in a store-room, but put adequately into context in an exhibition revealing the mechanism of colonial conquest. After all, there is no way of coming to terms with the past by removing all the incriminating objects to where they came from (“out of sight out of mind”), and then forget the historical impact that Europe had on Africa with a “clean conscience”! Restitutions cannot repair or nullify the results of colonialism, they can only reflect a recognition of the need for restorative justice and be an indication of a changed relationship.

Where the objects should actually be returned to, is another contentious issue. With few exceptions, museums in Africa are under-staffed, under-financed, and short-of-space museums. Museums are not equipped to quickly cope with large-scale repatriations.

This is no secret, but is not an endorsement of the mistaken argument that European museums have preserved cultural property that would have been "lost" if it had remained at their place of origin. A closer scrutiny of the staffing and storage situation of diverse European ethnographic museums and their century-old neglect of documentation shows how feeble such arguments are. Many museums in Europe are only able to counteract their systematic neglect by sourcing additional, and always time-limited third-party funds from foundations and special grants. Providing such funds for African museums is just as necessary.

Another problem is the instrumentalisation of culture and cultural objects for the pursuit of sectional, tribalist or dynastic interest. We have seen attempts to instrumentalize repatriations to assert dynastic or factional

claims. Such issues have to be resolved locally, and European institutions and support initiatives should be cautious and aware of disputes to avoid returning an object to one faction in an unresolved succession dispute. These and other issues are currently being discussed in Namibia as we think about the processes we need to review collections in German museums and find practical ways to ensure effective consultation with communities. The recently repatriated "Witbooi Bible", robbed in a military attack from the Witbooi community in 1893 and kept for over 100 years at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany, is now provisionally kept at the National Archives of Namibia, and it is agreed that it will return to the Witbooi community at Gibeon once the conditions to safeguard and exhibit it locally have been created. The decision has kept the Bible out of a succession dispute within the local rul-

ing family. The negotiations were not easy, but successful. The list of the first objects to be returned from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum to Namibia is being developed through a constructive debate amongst stakeholders. We also continue to debate the question of whether it is appropriate to accept a "loan" until the legal instruments have been created to facilitate permanent repatriations. The same applies to the still unsolved issue of a permanent resting place for human remains that have been repatriated to Namibia from German museums. It is a commendable African tradition not to decide hastily, under external time pressure, about such issues.

Werner Hillebrecht is the former national archivist of Namibia, and is active in cultural restitution issues with the Museums Association of Namibia.

TAKING CARE: ETHNOGRAPHIC AND WORLD CULTURES MUSEUMS AS SPACES OF CARE

Tina Palaić, curator at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum

Our lived reality is marked by climate disruption experienced on a planetary scale. All the species on this planet, including the human race, depend on the healthy ecosystem which has been disintegrating before our eyes. According to the recent United Nations scientific report, more than one million species of plants and animals are at risk of extinction. This is the consequence of rampant poisoning, looting, vandalism and wholesale destruction of the planet's forests, oceans, soils, watersheds, and air. Many regions have recently faced severe natural disasters, for example hurricanes, floods, droughts, extreme heat waves, and wildfires. All these events have been worsened by climate change. However, the negative effects of this natural crisis are unequally distributed, affecting most intensely those whose positions are already most fragile, including indigenous and formerly colonized peoples. Alarming environmental occurrences have raised public awareness of the threats facing the future of the planet. Growing anxieties about planetary wellbeing have stimulated

The many shapes of footwear in the course of history and in different geographical areas may cause excitement and wonder over human creativity and skills. Before the introduction of modern global production, footwear for the masses was generally made from locally sourced and easily accessible plant and animal material. The image shows some examples of shoes from around the world. (exhibition my feet. my shoes. my way., Slovene Ethnographic Museum, December 2019 – December 2020) Image credits: Blaž Verbič

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



new social movements addressing climate change and putting pressure on politicians to take more action.

The "Taking Care" project was born out of the environmental crisis and accompanying anxiety we are witnessing today. It is the result of a strong belief that museums do not only reflect society but also co-design it, and thus have a responsibility to respond to the pressing topic of climate change. Taking Care is a EU-cooperation project, co-funded by the Creative Europe program, that places thirteen ethnographic and world culture museums at the center of a search for viable strategies to overcome these challenges. It aims to intervene in the discussion on the Anthropocene Age (the current geological time period in which it is argued that humans are the having the greatest influence on the environment and climate change)The project emphasizes interconnecting crises: climate change, anti-immigrant racism and xenophobic nationalism with the intensification of right-wing populism.

The project's focus is on ecological knowledge that can be (re)discovered in

museums' extensive collections of the material culture of civilizations globally. It is framed around the notion of care, which is defined as every deed that contributes to repairing and maintaining our planet so that all species can live on it as harmoniously as possible. The important emphasis is caring for things and for people together. Many artefacts in ethnographic collections recall landscapes that no longer exist, or contain ecological knowledge that can be made available in the context of joint research with communities of origin, designers, activists and artists, and used to create a sustainable future. The project is organized in five work packages, namely *Matters of Care, Ecological Knowledges, Designing Sustainable Futures, From Preservation to Care* and *Caring in a World We Share with Others*. In a series of workshops, creative residencies and exhibitions, as well as

through artistic or activist research, small lab meetings and in joint publications, the project partners will discuss creative solutions for more sustainable use of the earth's resources, as well as heritage resources, and thus contribute towards fashioning more equitable futures.

Ethnographic museums and museums of world cultures should no longer be conceived simply or primarily as treasuries of heritage that must be preserved. They are also places of encounter and practice, of social experimentations and innovation, where various knowledges and skills can come together or are developed anew. They are places of care where the transformation of our societies to become more humane is a possible outcome of their work. Today, more than ever, we need such discursive spaces.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project title: Taking Care.
Ethnographic and World Cultures Museums as Spaces of Care
Program: Creative Europe – Culture, European Union
Duration: 1. 10. 2019 – 30. 9. 2023

PROJECT PARTNERS

Project leader: Weltmuseum Wien/
KHM-Museumsverband, Vienna (AT)

Statens museer för världskultur,
Gothenburg, Stockholm (SE)

Mucem – Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée,
Marseille (FR)

Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen (DK)
Linden-Museum Stuttgart (DE)

Slovenski etnografski muzej,
Ljubljana (SI)

Museu Etnològic i de Cultures del Món/Institut de Cultura de
Barcelona (ES)

MARKK – Museum am
Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt, Hamburg (DE)

Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford –
University of Oxford (UK)

Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale,
Tervuren (BE)

Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden,
Amsterdam, Bergen-Dal (NL)

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology – University of
Cambridge (UK)

Museo delle Civiltà – Museo Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini",
Rome (IT)

Culture Lab, Tervuren (BE)



Reflections © MEG. Photo J. Watts

THE NEW MEG IN GENEVA / SWITZERLAND

Boris Wastiau (Director, Musée d'ethnographie de Genève)

The Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève reopened its doors to the public on 31 October 2014 after four years of construction work. The new building — whose structure exhibits the three Vitruvian qualities of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas* (durability, usefulness, and beauty)—, designed by the archi-

tects Marco Graber and Thomas Pulver, faces a pleasure garden created by the landscape artist Guido Hager. The new MEG is the fruit of a major investment programme undertaken by the City of Geneva, the Canton of Geneva, and the Association des Communes Genevoises. It offers the

general public all the facilities and services that are expected of a truly contemporary museum—exhibition galleries and areas devoted to scientific and cultural educational programs that benefit from the latest scenographic devices: an auditorium with a stage for the living arts and

digital projection, and a library; the museum also has a café-restaurant and a store and bookshop, all of which offer a welcoming and convivial atmosphere. The museum's original building has been renovated and now houses the staff offices, workshops and technical equipment. Located in a developing part of the city—in the Jonction district near the confluence of the Rhone and Arve Rivers, next to Radio Télévision Suisse, the Université de Genève, and the Bains district, which is famous for its contemporary art galleries—the MEG offers an increasingly enthusiastic and curious public a window onto the world's diverse societies and cultures.

An essential addition, the new scientific library doubles up as a specialised public library, where members of the public can expand their knowledge or enrich their visits. A 'Music Lounge' provides visitors with more than sixteen thousand hours of sound recordings of all sorts. There, visitors experience the pleasure of researching the answers to their own questions. The museum encourages visitors to read, listen, and look at the world from a different perspective, taking them outside their own fields of competence and comfort zone, and transcending their habitual cultural boundaries. In essence, visitors are invited to embrace the world's great cultural diversity.

In a vast museographic area located in the lower gallery, the MEG holds one large temporary exhibition every



The esplanade © MEG. Photo J.Watts

year. Each exhibition is complemented by an extensive cultural and scientific programme that includes guided visits adapted to different audiences and in several languages, shows, encounters, conferences, and film screenings.

The MEG embodies the values of the city of Geneva and its exhibitions are, of course, adapted to all audiences and meet their specific requirements. The museum's commitment as a Genevan institution is reflected in its policy of meeting all the needs and interests of its visitors, the policy of solidarity towards visitors from the most disadvantaged segments of the population, and initiatives that break down barriers and facilitate encounters and the sharing of experiences. This policy of openness is part of an ethical commitment to sustainable development. The MEG promotes cultural diversity and

the study and understanding of diverse cultures. Inviting its visitors to discover other ways of interpreting the world and living in society, the museum also encourages them to take a critical look at our own complex and cosmopolitan society. The museum endeavours to promote multilingualism in all its areas of activity and thereby aims to be a museum that maintains close links with its visitors and the local population—people with particularly diverse geographical origins.

To live up to its name, the Musée d'Ethnographie must remain a museum of living and contemporary societies, while conserving historical objects. The contemporary visual and plastic arts have long been a part of the MEG's exhibitions. Not only are they more predominant now than ever, but artists, craftsmen, and other

creators have become more involved in the conception of the exhibitions and are regularly invited to meet the general public. The collaborations that begin with the populations whose culture, works, and objects are presented are expected to develop, because the new MEG aims to be a 'forum', a dynamic venue where ideas and views can be exchanged. It invites visitors to reflect, interact, discuss issues, and philosophize. Since the immaterial heritage is inseparable from material culture, the living arts are not overlooked: each exhibition is complemented by representations and musical and dance performances, which includes the most contemporary forms such as DJ mixes. Literature, oral traditions, photography, and ethnographic films are also part of the programme of regular encounters with the public. The exhibitions of the heritage collections are thus complemented by an extremely broad range of cultural expressions, which gives them more value and meaning. The MEG's project aims to develop a universalist and truly global visual, musical, literary, and scientific culture.

'The Archives of human diversity' appropriately describes the objects selected for the MEG collection's permanent display, whose scenography has been arranged by Atelier Brückner (Stuttgart). The exhibition encompasses several centuries of history and comprises around one hundred civilisations represented by over one thousand remarkable pieces: objects of reference,



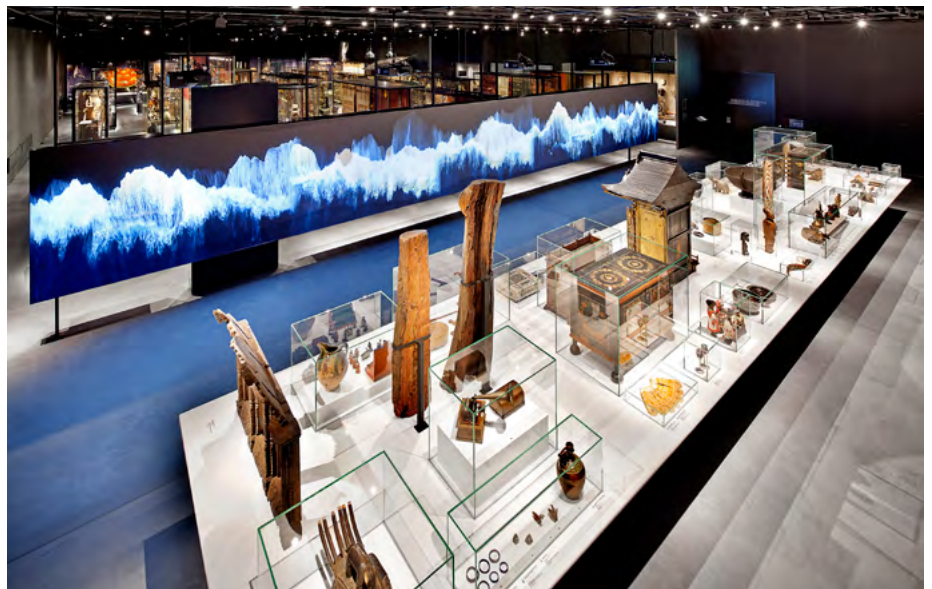
The library © MEG. Photo B. Glaiser

historical objects, and artworks which all attest to the human potential for creativity. The exhibition itinerary comprises seven main sections: a prologue that focuses on the provenance of the collections, five sections devoted to

five of the seven continents, and an area that focuses on ethnomusicology. The preparation of this permanent exhibition has brought to light hidden treasures that had sometimes been forgotten for generations!

The adoption of a historical approach aims primarily to illustrate the evolution of European perceptions of exotic cultures and to examine the changes in status conferred on objects in the various museums that preceded the MEG in Geneva. As a counterpoint to these historical testimonies, which are exhibited on a massive screen that radiates with light, *Sea*—a magnificent video work by the contemporary artist Ange Leccia which extends over 18 metres—provides a regular beat, an endless pulsation that evokes the natural measurement of time, perpetual movement, and the power of the elements that starkly contrast with the fragility of the various cultures. A second visual work by Ange Leccia, based on musical compositions by Julien Perez, highlights the ethnomusicology display. The ‘Sound Chamber’ explores the relationship between sound and vision, as two related “realms of vibrations”.

The MEG advocates freedom on various levels: the museum encourages the freedom to think, observe, and immerse oneself in the world’s cultures, with no taboo themes or objects, and without imposed views; dogmas—both secular and religious—, revisionism, and other impediments to clear thought have no place in the MEG, unless they themselves are the focus of study and analysis. The contemporary world is full of daily examples of clashes brought about by the conflicting values of societies and individuals; these values can be religious, economic, political, or moral. Given this context, the MEG aims to provide a



The archives of human diversity exhibition © MEG. Photos D. Stauch

highly tolerant environment, where one can broach—without fear of being taken to task—a whole range of questions relating to major contemporary themes, such as cultural relativism, universalism, globalisation, communitarism, and affirmations of identity. It also intends to be a place where individuals can reflect, ponder, review, re-evaluate, and question,

before forming an opinion, or arriving at a judgement. The MEG invites every visitor to reach their own conclusions about the world and its cultures. In 2017 the MEG received the EMYA (European Museum of the Year Award)!

For further information: <https://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/index.php>

WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

I hope you enjoyed this edition of ICME News. We will aim to produce the newsletter every four months. If you have any comments, would like to share news about an event or contribute an article please email: jeremysilvester3@gmail.com

I am in the process of putting together a new editorial team with the aim of ensuring that ICME News will continue to share debates, initiatives and news from all over the world. Please contact me if you are interested in volunteering to be part of the team.

The newsletter will seek to include a feature article about a different ethnographic museum in every issue. We would also like to include articles that focus on the biography of a single artifact as a way of discussing the ways in which ethnographic museums relate to communities.

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