

**COMCOL ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Umeå, Sweden, 5–9 December 2017**

**The Guardians of Contemporary Collecting and Collections
– working with (contested) collections and narratives**

CALL FOR PAPERS

COMCOL is the International Committee for Collecting of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which aims to deepen discussions and share knowledge on the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections development.

This year COMCOL jointly organises its annual conference with DOSS (Contemporary Collecting Sweden, previous Samdok), Norsam (Nordic network for contemporary collecting and research at museums), and ICOM Sweden. Ten years after the Connecting Collecting conference in Stockholm, which was the starting point for COMCOL, we will return to Sweden. From 5–9 December we will be hosted at the Västerbottens museum in Umeå.

The contemporary collecting collaboration Samdok brought in the 1970:s innovation to museum work. Samdok argued over the years for a more problem-oriented way of working, studying the present day to arrive at descriptions of social and cultural processes, emphasizing the importance of both the historical and contemporary contexts. In the course of time Samdok became a forum for scholarly discussions on contemporary culture and society, a forum for professional development and further education, sharing experiences of the empirical, methodological and theoretical dimensions of the creation of collecting and collections.

During the conference we would like to connect to the legacy of Samdok, focusing on collecting the present; connecting the present with historical collections and collections with communities. We would like to look closer at good practices in museums concerning collecting and collections, practices that are possible to develop further. We would also like to investigate the difficult narratives. As our diverse societies today put different demands on our collections, collecting strategies and presentations, it has become impossible to speak about cultural heritage without asking the questions: Which heritage? Whose? So how can (contested) collections be revisited? How can we create democratic collections? Which new approaches to museum ethics can be used,

and how can contemporary practices and collecting address or add to the discussion around difficult heritage?

We invite papers from researchers, museum professionals and students that address the collection development, including, but not limited to, the following topics:

The triangular relationship between museum, community and collection

What are the contested histories and objects of the past for societies today? How can we address issues around contested objects or narratives in the museum? For whom are they disturbing? Which roles can the communities play in the representation? And how do museums register and preserve the contested histories in a contemporary context to make the future colleagues understand its context and reason to be collected? Theory, practice and ethics.

The democratic collections: collecting and safeguarding of histories and objects from an inclusive perspective

As guardians of collecting, collections and collective memories, museums have a role and responsibility to collect from an inclusive perspective, focusing not only on the majority society, but also on minorities from a wide perspective. Age, educational level, ethnical background, gender, gender identity, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation and social class are examples that form us as human beings. In what way do museums collect and preserve histories and objects from minorities and our diverse society? How do museums work in an inclusive way with contemporary collecting and collections? And how is the diversity visible in the collections and in museums' digital catalogues? Theory, practice and ethics.

Letting go, identification and shared authority

The discussions about contested objects also encapsulate postcolonial issues of representation and repatriation, discussing museological issues concerning interpretation, categorization and multivocality. How can and do museums act when questions about repatriation arise? Which role can source communities play here? Theory, practice and ethics.

Collecting and participative strategies

How can collaborations between museums and communities create bridges to engage with (difficult) collections and create greater understanding and empathy? Can collaborations alter the context of the museums older collections? Can collaborations lead to new ways of collecting and interpreting old collections? Can collaborations lead to repatriation or de-accessioning of collections? Theory, practice and ethics.

Sustainability of contemporary collections

Who are the guardians of collecting, collections and collective memories of the museums? Is it one person, a group or a society? How do politics, economy and the spirit of the time influence collecting practices? In what way did the Samdok way of collecting influence its collecting at the time, and how does it function today? Samdok has also inspired the birth of COMCOL, what other collecting practices or collaborations between museums on contemporary collecting in the world can be seen as good practices to develop further and to inspire collaborations on collecting and collections?

Submitting abstracts:

Abstracts (between 250 and 300 words) should be sent to:
asa.stenstrom@vbm.se by June 1st 2017.

Approval of proposals will be announced by July 10th 2017.

The following information should be included with the abstract:

- Title of submitted proposal, please indicate if it is a paper, workshop or panel contribution
- Name(s) of Authors
- Affiliation(s), e-mailaddress(es), and full address(es)
- Technical requirements for the presentations

The conference and abstract language is English.

We warmly welcome proposals that go beyond traditional paper presentations and encompass also panels, post-it sessions and workshop formats.

Conference publication:

A conference publication is planned. Please inform if you are *not* willing to be a part of the publication! A full paper for the publication should be sent to:

asa.stenstrom@vbm.se by September 1st 2017.