



Introduction from the Chair

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

With a grateful heart we as COMCOL can look back at a very successful year. COMCOL was co-organizer of a conference on *Queering the Collections* in spring this year in Amsterdam. We also have a dynamic COMCOL Brazil group, that organised a very successful conference in Rio de Janeiro in November. Our joint ICMAH and ICOM-South Africa conference of 2012 was e-published and the COMCOL board was editor of the *Museum International* volume dedicated to collecting issues: 'museum collections make connections'. I am grateful and also proud that we as

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COMCOL are not only a dynamic entity, but that we have proven that the issues that we want to address are of importance and relevance.

This year's annual conference in Seoul was for me a personal highlight. Learning about collecting practices in South Korea, but also Japan, enriched my own theoretical understanding of this area. Meeting inspiring private collectors in a country that has a rich tradition in private museums was a learning experience in so many ways. I would like to thank the whole staff of the National Folk Museum in Seoul for all their moral and practical support and expertise. I feel I made friends for life and I believe this is the beginning of a long friendship. The warm welcoming COMCOL participants received at the Yeongwol International Museum Forum in the Gangwon Province was also impressive. I am happy to announce that together with the National Folk Museum we will publish the papers of our conference.

This last Newsletter of 2015 is again a nice read: impressions, reflections and further museological food for thought. I hope you will enjoy it and I hope that it will enrich your understanding on the theory, practice and ethics of collecting. I wish you all a happy holiday season and a very happy, healthy and peaceful 2016!



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Chief G'psgolox's totem pole in Kitlope Valley. Indian Agent Iver Fougner sent this photo to the Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa in 1927 to get permission to export the pole: "The reserve is uninhabited and very isolated. The chances are that the pole if not removed, after some time will fall down and be destroyed."

"Photo: Etnografiska museets bildarkiv 0279.0002."

The restitution of Chief G'psgolox's totem pole –

An inter-cultural meltdown or a win-win process?

Anders Björklund

The G'psgolox totem pole is the largest historical artifact that has ever been returned from Europe to North America, and it is probably the last totem pole that will ever make that journey. The story has met with immense international interest, it has been told in documentary films, scientific papers and in hundreds

of newspaper articles. Soon the first comprehensive monograph will be published in Swedish ("Hövdingens totempåle – om konsten att utbyta gåvor" = "Chief G'psgolox's totem pole and the art of exchanging gifts", Stockholm 2016, approx 250 pp, 100 photos) based on archival material from Canada, Sweden and Norway, interviews with Haislas and museum staff, literature and media.

In the year 1872 Chief G'psgolox from the Eagle clan of the Xenaaksiala/Haisla people (in Kitlope Valley, British Columbia) decided to have a totem pole carved and erected. In 1928 the pole was cut down and shipped to Sweden.

A new building for the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm opened to the public in 1980. The roof of the second floor was raised ten meters to house the tall pole which – after 50 years in storage – was presented to Swedish museum visitors.

Photo: Etnografiska museets bildarkiv 1046.0095.



The Director of the ethnographic collections in Stockholm was proud when he presented the pole for museum visitors the following year. Based on the accompanying documentation, the object was declared to be a "Ceremonial pole", a monument that celebrated Chief G'psgolox's encounter with a spiritual being. The acquisition of this unique item placed the Swedish museum on a par with famous institutions like the British Museum in London and Museum für Volkskunde in Berlin. However, the pole was soon taken down and put in storage and it took 50 years before it was raised again in the new National Museum of Ethnography (1980).

The process of restitution of the pole started in 1991 when a delegation from the Haisla people visited the museum and demanded that the "stolen" pole be returned to them. Three years later, and after an intense debate, this was agreed by the Swedish Government. But even though a replica pole was carved by the Haislas and presented to the Swedes, the restitution of the old pole was postponed as the museum (and the Government) wanted to be assured that once in Canada it should be preserved for the future. At last, in 2006, the G'psgolox totem pole started its journey back.

According to mutual agreements the old pole was to be preserved by the Haisla people as a unique item of cultural heritage. But in 2012 the owner family from the Eagle clan brought the pole back to its original location in the Kitlope Valley where it was left to disintegrate.

In search for a totem pole

New research has broadened the understanding of what was actually going on when the pole left the Indian reserve in 1928. The Swedish Consul at the time, Olof Hanson (1882–1952) – who was asked to find a suitable totem pole for Sweden – had emigrated from a county where conflicts between the nomadic Sami people and the farmers were frequent. From his early years he had met problems connected to ethnic groups and cultural heritage and he may have been influenced by the idea of "the vanishing race" – the belief that indigenous people were destined to die out following contact with western culture. At the same time – within this evolutionary paradigm – it was considered important by ethnographers to 'rescue' some of the material culture so that we would be able to visualize "early stages" of human civilization.

It was the Norwegian emigrant Iver Fougner (1870–1947) who (with un-named helpers) actually chopped down the pole. Fougner was employed as an Indian Agent and thereby a contact person between the authorities and indigenous peoples. But archival records prove that he was also dealing with Indian artefacts and that he visited deserted villages and graves in search of antiquities.

In the 1920s the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa had started to take action to prevent the export of Indian objects (among these the totem poles that were thought to stimulate a small but emerging tourist industry). This may explain why the two Scandinavians decided to go for the G'psglox totem pole: it stood in the isolated Kitlope Valley, seldom visited by strangers. So, when the Indian Agent Fougner sent a photo of the totem pole to the Canadian authorities to seek export permission, he wrote: *“The reserve is uninhabited and very isolated. The chances are that the pole if not removed, after some time will fall down and be destroyed.”*

Hard questions for museums

The story of the G'psglox totem pole raises some questions about museum practices and policies. By allowing the destruction of the original pole, following its return to the Kitlope Valley, western focus on material culture has certainly been challenged by the Haislas, who emphasize immaterial heritage such as dances, rituals and oral traditions. The Swedish museum on the other hand acted in accordance with traditional museum perspectives, tried every option to preserve the old pole and could not foresee that it would be carried out to the woods to rot. But should anyone be blamed for the final outcome?

And furthermore: The old pole was certainly authentic for the Haisla, impregnated as it was with meaning and historical references. And the replica pole that now stands in front of the Museum of Ethnography is authentic for the Swedes, telling a comprehensive story and loaded with connotations for cultural historians and the visiting public but also for museum practice. So, is the result a win-win situation?

The monograph soon to be published describes the motives for the frenetic collecting of “Indian curiosities” around the turn of the 20th century and how the totem pole was transformed into a museum icon. The study underlines the need to undertake thorough research before taking action in restoring objects; many agents with different agendas can be found in the discourse



Totem pole carvers Henry Robertson (center), his nephews Barry Wilson (left) and Derek Wilson (right) and grand daughter Patricia Robertson visiting the Museum of Ethnography 2000. They all belonged to the Raven Clan (like the old poles original carvers from the 1870s) and took part in the carving of a replica totem pole for the museum.

Photo: Tony Sandin, Etnografiska museets bildarkiv 1078.0002.

surrounding demands for restitution of a museum piece. The long-lasting negotiations between the Haisla and the museum resulted in exchanges of ideas and sometimes misunderstandings based on cultural values, but it was ultimately a valuable educational process.

Research might also uncover facts that shed new light on the acquisition itself – as in the case of the G'psglox totem pole. One can for example ask if the Indian Agent Fougner really told the whole truth in 1927 when he described the reserve as uninhabited. The land surveyor Frank Cyril Swannell travelling in the area at the same time as Fougner communicated something else. He took a series of photos with



In 2012 the G'psgolox totem pole was left to lie at the old graveyard in Kemano. The wood is quickly decomposing and a grizzly has gnawed on one of the carved figures.

Photo: Tony Sandin, Etnografiska museets bildarkiv 0962.0017.

captions that tell about a village and a mortuary pole. Here tents and sheds surrounded the pole and there were boats on the shore. Evidently, visited in springtime, this was not a deserted village but rather a place where the nomadic Haisla used to stay during the fishing and hunting seasons,

A closer look at the Indian Agent's photo of the G'psgolox totem pole also calls for a new interpretation. There are remains of a fence on both sides of the pole which, according to contemporary and later voices, was standing guard in front of an old grave yard. The pole was facing the Kitlope River and it was visible for everyone who approached the river bend, safeguarding the area.

This was hardly a "Ceremonial pole" as the Swedes were led to believe in 1929, but rather a "Mortuary pole" or a "Sentinel pole". The pole was equivalent to a grave monument for a Haisla clan that is still in

The G'psgolox totem pole was erected outdoors in the museum yard immediately after its arrival in spring 1929. The media was enthusiastic and museum visitors stood in line for weeks to get a glimpse of the exotic object.

Photo: Etnografiska museets bildarkiv 1046.0099.



existence. It ought to be up to them to decide if the pole should be saved for the future ("the white man's way") or given back to Mother Nature. And in both cases one thing seems to be true: The pole should never have left the Kitlope Valley.



Anders Björklund, Professor in Ethnology and former Director of the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, Sweden. He was instrumental in the restitution process during the period 2002–2006 and visited the old totem pole in its last resting place in the Kitlope Valley in April 2014.



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Thinking about the present - Contemporary challenges for the Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo's collection

Juliana Monteiro & Tatiana Chang Waldman

The task of the Immigration Museum (IM) of the State of São Paulo is to “promote knowledge and reflection regarding human migration. It favours preservation, communication, and the expression of cultural patrimony of various nationalities and ethnic groups which contribute to the diversity of Brazilian Social formation”. The museum has its headquarters in the building where Brás Immigrant Hostelry had been working for 91 years, and whose main purpose was to greet and lead immigrants and migrants coming from several regions of the country to their workstations. The Museum has the privileged position of telling this story in a place where it stirs memories and creates parallels thinking between past and present experiences.

Based on the purpose of creating parallels, The Immigration Museum's education and research departments began the project “Attention Invitation Letters” in February 2015, in partnership with Arsenal da Esperança Portuguese language course students and teachers. The initiative aimed to promote a dialogue between letters written by immigrants in the first decades of the twentieth century named “invitation letters” and letters

written by immigrants and refugees in the beginning of the twenty first century named by the project as “attention invitation letters”.

Vendredi, le 15 Mai 2015

Chère Ma famille

Je suis très très heureux de t'écrire cette lettre de mes nouvelles ici à São Paulo, au Brésil.

Je vous informe tous mes parents et amis que, tout va bien et j'espère penser à vous la nuit dans la paix. La seule chose qui m'empêche de dormir ici, c'est la nostalgie de mon pays et chacun de vous tous.

« L'aventure n'a pas besoin de dignité ni racine »

Tôt ou tard votre enfant noir qui est le fils de tout le monde serait du retour dans son continent.

Le Destin est inévitable

En sachant que tout le monde est un voyageur et immigrant, la route d'aventure n'est pas difficile sans penser la race, thème ou autre...

Aujourd'hui, tout mon cœur et pensée sont fixés vers vous, car être loin de toi ma mère, mes frères, amis... etc me coûte comme un voyage dans un autre monde nouveau.

Je vous rassure bien que je suis en bonne santé dans la diversité et la bonne considération au Brésil. Merci Brésil!

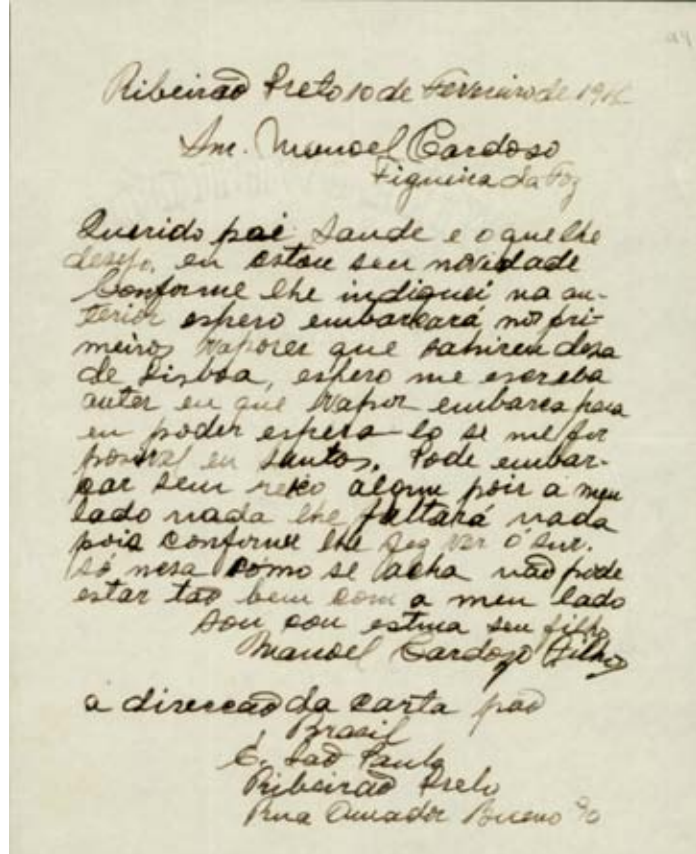
Je pense jour et nuit à vous tous qui sont si loin et si près de moi aujourd'hui.

Demain, je serais du retour.

ADAM KENATE (enfant noir) Nabila Nabila

Attention Invitation Letter (2015)

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo



Invitation Letter (1912)

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo

The invitation letters of the twentieth century were addressed to relatives and friends who lived in the immigrants' source country, writing about immigrant's daily life and projects in their new country, describing their anxieties and what they miss. Sometimes, the letters were sent to invite the relatives and friends to come to Brazil, which facilitate their entry in the country. For this reason, the letters were called invitation letters, because they had this function to stimulate other people to come as immigrants to the state of São Paulo. Through them, many people hoped to meet with loved ones and start a new life. Today, these letters form part of the old Brás Hostelry archive and have a space in the long-term exhibition "Migrate: experiences, memories and identities".

Different from the old letters, the twenty-first's century letters were written by immigrants and refugees and are the result of four meetings performed in IM space in February, March, April and May 2015. All the immigrants and refugees were men, at that moment living and learning Portuguese in Arsenal da Esperança and are from eleven countries in the African continent – Kenya, Togo, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Angola, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. During these meetings, education visits through the museum were organized and debates took place about people's displacement, use of the space of the old Hostelry and especially the existence of invitation letters.

The intent of these meetings was to approach the experience of migration in the past and the present. The invitation letters were presented to the participants of the meetings as a way to explain how Brazilian migration policy worked and how was the reality of immigrants back then. From the debate made on those previous experiences registered by the letters, the museum staff proposed the following activity: the participants spoke about how they communicate with their loved ones - essentially by digital media. Based on current experience lived by them, they wrote their own letters. The idea was that everyone could share, through a communication form that was commonly used in the past (the letters), their own experience of migrating and, with that, draw attention to themselves. So the letters written were not only invitation letters, but attention invitation letters.

From these meetings, forty five letters were written, which formed the core of the temporary exhibition "Attention Invitation Letters". These attention invitation letters were addressed to exhibition visitors and to people who daily lived with immigrants and refugees on the streets, squares, schools, workplaces, health centers, transportation systems, etc. These people cohabited in the same city and many of them were ignored. The aim is that the content of the letters will show and explain their experiences and that the richness of letters and diversity of stories catches the attention of those who read such letters' and makes them interested to know who the newcomers are, their reasons for migration and their situation in Brazil.



Education visit of Project (IM, February 2015)

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo



Project activity (IM, April 2015)

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo

Each text or letter that was written by the participants were reproduced on banners and displayed throughout the exhibition space, as seen in the images below. The authors were identified in small signs on the wall. With the idea of creating a meeting space to exchange experiences and the possibility of walking among narratives which could be ours, from yesterday or tomorrow, the exhibition design chose to invite visitors to move through the colored banners inspired by African prints, giving the impression of going inside the narratives.

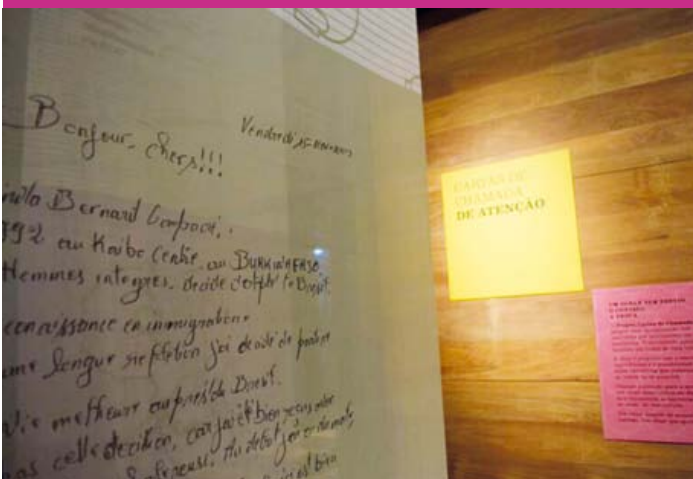
The exhibition “Attention Invitation Letters” opened on June, 12th and will run until August, 30th 2015 in the room for temporary exhibitions of Immigration Museum.

Sofia's Choice: additions to The Immigration Museum's collection

As described above, the previous topic details the richness of project “Attention Invitation Letters” and its collaborative potential. The documentation related to the exhibition – pictures of the opening, exhibition texts, exhibition design project, among others, makes you wonder ‘about the original letters produced by project participants?’

Before discussing this question, it's worth mentioning some points about what The Immigration Museum's collection is at the current juncture. The collection comprises museological, bibliographic, and oral stories and the institutional archive. Currently, The Immigration Museum is challenged to think about the future of its holdings, without ignoring this past with a physical element – objects, books, discs, tapes, pictures, clothes, furniture, etc. – and a conceptual and symbolic element (focus on immigration history by bias of Brás Hostelry), both of them are part of the work developed by the institution.

From this view, we can look at attention invitation letters and their purpose as examples of current activity that The Immigration Museum has sought to perform as part of their own collection policy. The first favorable argument for their incorporation in the collection is their direct connection with existing invitation letters in the Brás Hostelry archive, creating interesting links between past and present. Another argument is that the letters can be linked to a side of contemporaneous (im)migration which is more intangible: the history of the life of people who are living in another place and their attempts to settle in the city of São Paulo.



Attention Invitation Letters” Exhibition

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo



Exhibition opening “Attention Invitation Letters” (June 2015)

Photo: Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo

An argument which questions this way of thinking, it is that incorporation only by letters may lead to a lack of project context. After all, if 10 years from now someone refers to a list of additions to the collections made throughout a decade, sees a group of letters and doesn't know everything about the project or about the exhibition, this person may not comprehend their meaning and may choose to deaccession them.

Another important point regarding the nature of a group of letters is whether they are seen as museological objects, bibliographic items or archival material. As they were exhibited, they can be evaluated as documents with strong research potential – a function associated with the museum's collection. On the other hand, their existence has a meaning related to a particular context – project and exhibition “Invitation Letters” i.e., they are organically linked to the same source activity. Such consideration may indicate that, maybe, the letters should be preserved as part of the archive. However, if someone discovers their potential function as a research source maybe this material can be considered bibliography material.

Considering that action should be taken, it's decided that these letters could be better used as archival material, avoiding detachment of a set of documents which provide context and refer to the aforementioned project. In addition, these letters may not be exhibited again soon, because they are linked to such a specific action performed by the institution. So, they could be kept as a research source, mainly as joined elements whose meaning is not fully defined.

Thinking of integration and considering these three options, the letters can be considered part of the permanent archive of the museum. However, the way they are handled and their care does not need to be performed only under Archival Science rules. They can be physically in the museum collection storage room for conservation purposes and documented following archival description rules. Later, they can be made available for full or partial local public consultation through the library software (digitally) or museum collection itself (physically). Here we can see the preservation, research and communication functions of a museum being viewed by different strategies and tools across several collections that one institution of this size can have.

All of these “Sofia's choices” emerged from the representative example of attention invitation letters which show a very clear reasoning in terms of

preservation: independently from cuttings which will be proposed for collection policy, many times these historic, and mainly contemporaneous, migration items should be treated in hybrid way. Maybe they are both archival and museological collection items, requiring an extensive documentation effort to cross-reference among materials – which reinforce this as a strategy for collection of The Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo's interpretation and development.



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Due Diligence for Museums

Freda Matassa

Introduction

Museums know that they have to obey the law and follow ethical practice in caring for their collections and that all of their activities must be legally and ethically sound. They also have to demonstrate due diligence in their operations, particularly in the areas of acquisitions and loans. Since this term can be unfamiliar to museum staff, this article sets out the history and meaning of due diligence in managing cultural collections and explains what museums should do.

Museums work within a framework of laws, codes and conventions created to protect cultural heritage. Some of these are internationally binding, for example, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), which relates to the protection of cultural items in time of war and the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), which governs the movement of illegally obtained cultural goods, particularly archaeological or ethnographic items that may have been illegally excavated and exported. CITES, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1963), controls the illegal movement of materials from plants and animals across international borders. Many cultural items contain these materials, for example, bone, rhinoceros horn, tusk, shells, feathers, butterflies, skin and leather.

There are codes of ethics such as the ICOM Code of Ethics and various national codes produced by individual state Museums Associations. ICOM also produces the “Red List” which gives details of countries where national cultural items are at high risk from illegal excavation and export.

History and meaning

The term “due diligence” comes from industry and commerce and is usually used in relation to business. It means that professional practice is followed. For

example, if there is an industrial or transportation accident, investigators will check to make sure that the correct professional practice was followed, that everything was done correctly and that no mistakes were made.

In the same way, the term in museums means that correct professional procedures are followed. Museums should have written processes and good staff training for all our activities, particularly if there is a risk of using cultural items that may have been stolen.

Due diligence has been defined as:

“A duty to gather the necessary information and to act prudently and responsibly in evaluating associated risks in all transactions.”

The Business Directory

When applied to museums:

“Undertaking every possible effort before acquisition or loan to ensure that any object offered for purchase, gift, loan, bequest or exchange has not been illegally obtained or exported from, its country of origin or any intermediate country...and should establish the full history of the item from discovery or production.”

ICOM Code of Ethics

Due diligence and museums

In museums, all staff including the director and board of trustees, should be aware of the importance of due diligence. If anything goes wrong, such as a collection item that turns out to have been illegally excavated or a loan that is claimed by another owner, an investigation will be made to find out what happened and who is responsible. It is important that museums are seen to act morally and not to own, purchase or borrow any object that may have been stolen. Since most museums receive public money, they must be seen to act ethically and openly.

Curators who look after collections or organise exhibitions should do research into object history. This is particularly important for loans as the museum should not be seen to be borrowing stolen items or supporting the trade in illegal excavations or exports. Registrars and collection managers should know the rules and procedures for applying due diligence.

“Museums should not display material of questionable origin or lacking in provenance. Such usage can be

seen to condone or contribute to the illicit trade in cultural property.”

ICOM Code of Ethics

Due diligence should operate in the following areas:

1. Acquisitions

You should research the history of an item and its previous owners before it is acquired. All information should be documented and kept. If there are any gaps in the history which might suggest it was looted, stolen or illegally exported, the object should not be acquired.

2. Collections

Many collections have items which may have very few records. In order to be open and transparent, some museums have re-visited all items that may be “high-risk” and have published details on their website.

3. Loans out

You should know the history and provenance of loans in case there are any questions from the borrower. Objects become more visible when they leave their normal home and are on display in a temporary exhibition.

4. Exhibitions

Museums have a duty to make sure that the items they borrow do not have a doubtful history. Loans in should be researched to make sure the lender is the legal lender and has the right to lend and that the object has not been stolen or illegally moved.

5. Deaccessions

If a museum wishes to dispose of an object from the collection, it should make sure that it has a complete record of the history of the item and its previous owners. An object cannot be disposed of unless the museum is the legal owner and no other person has a claim.

High-risk items

If you have any of the following in your collection or wish to acquire or borrow them, you will have to follow due diligence practice and do provenance research into their history:

- fine art objects in Europe 1933-45
- archaeological objects found or exported

after 1970

- items from countries on the ICOM Red List
- ethnographic material and indigenous artefacts
- items from any country which was recently at war or had border disputes
- items from a country where cultural property was nationalised by the state
- items that may be seized as a result of a claim against an individual or a government

Immunity from Seizure

Many countries have introduced immunity from seizure law. This is a legal guarantee that cultural items lent to non-profit organisations for temporary exhibition will be returned to the owner. The reason for legislation is that many countries that have had claims against their cultural property may refuse to lend without this guarantee. It guarantees the return of the item but does not prevent a genuine claim or law suit.

The law in each country is different so check the legislation carefully if you are asked to provide immunity or if you want to obtain it for an item going on loan.

Items may be claimed by:

- person or family saying they are the rightful owner
- state saying it was illegally exported or stolen
- creditor for non-payment of a debt

A claim against a museum could be financially costly and damaging to the museum's reputation. Make sure that you undertake due diligence research into provenance and that there is no risk of any person or state coming forward with a claim.

Provenance research

If you have any “high-risk” items in your collection or wish to borrow one for an exhibition, you should undertake provenance research. Search for information and consult experts. Discuss your findings with colleagues and if there are gaps or doubts, present your findings to the directors to make

a decision. Since the museum's reputation is at risk, the decision to acquire or to borrow should not be left to a junior member of staff but should be made collectively with all the evidence examined.

Start by asking if the type of object falls into the high-risk category. Was the item in Europe during the Nazi period? Is it an archaeological object that may have been illegally excavated? Does it come from an area with war, looting or border disputes?

The following can provide useful information on provenance history:

- owner/lender
- published information
- museum records
- unpublished information – export licences, title deeds, inventories, etc
- expert advice
- new research
- art loss databases

Remember that only certain items are at risk of seizure. Research “high-risk” objects, follow a clear, written process, seek expert help, sign and date your decision and keep records of all your research and the evidence you found. Research documentation and evidence may be asked for in ten or twenty years time and should be placed in the museum archive.

Help and resources

Useful materials for provenance research:

- donor/vendor signed warranty
- exhibition catalogues
- sales catalogues
- bills of sale/ invoices
- export licences
- title deeds
- wills or bequests
- archives
- databases

Additional help can be found from the following:

Interpol database of stolen works of art

www.interpol.int/public/worksofart/default.asp

ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums

www.icom.museums/ethics

ICOM Red List

www.icom.museophile.sbu.ac.uk/redlist

Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

<http://cites.org/eng/disc/text.shtml>

International Foundation for Art Research website for cultural property laws

www.ifar.org/art_law.php

Smithsonian list of Lost Art Databases

www.provenance.si.edu/jsp/lost_art_databases.aspx

Looted Art Commission

www.lootedart.com

Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on Collecting and Borrowing Cultural Material, UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2005

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3697.aspx

Art Loss Register

www.artloss.com

Australian guide to due diligence

<http://arts.gov.au/collections/best-practice>



Freda Matassa, Committee Member of COMCOL and Director of Matassa Toffolo Ltd, providing collections management advice to museums and private collections.



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Dolls as a continuing collectible and disposable - A reference to India

R. V. Ramana

References to dolls are found in the civilization of India dating back to Indus Valley. The famous and petite metal image of Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro, displayed at the National Museum, India is usually illustrated in text books of the primary school children of the country. Dolls tend to hold the attention of people, generally in childhood. Considering their importance as an item of attraction, joy, peace and harmony, Sankar's International Dolls Museum was established in 1965 in the capital. It is named after its founder, the late Shri Shankar Pillai, a political cartoonist and also founder of the Children's Book Trust of India. The idea of collecting dolls from various countries he visited came to him on receipt of a doll as a gift from a Hungarian diplomat. There are about six and a half thousand dolls in the collection from eighty-five countries giving it an impressive international character. The dolls from some of these countries represent their respective cultural uniqueness such as Flamenco dancers from Spain, Samurai warriors from Japan. This is one of the two well-known doll museums in the country (the second, relatively smaller, one is located in Jaipur, Rajasthan) and deserves praise for the simplicity of its theme, and its continuing pleasant memories of humanity in general in addition to showing the unique cultural associations Indians have to dolls in particular.

It would be apt here to clarify that the meaning of the word doll in English may not completely convey the cultural associations it may hold in India, as the local and vernacular names for it are *moorti* or *pratima* (close to idol/ image/deity). Dolls may hold interest for adults, as well as children as they tend to attract, surprise, amuse and shock. Dolls are manufactured for

varied reasons; as souvenirs, keepsakes or disposables depending on the purpose they are meant to serve. Ganesh and Durga images are annually made for the two festivals of *Ganesh Chaturthi* and *Dussehra*. These two religious images are made in various themes of contemporary concerns and aspirations, and are disposed of (immersed in water bodies) at the end of ten days of festivity. They connote creation, celebration and separation and a belief in the cyclic continuity of life, nature and the seasons. Along with the religious rituals and cultural celebrations, a lot of creativity and freedom of expression goes into the



The dancer bommai is a prominent part of 'golu' decorations in Southern India

Photo: Chithiraiyan/Wikimedia Commo

making of the deities. They seek to be moderately current and attempt to represent upcoming sports events, Bollywood (Indian mainstream cinema), socio-political concerns or anguish such as personal or group traumas and at times the surrounding natural elements or even disasters – in short, a broad gamut of issues. These festivals are outdoor social spectacles, visited mostly by locals. In addition, there would be effigies of demons made to be destroyed through firecrackers pyrotechnics. This has a binary purpose, one is a deliberate break and holiday from the normal routine and grind, and secondly a communal gathering and the much desired and essential bonhomie. In addition to the two major pan-Indian festivals known to most citizens and the media, there are several regional festivals of a smaller scale but a similar nature, such as *Sankranti*, *Ramnavami* and *Bonalu*. Though all these festivals are Hindu, the faith of the majority of



Rolling dolls

Photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanjore_doll

the Indian population, one would notice a substantial number of visitors not belonging to the faith. All the people seek enjoyment associated with the event.

Besides these seasonal and giant sized public idols meant for public display and use, there are dolls of a smaller size made in traditional doll making centres in India. These centres manufacture secular and religious figures which are retained, preserved and also passed on to generations.



Bobble heads

Photo: <https://images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search>

The farm festival of southern peninsular India is known by the name *Sankranti* or *Pongal*. It takes place during early spring and is also a festival of dolls where the dolls collected over years are carefully displayed at people's homes. This is known as *Golu* and an important doll that is usually found among them tends to be *Tanjore bommai* (doll). It is made of clay and coloured, and has a bobble head. Similar dolls, though static, made in different media such as wood, glass and horn also find a place at such displays. These could be rolling dolls or couples. Artificial fruits, vegetable, insects, birds and fish made of wax and other material are other common items that are part of this festival. This assembly of dolls creates an interesting ambience and mood for celebrations, performances and gatherings during the festival.

Golu celebrations in Southern India

Photo: Bootervijay/Wikimedia Commons



Perhaps these practices have similarities with the contests of *Szopkas* organized in Poland during Christmas. In the Indian context, it is not a public event, but a union of families and friends. However, there are similarities in the efforts and preparations of the arrangement of dolls and their display.

Besides these ceremonial dolls, there are dolls made of local raw materials such as *Sikki* (golden grass) in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and out of small cloth pieces in Madhya Pradesh. Varanasi, Lucknow, Mathura and Vrindavan are known for their brightly painted wooden dolls, where as in West Bengal, Orissa and Rajasthan dolls are made of clay. Dolls are also made of a mixture of cow dung, sawdust and clay and coated with bright paints.



Sikki doll

Photo: <http://gaatha.com/sikki-grass-craft-bihar/>

It is interesting to note that contrary to popular belief, dolls and toys are not just casual playthings, but are intrinsically related to the social and religious rites of a community. In northern India, the story of Krishna's birth (*Janmashtami*) is related in its entirety by means of clay dolls. In South India, the *Dussehra* festival is called *Bomma Kolu* or a display of dolls. The first wooden dolls are given to a girl from her parents during her marriage and are called *Marapachi Bommai*. As girls were married off at a very early age during yesteryears, parents used to gift them with these dolls to play with. As a custom, the married girl is supposed to add at least one doll to her collection every year. In Bihar, the entire story of the *Shyama Chak* festival is related and depicted through clay images. Rural India

People watch as effigies of demon King Ravana, his brother Kumbhkarana and son Meghnad are burnt during the festival of Dussehra in Amritsar

Photo: Munish Sharma/Reuters



still enjoys simple clay dolls and wooden carts and it is perhaps in these ethnic toys that the true charm and spirit of India may be found.



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Collecting History and Museum Development in Korea

Kidong Bae

Introduction

The History of collecting goes back to the early stage of Three Kingdoms Period in Korea. Various valuable objects were collected by royal and powerful individuals in several historical periods. Collections in the Joseon dynasty show an appreciation of an ideal World, while collections in modern Korea since early 20 century have been formed for a variety of reasons. The history of collecting in modern Korea can be considered as reflecting of social changes as well as the intellectual history of a society and at the same time may show the history of society itself. The Korean experience of collecting cultural objects tells more clearly how collections play a role in a modern developing society and how important the spiritual vision of the society can be. The history of collections in Korea can be divided into four stages. Collecting was a private affair and not long lasting in the past, but in modern days, museums should, and increasingly do, provide permanent homes for public collections. Collections have been becoming more and more public instead of merely a personal hobby. The development of collections in Korean society can be comprehended in terms of shifts in paradigms of communication through history.

Collecting in the late Joseon Dynasty; Symbol of prestige and intelligence

The Royal collection was the most extensive in quantity and diversity. In addition to collections of books and archives in the Kyujanggak, diverse objects were collected by the Royal family even including Paleolithic artefacts and Chinese celadons and later merged to the collection of National Museum. Some collections of modern objects were exhibited in the Royal Museum in 1908 which was the first modern museum in Korean history. The most common objects of collections formed by intellectual elites (Yangban) were books, calligraphy and paintings, although ceramics and other objects are often mentioned in texts. It was very common for scholars of the Joseon dynasty to collect stationery materials for painting and calligraphy; ink stone, water dropper, brush etc. In particular,

paintings were enjoyed as representations of the ideal world.

In the late Joseon period, influenced by the Originator of evidential research of Qing dynasty, a school of historical research of material proof, made up of scholars of Joseon, collected material evidence of history, especially objects bearing inscriptions and ink rubbing of ancient inscriptions. The most famous one was Chusa, Kim Jeonghee, who was an eminent scholar, painter and calligrapher in late Joseon. It is believed this kind of tradition began with the formation of Shilhak, Korean pragmatism. Some Korean pragmatist scholars collected evidence to support theories of history and nature, and also collected samples of animals and plants and also some artefacts, even though few remain today. These collections are quite different from those for the appreciation of the ideal world and documents for archiving in royal and Yangban families in terms of objectives of collecting although all were carried out by high class elites of the Joseon dynasty.

Collecting as an embodiment of patriotism in Japanese colonial period

As under western colonial regimes, Japanese scholars came into Korea to collect historical, geographical and ethnographic information before the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Since 1910, Japanese scholars supported by the Japanese governor general in Korea carried out many archaeological surveys to collect precious archaeological objects from historical sites, especially ancient tombs. Many valuable archaeological objects were illegally exported or brought to Japan and formed famous collections of Korean heritages. Some of the collections became one of the major parts of the current National Museum in Korea.

Some rich Korean intellectuals acted to prevent valuable heritages from being exported to Japan. Gansong, Jeon Hyongphil is the most famous Korean collector who spent all his inherited fortune in purchasing extremely important treasures which would have been sold to Japanese collectors. The famous scholar and collector of late Joseon dynasty, Wichang O Sechang was his mentor in understanding and appreciating the value of ancient relics. He also established the first private museum in Korea to house his collection, Bowhagak in Seongbuk dong, Seoul. Many objects in the Gansong collection, which is the finest in Korea, have been designated national treasures. He has been respected as a patriot for his struggle to keep important cultural heritages in Korea against Japanese colonial pillage. Several university museums formed collections of Korean relics;

Ewha, Korea and Yonsei universities. These university collections were also initiated in order to keep them in Korea during the colonial period. Major collections formed during the Japanese colonial period represent a strong nationalism, symbols of Korean identity against colonialism.

Collections for the Public with emergence of new elites in culture

It was a golden time for collectors in Korea in 1960s and 70s, because a large quantity of antiquities flowed into the market due to rapid social and economic changes caused. New economic elites, and pioneering specialists played a role preventing the export of ancient relics and to keep them in Korea through collecting for the public. Cultural nationalism still persisted, but diversification began in collecting in terms of subjects, methods and groups of collectors. Many of the major collections started in this period have been expanded upon solid ground of financial supports and eventually became collections of major private museums. This stage of development of collections can be defined as a period of making collection for public and expanding collections from a focus on ancient artworks, archaeological objects, ancient publications etc. to diverse subjects, even to Tibetan Buddhism. Most of collectors recognized the special meaning of collection of Korean heritages and may have expected that it may strengthen social identity of them through collecting and preserving traditional cultural objects.

The most well-known collection, the Hoam collection by Late Hoam Lee Byoungcheol, Chairperson of Samsung Cooperation has been expanded since the early 1960s. His collection became the finest and most extensive among private collections. Almost at the same time, the Horim collection was begun by Yoon Jangseop who is also a famous business man. Both of the collections are housed at present in splendid museums in Seoul open for public; the Leeum and Horim museums. Late Dongwon Lee Honggeun and Late Sujeong Park Byoungrae, are also major collectors who donated life-long collection of great quantity of ancient relics to public museums. In addition to them, many collections of various kinds of arts, cultural and natural objects have been formed by rich and thoughtful business men and specialists of each field and eventually housed in museums.

Diversified collections for public education

Since the mid-1990s, cultural areas for collecting have been expanded greatly even to include objects that were considered trivial, for example movie posters,

ordinary domestic vessels and equipment. Among the new trend of collecting, several things need to be noted. Above all, some collections in the last couple of decades were intended as a source for public education, such as natural history collections. Objectives of collections have diversified; from making intellectual structures of a certain area of knowledge or atheistic appreciation of objects to much more practical ones, collections for sustaining museums as a business place of edutainment. Another significant change is a public interest in foreign cultural objects, which indicates that the public becomes more liberal and intercultural. Some important collections from foreign countries are exhibited in private museums; Museum of Middle and South America, Museums of World Ornaments, Indian Museum, African museums, Tibet Museum etc. Another thing to be mentioned are modern industrial collections. Participatory collections only appeared recently like the original Korean word processor in the National Hangeul Museum.

Conclusion: New perspectives

Collecting cultural objects is indispensable for mission to building sustainable society providing cultural information and emotional stimulation as well as an understanding of history. Looking at the history of collections in Korea, as society developed economically, more and more collections became open to the public in museums in the late 20th century and early 21st century. Collecting is not just about the past, but is being used to inspire people to think future. At the same time, more diverse collections appeared in Korean society including designated museums for special collections. This is a reflection of the transformation of Korean society towards rich diversity and intercultural complexity as results of economic development and globalization. How to organize collections belonging to different individual and institutes will be immediate an agenda: to prepare them for active and varied. This is a critical question for Korean museums. In this sense and considering very limited government budgets for expansion of collections, improved public policy would be necessary to build up, preserve and use expanded and diverse collections for the years ahead.



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A Brazilian Debate

Claudia Porto

The first edition of the *Seminário COMCOL 2015 - Gestão e Desenvolvimento de Coleções* (COMCOL 2015 Seminar - Management and Development of Collections) took place in Rio de Janeiro on 27 November. The event as a consequence of a series of meetings promoted since the beginning of the year by Brazilian COMCOL members, with the support of the *Gerência de Museus* (Museum Coordination) of the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Cultural Secretariat. It is also a consequence of the close collaboration of more than 30 representatives from museological institutions we invited to be part of the initial group. This group is made up of institutions such as the *Instituto Brasileiro de Museus* - IBRAM (Brazilian Museums Institute), the Collections Coordinator of the Rio de Janeiro State Secretariat of Culture, the *Escola de Museologia* - UNIRIO (Rio de Janeiro State Federal University's School of Museology), the *Museu Histórico Nacional* (National History Museum), *Museu Nacional de Belas-Artes* (National Museum of Fine Arts), Gerchman Institute, *Museu da Vida / Fiocruz* (Museum of Life), *Museu de Arte Brasileira* (Brazilian Art Museum), *Museu da Imigração* (Immigration Museum) and the *Museu Mariano Procópio* in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo (Minas Gerais).

In response to the demands identified at these meetings, the seminar focussed on collection policies and collecting the present. For this purpose we invited speakers who can focus on practical experiences, and who represent private collections, public museums linked to various ministries and of various sizes and specialized companies, as well as museum and academic



Panel on Contemporary Collecting.

Photo: Filipa Porto



Conversations during a coffee break

Photo: Filipa Porto

institutions. Our international guest was Danielle Kuijten, consultant, curator and affiliated member of the COMCOL board, who spoke about participatory strategies in documenting the present and gave the workshop "Objects and their relevance for today".

Our objective is that this first edition will allow us to become closer and establish a more continuous dialogue with colleagues and institutions, disseminate successful solutions for managing collections and instigate new questions, relevant to the Brazilian scenario in this area.

The COMCOL 2015 Seminar was designed in an organic manner, informal and democratic. It was organised in a totally voluntary way by a very small team and made viable with the support of companies and institutions who believed in the importance of the project: Oi Futuro - the host of the event -, the Netherlands Consulate General, *Instituto Itau Cultural*, *Museal* and Tuut. It is the first, among many other actions, which COMCOL intends to carry out in Brazil from now on.



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Needles in a haystack - Some reflections from the Working Group on Resources

Peter van Mensch

The main aim of the Working Group on Resources was to support the work of COMCOL by providing bibliographies concerning the themes of the annual conferences. The emphasis was on annotating theoretical texts rather than descriptions of case studies. This, however, proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Within the obvious constraints (time as one of the most important) it was very hard to find useful texts on the themes of the conferences. One major problem is the paradox of an explosive growth of the number of publications on museums and heritage on the one hand, and an apparent decreasing general interest in collection issues on the other.

During the last five years at least 350 books (in English) have been published on museum and heritage studies, not to speak of the many journals with a multitude of articles, and books in other languages. I had the advantage of being able to work with the library of the Reinwardt Academy (Amsterdam) first, and now with the excellent library of the Institut für Museumsforschung (Berlin). This advantage is in fact an “embarrassment of riches”. How to keep track of all incoming new publications and how to sort out useful texts on collecting and collections? Such texts are not easy to find. Recently Fredrik Svanberg has made a relevant observation: “Despite the interest that the museology of the 1990s and 2000s has taken in the meaning making of museums, only limited attention has been paid to meaning-making from the point of view of collecting” (Svanberg 2015: 391). One explanation might be a paradigm shift in museum work as described by Gail Anderson: “Collections – historically viewed as the centre of museum activities – have moved to a supporting role that advances the educational impact of the museum. The collection

holdings are no longer viewed as the sole measure of value for a museum; rather, the relevant and effective role of the museum in service to its public has become the central measure of value (Anderson ed. 2012: 5).

I will use two examples to illustrate the relative scarcity of texts on collecting and collections. It is however not scholarly research. A more thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the output of our professional field in the year 2014 will be published elsewhere. It should be noted that in the present text I do not refer to the growing academic interest (mainly in the sphere of art history) in the history of collecting.

Reinventing the museum

In 2012 Gail Anderson published a second edition of her *Reinventing the museum*, originally published in 2004. The subtitle of the first edition is “Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift”; that of the second edition is “The evolving conversation on the paradigm shift”. What the author means by “reinventing” and “paradigm shift” is explained in the introduction: “Reinventing the museum is not just adding a program, reinstalling a gallery, or increasing financial reserves – it is a systemic shift in attitude, purpose, alignment, and execution” (Anderson ed. 2012: 2). In the 2012 edition of the book, Anderson brought together 44 texts that substantiate this systemic shift. Three texts were originally published before 1990, 13 in the 1990s and 28 in the 2000s. Five texts concern collection issues (ethics of acquisition, collection plans, deaccessioning, and repatriation). The fact that three of these texts were published in the 1990s (out of 13), and only two in the 2000s (out of 28) may indicate a decrease in interest in such issues.

Of course, the balance in content that Anderson was looking for is her interpretation in retrospect and tells us little about the actual output in the last twenty-five years. It does show, however, how in the context of her perception of relevant developments, collecting issues hardly play a role. This might also be the conclusion after browsing through one of the latest major publications in our field: the ambitious *International Handbooks of Museum Studies*.

International Handbooks of Museum Studies

In July 2015 the four volume *International Handbooks of Museum Studies* was published by John Wiley & Sons. Overall editors are Sharon Macdonald (now Berlin) and Helen Rees Leahy (Manchester) with each

volume having its own editor(s). The volumes contain altogether 102 texts, 24 to 27 per volume. Contrary to Gail Anderson's book all texts are especially written for the Handbooks although there is a considerable amount of recycling of earlier material (the authors may have been explicitly asked to do so).

Without doubt the Handbooks are among the most important new publications in our field. Unfortunately the price (€ 646 at Amazon) will be a major barrier for museum workers. But there is also a barrier provided by the "professional culture" that is expressed by the book. Most contributions are deeply informed by contemporary New Museology and Critical Heritage Studies discourses. As such the Handbooks illustrate Gail Anderson's point of view; not in the least also because most of the authors are based in the United Kingdom, the United States or Australia. In the introduction to the first volume (*Museum Theory*), the editors, Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb, give 54 publications in their bibliography, all in English. Bourdieu, Deleuze, Foucault and Habermas are mentioned (not surprising in this context), but they are the only continental-European authors referred to. This is symptomatic of the Handbooks as a whole: the professional output from continental-Europe, Latin-America, Africa and Asia is almost completely ignored. Part of it is the implicit distinction between museum studies and museology. When Message and Witcomb speak of "the first phase of museum studies" (Message and Witcomb 2015: xxxvii) they ignore the work of the ICOM International Committee for Museology and the discussions on museology that preceded its establishment (in 1976).

In view of the observations of Svanberg and Anderson it doesn't come as a surprise that collecting and collections issues are hardly dealt with. In total only 9 texts (9 %) specifically focus on these issues: 4 out of 25 in volume 1 (*Museum Theory*), 4 out of 27 in volume 2 (*Museum Practice*), none in volume 3 (*Museum Media*) and one out of 24 in volume 4 (*Museum Transformations*). It is significant that the first article in the first volume is written by Tony Bennett who looks at museums as "exhibitory complexes" and does not show any interest in collections. There are many references throughout the Handbooks to objects and collections, but in most of the cases only in relation to the interaction between objects and visitors.

Manual of Curatorship

A comparison of the *International Handbooks of Museum Studies* (2015) and the *Manual of Curatorship*

(1984) shows how much the discourse has changed during the last 30 years. The replacement of "curatorship" by "museum studies" reflects the paradigm shift as mentioned by Gail Anderson, even though it should be admitted that the *Manual* focusses on museum practice whereas the *Handbooks* reflect upon an academic discourse.

The *Manual of Curatorship. A Guide to Museum Practice* was published by Butterworths, London in cooperation with the Museums Association. A second edition was published in 1992. Both editions were edited by an editorial board chaired by John Thompson. It is interesting to compare the two editions. For example, in the second edition the section on "Management and Administration" shifted from the last to the first (after the introductory section on "The Museum Context").

The first edition contains 62 contributions. The section on "Collections Management" has 30 articles, half of them dealing with conservation. Nine articles are dedicated to (subject matter) research each focussing on a specific type of collections. This is an interesting distinction from the *International Handbooks of Museum Studies* where a more general perspective is advocated. Together with two contributions on the history of collecting and collections, 11 articles (18 %) deal with collecting issues. In the second edition the section "Collections Management" is split into a section on "Conservation" (with 26 contributions) and one on "Collection Research" (with 13 contributions). The two articles on the history of collecting and collections (by Geoffrey Lewis) are replaced by one article on "Museums and their precursors" showing a more institutional approach to museum history. Eleven articles (out of 71) deal with collecting issues (15 %).

Conclusion

The apparent lack of relevant texts on collecting and collections may be too easy an excuse for not being able to produce proper thematic bibliographies. Of course there are more books – and a multitude of journals – but I think the general picture is the same. For example, in 2012 and 2013 *Museums Journal* published 37 and 34 articles respectively ("Features") of which only 3 each year focussed on collecting issues. The problem is not just quantitative but also qualitative: none of the collection related texts referred to above (including the *Museums Journal* articles) deals with the issues raised at COMCOL conferences. One of the key topics for COMCOL, documenting the present, is

not at all covered in the books mentioned here. Are we then rowing against the tide? Are we working on the basis of an outdated paradigm? I don't think so. In the context of New Museology and Critical Heritage Studies much has been written about an Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006) which should be rejected. Interestingly the Handbooks show how this old Authorized Heritage Discourse is replaced by a new one. The New Authorized Heritage Discourse is convincing and has many values, but tends to be rather exclusive with regard to discourses outside United Kingdom, United States and Australia. It would be too cynical to say that this New Authorized Heritage Discourse will have limited impact on museum practice worldwide since nobody would be able to read all those books (too many, too expensive), but it certainly is a major variable in the future work of COMCOL.

Maybe I am too pessimistic and maybe my analysis is incomplete. I really invite you to share your comments and opinions. In the following Newsletter I will present an analysis of publications on the issues of collecting and collections. It will show that despite what I have written above, there is a genuine interest in issues such as documenting the present by collecting, collection mobility, de-accessioning, repatriation, and the ethics of collecting. COMCOL itself plays an important role, for example by publishing the papers presented at its annual conferences, but also by acting recently as editorial board for a special issue on "Museum collections make connections" of *Museum International*. COMCOL members are active in publishing important texts. For example, Owain Rhys and Zelda Baveystock (also board member) recently edited a handbook for social history museums on *Collecting the Contemporary*.

In this way, COMCOL can (should) play a decisive role as "clearing house" by drawing attention to museological thinking beyond the New Authorized Heritage Discourse, and by giving a platform to professional multi-perspectivity.

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What we collect

Conchita Wurst on the Crescent Moon

Elisabeth Tietmeyer

At the end of 2014, the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin) acquired a life-size sculpture portraying a person with long, wavy black hair and a dark beard. The figure's head is adorned with a golden crown. The majority of the sculpture has been left in the natural colour of the pale Swiss stone pinewood, a material particularly used for the traditional craft of carving figures of saints in the Alpine regions of Europe. A close-fitting draped gown that extends to the feet is part of the design. The depicted figure is standing on a silver crescent gripping a golden floor-standing microphone in the right hand. The slight lunge of the left leg with the left hand resting on the thigh lends the sculpture a dynamic character. The crescent is situated in the centre of an arched base in the form of an irregular octagon whose sides are also golden in colour.

The sculpture represents the artistic figure Conchita Wurst, winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest in Copenhagen, Denmark. The unexpected victory of the Austrian drag artist Thomas Neuwirth (born in Gmunden in 1988) inspired the Berlin based Austrian artist Gerhard Goder (born in Salzburg in 1956) to create this work of art. Known for his works with fantastical and religious connotations, the sculptor works with wood, stone and metal; his artworks have been presented in various solo and group exhibitions in Europe while a number of his pieces are owned publicly or privately.

Gerhard Goder views his piece "Conchita Wurst on the Crescent Moon" as a contemporary document with which he wishes to embody current and challenging discussions in our society. The androgynous appearance of his sculpture is in line with Conchita Wurst's statement that she is a handsome man and a beautiful woman in one person and the audience is the



Gerhard Goder
Sculpture 'Conchita Wurst on the Crescent Moon' 2014; Swiss stone pine, edge-glued, carved, partially framed; H: 157 x W: 100 x D: 60 cm,
Inv.-No.: MEK N (31 L) 326/2014
Photo: © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Ute Franz-Scarciglia

sun shining down upon her. In order to give the figure an illusory and unique character, the artist placed it on a crescent moon, whose base he calls "the world".

Figuratively, the sculpture takes on a host of connotations, quotations and references to traditional religious forms, particularly as pertains to Catholic representations of saints, such as that of "Saint Wilgefortis" to name one example. She is associated with the legend of a Christian princess whose father wished her to marry a non-Christian. To avoid this,

she “miraculously” grew a beard, this masculine feature saved her from marriage, but not from the crucifixion arranged by her infuriated father.

The physiognomy of the sculpture also displays great similarities to a Jesus character who has found veneration in many churches of Central and Southern Europe in the past few decades in the form of a miraculous image. To have the figure standing on a crescent is also a significant iconographic parallel to the works portraying the Madonna on a crescent moon. This refers to eye-catching Christian imagery typical of the 16th century – and still often found today in the cultures of piety in Catholic regions – which depict the Mother of God standing on a crescent moon with the Infant Jesus in her arms.

The sculpture in the Museum collection

The Museum Europäischer Kulturen deals with cultural themes of everyday life in Europe from the 18th century until the present day. This is evident in the exhibitions and collection consisting of approx. 280,000 historico-cultural and ethnographic objects as well as pieces of popular art. For ethnographic research on contemporary topics, the Museum documents current social and cultural processes of everyday life. This includes, among other things, collecting objects that express cultural phenomena which were or are typical for Europe at a certain point in time. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the Museum is to determine areas of cultural heritage for the future and to preserve memory and self-assurance for posterity.

The Eurovision Song Contest certainly belongs to our modern European cultural heritage and it continues to fascinate millions of spectators and listeners with its special event feel. There are manifold reasons why Gerhard Goder's sculpture fits superbly into the collection concept of the museum. Firstly, as the artist has already mentioned himself, it is a contemporary document and thereby fulfils the standards of this Museum geared toward recording contemporary history. Secondly, it is consistent with many portrayals of Jesus and Mary contained in the collection of traditional cultures of piety both historically and in the modern day. With its conscious or unconscious citation of traditional motifs, the sculpture places itself in this historical domain of piety, even if Conchita Wurst herself was singing for the freedom of those who think outside the box in European society – which is what tipped the scales in her favour and ultimately decided her victory. Thirdly, the sculpture represents

an enormously successful example of the connection between historical-religious topoi with contemporary cultural themes of everyday life based on artistry and craftsmanship. Fourthly, the piece reflects our plural society, which today, more than ever, consists of people and communities with diverse cultures, origins, faiths, skin colours, sexual orientations and more. The Museum Europäischer Kulturen sees it as its duty to provide these various interest groups with a forum and a location for self-assurance – as concerns this sculpture, this credo applies in particular to the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Inter, Queer) communities, who also form a large part of the fan base at the Eurovision Song Contest. The purchase of this sculpture is therefore to be considered as a type of museological intervention intended to ask us to reflect on the living environments of the European community and challenge us to comprehend new cultural phenomena.



Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Director of Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



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“WHAT WE COLLECT”

What we collect is a new section in the COMCOL newsletter where a museum professional highlights a specific object and places it in the context of the institution's broader collection by discussing how and why it was acquired and how it fits in with the overall collection policy. If you are interested in contributing to this section please e-mail the editor: comcol.editor@gmail.com.

Meet a new COMCOL member

Eva Fägerborg interviews Oriol Canadés

As we would like to find out a bit more about our members and their interests we have introduced this section where new members present themselves. This way we hope to get to know each other better in the committee and create connections between the members. New members are approached and asked if they would like to contribute with a brief Q & A.

Perhaps “old” COMCOL members would also like to introduce themselves? We kindly invite you to contact the editors!

This time we meet Oriol from Barcelona:

Can you please tell us a little about yourself, your work and your museum/institution?

My name is Oriol Canadés and I am 28 years old. I studied Conservation and Restoration at the High School of Conservation and Restoration of Catalonia (ESCRBCC). I completed my studies with a Master's Degree in Analysis and Management of Artistic Heritage at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Since 2015, I have collaborated with the group 'Management and Development of Cultural Heritage' of a local political party. I'm a member of ICOM and the Catalan Museologist Association.

I've worked as a restorer at the National Archive of Catalonia (ANC). I collaborate in interdisciplinary teams on the attribution of artworks and worked on the research and documentation of photographic heritage for the Bosch and Cardellach Foundation (FBiC) and the future Textile Museum of the city of Sabadell.

At present, I have been working, for about a year, as a registrar-documentalist at the Joan Miró Foundation of Barcelona (FJM) as part of the online collection catalogue project. My work consists of referencing the bibliography of the artworks of the collection in order to later have that information published online, making the work easier for the researchers of Miró's universe and making the collection more visible.



Oriol Canadés at the library of Joan Miró Foundation.

Photo © Fundació Joan Miró

Photographer: Cristina Pérez

The origins of the FJM are part of a framework that Joan Miró himself conceived to give four big works to the citizens of Barcelona and their visitors. The first three were the ceramics mural at the airport – for the people who arrived by air, a great sculpture (finally replaced by another one at “l'Escorxador” park) – for the people who arrived by land, and the “Pla de l'Os” pavement – for the people who arrived by sea. The fourth work was the Joan Miró Foundation of Barcelona itself. The building was designed by the architect and Miro's close friend Josep Lluís Sert, who followed the three themes of circulation, materials and shapes.



The Joan Miró Foundation opened to the public on the 10th of June 1975 although the formal opening was not until a year later. The Foundation's board decided to ask Jaume Freixa – disciple at the Sert school and current president of the Miro's Foundation – to realise the expansions of the building in the years 1984 and 2001.

The collection at the Foundation was in great part generated through the donations that Joan Miró made himself and also those from Aimé Maeght and Pierre Matisse among others. In 2000, the Foundation received an important collection of works of art by Kazumasa Katsuta as a long-term deposit. The current collection of the FJM has representations of every stage of the painter's career as well as all the materials used in the different processes. In relation to the paintings, FJM has about two models of every edition, thus creating a unique document of the artist's creative process.

Regarding Miro's prints and engravings, the Foundation has about two models of every edition, thus creating a 'unicum' in the documentation of the artistic creation in connection to these kinds of artworks.

What I would highlight most, apart from the artistic collection, would be the incredible source of knowledge that is gathered in the documentary archive. Being able to have the sketches and the creative processes of the artist, as well as his personal library and a specialised library, makes it possible for us to continue to research the artist and his creative process today.

Facade of Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona.

Photo © Fundació Joan Miró

Photographer: Pere Pratdesaba

Apart from the permanent collection, the Miró Foundation schedules several temporary exhibitions through the year, the scope runs from coetaneous artists, to Miró and contemporary art. It also has a space – Espai 13 – dedicated to the different emerging proposals of art and commissioning. Since 2007, the Foundation gives the biannual Joan Miró award, which recognizes enquiry, innovation, creative freedom and commitment to his or her time.

Can you say some words about the museums in Catalonia and Spain?

I do not know the Spanish structure in reference to museums but in Catalonia it can be divided into two main axes. In 1990 the public museum's program of Catalonia began. This ordinance is intended to organize the museums into thematic groups. Each group has its insignia museum – national museums. Three national museums are now established: National Museum of Art of Catalonia (MNAC), Archeology Museum of Catalonia (MAC) and the Science and Technical Museum of Catalonia (MNACTEC). According to a new reorganization during the years 2015-2025, three further museums will be added: the National Contemporary Art Museum, the Natural Science Museum and the National History Museum.



Areas V -VI Sculpture in bronze and 'Anti-painting' in the temporary exhibition Miró and the Object.

Photo © Fundació Joan Miró

Photographer: Pere Pratdesaba

Apart from the public sector, Catalonia has a rich network of private museums and/or foundations with collections open to the public. We include in this category the Joan Miró Foundation of Barcelona, the Picasso Museum and the Dalí Theatre and Museum, among others.

At this moment, culture does not receive financial assistance at an institutional level. There is a need for a significant law on patronage to make it possible for the institutions to develop their activity without relying on public investments and, also, legislation to regulate the high costs of the insurances of loans of works of art. This mostly affects the private institutions, which are obliged to pay huge amounts if we compare them to public institutions. Moreover, lately, we have had to fight against the current VAT increase from 4% to 21%, which makes it more difficult for the creation of new cultural and research projects by public or private companies. As a result, the cost of visitors' tickets has increased.

How did you get to know about COMCOL and what made you interested in the committee? Why did you decide to become a member?

I was interested in ICOM and COMCOL because I want to participate in the teamwork of a global organization to create a dialogue – talking about different experiences and points of view to enrich and improve museum functions. As Miró said, 'from local to universal'. I decided to be a member of COMCOL because I think it is interesting to be able to debate

with other professional colleagues on themes like the promotion of museum collections or the creation of new narrative discourses to explain a collection to the public.

What topics related to collecting and collections development would you like COMCOL to focus on particularly?

I am mostly interested in the development of collections. Also, I am interested in the thinking and re-thinking of ways to highlight the permanent collections or the directives we can apply in order to give more visibility to the collections. I think that a collection is not only a source of knowledge and cultural and intellectual development but also an experience for the visitor. We have to reconnect the museum with the visitor.

Any more thoughts about COMCOL and/or ICOM that you would like to share with us? Expectations, suggestions...?

I have many expectations of ICOM and COMCOL. I hope they can become the engine of development and creation of new policies, ideas and dynamics which can be applied to museums of all kinds, regardless of their 'unicum' casuistry. For me, ICOM and COMCOL are the first big factories of ideas that can give the present tools to the museums and they also make priceless socio-cultural research work.

I feel that it is necessary to create a more theoretical group on the development of museum collections, apart from showing the individualities of each institution. I believe that it and the debates within COMCOL would contribute to the creation of more dynamic and organic structures to make it possible to adapt to the demands of the audience.



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Overseas conference participants in front of the host museum.

Photo: Jeong Yang Gwon, National Folk Museum of Korea

Conferences & News

COMCOL Annual Conference at the National Folk Museum of Korea

Kiwon Yi, Deputy Head of Cultural Exchange Division, NFMK

The 2015 COMCOL annual conference made an unforgettable impression on me. It was held at the National Folk Museum of Korea (downtown Seoul) from the 26th of November to the 28th of November 2015 with the theme of *Collecting and Collections: the politics and praxis of social, economic and intellectual sustainability*.

The conference gave us a great opportunity to understand the matters and methodological approaches on sustainability of collecting and collections and share the experiences and knowledge of speakers from 12 different countries presenting



Conference session "What does sustainability mean for institutional collecting?" Yukiko Shirahara (Japan), Ho Seon Ri (Korea), moderator Leontine Meijer-van Mensch (Germany), Priscilla Banda (Zambia) and keynote speaker Kidong Bae (Korea).

Photo: Jeong Yang Gwon, National Folk Museum of Korea

policies, practices, and management of collecting and collections socially, economically and intellectually.

There were excellent keynote speeches from Dr. Kidong Bae, Dr. Peter van Mensch, and Mr. Inkeon Jun providing us with effective ways and solutions for collecting materials and sustainable development of collections. Particularly interesting was the discussion about museums which contribute to the cultural context of objects – a location and/or community – and the sustainability of collections in tandem with social change. It was understood that museums should consider the environmental sustainability, economic feasibility, and social network related to objects when they are collected for their sustainable use.

I hope that participants obtained ideas, theories, practices, and new trends of collecting and collections through eminent speakers and use this new knowledge in their work. Furthermore, museums will play an important role in enhancing the sustainable development of collections in various ways.

COMCOL Annual Conference and Meeting 2016

COMCOL's Annual Conference and Meeting 2016 will take place in Milan, Italy, in conjunction with ICOM's General Conference 3-9 July. COMCOL's own conference will be organized in partnership with ICFA (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Fine Art) and will start with a pre-conference meeting on 30 June. We hope you received our call for papers and we look forward to your submissions. The online registration for ICOM Milan 2016 is open. Please observe the early-bird registration rate until 28 January. Registration form, rates and deadlines can be found here: <http://network.icom.museum/icom-milan-2016/registration/how-to-register/>

New COMCOL board

At the annual meeting 2016 a new COMCOL board shall be elected for the next triennium. Information about the election process and the call for nominations will be issued in February. We welcome all COMCOL members with a passion and enthusiasm for collections and collecting to put themselves forward!

EDITORIAL

COMCOL – Committee for Collecting – is the International Committee of ICOM dedicated to deepening discussions and sharing knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collection development.

COMCOL Newsletter provides a forum for the development of the work of COMCOL and we welcome contributions from museum professionals, scholars and students all over the world: short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to collaborate, introductions to new research or other matters. Views and opinions published in the newsletter are the views of the contributors. Contributions for the next issue are welcomed by **1 March 2016**. Please contact the editor (comcol.editor@gmail.com) if you want to discuss a theme or topic for publication.

COMCOL Newsletter is available at COMCOL's website <http://network.icom.museum/comcol/>

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