

COMCOL



International Committee for Collecting

www.comcol-icom.org

COMCOL is the International Committee of ICOM with the mission to deepen discussions and share knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections development. COMCOL is a platform for professional exchange of views and experiences around collecting in the broadest sense. The mandate includes collecting and de-accessioning policies, contemporary collecting, restitution of cultural property and respectful practices that affect the role of collections now and in the future, from all types of museums and from all parts of the world. COMCOL's aims are to increase cooperation and collaboration across international boundaries, to foster innovation in museums and to encourage and support museum professionals in their work with collections development.

COMCOL Newsletter is a forum for developing the work of COMCOL and we welcome contributions from museum professionals and scholars all over the world: short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to cooperate, 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 December 2011** to the editors, and contact us also if you wish to discuss a theme for publication.

COMCOL Newsletter (formerly *Collectingnet Newsletter*) is published four times a year and is available at COMCOL's website <http://www.comcol-icom.org>, at ICOM's website <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-committees/international-committees/international-committee/international-committee-for-collecting.html> and at the Swedish Samdok website <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213&topmenu=143>.

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Contents of this issue

Statement from the Chair
Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

Expert Audiences in Museums
Imke Duijf

COMCOL Annual Conference 2011
- programme

Collecting the World
Mille Gabriel

Acquisitions to collections through cooperation
Minna Sarantola-Weiss

Whether to keep the Noble Prize?
Ilze Knoka

Winter day in Finland 2011 – documenting
contemporary life in Finnish families
Riitta Kela

Statement from the Chair

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am so excited to see you all in Berlin. It will be our first annual meeting and I hope that a lot of you will have the possibility to attend the conference.

Such a conference doesn't come about without the engagement of people. It was and is especially Elisabeth Tietmeyer and her team in the Museum of European Cultures who makes this event possible. I have a huge respect for the way Elisabeth is managing all the big and also smaller conference tasks, this although she is also in the process of opening a new exhibition (December 2011). I think that I am not exaggerating when I write that during the last couple of months Elisabeth and I have become friends and I hope that this spirit of friendship and love for content will be fundamental corner stones of the identity of COMCOL.

I am happy that so many students will attend our conference, and that students and other young professionals will also present papers. ICOM wants to be a young and dynamic organization, but unfortunately in a lot of countries, students can't become ICOM members and therefore can't join an International Committee. I hope that those National Committees will change their policies, but in the meantime I urge every student who is interested in COMCOL, but can't become an ICOM member to become a "friend of COMCOL". In our COMCOL newsletter we also want to be a platform where students and other young professionals can contribute. I also encourage lecturers to make their students aware of the possibility of publishing in our newsletter. I am particularly proud that a young BA

graduate of the Reinwardt Academy, Imke Duijf has written an article for this newsletter. In her article Imke Duijf writes about expert participation in museums. This article is a summary of her bachelor thesis. This thesis is so innovative and thought provoking that Imke Duijf was awarded the first Pieter-Jan-Abraham-Van-Mensch-Award for innovative museology.

Meanwhile the preparations for our annual meeting for 2012 have started. We want to organize this meeting together with ICMAH – the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Archeology and History, ICOM South Africa and the Iziko Museums of Cape Town. The Chief Executive Officer of the Iziko Museums of Cape Town and the Chair of ICOM South Africa Rooksana Omar, wrote to me that she "shall be pleased to host the COMCOL Meeting in 2012" and that we together "will make the next conference very interesting and add to the intellectual body of knowledge creation as well as add to a better understanding of our collections." What more do we want...

A final word: the dates for the 2012 conference have just now been settled: 5-10 November 2012 COMCOL's second annual conference will be held in Cape Town!

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

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COMCOL Annual Conference 2011

Short versions of programmes for the joint conference of ICOM committees **COMCOL, CAMOC, ICOM-Europe 31 October - 1 November 2011** and for **COMCOL conference 2-3 November 2011**. Venue: Museen Dahlem – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Dahlem Museums – National Museums in Berlin). Detailed programme and registration form, see: <http://www.comcol-icom.org/>

Joint conference theme: *Participative Strategies*

COMCOL conference theme: *Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present*

Monday 31 October

12:00 Registration and coffee

14:00-14:30 Conference start, welcome

Christina Haak, Deputy Director General of the National Museums in Berlin

Hans Martin Hinz, President of ICOM

Chairs of the International Committees of ICOM: *Léontine Meijer-van Mensch*, COMCOL – International Committee for Collecting, *Suay Aksoy*, CAMOC – International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities, *Damodar Frlan*, ICOM regional Committee for Europe

14:30-17:20 Keynote speeches

Chair: *Jack Lohman*, Museum of London, United Kingdom

Renée Kistemaker, Amsterdam Museum, Netherlands: “Collecting stories and objects of European entrepreneurs. Some historical and ethnographical approaches used in the project *Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities* (2008-2010)”

Frank Eckardt, Bauhaus University, Weimar, Germany “Urban futures: experience and aesthetics in the emerging media city”

Chrischené Julius, District Six Museum, Cape Town, South Africa: “Participative activities of a community-based museum”

18:00-21:00 Reception at Dahlem Museums

Words of welcome by Konrad Vanja, Director of the Museum of European Cultures, guided tours through exhibitions, buffet.

Tuesday 1 November

09:30-10:45 Panel I: Redefining curatorship in times of change for museums and societies: towards participative strategies

Chair: *Suay Aksoy*, The History Foundation of Turkey, Istanbul, Turkey

Kylea Little, Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom: “Sharing curatorial responsibility. Are there any sacred museum functions that no one but curators can do?”

Angela Jannelli, Historical Museum Frankfurt, Germany: “The *Stadtlabor* (City Laboratory) as means and medium for documenting present-day Frankfurt”

Zelda Baveystock, National Museums Liverpool, United Kingdom: “The secrets of our success: synthesising collections and audience development at the Museum of Liverpool”

11:15-12:05 Panel II: Recollecting communities I – the cultural self

Chair: *Elisabeth Tietmeyer*, Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin, Germany

Stefan Krankenhagen, Foundation University Hildesheim, Germany: “Recollecting Europe – together? Collection strategies and aporia of today”

Thomas Walle, Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway: “Participation and ‘othering’ in documenting the present”

14:00-15:15 Panel III: Recollecting communities II: in labour, social and urban contexts

Chair: *Damodar Frlan*, Ethnographical Museum, Zagreb, Croatia

Helen Watkins and Crawford McGugan, Glasgow Museums Resource Centre United Kingdom: “Red road flats legacy project”

Otto Hochreiter, Graz City Museum, Austria: “Country of cities. An exhibition for the centennial of the Austrian association of cities and towns”

Tanja Rožnberger and Manja Vadla, Museum of recent history Celje, Slovenia: “Don’t throw pots away”

15:45-17:00 Panel IV: Recollecting communities II – the social self

Chair: *Léontine Meijer-van Mensch*, Reinwardt Academie Amsterdam, Netherlands

Tena Mimica and Katharina Dankl, Vienna, Austria: “Doing kinship with pictures and objects – documenting contemporary practices of family”

Eduardo Cassina, Reinwardt Academy/Goldsmiths, London, United Kingdom: “Who is the curator? LGBT collecting and identity forming over the rainbow (flag)”

Jette Sandahl, Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark: “Collecting temporary objects of love – and looking for new partners”

17:00-17:15 Conclusion by Peter van Mensch, MMC Mensch Museological Consulting, Amsterdam, Netherlands / Berlin, Germany

18:30-21:30 Reception at the German Historical Museum: Welcome by Alexander Koch, President of the German Historical Museum and Franziska Nentwig, Board Member of ICOM-Germany, guided tours through exhibition, drinks and snacks.

End of joint meeting.

COMCOL Annual Conference: *Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present*

2 - 3 November 2011, *Museen Dahlem – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (Dahlem Museums – National Museums in Berlin)

Wednesday 2 November

9:15 Words of welcome

09:30-11:00 Panel I: The potential of collaborative collecting

Chair: *Susanna Pettersson*, Alvar Aalto Foundation / Alvar Aalto Museum, Helsinki, Finland

Pina Cardia and Arjen Kok, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, Amsterdam: “Incorporating lay stakeholders in expert cultural value assessment”

Jonas Koch and Dennis Herrmann, University of Oldenburg, Germany: “Theoretical and practical reasons for on- and offline participation in museums”

Anna Fredholm, Army Museum, Stockholm, Sweden: “Afghanistan through the eyes and voice of a soldier”

11:30-13:00 Panel II: Pitfalls and limitations of collaborative collecting

Chair: *Peter van Mensch*, MMC Mensch Museological Consulting, Amsterdam, Netherlands / Berlin, Germany

Paula Assunção dos Santos, Reinwardt Academy and advisor of the *Museu da Mare*, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil: “Participative collecting at the *Museu da Maré*: an organic relationship”

Markus Walz, HTWK Leipzig, Germany: “Selection of cultural assets between research and plebiscite – three museological points dealing with ‘collecting 2.0’”

Viola König, Ethnological Museum – National Museums in Berlin, Germany: “One History – Many perspectives: exhibiting cultures from Africa, Asia, America and Oceania in the future *Humboldt Forum* – examples from North America”

14:00-15:30 Panel III: Case studies

Chair: *Minna Sarantola-Weiss*, Helsinki City Museum, Finland

Zoltán Fejős, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary: “Sharing objects, co-curating knowledge and reframing the museum space”

Christine Fredriksen, Bohusläns Museum, Uddevalla, Sweden: “Participative strategies and the maritime cultural heritage”

Aleksandra Janus, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, and *Dorota Kawęcka*, Reinwardt Academy, Katowice, Poland: “What to take and how to share? Challenges regarding establishing a Theatre Museum in 2011”

16:00-17:20 Panel IV: Collecting projects

Chair: *Judith Schühle*, Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin, Germany

Aegli Dimoglou, Direction of Cultural Heritage, Volos, Greece: “Community and cities museums: roles and synergies”

Annemarie De Wildt, Amsterdam Museum, Netherlands: “Behind the counter – the neighbourhood shop of the Amsterdam Museum”

Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin, Germany: “The ‘Doner Connection’ – collecting the present”

17:30 Final conclusion and discussion about working groups

18:00 COMCOL Annual Meeting and meetings of COMCOL working groups: Collections Mobility, Resources, Contemporary Collecting

Thursday 3 November

09:00-18:00 (approx.) Excursion by bus to the city of Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg county

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisenh%C3%BCttenstadt>. Guided city tour; lunch; visit of the documentation centre of the GDR.

The excursion is sponsored by the Association of Friends of the Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin.

End of COMCOL meeting

Acquisitions to collections through cooperation

Minna Sarantola-Weiss

In 2009, Finnish museums launched a project for the purpose of coordinating collaboration in matters related to acquisitions, documentation and collections. The project is known as TAKO, an acronym from the Finnish words *tallennus* (acquisitions and documentation) and *kokoelmat* (collections). Participation is on a voluntary basis and the secretariat of the project is at the National Museum of Finland.

Cultural-historical museums in Finland have for many years realised the need to develop collections management and coordinate their

respective tasks. The objectives are to allocate responsibility for acquisitions and documentation among museums and to create the so-called Finland Collection, with the further aim of improving collections management and the mobility of collections and competencies.

This activity is carried out through seven working groups – pools – with each museum participating in the work of 1-3 pools. The pools define joint objectives and share expertise in their respective fields. This collaboration seeks to reduce overlap in acquisitions and

documentation to allow museums to devote more of their intellectual and economic resources to their basic tasks.

The work in the pools primarily steers future acquisitions and documentation. Allocated responsibility for acquisitions means that museums in the pool can add to their collections in a considered manner and share responsibility among members of the pool. Not everyone needs to collect and document everything.

The documentation of present-day life is of central importance in the TAKO scheme. Additions to the Finland Collection are specifically made through new acquisitions carried out in connection with documentation projects. These projects will be conducted collaboratively by museums and scholarly communities, thereby developing the Finland Collection into a representative memory store of present-day Finland that will be of interest to Finns and others in the future.

In 2011, the pool-based work involves some sixty museums. The themes of the pools are:

- * Man and nature
- * The individual, the community and public life
- * Everyday life
- * Industry, services and working life
- * Communications, traffic and tourism
- * Education, art, high culture and well-being
- * Trends, influences and turning points

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Winter day in Finland 2011 – documenting contemporary life in Finnish families

Riitta Kela

As a part of the Finnish Museums new collection network, TAKO, a group of its member museums started their work with a new kind of project on documenting contemporary life. The aim of the project was to document one winter day in eleven cities in different parts of Finland. *Winter day in Finland 2011* is a project that involves partner museums from northern Finland to the south coast of the country. Participating museums are the National Museum of Finland, county museums, municipal museums, and specialized museums. Every museum chose its documenting subject from its own local area and in relation to its own collection policy.

The content and guidelines of the documenting project were discussed and planned together with the colleagues in our group. At first all the museums decided together to focus on Finnish families. We tried to figure out and document contemporary everyday life in different kinds of families in Finland. One of the interesting

questions was if it is possible to observe and to document the influence of the cold and snowy wintertime here in Finland? Are there a lot of differences in everyday life between different parts of Finland during winter?

We started our work by inviting a researcher to present to us the latest research on what kinds of families are typical in Finnish society in 2011. After an interesting lecture and a lot of discussions every museum chose the family it wanted to document. We had very different families – the elderly, students, families with small children, farmers, fisherman, families working in the IT industry, recently unemployed etc.

All partner museums decided jointly that our documenting day would be the 2nd of February 2011. Researchers and photographers from eleven museums headed to the families – their homes, work places, schools, different hobbies and other daily activities. Every family was

followed from early morning until late at night. Some families wrote diaries and photographed themselves too. We got a large amount of material – in total 3126 photographs, several hours audio and video recordings, 20 hours interview materials, 25 observation diaries etc. Right now we are analyzing the data, writing reports and building up a web site *Winter day in Finland 2011*. It will open to the public on the 2nd of February 2012.



*Winter day in Finland: Fishing at Prästö.
Photo Peter Sjöstrand, Provincial museum of
Western Nyland.*



*Winter day in Finland: the city of Tampere.
Photo Riitta Kela, Museum Centre Vapriikki.*



*Winter day in Finland: the city of Jyväskylä.
Photo Pekka Helin, Museum of Central Finland, Jyväskylä.*

This project on documenting contemporary life in Finland was the first project inside TAKO collection network. For this reason one of the main goals was to find new kinds of methods to document contemporary life and especially everyday life in Finnish families. Other targets were to get new, good quality contemporary collections into the participating museums and find new ways to communicate with our museum audience. We tried to find a different way to involve citizens in documenting their own everyday lives and to increase the understanding of the value of contemporary documenting. Learning processes and the exchange of information between the project partners were also important parts of that project.

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Expert Audiences in Museums

Imke Duijf

Museums have been changing institutions ever since they came into existence – the focus throughout the years shifted from being collections-focused to being audience-focused. Although collection, presenting and conserving remained the core tasks of most museums, it has become of growing importance to relate those tasks to the audience. Museums were highly academic and offered well-researched information before the 1960s, but this slowly changed as museums began to aim collections and interpretation towards a more general audience. Over the last decade these changes have continued to happen – social responsibility and communities are important, just as making collections open and understandable is to the general audience. Participatory projects with communities are of increasing importance and offer the chance to audiences to get involved in museums. But could museum have been overlooking their expert audiences because of these changes? And now that participation is an important trend, how can those experts be of value to museums?

This article summarizes research I conducted for my BA in Cultural Heritage (Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam). The British Museum in London offered a work placement to conduct research on a target group of experts, to offer the museum an in-depth look into this group and their participatory needs. This article will firstly focus on an introductory background into expert visitors and the target group in the British Museum and secondly on the opportunities and chances with the target group.

Backgrounds

Experts are a small and specific target group with a connection to a collection or subject that is covered in a museum or gallery. This research and the definition of experts is based on two theories, by Falk (2009) and Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2005). They both state that visitors need to be segmented by identity or motivation, rather than demographics. *Experts* are intellectually motivated and are influenced by their prior knowledge to find out

more about their subject of interest. Their needs include a high level of access to collections, critical engagement and access to museum staff and resources. They are self-motivated and have a clear view on what they want to take away from a visit to a museum. The British Museum's definition of experts is: '*specialists who want to deepen their knowledge further by engaging deeply with the collection*', which is used as the main definition throughout this research.

Experts

The main aim of the research was to get an in-depth look into the British Museum experts and to find out about their need for involvement. Visitors were interviewed in the Museum galleries and in the departmental study rooms. Overall, 61 expert visitors of the British Museum took part in the questionnaires and four experts took part in in-depth interviews to find out more about their needs for visitor involvement.

The main outcome of the questionnaires was that the expert target group at the British Museum is very diverse: subjects of interests ranged from very specific ones to broad ones, all relating to subjects in the museum. This variety showed that it was hard to get a grip on the actual topics of interest, as they will keep changing with every expert visitor that comes in. Therefore, four categories of subject involvement were defined, to get a better grip on the diversity of the target group:

Students are currently involved in their subject of interest through formal education;

Professionals are currently involved in their subject of interest through their regular employment;

Academics are currently involved in their subject of interest through research attached to a university;

Personal interest visitors are currently involved in their subject through self-study and self-motivated interest, or have a formal

qualification in the subject but are not professionally or academically involved in the subject.

These four categories have different ways of visiting and using museums and gaining knowledge. Students are motivated by a formal involvement and are focused on gaining some kind of formal qualification; professionals are involved in a more practical way, such as art dealers or artists; academics are researchers just as museum staff and therefore their use of the museum is very closely related to the work they do, and personal interest visitors are the most diverse group – they can be hobbyists or theoretical learners, and are personally motivated to learn more about their subjects.

Expert involvement

When museums start to think about involving experts in some way in their work, it is important to approach them as informed people, who, with their knowledge and skills, can give an intellectual contribution to the museum (Falk 2009). Secondly, it is important to show experts how both the museum and the expert will benefit from working together with the museum.

Involvement can be a two-way exchange between the museum and the expert, to increase knowledge and understanding of a subject for both. By exchanging studies or research, museums open themselves up to different insights on collections and can broaden their own interpretation of a collection. This type of collaboration requires involvement from both sides, and museums will need to take an active approach in setting up contacts, but over time this could benefit the understanding of collections and offer new views of collections. Also, long-term partnerships could be formed between museum professionals and experts.

When museums take the approach of involving the general audience as well, the experts could be part of interaction between the three groups: audience, experts and the museum. Conversation and discussion can be sparked between the three groups. It is important to show that collections and objects can be interpreted in different ways, to make the general audiences feel confident to also take part in such discussions. This could happen via

web-based projects, such as the BBC and British Museum's *History of the World*, but also in making the museum a central point to get people together, as the *Identification Service* in the Darwin Centre of the Natural History Museum in London does, both online and on-sight. In both projects it is important to spark the visitor's interest in subjects, but also to create a more broad and open look at collections, which can both benefit the museum's knowledge of collections and allow them to approach collections critically. Experts can offer their knowledge to both the museum and the general audience, and improve their own knowledge by doing so as they are also taking in multiple viewpoints on collections.

Overall, the most effective or appropriate way for a museum to involve their audiences depends on the aims of the museum or the project. Expert involvement should be about exchanging knowledge, getting a broader understanding of collections and a more open approach to different viewpoints of collections and ideally sparking an interest in new subjects for all involved: the museum, experts and the general audiences.

There is a lot left to explore and research into the opportunities of visitor involvement, but the possibilities are diverse, which makes expert involvement and participation an exciting opportunity for museums to explore.

Sources:

Falk, J.H. (2009) *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, California, Left Coast Press.

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2005) *Never Mind the Width, Feel the Quality*, Manchester.

Links to case studies:

Natural History Museum Identification Service:
<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/>

BBC & British Museum History of the World:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/>

Link to PDF dissertation:
http://www.ahk.nl/uploads/tx_ahklichtingen/i.duijf-scriptie.pdf

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Collecting the World

Mille Gabriel

Browsing through the websites of major ethnographic museums in- and outside of Europe reveals that most collections stem from the 19th and early 20th centuries. In consequence, one could argue that such ethnographic collections are testimonies of Europe and its colonial relations at one particular point in time, rather than serving as historical representations of peoples abroad. What relevance such ethnographic museums have in a decolonized world depends on how the original collections are brought to use, but also how they are put into perspective by present-day collections.

Debates on how to collect the world are thus inextricably tied to a redefinition of the ethnographic museum and its role in the age of globalization. At the Ethnographic Department at the National Museum of Denmark a small team of researchers have taken on the task of investigating how this challenge is dealt with at ethnographic museums. Several major tendencies have been identified so far:

In recognition of their colonial legacy, ethnographic museums can decide to withdraw from collecting altogether and confine acquisitions to whatever is offered to them by private donors.

Another strategy is to complement colonial collections with their modern ethnographic equivalents. This calls for the involvement of

source communities in collecting the present, but also in co-curating exhibitions afterwards. Additionally, it offers museums the opportunity to bring the tension between continuity and change to the fore of their exhibitions.

A third option for museums is to take upon themselves the obligation to collect and document contemporary events, disasters and developments of global relevance, such as the tsunami, the Arab Spring and the current starvation at the African Horn. This allows ethnographic museums to part with their colonial legacy and establish themselves as centers for public debate in a global world.

With the main objective to critically re-evaluate our own collecting strategies, we are most eager to learn from other ethnographic museums/departments that are facing or have been going through the same challenges. Please share your thoughts with us regarding why, what and how ethnographic museums should collect in today's decolonized and globalized world!

Please contact:

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Whether to keep the Noble Prize?

Ilze Knoka

The Literature and Music Museum was started in 1925 by a teacher who deeply believed in the power of demonstration. As a teacher of sciences, Jānis Grete was one of those who introduced his colleagues all around the country to the concept that no knowledge can be obtained without seeing and touching the

real natural object. That was why Grete kept collecting samples of minerals, bones, even bread, and by demonstrating these collections to his students taught them to recognise and understand the world around them. Being highly enthusiastic, Grete also launched so-called writers' corners and an exhibition

devoted to Latvian literature where he gathered and displayed manuscripts and objects previously belonging to the writers. Greste himself used to claim: 'I am a friend of poets not of poetry', which – as it appears now – clearly expressed the basic concept of the collection. Object as a resource for teachers plus a strong belief in aura radiated by things once touched by the owner, an outstanding person be it a writer, a poet or a composer is central to this approach. The beginnings were quite humble: Greste started with addressing the writers he personally knew and asked for some example of handwriting conceding that the same text could be rewritten several times to get a resource to be sent to as many schools as possible. The idea of uniqueness was a little corrupted in such a way, but as a teacher Greste had his own priorities.

Development of the tradition

Since the period of Greste's activities the museum has undergone several structural changes and different names, also the amount of the collection has reached numbers (0.8 million items) that could not have been predicted by the initiator. During the 85 years of its development several principles of selection have been established, one of those being recognition of the value of objects that were collected by the writers. These objects can be of different type ranging from clips from newspapers, postcards and souvenirs to ties, pens and cigarette-lighters. The principle 'but the writer himself was gathering those' has been used as the main argument in discussions about compliance of various things bearing no aesthetic nor historic value apart from having been close to the particular person. Hence the concept of things keeping touches of their owners has been fully observed.

Another aspect of the development is quite a close connection between the Literature and Music Museum devoted to national literature and music in general and the numerous memorial houses devoted to their particular inhabitants – several memorial houses have been preserved on the basis of the collection when the right circumstances have emerged (be it because of the will of the family or the government). As the memorial displays can be appraised only when housing the original objects in their original places, then in cases

where the person in question has been a collector of some kind, surely, the exhibition gains additional fulfilment if this memorial collection is also on display. These are the moments when the policy of keeping even the strangest things under public protection simply because 'but he himself collected them' gain some ground. However, not all the writers can possibly have their own historic houses and not all of them may get an audience. Therefore the policy of gathering everything for everybody in case the opportunity of a separate museum comes about seems rather exaggerated and destructive in a way, at least in terms of management.

The plot of the Noble Prize

At least one of the Latvian writers whose collection has been gathered by Literature and Music Museum (and by that added to the national collection) was an addressee of the American Biographical Institute and International Biographical Centre. In total he had received 96 nominations from this world-known scheme where anyone who pays these institutions the amount they require can receive a wide range of titles starting from Man of the Year up to The Most Intriguing People of whatever year. There is also a Noble Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Contributions to Humanity. Presuming that not every addressee will immediately notice the slight difference between 'Nobel' and 'Noble' the sense of being honoured by this nomination and many others of the same type can startle anyone regardless of their profession and experience of receiving such awards.



The nominations sent by the American Biography Institute can be regarded as spam letters along with all those numerous offers

reaching our mailboxes with information about discounts, sales, opportune subscriptions etc. Most people erase them immediately after receiving, but some of us keep them – and there can be different reasons for keeping them including need of paper for kindling fire (if they are printed), conducting research into indirect selling and also the bug of collecting. Nevertheless, the papers are worthless until some museum curator plays the ‘but he himself gathered those’ card and adds this former trash to the national collection, and suddenly 96 units (each consisting of the letter, an envelope, and a form of payment) joins the body of documents to be preserved, protected, conserved and cherished in all possible ways up to the end of time. This is the moment when I, as the current director of the museum once started by Grete, want to ask whether this kind of Noble Prize should really be musealised with all the consequences this decision bears to the museum in terms of

resources and concept of heritage. I know that many of my colleagues are positive about this; nevertheless it feels that the delicate border between professional prudence and caution not to waste something valuable turns into irresponsibility and avoidance of responsible selecting has been exceeded, even though it was sanctioned by several previous generations. Should these 96 attempts to cheat a writer be preserved just like the original manuscript of his best book just because the writer kept them in a pile thereby leaving his fingerprints (and aura!) on them? Should this accidental contact decide if the garbage sent all over the world becomes a national treasure?

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