

COMCOL INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR COLLECTING



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MUSEES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MUSEOS

NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

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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 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.

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CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR • Léontine Meijer-van Mensch	2
COMCOL ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND MEETING	
2013 – PRELIMINARY PROGRAM	4
MUSEUM: TAKE THAT CHANCE • Cláudia Porto	6
THE AUSTRALIAN DRESS REGISTER • Sarah Pointon	11
AN HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MUSEUM PRACTICES:	
PUTTING THE BASICS FIRST • Fionn Zarubica	16
EUROPEAN REGISTRARS ARE ENCOURAGED TO “THINK SMART!” • Freda Matassa	20
COMCOL WORKING GROUPS • Peter van Mensch, Arjen Kok	23
IN BRIEF – NEW PUBLICATIONS	26

STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR

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Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

Dear Readers!

Wonderful news! The last couple of months the Strategic Allocation Review Commission of ICOM undertook a review of the annual reports, submitted by the International Committees. This Commission examined if an International Committee has operated within the ICOM Strategic Plan. This review was very important for COMCOL, because a positive review would mean that we would become an official ICOM, International Committee in place of the probationary status we have had for the past three years. COMCOL was granted this recognition because of the content of our conferences and meetings, our publication and research activities and our attractive and informative website. We have had an inclusive approach for young members, we were active in exchanging with emerging countries and active in cooperation with other committees. In addition we have had a steady growth in membership over the last three years. When I received the email from Paris, confirming our official status I was happy, relieved and also confirmed in the strong belief that what we do as COMCOL is of importance and that we actively contribute to the museological discourse. I want to thank you all for your support and I hope we will continue to be a dynamic and interesting committee.

In this Newsletter you will find the preliminary program for our Annual Conference in Rio. I am very excited and I think we will have a very interesting conference, once again. I would like to draw special attention to the “collecting memories” workshop on Thursday

15 August. We will organise this workshop together with our colleagues from the Museu da Maré, MINOM (The Movement for a New Museology) and Imagine IC. The Museu da Maré was the first museum that was established in a favela (slum) in Rio de Janeiro. It is a grassroots initiative that connects the memories of neighbourhood participants. Imagine IC is based in Amsterdam. They are “in search of stories about everyday life in today’s constantly changing society”. I am especially grateful that Danielle Kuijten, who organized our last year’s District Six workshop in Cape Town, is again willing to be the guiding hand for this year’s workshop. In Rio we will also elect a new board. You will find information about the candidates on our website and I hope all our voting members will vote. Unfortunately student members can’t vote, but we can start lobbying for that!

Talking about our website, we are now working on a new one, hosted via ICOM. This website is still in the making, but we will have the technical opportunity to be much more interactive and multi-lingual. As you can see we are progressing and we hope to really practice what we preach. Maybe you have already noticed the new layout of our Newsletter! Our COMCOL colleagues from Poland Aleksandra Janus and Dorota Kawęcka have been working on the new design and I am very pleased with the result, thanks ladies!

One final thing, I would like to encourage all our members and friends to inform Eva Fägerborg, myself, or other board members about their talks, presentations, articles and other publications about COMCOL, or where COMCOL is part of the content. All such things are important and should inform our annual report to ICOM. We have our official status now, but this does not mean we should sit back and relax. COMCOL is not only its board, we are all making COMCOL together!!

I hope to see many of you in Rio, or somewhere else in the near future! Enjoy and please raise a toast to the wonderful status COMCOL has earned!

COMCOL ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND MEETING 2013 – PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

11-17 August, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

GENERAL COMCOL THEME: THE REINTERPRETATION AND
RE(USAGES) OF (OLDER) COLLECTIONS AND THEIR VALUE
FOR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SUNDAY 11 AUGUST

13:30 – 14:50 **COMCOL BOARD MEETING**

MONDAY 12 AUGUST

9:00 – 9:50 ICOM OPENING CEREMONY
10:10 – 11:00 ICOM KEYNOTES SPEECHES
12:10 – 13:30 LUNCH
13:30 – 14:50 **COMCOL WORKING GROUPS**
14:50 – 15:10 COFFEE BREAK
17:30 – 23:00 ICOM OPENING PARTY

TUESDAY 13 AUGUST

COMCOL JOINT SESSIONS WITH ICME, ICMAH, ICR AND ICOM KOREA

Focus on Collecting: Contemporary Collecting and the Reinterpretation of (Older) Collections

9:00 – 10:35 **JOINT SESSION I**
10:35 – 10:55 COFFEE BREAK
10:55 – 12:10 **JOINT SESSION II**
12:10 – 13:30 LUNCH
13:30 – 14:50 **JOINT SESSION III**
14:50 – 15:10 COFFEE BREAK
15:10 – 16:30 **JOINT SESSION IV**
15:50 – 16:40 ICOM KEYNOTE SPEAKER
18:00 – 22:00 **JOINT RECEPTION (LOCATION TBD)**

WEDNESDAY 14 AUGUST

COMCOL DAY

The (Re)interpretation and (Re)usages of (Older) Collections and their Value for Contemporary Society

9:00 – 10:35	COMCOL SESSION I
10:35 – 10:55	COFFEE BREAK
10:55 – 12:10	COMCOL SESSION II
12:10 – 13:30	LUNCH
13:30 – 14:50	COMCOL ANNUAL MEETING
14:50 – 15:10	COFFEE BREAK
15:50 – 16:40	ICOM KEYNOTE SPEAKER

WEDNESDAY 14 AUGUST

COMCOL DAY – WORKSHOP IN MUSEU DA MARÉ TOGETHER WITH MINOM AND IMAGINE IC

We would like to offer you an experience of Rio through the story of Museu da Mare. The aim of the workshop is sharing experiences of the different institutions and participants.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

10:00 – 11:00	TRANSPORT CONFERENCE LOCATION TO MUSEU DA MARE
11:00 – 13:00	WELCOME AND TOUR OF MUSEUM.
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 16:30	SHORT PRESENTATIONS ORGANISERS – PANEL DISCUSSION ON PROPOSITIONS

LOCATION AND HOST MUSEU DA MARÉ

The Museu da Maré is the first museum to be established in a favela (slum) in Rio de Janeiro. It is a grassroots initiative that connects the memories of neighbourhood participants with a philosophy of intense social activism. This museum organically adapts itself to the social demands of the favela inhabitants and other relevant stakeholders. Particularly interesting are the new ways in which the museum uses exhibitions and collections to foster a symbiotic relationship with the local community.

COSTS

The fee includes guided tour, transport, thee/coffee and lunch.

STANDARD FEE	EURO 35
STUDENTS FEE	EURO 25

FRIDAY, 16 AUGUST

ICOM EXCURSION DAY

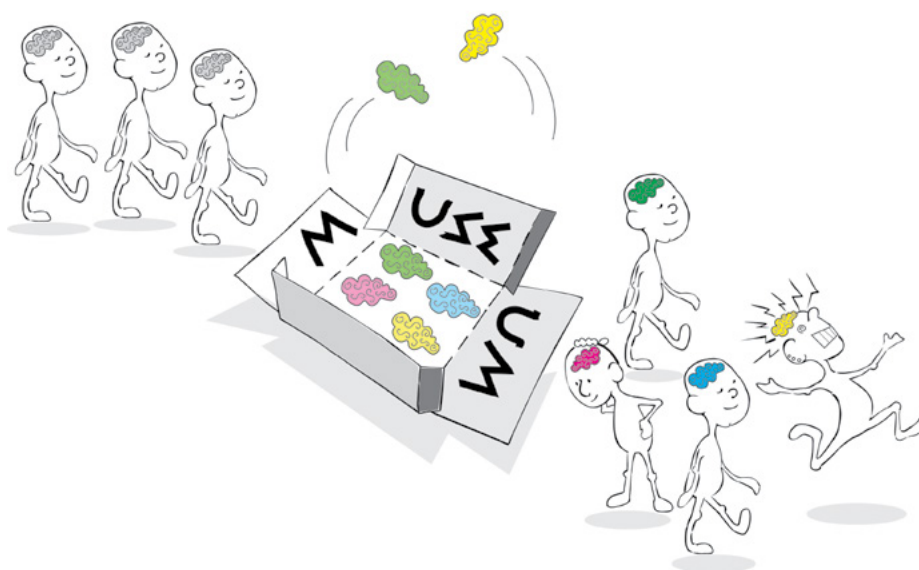
SATURDAY, 17 AUGUST

9:00 – 12:00	ICOM GENERAL ASSEMBLY
12:00 – 12:30	ICOM CLOSING CEREMONY
12:30 – 14:00	LUNCH
19:00 – 23:00	ICOM FAREWELL RECEPTION

MUSEUM: TAKE THAT CHANCE

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MUSEUM: TAKE THAT CHANCE

I made the outline of the drawing above as an aside during a seminar on mediation in museums that occurred in Rio de Janeiro last year. The aim was to synthesize into an image all the potential that musealized spaces have, to influence and change significantly (and positively, I hope) the life course of people of any age and from any origin, economic class or educational level, throughout the world. And to inspire museum staffs and visitors to take an extra leap towards the extraordinary experience that a visit to a museum should always be.

The drawing shows a number of people entering a museum. We can understand them as individuals or as a group. They are identical in shape and look equally disengaged in their monochromatic walk.

It is unclear whether their entry is undertaken willingly or as a result of pressure of some kind. It does not matter how they arrive. The paths that lead the audience to the museum can be several, encouraged by a good communication plan or by great planning by the education department. There are so many different kinds of museums, that people can enter one by building it themselves (as it happens when the community itself creates the museum) or when someone interacts with someone else in a historical square that's been musealized in their hometown or city. This, as it turns out, is the theme for another drawing.

We see the queue of visitors (like products in a factory mat, if we want to open this discussion a little bit more) that moves inside a box full of colorful brains. The box is opening. Or closing. Or is permanently open. Because museums can be made up of open or closed spaces, solid medieval halls, national forests or memories of past times merely registered online; they may be in the process of opening for the first time, changing to get closer to the community and the local environment, or they may even be „closing”, trying to narrow their focus.

Referring to the origin of museums, the word Mouseion written with Greek-inspired characters, identifies the box. The arrangement of the characters follows three of its four sides, so as to allow the verb „use” to be highlighted, reinforcing the close relationship that should exist between subject and object, object and subject (the subject who sees, questions and acts; the object as the starting vector of the museal action; objects and subjects that watch numbly while the exhibition „passes by” – and so on).

The box is filled with colorful brains. They represent the lighting up of the minds (could the verb „to rise” be also used here, with equal validity?), a sort of „enlightenment” in the Buddhist sense of finding ourselves, suddenly, a new wisdom or understanding which enables the „enlightened” being a clearer perception about themselves, their lives and their world.

The collections, however we classify them (scientific, historical, of art, fanciful, manipulative, liberating) have enormous power to communicate. Each object was once contemporary, but people forget about that as they watch the objects in an exhibition. It is essential that this is taken into account by both the museum staff and the audience, because this peculiarity („This lamp has once illuminated the room of Paulo Freire”) will awaken the questions „what is”, „what was that made from”, „why was it done”, „how was it used”, „where was it used” and others. More importantly: this approach will stimulate new knowledge. „How are the lamps nowadays? What is their cost in the family budget and the planet? How was life without lamps? How could people live today without electric power?”

In exhibition rooms (and any musealized space), the individual is brought face to face with the object and, therefore, with the individuals that used it. We connect to entire civilizations that are often very different from us. A better understanding of these civilizations helps us make better decisions in today’s world.

A museum’s collection can change how we see our own culture, ourselves and our future. But, for that, an opening of thought is necessary that, not infrequently, is lacking in the institution itself. One must look at the exhibition room in the same way as the writer looks at the white sheet of paper, with fear, courage, curiosity and inspiration. The sheet may develop into a literary classic or into a ball of paper to be thrown at the corrupt politician. Both products are relevant.

It is necessary to leave academicism and rigidity aside. It is necessary that museums make a definite leap and deeply touch the individuals, since it is the emotion within a message that will stick to human memory and, therefore, enhance learning.

One of my favorite examples of sensory experience is the Memorial Pavilion for Children of the Museum Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, dedicated to perpetuating the memory of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. The architect Moshe Safdie designed the entrance to be a stone corridor that descends into a dark underground gallery

(vagina, uterus, subconscious, genesis), where pictures of dead children can be seen; from there, one passes to a vast hall, where a single candle reflects thousands of tiny lights. A voice repeats the names of the dead. The scene reminds one of the vivid Jewish image: „Knowledge is like the flame of a candle that can light many other candles without decreasing its own flame”. From the illuminated hall, the audience goes up to the top of the building (representing the return to consciousness, the „real” world), where one can observe the beautiful scenery and „resume” the everyday life.

It is important to note that this collection of photographs was only one amongst the various resources used to speak directly to the visitor’s emotions. The object was part of, but not the whole experience.

Museums that share their collections on the Internet, using it as a starting point to create passionate relationships between people; institutions that invest in their physical spaces as a means of generating a solid emotional relationship with the visitor (encouraging, therefore, also, new audiences and new sponsors); exhibitions that create real empathy with the audience or that, conversely, cause profound interior reactions, bringing up fears and desires, encouraging – whenever possible – opposite interpretations of the same historical figure or object. We need all this, as much as we need traditional museums. There is room in the world for every kind of museum, as long as every kind of museum is allowed.

Museum professionals have talked for many decades about the need to desacralize collections and to assemble multidisciplinary teams in museums. However, both practices are still somewhat rare in Brazilian museums, although changes are, indeed, happening. There have been very few controversial or iconoclasts exhibitions (not every exhibition should be controversial or iconoclastic, of course, but the conversation between very different ideas is always healthy and often desirable). The vast majority of exhibitions in Brazil still plan their education programme only after the entire exhibition has been conceived, planned and assembled by the curators. The digital

experiences are largely limited, even today, in providing more than institutional information online. This is also changing for the best, but good examples on the web are still more findable abroad than in Brazil (some of my favorite initiatives are the V&A Knitting pages, the use of crowdfunding to purchase the painting „The Three Graces by the Louvre, and the spontaneous movement named „Let’s Build a Goddamn Tesla Museum”, in New York).

Back to the image at the centre of this text, we finally see the visitors leaving the box, back to their lives. Their gestures and their paths are no longer the same. Each one is somehow different. We can expect that they have been touched by the fire of the „museal kundalini”. Even if they seem the same (as the figure at the top), the seed has been planted.

The slogan „Museum: take that chance” may orient the eye and motivate the action. But, as museums do not work miracles, some of the transformations will always depend on the individuals themselves, the communities, the government, the nation.

The 23rd General Conference of ICOM – International Council of Museums will be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. Thousands of curious brains will be in town, coming from everywhere in Brazil and the world: conservators, curators, educators, managers, theoreticians, teachers, communicators and many more, eager to absorb and share. In parallel, we recently celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the round table of Santiago (Chile), one of the most iconic moments of museology. There is no better time to color brains.

THE AUSTRALIAN DRESS REGISTER

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Sarah Pointon

The Australian Dress Register (ADR) is a collaborative, online database project about dress pre 1975 with an Australian provenance. The site aims to document significant and well provenanced men's, women's and children's clothing, ranging from the special occasion to the everyday. Managed by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, it brings together for the first time a detailed study of garments across public, private and community collections of dress.

Museums, historical societies and private collectors are encouraged to research their garments and to share the associated stories, what they know about members of their community, what these people wore and life in the past. The register places importance not just on the physical attributes of the garments, but what they can reveal about their social and historical context.

By sharing this information on the Australian Dress Register, it provides a world wide audience virtual access to these garments and stories while the garments themselves remain safely stored in the location to which they are most relevant and significant, their own community collection.

Support for contributing individuals and organisations is provided through training and resources which have been designed to encourage them to undertake documentation, significance assessment and research of the objects in their collections. We acknowledge the contributors and custodians as the best people to do this, possessing the most knowledge of their garments history and the best understanding of its importance in the local context. On the ground support



Workshop held at Glen Innes & District Historical Society, 2011. Photo: Joyce Bryant. Reproduced courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

is also available from the ADR regional coordinators.

The resources provided on the website empower the local custodians to progress step by step through the process of object documentation. This includes establishing an object file, writing descriptions, undertaking research, recording stories and collecting images and other historic documen-

tation pertinent to the garment. They are then shown how to use this documentation to assemble a statement of significance, which draws all this information together. It presents a simple standardised process for assessing significance and object documentation.

Garments included on the site may not necessarily be the most valuable in a collection, in terms of their monetary or aesthetic value, or those that are in the finest condition. In fact the Register can be used as a great way of accessing a garment, which may rarely be viewed due to its fragility and condition. Garments that make interesting entries are those that have a story to tell; garments that add to our knowledge and understanding of local and social history as well as the study of dress.

On the Register, personal stories are literally found within the fabric of the garments. The inside of garments both in their construction and markings often reveal elements that the wearer may have tried to conceal or hide – perhaps bearing the signs of perspiration from a hot summers day, or stretched seams indicating where they have put on a little weight or evidence of where the seams have been let out to conceal the early stages of a pregnancy.

These clues to the lives of people held within a garment can provide a powerful connection to the past for contemporary audiences.

By giving a global audience access to these garments and clues, the Register helps people connect both physically and emotionally with the stories and life experiences of past generations in a new and unique way.

Not only do these garments give us a glimpse into the life of the person or people who wore them, but they can also reveal details about the place they wore it and their community. They provide a human context to the local built environment. While the Register is a project based on dress, it also has the ability to tell us so much about the time and context in which the items were originally worn.

This unique documentation is suitable and valuable for in depth multi disciplinary research of various levels by students and scholars of history, textiles, theatre, film, fashion and design, as well as designers, milliners and crafts people.

In addition to assisting contributors with their entries, we would also like to encourage and support better collection management and care of both public and private collections in general. We recognise the need to provide both information and training to the mostly volunteer based organisations, which often have very limited resources at their disposal. Through the provision of resources, workshops and advice we hope to assist with improving the documentation and storage of their collections.

The online resources designed to assist with entries and general collection care include over 30 information sheets and five videos on how to photograph, display and store clothing and textiles safely. The information sheets are also available as a publication via the Powerhouse Museum website **[HTTP://WWW.POWERHOUSEMUSEUM.COM/PUBLICATIONS/](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/publications/)**

The Register is a democratic collaborative structure that encourages communities to care for and document their own collections; we just provide the training and resources to assist them. As a result of enhancing contributors' practical skills and knowledge of collection care and documentation, community history is made available



Day dress made by David Jones, Sydney, Australia, c. 1895 (H7423). Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Penelope Clay.

for everyone via the website and preserved for future generations.

Even prior to the launch in 2011, the project has always been underpinned by a broad engagement and high level of consultation with stakeholders. The process of designing the database and developing the website has involved feedback and participation by those working with textile collections including community and regional museums, larger state institutions as well as specialist stakeholders from the education sector and industry. This included seminars and roundtable meetings over a period of three years. These generated extensive feedback on the site and buy in from the contributors

and stakeholder groups, culminating with the formal convening of the Advisory Committee in June 2010.

Some of the garments already on the site range from a convict jacket to a court costume belonging to the explorer William Charles Wentworth; 19th Century dresses made by the Australian department store David Jones, a possum skin cloak and a woman's corset. Some examples from the 20th Century include a child's crepe paper 'gum blossom' fancy dress costume, a pair of men's underpants made from tram destination roll fabric during World War II, a 1930s Manly Warringah rugby jersey, along with a pair of Lederhosen belonging to a girl who migrated to Australia.

At a recent count, there are over 120 entries online with another 40 in progress, with over 46 contributing organisations and individuals. There is, however, potential to increase this number dramatically over the next few years. Originally the project focused on New South Wales and the majority of the content is from there; however our focus is now to form partnerships with institutions in the other seven states and territories of Australia and gain more interstate content on the site. There are a number of areas that are under represented on the site, such as indigenous garments, menswear and everyday clothing, so these are areas that will be targeted in the strategies to build the site. With the rise in both numbers and different types of garments represented, the value of the ADR as a resource will only increase.

The Australian Dress Register brings together for the first time a detailed study of garments across public, private and community collections of dress. It offers virtual access to these collections throughout Australia that without it, only a handful of people may be aware of. Brought to light, often after many years in storage, the Register allows garments to act as a medium through which we can engage with history and communities from the past in a very personal way, sharing regional and national stories of importance. In addition to enhancing the care of these collections, the core purpose of the Australian Dress Register project is to record the vulnerable garment histories and associated stories before they are lost forever.

AN HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MUSEUM PRACTICES: PUTTING THE BASICS FIRST

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Serbia 2013. Today, heritage protection in Serbia is at a serious turning point. Ongoing turbulence in the region, has led to a circumstance wherein heritage is neither a social nor a political priority, and no clear national strategy for protection exists. There is little cooperation between state ministries and legislation is inconsistent with current standards. The institutional network based on a model of operation that was established in 1947, is obsolete and inefficient, resulting in poor inter-institutional communication and cooperation, as well the absence of an integrative approach.

Financial resources are uncertain at best. This year only 0.6 per cent of the annual budget for the state was set aside for culture. And because governments here change so rapidly, there is no stability or basis for establishing any long-term initiatives.

There is constant pressure on those involved in protection efforts from state administration, poor wages, cocooned institutions, revolving leadership, limited opportunities for professional development and low professional morale. All of which have lead to little incentive for practitioners to advance in the field.

In terms of collections care, there are few up to date education programs available, or mechanisms in place for collections research. Inadequate storage and exhibition facilities have resulted in massive damage to museum objects, and no standardized or centralized documentation system exists.



Fionn Zarubica and Students from Collections Management Certification Program, Serbia, Labelling Objects, February 2013. Copyright © 2013 Fionn Zarubica & Associates.

On the public front, Serbia's two most important museums are closed. The National Museum in Belgrade has been effectively closed since March 1999, when they withdrew their permanent collection from display due to the bombardment. They officially closed in 2001, and since then have been awaiting reconstruction to provide appropriate storage and exhibition conditions. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade is also closed.

In 2005 they began to withdraw artifacts from permanent display owing to extremely unfavorable conditions in the exhibition space. Reconstruction began in 2008, but it is currently at a standstill. This has undermined potential community outreach, education and tourism, and has gravely impacted economic growth.

Here in Serbia conditions are so critical, and cultural heritage is so endangered, that any conversation other than how to address the immediate and basic concerns of the objects themselves is fruitless.

What is needed now is a clearly defined strategy for protection, an organized integrative system that gets down to the basics of collections care; unifying and linking all activities to provide interdisciplinary education on an academic and expert level.

In recent years the international museum community has become increasingly involved in high-concept intellectual discourse. Hypotheses about new technology, curatorial theory, museum architecture and exhibition design, have largely dominated the conferences, newsletters and blogs.

But what about the basics? For regions that are only now coming out of decades of instability, what would make a difference is education and training for professionals to address the primary needs of the objects and to help them find an approach to their care that is cost efficient and practical.

Suggesting to a museum in Serbia that they could really improve their storage conditions, have more permanent collection rotations or get onboard with international standards, without offering resources for a meaningful and long-term basis of education and training, is like asking a paraplegic to sprint across the room; as is encouraging more students to spend years in school to become curators of objects that they cannot locate or work with – and for museums that are closed.

If you don't know what you have, if what you have is inaccessible or in a devastated condition, what are you going to curate, conserve with high-tech equipment or document using expensive software? And most importantly, without accessible and stable objects, or open museums, how can you possibly make any relevant contribution to the community you serve through exhibition and education?

The fundamental issues of object safety and documentation need to be settled first, and museums in the region must come together in mutual cooperation. Establishing standards now is essential, as is winning the support of the people who have to abide by them.

Additionally, it is important that we examine underlying issues that affect morale, such as professional depression, and answer the questions of why we are in the field in the first place, why does cultural heritage matter and how does it make a difference to others? In many post-socialist cultures, there are individuals who are professionally engaged in the museum field who have no genuine rapport with what they do. It is a job. How do we penetrate the barriers set up by the old systems? Unless we can reach the hearts and minds of the professionals in the field, important topics such as standards and ethics, and all that they entail, cannot find a sticking point.

The time has come for an holistic approach to education and training that takes all the issues into account, is contextual and relevant to the cultures, individuals, resources and situations in question; and most importantly, provides follow-up and long-term support.

Therefore, in partnership with The Central Institute For Conservation In Belgrade, and with support from the United States Embassy in

Belgrade, Fionn Zarubica and Associates has launched a Collections Management Certification Program in Belgrade, Serbia, which while taking an holistic approach, offers state of the art collections management training to museum professionals and emerging professionals in the region. The program is offered at no cost to the participants and admission is based on professional qualification and academic excellence. The program addresses the urgent need to get those who work directly with local collections in a position where they can make ongoing and meaningful improvements to their collections, through documentation and preventive conservation. It also offers progressed studies in exhibition arts, incoming and outgoing loans, as well as museum ethics, effective use of resources, best practices and sustainability, through instruction and hands-on training.

Good collections management is not by necessity high-tech, it does not require an advanced degree; neither does it require expensive software or equipment. It requires intention, goodwill, education, training, collaboration, common sense and hard work. It is the starting point, the basis upon which all future success, if any is expected, must be built.

The heritage in the region is worth saving. With examples of human workmanship ranging from the Bronze Age, through Classical Antiquity to contemporary society, it is relevant to the global discussion as well as vital to the cultural life of the local community.

Once we have established the basics of collections care here, instituted modern standards and entered into creative and constructive cooperation with our colleagues in the region, then communication with others will become possible. Then we can join the international dialogue and present our treasures in the appropriate frame, making them accessible to the public, scholars and researchers; thus promoting community growth, stability, civic awareness and tourism, by allowing local and far ranging communities into contact with the rich heritage and cultural life that Serbia has to offer.

EUROPEAN REGISTRARS ARE ENCOURAGED TO “THINK SMART!”

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** For further information, see the
conference website
www.ukregistrarsgroup.org/erc2012

Freda Matassa

The 8th European Registrars Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland on 4-6 November 2012. Five hundred delegates from twenty-five countries attended the conference which focused on creative thinking in a challenging economic climate. The delegates were museum and gallery professionals whose role is to manage and care for cultural objects and to oversee the practical aspects of heritage collections.

One of the main topics was how to pool resources and share collections by creating partnerships and sending exhibits on tour. Examples were given of national and international touring by the Horniman Museum, London, and a group of Registrars from the Centre Pompidou, Musée du Louvre, Archives Nationale and the Grand Palais in Paris.

Going beyond Europe, there was a presentation by Registrars from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo called “After the Revolution”, which gave a first-hand account of the experiences and challenges for museums in Egypt. This was followed by a talk about a key loan from The British Museum to Iran, which gave details of how the loan had taken place and stressed the importance of international loans.

One of the main talks was on the new “European Packing and Transport Standard for moveable cultural heritage”, produced by CEN, the Committee for European Standardisation. A group of six registrars who are all involved in writing the standard, gave an

update on progress and were able to answer questions on the new guidelines.

Other topics addressed were: making loans easier, based on the UK Museums Association's "Smarter Loans" programme; a talk on due diligence and what it means for museums; and a presentation on a training programme for registrars created by Leeds Museums and Galleries in partnership with Leeds University which is one of the first specialist courses for registrars.

As well as the presentations, there was a series of sessions where delegates could talk to individual experts, ask advice and receive practical information. These included historic loans, a discussion of packing cases and container leasing services, new air transport regulations for hand-carrying objects, acquisitions and disposals, contracts for couriers and fine art insurance.

The conference was held by the United Kingdom Registrars Group with an organising committee based in Edinburgh and chaired by Janice Slater, Registrar at National Galleries of Scotland. The European Registrars Conference was the idea of Julia Toffolo, Registrar at the Government Art Collection and Freda Matassa, at that time Registrar at the Royal Academy of Arts, who created the first conference in London in 1998. The UK Registrars Group was formally constituted in 1991 and following the example of the American Association of Museums Registrars Committee, was the first registrars group in Europe.

After the success of the London conference, French registrars formed a group to develop the profession in France and a second European Conference was held in Paris two years later. Since then the conference has been held every two years and has taken place in Rome, Wolfsburg, Madrid, Basel and Amsterdam. In each case, a national group of registrars was created to establish the profession in that country, to support and advise registrars and to facilitate international working. The next conference will be hosted by Nordic Registrars and will take place in Helsinki in 2014.

Although not everyone has the job title “registrar”, registrars groups are an important source of professional information and networking for everyone involved in the practical and logistical aspects of heritage collections. There are continuous new developments in transacting in art and cultural heritage with new laws and regulations coming into force all the time. The European Registrars Conference offers the chance to discuss topics of common interest as well as to look at new developments in international working both within and outside Europe.

COMCOL WORKING GROUPS

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RESOURCES

Peter van Mensch

The Working Group on Resources is preparing a bibliography on the issues raised during the 2012 Cape Town conference, similar to the bibliography compiled in connection with the 2011 Berlin conference. This last bibliography is now available on the website ([HTTP://WWW.COMCOL-ICOM.ORG/RESOURCES/](http://www.comcol-icom.org/resources/)). For the new bibliography some topics are selected, such as „The notion of European museums and European museology outside Europe”, and „Collections as expressions of utopian ideals”. Some topics connect the discussions in Cape Town with the theme of our conference in Rio de Janeiro, such as „The legitimacy of old collections in and after periods of transformation”, and „Strategies to make old collections more relevant for present day missions and needs”. I invite everybody with an interest to participate in our work to contact me.

HOW URGENT IS IT FOR A MUSEUM TO SPEND TIME AND RESOURCES ON CONTEMPORARY COLLECTING?

Arjen Kok

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The new Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which opened on April 14 after ten years of renovation, has decided to drop the conservative collection policy it adopted in the 1920's under the directorate of Schmidt-Degener. Schmidt-Degener decided to draw the line at around 1900 and consequently returned all loans of paintings by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Mondrian and other modernist painters the museum had at that time. For almost a century the Rijksmuseum turned its back on contemporary art and focused on the Golden Age of Dutch painting,



Marlene Dumas, *The Last Supper* (detail), 1985-1991, collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

which – according to the Rijksmuseum – started in the fifteenth century, peaked in the seventeenth century and ended in the nineteenth century. Rembrandt and the *Nightwatch* being the absolute top.

But with the 21st century in sight, the Rijksmuseum in the person of (former) director Ronald de Leeuw broke this convention with the acquisition of an early Mondrian. Since then the museum has collected

a number of highlights. The latest acquisition is a fabulous painting by Marlene Dumas, *The Last Supper*, appropriately donated by a collector just before Easter this year. And in the renovated building on the top floor (the attic, in fact) a 20th century display has been mounted. The Mondrian, with other early 20th century art, is presented in combination with a Koolhoven airplane, a symbol of the radical changes in art and society that characterize the first decades of the 20th century. The Rijksmuseum will undoubtedly assemble an excellent collection of high class modern and contemporary Dutch art. In combination with design and applied arts, the exhibition will present an interesting panorama of the visual culture of the Netherlands in the 20th century.

However, collecting contemporary art seems easy, compared to collecting contemporary history. A whole system of art dealers, auction houses and big collectors help museums to choose from the enormous production of modern and contemporary art.

Collecting contemporary history is entirely different. It is far less glamorous and there isn't half as much money involved. Most museums probably feel a bit on their own when it comes to contemporary



Wehkamp catalogue Spring 2

collecting. What to select from the overwhelming amount of objects and information? And when a selection is made, how should it be documented? The Netherlands Open Air Museum chose to collect mail order catalogues of a large mail order company. That way it could document a broad selection of household items and follow the changes over the years. A few years ago the company switched from printed catalogues to an on-line catalogue. This created a problem for the museum

because it wasn't equipped to collect and archive websites and on-line catalogues.

So it is not a 'natural' thing to invest time and money. Even if the urgency is felt, as in the case of the Open Air Museum, one can be faced with unexpected challenges. At the COMCOL conference 2012 in Cape Town the COMCOL Contemporary Collecting Working Group and the Resources Working Group organized a joint workshop to discuss the idea of creating an instrument to support museums to develop a contemporary collecting policy and practice. In the end the participants concluded that a tool kit would be the best option: a Toolkit Documenting the Present.

A first draft of the structure of the toolkit is published on contemporarycollecting.tumblr.com, the blog of the Contemporary Collecting Working Group. Comments and contributions are welcomed, since the toolkit is meant to be a collective effort of the members of the working group, COMCOL members and others who are interested in participating. The aim of the working group is to present and discuss a full draft of the toolkit at the annual conference in Rio de Janeiro.

IN BRIEF – NEW PUBLICATIONS

“QUE RESTE-T-IL DU PRÉSENT? COLLECTER LE CONTEMPORAIN DANS LES MUSÉES DE SOCIÉTÉ”

Available: (price 39 €):
[www.lefestin.net/livre/que-
reste-t-il-du-pr%C3%A9sent](http://www.lefestin.net/livre/que-reste-t-il-du-pr%C3%A9sent)



In COMCOL Newsletter No 19, Jacques Battesti wrote about an anthology on contemporary collecting to be published in November 2012: “Que reste-t-il du Présent? Collecter le Contemporain dans les musées de Société”. The effort to gain, and present, experience from many other countries has resulted in a very interesting and impressive

book in an elegant graphic form. It contains 400 pages, 400 images, and has 42 contributions from 14 countries. The texts are written in French with summaries in English, some texts in English with summaries in French, one text in Spanish.

Available: [www.ep.liu.se/ecp_
home/index.en.aspx?issue=083](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083)

“ENTERING THE MINEFIELDS: THE CREATION OF NEW HISTORY MUSEUMS IN EUROPE”



Another publication from the EuNaMus research programme is now available online: “Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe: Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past, and the European Citizen, Brussels 25 January 2012”.

