

ICOM News

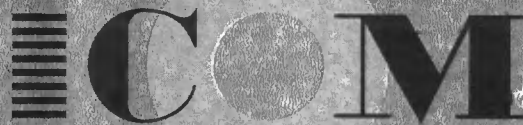
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SPECIAL ISSUE

Managing Change:

museums
facing economic
and social
challenges

19th General Conference
Barcelona 2001



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MUSÉES

In this extended issue of *ICOM News*, devoted to the ICOM General Conference of 1st to 6th July, 2001, held in Barcelona, Spain, you will find the Conference Keynote Speeches in their entirety; summaries of the Concurrent Session and Round Table discussions; and an overview of other key sessions (International Committee discussions, the Marketplace of Ideas), as well as ICOM's Resolutions for the next triennium and other significant moments of this major international event.



Official inauguration of the 19th General Conference and 20th General Assembly of ICOM, 1st July, 2001

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The opening ceremony of the 19th General Conference of ICOM was held on Sunday 1st July, 2001 at the Congress Palace in Barcelona, Spain. It marked the beginning of a week of activities and discussions centred around the theme "Managing Change: museums facing economic and social challenges." A number of political representatives from Barcelona and Catalonia and personalities from the world of Spanish museums and culture attended the ceremony. Rafael Feria, President of ICOM-Spain, Frederic-Pau Verrié, Chairman of ICOM 2001 Barcelona and Jacques Perot, President of ICOM, had the honour of welcoming the following personalities:

- Joan Francesc Marcó**
Provincial Councillor and President of the Borcelono Provincial Council Department of Culture
- Marc Mayer**
Director-General for Cultural Heritage, Generalitat of Catalonia
- Fernando Checa**
Director-General of the Prado National Museum
- Mounir Bouchenaki**
Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO
- Joan Clos**
Mayor of Borcelono
- Joan Rigol**
President of the Parliament of Catalonia

The General Conference was attended by over 2,000 museum professionals specialising in a range of different fields, who travelled from all over the world to compare their findings and experience. Discussions and working sessions were held in parallel until the last day of the Conference, when all the participants came together again for the General Assembly. For the first time, the Conference set up Round Table discussions. This initiative, as Frederic-Pau Verrié stressed in his opening address, illustrates the desire of museums to involve themselves in the transformations taking place in society. These Round Table discussions, which provide an opportunity for a wider audience to hear important personalities from the world of culture and museums debating the topical issues and major concerns of museums today, were enthusiastically received. ■





Jacques Perot, elected for a second term (2001-2004) to the post of President of ICOM

Using expressions such as "intolerance", "blinded by ideology", and "spurious ethnic claims", Jacques Perot made a point of commenting on the destruction in the Balkans and the attempts which have been made to efface history in the region. "Let us say for all to hear," he went on, "History exists, whether happy or unhappy. It cannot be swept aside or trivialised or rewritten. But wherever possible, the aberrations of history can and should be repaired. In this connection, I should like to say how delighted I am to see the efforts made in Europe and the United States to return goods stolen by the Nazis and other totalitarian regimes during the last century".

"Another insidious, destructive evil" – the illicit trade in cultural goods – "springs from cupidity." The President cited ICOM's campaign against illicit trade in cultural property "in accordance with our Code of Professional Ethics". However, he reminded members that campaigning against clandestine trafficking in cultural goods does not mean banning all circulation of cultural property: he drew attention to existing means of "ensuring that objects protected by national legislation are seen in other countries, through deposits . . . exchanges . . . and co-operation," and said that museum professionals were capable of defining for themselves a positive, open-handed policy in this area.

He explicitly called for an improvement in ethical standards in the art market: "Is it acceptable for certain specialist dealers to flout laws and regulations by arranging for illegally exported stolen works to circulate? Should it be standard practice for great auction houses to allow objects which are known to have been acquired by illegal means to figure in their sales catalogues? Surely not."

Taking as an example the earthquake in Peru on 23rd June, 2001, which led, amongst other things, to the partial destruction of the collections of the Museum of Contisuyo, Jacques Perot said that it was essential to try to protect cultural heritage in the event of natural disasters, and praised in this respect the important work of the International Committee of the Blue Shield.

Protection and conservation of heritage are two of the main tasks of museum professionals. But the President also emphasised their other tasks: "Museums – whatever their size, their collections, their type of institution – often play a major role in the development of a city's policy. There is no sustainable development without cultural development. Rightly, the museum is in the service of society. . . . But how can we accomplish this duty? With whom? With what means? How?" He voiced the anxieties felt by some professionals, faced with these uncertainties on the cusp of the third millennium. "The drive to change and transform, the explosion of new media and technologies, the triumph of free market capitalism and the inexorable advance of globalisation have led to much painful soul-searching. . . . We need to reflect and perhaps question some of our ideas to adjust to a rapidly changing world. This is precisely the theme of our General Conference. . . . Can museums be seen as businesses? How cost-effective can they be? How can the various elements of society ensure that museums survive and develop? . . . These considerations deserve to be included in our calculations: we have to recognise that, whether we like it or not, the museum of yesterday, which was purely a place of study and private pleasure, and was often inward-looking, has reached the end of its life-span, and our establishments will only survive if they place themselves at the heart of the community and are entirely open to it. Then, and only then . . . will the communities around them, whether we call them local authorities, sponsors, patrons or friends, provide museums with the means to develop. It is up to us to attract an entourage of potential supporters – and it is also up to us to develop our own resources."

Amongst the additional challenges facing museums, Jacques Perot cited new communications media, and especially Internet, as a way of "communicating more effectively, be it with other specialists, for information, or for educational purposes". He specifically mentioned the work undertaken by ICOM in association with the J. Paul Getty Trust, to create the top-level domain .museum – an initiative which will give museums "new credibility". Jacques Perot ended his speech in Spanish, saying that Spanish would become ICOM's third official language, and that as an organisation, we needed to think about how we use languages, so as to achieve mutual understanding and preserve cultural diversity.

It was on a note of hope, with the aim of creating "the museums we aspire to" that the President of ICOM opened the proceedings of ICOM's 19th General Conference. ■

Valérie Jullien,
Communications Officer, ICOM Secretariat

The Museums We Aspire To

Jacques Perot, who has been President of ICOM since October 1998, was elected for a second three-year term of office during the ICOM General Conference. He began his inaugural address at the opening ceremony by thanking the Spanish Committee of ICOM and the ICOM 2001 Organising Committee, who had worked so zealously to ensure that this General Conference – the first of the 21st century – should be a great success.

In his speech, the President chose to alert ICOM members to the dangers threatening our common heritage. "Where do these threats spring from? What is the source of these attacks? Who are these enemies of the heritage of mankind?" he asked. "Their names are Intolerance, Cupidity, Natural Disaster and Armed Conflict." He referred to the destruction of the Bamian Buddhas as "a deliberate attack on heritage of incalculable value, stemming from ideological and religious principles which refuse point-blank to take heritage into consideration". However, he reminded his audience that it was vital to take action to protect moveable goods as well as monuments, notably in the case of the collections of the Museum of Kabul. "Many items from its collection have been destroyed or dispersed and the latter are now appearing on the art market. These objects must be recovered and preserved until happier times return to the ravaged, war-torn lands they come from . . . and international organisations now need to authorise other museums to preserve, temporarily, the priceless works which bear witness to the rich past of this region".

