

# SRAL

Art Conservation and Research



## ICOM General Conference and General Assembly

September 1-7 2019

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The ICOM General Conference occurs every three years and is the venue for all ICOM National, Regional and International Committees to come together to discuss the latest updates within the museum sector. The conference is a global event which allows current topics in the museum world to be discussed and solutions devised. The conference is typically attended by around 4000 (this year 4500) members from over 100 (this year 115) countries.

The General Conference in Kyoto 2019 was the 25th edition and focused on the theme “Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition”. The conference aimed, through plenary and committee sessions, keynote lectures, excursions and workshops to inspire a range of discussions and exchanges on museum-related issues to allow participants to engage with other museum professionals.



Figure X: Keynote speakers and plenary session events at ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

Each day the conference kicked off with a keynote speech. The three keynote speakers were Kengo Kuma, a Japanese world-renown architect who discussed how museums can be integrated better into community activities through design and form; Sebastião Salgado, a professional photographer who highlighted the beauty and depth of culture of the Amazonian people and landscape little seen by outside eyes; and Cai Guo-Qiang, a Chinese artist who showcased some of his community art projects and exhibitions taking place throughout the globe. The sub-themes of this 25th General Conference were: Sustainability, Decolonisation and Repatriation, Disaster Management, the Asian Art Market and the Museum Definition. These topics were addressed in plenary sessions during the first three days of the meeting, each session following a keynote address.



The conference is not without additional means for participants to meet. Social events were organised for each evening. These were hosted by venues throughout the city of Kyoto and ranged from large gatherings for all delegates to more intimate situations such as a Noh theatre performance. All tastes were catered for and the venues encouraged participants to explore the city and the culture of Japan.

This 25th General Conference included an intensive programme organised by the ICOM-CC Directory Board and other key members of our committee. The planning for these sessions began some 18 months prior to the conference and aimed to be very collaborative and strengthen links with other international committees. We aimed also to organise an excursion during the conference and a post conference tour. This would be the busiest meeting ever at a General Conference for ICOM-CC. Typically the ICOM-CC presence at the General Assembly is low as our triennial meeting occurs off-schedule to accommodate the c. 1000 delegates who attend the ICOM-CC Triennial Conference. The next ICOM-CC Triennial Conference will be in Beijing in September 2020. ICOM is currently promoting the collaboration and cross-connections between committees and thus this year's General Conference was the opportune time to develop such connections.



Figure X: Some members of the ICOM-CC team at the Kyoto 25th ICOM General Conference.

The below report highlights the ICOM-CC activities both throughout and after the 25th ICOM General Conference. Five members of the ICOM-CC Directory Board attended the meeting (Chair: Kristiane STRÆTKVERN; Vice Chairs: Achal PANDYA and Renata PETERS; Liaison Officer: Kate SEYMOUR; and ordinary member Yacy ARAFRONER). A number of Working Group Coordinators also were present. These included Anna BÜLOW (Preventive Conservation), Deborah LEETRUPIN (Textiles), Stephanie AUFFRET (Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer) and Stephanie DE ROEMER (Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decorations). Other key ICOM-CC active members present were Joan REIFSNYDER (ICOM-CC Secretary), Bart ANKERSMIT (Assistant

Coordinator Preventive Conservation from RCE, The Netherlands), Jesper JOHNSEN (National Museum, Denmark) and Ali NASIR (Assistant Coordinator Working Group Textiles from the National Museum Institute New Delhi) was awarded a Getty Grant to attend the meeting. Furthermore, Shumeng DAI (Conservator at the National Art Museum, Beijing) was awarded an ICOM Young Professional travel grant to attend the conference. Of course other ICOM-CC members were present and active within other sessions during the conference.

Monday, 2nd September, 2019



Figure X: Selection of images from the ICOM-CC, INTERCOM and ICOM SEE session on Monday, 2nd September at the ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

The first ICOM-CC afternoon session was hosted jointly with two other ICOM committees: ICOM SEE (Regional Alliance of South East Europe countries) and INTERCOM (Committee for Museum Management). Eight papers were selected from some 60 submissions on the theme of “Shaping the

Future, Doing More with Less”. Unfortunately a number of the speakers were unable to attend and present. Although the presentations took place in the satellite venue they were well attended and discussions were lively. The session was chaired by ICOM-CC Preventive Conservation Working Group Coordinator Anna BÜLOW. Topics ranged from the reshaping of the Danish National Museum reinventing visitor experiences under times of financial restraint (Jesper JOHNSEN, National Museum, Denmark), an update on the concept of the liquid museum where boundaries are fluid and how different organisational models can be implemented (Olga VAN OOST, Flemish interface centre for cultural heritage, FARO, Belgium) and managing public programming at the National Museums of Kenya (Priscilla MUTILE MBAI, National Museums of Kenya).

Tuesday, 3rd September, 2019



Figure X: Selection of images from the ICOM-CC, ICMS and ICAMT session on Tuesday, 3rd September at the ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

On the afternoon of the second day of the ICOM General Conference, ICOM-CC joined with ICMS (Committee for Museum Security) and ICAMT (Committee for Architecture and Museum Techniques) to highlight issues on storage. Topics ranged from: an overview of research and publications explaining how the field has addressed storages issues by Gael DE GUICHEN (ICCROM, Italy); setting up security for museum storage facilities by Vernon RAPLEY (Victoria and Albert Museum, UK); overviewing the management-planning and design for a new storage facility by Kiem-Liam THE (Toornend Partners, The Netherlands); an overview of the ICCROM-IGNCA programme Re-Org in India by Achal Pandya (Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, India); documentation strategies for storage after disasters in Brazil by Gabriel BEVIAQUA (Moreira Salles Institute, Brazil); the influence of relative humidity and temperatures (installations) on designing storage facilities by Bart ANKERSMIT (RCE, The Netherlands); and concepts to be considered when designing a new storage facility in Denmark by Jesper JOHNSEN (The National Museum, Denmark).

Wednesday, 4th September, 2019

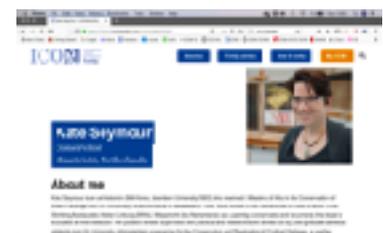
The third afternoon of the General Conference saw ICOM-CC team with ICOFOM (Committee for Museology). The two committees organised a joint session on ‘The Essence of Conservation’. The afternoon session saw the presentation of eight papers in a session moderated by Renata PETERS (Vice Chair ICOM-CC) and Francois MAIRESSE (Chair ICOFOM). A further 12 papers are publishing in the preprints of this session. To summarise: The first speaker Supreo CHANDA (Univeristy of Calcutta, India) presented a paper on living heritage and how the intangible aspects of living side-by-side with cultural heritage venues can stimulate an inter-connectivity with community and rebirth. Robin SLOGGETT (University of Melbourne, Australia) discussed the similarities of validation methods used by South Asia and Australia communities to the peer review process. She expressed that this model could be used for decision making in conservation. The third

speaker, Mira NAKAMURA (Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum, Japan), provided an example of the Sakubei Yamamoto Collection for the preservation of archival paper collection using digital means. Scarlet GALINDO (Museo Nacional de la Acuarela, Mexico) discussed authenticity and value allocation in present day collections and how this can be transferred to the future, especially of objects removed from their original cultural context. Gina LEVENSPIEL (University of Melbourne, Australia) gave an example of architectural conservation discussing the reconstruction of a building. She questioned how far can the reconstruction be taken and answered that in the case study presented the conservation architects could return to the original blueprints. The sixth speaker, Markus WALZ (University of Applied Sciences Leipzig, Germany), provided an illuminating and funny (but with a serious message) talk on who are the authorities that define decision making in consideration and how their perspective can influence form and appearance. Stefanie AUFFRET (ICOM-CC Wood, Furniture and Lacquer Working Group Coordinator & Getty Conservation Institute, USA) discussed different views on authenticity, originality and materiality from a conservator's perspective in relation to furniture. And finally, Hsu HSINHUI (Chung Tai World Museum) explored how museum practices can shift from that of a religious practice for conservation. She showed, in relation to two sculptures, how current secular thinking can be revised to include Buddhist s perspectives. The full publication can be found on the ICOM-CC and ICOFOM websites. <http://www.icom-cc.org/51/news/?id=534>.



Figure X: Selection of images from the ICOM-CC and ICOFOM session on Wednesday, 4th September at the ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

Unfortunately, the extensive ICOM-CC programme overlapped with ICOM Netherland activities. The main activity, organised jointly with DEMHIST (Committee for Historic House Museums) and ICOM Japan, was held in the afternoon on Wednesday, 4th September. The interesting session focused on links between The Netherlands and Japan looking beyond the museum sector. ICOM Netherlands also supported the new ICOM Family initiative which aims to connect ICOM members who have similar interests globally. This professional networking tool will help travelling ICOM members connect on a personal level with local members when working abroad. In this manner, knowledge and experiences can be shared and the community strengthened.



### Trade Fair: Monday 2nd to Wednesday 4th September

A Trade Fair ran for the first three days of the conference. Many local, and international, companies providing support for museums and prefatory institutions had stands. Some Japanese museums and institutions also had showcase stands. One of the most interesting was the stand outlining the Preservation of Cultural Assets Damaged by the Tsunami in 2011. (<http://www2.pref.iwate.jp/~hp0910/tsunami/index.html>) The Iwate Prefecture Institutions had joined together to illustrate the preservation and conservation work undertaken in the area after the 2011 disaster. The aftermath and rescue efforts of this disaster had been presented by Dr. K KAMBA (Formerly of the Tokyo

National Museum, Japan) at the ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in Melbourne 2014. Our committee, in conjunction with Dr. Kamba, organised a post Conference Tour to the area. The interaction with the staff members at the stand gave the ICOM-CC team a good introduction to those dedicated sharing their experiences and knowledge in times of natural disaster.



Figure X: Selection of images of the conference venue and trade fair at the ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

## Off-Site Excursion: Thursday, 5th September, 2019

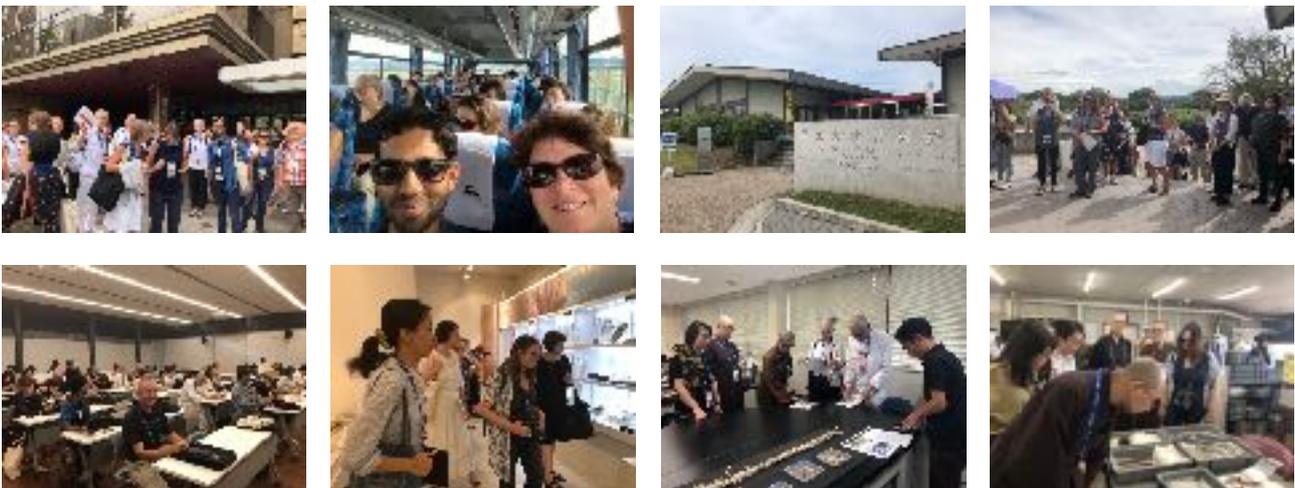


Figure X: Selection of images of the ICOM-CC off-site excursion to Nara during the ICOM-CC General Conference. Many thanks to Reiko Sakaki for facilitating this event. Photos: Kate Seymour

The Thursday sessions are typically reserved for off-site excursions for ICOM-CC committees. ICOM-CC organised a day trip to Nara to visit the Nara Palace Site Museum and the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, as well as temples, shrines and other museums in the city (on own schedule). The trip and funding for this was organised marvellously by Reiko SAKAKI (Salt and Tobacco Museum, Tokyo, Japan). The excursion was fully booked and attended by many of the speakers of the three ICOM-CC sessions described above. The trip promoted further discussions and exchanges between delegates, as well as showcasing the research being carried out by Japanese conservators at the research centre. Salvage techniques for the rescue of cultural heritage object after the 2011 Tsunami were also discussed and explained. This linked nicely to the ICOM-CC post conference tour to the Tohoku region (Sunday 8th to Wednesday 11th September).

## Saturday, 7th September, 2019

A General Assembly was held at the end of the conference, at which the ‘business’ of ICOM is determined and disseminated. The GA is the decision-making body of ICOM which, amongst others, allows the statutes of the organisation to be discussed and adopted. The GA is open to voting members of committees. ICOM-CC as an International Committee has five votes at this assembly.

These votes can be pre-allocated to voting members of the committee or given as proxies to other voting members. Due to the presence of the majority of the ICOM-CC Directory Board at the General Conference all five votes were used. The agenda also included an additional session (An Extraordinary General Assembly) which focused on the adoption of the new proposed Museum Definition. The topic had been in discussion all week during breaks and even within sessions. After a long session lasting nearly four hours, during which many voices were heard both pro- and con-, the decision was made to postpone voting on the new definition. The discussion will continue, guided by the standing committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP), as more opinions will be heard from National, Regional and International Committees. The floor agreed that the intension to change the defining was valid. The Museum Definition requires updating to reflect the relationship between ‘the museum’ and ‘the public’ that use these spaces, as

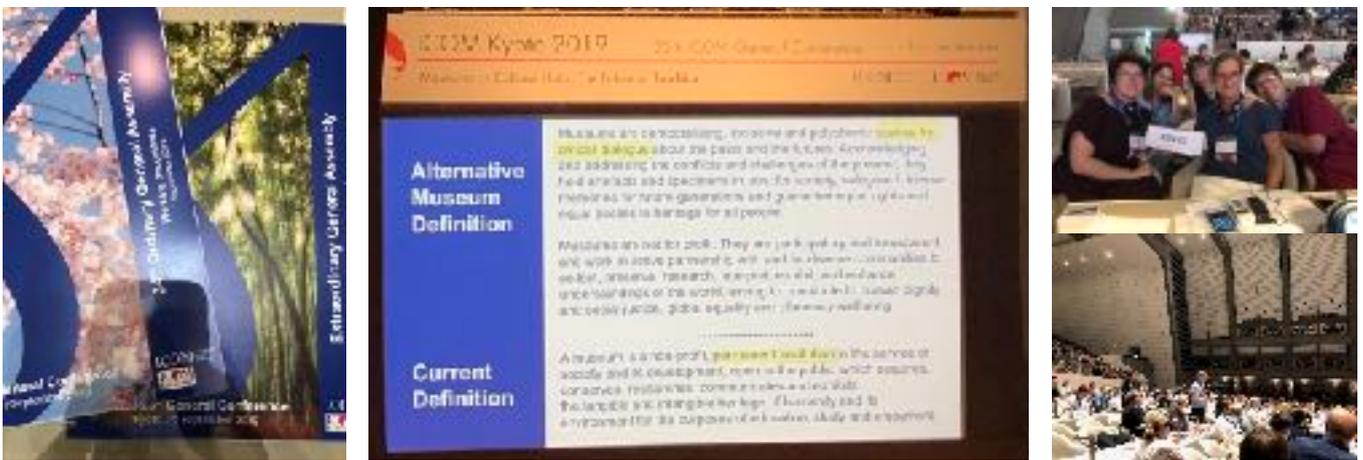


Figure X: Selection of images taken during the 35th General Assembly and the Extraordinary General Assembly held on conclusion of the ICOM-CC General Conference. Photos: Kate Seymour

societal changes have implemented new conditions, obligations and possibilities for museums. The committee will work towards a new amended definition which will be voted in the future.

The 25th ICOM General Conference concluded with a beautiful event hosted by the National Museum, Kyoto. The museum opened its doors to all delegates providing refreshments in the garden and additional showcase activities of Japanese culture. The hand-over to the next organising committee for the 26th ICOM General Conference was shown by video link to the gathering. Next time PRAGUE will be the ‘worldwide hub for exchange about topical issues museums tackle today’<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> <https://icom.museum/en/activities/events/general-conference/>