

ICOM AND UMAC: A JOINT VENTURE

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Mr. Chair, dear museum colleagues, ICOM friends, good evening! It is a great pleasure to be in Norman, Oklahoma.

First, let me extend a welcome to you on behalf of the ICOM Executive Council and Jacques Perot, our President. Thank you for allowing time for me to speak.

We, the ICOM Executive Council, are pleased you have come together for this meeting of the International Committee of University Museums and Collections (UMAC). Not only is this committee important to the International Council of Museums as the representative body of a significant part of the museum community, it is important because, as many of you have learned, it is through the International Committees that we as members of ICOM have the opportunity to interact with colleagues from around the world. A stated objective of your Committee is to provide

its members with a forum to identify partnership opportunities concerning the resources in the collections, to share knowledge and experience, and to enhance access to the collections. The aim is to protect the heritage in the care of universities. (International Committees 2004)

As a director of a university museum, I endorse those objectives enthusiastically and commend you for your vision.

As you may know, ICOM has 29 international committees and each is devoted to the study of a particular type of museum or a specific museum-related discipline. Composed of ICOM members who request membership, international committees are exclusively professional bodies. Through its international committees, ICOM achieves its major objectives: the exchange of scientific information at an international level, the development of professional standards, the adoption of rules and recommendations and the realization of collaborative projects.

People often wonder which is the largest international committee; well, according to the latest figures I have from the June 2003 meeting, the three largest international committees are ICOM CC, the conservation committee, CECA, education committee, and ICOFOM, the museology committee. UMAC is not the smallest in either active or voting members and it is developing quite nicely as a young committee. That is made evident by this meeting.

According to a decision of the Executive Council at its 102nd session, held on December 9-11, 2002, every ICOM member has the right to become a member of one international committee with full voting rights. Membership in this committee is free and includes all

services rendered by the committee, but the committee has the right to charge fees for specific events, such as the one relating to this meeting. In addition, every ICOM member has the right to become a member of other international committees, but without voting rights. International committees can request financial contributions to cover expenses from those members registered under this category.

ICOM has at present 115 active national committees. ICOM members are often interested to know which of the 115 committees are the largest. The actual number of national committees seems to change weekly as some are lost for various reasons and others are added. We usually have 123 or 124 countries represented, but not all have adequate membership to constitute a national committee. Nevertheless, the largest national committee is Germany with over 2200 members. The second largest is France, followed in descending order by Switzerland, The Netherlands, United States, Denmark, Spain, Israel, Sweden, The United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria, Finland and Norway. It is easy to see from this list that Europe has many of the largest national committees. There are over 13,000 ICOM members in Europe.

The number of ICOM members is increasing daily. According to the ICOM web site, there are 17,000 members, and they come from 140 different countries. The membership of ICOM continues to grow at about 6 percent per year.

Perhaps some of you are unaware of how ICOM works. So, without going into great detail, I will give you a brief overview. ICOM is built on the membership of the National and International Committees. They elect the officers that serve on the Executive Council, determine the agenda for the Advisory Committee—which, in turn, places issues before the Executive Council—approve the budget, develop the resolutions for inclusion in the triennial strategic plan and select the person to chair the Advisory Committee.

The next election of officers will take place in Seoul, South Korea, in October 2004. The slate of candidates is listed on the ICOM web site, and will be circulated by ICOM prior to the election. Because your International Committee votes in the election, it behooves each of you to review the list of candidates and let your representatives know your preference. There are 21 candidates for the Executive Council and nine are to be elected. There are two candidates for President, three for Vice-President and two for Treasurer.

At the triennial conference in Seoul, the membership also will vote on a newly revised Code of Ethics and the Statutes in a rewritten form, and will

determine the definition of “museum.” I encourage you to attend the triennial or to let your committee leadership know your wishes about these issues.

Although ICOM is over 50 years old, or perhaps because it is over a half century old, it is an evolving organization. ICOM must change to meet the needs of contemporary society and the museum profession in the service of that society. New visions and new attitudes for the future role of museums—addressing social and environmental issues; advancing academic research and public education; promoting higher standards of collections care and retention; and defining international ethics for use of intellectual and cultural property—are imperative, and unless the ICOM membership takes a leadership role in this initiative, others will impose their vision and ideas on our activities.

As an element of the changing museum world, university museums and collections must reflect the growth of the museum profession; the expansion of the museum community to include a growing number of diverse institutions, programs, and activities; the inclusive attitude of audience development; and a greater sense of social as well as academic identity and responsibility.

Partly in response to these changes, many universities have given attention to the extraordinary educational potential of museums. They have come to realize there is a need for museums and collections to represent the diverse academic activities of their institutions, and for maintaining the unique nature of their research initiatives. The form these museums take is evolving at a rapid rate, but often with a lack of direction and mission. University museums have to change, or refocus, as they confront new economic demands, and those changes will influence the ability of university museums to survive, as they exist today, and as they grow in a different and more demanding intellectual environment.

The university museum community has a unique role in addressing both informal and formal educational opportunities. University museums and collections have the extraordinary role of serving as the intermediary between the academic and lay communities. Our museums and collections are the truest keepers of natural and cultural resources.

The university museum of the future may follow this tradition-bound path of predictability or seek new venues for fulfilling its museological role. If the university museum is to be more accessible and purpose-oriented, it must have a holistic nature, emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. The university museum of the future must redefine its mission to identify outcome objectives for information exchange, service and research. It must define its public role to include all elements of the university, as well as the public. It must find the means for being common to all inherent purposes.

The ultimate question for the university museum of the future may be one of identity. The mission of a museum grows out of tradition and is shaped by need; if the university museum fulfills no definable need, it will have no reason for existence. And, if its primary function is to be a repository for teaching and research collections with no “service” orientation, the viability of the institution will be in jeopardy.

University museums have the opportunity to provide leadership and direction for the international museum community. The challenge is to interpret and anticipate the requirements of society because museums mirror society. As the technological, multicultural, entrepreneurial and expedient nature of society increases, it is reasonable to assume the museum community will follow. These tenets appear to be gaining in importance worldwide, so no nation or group, regardless of social or economic status, is exempt from their influences.

ICOM and the International Committees such as UMAC are established for addressing these issues. They bring together persons with commonly shared interests and objectives. I personally, and as a member of the ICOM Executive Council, thank you for your participation in this conference and wish you good luck for your meeting. I congratulate each of you for your dedication to university museums and collections.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and colleagues

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