

Recent Collaborations and Partnerships: “Increasing Access to Knowledge”

« **Universal Museums** »:

The British Museum’s Africa Programme

The British Museum was a key partner in the Africa 2005 season (a series of major cultural events which took place in London celebrating contemporary and past cultures from across the African continent and the diaspora) with special displays, new installations and an extensive public programme. The Museum also aimed to stimulate debate about African issues across the UK as it toured the “Throne of Weapons” (a contemporary creation made in Mozambique from decommissioned arms) to over twenty venues in 2005, on short-term loan to museums and galleries, but also, in a first for the British Museum, on day trips to non-museum venues including schools, cathedrals, community and shopping centres. (The tour is supported by the UK National Commission for UNESCO.)

In Africa itself, the first phase of the BM’s Africa project is underway. Funded for three years by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the British Council, it involves extending relationships and developing partnerships with African museums through skill sharing, loan programmes and joint research and conservations work. The Museum hopes to encourage an alternative, African, interpretation of its collection. 150 objects were loaned to Kenya for an exhibition on East African trade which took place in the Spring of 2006. This was the first time the BM has loaned objects in this way to sub-Saharan Africa.

Curatorial exchanges have also been developed with museums in Sudan where the BM is already involved in rescue archaeology at the Merowe Dam. And a partnership was agreed in 2004 with the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt to bring three museum professionals from Egypt to the BM annually for a period of eight weeks to provide work-shadowing and training. This programme will last for five years in the lead up to the opening of the Grand Museum in Cairo scheduled for 2009. A training programme with the National Museum of Ethiopia following a discussion of the museum’s conservation needs will also be established. The Museum is also investigating how it can assist with the rebuilding of southern Sudan’s cultural infrastructure subsequent to the signature of peace agreements in the area.

Source: BM Press Releases

The Museum of Modern Art's International Program, New York City

In 1952, thanks to a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Museum of Modern Art officially established an International program to develop long-range exchanges of the visual arts with other countries. It is the most extensive program of its kind conducted by a privately sponsored museum. Its wide range of initiatives include internationally circulating exhibitions from the MOMA collections, workshops for museum professionals, publications, education and conservation programs, professional assistance to museums, lectures and symposia, etc. The program has hosted invitation-only Museum Professionals Workshops annually since 1998 and focused on building relationships with museum professionals in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific. In 2002, the program initiated a series of documentary anthologies aimed at introducing English-speaking readers to landmark texts by artists and critics from outside the United States.

Source: MOMA website

The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Beijing World Art Museum

In the exhibition, "From Monet to Picasso: Masterworks from The Cleveland Museum of Art", sixty of the Museum's most highly acclaimed European paintings and sculptures from the late-19th and early-20th centuries will be shown in Beijing. This exhibition marks the first time that an exhibition of modern European masterpieces will be shown in China. After its première in Beijing, the exhibit will travel to The Mori Arts Center in Tokyo, Japan, and The Seoul Arts Center in Seoul, South Korea, in December 2006. This is the first major show of European Impressionists and Modern masters to tour these three major Asian capitals. Over the course of the next four years while the CMA undertakes its \$258 million renovation and expansion project, six different exhibitions will travel to more than 12 venues in six countries. This marks a milestone for the Museum, as it will be the first time in its 90-year history that so many masterworks from the permanent collection will be on view outside of Cleveland.

Source: Cleveland Museum of Art Press Release, May 22, 2006

State Museums, Berlin

From August to November 2006, the Collection of Classical Antiquities presented the exhibition "Greek Gods-Treasures from the Pergamon Museum Berlin" in Sao Paulo. The exhibit, comprised of approximately 180 marble sculptures, vases and bronze works, held in the Museu di Arte Brasileira of the Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (FAAP), displays the

characteristics of ancient Greek and Roman religion and mythology. Thanks to the financial contribution of the FAAP, many works which, due to their poor condition, have had to remain un-exhibited in Berlin for decades, have now been restored.

Source: Antikensammlung (Collection of Classical Antiquities) website

Other partnerships:

The Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS)

The Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS) is a project which emerged out of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), an interregional forum officially established in 1996 which consists of the European Commission and the twenty-five members of the European Union (EU) and of thirteen Asian countries in order to deepen relations between Europe and Asia on all levels. ASEMUS is largely supported by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) which is funded by contributions from the member governments.

ASEMUS is thus the expression of a broader inter-governmental rapprochement and consists of a cross-cultural network of approximately 60 museums from the countries of Asia and Europe (including the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, the British Museum, London, Hong Kong Museum of History, China, the National Museum of Ethnology, Netherlands, and the Musée du quai Branly, Paris). Its founding conference took place in Stockholm in 2000 and it was officially launched to the international museum community at the 19th General Conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Barcelona in July 2001. The Secretariat is currently located at the National Museum of World Culture in Sweden but, using modern information and communications technology, the network could be administered from more than one location.

The ambition of ASEMUS is to “share and develop professional competencies and expertise relating to cultural heritage resources and to produce new types of joint, innovative exhibitions and public programmes”. Seminars on conservation techniques have already taken place (Kuala Lumpur 2003, Manila 2006) and a virtual exhibition, “Masterpieces”, and an installation in Helsinki, “Borderless Me” are scheduled to begin in September 2006. Another important initiative, a travelling exhibition, “Self and Other: Portraits from Asia and Europe”, an exhibition of 200 outstanding portraits of Asians and Europeans from past and present, about changing mutual perceptions of Asians and Europeans, will visit eight countries in both continents over two years, 2008-2010.

Within the ASEMUS framework, mention can also be made of the National Museum of Denmark’s exhibition on Nias (an island in Indonesia), conducted in co-operation with the

National Museum of Indonesia, in Jakarta, the National Museum of Ethnology, in Leiden, and the Royal Tropical Museum in Amsterdam.

Discussion around different projects at the last Executive Committee Meeting of ASEMUS, held in Corilleras, the Philippines, in November 2005, generated general remarks on lessons learned and ideas for the future:

- ASEMUS involvement has been too “top-down” in each respective institution. The “doers”, curators, museums teachers, conservators, etc. need to be more involved.
- The multilateral approach has also strengthened bilateral links between participating museums.
- An action plan needs to be developed as well as an effective way to evaluate past and present activities in order for projects to be completed in a timely fashion.

Sources: Pages of ASEMUS website; Minutes of the ASEMUS 8th Executive Committee Meeting

Samp: African Swedish Museum Network

Samp was initiated by Mr Alpha Oumar Konaré, from Mali, in the mid-1980s when he was vice-president of ICOM, to foster exchange between and development of African and Swedish museums through joint projects, capacity building and research. The Swedish National ICOM committee, which hosts the network, officially launched Samp in 1989, after a meeting between 30 museum professionals from African and Swedish museums. “Twinships” between museums were established the same year. The Swiss museologist and ethnologist, Elisabet Olofsson, is currently the director of the programme and has been a coordinator since its inception. Sida (the Swedish International Development cooperation Agency) has been the main financial contributor but over the years participating museums have increased their resource input.

In recent years, Samp has worked on strategies for a sustainable structure, the development of tools and systems to be used in the network, and capacity building. It appears necessary to overcome certain communication problems, including the fact that several institutions lack computer access. At the Samp General Meeting held in Stockholm in 2002, participating museums approved a new informal organization which was inaugurated in 2004 and guarantees museums ownership of the network and allows greater representation in the decision-making via internet. Twenty museums participate in the Samp network twinning category and ten museums in a joint category. For example the Malmö City Museum, Sweden and the District Six Museum, South Africa have had an established twinning since 1996. The

first twinship project, called “Memory, culture, identity and the building of community”, was concerned with the use of oral history and sound in the making of museum exhibitions. Urban renewal and displacement were the themes of the project. Sound installations have now been incorporated into each museum’s current exhibitions. In 2001-2001, the two museums embarked on a Museum Education Exchange Partnership allowing youths from Cape Town and Malmö to visit both museums. A project in 2003 focused on tackling the issues of fundraising and sustainability.

Source: Samp Annual Report 2004; District Six Museum website

The ALAS network (Asia-Latin America-Africa-Sweden)

The ALAS pilot project was initiated in October 2001 and involved eight museums from four different continents. Three individual projects were implemented in 2002:

- 1) The Museo Historico y Antopologico Maurice van de Maele, Valdivia, Chile, the Department of Museums Antiquities, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and the Museum of Human Science, Harare, Zimbabwe run a Museum Marketing project named “Strategies for museum marketing for the local communities”.
- 2) The Balay ni Tan Juan Museum, Bago City, Philippines and Skelleftea museum, Skelleftea, Sweden, initiated a project called “Outreach-Attracting local visitors through Exhibition” and
- 3) The Regional Museum of Archaeology Altos de Chavon, La Romana, Dominican Republic, the Botswana National Museum, Gaborone, Botswana and the Khama Memorial Museum, Serowe, Botswana began a project for conducting database inventories: “Integrated Database Model for the Documentation of Collections”.

An evaluation took place in Malaysia, November 2002, and determined the need to further elaborate ALAS network possibilities. As a result, a meeting took place in Mumbai, India, in October 2003, to establish an intercontinental network to work on joint projects. The network’s objective is to establish by the end of 2007 an intercontinental network among museums in Asia, Latin America, Africa and Swende, in order to promote heritage understanding for the benefit of communités, their identity and their development. 16 museums have currently applied for participation in the network.

Source: Samp Annual Report 2004

Le Ministère français des Affaires Etrangères et l’Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA)

Les musées au service du développement (MSD 2006-2009) est « un programme de soutien au développement des musées et institutions assimilées pour qu'ils deviennent des acteurs importants de la vie éducative, culturelle, sociale et économique en Afrique ». Le programme fonctionne essentiellement sous forme d'appels à projets et l'ensemble est coordonné par une équipe technique basée à l'EPA (Alain Godonou est le coordinateur général du projet). Il s'agit d'un programme qui couvre prioritairement les pays de l'Afrique subsaharienne. Le financement vient du Fonds de Solidarité Prioritaire (FSP)/Ministère français des Affaires étrangères, le gouvernement du Bénin, le Musée du Quai Branly et autres partenaires.

Source : EPA website

The Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA), Tervuren, Belgium

A few examples of collaboration with African partners which focus primarily on long-term initiatives, the key aspects of which are an interdisciplinary approach and knowledge sharing: Musée National de Lubumbashi (DRC). As a result of the first collaborative venture with this museum during the 2000-2004 period, the MLN's permanent exhibition was updated and a digital inventory of the ethnographic collections was established. As part of this project, African scientists were able to assist training courses at the RMCA. Since 2004, the Museum has also supported the development of an educational department at the MLN.

[Interdisciplinary support for sustainable management of forest ecosystems and fish populations in the Congo Basin. Regional forestry institute created by UNESCO]

Source: Annual Report of the RMCA, 2003-4.