

Museum

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**1492 and afterwards:
encounters continue**

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As 1992 dawns...

Regular readers will note some changes in *Museum*. Beginning with this issue (1992:1) our English edition is being co-published by UNESCO and Blackwell Publishers of Oxford, United Kingdom. Since there has been some doubt about the magazine's future our association with this respected international publisher is good news indeed. The partnership ensures the financial viability of *Museum* by offering production assistance and much-needed marketing support throughout the English-speaking world. The magazine's editorial office remains at UNESCO, but printing, subscriptions and distribution of the English-language edition will be handled directly from Oxford.

Some change in presentation is evident in this issue as well. These will be expanded and refined during the coming year as we have a chance to analyse the results of the reader survey. We are most grateful to all of you who responded so promptly – and so candidly – to our appeal, and we ask your patience while your comments are being evaluated.

We also have the pleasure of announcing the appointment of Marcia Lord as the new Editor-in-Chief of *Museum*. Ms Lord, who hails from Chicago, is a twenty one year veteran of the Organization and brings to her post great experience in book promotion, publishing and cultural affairs.

Our satisfaction in knowing that *Museum* will be in good hands is tinged with sadness however, for we must say goodbye to Arthur Gillette, who is moving to UNESCO's Youth programme. During his three years with the magazine, Arthur brought a fresh and dynamic approach to *Museum*. He put it back on schedule, he injected new personality into its pages and he greatly enhanced its visibility. We shall miss this good friend but we wish him well in his new tasks. Fortunately, as his office

is only a few floors below us, we'll be able to keep in touch.

Finally, as 1992 dawns, we at *Museum* are optimistic about the transformations around us. We hope that whatever changes may occur in your own lives will be for the better, bringing peace and well-being throughout the New Year.

Alison Clayson, Acting Editor in Chief.



From the Editor

The year 1992 has been designated by the United Nations and UNESCO for the 'Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Encounter Between Two Worlds.' Appropriately, museums on both sides of the Atlantic are gearing up, at this writing, to recall and highlight the artistic, architectural and other mutations wrought, on the heels of Columbus's historic voyage, by the Iberian peninsula in what is now called Latin America and the Caribbean. And these exhibitions will doubtless enjoy well-deserved popularity among their visitors and wide coverage in the media.

This issue of *Museum* seeks to complement such an approach. Its scope is broader than the Iberian axis, showing how museums reflect immigration to Latin America and the Caribbean from other 'Worlds': Africa, northern and eastern Europe and Asia for instance. Its vision also shows how 'encounters' have continued over the centuries: Jewish immigration to Argentina and Japanese immigration to Peru, to quote but two cases, are quite recent. Finally, the conception of this issue encompasses mutual, circular and even circuitous influences that – through museums and exhibits – have carried Hispanic American culture's radiance to North America and ('turn about is fair play') back to Spain and other parts of Europe: a museum director to New York and Nicaraguan painting to Denmark, for example.

Above and beyond documenting 'continuing encounters between many worlds' (perhaps not Columbus's prime intention), this issue suggests how vital it is, in today's dangerous world, that culture be allowed and enabled to transcend 'we' and 'they' to become 'all of us'.

Museum would like to thank the two Co-ordinators of the central theme of this issue for their thoughtful help in identifying authors and seeing the issue through to completion. They are Lucía Astudillo de Parra (Ecuador) and Yani Herreman (Mexico), whose biodata appear with their respective introductions on the following page.

A.G.

Museums in Latin America – other encounters

Yani Herreman

The preparation of this issue of Museum has been co-ordinated by two specialists – the architect and museum director Yani Herreman (Mexico), who is actively involved in museum development in her country and in the region, and is a member of our magazine's Advisory Board, and Lucia Astudillo de Parra (Ecuador), who has been responsible for several original museum projects and is currently President of ICOM's Regional Organization for Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are very grateful for the collaboration of the two co-ordinators; over to them now to share a few introductory ideas with our readers.

Looking through the scant bibliographic material on the history of museums in Latin America and their impact on the continent's cultural development, I have been able to ascertain a fact which may be common knowledge but is none the less interesting and thought-provoking.

The museum as a cultural institution was introduced into the New World as part of an alien social system imposed upon a colonized people. And yet, unlike other institutions, as time went by museums became part and parcel of the emerging cultures and came to be seen both as symbols of national identity and as a means of educating people and giving them democratic access to culture. These two approaches to museum development gave rise to courses of action which have persisted to this day, albeit more perceptibly in some cases than in others, and they are the salient features of Latin American museums today.

Without going into historiographic detail, suffice it to say that the museums started out as collections of scientific objects and curiosities, as was the case of the National Museum of Mexico whose forerunner was the Longinos collection (1790) and the Museum of Science in Rio de Janeiro, founded by John VI in 1818 to house his mineral collection. In some cases they also have their origins in collections built up by Europeans who, out of affection for their new country or in a spirit of enlightenment, left the fruits of their research behind them. This, of course, was not the usual pattern, for we should remember that this was the period in which artefacts from the newly discovered lands first made their appearance in private collections and in those of the future great museums of the world.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the voyages of discovery, saw a massive exodus of cultural property from

the continent; this is how the Dombey collection, deposited in the Royal Library of France in 1786 and now part of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, came to be constituted, as were the La Rosa Ferris, T.H. Teunot, Clay Simonds, Sir William Lawrence and C. G. Clarke collections, all from Peru and now in the British Museum – to name but a few.

As I have said, the nucleus of Latin American museums consisted of collections drawn from the local culture and environment. This is how they came to be regarded subsequently as symbols of cultural identity. After the wars of independence, the newly formed governments, recognizing the significance of museums in the fight for national consolidation, used them to project a new ideology. They also saw how valuable they were as a medium of education and communication. The founding statutes of several of the new national museums explicitly refer to this function.

Museums emerged as a major factor in the positivist view of cultural awakening. This idea of the museum as having an educational function, a role in disseminating culture and indeed a social obligation, was to have a somewhat erratic career in the history of the region. However, many museum projects, such as those of Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba and Brazil, among others, as well as the statements made at an important round-table meeting held in Santiago de Chile, in 1972 on the museums of our region, confirm this underlying conviction, which has given rise to various examples of community-oriented museums.

This brief historical outline does not claim to apply to all the countries of the Latin America region which, although their historical background is similar and their present economic and social circumstances very much the same, have none the less preserved their own identities.

In the more recent past (twentieth century) the pattern of museum development has by no means been uniform. Museums have undergone the social, economic and political changes taking place in each country, have adapted to current circumstances and in most cases reflect prevailing cultural policies.

So far I have spoken about 'classical' museums of the kind that emerged and evolved under Spanish or Portuguese colonial control, shaking it off when the time came. This issue of *Museum* deals with the 'other' sources of influence which also made their mark on local culture and left the imprint of their original cultural heritage on American soil. These include Japanese and German immigrants, for example.

The black peoples have been a major cultural component of the Greater Caribbean and Brazil, and must be represented in terms of their real importance in the socio-cultural make-up of these countries. The Museum of Guanabacoa shows not only the historical background but also the continuing presence of black people in Cuba.

In conclusion, I shall return to the theme of the Latin American presence in European museums to ask a question that is difficult to answer in so short an introduction. How is the culture of Latin America today brought to the public eye in Europe? The answer is partly to be found in the following articles. I hope that, as 1992 approaches, exhibitions will be held to inform the world about Latin America and what it stands for, its significance in the past and its influence today. ■



Let's shake hands

Lucía Astudillo de Parra

Just a few months ago, when I was in Denmark savouring a multicultural atmosphere, I was talking to Yani Herreman and Arthur Gillette about the *Museum* issue entitled '1492 and Afterwards. . .' that was being planned. And now, with several articles before me, I am setting down a few thoughts about the content of this issue; communication does, in fact, represent for me the most significant encounter between human beings, one that cuts across time and space.

Accustomed as I am to moving between different worlds, hearing the sound of different languages, feeling at times like the pendulum of a clock as I travel from one continent to another, it seems to me that our life on earth is one of constant discovery of other people. The most important feature of this contact – or this impact – is the learning aspect and the enrichment of our present life with the wealth of spiritual gains that stem from the drawing together of human beings, irrespective of their origin.

There was an encounter in 1492, but in fact knowledge and understanding between human beings form part and parcel of our daily life. One example of the ending of cultural isolation is found in the immigration museums that exist in Latin America. This type of museum provides a clear invitation to us to pluck up our courage and open wide the doors, to venture in and out, to understand and appreciate the values that other cultures offer us.

Through their history, exhibitions and activities, immigration museums make us aware of the need to move away from the ethnocentrism which prevents us from seeking new environments; they help to make us understand that other cultures exist in the country alongside our own and that it is absolutely necessary to eliminate racism and animosity between people. We

have to make every effort to lower the barriers that have been raised between people, countries and continents.

The year 1492 witnessed an encounter with a world that was unknown to those intrepid navigators, but one that had always been there. The year 1992 should herald an era marked by an ongoing process of encounters on a vaster scale in the interests of solidarity, exchanges and world peace.

The staff of immigration museums, immigrants or descendants of immigrants working in museums in the countries that gave them shelter and which are now their own countries, understand better than anyone else the vital need for a vast movement of understanding and solidarity between different components of the human race.

Cultural artefacts of whatever kind, which sally forth from museums and institutions in our countries, should bear the proud stamp of the rehabilitation and enhancement of our roots and cultural identity, and reflect, at the same time, a sincere desire to promote the closer union of people everywhere.

Today, we must all seek to know one another better and overcome the differences that separate us. We human beings run into one another on every corner; we must shake hands and greet each other fraternally. Today, we all have to realize that the relations and interactions between our own culture and other different ones make it easier for us to evaluate our own society more accurately. We must all combine our efforts and work to achieve a world that will give our fellow-beings a better quality of life; and it is as well that museums should be aware of this. ■



Near Havana – a wealth of Afro-Cuban traditions

Marta Arjona

Personal and collective grief and cultural enrichment – these are two conflicting but genuine and profound aspects of a very special type of immigration: the arrival on the shores of the Caribbean of Africans brought by force as the raw material of slavery. To commemorate that experience, and above all the emergence of specifically Afro-Cuban cultural patterns, a museum has been set up near Havana which Cuba's

Director of Cultural Heritage, who is also a member of the ICOM Executive Council, describes below.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the slave trade brought Africans to Cuba chiefly from Guinea, Gabon, Congo and Angola. With the expansion of commerce, however, they also arrived from Mauritania, Zanzibar and Mozambique, bringing with them in their foreboding and sorrow a powerful identity which took its place for ever in the vital force of our cultural memory.

These groups of Africans, who came devoid of musical instruments and speaking a variety of languages, transmitted orally and gesturally the true essence of their customs and beliefs. Lucumi, Mandingo, Ganga, Congo and Carabali, among many other origins, identify the varied regions of the African continent that are present in the transculturation process, as the great Cuban writer Fernando Ortiz called the result of the merging of black and white cultures, the undoubted progenitors of the Creole idiosyncrasy as a feature in the identity of our people.

The town of Guanabacoa, to the east of Havana, was founded in 1743 by royal letters patent of Philip V of Spain. It was surrounded by tobacco and sugar-cane plantations, its economic mainstays of the time, which explains the concentration in the area of large numbers of Africans brought specifically for the planting and cutting of the cane. Hence, too, the traditional maintenance in the Guanabacoa area of settlements of Africans and subsequently Creoles, the descendants of the African slaves who gradually added to the wide range of traditions which surfaced in customs and cults and, particularly in the latter, brought to popular culture the syncretism of the African and Catholic religions.

Exhibit



Photo by courtesy of the author

An indelible imprint

When the Municipal Museum of Guanabacoa was opened to the public in 1964, a whole process had been carried out of retrieving, classifying and preserving items of Afro-Cuban rites, which, assembled in collections of Yoruba, Bantu and Carabali origin, were to make up the basic holdings of the museum in the space assigned to those cults. The museum boasts exhibits of the very first order that display the powers of orishas (deities) and holy men, *santería* (Afro-Cuban ritual) material, characteristic dress for representing Shangó, Oshún, Yemanyá, Obatalá, Elegguá and others, and with the impressive costumes of the Iremes or *diablitos* (little devils) peculiar to the Abakuá rites. There is also a large collection of percussion instruments including Arara drums, yuka drums, rattles and chequerés (small drums), completed by the three Batá drums, all double-skin and waisted, which are the main sound representatives of Cuban santería.

In the seven rooms devoted by the museum to Afro-Cuban ritual, visitors can gather valuable information on the presence of black people in Cuba, and, from the folklore group that works for the museum and is made up of genuine descendants of Africans, can also follow the liturgical episodes in the various ceremonies that constitute the ritual values.

When we see the spectacle in its full dimension, we remember these words of the Cuban Africanist Fernando Ortiz: 'No people has been able to represent those visual symbols of dreadful mystery with such genius as the African Negroes. In contrast with their mystical *diablitos*, masks and sculptures, the Christian representations of demons, goat-footed and horned like the fauns of classical paganism, are generally counterproductive and laughable figures.'

The Museum of Guanabacoa, in all modesty and perhaps on account of this, captures in its displays and its cultural activities programmes that little magic aura of ritual evocation which so moves us; and this is homage to the children of Africa who have, for over half a millennium now, left upon our cultures their indelible imprint. ■

Japanese immigrants in Peru

Amelia Morimoto

Although numerically small, the Japanese-Peruvian community has distinguished itself in many spheres of national life. This is visibly demonstrated in the Commemorative Museum of Japanese Immigration in Lima, which is described in this article. The author has studied psychology, anthropology and museology and has written many books and other works on Japanese immigrants and on museology. She is a member of ICOM and adviser to the museum whose story she tells below.

The official histories of Peru contain many gaps; and just as in its books, so also in its museums, there is a marked lack of attention to groups and cultures that have made a vital and significant impact on its past and present history. This gap is being filled by studies such as those on Japanese immigration and by the establishment of a specialized museum.

The arrival of Japanese immigrants in Peru had its origins in a series of changes which took place under the so-called Meiji Restoration in Japan (1867–1912), during which a sizeable portion of its agricultural population emigrated to the American continent in search of a better life. In Peru, these immigrants were welcomed as workers in the agricultural-export sector (sugar-cane and cotton). Between 1899 and 1923, 18,000 Japanese men, women and children were integrated into Peruvian society in this way.

At present, the population of Japanese origin numbers approximately 45,000 people, 95 per cent of whom are fourth-generation descendants of immigrants. Though numerically small, this community is now active in all spheres of national life. Persons with Japanese names now occupy prominent positions not only in business but also in the professions and in sport, literature, art, music and politics.

The Amano Museum, which focuses attention on the work of the Japanese scholar, Yoshitaro Amano, is one of the most important in Peru, both for the quality of its exhibits and for its encouragement of archaeological research.

The Commemorative Museum of Japanese Immigration was established with another end in view. During the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants, a number of institutions of the Japanese-Peruvian

community decided to establish a museum, on the lines of a similar institution in Brazil, in order to pay tribute to their first immigrants. The campaign was so well organized that the community collected enough money not only to establish the museum but to keep it going to the present day.

However, the museum owes a special debt to the Fundación Cultural Nikkei del Peru (formerly the Fundación 80 Peruano-Japonesa), which was established to provide support for this private museum, and to the fact that it forms part of a very dynamic cultural complex, the Centro Cultural Peruano-Japonés.

3,000 visitors a year

The Commemorative Museum of Japanese Immigration was opened to the public in 1981. The exhibition hall, covering an area of 273 m², was fitted out by the Japanese firm Tanseisha with museographic materials brought over specially from Japan. The hall is divided into six connected areas in which the history of the various periods of relations between Peru and Japan is represented, with special emphasis on the development of the population of Japanese origin in Peru. The displays are illustrated with a profusion of explanatory texts, photographs and objects connected with the first immigrants. A last section is reserved for temporary exhibitions.

This last section is one of the museum's problem areas, for even though a variety of temporary exhibitions have been mounted on specific subjects relating to the life of Japanese immigrants (education, agricultural activities, etc.), it is difficult to find in Peru itself materials for the mounting of new exhibitions that match the modern, sophisticated museography of the rest of the museum.

The museum also has a documentary archives area of approximately 47 m² and a similar area for storing exhibits. But the museum's collections have grown so rapidly that both these areas are now too small to allow proper conservation. In recent years a large area for administrative and research activities has been added to the original surface area.

Even though the museum's premises are not very large in themselves the fact that it forms part of a cultural complex places at its disposal several lecture rooms, an exhibition gallery and a variety of services including a cafeteria and a Japanese restaurant.

In the ten years since its inception the museum has received an average of approximately 3,000 visitors a year, many of them Japanese tourists who find explanatory texts written in their own language. All the museum's literature is available in two languages, Spanish and Japanese.

However, the museum's most enchanting visitors are, without any doubt, the children. Many of them are of Japanese origin and are less interested in reading the sometimes rather dry explanatory captions than playing with the keyboard of the illuminated map of Peru and enjoying the automatic slide projectors and the lively music – the only sound in the museum – of the video recorder showing old films of the days of their parents and grandparents. These children come back again and again in their summer holidays, and give every indication of having discovered the recreational side of contemporary museum technology, which at the same time makes it so easy for them to commute between their community's past and present.

A President of the Republic

In 1990 the museum received an unusual influx of visitors in terms of both numbers

and motives. The fact is that Peruvian society is in such a state of turmoil that it would be difficult for any individual or institution to be unaffected by social upheavals.

In the first place, the serious crisis in the country prompted great numbers of people to emigrate. Those of Japanese extraction emigrated to Japan to take on temporary jobs in Japanese industry. In almost every case, emigration formalities began at the museum, whose archives contained documents and other information concerning their forbears, which they needed in order to legalize their employment situation in Japan.

Secondly, the last general elections in Peru produced another category of visitors: journalists needing to write about a candidate of Japanese origin, who came to the museum to gather information that would satisfy or stimulate the curiosity of their readers. Television and local and international newspapers and magazines concentrated attention on the museum and the Japanese-Peruvian community in general, as a reflection of the interest in the candidate, who is now President of the Republic.

However, the information services provided by the museum are not used only by people needing one specific piece of information: many local and foreign researchers have used the documents kept in its archives as sources for works of scholarship. The museum is in contact with other institutions and communities of Japanese origin, and can therefore be of great assistance to scholars doing research on related subjects.

As the promotion of academic research is one of its basic objectives the museum has also, over the past few years, taken on the organization and sponsorship of seminars, lectures and talks on subjects related to



Japanese immigration. Even though it lacks the budget to finance research itself, the museum does provide logistical support. In the last few years one research group has carried out a large-scale study on the contemporary Japanese-Peruvian community.

In the service of society as a whole

The museum is not only unable to carry out research, as already mentioned, it does not have the resources to retain all the professional and technical staff it needs. The number of paid staff is minimal with only four people to carry out all the administrative and maintenance work. It is volunteer help, both professional and non-professional, that enables the museum to perform its duties satisfactorily. For example, the services of specially trained volunteer guides have made it possible for the museum to receive a relatively large number of visitors at a time. An adequate number of professional advisers can also be counted on for assistance in the preparation of temporary exhibits inside and outside the museum.

To sum up, one can say that the great driving force of this museum has been the devotion of the many people who over the years have come to offer their services, which is true of most of the cultural institutions of Peru. But despite this the museum has not yet been able to exploit its full potential to serve society. For example, its exhibitions do not seem to have reflected the advances made in research. As mentioned above, the descendants of immigrants now play a quite significant role in national life, and this is not sufficiently documented. The problem is the still prevailing view that museums are fossilized manifestations of the past rather than institutions that also reflect the present with all its difficulties and achievements.

This museum should not adopt an outlook that is peripheral to the course of events in the country. Now that most institutions are affected by the crisis, in one way or another, the need is for proposals that could be relevant to society as a whole. As a part of society, the museum should move in that direction. ■

The Jewish Museum of Buenos Aires

A Museum Report

Following the creation in 1862 of a Jewish Congregation in Argentina, the government of that country appointed in 1881 a special envoy to promote immigration of Jewish families fleeing pogroms in Russia. This effort proved successful and by the end of the nineteenth century several tens of thousands had settled on the land in rural co-operatives. Published in 1910, and still considered a classic today, Alberto Gerchunoff's historical novel *Los gauchos judíos* (*The Jewish Gauchos*) recalls this epic.

The first Jewish families had arrived at Rio de la Plata in the sixteenth century. But even earlier, following the royal decree of 31 March 1492 that resulted in the banishment from Spain of some 150,000 Jews under the Inquisition, exiles were to be found among the crews of Christopher Columbus's earliest crossings. These were the first Jewish visitors to a New World that was to welcome hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants in the following centuries.

Many books keep the memory of this immigration. Also relating its history is the Jewish Museum of Buenos Aires, created on the initiative of Dr Salvador Kibrik in 1967 and presently managed by the Jewish Congregation of Argentina. Its collection comprises religious and other objects of cultural,

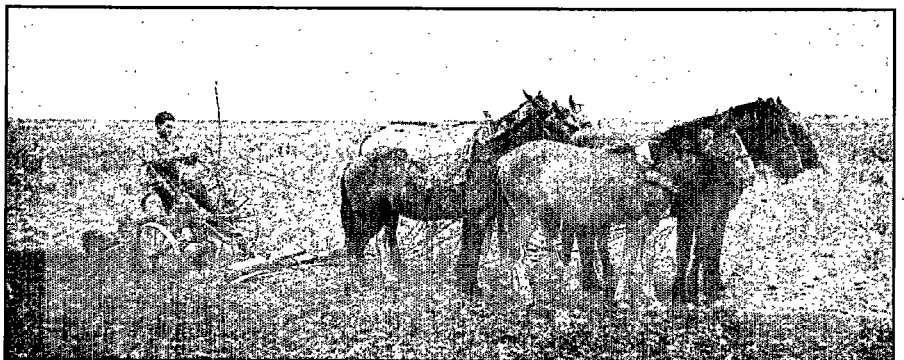
artistic or historical value from different countries of emigration as well as from Argentina, manuscripts (by Martin Buber, Stefan Zweig and Albert Einstein, for example) newspapers and other documents, and further precious items, including maps of property settled by Jewish immigrants at the end of the last century. A special hall is dedicated to paintings. Individual visitors number six to eight a day, some coming from as far away as Japan, the United States and Italy, while the museum also receives groups from schools, university faculties and other public institutions.

The President of the Jewish Museum of Buenos Aires Guillermo Pollack, is an engineer, and its acting director Victoria Bernadsky de Celtman is a professor. It maintains relations with other museums in Argentina as well as France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the USSR.

On accepting to become an honorary member of the museum, world-renowned writer Jorge Luis Borges stressed its role in 'providing historical evidence of the participation of Jewish culture in the development of Argentina' ■

Museum wishes to thank Cristina Barbin, of UNESCO's Office of Public Information, for obtaining the information on which this article is based.

A Jewish immigrant to Argentina in the late 1880s.



Germany to Southern Brazil

Teniza Iara de Freitas Spinelli

Skilled craftsmanship, a high rate of literacy and a love of singing and gymnastics – these were some of the traits brought by German immigrants to southern Brazil and recalled today at the Visconde Historical Museum in the city of São Leopoldo, presented in this article. The author is Museums Co-ordinator for the Secretariat of Culture in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and Director of that state's Anthropological Museum, and belongs to the Brazilian ICOM Committee and the Federal Council of Museology.

'The wave of immigration to Brazil that occurred 300 years after Europe's discovery of America was, in its own way, another discovery of the New World.' The speaker is history professor Telmo Lauro Müller, founder and director of the Visconde Historical Museum in the city of São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and his words, addressed to students on a guided visit to the museum, refer to the opening-up and settlement of southern Brazil by German immigrants.

Portuguese territory in southern Brazil was deserted in the early nineteenth century and in need of a fresh initiative, particularly in order to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Spaniards across the border in Buenos Aires. In those days it was said that the 'gaucho' natives of the southern prairies slept with one eye open, keeping close watch over their frontiers. But as the Brazilian Government encouraged German immigrants to occupy small estates and engage in mixed farming (a sedentary population that contrasted with the authentic 'gauchos'), a strip of land in southern Brazil, amid vast tracts of unpopulated territory, was gradually made secure against the Spaniards. The settlers were therefore brought over from Europe not only to meet the demand for an agricultural work-force but also and above all to make Brazil's borders secure.

The historian Oberacker, listing the aims pursued by the Brazilian state in its policy of colonization through small-scale estates, observes that alongside demographic and military motives (settlement and defence of the existing borders) it also acted from economic motives (supplying the urban population and the army) and to achieve moral and social aims (promoting a sense of the dignity of manual labour and the formation of a middle class).

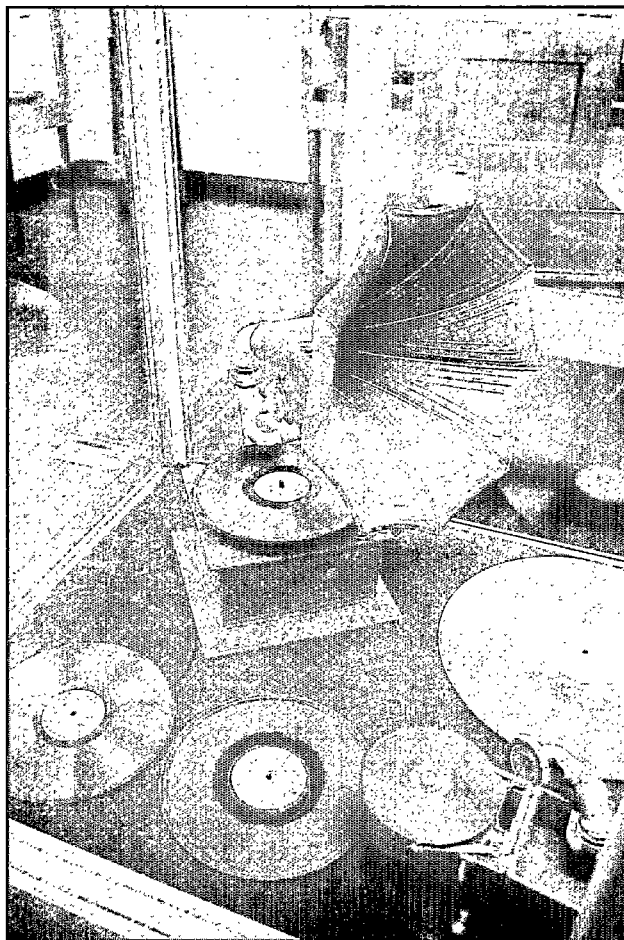
The government set out to absorb shifting segments of the European population, especially Germans and Italians, whose lives had been disrupted in their home countries by scarcity of land, the drift away from rural areas to towns that were unable to support the uprooted peasants, over-population, a hostile political situation and other personal problems. Pursuing the aims mentioned above, the Brazilian Government began to send its political agents to Europe to contract immigrant labour. Chief among them was Major Jorge Antônio Von Schaeffer, appointed by Dom Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil.

From then on, groups of German immigrants contracted by the Imperial Government began to arrive in Rio Grande do Sul. The first group, comprising thirty-nine persons, reached São Leopoldo on 25 July 1824. Quartered in the Imperial Trading Post of Linho Cãnhamo by the Sinos river, they started the first German colony in southern Brazil, the colony of São Leopoldo, which is still very much in evidence today.

There was a regular inflow of registered immigrants into the colony thereafter and it soon became a supply centre for Porto Alegre, the provincial capital, finally breaking away twenty-two years later to form a new municipality. With the settlement of the Sinos and Caí river valleys, Rio Grande do Sul experienced far-reaching ethnic, cultural, social and economic changes.

It was with the aim of recording this saga of immigration for posterity that the Visconde de São Leopoldo Historical Museum was established on 20 September 1959. It is dedicated to José Feliciano Fernandes Pinheiro, a great promoter of immigration, who was the first President of the Province of São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul on that historic date in 1824.

German immigrants brought with them a love of music.



Nelson Winter

The museum as a community's collective memory

The Visconde de São Leopoldo Historical Museum is the fulfilment of a dream and the fruit of the practical initiative of Professor Telmo Lauro Müller, who brought together the authorities, learned circles and other members of the São Leopoldo community, setting in motion the process that culminated in the establishment of a museum whose purpose is to preserve the memory of the immigrants who left such a strong imprint on the region and played such an important part in shaping the personality of the people of Rio Grande do Sul.

The Visconde Historical Museum is a duly registered non-profit-making cultural body with a valuable historical and cultural collection at its disposal and enjoying the support of the Municipality of São Leopoldo. All decisions are taken by the General Assembly, which elects both the Board of Directors and the Museum Council. Professor Müller describes this structure as unusual for Brazil but important inasmuch as the museum is thus spared the influence of state paternalism and of changes of government that make for instability in cultural institutions as administrations come and go.

The museum has thus been able to win the community's respect. It is run according to strict principles, with a small staff responsible for its educational and cultural activities. It also supervises the Casa do Imigrante da Feitoria (Trading Post Immigrant Centre), whose premises were added to those of the museum in 1984.

The Visconde de São Leopoldo Museum was first housed in a hall in the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Arts of Sinos University (an old humanist school founded by German Jesuits in 1859) and gradually expanded as its collection grew. In 1962, the Municipality of São Leopoldo placed an old house at the museum's disposal while new premises were being built. Opened in 1985, the medium-sized, 846 m² building is of modern design and capable of expansion. It was a joint project involving, besides the municipality, a number of local companies, the Brazilian and the German Governments.

The museum's collection currently consists of over 1,000 objects, about 6,000 photographs, 24,000 newspapers (mostly in German), 5,000 special interest books and 140,000 documents. The bulk of this collection was donated by the community, which views the museum as the preserver of its memory. All the museum's exhibits

are records of the daily lives of the people who lived there, thus reflecting a shared past.

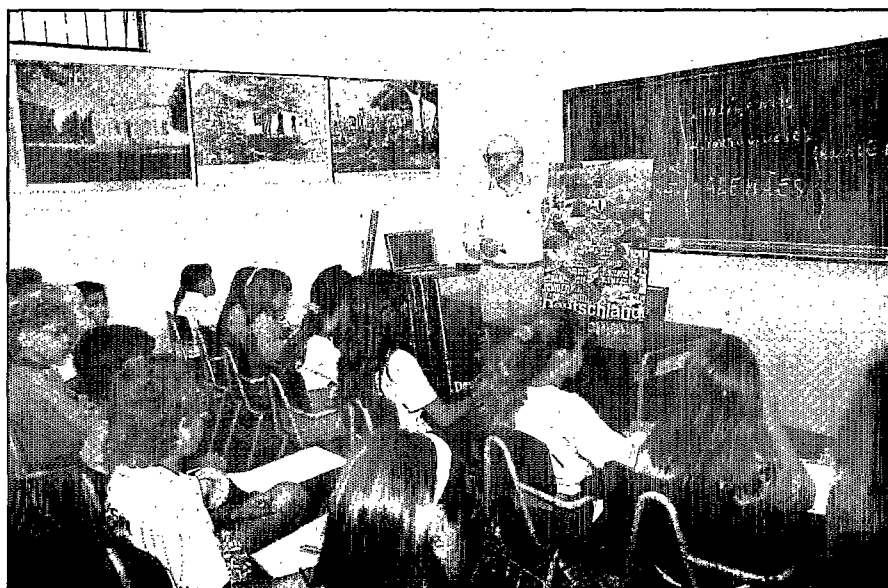
Having celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1989, the museum is still as active as ever. Its daily visitors consist mainly of students from all parts of the country as well as a large number of researchers and visitors from other towns in Rio Grande do Sul, other states of Brazil and many foreign countries. As Professor Müller notes, the museum's importance is perceived more clearly by visitors from afar, especially by Europeans, though some are unaware of the scale of events in our part of America and even German visitors are struck by the fact that São Leopoldo has records of much of their own history.

The museum's programme of activities also includes lectures, often in response to requests from neighbouring municipalities, especially those with a German cultural background. Other facilities include a library, archives, research areas and a meeting room for the members of the São Leopoldo Historical Institute.

Preservation and reproduction of ethnic identity

When students arrive at the Visconde de São Leopoldo Historical Museum, they are first taken to a lecture room for an introductory talk geared to their academic level and focusing on a theme selected by the accompanying teacher. The idea is to give them a clear understanding of what they are about to see, since the museum deals specifically with German immigration and settlement in Rio Grande do Sul. Visiting children, many with German family names, pick up historical details about their ancestors, who were also children once, playing together and using slates and chalk, walking several miles barefoot to school. The 'gaucho' historian Moacyr Flores tells us that out of a total of twenty-eight provincial schools only one was located in southern Brazil.

Bringing with them from Germany an awareness of the value of education, the immigrants, on discovering that no primary-school facilities had been provided for the settlers, decided to set up a German-



*Museum director Professor
Telmo Lauro Müller
on the job.*

language school (die Schule) somewhere in the German colony. Those of the settlers who were best schooled in reading and writing automatically became teachers on behalf of the rest. This accounts for the almost total absence of illiterates among them and for the continued existence in the region colonized by Germans of a large number of schools that are now over 100 years old.

In addition to teaching aids used in the past, the collection reproduces the atmosphere of the time through furniture, clocks, chests, sewing machines, distaffs, flat-irons, clothes, pipes, beer mugs, dishes and a vast quantity of cooking utensils, etc. The children are particularly keen to see and find out more about how the former inhabitants of the region used to live, work and entertain themselves.

Early immigrant houses are first shown in a series of panels ranging from the thatched or wattle-and-daub hut to the more developed half-timber (Fachwerk) buildings. The children compare them with the houses found today throughout the region built according to original models – a representative selection of German colonial architecture in southern Brazil. This gives them a sense of responsibility for the preservation of their cultural heritage.

On the subject of social life, the museum displays a valuable collection of club flags, medals, trophies and other records of the societies established in the German colony of Rio Grande do Sul. It was in these societies that the German settlers used to relax during their spare time, starting off with a session of amateur music-making (Hausmusik). This tradition, imported to Brazil from Germany, spread to the churches, clubs, salons and later to the choral societies (Gesangverein), choral singing being a typically German pastime. Exhibits such as painted wooden targets

used by rifle clubs (Schützenverein) and items used in gym clubs (Turnverein) identified by the 'four Fs' (*frisch* – healthy; *fromm* – devout; *fröhlich* – cheerful; *frei* – free) are also of interest to the visitor.

The German immigrants were deeply religious and their isolation contributed to the sense of unity between family and community, forging a strong link between religion and ethnic awareness. The museum's collection includes musical instruments, effigies of saints, objects of worship and religious books. The most outstanding of these is a carved wooden pulpit which is one of the most admired of all the pieces on display.

A new culture generated by new encounters

The occupation and settlement of the new land gave rise to a form of subsistence agriculture that gradually evolved into commercial farming to supply the domestic market. The museum also has records of this phase, such as weapons, axes, ploughshares, farming tools and other implements for early trading ventures. German trade began on the *picadas*, the rough-hewn trails followed by the travelling salesman (*der Musterreiter*), a typical figure immortalized in the museum's paintings and photographs. A later development was the founding of large import-and-export trading houses. The capital thus generated laid the foundations of German industry and a variety of companies such as banks, insurance companies, hotels and shipping companies.

The Germans were also excellent craftworkers: blacksmiths, tanners, cobblers, brewers and weavers. As a result, the entire economic situation in Rio Grande do Sul was transformed. The Portuguese and their descendants, who specialized in cat-

tle-breeding and the production of jerked (dried) beef, saw their basically agricultural and pastoral life changed as the small German craft businesses laid the foundations of industrialization in southern Brazil, particularly in the Sinos and Caí valleys, an area of concentrated industrial development up to the present day. Innumerable examples of this craftwork are on display in the Visconde de São Leopoldo Museum. The German artisans were so skilful that, according to the historian Aurélio Porto, the word '*serigote*' in Portuguese (designating a piece of the gaucho's saddle) is a corruption of the German '*sebr gut*', meaning very good, a compliment for work well done and a sign of the growing contacts between Portuguese and Germans.

These inter-ethnic relations that evolved throughout southern Brazil (in spite of the established authorities) resulted in the meeting of the different groups that go to make up Rio Grande do Sul society (Indians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Africans, Germans and Italians and those who followed them later on) and generated, after the first few encounters, a rich and multifaceted culture, a cultural universe. An evocative part of this universe has been documented and placed on permanent display in the Visconde de São Leopoldo Historical Museum. ■

A 'Museum Viking' in Ecuador

Lucía Astudillo de Parra

Was Christopher Columbus really the first European to set foot on what was later to be called Latin American soil? The Vikings had already arrived in North America; mightn't they have had the technology to enable them to sail on to more southerly climes? What is for certain is that there is at least one present-day case of Scandinavian immigration to South America (and a museum case at that): that of Olaf Holm, which is described below by the President of the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Organization of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). She has taken some of her information from articles written in the Ecuadorian press by Karina Salazar E., Lola Marquez, Carlos Mora H. and Presley Norton.

I tried everything – telephone calls, letters and personal visits – to get the man to write an article on his life as a Viking museum immigrant, or to agree to an interview, but without success. Olaf Holm, Director of the Anthropological Museum of the Central Bank in Guayaquil, tells me he finds it difficult to write about himself, and he does not like filling in questionnaires.

So I decided to use my own conversations with him, mainly on the work of the Ecuadorian Committee of ICOM, of which Olaf is a very active and useful member, and various articles that have appeared in the national press, to piece together something about this Dane who has made such a contribution to our knowledge of Ecuadorian prehistory, to the creation of the Anthropological Museum of the Central Bank of Ecuador in Guayaquil, to cultural exchanges and to friendly relationships between Denmark and Ecuador.

It was, as they say, purely by chance that Olaf Holm came to Ecuador. In 1940, Denmark had decided to send three people on a mission to various South American countries – one for each of the chosen countries – and fortunately for our Viking, or rather fortunately for Ecuador, it was he who landed on Ecuadorian soil. The war had begun in Europe, but Denmark was still neutral: then, after Olaf had been in Ecuador for a few months, Germany invaded his country, the young man's bank drafts were cut off, he lost contact with his family and, at the request of Ecuadorian people who told him how much they needed the young researcher, he decided to stay – for the rest of his life. Olaf no longer considers returning to Denmark: his work is in Ecuador, and his wife, children and grandchildren are in Ecuador too.

So many dreams

For many years Olaf Holm carried out research and studies into the history, ethnography and natural history of Ecuador. From 1953 to 1986 he wrote more than 100 articles on pre-Columbian culture. From 1951 to 1974 he was Director of *Cuadernos de Arqueología e Historia* (Archaeological and Historical Notebook), a publication of the Guayas branch of the House of Ecuadorian Culture. Titles of his articles include: 'Tattooing Among the Pre-Pizarro Aborigines of the Ecuadorian Coast', 'Artefacts of Concha de Joá; The La Chorrera-Bahía Transition', and 'The Galápagos Islands in Ecuadorian Prehistory'. I expect like all Danes, and particularly those from the city of Århus, Olaf has a deep affection for the sea, and perhaps this is why he is working on a book entitled *La Historia de la Navegación Precolombina* (The History of Pre-Columbian Navigation), which will explain the importance of the Ecuadorian coastline in sailing from Central America to Southern Peru. Olaf continues to share his scientific findings with the reading public, and is now editor of the *Miscellaneous Review of Ecuadorian Anthropology*.

As Director of the museum, he is committed to making it a leading international research centre. Indeed, he would like to see the museum become a research and training centre for the whole of Latin America. 'I venture to predict' says Olaf, 'that . . . the museum is turning into a research centre, where foreign experts will meet and pass their knowledge on to us . . . Several foreign institutions help us in our work, and although it doesn't figure in our accounting it amounts to financial as well as scientific support, since it has saved the Central Bank a great deal of money'.

And at the same time Olaf's dreams have, one by one, been coming true:

Under an agreement with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), specialists have formed a research team to investigate pre-Columbian metallurgy. In particular they are trying to identify the origin of the copper used in Ecuadorian prehistory and trace its movement across South America.

Art historians of the Getty Trust in California have come to Ecuador to study the pre-Columbian art of the Jama Coaque coastal culture (AD 500) in Manabi.

Staff from the International College of German Ethno-musicology, with financial backing from the Volkswagen Company, are studying the musical instruments of the pre-Columbian coastal culture.

A Danish university has been helping

in research work involving the collection and identification of the medicinal plants used by Ecuadorian Indians. They have also been studying the freshwater flora of the neotropical region.

The museum has a standing arrangement with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., which every year sends over an expert to analyse skeletons excavated during the archaeological season.

An incurable disease

Olaf Holm is obviously a polymath: botanist, anthropologist and archaeologist. But I am sure his favourite subject is archaeology. He describes his passion for it as 'a disease for which there is no vaccine, because it consists of a touch of mysticism, a desire for knowledge and above all a disciplined approach to one's work'. Olaf is completely immersed in his world of pre-Hispanic shards and fragments, but he

Dr. Olaf Holm, Director, Museos Banco Central en Guayaquil.



L. Astudillo de Parra

insisted that simply 'describing pots and other pieces one has found is not archaeology, but rather what I disparagingly call "potology". Our main concern must be the people who made these pieces, why they made them and for what purpose they made them, how they lived, how their society was organized.'

Olaf Holm has also been anxious that the Museum of the Central Bank should help to popularize his favourite subject among the students of Guayaquil. He says that the existing textbooks on prehistory are obsolete, since they do not reflect the research work being carried out today and the conclusions that have been arrived at. He feels that the job of revising school textbooks should be done by the Ministry of Education. All the same, in 1985/86 and 1987, with his collaborators, Olaf mounted an exhibition called *The Past Lives on. An Educational Exhibition of Pre-Hispanic Technology*, which gave the students of Guayaquil the opportunity to become familiar with the making of the various tools, and with the way of life and work of the pre-Hispanic cultures of the Ecuadorian coast.

Olaf remarks:

Years ago I remember seeing a fifth-grade school textbook. It was a kind of vademecum – a little history, a little botany, a little geography, etc. There were two or three pages on the Incas, the same on the Aztec, Maya and Chibcha civilizations, and three on Ecuador. How can children be expected to have any idea of the importance of the history of their country when they see it compared with three peoples that have no place in the shaping of Ecuadorian culture? Even the Incas were only in Ecuador for sixty to seventy years. Ecuadorian prehistory developed over thousands of years, before a single Inca

was born. And still people talk about the Incas here. It's absurd. What is much more interesting is the fact that there were cultural exchanges before the Incas. And most interesting of all is that along the Ecuadorian coast a very advanced navigation technique for the times was developed which allowed these cultural exchanges to involve the whole Pacific coast of America at a time when the Incas were not yet in existence. This means that they are just a very short closing chapter: the last chapter before the arrival of the Spanish.

Ecuador owes the rewriting of many pages of its history to this Dane who, when he arrived in the country at the age of 25, knew nothing of its history, and had no inkling that it would become the focus of his professional and personal life. We Ecuadorians – by birth, that is – know that although he is a Dane by birth, his heart, his life and his work are with Ecuador. For us he is a great nationalist – a defender of our cultural identity – and a great internationalist. ■

Peasant paintings from Nicaragua travel to Denmark

Peter Ludvigsen

Why did the peasants of an isolated island in southern Nicaragua suddenly start painting two decades ago? What were the results? And how did a selection of their work find its way, in 1986, to Denmark where it was exhibited in the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen to raise funds so that similar cultural activities could be launched elsewhere in the Central American country? Here with the story is the director of the Workers' Museum.

Lake Nicaragua is situated in the southern part of Nicaragua. Approximately 30 km from the mainland, a group of small islands, called Solentiname, are scattered in the lake. In the 1970s and 1980s, these islands made Latin American history in a most unusual way. Until then, life had passed by without radical change for several hundred years. Due to nature's bounty and a hothouse climate the machete and the pickaxe were sufficient tools for the individual families to cultivate the small plots of land that were placed individually in the clearings of the virgin forest on the islands. The land is harvested several times a year and there are fish in the sea. Approximately 2,000 people live on the islands. For more than forty years the Somoza family had possessed Nicaragua. But for some unknown reason the greedy grasp of dictatorship had never reached Solentiname. Perhaps it did not seem worth the effort.

In 1967 the islands had their first priest, Ernesto Cardenal, who was also a poet, born into the upper class and well-educated. He planted a tree of wisdom in Solentiname. Ernesto Cardenal with a friend from Costa Rica taught the peasants at Solentiname to express their everyday existence through painting and thus look at their life in the islands in a quite new, disciplined way.

A hollowed pumpkin: the start

In 1986 the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen arranged an exhibition of these peasants' paintings, similar exhibitions having been shown in several countries in Western Europe and North America. The exhibition at the Workers' Museum was financed by the Danish Trade Union Movement, while the collection of paintings and other practical tasks in connection with the exhibition were done by ARTE (The Work-

ers' Theatre Organization), Arbejdernes Kunstforening (The Workers' Art Society) and Arbejdermuseet (The Workers' Museum) itself, one of the first of its kind in the world, and established in 1983.

In August 1986 we went to Solentiname to collect the paintings. It was difficult to reach the place by road as the highway between Managua and San Carlos, the provincial capital, had been mined by the Contras who operated in the rainforest in the south-eastern part of Nicaragua. From San Carlos, the passenger boat sailed to Solentiname almost every day. From a distance the islands look very much alike and one gets the impression that they are completely covered with rainforest. When one gets closer, however, one realizes that on all the islands there are huts placed 200 to 300 metres apart along the shore. From a still closer vantage point one can see that almost every family has two huts: one to live in and one for cooking. In the latter there is a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape. Each family hut is surrounded by banana, mango and avocado trees, as well as maize fields.

On his arrival in 1967, Ernesto Cardenal settled on the main island, Mancarrón. A church was built there and when we visited the island in 1986 there was a cultural centre next to his house. The huts are built of clay, whitewashed and with a blue foundation. The children have painted colourful murals on the church, which forms a delightful explosion of colour. This also applies to the square in front of the church. It was here that the co-operatives of Solentiname were established, the peasants assembled here on Sundays for Bible discussions and Ernesto Cardenal's Costa Rican friend lived here. He taught the peasants to paint in oils.

At the time of our visit in 1986, Marina Silva had been painting for more than ten years

and had made a transition that took people from Western Europe several generations to accomplish. But let her speak for herself:

It all started with a hollowed pumpkin. We have only few cultural traditions on the islands and one of them is decorating *guacales* (calabashes) which we used as bowls and drinking cups. But as everybody is using plastic now this has finished. Ernesto had only been on the islands for a short while when he noticed a decorated calabash at Eduardo Arana's house. Ernesto provided him with the tools for painting so that he could try to paint a picture. Eduardo had his doubts about it as he could neither read nor write; but he succeeded in painting quite a good picture.

This is how it started and it changed our lives. It was something new and absolutely wonderful and for us, the peasants, it was a spiritual revival. Prior to this, we had had a wretched existence with hard work. We only existed, with

very little variety in a humdrum everyday life. It was just work, work and work. The husband was in the field, the wife did household chores and the children helped them. Then we became aware of ourselves through painting, we learnt to look at the landscape with new eyes.

We had been unconscious of the beauty that surrounded us. We were blindfolded, but simultaneously with discovering the art of painting we discovered a new world. Now painting is part of our existence. Well, I think I can express it like this: only now can we call our existence a real life.

Ernesto Cardenal not only gave us, the peasants, the incentive to paint, but he also developed the artistic and craftsmanlike abilities of each individual. He built a small workshop for woodcarving and pottery. He got hold of a loom and later on a poetry workshop was established.



Darío Zamora: Liberation from the Yoke

Allan Schnipper

Life would just have continued as it had for centuries if Ernesto Cardenal had not settled in Solentiname. We had hidden talents that no one knew about because we were kept ignorant. We lived isolated from the surrounding world.

In my family we were eleven children, and I have also had eleven children. My eldest son, Alejandro, did his first painting at the age of 17. His landscapes touched us all. We admired the neatly painted leaves, the islands that had been shown in the minutest detail, the trees, the animals.

The world can be changed

Olivia Guevara Silva started to paint in 1976. When we talked to her in 1986, she

lived in a formerly bourgeois villa on the outskirts of Managua. After the Revolution Cardenal became Nicaraguan Minister of Culture, and when Samozá's National Guards were being resocialized in the prisons he arranged for Olivia to come to Managua and take charge of their education so that they, through the peasant paintings, learnt to look at life in a new and better way.

Said Olivia in 1986:

I live in Managua now. To begin with Solentiname was our hope. Now all Nicaragua is our hope, but I keep on painting pictures of my islands, of the beauty of Solentiname. When I see paintings without water I feel something is missing. The same applies to the birds on the islands, the white herons and the cormorants. The birds in Managua seem so small to me. I do not feel like painting them at all.

Now I only paint when I have the time. When I finished my first painting I felt happy and fulfilled. But painting keeps me alive and makes me feel at peace with myself. The war was terrible. It was terrible with the flight to Costa Rica, the dissolution of the congregation, the destruction of our co-operative and the death of my son Donald. Painting helped me to overcome.

At the beginning I could see how my daughter Mariña painted, how she mixed the colours. I asked her why she mixed the colours instead of using the green colour right from the tube. She showed me how to mix the colours. Mariña had found out the technique through experimenting. Everybody in our house painted. We showed the finished paintings to Ernesto and we discussed them. Maria showed Gloria how she painted, Gloria showed Marina how she did it, and Miriam learnt it from Marina. Pablo

Peasant painter
Pablo Mayorga
at work.



Peter Ludvigsen

Mayorga was a mere child when he started to paint. Carlos only started painting in 1976. He is very shy and introverted, he did not attend the church services and was never there when we discussed the paintings. He had a later start than the rest of us, but today he paints some of the best pictures.

When everything was functioning and the perspective of it all had dawned upon many of us, a dissatisfied peasant told the commander of the National Guard in San Carlos what was going on in Solentiname. Then one quick night raid destroyed it all.

However, the changes that within some years had happened to people at Solentiname were not just forgotten overnight. The colours and the patterns had always been part of the traditional ornamentation on the islands. The expression of colours was analogous to the oral narratives. The narratives, the patterns and the colours belonged to an existence that was repeated over and over again. Through the Bible discussions, through the paintings, through poetry, through the community the traditional existence was thrown off balance. Desires for changes were expressed in the discussions, the paintings showed a comprehensible world, true to life, but *changeable*. The traditional pattern of life was broken by the perspective implied in the criticism. A new goal for existence was set.

The Copenhagen exhibition

With the victory of the Sandinistas in 1979 the priest and poet from Solentiname became Minister of Culture. He, however, had also learnt something at Solentiname. Now he knew how he could make use of the traditional culture of the Nicaraguan peasants to build up a new society and

create a cultural awareness among a formerly completely oppressed population.

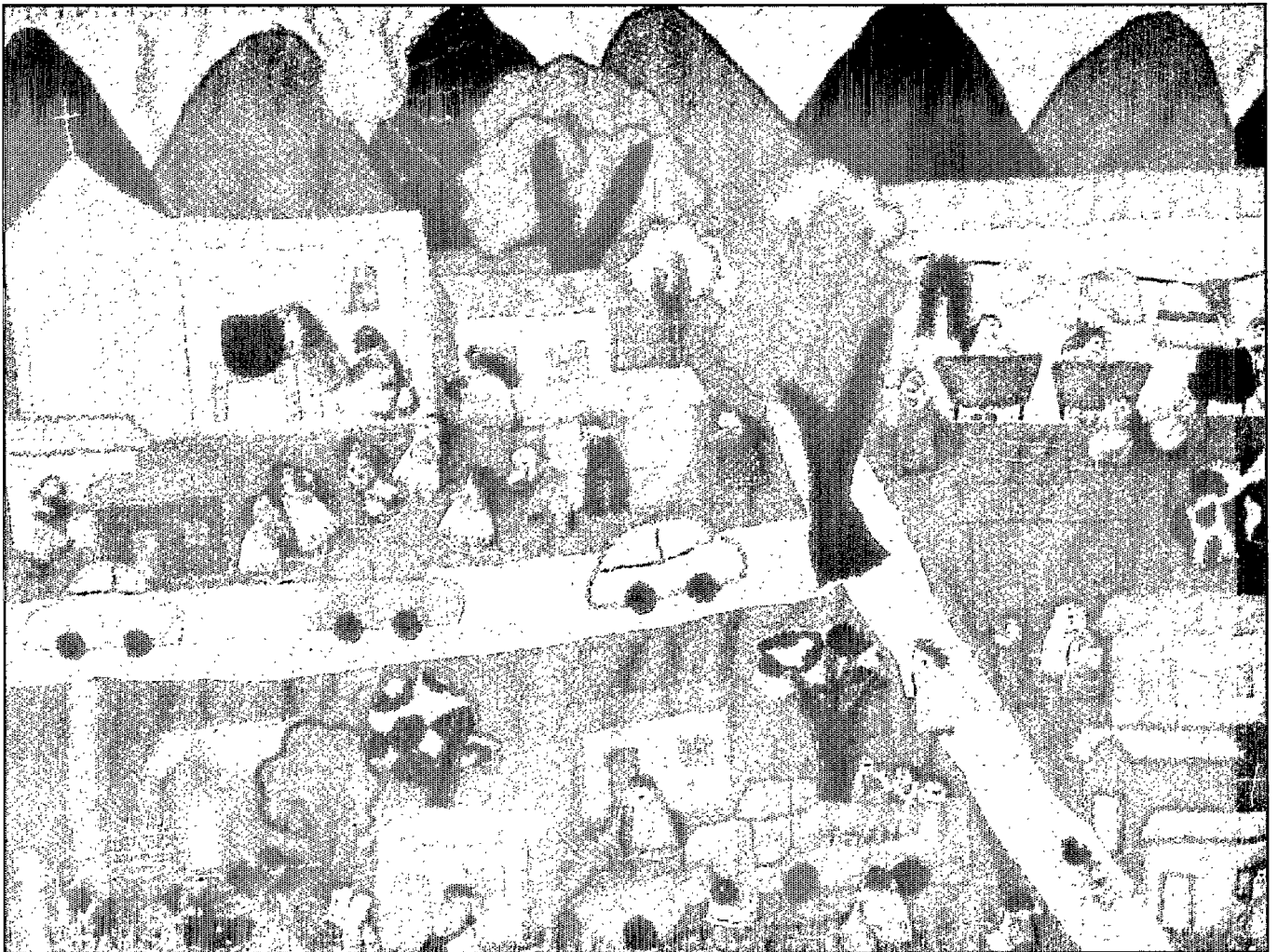
Therefore the principles from Solentiname were transferred to the whole country and during the 1980s there were art schools and poetry workshops all over the country. For many years previously the only oil-paint stores were at the Ministry of Culture in Managua, in one of Somoza's luxury villas on the outskirts of the city. Artists had to deliver their paintings here in order to receive payment for them and get a new supply of oil paints. Under Minister Cardenal, all this changed.

The exhibition at the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen in 1986 was also planned with the aim of giving financial support to the cultural policy that Ernesto Cardenal stood for. The seventy-five paintings, bought in Nicaragua for the exhibition by means of subsidies from the Danish Trade Union Movement, were sold during the exhibition. The result was fantastic. People were extremely interested in the exhibition and also keen buyers. When the exhibition finished the profits were sent to the Ministry of Culture in Managua, in order to be spent on the continued spread of cultural centres.

The rich traditions of the Nicaraguan population formed the base of the new Nicaragua. Peasant painting became an essential factor in the peasants' detachment from their own way of life. This awareness developed and after a decade it turned on its own creators when the Sandinistas lost the election in 1990. The artists of Solentiname actually tell us why this had to happen. They learnt to look at reality in a new way. They knew their islands in the minutest detail. They expressed the details with love, but every time they did so, they dissociated themselves from the things they loved so much. They became part of a cultural process that slowly but surely estranged them from themselves. ■

And in Stockholm . . . Chilean 'samplers'

Thanks to an exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum of Stockholm (December 1986 to February 1987) Sweden was able to discover a veritable rainbow of examples of a typically Chilean form of popular art – *arpilleras*, which are not unlike the samplers embroidered in Great Britain and North America a century ago. We have pleasure in presenting one of the *arpilleras* exhibited on that occasion. And we add that another exhibition devoted to Latin America – Paraguay, in the event – took place at Stockholm's Culture House from June to September 1989. ■



Self-Portrait: A World-Class Art Museum in a Multi-Ethnic Community

Luis R. Cancel

Born in New York City of Puerto Rican parents, the author brought to bear a very personal feel for museum work in a multi-ethnic community as Director of the Bronx Museum of the Arts. He trained as painter and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Pratt Institute, a Master's degree in public administration from Harvard University and another M.A. degree in arts administration from New York University.

I was named Director of the Bronx Museum of the Arts in 1978, a time of crisis for the institution and the City of New York. For the city, the fiscal crisis had overtaken one administration and a newly elected mayor was about to assume the challenge of correcting past fiscal excesses. For the museum, the absence of stable leadership created a climate of mistrust – patrons and government sponsors felt that four museum directors in seven years demonstrated institutional instability – and they were correct: the Bronx Museum was in considerable disarray.

Given that climate the challenge I faced, as an untested 25-year-old museum director, was to demonstrate that the Bronx Museum could be managed in a financially prudent manner, while at the same time maintaining high-quality art exhibitions that appealed to the diverse ethnic communities that reside in the borough.

Having been raised in the Bronx, one of New York City's most populous counties, I had a personal appreciation for the importance placed on ethnic and neighbourhood identification by residents of the county. To a large extent, the Bronx's 1.3 million residents are composed of separate ethnic communities, living adjacent to each other, but rarely interacting. There are large concentrations of African Americans with pockets of West Indian; there is a very large Hispanic contingent dominated by Puerto Ricans but also including recent immigrants from Santo Domingo, Colombia and several central American countries; there are older white ethnic communities of Irish, Italian and Jewish extraction; and a small but growing community from Korea, Taiwan, the Indian subcontinent and Japan.

The Bronx is also a community of extreme economic differences, within the borough's 15.5 Km² you have one of the wealthiest

areas of New York, Riverdale, and one of the nation's poorest, the South Bronx. This condition is additionally aggravated by a reluctance to cross the invisible boundaries that exist around each of those communities. The tendency has been to frequent Manhattan for work or pleasure but not to conduct those same activities in the Bronx. Being a native of the borough, I understood this peculiar type of neighbourhood insularism and devised strategies to assist the museum in overcoming this polarizing tendency.

Spanish speakers not proficient in English

I began by looking at the past exhibition history of the institution and noticed that the museum would vacillate between two extremes: it would go through periods of only doing exhibits about the Bronx, limited to artists who were local residents, or it would try and replicate the Museum of Modern Art, without that Institution's financial resources. I opted for a hybrid approach. I started by dividing up the annual exhibition calendar into three primary categories:

Exhibitions which explored a Bronx theme of some sort, usually addressing architecture or urban planning issues. This could also include exhibits which highlighted the culture of a particular ethnic group – sort of cultural anthropology, but with a strong fine-arts focus.

Exhibitions devoted to the permanent collection focus of the museum. This is defined as twentieth-century works on paper by artists from Africa, southern Asia and Latin America and the American descendants from those geographic areas, African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics.

Last but not least, exhibitions we defined as chapters in modern art. These latter exhibits explore important movements or periods that proved seminal to the art of our time.

In reviewing exhibition proposals by the Bronx Museum's curators, I used these broad categories as a sort of matrix that any given year's exhibition schedule had to match. If one year's crop of proposals emphasized one of the three goals more than the other, we would defer an exhibit in that category and actively seek out a show that met one of the other goals to fill in that same time slot. We generally sought to divide the exhibition schedule into thirds, balancing the three goals, though this has never been rigidly adhered to.

Additionally, the museum implemented a policy of having bilingual (English/Spanish) wall labels for all of its exhibitions. This recognized the fact that the Bronx contains one of the city's largest Spanish-speaking communities, most of whom are recent immigrants and not proficient in English. The goal was to make the didactic information in the exhibit as accessible as possible and encourage visits by these new arrivals. Perhaps establishing a pattern of museum visitation where one did not exist before. When mounting shows that appealed to other ethnic communities of recent immigration status, the museum has used three languages in its wall texts! The most recent example was the one-person exhibit of Mo Bahc, a Korean artist. Although multi-lingual translations place a

The author



1990 Joe Vericker/Waterbury Studio

considerable burden on the museum's curatorial staff, to obtain proper translations and proof-readings, etc., it nevertheless demonstrates to the target community that the institution is making an effort to embrace them and welcome them. It has been my experience that this small token effort generates considerable good will for the institution.

Beyond the enclave

In retrospect, I feel that one of the advantages I brought to my position as Director of the Bronx Museum was my bilingual/bicultural background. Having been born and raised in the Bronx by parents who migrated from Puerto Rico, I witnessed at first hand the hard adjustments many families face in establishing economic roots in a new community. This experience instilled in me an ability to straddle two worlds simultaneously. It was part of my growth experience to have to mediate between the demands placed on my family by the majority culture outside the home and the values and language within. My thinking as a museum professional has clearly been shaped by my childhood experience as a mediator. I am always striving to seek the other person's perspective, and this is helpful in a museum setting when I ask my curators to try to put themselves in the shoes of the visitors who will see their exhibit, as well as in the shoes of the culture being represented. Have they done enough to provide a cultural content where appropriate? Are the labels written in a language that is accessible and informative? Are we doing enough to break the barriers of cultural insularism and ethnocentrism?

These are the concerns fuelled by a life immersed in a large city with divided communities, communities that can offer rich and stimulating insights once the bar-

riers fear erected around them are breached. It has been, and continues to be, one of my personal goals to foster programmes and opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. It has been my great opportunity to institutionalize that goal through the work of the Bronx Museum. And although the task is daunting and our resources meagre, we continue to chip away at the walls erected by racism, confident that every little shard broken off represents progress, no matter how small.

As an institution, the museum has progressed over the past thirteen years and built strong ties to various Bronx constituencies, appealing to their ethnic pride while at the same time fostering opportunities to glimpse the world beyond their enclave. We like to refer to this process as offering our constituents a 'window to the world'. The Bronx Museum's curators and I would welcome any opportunities to further those goals with other museums. ■

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Joan Miró – pre-Columbian inspiration?

Américo Castilla

*Was there some influence of pre-Columbian symbolism from Latin America on the work of the major Catalan artist Joan Miró (1893–1983)? This cannot be affirmed with total certainty, but it is worth asking the question for **Museum's** readers, as does Américo Castilla, an Argentine art historian.*

One of the main components of twentieth-century art is its claim to 'originality'. In these terms 'original' does not equate with 'new' but refers, rather, to its 'origin'. An original work, then, would be one that stands out because of its fidelity to a cultural benchmark from which it draws its origins. While all art claims to be original, certain artists express their originality intuitively. Others, in contrast, hew deliberately to archaic expressions which leave quite uncovered the sources of their artistic language.

The encounter of cultures that happened when Christopher Columbus arrived in America turned out to be especially interesting from the point of view of written language. Indigenous Americans expressed themselves through ideogrammatic signs. Europeans, who had only just begun to use printing, did so through alphabetical symbols. The symbolic and open-ended medium of the American codices found its counterpart in the strict alphabetic code which nevertheless set free, thanks to calligraphy, its expressive potential. These two different ways of perceiving reality and expressing feelings were one of the chief divergences between the two cultures.

It is amazing to see that, at present, both ideograms and alphabetic writing have succumbed to electronics, and to note that it is the artists who have taken up the 'archaic' forms of written expression to announce new messages to today's world. Just as medieval monks shut themselves off from the world to reconstruct knowledge through writing, so today many contemporary artists have chosen to call upon signs – upon writing – as the means with which they evoke on their canvases such ancient components of our fantasies as the kabal, exorcism and witchcraft, expressing through ideogrammatic and calligraphic symbols the timelessness of these practices.

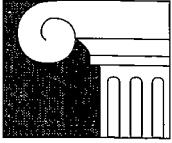
Joan Miró, a giant of modernity, is a curious example of this. His work took on archaic forms in terms both of ideograms and calligraphy. The influences upon him were both Oriental and American. His use of archetypal geometry as well as his knowledge of the work of J. Torres Garcia make it legitimate to assume that the meanings of the symbology of the Americas were not foreign to him. The final work of Miró was built on these foundations – a work both unique and original. ■

The 'Wall of the Sun' at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The spirals used by Miró to represent the sun stem from a very long iconographic tradition. In the American cultures of the Andes, where the sun was the chief deity, this spiral may be observed in innumerable inscriptions.



UNESCO/P. Volta

A City and its Museums



The Museumscape of Frankfurt
Hilmar Hoffmann

If you wanted to paint Frankfurt's museumscape, your picture would be neither monumental nor heroic; intimate, rather, with individual though interconnected scenes of daily life. This would not be an idealized image, then, but a texture rich in real history and tension that makes it worth taking a closer look. Our guide is Hilmar Hoffmann, a former city councillor and Head of the Department of Culture in Frankfurt am Main.

An essential feature that has shaped the history of the Frankfurt collections is the fact that none of Frankfurt's numerous museums owes its existence to the Art and Curiosity Cabinet of some royal *Homo universalis*. Instead, individual items or – less frequently – private collections built up by a few patrician individuals came to be handed over to the public as the basis for a museum. In other cases, items left by scholars or artists were declared the common property of the people. Let me take an example. To his will, written in 1815, Frankfurt citizen Johann Friedrich Staedel appended the Foundation Charter of the Staedel Art Institute, which enabled the cornerstone of Frankfurt's most important art museum to be laid two years later.

The museum had to be relocated several times before finally being housed in a purpose-built structure on the River Main in 1878. The Staedel is a particularly typical example of the specific development of the Frankfurt museumscape. Even in his Foundation Charter, Staedel specified that the foundation should be run by five administrators, five 'worthy citizens of this town', and that they 'need not seek consultation or consent from any higher authority'.

The forward-looking concept of the Staedel Art Institute, combining school and collection, found its equal in the building itself and also reflected an important step in the development of museum architecture. In retrospect, we can take this as an indication that the concept of the museum as monument was consciously propagated by architect Oscar Sommer and even that it was meant to counteract the Prussian hegemony of Berlin's museum buildings. The central protruding façade bay is ornamented with the heroes of the German Renaissance, Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein, after whom the adjacent streets are also named. All in all, this was not a specifically regional or even municipal architecture programme, but constituted a conscious integration in the 'iconology of German museum architecture at the beginning of the Second Reich' (Otto Martin, 1983).

Another example of the bourgeoisie – rather than princes or kings – as museum founders stems back to Frankfurt's

'greatest' son, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. His essay 'On Art and Antiquity' (first published in 1816) called for the works of art then scattered among the patrician houses to be brought together and made accessible to the general public. He was thus *spiritus rector* for the foundation of Germany's largest museum of natural sciences, the Senckenberg Museum. As early as 1763, Dr Johann Christian Senckenberg had established a foundation with the aim of setting up a hospital and a 'theatre of anatomy', a chemical laboratory, a botanical garden, a library of science and, finally, a natural history collection. This list alone indicates how extraordinarily well defined the presence of natural science disciplines was in Frankfurt even then.

From the end of the war to the 1970s

Up to the outbreak of the Second World War, Frankfurt could boast twenty-two museums or museum-type institutions, seventeen of them founded on the initiative of private individuals. Of course, in the wake of the terrible destruction of the war, Frankfurt, like other cities, faced more urgent tasks, above all housing, transport and related infrastructure. After all, Frankfurt very nearly became the capital of the Federal Republic, and by the end of the 1960s, become jokingly known as 'Bankfurt' or 'Mainhattan' that was to be so frequently cited as a negative example of the effects of a town planning policy dominated entirely by commercial concerns.

What about culture? The museums had far from regained their pre-war status. This was by no means a problem peculiar to Frankfurt alone. Throughout the Federal Republic, museum construction was slow. The museums had changed little in real terms in comparison to the pre-war years. Indeed, some had even reverted back to a status quo ante which they had already successfully overcome in the nineteenth century. This could be said, above all about the way the museums perceived themselves and their role, which increasingly alienated them from their potential visitors.

An initial attempt to break out of this stagnant situation, therefore, required a review of the very concept of museums. It was not difficult to pinpoint the factors that made the museums so inaccessible. The Museum of History played a pioneering role at this stage of innovation. It hoped to open up to those social groups who traditionally tended to keep their distance from museums. The educational task of the museums was reactivated and clearly expressed: the 'museum as a place of learning' became the cultural policy byword of the Frankfurt museums.

This criterion was fulfilled in exemplary manner by the Museum of History but perhaps carried to excess and soon generated its own problems. The museum as a place of instruction was virtually *terra incognita*. So it is hardly surprising that, despite good intentions, presentations were rather too verbose. Because of this, the very groups whose interest in museums was supposed to be awakened were being put off.

There was a further and perhaps even more serious problem. Ever since Walter Benjamin, progressive museum educationists had harboured a profound mistrust of the aura of the original: collecting was suspected of manifesting fetishism. Finally, the dominance of the task of mediation led to a tragic misunderstanding: the museum often became a substitute for school and university, for newspapers and television. Indeed, it was expected to make good all the shortcomings of these media, both in terms of historical awareness and in terms of the capacity for visual communication. Too little consideration was given to the unique, specific characteristics of the museum which comes into its own only by permitting an experience that can be replaced by no other medium. So the wheel turned in the 1970s, powered by the large and hugely popular special exhibitions of that decade in the Federal Republic of Germany. These brought home clearly to even the most insistent critic of

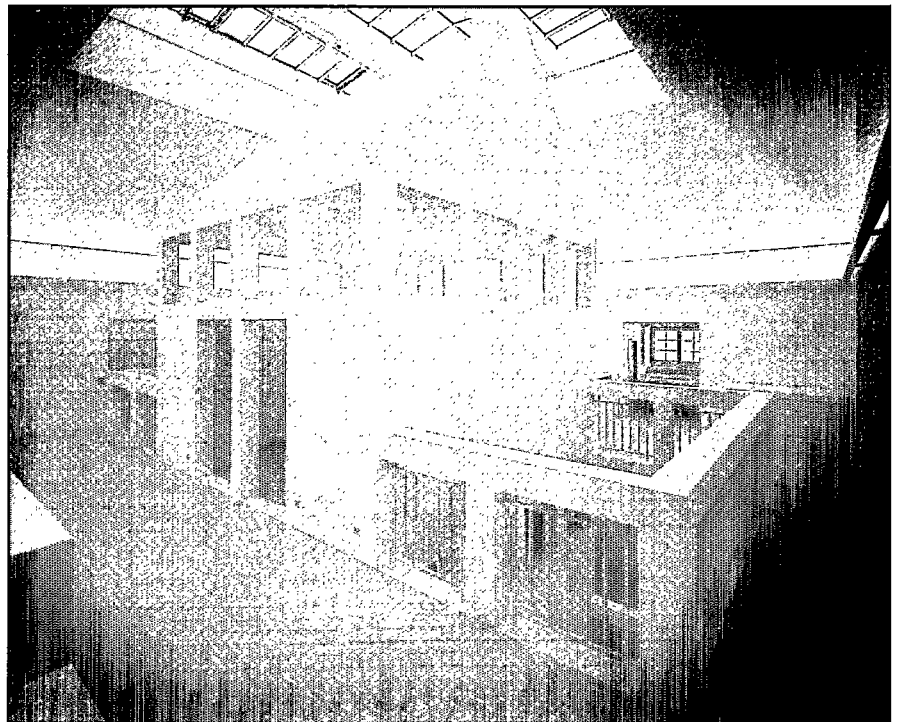
such mass events that there was quite obviously a newly awakened interest in history, however indistinct it might be in the case of each individual. Such an interest is strengthened in the immediate presence of the original.

The newly awakened interest being taken in the new museums by disaffected groups is characterized by a paradoxically changing attitude towards museum visits. Visiting a museum has become – most visibly in the case of openings – a major social event, and often a convivial and informative event as well. People bring their friends or the whole family; the museum has become a meeting place and the starting point for social activities that have little in common with the scholarly ritual of the learned art connoisseur. In this role, however, the museum is no more than a suitable setting for exclusive social meetings, their exclusivity being assured by a renewed acceptance of the existence of a barrier which alienates certain groups from museums!

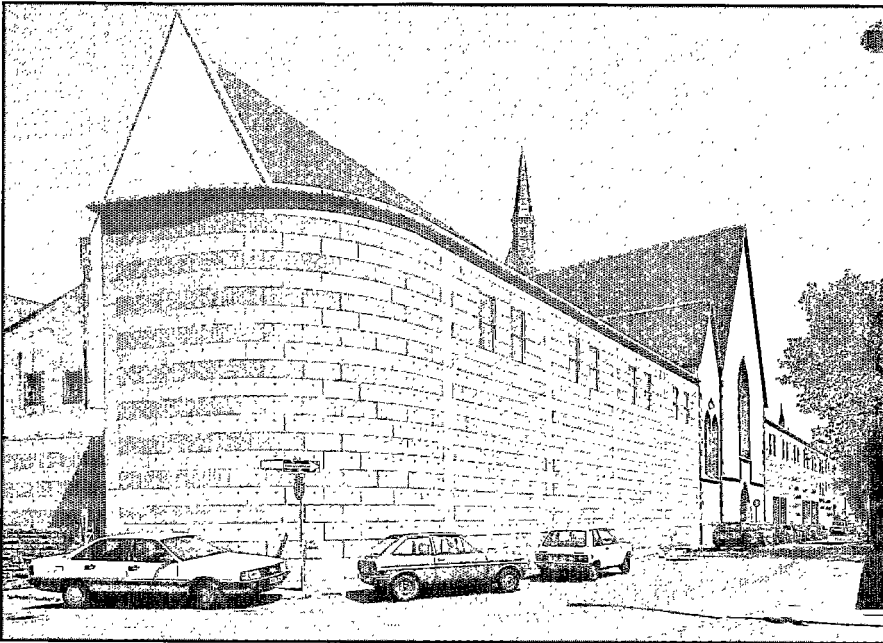
The 1980s: priority to history-sensitive architecture

On a stretch of the River Main the municipal authorities have been able to develop an area that has come to be known as Museum Embankment. The eminent suitability of the site

*The 'nesting doll' principle at the Architecture Museum – a dialogue between past and present.
Architect: Oswald Mathias Ungers.*



Hochbauamt der Stadt Frankfurt am Main



Yet again, old and new side by side – the core of the Pre- and Proto-History Museum is a Carmelite monastery while the wrap-around extension dates from the 1980s. Architect: Josef Paul Kleibues.

makes the concept of Museum Embankment a paradigm of town planning and conservation: every new museum and almost every extension have been able to integrate, at their core, one of the patrician villas that are scattered along the riverbank, thus giving them a new purpose and allowing them to be preserved as historical monuments.

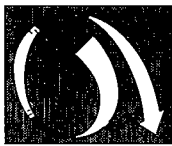
Frankfurt museum architecture of the 1980s has become famous primarily as a result of the competitions that helped to promote the new and still controversial concept of architecture so vaguely termed Post-modernism. The first of these competitions resulted in the most spectacular building: the extension of the Museum of Arts and Crafts. The winner of the international competition for the extension, the American architect Richard Meier had a brief which specified that the park should be maintained and that the neo-classical villa Metzler, in which the museum had been housed, was to be the focal point of the new design.

Meier's building, which ranks today as one of Germany's most beautiful museums, is not monumental, in spite of its large volume, but adapts instead to the historic scale. The many transitions from interior to exterior space embed the ensemble naturally in the museum park whose network of paths, entrance gates and fountain complex make it seem an extension of the museum into the urban environment.

This new building is only one – albeit the most magnificent – of the pearls in the chain of museums along our Museum Embankment. Two other institutions were opened before it as new museums which enrich the Frankfurt museumscape in a very specific way. These are the German Film Museum and the German Museum of Architecture. Both these are of particular significance in terms of cultural policy, because in them the Federal Republic succeeded for the first time in integrating two of the major creative media within the context of a museum.

The Architecture Museum comprises three types of building: a narrow, glass-roofed hall which runs around the old building at ground-floor level; a large hall to the rear which partly covers the former garden of the villa; and, in the centre, the original building itself. Here, an articulate architecture has been created, which claims independence and refuses to be merely a subservient shell for works of art. On the opposite north bank of the River Main, in 1988 and 1989 two new museums were also established: the Rothschild Palais has become the Jewish Museum and the Carmelite Monastery and its extensions the Museum of Pre- and Protohistory. In these museums one finds thus the *leitmotif* that runs throughout the planning of the entire Museum Embankment and is present in all of Frankfurt's new museums, too numerous to be listed, much less analysed, here: a unity of dialogue between past and present. ■

Return and Restitution of Cultural Property



*Towards co-ordination of efforts to combat illicit traffic:
UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee meets in Athens
Etienne Clément*

The author is a Belgian jurist specialist in international law and assistant programme specialist at the International Standards Unit in UNESCO's Division of Physical Heritage.

To intensify exchanges of information on cultural property, in particular on stolen works of art and artefacts from illicit excavations, was one of the wishes expressed by the participants to the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation which was held in Athens from 22 to 25 April, 1991. As was underlined by Mr Tzannis Tzannetakis, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Culture of Greece at the opening of the meeting, illicit traffic of cultural property has now achieved the measure of disaster.

It is rampant everywhere, in particular in Latin America and in the Mediterranean, nor does it spare Africa, Asia or Oceania. Indeed several countries qualified as 'importing states' have demonstrated their readiness to collaborate with countries who are victims of that traffic in order to counter it. For instance the United States has taken measures to restrict the importation of specific items of cultural property when requested by other states party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

But it is necessary to identify the objects in order to retrieve them. This is why the Committee insisted once again on the necessity of preparing national inventories and invited UNESCO to present at the next session a form which could be used as a model. International computerized data bases on stolen cultural objects have also existed for some years at INTERPOL and at the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR). National initiatives have also been taken more recently. For instance Canada has offered to provide UNESCO Member States with access to its international data bases on stolen cultural property and legislation. The co-ordination of these propitious initiatives is a real concern and the Committee asked UNESCO to continue co-operating to this effect with the United Nations Office at Vienna which is competent, within the United Nations Secretariat, for international co-operation for the prevention of crime.

The only international and representative body

This was not the first time that the Committee met in the city where, more than 2,000 years ago, democracy was born. In 1985 Athens (and Delphi) had hosted a session. In 1991 forty-one states, members and non-members of UNESCO were represented (among which thirteen from the nineteen Committee members) as well as the United Nations, INTERPOL, the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) and ICOM. In the sumptuous setting of the Zappeion Palace, right in the centre of the city, and chaired by Mr Yannis Tzedakis, Superintendent of Antiquities of Greece, the session was held in a serene atmosphere. Canada, Cuba, the Republic of Korea and Uruguay were the four Vice-presidents. Nigeria, represented by Mr Yemi Lijadu, was chosen as Rapporteur. Among other questions considered by the Committee was the UNIDROIT draft preliminary Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, which should become a useful complement, in the field of private law, to the provisions of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The Committee called on all states to give careful attention to each article of that preliminary draft, which is to be the subject of a meeting of governmental experts in Rome, a few weeks after the meeting of the Committee.

While the Committee is asserting itself more and more as the only international and representative body for the discussion on the means to struggle against illicit traffic of cultural property, its original vocation remains the examination of requests for return or restitution of cultural property presented by member states. Although no new request had been officially presented to the Committee since the previous session in 1989, several delegations, namely from countries which had never before participated in its sessions, have informed the Committee of bilateral negotiations being considered or actually under way with other countries with a view to the return or restitution of specific items. As to the well-known 'Parthenon Marbles' exhibited at the British Museum and which are the subject of a formal request presented by Greece in 1984, the Committee was able to view the plans and models of the new Acropolis Museum designed to receive the Marbles in the event of their return to Greece. At the Committee's request, the plans will be presented to a panel of independent experts of international repute. ■

Frankly Speaking



Storage: out of sight (out of mind?)

Bernard M. Feilden

In many museums, there are more objects in store than on display. Far from regular public scrutiny, their fate is often unenviable. It can even be tragic, as is stressed by the author of this column, who is from the United Kingdom and Director Emeritus of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCRUM), and has many years' experience in museum trouble-shooting.

You can judge the quality of museum management by the condition of the storage areas. The worst situation that I found was where moulds and silverfish were destroying priceless fabrics that were being stored in a special building; I was advised against entering a related storage facility because it was overrun by fleas, termites, rodents, snakes and tarantula spiders. The manager of this national museum made his getaway while I was being shown around. I tried to organize an international rescue operation, but inevitably received no response.

In another case I visited a country's national archives housed in a damp basement and noted that pipes ran overhead and drains with access manholes were in the floor. These conditions could almost certainly lead to a predictable disaster. Flooding of the basement from overloaded rain-water drains is quite frequent in the basement of my local museum in a twelfth-century castle formerly used as a prison.

Dust is also a menace for storage; it gets everywhere unless one can afford air-conditioning. I found a strange phenomenon in one national museum when I was making a detailed inspection. I was puzzled by conical piles of dust spaced at regular intervals until I looked up at the ceiling of the storage area. Then I saw that the piles related to the gratings on the floor. The cleaning staff had obviously found it more convenient to sweep the dust down the gratings than to carry it away. Clearly noone had inspected the storage area for years.

The best storage arrangements that I have found were in the National Museum of Japan. The room was air-conditioned and had ample space and special racks.

Hand guided by mind

Museum management and its architects should be aware of the importance of storage. Management of our collections is often entrusted to persons with no training in conservation. Because of ignorance, management is hostile to conservators. One

curator I met accused conservators of being arrogant, but I found that he allowed direct sunlight to fall on priceless paintings in his care – noone had been told to draw the blinds. No matter that the gallery was quite empty as the museum was closed to the public.

Paul Perrot, formerly Assistant Secretary for Museum Programs at the Smithsonian Institution and having served as chairman of ICCROM's Council, now Director of the Virginian Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, states: 'Many museums, both large and small, do not have a firm grip either on the numbers or on the condition of the objects in their care'.¹ This is an understatement. Paul Perrot adds,

I do not want to belabour the nature of the challenges. How are we going to meet them? Certainly not by having conservation and the training of conservators the step-children of our museums and our universities, nor perpetuating the situation of disciplines refraining from making the study of conservation, at least in its most elementary aspect, a required element in any curator's experience.

Furthermore, 'conservation is a craft, but it is also a discipline. We must instil in those who are called upon to administer our museums, and historical societies, the necessary understanding.' Paul Perrot goes on:

In an ideal situation I would like to see a museum in which the conservator and curator are absolutely equal and, indeed, in regard to the safety of objects, the conservator should have veto rights over the curator and open access to the director. If we are able to maintain the integrity of our collections, ensure their preservation for the future, and deepen our understanding of their structure, the conservator must have a solid academic foundation. This does not mean short-changing manual skills, but rather it is an affirmation that the hand is guided by the mind, and that the mind must be able to communicate its perceptions clearly to the curator, the archaeologist or the ethnographer, so that the two special knowledges can mingle and create fuller understanding.

The ICOM core syllabus

The 1987 report of the British Working Party on Museums Professional Training and Career Structure² says that in the present situation the most remarkable characteristics of the museum and gallery world are its rate of growth and increasing diversity. There are pressures to maximize resources and to

increase earned income and reach more people. These pressures have practical implications for the training of curators, exhibition and interpretation staff, education officers, indeed, all staff who face the public every day. However these pressures increase, the problems of storage and management must keep all these demands in balance.

At present more than half the junior curatorial staff who enter British museums with degrees in art history, anthropology, ethnography or archaeology do so without any formal job training. This situation is not wholly satisfactory. In non-curatorial fields, such as conservation, design and education new entrants are likely to have had prior training in their field. Because of their lack of appreciation of scientific conservation, curators may neglect the care of the collection in their charge. It is to be hoped that the above report will correct this situation, which is not confined to the United Kingdom. The International Council of Museum's core syllabus should be the starting point for all curatorial training programmes to enable all curatorial entrants to embark on their basic duties of

cataloguing, storing, preserving and displaying the collections in their charge.

Over the last few decades conservation has emerged as a distinct profession. Its practitioners – conservators and restorers – have become increasingly expert in understanding the processes of deterioration, in giving objects a new lease of life and preparing them for display. The knowledge and skills required for this profession can only be passed on and developed by means of adequate training. ■

Notes

1. Norbert S. Baer, (ed.) *Training in Conservation* (volume of essays including Paul Perrot), New York Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1989.
2. John Hall, *Museum Professional Training and Career Structure* (Report of Working Party: Museums and Galleries Commission), London, HMSO 1987.

Frankly Speaking



'What a shame your husband's still alive'
Catherine Van Rogger

Many specialists and artists are united in their conviction and concern that the words 'art' and 'market' in the term 'art market' are today increasingly in conflict with each other. But is this really anything new? And what, then, is the role of the museum, which is often required by circumstances to arbitrate between the two? Here is a point of view, in the form of the story of a life, which should provide ample food for thought on both these questions, and many others besides. This epic has been brought out of its obscurity for the readers of Museum by the artist's wife. The reproduction of one of her husband's works, appearing on the back cover of this issue, is printed with her kind permission.

The painter Roger Van Rogger was born in Antwerp in 1914 and died in France in 1983. His life as a man and as an artist can be divided into two distinct periods – his youth, which brought him success, and his maturity, when his art became more important to him than anything else, leading him to die in complete solitude.

After being made a prisoner of war in 1940, he escaped. Hunted as a resistance fighter, he fled to Brazil where he became famous, holding the second exhibition in the newly opened museum of São Paulo after Diego Rivera, and had numerous exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro. In 1949, he moved to

New York where the Museum of Modern Art purchased one of his large canvases entitled *The Descent from the Cross*. The press gave him enthusiastic reviews. This period in the United States was to be his last contact with the public. In what Fabio Doplicher calls the 'Van Rogger affair', the United States will go down on record as having been open and friendly to him. But Van Rogger was determined to return to France, the country he had fought for and which, in his eyes, was the land of freedom for the individual and a beacon for the creative worker.

Very quickly he realized, as he was to write thirty years later, that 'Mystery had been replaced by dogma, the dogma of a venal morality giving free rein to speculative instincts.' The royal road of ignorance could welcome all manner of trickery while automatically excluding the slow-moving obscurity of the great work that 'is accomplished with the help of time'. He observed that 'dealers, galleries, governments, admirers, critics, collectors, museum directors and ministerial offices all conspire to block the intrusion of anything of intrinsic value or of explosive content into a field that, thanks to them, is now just like any other field'.

He was thus excluded from the French art scene as from 1952. From that time on, he plunged headlong into the solitary world of painting.

Van Rogger was not the type of man to let himself be edged out without a fight. He unrelentingly continued to work on his contacts with museums, galleries and official bodies: 'I have just got back from Paris where I am still trying to get a foot in the door. I must succeed in this, and I shall not abandon my effort not to confine myself to a facile other-worldliness. I would like the twentieth century to come alive and I belong to it', he wrote in 1965. But only 'non-committal stares' came to rest on his canvases. Only once did his work evoke an unexpectedly enthusiastic reaction, when a Parisian museum curator, in front of the painter and his works, exclaimed to me: 'Oh, Madame, what a shame your husband's still alive! I could have done such a marvellous retrospective!' Nineteen years later, when the happy event of the artist's death had occurred, I was told: 'As your husband has unfortunately passed on he is no longer contemporary and we can't do anything with his work.'

And they didn't. This exclusion reached such proportions that after twenty years, Van Rogger asked the Ministry of Culture to kindly issue him with a certificate of rejection. A month before he died, he wrote in an indictment that I have entitled 'Testament': 'Today, the art scene, whether in museums,

galleries or the market-place, has been declared out-of-bounds to artists and public alike.' That was just a statement of fact and perhaps of regret, as all painters have a profound desire, as Cézanne put it, 'to paint pictures like the ones you see in museums'.

But, who, today as in those days, is willing to take the risk of exhibiting paintings in a museum? Certainly not the curators. Their perilous profession obliges them to perform fantastic balancing feats in order to stay on the tightrope of official art without falling or losing face in the eyes of their colleagues. They keep their eyes glued to the only thing that can keep them from falling – popularity – and cannot even for an instant look anywhere else. Small wonder that the word 'risk' is constantly on their lips. Logically, the risk would seem to be greater on the side of the artist who embarks on a non-commercial career, but then again every profession has its pitfalls. What are those of the curator? Like those of any civil servant: the risk of breaking the rules. But, you may protest, art is the domain of creative freedom, to which so much lip service is paid that it is surprising to see how panicky curators can get when faced with a real work of art. Most often, their incompetence sends them running straight into the sheltering arms of the law. It is always comforting to have a law handy and not to transgress it.

This law is the law of the market-place. Luckily, it is imposed on them from the outside, the product of an overwhelming consensus of all authorities, especially since the Ministry of Culture has itself decided that art should be a money-making venture just like any other. It is only a short step from this attitude to the one that considers an unprofitable work not to be art at all. The museum is thus just one more cog in the wheels of commercialism. As one curator put it: 'An exhibition in a museum is only valid if there is a sale before or afterwards. Everyone has to eat, you know!' Conversely, a dealer once told me: 'After a promotional period in several museums, it would seem vital for these works to go on to the normal gallery circuit.' It is certainly very generous, if not very cultural, to wish to fling the artist into the commercial market, but what happens when, 'As your husband has unfortunately passed on, he is no longer contemporary', and he no longer 'needs to eat', and only his work survives?

'Ah, his work!' a curator said to me. 'I'm not really qualified to judge his work. But nobody is interested in abstract painting any more. Nowadays you've got to be representational.'

A curator did dare to mount an exhibition two years after the

artist's death, however. The risk could not have been that great, as almost five years later, an article praising his museum was illustrated with a photograph of the curator in front of Van Rogger's canvases. In point of fact, the real risks were for the paintings. Two of them were returned damaged, without so much as a word from the museum! A revealing anecdote emerges from this exhibition. A well-known critic wandered in on the opening day and was amazed.

'I must do a piece on this. It's truly astounding. Who is his dealer?' he asked me.

'He has no dealer.'

'I mean his manager. Who represents him?'

'No one.'

'You mean he painted all this without a manager?'

'That's right.'

'Ah.' He left, disconsolate and never wrote the article.

So I have finally concluded, after a lifetime of struggle in

France – first at the top, then at the bottom – and after years of patience, that one cannot expect museums to be pioneers. They have neither the courage nor the capacity for it. Furthermore, it is not their role to do so. The curator is in charge of preserving, being responsible for the best of what the past has to offer us and following, with the inevitable time-lag of at least a generation, the evolution of art. Today, when you want to appear serious, you show art from the 1950s. This is due to the fact that the curator is closer to the general public, as the dealer is, and not within the narrow confines of the world of the artist, who shapes the future and carves out the real features of our era. This creation always exists outside the time-frame of the present, that is, that of the art market, which is by nature changeable and style-conscious. Needless to say, this time-frame is not that of timeless and enduring art. In attempting to attune themselves to the market, museums imagine they are being avant-garde, but this is only an illusion that they pay for by relinquishing their cultural vocation and abandoning all intrinsic criteria in their choices. In fact, true creation will always elude them for it runs deep, communing

*'What a shame
your husband's still
alive'
(C. Van Rogger)*



C. Van Rogger

with the subterranean substance of a society with which the artist must cope like everybody else, without the privileges of those in the museum-gallery crowd.

Paradoxically, this is why the average person who appreciates painting will discover the real art that will become representative of its era long before the system of museums and dealers does, provided of course they are allowed to come into contact with it.

This is the whole purpose behind the exciting adventure of the Fondation Van Rogger. Faced with the system's predictable delay, the artist's work naturally turned to the public, without any commotion, far from dealers and the media, independent and non-exploitable.

Imagine a path leading up a hill to a magic land of space and colour. Behind frescoed walls, there are canvases, more canvases, and yet more canvases. The exhibition is renewed each year, using selections from a body of work accumulated over the course of thirty-five years, comprising oils, gouaches, drawings, engravings and sculpture. The public has no idea what is awaiting them, having been directed there by the simplest of signposts. They are dumbfounded, nothing has prepared them for what they are about to see. No publicity, no article, no pre-digested critic's review.

They sense from the outset that the paintings they are gazing upon here in solitude have not been seen by anyone but themselves (i.e. the public), so often held up to ridicule and humiliated, whose opinion is never solicited until it has been mercilessly pre-conditioned. 'This painting is much too profound,' a curator (yes, another one) once informed me. 'You'll never get the public interested in it. The public only likes superficial things. Just look at what's being shown!' he added somewhat inconsequentially. Today, after the fifth Van Rogger exhibition at the Fondation Van Rogger, I can assure him that he was wrong. People who love painting want to see painting, and the better the quality of the painting, the happier they are. When confronted with evidence, the honest man admits defeat. The other desperately seeks some intellectual justification.

In front of these canvases, everyone finds the dignity that comes of making one's own cultural choices. From the state of passive spectators, they rise to that of active participants, aware that the fate of this work lies in their hands. Each painting invites the viewer to join in this adventure. The work awaits its public. This public, which counts many painters in its ranks,

knows painting when it sees it; and each individual does what he or she can to promote it. Some contact the museums in their region only to be turned down, others organize exhibitions in private contemporary art centres, while yet others write about this work in private reviews. Gradually, these paintings are beginning to find their place in the museum of the imagination – the only truly viable, untouchable museum, located outside of the notion of historical context, where Rembrandt rubs shoulders with Goya, Cézanne and Lascaux.

It is not my intention to discuss the intrinsic value of Van Rogger's work, but I feel compelled to do so by the remarks I can already hear being passed, even at a distance, along the lines of: 'If no curator wants to exhibit his work, it can't be good enough to put in a museum.' How familiar I am with this line of argument which springs so naturally to the mind of anyone who hasn't seen his painting! This is the easy way out – the perfect alibi. But what about people who have seen his work, then reproachfully declare: 'What a shame your husband never exhibited his work!?'

Here is what Van Rogger wrote to a civil servant in the Ministry of Culture in 1979, which applies to this naïve type of public as well:

There was no Art, and no 'modern' man. Paris is still a dumping ground for garbage-encrusted lies, and especially so today, when the mind is buried under the most conventional ignorance of all time. No culture, no love. The most elementary sort of instruction takes the place of higher learning. Even its Machiavellianism is ridiculous. I've just come back from there, and I dream of it still. I can reach out and feel the decadence of ancient times. Read again what they said about France's greatest poet, Baudelaire. They made him a senile half-wit.

Don't let's go over the ground we've already covered, shall we? I know by now that my painting is not going to be appreciated and once again, I have to see to getting my canvases back. The last one took three years to be returned, subjecting me to every form of insult known to man. Could you please get them sent back to me, if it's not too much to ask?

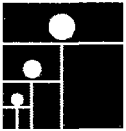
I am right and reasonable to feel like the living dead in this non-life, made up completely of a long succession of assassinations. Who wouldn't sell his eternal soul to be able finally to harm an artist?

I will go back this morning, like every other morning, to my studio, poorer, less sure of my choice, my life, my destiny, and of my right to paint. Burning the canvas at both ends. With, as my sole companion, folly, useless indignation; and seething with anger to avenge the damned, plunging deeper into genius

like a floating, translucent, transcendental dawn, invisible to all save the initiates, whom I paralyse.

But a force greater than my reason and good sense presses me onward. ■

WFFM CHRONICLE



Newsflash

Thinking of setting up an Association of Friends of Museums? WFFM, at its Board of Directors which met on 12 and 13 October 1990, decided to devote its efforts to developing its network of relations in non-member countries of the Federation, and specifically to establish contacts with persons wishing to create Associations of Friends of Museums.

For further information, contact the Secretary-General of WFFM at the following address: Palais du Louvre, 34 quai du Louvre, 75041 Paris Cedex 01, France. Tel: (1) 48 04 99 55.

'In' or 'out'?

Museums from the point of view of adolescents

Today, young people have become a target public for an ever-increasing number of museums. Filling in gaps left by the schools and supplementing the schools' educational role are two increasingly important goals in the museum world. But how do adolescents feel about museums' overtures to them which, in some cases it would seem, border on attempts at seduction?

To find out, Museum asked a class of young people about 14 years old at a secondary school in a working-class neighbourhood of Paris. These students were from Asian and North African, as well as European, backgrounds.

Enthusiasm ran high at the start and the idea of devoting an entire issue of our journal to a 'Junior Museum' was even discussed. However, this initial enthusiasm waned as interest inevitably dropped off. In fact, our young reporters did not, except for the rare exception, come across any advances from the museums and (even less) any attempts at seduction!

Ten months later, there was only a hard (or should we say hardened) core left made up of Sandrine Rona-Beaulieu and Stéphane Janin. Jamila Hamoumi was also part of the group, and Touhami Hannachi and Christian Kam joined in occasionally. Sarah Kousierov added to the general effort through the criticisms she made. Olivier Carrère may not have had much to say but he contributed all the illustrations for this article. The entire team would like to thank the directors and staff of the museums they visited for meeting them and for so kindly answering all their questions.

The fruits of their work are contained in the sometimes impressionistic but always well thought-out articles and ideas that follow. Listen to what they have to say. ►

For lots of us, museum rhymes with humdrum

Sandrine and Stéphane

A museum usually means a compulsory class trip led by one of the teachers. Students can't ever choose the museum – that's always done by the teachers, who want to use the museum to liven up and illustrate their lessons. The only problem is, teachers aren't necessarily capable of sparking the class's interest in the topic they've chosen. So instead of being an interesting outing, the trip turns out to be a chore – something you're forced to do, an extension of school. Being in a group of twenty-five or more students doesn't help you to concentrate, and tends rather to encourage horseplay and rowdiness.

This isn't exactly the purpose of the trip.

Going to museums with your school doesn't make you want to go back on your own or with friends at the weekend. Young people prefer different kinds of amusement when they're free.

It's not the 'in' thing to go to museums. They've had this reputation for ages and it gets carried on from year to year. Museum-going costs far too much for the enjoyment you get out of it. And museums are often old-fashioned, dusty, fixed, still and deadly dull. You feel uneasy walking through these enormous, endless halls crammed full of rather poorly displayed objects that don't really grip your attention, whose labels tell you things that are too technical for visitors to be interested in or understand.

In addition to these objects, you also see museum guards who are as fixed, dusty and motionless as the things they are guarding. They sit on their chairs in a corner of the room, waiting for the museum to close so they can go home. They don't have much to say, except 'Don't touch.' They keep an eye on things, but don't explain them to you.

A Crime Museum !

Museum guides from the old school – the ones who reel off a speech they've learned by heart – don't make us feel like going to museums to listen to them and their boring spiels don't inspire us to ask questions, discover new things or think up others. Someone told us a true story about a guide who, in a room full of paintings by Old Masters, rattled off his speech like a parrot in such a chopped-up way that the meaning was lost:

'Here we have the Madonna; And child from the school; Of Boticelli...', whereas it should have gone: 'Here we have the Madonna and Child from the school of Boticelli.' We almost died laughing.

We were, however, lucky enough to visit the Museum of Musical Instruments with a good guide who answered our questions very nicely. He made our visit pleasant and interesting, despite the fact that it is one of those dusty, old-fashioned museums, which may well account for its lack of visitors. The new museum that the guide described to us is being built and promises to be much more interesting. We plan to be some of its first visitors once it has opened.

Another big reason for our lack of enthusiasm is that we don't know what each museum contains. We are vaguely aware of them: the Ethnology Museum, the Maritime Museum, the Louvre, the Holography Museum, and so on. But it wasn't until Museum gave us this assignment that we looked for something more unusual and interesting. These museums didn't come to us – we had to go to them. We had to buy a book, *Les Musées en culottes courtes* (Museums for Children; by Brigitte Ventrillon and Anne Cally, Editions Hermé), to discover and choose the ones that would interest us the most. This is how we

discovered the lovely little Museum of Viticulture. Others attracted our attention as well, such as the Henri Langlois Film World Museum and the Loire Boat Museum (in the Touraine Region). Still others fascinated us but we didn't have time to visit them. We still intend to go some day out of curiosity and because they are unorthodox, original, not compulsory and nothing to do with school! There are also the Breadmaking Museum, the Children's Museum, the Museum of Education, the Museum of Mechanical Music, the Museum of Counterfeiting and the Museum of Police Archives (which would be more enticing if it were called the Museum of Crime).

*You feel like doing something else, or
nothing at all*

But you never hear about museums in the street or on the Metro, or on the television or radio, whereas any newspaper will provide you with a complete list of films, plays and concerts you can go to that week. Going to the cinema is an easy thing to do, while going to a museum is quite an exploit.

The major museums sometimes put up posters advertising special exhibitions: Galliéra on fashion, La Villette, the Grand Palais, etc. There is public information and it is often very effective, with very attractive posters that draw the crowds. People are pleased to be able to see something that they may never again get the chance to see. On the other hand, you can go to a museum any time – you keep it for a rainy day, or for when you're bored. But then, that particular day you feel like doing something else, or nothing at all. Going to a museum is rather like an expedition and requires too much effort. And we're too busy with other things to want or to be able

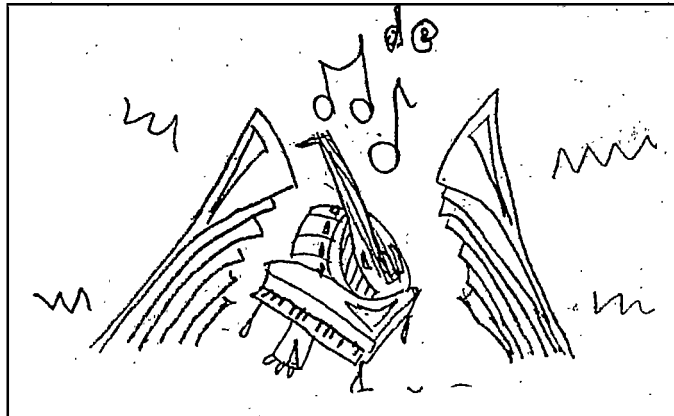
to make the effort when our time is more than taken up with friends, school work, parents, reading, family outings, out-of-school activities and so on. The list is endless.

Is there a solution? It's not really for young people to find it. Sure, we have ideas, but putting them into action is another thing altogether. One idea would be to put up museum advertisements in the schools and change them periodically. Distributing pamphlets in classes is another, along with holding contests and showing commercials on prime-time television between spots for detergent and disposable nappies, advertising in magazines read by young people, in television guides, on independent radio stations, and finally, issuing discount cards encouraging us to return more often.

The Museum of Musical Instruments

*Stéphane, based on an interview by
Christian*

This museum is over 100 years old. A real collection had been put together by 1860, when the museum was opened to the public. Since that time, the museum's acquisitions have grown to include some 4,000 instruments which, owing to lack of space, cannot all be shown to the public. The oldest date back to the sixteenth century. Classical music from European countries, and particularly France, is the emphasis here. All the families of musical instruments are represented: strings, wind and percussion, but none is truly complete. Only a handful of pre-sixteenth-century instruments are still in existence, and these are scattered all around the world. Those dating from antiquity or the Middle Ages are even rarer and often turn up in ar-



instruments in an improved setting, thus making music more easily accessible to the public. The instruments will be presented by families, and their history will be traced along with that of the music played on them. Music from the period

archaeological digs and so are in very bad condition.

The price of an instrument can vary according to several criteria, such as its condition, authenticity, rarity and history. But, as with paintings, the fact that a certain instrument is in vogue can quadruple its price. The museum's most spectacular exhibits are probably its harpsichords, which belonged to the extremely rich who had them decorated to match the interiors of their homes. Undoubtedly the most original instrument in the museum is the octobass – a gigantic double bass measuring four metres, with a sound box two metres high and a long neck. To play it, you had to climb up on to a platform and use an enormous bow while operating a mechanism that pressed the strings against the neck of the instrument.

To be able to display all its instruments, the museum is moving to a new location as its current premises consist of just a 300-square-metre room and a small mezzanine gallery upstairs, both of which are a bit run down. The future Museum of Musical Instruments, which is currently being built at La Villette, alongside the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, the Géode and the Grande Halle, right next to the Conservatoire de Musique, will display a larger number of

will be played over a system featuring infra-red headsets allowing visitors to hear the music appropriate to each display without disturbing the person 'listening and looking' at the neighbouring exhibit. What will they think of next?

A Wine Museum... in 'Water Street'!

Sandrine and Jamila

Barren women no longer come to the Rue des Eaux (Water Street) to drink 'the miracle spring water'. The spring is still here, however, and its water still has the same ferruginous, sulphurous and laxative properties, and is also renowned for its effects on the fertility of women. But today, its visitors are wine-lovers and other interested people who make the pilgrimage to view the magnificent cellars from the Napoleonic era and the vintage French wines stored there.

Before becoming the property of the 114 oenologists and wine-lovers, the Echantons de France (Cupbearers of France) who, in their red and blue uniforms with genuine ermine collars (and Monsieur Joce, their real, genuine Maître), go about the business of defending and promoting wine, this former Abbey 'des Bonshommes' was

the setting for many an adventure. It was here, among other places, that the kings liked to come to think and take refreshment, and that Balzac hid from his creditors and the tax collector. You can still imagine him sneaking down the back staircase. Napoleon himself came here to refresh himself (history does not enlighten us as to his choice of beverage) with his generals. It was here, too, that Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Benjamin Franklin came for a drink of spring water, that is. It also served as a refuge for conspirators under the Directoire, before becoming a cotton mill for a time.

But to get back to the cellars, they were made into wine cellars for the restaurants on the Eiffel Tower. This fascinating and attractive museum was only opened to the public in 1981. It contains tools and materials relating to wine-making. An array of instruments from the past used in vine-growing, the grape harvest and vinification are on display, accompanied by a few wax dummies used to demonstrate some of the techniques used at that time.

There are also strange and originally shaped bottles and glasses, as well as a collection of unusual, elaborate decanters which are more aesthetically pleasing than they are practical. Our guide also showed us stemless glasses that ill-intentioned gentlemen gave to their female companions to make them drunk. Being women of good breed-

ing, they had to drain their glass to the last drop before being able to put it back down on the table.

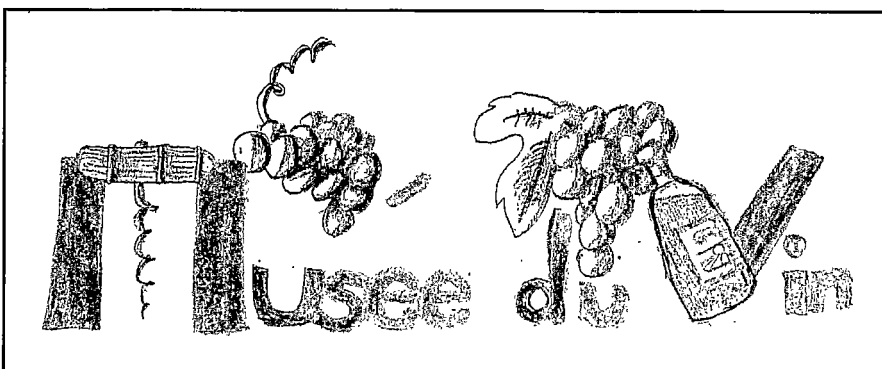
It was a fascinating visit, bringing history to life for us. It was interesting to see how much wine-making has changed over the years. Since the museum has very few visitors, we were able to stay as long as we liked, lost in our reveries.

An exhibition of Loire river craft

Sandrine

The idea of putting together an exhibit of Loire river-boats in a tiny hamlet in the middle of the Touraine countryside came to Monsieur and Madame Pronobis only after they had been asked to make scale models of the larger boats that they manufacture and sell to fishermen and the rural community. It took them only a year to set up this permanent exhibition! One year to build the models, find authentic objects and old photographs and a year for Madame Pronobis to write a small pamphlet describing fishing in the region and life in the olden days on the Loire and Vienne rivers.

The museum was opened in 1987, and in spite of its cramped quarters, it manages to display around 100 model boats. Its collection includes, among many other features,



a magnificent pulley dating back to 1856, which is probably the oldest item in the museum. Special nets for catching shad are also featured, along with model fishermen, paintings of the region, and explanations about barges and other river craft.

I liked this simple, unpretentious little museum, which, having received no financial help for setting it up, owes its existence entirely to the dedication of a couple who wish to preserve the traditions of Touraine and Anjou.

The Film World Museum appealed to us all but we soon realized that our interview was rather weak because although we all love films, we don't have enough grounding in the subject to be able to ask suitable questions. We did discover, however, that since its founding in 1970/71 by Henri Langlois, the museum has had approximately 40,000 visitors a year from all over the world, ranging from kindergarten children to senior citizens. We also learned that the visitors who were the most interested and got the most out of their visit were children and adolescents. The museum's director confided to us that his favourite item in the museum is the first Lumière brothers poster, and that despite his admiration for Ingrid Bergman in Flemming's Joan of Arc, he is extremely partial to Romy Schneider's beauty!

One morning we also visited the Radio France Museum, but as we arrived too late to catch the first guided tour, we had to wait an hour for the next one. It was very interesting, of course, but the brochure we were given tells you absolutely everything about the museum much more clearly and in better detail than the exhibition itself. What interested us most was the development of the microphone from the early days of the heavy, cumbersome ones, like those you see in the old movies, to minuscule, ultra-discreet lapel mikes. In the old

days of live television, when singers moved around the stage, they always tripped over their microphone cords. Today, that's no longer a problem, since the cords have disappeared!

Last year, I went with a friend to see the exhibition of the Mucha poster collection owned by Ivan Lendl, who had come to Paris for the French Open tournament. I loved all these posters and spent a small fortune buying postcards of my favourites. When I got home and showed my treasures to my mother, she said: 'If you had only told me, I could have shown you the books we have on Mucha!' Looking at these books after seeing the originals, I must say the reproductions are much less interesting because even if they are well printed, they aren't the original size and the colours are different from the ones I remember seeing.

The last museum on our itinerary was the Orsay Museum. We had the same impressions about this museum that we had had about all the others, – that it was much more interesting to visit them with a couple of friends instead of the entire class and the teacher, and that museums were so much more interesting viewed this way that we promised ourselves we'd go back soon, because we hadn't had time to take everything in.

I've just learned that the anatomical models they talked about in the television film *Les deux Fragonard* really exist and are on display at the Museum of Veterinary Science. I can't wait to go see them! ■

Water, water everywhere (even in Switzerland?)

Yes, even in Switzerland, a land-locked country probably best known for its high mountains, humidity is a constant threat to many museum objects and thus a permanent foe of their keepers. In this special feature, two Swiss specialists – one working in Lugano and the other in Geneva – report on new developments in the struggle to maintain humidity at as acceptable levels as possible in museum environments.



Conventional climate vitrine built around painting's frame.

Photo and vitrine: Royal Academy, London

Paintings: the (show) case for passive climate control

Emil Bosshard

Concerning museum technologies there is a widespread assumption that "the more sophisticated the better". This article suggests that, even in such a very hi-tech country as Switzerland, that assumption is not necessarily correct. Having been deputy restorer at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and conservator of fine arts at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, the author worked as chief of the conservation department at the Swiss Institute for Art Research in Zurich and, since 1985, has been head of conservation of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano.

Climatic conditions kept as uniform and as constant as possible: these are the prerequisites demanded by restorers and museum technicians when works of art are to be handed out on loan, transported or permanently exhibited. If a work of art is to be placed in an exhibition hall with dubious, unstable or merely unpredictable climatic conditions, a climate-controlled show-case is needed for the more sensitive exhibits. Usually the air-conditioning of such show-cases is limited to maintaining a certain relative air humidity. The methods for reaching this objective are manifold, and have already been published in detail elsewhere ¹, so that we can refrain from listing them again here. A basic distinction has, however, to be drawn between active and passive climate control.

In the case of an active, motor-operated system, electrical and physical assemblies are used for cooling, warming, humidifying, dehumidifying, demineralizing and circulating. Such apparatus, with complete automatic control by means of thermostats and hygrometers, are certainly most impressive from the technical point of view. They have disadvantages, however, which must not be underestimated: they function only as long as there is electricity available, they are very expensive, they need maintenance and are very susceptible to damage. Experience has shown that their reliability is limited in duration. It must in fact be stressed that a climate-controlled show-case that functions imperfectly and erratically is much more harmful for the object displayed in it than if no climate control at all is used.

Considerably safer in this regard are passive climate-control systems, which avoid the need for energy supply and have no moving parts. For about thirty years now hygroscopic materials, maintaining the climatic conditions at original loading time,

have been inserted into closed show-cases. These are materials which emit or absorb humidity, and which are thus able to stabilize the relative humidity in the show-case. As is well known, silica gel had proved to be particularly efficient in this respect: in the form of silica gel granulate, it is now being used in museums throughout the Western world. The fundamentals of this system and experience with it have been documented in numerous reports ². Particularly informative were the results of its practical application obtained by F. Schweizer and A. Rinuy in the 1980s ³. It was shown, in fact, that by using efficient buffer material and relatively air-tight show-cases, it is possible to stabilize the climatic conditions for long periods of time.

What about cases in use today?

In the traditional climate-controlled show-cases, the painting (or several together) is mounted with its frame in a case made of glass or acrylic glass where the silica gel, usually placed behind or under the painting, is commonly concealed by means of a textile covering (photo).⁴ This system offers the advantage that the show-case does not have to be tailor-made to suit the measurements of the painting, so that, if necessary, it can also be re-used for another exhibit. It has also certain disadvantages, such as:

The painting is placed into a rather unsightly and (especially when acrylic glass is used) highly light-reflecting case, which spoils the aesthetic pleasure of viewing the work of art.

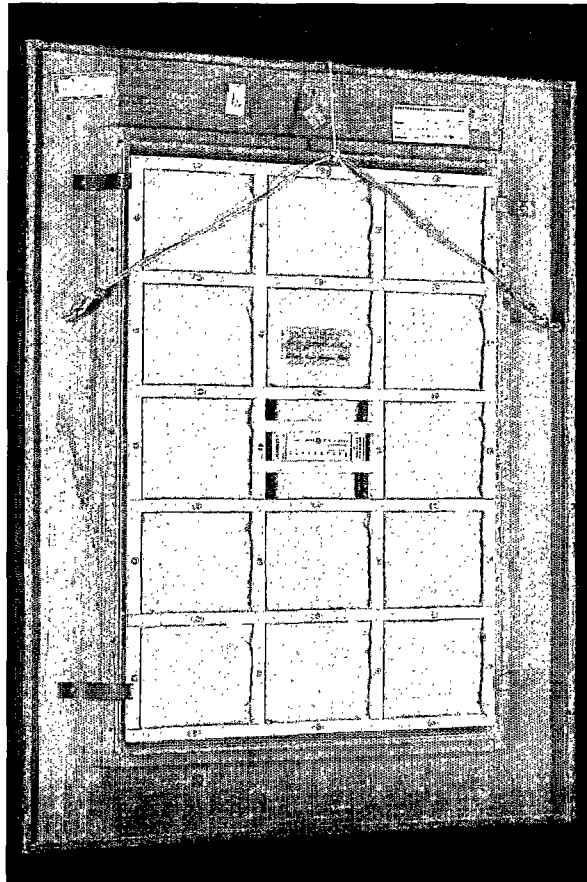
The second defect is technical: the efficiency of such showcases is directly dependent on their intrinsic air-tightness and on the ratio of buffer material used to the internal air volume. Now, this type of show-case has a consider-

ably larger air space around the painting than is actually necessary. The bigger the show-case, the less airtight it is likely to be.

A further disadvantage becomes evident when exhibits are given out on loan: the work of art is removed from its normal surroundings, it goes on a short (or long) trip, during which it is exposed – as is well known – to hardly controllable climatic conditions, and finally arrives at the pre-conditioned display case prepared for it. Although the climate conditions for that display case may have been agreed upon in advance, the lending conservator has practically no possibility to check them, let alone to change them, when he or she arrives with the exhibit. Thus, even with optimal precautions, the exhibit passes through three different climatic environments: (a) at the home museum; (b) in a case during transit (quite apart from packing and unpacking); and (c) in the host display case. After the exhibition, the same condition changes occur again in the reverse sequence.

It is possible to eliminate these shortcomings by making the modifications described below:

The show-case is reduced in size, until the painting itself (without frame) is separated on either side by only 5–10 mm from the inside surface of the case. In this way, the air volume to be conditioned will be so reduced that small quantities of silica gel will suffice. The show-case thus becomes so compact and flat that it can be fitted into the picture frame. With a front of non-reflecting glass, which is practically invisible, it will now be not more disturbing than a painting under glass. The advantages with respect to loan



Emil Bosshard

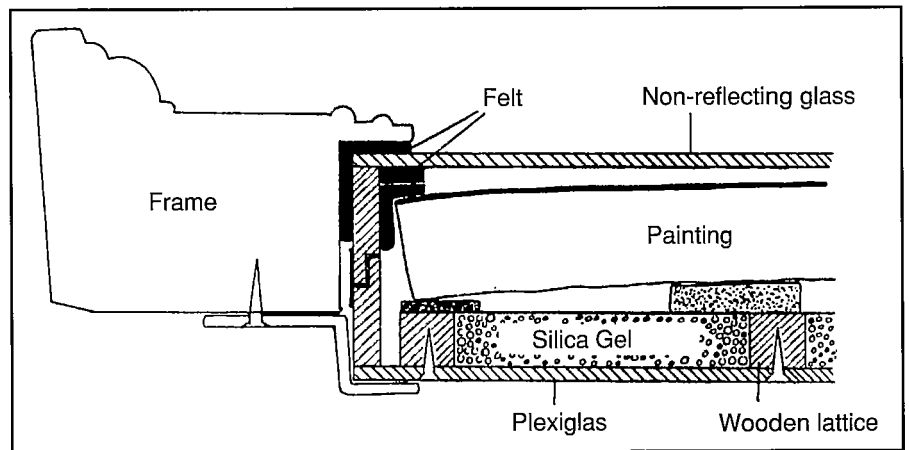
Reverse of climate-controlled case showing bags of silica gel and paper hygrometer to monitor the relative humidity inside the closed case.

and travel are considerable. The painting can now be encapsulated in its usual climatic environment and can be packed into the transport box on its own show-case. In this way, it proceeds to the host museum and back well protected against variations of relative humidity and against physical contact of any kind.

Design

Such a type of show-case was developed by Ben Johnson and George Wight in California in the early 1980s. In co-operation with the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the system has been further improved and brought to near perfection, so that now a standard climate-controlled show-case is currently available⁵. It consists of a plexiglas box with a normal width (depending on the painting's thickness) of 3.5 to 8 cm, and with a front of non-reflecting glass. The whole inner rear side is fitted

Fig. 1: Schematic cross-section of a climate-controlled case as used by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Emil Bossbard.



with a wooden lattice 1 cm thick, whose paint openings hold "Art-Sorb" silica gel⁶ contained in small fabric bags. The fabric bags in turn are held in place by a fine metal mesh. (photo)

The painting, usually on a wooden panel, is put into the cover, with some felt buffers in between (see schematic drawing, Fig. 1). The latter keep the panel at a distance of about 5 mm from the front and sides of the made-to-measure showcase, and thus permit the air to circulate freely between the front side and the rear side of the panel. The panel, from the direction of the rear (i.e. the wooden lattice), is softly pressed towards the front into the cover by means of several foam-rubber or felt buffers. As a result, the inside of the show-case is used approximately as follows: one third of its volume is occupied by the painting, one third by the bagged silica gel with its wooden lattice, and one third remains as free air space.

The conditioning of the silica gel is carried out by exposing it, for three to four weeks, to the desired relative humidity (RH), or even better to a RH which is about 3 per cent higher than desired, since the RH diminishes slightly after the show-case is closed. Then the show-case is closed with-

out the use of screws, by putting the rear side over the front side with the painting, and sealed by covering the joints in the side walls with an airtight adhesive tape. Also enclosed, but visible from behind, is a paper hygrometer, which permits the approximate degree of relative humidity to be read without having to open the show-case.

Test results and experiences

At the present time, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano has fifty-eight paintings in show-cases with stabilized air conditioning as described above. Originally, these cases were intended as a protection for sensitive wooden panels during temporary exhibitions and badly air-conditioned museums. Since the method proved to be so reliable, it was decided to leave the paintings in their show-case after the exhibitions. Many of them have, at the time of writing, been in their cases for six years without interruption and without any maintenance. The paintings are on thin German and Dutch wooden panels, as well as Italian ones on thick panels.

Basically, the time during which the closed show-case can maintain its relative humid-

ity depends on the following factors:

the airtightness of the case; the more hermetic it is, the longer the climatic conditions remain constant.

the quantity and the moisture-retentive capacity of the buffer materials.

the relative degree of humidity of the air surrounding the case; the greater the difference between internal and external relative humidity conditions, the faster change will occur inside the show-case.

It must be assumed that a show-case designed in this way is never completely air-tight. On one hand, plexiglas itself is to a limited degree permeable to air. On the other hand, any change in air pressure and temperature, as occurs for instance during transport by air, will doubtlessly cause a certain movement of air into or out of the case.

Now, how does the relative humidity inside the show-case behave? In order to determine this, two test programmes were carried out. One was empirical, measuring

and recording once a week the behaviour of such a show-case in an unclimatized room over a period of two years. While the RH in the room fluctuated by 30 per cent, that in the show-case varied by only 2 per cent (Fig. 2).

Parallel to this, another test programme was carried out in 1988/89, under accelerated laboratory conditions, by Mervin Richard of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. He had calculated a half-life of two years for these cases, and postulated that if the show-case with an RH of 50 per cent inside was continually exposed to an environment with only 30 per cent RH, the RH inside the case would decrease to 40 per cent within about two years. Inside the display cases described here, the volume of silica gel constitutes approximately one quarter of the air volume. The result is an intended over-capacity, a clear "overkill". It ensures a rapid levelling out of RH fluctuation, even in case of a sudden change in temperature. In his tests with a climatic chamber, Mervin Richard noted that a temperature change of 10°C causes the relative humidity inside the case to change only by about 2 per cent. ⁷

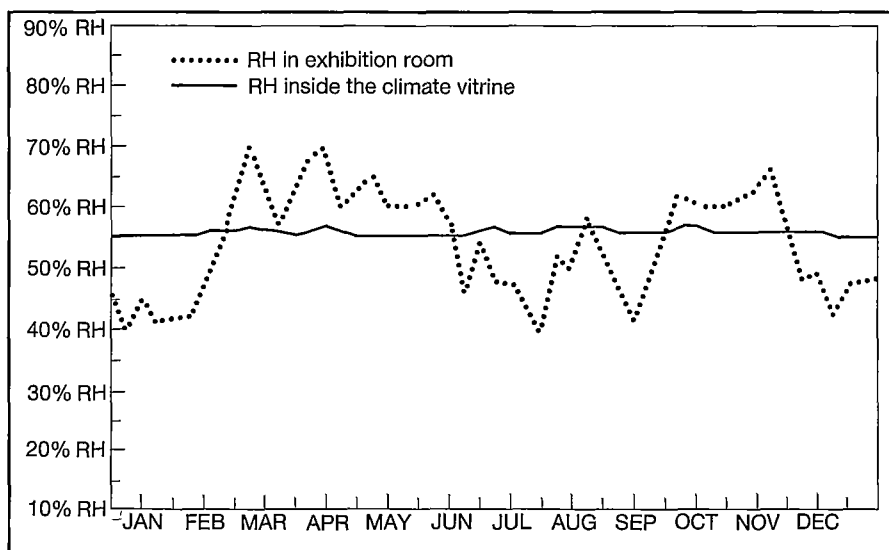


Fig. 2: Empirical test in Lugano 1989. Emil Bosshard.

Sudden sharp changes eliminated.

The results obtained show by these tests that this type of display case can ensure controlled and stable climatic conditions (with respect to humidity only, not to temperature) over many years without any maintenance. Although the relative humidity inside will doubtlessly alter towards the value of the humidity of the room, this will occur very slowly. It is especially if the painting hangs in a room, which in winter has a too low and in summer a too high air humidity, that this buffered show-case will provide effective protection by balancing out its own average value to correspond with the average relative humidity of the room. Detrimental sudden and sharp changes of relative humidity inside the case are thus almost completely eliminated.

Notes:

1. G. Thomson, *The Museum Environment*, London, 1978/1986; *Museum*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 (146) 1985; G. Ognibeni, *Ausstellungen im Museum und anderswo*, Munich, 1986.
2. T. Padfield, "The Control of Humidity and Air Pollution in Show Cases and Picture Frames", *Studies in Conservation*. Vol. II, 1966, pp.8-30; N. Stolow, *Controlled Environments for Works of Art in Transit*. London, 1966; G. Thomson, "Stabilisation of RH in Exhibition Cases: Hygrometric Half-Life", *Studies in Conservation*, Vol. 22, 1977, pp.85-102.
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5. Manufacturer's address on request.
6. Produced by Fuji-Davison Chemical Ltd.
7. These test results vary according to size of vitrine and temperature range. All tests were made with empty vitrines. The results can be expected to be even better with vitrines filled with panel paintings. ■

Hygrometry and the happiness of a harpsichord

Jacques Deferne

Musical instruments are particularly vulnerable to the mood swings of Lady RH (relative humidity). Jacques Deferne should know; he has a Ph.D. in science (from the University of Geneva) and also plays the harpsichord. He is at present curator of the Department of Mineralogy at the Natural History Museum in Geneva as well as being chairman of the Association for the Early Music Centre in the same city. It was his friendship for harpsichord makers that prompted him to go more deeply into the problems associated with hygrometry.

"I don't need a humidifier for my harpsichord. I live on the shores of Lake Geneva and in winter I leave the window wide open for a quarter of an hour every morning. That's quite enough!"

This unfortunate harpsichord was in grave danger of its soundboard splitting, its action being disturbed and its pitch distorted only hours after being tuned. The viewpoint quoted above shows how little the notion of relative humidity is understood, though it must be conceded that it is not so easy to grasp as the notion of temperature and the graduations on a hygrometer are not a bit like those on a thermometer.

A dash of hygrometry

The air can absorb a certain amount of moisture, the exact quantity depending on the temperature of the air. The maximum amount – when the air is saturated – corresponds to a reading of 100 on the hygrometer scale. The ambient air, however, rarely takes in all the moisture it is

capable of absorbing. If it only takes in half, then the hygrometer will register 50 per cent humidity. This is what is known as relative humidity (or hygrometric state). Its measurement is essential to the proper conservation of several parts of our unfortunate harpsichord, for example.

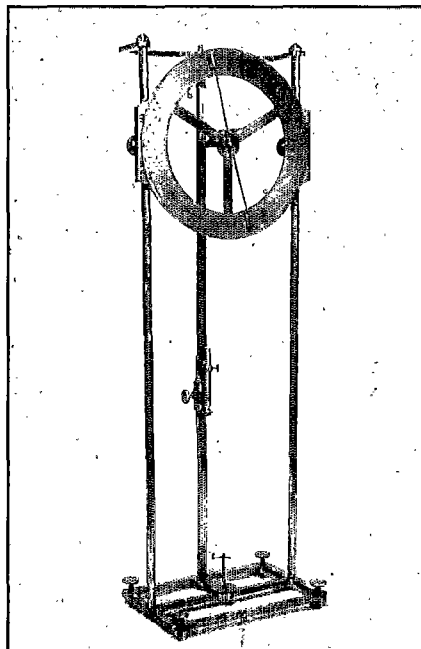
The Swiss physicist and naturalist, H.B. de Saussure (who was born near Geneva), was the first to study hygrometry and to define a unit of measure for humidity. Basing his work on the property of hair to lengthen by 2.5 per cent when relative humidity passes from 0 to 100 per cent, he constructed a very simple hair hygrometer. This instrument, calibrated by comparison, is a little inaccurate but, being inexpensive, is still widely used.

Other, far more accurate, instruments are now to be found on the market. The principle on which they work is the variation of the dielectric constant of alumina per the electrical resistance of a salt sensitive to atmospheric humidity. A digital display unit shows simultaneously temperature, relative humidity and dew-point temperature. (Dew-point temperature is the temperature at which relative humidity is 100 per cent. At this temperature moisture condenses on objects of equal or lower temperature.) The accuracy of these instruments is guaranteed to within 0.1 per cent for temperature and 1 per cent for relative humidity. They are expensive and intended mainly for professional use in air-conditioning.

Mathematical studies have made it possible to work out a diagram which takes into account hygrometry's three interdependent variables: the absolute amount of moisture contained in the air, temperature and relative humidity. Using this diagram it is possible to find any one of the three variables once the other two are known and hence to solve problems such as how

A hair hygrometer – the laboratory model invented by H.B. de Saussure and constructed by Jacques Paul in Geneva C. 1780.

Illustration by courtesy of the author



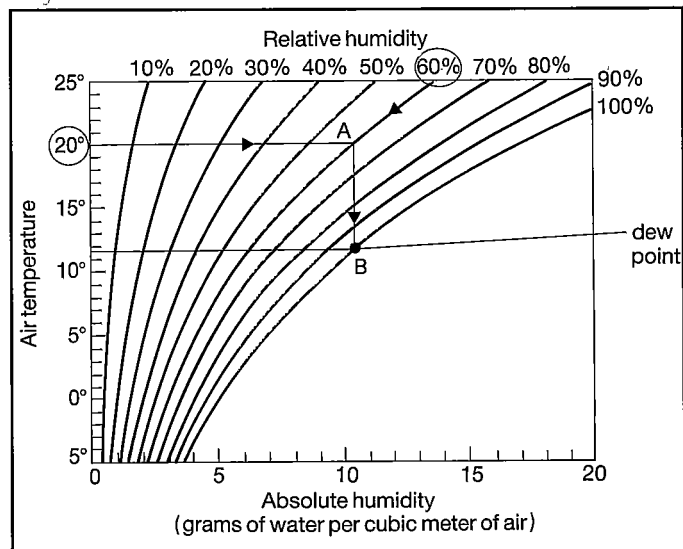
much water should be made to evaporate in a given space in order to maintain an optimal hygrometric state of between 45 and 65 per cent (the ideal being in the region of 55 per cent).

How to use the diagram

An example will help in understanding how to use the diagram to solve problems such as: How much water should be made to evaporate in a museum room heated to 20C in order to maintain relative humidity at 60 per cent when the outside air is at 5C with a relative humidity of 80 per cent? (The volume of the room is 90m³).

ing from 3.5 g/m³ of air in January to 11 g/m³ in August. (This implies that homes should be humidified artificially from November to May if one wants to maintain an acceptable humidity level.) On the other hand, on one and the same day—especially in summertime—the variation in outside temperature between dawn and afternoon causes a considerable difference in relative humidity. Fortunately, temperature varies less indoors and so relative humidity is more stable.

What effect does all this have on our hapless harpsichord? Well, green wood contains a large amount of water, often



From this diagram it is clear that if the temperature of the outside air is 5C and its relative humidity is 80 per cent, then it contains 5.5 g of water per m³. If this air, heated to 20C, is to be maintained at 60 per cent relative humidity, it will have to contain 10.5 g of water per m³. This means adding 5 g of water per m³, or 450 g for the room's m³. If, however, we take into consideration the five or six complete changes of air that the room undergoes in twenty-four hours on account of the circulation of air between it and the neighbouring rooms and the outside, then two or three litres of water will have to be added every day.

Climatological observations in temperate regions show that the absolute amount of moisture in the air changes only very gradually as the year progresses, increas-

representing over half its weight. This water content, which is also expressed as a percentage, is defined as the ratio between the weight of the water contained in the wood and the weight of the wood when perfectly dry (a state which can only be attained in laboratory conditions and which is only stable in a perfectly dry atmosphere). As the wood dries out, the moisture contained in it evaporates in the air and continues to do so for as long as the surrounding air is drier than the wood itself. The drying period usually lasts for several years, until wood and air have attained moisture equilibrium. Should the ambient air become more humid, the wood will reabsorb water; if it becomes drier, the wood loses water. Like blotting paper, wood absorbs moisture or releases it into

the air depending on the atmosphere's hygrometric state. The wood shrinks and expands.

The following table gives the moisture content of wood in relation to the relative humidity of the air. It can be used to work out variations in the length and width of a harpsichord's soundboard.

Relative humidity of the air (%)	0	25	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Water content of the wood (%)	0	5	6	7	9	11	13	16	20	28

fication in the instrument's tone.

How then can our harpsichord be assured of an environment where relative humidity is as constant as possible? That is a job for humidifiers.

The chief consequence of a change in the humidity of wood is shrinkage or swelling. The amount of shrinkage varies considerably according to whether it occurs longitudinally (along the grain) or radially (across the grain). The amount of expansion or shrinkage corresponding to one per cent of relative humidity is approximately 0.02 – 0.03 per cent across the grain, and 0.002 – 0.005 per cent along the grain. In the soundboard of a harpsichord, the grain generally runs parallel to the strings. The soundboard measures approximately 170 cm in length (i.e. in the direction of the grain), and 100 cm in width. When relative humidity goes from 30 per cent (very dry) to 80 per cent (very humid), these dimensions vary by the following amounts:

width: $0.0002 \times 50 \times 100 \text{ cm} = 1 \text{ cm}$

length: $0.00002 \times 50 \times 170 \text{ cm} = 0.17 \text{ cm}$ (or 1.7 mm).

The fact that a considerable change in relative humidity can cause the length of a harpsichord's soundboard to increase by 2 to 3 mm and its width by 1 cm is quite striking. This example illustrates the importance of keeping things made of wood – and in this case, musical instruments – in conditions where the humidity is as constant as possible.

Too much humidity can cause severe damage. The moving parts can jam and the soundboard swell and warp. In over-dry conditions, on the other hand, cracks will appear in the soundboard, causing a modi-

Transporting musical instruments

The problem dealt with in this article is particularly relevant when it comes to transporting musical instruments. Certain precautions should be taken:

Never leave an instrument in a car parked in the sun.

Keep the instrument in a case or other wrapping, as airtight as possible, throughout the whole journey. A harpsichord, for example, should be covered by a dust sheet. When an instrument is being transported by air, it is absolutely essential to follow this advice; the frequent renewal of air in the plane and the enormous difference between inside and outside temperatures make it impossible to ensure sufficient humidity, and relative humidity is between 15 and 35 per cent.

Humidifiers

Humidifiers diffuse water vapour. Evaporation consumes a great deal of energy (it takes 750 watts to produce 1 kilogram of vapour). The energy can be supplied either by an electric element or by a slight cooling of the ambient air (heat being a form of energy). Several companies make humidifiers of various sizes, according to the volume of the premises to be humidified. There are, in general, three types of humidifier, each having a different way of getting moisture into the air.

A. The vaporizing type. Water is vaporized over a hot surface or between two electrodes and the hot vapour spreads into the air. The humidifier runs on mains electricity. When in use the appliance consumes some 500 W. Its disadvantages lie in the danger of a short circuit and the fact that young children could burn themselves on it. Its main advantage is that it runs in perfect silence.

B. *The spray type.* A pulsing system sprays tiny droplets of water into the air. In this case, it is the ambient air which provides the energy required for the droplets to evaporate (the air cools slightly in the process). Very little electricity is used. This type of humidifier does, however, require a water softener to prevent calcium deposits forming on furniture.

C. *The evaporating type.* A fan forces the air through a permeable curtain (of woven fabric or absorbent paper) which is kept constantly wet. Electricity consumption is low - about 20 W. The energy needed to evaporate the water comes from the air itself, which is somewhat cooler after passing through the curtain. This type of humidifier thus causes a slight drop in the temperature of the room in which it works.

These humidifiers are fitted with a water reservoir with a level indicator. These reservoirs must, of course, be filled regularly. Some models are connected directly to the mains water supply and therefore have no need to be topped up. Some models filter the dust particles out of the air as it passes through and may even filter the air through active carbon. These are sold as "purifiers". Their usefulness should not be lightly dismissed in today's world where towns are often dust-clogged and polluted.

The output of A and B-type humidifiers is independent of the humidity of the ambient air; so long as the appliances are switched on, they function. If humidity is to be kept constant, therefore, they must be fitted with a humidistat, a small instrument which switches on the humidifier when there is insufficient humidity and switches it off when the required level is reached. This accessory is vital, especially where programmed heating systems provide for different day and night-time temperatures, causing variations in relative humidity. It can either be incorporated in the humidifier or placed alongside it.

In the C-type (evaporating) humidifier, on the other hand, output depends directly on the humidity of the ambient air; when the air is dry output is as its highest; when the air is humid, output diminishes, practically

ceasing altogether when relative humidity approaches 60 per cent. This type of humidifier does not require a humidistat; it automatically maintains relative humidity at around 60 per cent, provided, of course, that it is powerful enough for the volume of air to be humidified.

All these appliances require a certain amount of maintenance since evaporation causes fur to form in the reservoir and on various parts of the humidifier.

Choosing a humidifier

The type of appliance chosen will depend on the power source chosen to evaporate the water: mains electricity (for Type A), or a slight lowering of the temperature of the room to be humidified (for Types B and C). If you choose the spray type humidifier (B), make sure that the water-softening system works effectively. Check the technical data sheet for evaporation capacity; this is normally expressed in litres or fractions of a litre per hour. Also check that the volume of air for which the appliance was designed corresponds to the volume of the premises you intend to humidify. Finally, make sure that the reservoir is easy to fill and large enough for the humidifier to function for at least forty-eight hours without a refill.

If you choose an A or B-type humidifier, check that it has a built-in humidistat. If it does not, have one installed separately. Make sure that the sound level of the appliance is acceptable; too loud a hum soon becomes unbearable.

If you are offered an "Air purifier", make sure that it meets the criteria given above. In case of doubt, consult a specialist or contact the technical department of a company making this kind of appliance.

You might think that all these precautions are not only a bother but superfluous. They are not. They are the price to pay for a happy harpsichord!

This article is a summary of a fuller study which can be obtained on request to the author at the following address: Museum of Geneva, B.P. 434, CH-1211 Geneva 6, Switzerland. ■

In Rotterdam: a new documentation system for a new collection

Alma Ruempol

Even the most complete museum collection is often hampered by an inadequate documentation system, precluding full appreciation of the objects displayed. At the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, an innovative approach to documentation draws on numerous previously unexploited resources to enhance access to its collection of pre-industrial objects. The system is presented here by one of its designers, the current curator of the collection. She received her degree in the History of Art from the University of Leiden in 1966. This year, on the basis of the system she and her colleague Alexandra van Dongen wrote 'Pre-industrial Utensils 1150-1800', Amsterdam, 1991 (in Dutch/English, 80 florins.

In 1983, I came to Rotterdam's Boymans-van Beuningen Museum as curator of pre-industrial objects. Shortly before, the museum, internationally renowned for its superb collection of paintings, drawings, prints, and modern and decorative arts, had procured the Van Beuningen-de Vriese archaeological collection. This collection contains some 10,000 items dating from 1100 to 1800, the majority from the sixteenth century. Most are simple household utensils used in Dutch towns for cooking, eating and drinking. The surviving objects recovered primarily in archaeological excavations, are chiefly made of materials which do not decay in soil: ceramics, some metal, to a lesser extent glass, and a little wood, leather and bone. Since such objects not only reveal much about cultural patterns of the past, but also inspire designs for items of today's decorative art, they constitute a most appropriate complement to a museum of art.

In 1981 a committee of experts, including the current director of the museum, drew up a report on the Van Beuningen-de Vriese collection. This report clearly sets out the collection's significance and serves as a basis for the museum's current philosophy, which may be summarized as follows. The collection of utensils is unique of its kind, not least by virtue of the long period it reflects. Partnered with a celebrated collection of decorative art, it indicates form-relationships between the object of art, the luxury utensil and the simple utensil throughout the ages. In combination with paintings, drawings and prints, the collection can also shed light on how and in what environment an object was used, as well as how utensils were made, traded and transported. In the development of utensils from the Middle Ages to the present, correspondences in form, decoration and in some cases material can be discerned. Ordinary utensils of the past,

such as cooking pots, beakers, spoons and knives, and even combs and chamberpots – in short, objects used by our ancestors for essential everyday activities – are a concrete and permanent factor in our society throughout the centuries. Utensils only change shape when economic, technical and social changes take place. Finally, the development and sophistication of these objects tell us something about the daily life of our ancestors.

Information, quotations, illustrations

As an art historian, my field had been the decorative arts, paintings, drawings and prints of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not archaeological objects. In my new post, I was quickly confronted with a dearth of information about relationships between form, function and use of objects, as well as information about production methods, use and users. Paintings, prints and literature yield only scraps of information about objects related to elementary activities such as eating and sleeping. Casual details or phrases often provide the most reliable information. In order to construct a proper documentation, then, it seemed sensible to glean information from a variety of disciplines – archaeology, art history, geography, archive sciences and linguistics – and to make such information permanently and easily accessible.

With these considerations in mind, the scientific documentalist G. J. Koot and I began to collect data. Our efforts concentrated on doing full justice to the museum's own collections and in particular the collection of pre-industrial utensils. The method we devised is practical and explicit. Its purpose is to provide as much relevant information as possible in the form of readily understandable, illustrative data for museum staff to consult when

The Boymans-van Beuningen Documentation System in a nutshell. Engraving of The Prodigal Son, by Petrus Iselburgh (1568–1630). This print is indexed under: Beaker, Plate, Drinking cup, Flute glass, Chandelier, Candlestick, Knife, Platter, Fork.



Boymans-van Beuningen Museum

designing permanent setups, exhibitions and catalogues. All too often, museum exhibits and publications are formulated using ad hoc information, but with our system, staff and trainees can systematically retrieve data on many areas of interest to them.

Gradually, the Boymans-van Beuningen Documentation System for Pre-industrial Utensils took shape. In broad outline, the system makes use of three types of information.

Information on the actual utensils

This includes the traditional inventory card data-material, size, archaeological site, bibliographical references, etc. To appreciate the diversity of the collection, consider just those items classified as 'earthenware vessels': this category alone features: bellied

pots; one-handled, three-legged cooking pots; two-handled, three-legged cooking pots; two-handled, narrow-necked pots; pots with and without spouts; ointment jars; extinguishers; colanders; flowerpots; and moneyboxes. On the basis of the varied forms of the objects, the connection between form, material and purpose is examined. Obviously, objects were multifunctional to a greater extent in the past than they are today.

Quotations from literature and archival research

Research since 1984 has focused on printed and handwritten texts of the period in which the objects were used. We started with the sixteenth century, from which most of the collection dates, and used our findings as the basis for further documen-

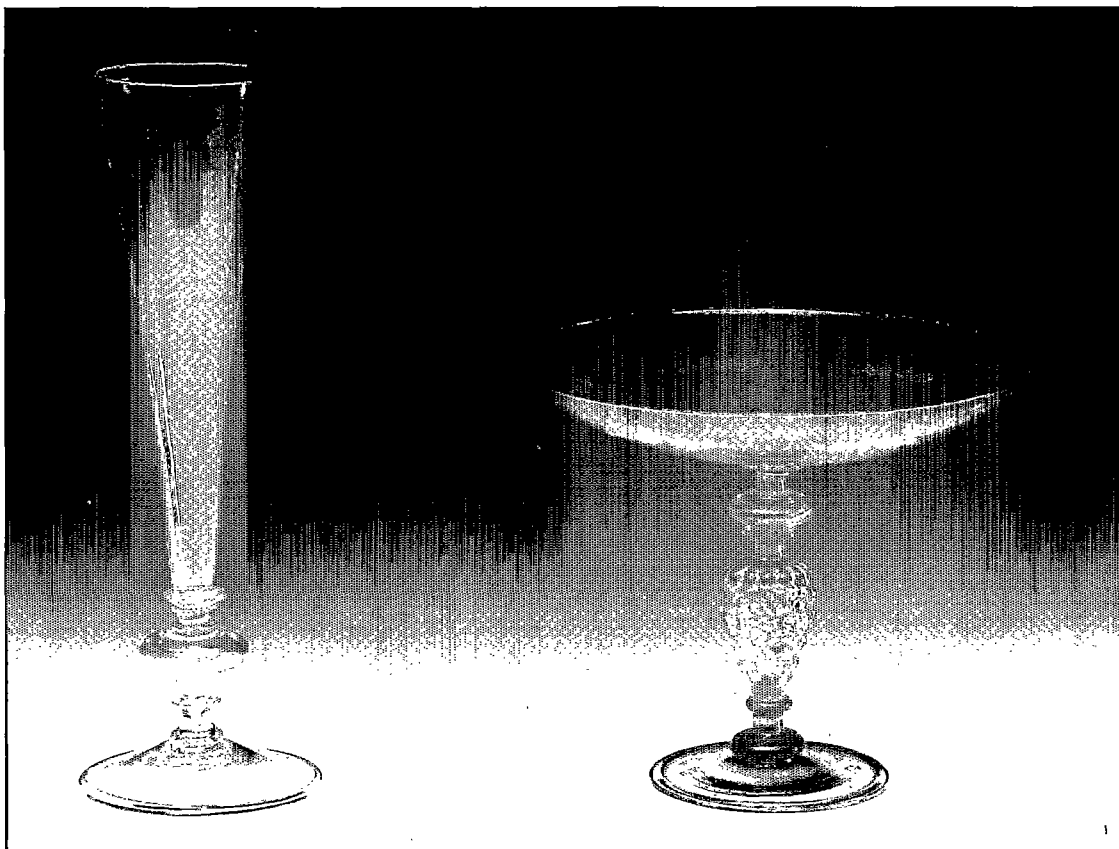
tation. The objects in the collection and proposed exhibitions suggested themes such as food and drink, cookery books, 'land of milk and honey', etiquette manuals, travelogues, pilgrimages, assaying, legislation and regulations, household effects, cutlery, lighting, heating, potteries and the ceramic industry. The documentation is chronological by theme. In addition to Dutch quotations, we have recently begun including the phrases of foreigners who observed curious customs or objects during visits to the Netherlands.

Sixteenth-century texts soon revealed that objects went by different names than those used today. Thus, we have also undertaken etymological research into old terms for utensils. This research must certainly be

extended up and into the nineteenth century when industrialization hastened the disappearance of all kinds of traditional objects and often their names too. Occasionally a word remained in use, albeit associated with an object whose shape and material changed because of technical developments. Our 'footless' metal roasting tins are an example: a sixteenth century *braetpan* was usually earthenware and stood on three legs; its form has since changed, but the modern Dutch word for roasting tin is still '*braadpan*'.

Illustrative material

Because prints, drawings and paintings provide a wealth of information about how utensils were used, the relevant works of



An early seventeenth century flute glass from the Netherlands and an Italian drinking cup of the same period.

Boymans-van Beuningen Museum

art in the Boymans-van Beuningen collections are also documented. We started with pre-1800 prints from the area of Dutch culture, again with an emphasis on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All prints in which one or more utensils occur are photographed *in toto*. Enlargements are then made of the objects depicted in the prints. The total shots are ordered alphabetically under the artist's name and the enlarged details under the type of object. The resulting documentation system currently registers approximately 2,500 prints and details in cross reference. There are sometimes dozens of illustrations of each type of object with slight differences. The illustrated objects are then dated according to the years of the artist's birth and death. In the case of prints based on paintings by other (often earlier) artists, the original artist's date serves as the guideline, unless details of the utensils have been 'updated', as is sometimes the case. On the other hand, there is reason for supposing that utensils may have been left lying around in studios for a long time before being used as models. Dating should therefore be approached with caution.

This part of the documentation system now includes paintings in the Boymans-van Beuningen collection, and a start will shortly be made with the drawings. Because the museum's collection does not include illustrative material for utensils of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, our primary source of information on this period consists of books of miniatures from other Dutch collections. The illustrations they contain are treated in the manner described above.

Applications and access

When the various sections of the Boymans-van Beuningen Documentation for Pre-industrial Utensils are combined, the infor-

mation consists of: object, inventory card data and relevant literature; illustrations of an object throughout history; the development of the form of each type of object throughout the ages in relation to its use; an object's function throughout history; etymological development of an object's nomenclature; and quotations from the period in which an object was used.

For our museum, the system provides first and foremost a basis for arranging the public study collection. The photograph system provides visual information about the objects, offering practical and illuminating aid in mounting exhibitions. The system can be continuously expanded as needed. It has already opened up interesting avenues to colleagues inside and outside the museum. Under certain legally established conditions, the documentation system will therefore be accessible to professionals and interested members of the public.

With this in view, the museum acquired computer facilities some time ago, making it feasible to automate sections of the system. Computerization is in fact being implemented wherever practical. Sections such as the photograph print documentation and the inventory cards describing objects are already easy to consult. Of course, the system will eventually be fully automated, so that pressing a key will instantaneously release all the available data on, say, a cooking pot. It is quite conceivable that any museum with ethnographic or instrument collections might assemble its data in a similar fashion and make the information permanently accessible. ■

Meeting a need: how to produce a guide for families

Vasundhara Prabhu

In *Museum*, No. 169, we published 'Robert and the Museum Problem,' a short story that told about the stormy reactions of a little boy when he was taken to museums. Also noting, to put it another way, that family visits do not always fulfil their potential, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles, California, decided to issue a special family-oriented guidebook to its collections. Here with the story – and suggestions for others wishing to follow suit – is MOCA's first director of education who was educated in India, Australia and the United States, and worked at the Boston Children's Museum and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art (at Cornell University) before moving to Los Angeles.

In October of 1989, the Museum of Contemporary Art began offering its visitors a complimentary publication entitled *Together at MOCA: A Guide for Families*. The guide aims to introduce the reader to contemporary art and contains ideas to help him or her to look at and think and talk about the contemporary art on view in our galleries. The guide is available in five of the major languages spoken in Los Angeles. This was far from an isolated initiative and it may be asked why more and more museums in the United States are publishing guides for families. Who writes these guides? Who really uses them? Do they work? Who funds these publications? Finally, how does the museum benefit from these guides? If *Museum* readers are planning to publish a guide for families, they may want to consider our experience in producing one.

Observe and consult

A first suggestion is to observe your visitors. At MOCA, we were surprised by the number of families who visited the museum. We also observed that parents were either expending a lot of energy in trying to stimulate children's interest in the art work on view or were trying to get the children to behave. Both activities seemed to create a lot of stress on the part of all concerned!

To understand motivations, it is helpful to speak to your visitors if you can. That is, we noted that many of our visitors spoke other languages! Many spoke English, but did not read it very well. We asked some of these visitors if it would be helpful to have labels and gallery guides in their own language. The answer was yes, so then we contacted city and county officials who gave us information on the demographic situation of Los Angeles and, taking that into account, we selected the languages in which to issue the

guide we had decided to produce.

Other consultations can helpfully be aimed at members and staff of your museum and at other museums. We conducted surveys in which we asked MOCA members to rate their knowledge and pleasure level with regard to contemporary art. Interestingly, many of the respondents rated their knowledge as low but their interest as high. Regardless of their knowledge level, all requested assistance via publications about contemporary art. MOCA's Information Desk staff were asked to note the types of questions the public asked about the museum and about contemporary art. These questions also helped formulate the content of the guide. When we contacted museums around the country, our colleagues were very helpful in sharing copies of their own guides. The majority of the guides we received were designed for children to use when they visited the museum with school groups. After our guide was published, museums who responded to our survey were sent a copy of it.

Once the need for a guide is firmly established, the next thing to consider is how to acquire funding. We were fortunate enough to locate and contact the Joseph Drown Foundation, which was immediately eager to sponsor a publication that would assist families to see and understand art at MOCA. The down-to-earth usefulness of the planned publication was also appreciated by the Foundation. The stipulation that the guide would be available free of charge was suggested by MOCA and accepted by the Foundation. Additional support was provided to the project by the designer and printer. Without all these generous gifts, the publication would not have been undertaken and could not have looked as good as it does!

Next question: What art works should go into the guide? MOCA had had a very

successful year in acquiring works for its permanent collection and we wanted to share our excitement with the public. It was obvious, then, that the guide would pertain to the permanent collection. We selected works that represented: the history of contemporary art; MOCA's key donors; a variety of artistic media; and male and female artists both living and dead. Finally, we also chose works that would reproduce well and artists whose works would most likely be on view at any given time. For example, Louise Nevelson's 'Sky Cathedral/Southern Mountain' may not be displayed all the time, but another work by her will be on display.

Design

In this day and age, we cannot underestimate the design and packaging of any product. The presentation of the guide was crucial to its success. It was thus important to make MOCA's educational publication as aesthetically valid as MOCA's exhibition catalogues. The guide had to reflect MOCA as well as appeal to both adults and children alike. To find a designer sensitive to the institution, its audience and the content was crucial, and we were fortunate to work with Kit Hinrichs of the San Francisco office of the Pentagram firm. In discussing the project with the designer, the samples from colleagues at other museums were very helpful to illustrate ideas or graphics that we liked (or didn't like).

We were also fortunate to find educators, artists and arts administrators who translated the guide for us. Much time and energy was spent in discussing with them the intent and tone of the guide. We also discussed some of the cultural issues about the behaviour of families in public and ways in which parents and children do or do not interact. The museum's intention had to be explained culturally as well as

linguistically in these translations. Similarly, we had to work with the designer to come up with a design that would accommodate the translations. Finally, we were lucky enough to find a printer who was familiar with languages other than English.

Since *Together at MOCA* was our first educational publication for visitors, the project was ambitious. Indeed, the future of educational publications depended on this first one! The education department conducted the research described above and integrated the information with the goals of the publication. The project was conceived to make a statement not only to MOCA's public, but also to its staff, trustees and donors. This intention helped us to identify the components of the guide. These are:

- 1.How to look at an exhibition (explains how works are selected and installed).
- 2.Why read labels? (provides an explanation of label components.)
- 3.Advice for parents (suggests how to use the guide in the museum).
- 4.Advice for children (suggests how children can help the family look at art).
- 5.What is contemporary art? (describes critical issues in contemporary art.)
- 6.Ask yourselves (offers readers questions to help look at specific works on view.)
- 7.Background on artists (includes photographs of the artists).
- 8.Art terms (provides definitions).
- 9.At home (suggests activities families can pursue on the way home, that night, the following day, next week and next month).



10. Talk back (asks readers to evaluate the publication).

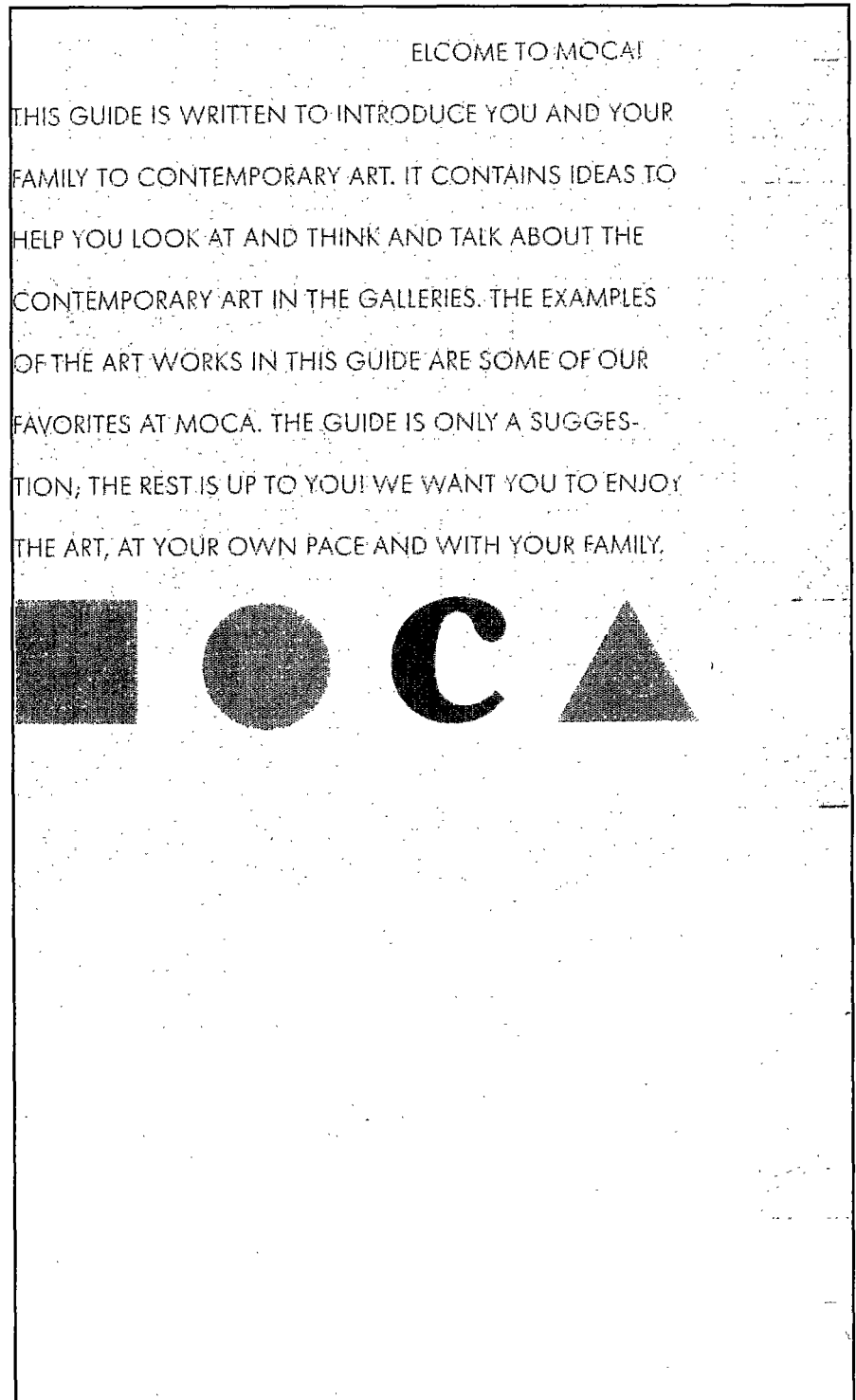
11. Information about the museum (includes address, admission costs, hours and telephone numbers for programme and exhibition information).

Evaluation? Check your trash barrels!

Many adults ask if it's permissible to pick up the guide if they don't have children. It is. The guide is in fact now being used equally by adults alone and by adults with children. In observing families, we discovered that the average number of works of art they discuss is three. (Ten are illustrated and discussed in the guide. It seems that they get the idea and then apply it to other works on view. Guides are not returned and – to take but one other evaluative indicator – we have not found any in the museum's trash barrels!

We have, of course, received some complaints about the guide and these fall into two areas. First, the public finds the type-size generally small, making it difficult to read. Second, the public expects the guide to be published in more language versions; some even feel insulted that their language is not available! The explanation that demographic studies helped us select the languages, and that our funds are limited, does not satisfy them.

On the other hand, we have been disappointed that more people have not responded with the talk back cards. From those received, however, a curious pattern is emerging: readers tend to cross out the questions pertaining to the guide and talk back to the institution. These comments fall into two areas. In one, they complain about MOCA's public amenities; for example, the cost of parking or the lack of benches in the galleries. Secondly, the writers speak directly to the curators, ask-



ing them to justify the selection of an art work or the installation of a show. The overall tone here is one of feeling overwhelmed or confused by the art and therefore of being insulted.

Be these reactions (or non-reactions) as they may, the guide has on the whole been very well received. Museum colleagues are impressed with both the scope of the content of the guide, and with its design. MOCA trustees and donors have found it very informative and have appreciated the handsome presentation. The public is pleased with the guide and surprised that the guide is available without charge. The different ethnic and linguistic communities have thanked us for printing the guide in their languages.

Finally, we cannot underestimate the importance of books in our culture. They remind us of the circumstances of our lives when we acquired them. We collect them, store them on shelves, display them on coffee tables. We can all interact with books, and this aspect of the guide will, we hope, be evidenced in conversations with the public in the future.

We ran out of the English version of the guide in four months and the Spanish version in six months, and have currently received funds to reprint the guide. The guide has been adapted (with permission) by other museums in the United States. On the whole, the guide has brought a lot of attention to MOCA: people are impressed by the permanent collection that it refers to and the philosophy of museum education that it espouses. Because of its presentation, people are attracted to it and impressed that an educational guide can look attractive. Finally, because we are a small education department, we have discovered that a publication such as *Together at MOCA: A Guide for Families* has been an efficient expenditure of time, effort and

funds. We now plan to publish a series of these guides and look forward to any comments that *Museum* readers may wish to offer. Our address is:

Education Department,
Museum of Contemporary Art,
250 South Grand Avenue,
Los Angeles, CA 90012, USA
FAX: (1)(213)620-8674



Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I was pleased to see that *Museum* No 169 featured "Parks and Gardens of Delight." Your readers may be interested to learn that IUCN (The World Conservation Union) has relaunched *Parks* magazine, the international journal dedicated to the protected areas of the world. The magazine is published three times a year, and each issue features a theme. So far, *Parks* has dealt with 'People and Parks', 'Pollution' and 'Professionalism in Park Management'. The objectives of *Parks* are (a) to demonstrate the contribution which protected areas can make to sustainable development; (b) to improve the quality of protected areas management; (c) to communicate protected areas information among all involved; and (d) to promote the management of protected areas as a profession. *Parks* magazine has an international circulation of 1,400 recipients, including most of the worlds' government bodies dealing with protected areas. Anyone interested in subscribing to *Parks* should write to:

Scientific and Technical Letters Ltd,
PO Box 81,
Northwood,
Middlesex HA6 3DN,
United Kingdom,
or (in the USA only)

Science Reviews Inc.,
707 Foulk Road,
Suite 102,
Wilmington, DE 19803.

Before submitting any material potential contributors should write to:

Paul Goriup, Editor, Parks Magazine,
36 Kingfisher Court,
Hambridge Road,
Newbury RG14 5SJ,
United Kingdom.

sincerely,

Paul Goriup

Dear Sir

It is with great interest that I read the No. 4, 1990, issue of *Museum*, on the subject of museum publications: I am an avid reader of the magazine, as I am finishing a Bachelor's degree and wish to pursue further studies and a career in museology or museum education.

Thank you for your thoughtful solicitation of readers' opinions and ideas.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Thyssen

Carrboro, North Carolina,
United States.

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