

Presumption to Responsibility. Museum and Contested History. Saying the Unspeakable in Museums.

The International Conference co-organized by national committees ICOM Czech Republic, ICOM Slovakia, ICOM Austria

The press news of 20th November 2017

Date: 22nd – 24th November 2017

Venue: The Moravian Gallery in Brno, Governor's Palace

Museums are significant movers of society. The selection of themes and the manner of interpretation may influence whole generations. The conference entitled **Presumption to Responsibility. Museum and Contested History. Saying the Unspeakable in Museums**, co-organized by co-organized by national committees ICOM Czech Republic, ICOM Slovakia, ICOM Austria, will be devoted to the manner museums interpret complex stories of our past. The society itself finds it very difficult to discover a way towards them every now and again; therefore, it is museums' mission to initiate discussion and reflection.

The mission of objects that are housed in museums is to document our cultural and political heritage. Objects selected by museum curators give themselves evidence about our ability to objectively document history. However, history is frequently perceived differently since it is a live instrument. It defines people's identity; each of the individuals defines themselves through significant and landmark historic events.

The manner in which museums display and depict controversial history and traumatic memories suggests how and if we are able to interpret events the society in question does not necessarily take pride in, or would preferably erase from its history. Museums have opportunity to provide different perspectives, and move visitors to think beyond the scope of their experiences.

Museum objects themselves are extremely merciless. They are what they are; not a thousand words help us change their heart of matter. Unless we destroy them, they will present a solid base we can build our society on and raise its quality. A financial crisis can change our lives over the night, a political situation can change faster than we are able to admit, the cultural heritage, however, remains unchanged; we may rely on its stability in any crisis we might be faced with.

The opening ceremony will be attended by Bettina Leidl, the Vice-Chair of ICOM Austria; Dušan Buran, the Chair of ICOM Slovakia - National Committee; and Martina Lehmanová, the Chair of ICOM Czech Republic - National Committee. The Conference will welcome keynote speakers such as **Sally Yerkovich, the President of ETHICOM – ICOM International Committee for Ethics; Daniel Herman, the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic**; the Closing Ceremony will be attended by **Peter Keller, the Director-General of ICOM**.

The Conference will be attended by delegates from eleven countries; participants from Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, the United States, Japan, Hungary and Poland will present their conference paper along with representatives from organizing countries.

What will present the culmination of the Conference is a discussion on complicated themes on history prepared by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes' professionals, which takes place on 24th November 2017 from 3.20 p.m. and accessible to the public.

Acknowledgements: The Conference Presumption to Responsibility. Museum and Contested

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Additional information:

ICOM Czech Republic – National Committee
www.czech.icom.museum

ICOM Czech Republic – National Committee was founded in 1994 as a successor to ICOM Czechoslovakia –National Committee that had been one of fourteen founding members of ICOM – International Council of Museums. Its primary objective is to support Czech museum professionals' participation in global international community. We had been engaged in Recommendation on Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, Their Diversity and Their Role in Society adopted by UNESCO in 2015. One of our topical missions is also a bid for organizing the 2022 ICOM General Conference in the Czech Republic. ICOM Czech Republic – National Committee has over 350 members.

A museum is in the service of society and its development, open to the public. That is an excerpt from the definition of museum by ICOM. Are we able to accomplish this service? The Czech public faces numerous questions to which numerous answers exist; more often than not, they are problematic, controversial, even painful, especially those ones regarding the 20th century. The Conference Presumption to Responsibility will be devoted to such questions. It aims to explore whether the Czech approach differs from that of our colleagues from abroad. It will present the topics seen in different perspectives.

Martina Lehmannová, President of ICOM Czech Republic – National Committee

ICOM Austria
www.icom-oesterreich.at
www.facebook.com/icom.oesterreich

ICOM Austria is one of ICOMs biggest committees with more than 2000 members. In this strong and dynamic network we are bringing together Austrian and International experts. Our mission is to inform our members about the latest developments and scientific findings in the museum field. Protecting and promoting our common cultural heritage is our common goal. Museums are full of traces from our history. The Objects that we collect, exhibit, explore, conserve and convey are evidence of our cultural heritage and our history. Each of them tells its individual story and presents the past from different perspectives, defining our view and perception of the past, the present and the future.

How should museums present difficult or controversial topics? How should our exhibitions reflect the different positions? And should museums take on an active role in discussing current social developments like migration or globalization? Now, more than ever museums have to be courageous in keeping our moral and ethical values, promoting social inclusion and scientific reasoning. Austrian museums are very actively working in that direction. As I am also director of the Jewish Museum in Vienna, I just want to mention our upcoming exhibition "Comrade. Jew. We only wanted Paradise on Earth." starting on December 6th. We focus on the utopian idea of an egalitarian society and the failed dream of a better world from an Austrian Jewish perspective and trace diplomatic, political, social, and cultural connections. The different life stories

reflecting the diversity of approaches, with examples from art, literature, film, theater, and music, as well as contemporary and personal documents, combine to produce a discerning view of a complex topic.

Together with our partners ICOM Czech Republic and ICOM Slovakia we will discuss the important role of museums in our society at the upcoming conference across all borders and within an European perspective.

Dr. Danielle Spera, President of ICOM Austria

ICOM Slovakia

<http://network.icom.museum/icom-slovakia/>

ICOM Slovakia accompanies more than 200 museum professionals as well as 12 institutional members from the Slovak museum scene. Its main purpose is to link its members to the recent developments within an international network of museums, to mediate contacts to specialists abroad as well as to involve the Slovak colleagues to methodological discussions and developing of strategic documents. ICOM Slovakia profiles itself as a democratic institution for open promoting of cultural heritage, and thus it puts strong emphasize on the diversity of museums and their collections.

As one of the post-communist countries, Slovakia has not only inherited beautiful and idyllic works of art or unique materials of natural history, now kept in museums and galleries. It still struggles with the interpretation of its own past in the 20th century – especially of two periods dominated by totalitarian regimes: fascism and communism. Numerous people lost their jobs and needed to emigrate; thousands were killed in concentration camps by Nazis, were prosecuted or expelled into exile. Lots of the victims were fascinating personalities, wrote letters to their relatives, wrote novels and poems, took pictures, and created artworks. Many of these objects have been documented and are kept now in museum's collections. These do not necessarily document a pride of a nation, but they definitely belong to its history. Through their collecting, presenting and interpretation, museums could – in fact, have to – become key figures in a contribution to better understanding of the past, be this very inconvenient when confronted with a self-image of individual, social group or the society as a whole. Several recent projects of Slovak museums and galleries have shown that there is enough of both – topics as well as social demand – available.

By co-organizing a conference dedicated to the troubled history of the 20th century and its reflection from the perspective of a museum institution, we hope to initiate a wider discussion on forms, methodology and impact of such exhibitions (catalogues, books, films, websites etc). This will be certainly not concluded at the meeting in Brno; however, we are very glad to have found excellent partners for this initial step in the National committees of ICOM Czechia and ICOM Austria, with whom we share a common interest in a better understanding and further promoting of collections of Central European Museums.

Dr. Dušan Buran, President of ICOM Slovakia