

## Intangible Heritage at the *Musée de la civilisation* of Quebec

by Yves Bergeron

Head of Research, Musée de la civilisation, Quebec, Canada

Since it opened in 1988, the *Musée de la civilisation* of Quebec has focused on the social dimension of human existence, and its exhibitions and cultural activities have deliberately encompassed intangible heritage. Objects are used chiefly to illustrate the unfolding themes of exhibitions.

> The permanent exhibition “Memories” exemplifies this approach. The directors of the museum felt that it should be a themed exhibition focusing on Quebec identity rather than a traditional exhibition based on the history of Quebec. An interdisciplinary team spent three years on the project, which was inspired by the work of the French historian Pierre Nora on collective memory.

> “Memories” presents Quebec through the filter of collective memory. The visitor follows a prescribed route through nostalgic reminiscence, adaptive memory, repressed memory, imposed memory and spontaneous recollection. The ethnographic objects and art works encountered along the way have been chosen for their power to trigger memory.

> Given that each new generation redefines its relationship with heritage and history, the concept of heritage is always subject to change over time. For example, heritage is no longer seen as consisting essentially of architecture and artistic masterpieces, as was the case thirty years ago. The public consultations on heritage policy organised in Quebec enabled citizens

to introduce notions of intangible heritage into the draft policy. When they were asked what they understood by heritage, citizens unanimously answered “language and history”. Clearly, therefore, heritage is closely linked with identity; and identity is not defined only through physical objects.

> The *Musée de la civilisation* has explored the theme of intangible heritage via exhibitions such as “Crossings / *Métissages*”, “*Le français dans tous ses états*” [French all over the place], “*Skin Talks / Parole de peau*” and “*Forever Blue / Infiniment bleu*”.

**Contact:** Yves Bergeron, Head of Research  
François Tremblay, Head of Exhibitions,  
Musée de la civilisation  
16, rue de la Barricade, C.P. 155, succ. B  
Quebec QC - Canada G1K 7A6  
Tel. (+1) 418 643 2158 - Fax (+1) 418 646 7229  
Email [ybergeron@mcq.org](mailto:ybergeron@mcq.org) - [www.mcq.org](http://www.mcq.org)