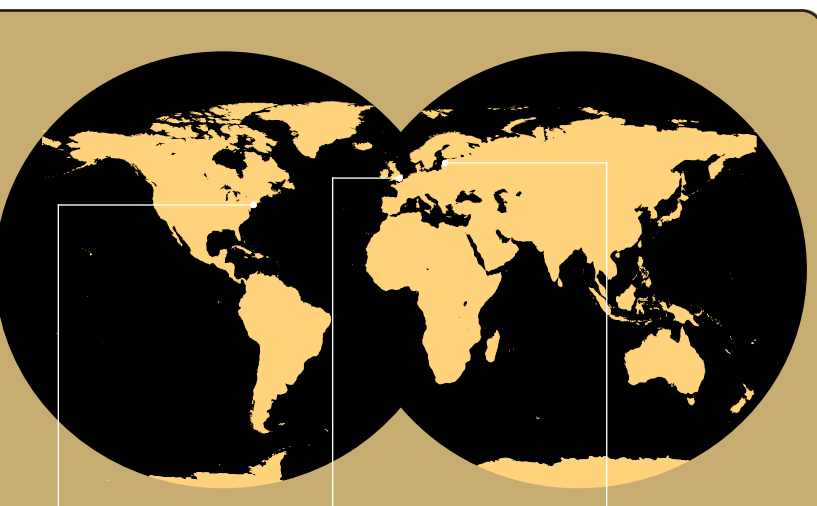


Universal Museums in Practice

In the wake of the publication of the “Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums” (see p. 4), *ICOM News* has asked some of the signatories of the Declaration to describe the work of their institution and address how they understand their role as Universal Museum



UNITED STATES

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Tel. (+1) 212 423 3840
Fax (+1) 212 966 0924
www.guggenheim.org

GREAT BRITAIN

● The British Museum

Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DG
Tel. (+44) (0)20 7323 8000
<information@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk>
www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

RUSSIA

● The State Hermitage Museum

34 Dvortsovaya Naberezhnaya
(Palace Embankment)
St Petersburg 190000
Tel. (+7) 812 117 34 65
www.hermitage.ru

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

by **Betsy Ennis**

Director of Public Affairs, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was founded in 1937 to realise four basic objectives: the collection, preservation, interpretation, and presentation of objects of 20th century visual culture. As a leading interpreter and exhibitor of international contemporary culture, the Guggenheim Foundation seeks to produce a superlative cultural experience for a diverse public audience; reflect the highest cultural values and most extraordinary creative achievements of our time through the institution's architecture, collections, exhibitions, and educational programmes; preserve and conserve the objects in our care; and to emphasise and prioritise 20th century and contemporary art, architecture and design, and on occasion present the visual arts and architecture of non-western, non-contemporary cultures as a point of contrast, support and context.

> The ever-expanding international network of Guggenheim museums and partnerships is what truly distinguishes it from all other arts institutions. With museums in the United States, Italy, Germany, and Spain, the Guggenheim has made its commitment to internationalism a high priority.

> Under the leadership of Thomas Krens, director of the museum since 1988, the Guggenheim has increased the scope of its operations. With nearly three million visitors annually worldwide, the Guggenheim network comprises one of the most visited cultural institutions in the world. In accordance with the Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums, the Guggenheim firmly believes:

“that museums serve not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation. Museums are agents in the development of cultures, whose mission is to foster knowledge by a continuous process of reinterpretation. ... To narrow the focus of museums whose collections are diverse and multifaceted would therefore be a disservice to all visitors.”

> In the late 1990s, the opening of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin expanded not only the physical base of the museum, but the very notion of collection growth - through unique acquisition programmes that were designed to enrich the core Guggenheim collections - suggesting a new model for the expansion of museum collections. By creating new museum locations and augmenting their collections, the Guggenheim network hopes to support and contribute to the notion of the Universal Museum by creating physical and intellectual access by the greatest possible number of people across the globe.

> Moreover, the concept of museum collections and their use has evolved further through an agreement between the Guggenheim, The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna to work together on a wide range of programmes, especially long-term collections sharing.

> The Guggenheim vigorously pursues the traditional tasks of scholarship and stewardship that have been the hallmark of the modern museum. But to realise the promise of its original vision, and to shape the experience of culture in a massively interconnected world, the Guggenheim must redefine itself as a new and challenging institution, one with the capacity and energy to shape the discussion of what museums can aspire to be.