

The Real Avatars

at *The Tech on Second Life* invite you
to make your avatar and join us today.
The experiment continues!

A Whole New Experience

Gladys Barrios Ambrocy, Chairperson, ICOM-Guatemala, ICOM-LAC,
Director, Museo de la Universidad de San Carlos (Guatemala)

Since the year 2000, we have been motivating national and private museums all over the country to organize special activities for International Museum Day according to the theme proposed each year by ICOM. In Guatemala, we celebrate this action with a wider concept than just one day through a Museums Festival from 5-31 May. 33 Guatemala City and inland museums participate offering 166 activities for diverse audiences.

> This year's opportunity organised by ICOM and The Tech Museum of Innovation of Silicon Valley, California (USA) sought to motivate us to develop innovative activities based on the proposed theme and also to mobilize in the virtual world to celebrate the International Day, via the Second Life platform which transported us from the real to the virtual world.



Samuel Franco, Vice-President, ICOM-Guatemala,
Museum of the University of San Carlos on 12 May 2008.
Photo: ©Gladys Barrios

> It was an experience which confronted us with a series of obstacles which we had to overcome one at a time, from the capacity of our computers into which we tried to install the programme, to learning to work the programme itself and then share with museums this new technology.

> Bit by bit we were getting involved, we managed to create our avatars, and install internet service for our visiting public. From our participation in the "pilot run" on 18 April until International Museum Day on 18 May 2008, we presented to museums how the programme worked and cross-trained. On 18 May (at the Coffee Museum) in the La Azotea Cultural Centre, visitors had the opportunity to get to know firsthand this virtual platform that is opening up a new world to museums, generating much commentary about how to move ahead in future. We also managed to feature International Museum Day by launching websites and attracting coverage of museums on television and through special interviews on radio and in the press.

> To see how the images (photographs) we sent from the Museum Festival at the University of San Carlos were incorporated in the virtual world at The Tech motivated us and allowed us to experience a very different 18 May this year. It is worth mentioning that usually in our country, IMD is chiefly celebrated by the educational community which visits a great many museums on this day. This year was different because it became a family day to visit museums. Visiting various museums ourselves, we noticed how the family groupings of parents and children were taking advantage of the free entrance offered by more than 25 state and private museums with 18 museums having organized special events with a great deal of dedication and enthusiasm, making IMD a true celebration for all visitors.

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More info on IMD reports from 15,000 museums in 90 countries! - Visit *The Tech Workshop with Electron Tagerpaw (aka AVICOM's Marie-Françoise Delval)*, hear the ICOM President's speech, and find out how to join us today: http://icom.museum/2008_contents.html



Ech-cherki Dahmali's avatar in the ICOM space at The Tech on Second Life.

IMD in 2 Worlds

Ech-cherki DAHMALI, Secretary, ICOM-Arab and ICOM-Morocco;
Board Member, AFRICOM and CIMUSET (Morocco)

First, my deep gratitude to the ICOM team having selected me to participate in the "action group" preparing the celebration of International Museum Day for the first time on SECOND LIFE at the Tech Museum of Innovation, official host of the activities of this museums event.

> Indeed, this is the first time since the creation of IMD in 1977 that ICOM has invited museums from around the world to celebrate the International Museum Day both in the real world and in the virtual world.

> In accordance with the theme « Museums : agents of social change and development », ICOM-Morocco and our museum organized several events revolving around the idea of opening up access to diverse audiences during the week (18-22 May).

> Celebrating on Sunday 18 May in the virtual world was an exception experience for me to meet professionals and colleagues present at The Tech on Second Life. I was thrilled to present our museum and to have our museum selected as one of the "The Real Avatars".

> I benefited from this opportunity to introduce our museum to the various participants and to gather information about other museum institutions represented by colleagues who were recognised thanks to their virtual person in the different areas of The Tech.

> Finally, I can say that the IMD celebration on Second Life showed concretely the importance of creative interactions and information technology in the communication and exchange between professionals from the world's museums.

> In fact, the virtual event turned out to be the kick-off for our real-life events, which were numerous:

- A sound visit to the Telecommunications Museum and a clay sculpture workshop for blind students from the Institut Mohammed VI des Non Voyants (Temara). The workshop was televised and featured on 2TV 11 o'clock night news.
- A guided visit and painting workshop for hearing-impaired children from the Association Marocaine de Protection des Sourds (Casablanca). This too was televised on TVM on the late news.
- A special guided tour of 25 engineering students studying telecommunications from the Ecole Mohammedia d'Ingénieurs.
- A practical course in museology on the theme « exhibition techniques » at the Moroccan Telecom Museum for students from the Institut National des Sciences de l'Archéologie du Patrimoine.
- A theatrical performance was given by the students from the Al Azhar School within the museum : « Les télécommunications entre hier et aujourd'hui »
- IMD was also the occasion to welcome visitors such as M. Yves Jacques Cabasso and Mme Mounia Lazrak respectively, Director and Head of Cultural Partnerships of the Institut Français de Rabat.

> On Thursday of that busy week, as Conservator of the Telecom Museum, I was then the invited guest on the live radio show ARCHICOOOL (Radio Aswat) for one and a half hours! Our discussion of the "State of the art:



© Maroc Télécom Museum (Rabat)

museums and moveable cultural heritage in Morocco” was the perfect way to round out IMD week.

> This year, International Museum Day showed us what Alissandra Cummins had foreseen, that it is “possible to get together differently to interpret the past in light of the present in order to prepare a better future.”

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Experimental Interactivity

Monique Aggiorni, Director, Debbané Museum Foundation, Beirut (Lebanon)

The announcement of the activity at The Tech Museum intrigued me and I was enthusiastic to try this experience on “Second Life” which promised to be innovative and instructive for both staff and visitors.

> Despite the events in Lebanon which prevented us from having a large number of visitors on International Museum Day, I felt myself as belonging to a large museum family, to a cultural world that we all strive to maintain and ameliorate, whatever happens, in a country in continuous upheaval.

> I appreciated having the chance to visit the “installations” at The Tech Workshop on the pilot. I found it highly interesting to see the possibilities offered by experimenting with this type of interactivity. I would propose to organize monthly meetings on Second Life as an original way of getting to know colleagues better and thank ICOM International and The Tech for this opportunity.

> Exploring and trying new experiences together while meeting professionals from the museum world was indeed an innovative and relaxing way of visiting a museum. I enjoyed strolling and appreciated the view, the deep sofas, and the joy of sitting down for a drink!

> I can't say how fantastic this idea was. I also learned from those in their 30's (Lebanese friends, colleagues, and my children!) that they are hooked on Second Life...all the more reason to find an original way to interest this crowd in the world of culture.

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Conversations at The Tech

Susan Hazan, CIDOC, Curator, Israel Museum (Israel)

On May 18, 2008 ICOM museums celebrated annual International Museum Day, and this year the theme was Museums: agents of social change and development. In addition to the traditional seminars, lectures and exhibition visits that took place in museums around the world on, for the first year, ICOM added a Second Life location for museum professionals to join in the festivities from the comfort of their office chair, or, as it was a Sunday, if they so chose, from the luxury of their armchair at home.

> Avatars were welcomed with the indispensable coffee, and quickly got themselves comfortable in small groups on the cozy sofas for informal chit-chat for the 24 hours that crossed all possible time zones. Participants to this event were encouraged to visit the rock art grotto, created by Bjorlyn Loon, a SL designer (Lynn Cullens in real life) who built the rock face, and embellished it with pseudo-ancient cave paintings. This made an excellent locus for exploration, and an obvious focus of avatoral discussion. Tours of the Tech Museum campus were available by a specially-scripted, flying, ICOM-bus which took those participants - who were perhaps a little weary of flying themselves around the build as their still unfamiliar avatar - but who still wanted to enjoy a bird's eye view of the Tech Museum's campus.

> ICOM-branded T-shirts were distributed to participants, and ICOM staff welcomed museum professionals during the event, where each participating museum was represented by a “curator” avatar. The celebration began at 3 am, Eastern Daylight Time (9 am SLT) and continued on for this especially long day with the highlight of International Museum Day taking place at 6 p.m., Paris Time, (9am SLT) when Alissandra Cummins, ICOM's President gave a welcome speech from the Second Life podium to the assembled avatars from all over the world.

> The Tech Island in Second Life, The Tech Virtual, who hosted International Museum Day, was developed by the Tech's San José, California (USA) with the simulated facility looking very much like the real site. While the auditorium and exhibition galleries are modeled on the real museum, the build is designed to facilitate projects and community connections using virtual worlds as a platform to build new kinds of collaborations within the museum world. I had to admit that sitting down with Mars Voyager, an 'astronaut' from the Second Life Planetarium in a fascinating discussion about what added value their visitors could get from flying around their island, made for a useful exchange ideas. Where else could I learn, first hand about what the virtual world could offer museums that simply wasn't possible in real life, and perhaps, even more interestingly, what this could contribute to meaningful visitor experience.

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Rock Art Partners continue work on the prototype of the “Virtual Rock Art Site Museum”. Conversations and interviews with Peter Friess, Alissandra Cummins, real and virtual museum curators, and maybe with you, in the next issue of ICOM News. If you already have your avatar, join us in the ICOM space at The Tech in Second Life: <http://tinyurl.com/6hqj84> - Contact : communication@icom.museum