

Museum Storage Current Situation and New Challenges

**International Conference
Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris
29 to 31 October 2024**

CALL FOR PAPERS

From 29 to 31 October 2024, the ICOM Working Group on Collections in Storage will be organizing a symposium on the subject of museum storage worldwide. The symposium, to be held at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, follows the launch of an international survey on museum storage, the results of which will be shared and discussed during the symposium.

The functions of museums, as they have developed since their inception in the 18th century, are largely based on collections of material objects. The principle of accumulation, on which this logic is based, presupposes the creation of storage to house objects that are not on public display and the constitution of databases, whether tangible or intangible, to enable the development of knowledge. For a long time, museum functions have revolved around the information-bearing object, and the functional model of preservation, research and communication associated with the collection. Since the 1960s, the evolution of the museum world has led to a rethinking of the museum in terms of its socializing function, a "forum" at the service of society and its development. Today, for a large number of establishments, exhibition spaces or reception and entertainment areas are regarded as essential as the collections. This new concept of museum introduces the idea of storage as a space deeply connected with all museum activities and also allows for the rotation and renovation of collections on public display.

As early as the 1970s, the problematic state of many storerooms led some museums to build new structures with specific management resources, but also spaces better adapted to the management of collections. This latter trend has become increasingly important over the last few decades, as many establishments have been forced to find new spaces to accommodate their growing collections. Sometimes shared between several museums, but also with other institutions (libraries or archive centers), or even with private collectors, these spaces have gradually taken on more and more autonomy, as witnessed by the Depot at the Boijmans van Beunigen Museum in Rotterdam or the Conservation and Resource Center at the MuCEM in Marseille. ICOM devoted a special

issue of *Museum International* journal to museum storage spaces in 2021. In addition, new shared storerooms have been created to house collections that have been recovered during the emergencies such as earthquakes, floods etc.

Technology dedicated to the development of storage and the preservation of collections has continued to develop, both in terms of the architecture of spaces and innovations in preventive conservation, particularly in terms of adapting to climate change. It is in this context that, following the resolution of the 34th General Assembly, ICOM created a Working Group on Collections in Storage in March 2022, made up of members from ICOM's various National and International Committees. The Working Group launched an international survey in 2023, aimed at taking stock of the museum storage situation worldwide. This report is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a discussion that ICOM intends to continue, by inviting professionals and researchers to discuss the current storage situation around the world, the communication and interpretation actions that are organized around them, the technological transformations and new types of storage that have been set up, as well as their possible evolution in the coming years and the means best suited to meeting tomorrow's challenges.

Researchers and museum professionals interested in the issue of museum storage are invited by the scientific committee to meet and discuss the challenges facing this particular museum sector and/or submit in French or in English a paper proposal for the symposium, which will be held in person in Paris. Unfortunately, submissions in other languages cannot be taken into account.

Paper topics

All papers must address one of the following five themes:

1. *Museum storage around the world: current situation*

The survey launched by ICOM in 2023 sought to create an initial, essentially qualitative assessment, of the state of museum storage around the world. This initial view, generally presented on a global or continental scale, needs to be refined by more precise interventions, carried out in the field, on the actual state of storage. What are the particular problems (climate, security, natural disasters, funding) facing museums in specific countries or regions? What practical measures have been adopted to manage the risks associated with collections management?

2. *Storage (re)organization and solutions relating to storage management*

Day-to-day storage management is a complex activity that is often neglected in many establishments, as shown by the ICOM survey: inadequate equipment, unperformed inventories, poorly preserved collections, etc. Beginning in 2011, ICCROM developed a program for reorganizing storage (Re-org), which has been used in a large number of countries. On a smaller scale, many museums have put in place practical methods aimed at managing the problems of storage classification and overcrowding, managing conservation constants or preventing natural hazards. What are the main problems encountered in this context? How have they been resolved? What solutions are there for museums whose budgets do not allow them to support costly investments?

3. *Interpretation and communication about storage*

Many of the storage structures that have been developed in recent years include mediation areas designed to welcome a non-specialist public and raise awareness of the challenges of heritage preservation and collections management. This new perspective

on interpretation, which has also influenced the design of visitable storage in the permanent exhibition space, responds to the curiosity of the general public about these generally inaccessible spaces, sometimes shrouded in mystery. Communication and interpretation initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic also focused on these special spaces. How were these initiatives received by the general public? Are visible or visitable storage an appropriate response to the need to showcase collections that are generally not visible? Can we draw up an assessment of the communication and interpretation initiatives surrounding the reserves?

4. *New storage, new technologies, new challenges*

In recent years, new storage building projects have been launched or are about to see the light of day: visitable storage, autonomous or shared with several establishments, storage developed in partnership with the private sector, and so on. Museum technology has developed considerably in this area, in particular to address the issue of ecological transition, but also to ensure better material management of collections. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these new buildings? Have they met expectations in terms of collections reception and management? What challenges must be met in the coming years?

5. *The place of collections in tomorrow's museums*

On a more theoretical level, the management of storage calls into question the place of collections within the museum. While the storage survey reveals a high level of confidence in the existence and importance of collections for museums, a number of new museums have distanced themselves considerably from the management of collections, or even their existence. This is the case of many community museums and ecomuseums, or establishments committed to social inclusion or participation. Is there a place for collections in the museum-forum? What role have digitization and social networking played in changing the museum's relationship with its collections? Is the "empty museum", to quote the title of a recent book, the future of the institution? Could museum reserves become so autonomous as to detach themselves from museums?

Proposals for papers

Proposals for papers and/or articles will be accepted up to and including **15 May 2024**.

Papers should be presented in English or French.

They should be addressed to **storage@icom.museum**

They must include for each author (two-part papers are also welcome):

- 1) Your full name;
- 2) Session number;
- 3) A title and, if applicable, a subtitle;
- 4) An abstract (maximum 3000 characters including spaces, approximately 450 words), including the main references used;
- 5) Your intention to present the paper in person at the Paris symposium, if accepted;
- 6) Your status (museum professional (and title), researcher (PhD student, doctorate), teacher-researcher (and title), etc.);
- 7) Your institution(s) (Museum, University, Laboratory, Institution, etc.);
- 8) Your e-mail address.

The organizing committee undertakes to:

- Acknowledge receipt of your proposal
- Forward your anonymized paper to the symposium selection committee, which will evaluate all papers.
- To inform authors of the selection committee's decision by **15 June 2024** at the latest.



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