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Introduction

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In the period of high Modernism it was Michael Brawne who in 1965 most clearly articulated the term 'The New Museum'. Art museums were places that facilitate the encounter between object and observer, to make possible communication between an artefact and the individual.¹

In the decades following, new art museums around the world, both public and private, adhered to this core role but many have also developed as formidable expressions of cultural identity. Providing a space for individual encounters with art is therefore not the only way of understanding the role of art museums. Recent museology also seeks to augment traditional functions and to provide opportunities for diverse peoples to experience art across cultures in different ways.

Globalisation has made cross-cultural issues more pertinent to art-museum practice and perhaps it is this that most clearly defines the new art museum. In the twenty-first century the way art museums look and feel is to a large extent the product of cultural exchange, and a high priority is the facilitation and exchange of information and values across cultures.

The papers included in the 'New Museums across Cultures' section identify and analyse cross-cultural issues in art museums from around the globe, examining the museum scene in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and the Americas. In these papers the authors interrogate recent policies, architecture and interior design, and focus on interpretation techniques and technologies. They explore strategies for the inclusion and representation of diverse citizenships and cultures, and discuss the tension these issues have frequently exposed between universal and local values.

UNESCO and Museums *The Pursuit of Global Cross-Cultural Museology*

It has been largely forgotten that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) was, and remains, a key advocate of global museology. Furthermore, it may well be that the roots of cross-cultural interest within the discourse of museology lie within the years after World War II during which UNESCO was active in the fostering and dissemination of museology in the postcolonial world, in particular. In this introduction, I present an interpretation of some historical material from the early UNESCO years to provide a background flavour to the case studies and ideas discussed in the papers that follow.

At the First Session of the UNESCO General Conference in 1946, delegates supported the recommendations in the *Supplementary Report on Museums* that was prepared by the Secretariat in Paris, also known as the UNESCO Museums Section (UMS). In the following years, the UMS orchestrated a discussion about the roles and functions of museums between members of the museum profession, and developed tools and mechanisms for the sharing and wide dissemination of museological information. Relevant early milestones included the launch of the periodical *Museum* in 1948, and the publication of the handbook *Temporary and Travelling Exhibitions* in 1953. An art-specific initiative was the publication of the UNESCO World Arts Series. This included the volume *Australia: Aboriginal Paintings, Arnhem Land*, published in 1954 with an introduction by Sir Herbert Read.²

In the 1940s, museums operated within fractured systems of information exchange. Professional personnel communicated within colonial allegiances, shared languages and localised organisations. UNESCO, however, viewed museums as critical sites for the presentation, interpretation and dissemination of a wide range of knowledge, and in partnership with the new international organisation International Council of Museums (ICOM), it hoped to unify and harness professional expertise to create a global web of museology. This was driven by the belief expressed in the constitution

of UNESCO that knowledge had the potential to address cross-cultural ignorance, identified as a contributor to previous conflicts between nations.³

In the wake of World War II, the UMS began to document the needs of museums across many devastated European cities, including undertaking the complex tasks associated with the repatriation of looted artworks. But critical to supporting UNESCO's global ambition was the production of a strategic plan for fostering museology around the world. In the event, this plan was a slim densely type-written paper prosaically titled the *Supplementary Report on Museums*.

A full analysis of this report is not possible here, but the proposals contained within the plan, and the personalities associated with it, were bridges between an earlier period of museology and the cross-cultural activities that developed in the twentieth century. A key participant was Dr Grace L Morley, a pioneer in the dissemination and development of cross-cultural museology. An American by birth, Morley had been seconded to UNESCO from her position as founding Director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, a position she had held since 1934. She was based in Paris at UNESCO between 1946 and 1949, afterwards returning to the San Francisco Museum of Art.⁴ In the later years of her career she served as the Director of the National Museum of India, New Delhi (1960–66), and at that time she was also the founding Head of the ICOM Regional Agency in Asia. Morley remained a significant player in the work of UNESCO and ICOM in the Asia-Pacific Region until her death in India in 1985. A telegram reporting this related that her ashes were to be immersed in the Ganges by her most respectful Indian colleagues.

Morley wrote the *Supplementary Report on Museums* and represented UNESCO at the 1946 meeting of the Sub-commission on Libraries and Museums. In her role as UMS Division Head, Morley was confident and persuasive, and she emphasised 'the important part played by museums in the civilised world', a refrain in her writing in the following years that echoed UNESCO rhetoric.⁵ The national representatives on the Sub-commission, including Chairman Professor Cibulka (Czechoslovakia) and Vice-Chairman Mr Carl H Milam (United States), received the report favourably. The minutes record that Mr Leigh Ashton (United Kingdom) commented that it was 'admirable, and in spite of certain differences of opinion was acceptable to all parties and could very well serve as a basis on which to work'.⁶ No doubt Ashton helped achieve a consensus within the committee. In the British museum scene, he was a

senior professional. Ashton had joined the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, in 1922, and was appointed its Director in 1945. He was personally aware of the logistical issues large metropolitan museums had faced in times of modern warfare. Significantly too, Ashton's art historical interests were shaped at the V&A, an organisation that had maintained a long-held interest in the cross-cultural interpretation of heritage; notably, he worked on the seminal *International Exhibition of Chinese Art*, London, 1935 (and was published on the subject of Chinese art). He was later a contributor to the exhibition 'The Art of India and Pakistan', held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1947–48, and New York in 1949. Thus, in terms of cross-cultural appreciation and interpretation, his interests were very closely aligned with those of UNESCO.

Despite its hasty production, the *Supplementary Report on Museums* mapped out the issues and areas of operation where UNESCO could provide leadership and support for the museum profession around the world. These included the 'collection of information on technical museum matters of every kind, including documentation, preservation, installation, display, interpretation', and the development of a suite of supporting publications and the mechanisms for the 'interchange of museum professionals'. With some enthusiasm the delegates discussed these and other issues. The Chinese representative, Mr Hu Tientshe, suggested a worldwide inventory of museum and library wartime losses.⁷ However, at the third meeting of the group the influential UNESCO Executive Secretary Julian Huxley, shifted the discussion away from immediate collection-management issues to focus more acutely on the link between the UNESCO agenda and the educational role of museums. He emphasised that 'a special inquiry into the educational functions of museums would be useful'.⁸

The link between museums and education is evident in UNESCO thinking from the start. For example, Morley's *Executive Summary of the Supplementary Report on Museums* reiterated the vision expressed at the establishment meeting of UNESCO in London the previous year:

It [the London statement] deliberately stressed the educational possibilities of museums for all men, assuming that their responsibilities for collecting, preserving and scholarly research are accepted and understood as long established functions. This educational aspect of museum development is bought out because it turns their full resources,—for instruction, for stimulation and inspiration, for recreation in the broadest and highest sense,—to the service of humanity

at a time mankind needs as never before the assurance of realizing his achievements as a creative human being, in past and present in visual, tangible form, for every man to understand and be encouraged.⁹

This statement is synchronous with the development of the 1946 ICOM definition of the museum in which the professionals took a more mechanistic tone. This definition stated: 'The word "museums" includes all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms'. While the definition was not directly criticised by Morley, for UNESCO, it was probably way too narrow to encompass the aspirations of the London statement. Morley recognised that in the 1940s, European-style museums were far from universal, and those which were colonial legacies were at risk of postcolonial neglect; museums had a limited geographical and cultural reach, and furthermore, were of little use in places where their functions were not familiar to, or valued by, the local people. This challenged the achievement of UNESCO ambitions, and, in part to address this, the *Supplementary Report on Museums* included the dynamic recommendation that research ought to be undertaken into the idea of 'cultural community centres' that 'develop from local roots and needs'.¹⁰ This recognised the inherent bias of what has subsequently become known as 'Eurocentric' museology, and, at least potentially, helped to sow the seeds of a new museum-development paradigm in which organisations grew from diverse community or cultural needs and local participation, and were places where those communities could create and disseminate knowledge about their own identities.

The participation of diverse cultures in the production of knowledge was critical to the values embodied in the constitution of UNESCO. It was envisaged that nations (and cultures) would 'collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples' and promote 'the free flow of ideas by word and image'.¹¹ For Morley, an art historian and museum curator, a useful way of achieving this collaborative exchange of knowledge was through the development of touring exhibitions, a core activity of traditional art museums. Thus, a milestone in UNESCO's mission of stimulating global museology was passed in 1953 with the publication of the *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*. In the foreword, Morley provided a rationale for UNESCO's promotion of international touring exhibitions. She wrote:

Travelling exhibitions have already demonstrated their usefulness in many arts of the world. They bring to remote places the possibility of knowledge and enjoyment of arts, sciences and history provided for large centres of population by great museums and exhibiting organisations. Going from country to country, they furnish an intellectual and cultural interchange of great values and broad influence. They can be used very profitably to enrich education at all levels and in all fields, and can be adapted as needed to impart information, to give instruction and to offer pleasure.

... They [UNESCO advisers] ... advocated increasing this activity so as to establish a network of international exchanges of additional exhibitions—not necessarily large, but representative and diversified—which would serve in interpreting one people to another and would go to the more remote regions of a country as well as to its great centres. Delegates to general Conferences have repeatedly agreed with their recommendations, and an international exchange of exhibitions programme has finally been launched under Unesco's direction.¹²

An early example of an exhibition developed within auspices of this program was *Australian Aboriginal Culture*, produced by the Australian UNESCO Museum Committee.¹³ In general, Morley argued that the exhibition was a distinct medium for the dissemination of information and, like a book, had a particular role and structure. She was confident that exhibitions had the potential to reach audiences across cultural and language barriers, primarily through the use of visual images and objects. Through them museums could effect change, breaking down ignorance through 'interpreting one people to another'.¹⁴

At the mid-point of the twentieth century, the underlying museological theory pursued by UNESCO had deep roots in the practices of the past but was also ambitious and idealistic. In the face of numerous political, social and economic tensions, UNESCO pursued the dissemination of information about cultures, societies and customs across cultures through the promotion of a global museological network. Morley and others were firm in the belief that the creation and dissemination of knowledge could address cultural ignorance, an identified cause of conflict. It is pertinent therefore to conclude by acknowledging that while Dr Grace L Morley may have been a visionary she may not have imagined the tremendous growth of diverse museums around the globe during the past twenty years, and, perhaps, more importantly, the achievement of a vibrant, inclusive and critical global museological discourse, as the following papers

presented at the 'New Museums across Cultures' sessions clearly demonstrate.

NOTES

- 1 Jonathan Sweet, 'Museum Architecture and Visitor Experience', in *Museum Marketing: Competing in a Global Market Place*, Butterworth Heinemann, 2007, pp. 231–2.
- 2 UNESCO World Art Series, *Australia: Aboriginal Paintings, Arnhem Land*, New York Graphic Society by arrangement with UNESCO, 1954.
- 3 *Constitution of UNESCO*, UNESCO, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, viewed 26 September 2007.
- 4 VP Dwivedi (ed.), *Museums and Museology: New Horizons, Essays in Honour of Dr. Grace Morley on Her 80th Birthday*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1980, p. iv.
- 5 *General Conference First Session, Held at UNESCO House, Paris, from 20 November to 10 December 1946*, UNESCO, Paris, 1947, p. 164.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 164.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 162.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 165.
- 9 *Supplementary Report on Museums*, Preparatory Commission, UNESCO, Paris, 14 November 1946, p. 1.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 2.
- 11 *Constitution of UNESCO*.
- 12 Grace L Morley, 'Foreword to the First Edition (1953)', *Museums and Monuments: X, Temporary and Travelling Exhibitions*, UNESCO, 1963, p. 56.
- 13 Jonathan Sweet, 'UNESCO and Cultural Heritage Practice in Australia in the 1950s: The International Touring Exhibition *Australian Aboriginal Culture, 1948–55*', *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, pp. 209–18, www.unisa.edu.au/artsman-journ/v4i1/academic.asp
- 14 Morley, p. 56.