

President's Report for period September 2023 to September 2024

To be presented at the 24th UMAC Annual General Meeting - Technical University of Dresden – Sept 26, 2024.

CONFERENCE SYDNEY 2023

The 22nd UMAC Annual Conference with the theme 'Truth-telling through university museums and collections' was a hybrid conference (in-person and digital) that took place at the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney from 28th August to 1st September 2023. While the conference language was in English, for the first time we offered participants the option of also publishing in their original language.

The conference sub-themes were; collections, social responsibility and ownership; truth-telling and museum policy; legacy collections in university museums; do university museums reflect their universities? Does the university value the contribution? Repatriation and a global context; Art and truth-telling; What does it mean to be a socially responsible artist/scientist in the 21st century? Student engagement: case studies of formal and informal learning experiences; students and the museum as a vehicle for social action; expanding access across the campus: evolving academic engagement in university museums; spaces, sustainability and experience; historical collections for the future? How can university museum collections be used in climate change discussions? Challenging the model of Western universities - recognising ideas from the Global South; museum as an agent of knowledge: How does a university deal with the past? Restorative justice for a just future; sustainable museums: collective action for a positive future.

There were 128 oral presentations, 15 posters, 5 workshops and roundtable discussions from a combined 247 contributors. List of represented countries included Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom, USA. There were 18 different Indigenous nations represented in the Australian contingent.

This was the first conference put together by the new Board of UMAC. It was only the second time we have had a conference in the southern hemisphere. For this reason, we picked a strong theme highly relevant to the Indo Pacific region on Truth-Telling through University Museums and Collections. We picked three leading female Indigenous academic keynote speakers who provided an excellent contextual

framework for the discussions. In this way we believe we have broken-free from the Eurocentric nature of many of our earlier conferences. This was shown by less European participation and greater participation from Asia, the Pacific and South Africa.

We were also pleased it was a hybrid conference. This was our first in person meeting of UMAC since the pandemic. There was an outbreak of COVID among Board members and other conference delegate, this meant that people struck by the disease could isolate and still participate digitally. This was the first time we managed to include a section devised by students who did a panel discussion, and an exhibition walk through and response.

TWO HORIZONS

UMAC ICOM, is funded by SAREC for the ‘Two Horizons’ project. The full title of the project is “two-way museology, a cross-institutional and multi-knowledge system exploration”. The project concept emerged from the new UMAC Board (elected in 2022 at Prague) through our strategic planning processes. We considered the first task of the new UMAC Board to be the formulation of a new strategic plan that supports and feeds into the ICOM strategic plan for 2022-2028. The ‘Two Horizons’ project builds on UMAC’s ‘restitution and return’ (an earlier SAREC supported special project) work and is an important research component of our decolonisation strategy. It is based on a simple premise outlined briefly below.

It has long been known that material engagements with objects provide cross-disciplinary bridges in pedagogy. This research project extends this concept to explore how different forms of knowledge can be embedded into the materiality of objects and how different knowledge systems can be represented in the diversity of museum work programs.

Our Board know that there are many museums, both within the higher education sector and outside of it who are already developing these practices. For example, ethnographic museums already have experience in working with objects that carry meanings derived from other knowledge systems. The project was designed to consist of a series of workshops, either face to face or online that explore the question of bringing multiple knowledge systems into a variety of museum work (e.g. exhibition, cataloguing, museum education and augmented and virtual reality). We are looking for examples of museum practices that are experimenting with multiple knowledge systems (two horizons museology) for inclusion on a research website or portal and discussion in workshops (online and face to face).

An essential element of each example of this form of museology is a combination of expertise in museum practice and cultural knowledge holders being directly engaged in shaping the museum practices. Bringing practitioners together to document examples on a centralised website would enable the potential for developing a best practice guide in the future as a project outcome for the wider museum sector.

In designing the project, we reached out to many ICOM and non-ICOM organisations to become either financially supporting partners or non-financial partners, the former having a direct say in the disbursement of project funds. The simplicity and relevance of the project initially attracted many partners. These include ICOM Australia, Shanghai Foundation, ICOM ICR (Regional Museums), ICOM ICME (Ethnographic Museums), CAUMAC (Council of Australian University Museums and Collections), Anant University, India, Australian National University, Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney.

Long COVID has meant a slow start with progress for this project. Plans to launch the UMAC ‘Two Horizons project’ in Canberra following on directly from this year’s conference at the Chau Chak Wing Museum have been cancelled because of illness. It prompted the cancellation of other follow up workshops after UMAC 2023 and for a time meant limited interaction with project partners.

Since this slow start, some progress has been made. A presentation about the project was made to the non-financial partner, the new ICOM ASPAC Board (via zoom). A recorded presentation about the project was made to the non-financial partner ICOM ICME 2023 annual meeting in Budapest. We have identified a group of Indigenous Object-Based learning practitioners who have developed protocols and programs for using Indigenous cultural material in museum education programs. We have identified a virtual reality practitioner who is creating virtual reality experiences of Yolngu Indigenous knowledge systems. We are discussing the possibility of including his research experiences (PhD creative practice and exegesis) in the Two Horizons project.

In 2024 the project has attracted new partnerships including the University of Canberra. A conference was held in July 2024 entitled ‘Voicing the Living Archive, working with Indigenous Collections in Higher Education’. Material from this UMAC sponsored conference will be made available through the Two Horizons research portal to be established on the UMAC website later this year. Another new partner is the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (India), the world’s largest Indigenous higher education institute, who are building a pedagogical museum on campus. Two Horizons is working with them on Indigenous knowledge through Object-Based Teaching and Learning. A range of other material is being assembled for the research portal.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

An annual general meeting was held on September 1, 2023. The meeting opened at 11:30am after the announcement of the 2023 UMAC Award winner, the Object-based Learning program of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney. This is the first time the UMAC Award has been won by the host of the annual conference. The meeting was conducted in hybrid form because of the need for some Board members to isolate.

PUBLICATIONS

Over the reporting period UMAC published issue UMAC Journal issue [16 \(1\)](#) a thematic issue on pedagogy containing the results of an earlier SAREC funded project. The issue included case studies on the use of university museums and collections for specific pedagogies. UMAC Journal issue [16 \(2\)](#) represents the abstracts volume for the joint meeting with Universeum held at TU Dresden (details not to hand at present). The journal is only produced in digital format under a Creative Commons License CC BY-SA 4.0, ISSN 2071-7229. A third thematic issue of the journal is close to publication, issue 16 (3), with guest editors on STEM in the Art Museum.

COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to the journal, UMAC maintains a UMAC Mailing List, Facebook, Twitter, WeChat and YouTube channels. The [Linkedin Group](#) which commenced last year has attracted 183 members. Regular messages are distributed across all media.

The following videos were added to the YouTube channel over the reporting period. This included [4 Imaginations videos](#), 3 videos of the finalists for the [2024 UMAC Award](#) and [2 UMAC 2023 posters](#) presented as videos.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Zhao Ke has reported to the Board on plans for the UMAC Futures working group. This involves continuation of the [Imaginations series of interviews](#) with young professionals from around the world. To date 22 scholars have been interviewed from 12 university museums. The [UMuseums app](#) based on the UMAC database has been revamped using money raised by UMAC Futures. There has been over 21,000 views and 411 installs so far with a new version of the app launched recently which incorporates new features including user feedback.

UMAC Vice President, Giovanna Vitelli was a Co-keynote at the MINOM-ICOM 2024, Catania (Italy). A keynote for the Consulta Universitaria Nazionale per la Storia dell'Arte (CUNSTA) annual conference, Cagliari (Italy) CFP: "Musei e collezioni d'arte nelle università italiane" (Cagliari, 21-22 settembre 2023) (cunsta.it) in September 2023.

In July 2024 Co-Director, MAGMa Erasmus Mundus Masters Programme Summer School 2024, "Contested Collections, Museum Practice" University of Glasgow - Postgraduate study - Taught degree programmes A Z - Managing Art & Cultural Heritage in Global Markets (Erasmus Mundus International Master).

In April 2024 she was Session Moderator 'The Return of the Galliwasp', the first natural history repatriation from Europe to the Caribbean.

Repatriation and Museums conference, Glasgow.

[From-Scotland-to-the-World-EVENT-PROGRAMME.pdf](#) (create.ac.uk)

One of our objectives is the 'Building Bridges' project initiated by our two Spanish speaking Board members. This project evaluates the priorities for the ICOM Spanish-speaking community in relation to university museums and collections and with the Board looks at ways to lift participation in UMAC by Hispanic university museums.

28 August 2023 UMAC convened a meeting at the UMAC 2023 conference with a delegation from the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, A memorandum of understanding was developed and signed to enable the resumption of a global training and workshop partnership in 2024 and beyond. The MOU covers the mandate of the current UMAC Board.

14 October 2023 UMAC wrote to the President of ICOM Spain requesting that the decision to reject the ICOM membership application from a university professor who works with university collections be reviewed and reversed. This decision was subsequently reversed, and the membership application accepted.

5 December 2023 A presentation on 'Ethnographic museums and two-way museology' was made at the ICME 2023 Annual Conference: Museums and Change: Transforming Our Institutions for the Future in Budapest, Hungary.

11 Dec 2023 An invited presentation on behalf of UMAC: 'University Art Museums: a global view of challenges and opportunities', was made at the Collezioni e musei storico-artistici universitari: riflessioni su problemi e prospettive, in Macerata, Italy.

December 2023 - Successful campaign to stop the closure of Griffith University Art Museum, letters were written on behalf of UMAC to University Executive during a consultation phase for the proposal to close the museum. The university decided to support the art museum during 2024 with a broader investigation into the future of the museum. UMAC has offered assistance with this follow up review.

One of our objectives is the 'Building Bridges' project initiated by our two Spanish speaking Board members Ana Isabel Diaz-Plaza Varon and Margarita Guzman has been to evaluate the priorities for the ICOM Spanish-speaking community in relation to university museums and collections and with the Board looks at ways to lift participation in UMAC by Hispanic university museums. We have agreed to revamp the outdated Spanish material on our website.

Africa is another potential growth area for UMAC. Board member Sian Tiley-Nel reports that ICOM-UMAC has grown its membership in South Africa with nine paid-up universities and a wider UMAC emailing list of now 46 representatives for university museums and collections (archives and galleries) in higher education in SA. There are only three South African universities paid up for 2024 as institutional members of UMAC (1) University of Pretoria Museums (2) Stellenbosch University Museums and (3) the Javett-UP Arts Centre. The other universities represented by individual membership are on the mailing list (4) Witwatersrand University, (5) Sol Plaatjie University, (6) University of Cape Town, (7) North-West University, (8)Walter Sisulu University, (9) University of the Western Cape. Of the 26 public universities, only 11 are traditional universities, some are so newly established they

have not acquired 'collections'. However, many of these are 'missing' middle universities. I will continue to advocate membership, however, overall membership in ICOM-SA is declining, the website hasn't been updated in years and most cannot afford the ICOM fee a very large percentage goes to ICOM Paris. ICOM-SA also offers no funding and UMAC SA is unfunded. My efforts are largely networked-based.

In total, there are now 26 UMAC members in Africa and the UMAC database has grown to listing 16 museums and collections in South Africa. This database is very important as it is like a business card which promotes UMAC on a global scale. Before 2019, there were NO members from Africa. The UMAC Worldwide Database is the global business card which can help promote African university collections and museums and this together with LinkedIn should be used to encourage more members from the African continent. According to the above database, UMAC is represented in Africa by 10 countries: Morocco, Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, Botswana, Madagascar, Senegal and Western Sahara. I supported the UMAC LinkedIn which only began in November 2022 and currently, we have 182 followers- I continually use this platform to promote more members for Africa.

The UMAC Board has agreed to expand the number of travel bursaries offered to participants in the joint UMAC Universeum meeting in Dresden. We are also offering small travel grants for finalists in the UMAC Award for 2024 to be able to attend the announcement of the winner at the Dresden conference.

Andrew Simpson

September 2024