UMAC

ICOM international committee for university museums and collections

UMAC Annual Report 2025-2026

- **Elections**

  A new board was elected during the AGM organized online on the 27th of Novembre. The vote was organized by an ad-hoc committee (Levent Tökün and Kirsten Vincenz), and voting process via Balotilo had been completed prior to the meeting.

  Levent Tökün and Kirsten Vincenz, members of the Election Committee, presented the electoral process and its challenges.

  Key data included:

  – 942 voting emails sent

  – 176 votes received

  – A high volume of technical incidents and member enquiries

  The importance of maintaining accurate membership records and contact details was underlined.

  Results of the 2025 elections were announced as follows:

  – Chair: Sébastien Soubiran

  – Vice-Chair: Giovanna Vitelli

  – Vice-Chair: Zhao Ke

  – Treasurer: Nathalie Nyst

  – Secretary: Ana Isabel Díaz-Plaza Varón

  – Ordinary Members: Ayumi Terada; Mauricio Candido da Silva; Sian Tiley-Nel

- **Transition**

  The change of board needed a transition period to get acquainted with different tools and procedures. The previous secretary Gina Hammond was very helpful in accompanying Ana Isabel Diaz-Placa Varon and sharing all necessary information.

- **Ordinary general assembly**

Two ordinary general assembly were organized online.

The first one on the 26th of January was intended firstly to vote the 2026 UMAC provisional budget in order to complete the ICOM online procedure before the 30th of January and secondly to approve the strategic plan written by the new board for the next three years. Both were approved. See minutes in annex.

The second one was organized on the 10th of June in order to vote for the 2027 annual conference host. See minutes in annex.

- **Board meetings**

In order to discuss UMAC ongoing and future activities, the executive board of UMAC meet online once a month and uses *WhatsApp* for current exchanges as well as a mailing list.

- **Strategic plan**

The strategic plan developed by the board was approved during the online ordinary general assembly on the 27th of January. It is available online on UMAC website.

- **Communication**

  - **digital environment**

    - **website**

https://umac.icom.museum

It is a WordPress website with an accessible CMS. It is hosted and generously maintained by the Coordination Centre for Scientific University Collections in Germany at the Humboldt University. The secretary of the board is in charge of updating information. Lots of information had to be updated on the website.

Due to maintenance issue the colleagues from the Coordination Centre alert us on their difficulties to maintain the website on a long term. A general reflection was leaded by Ana Isabel to reconsidered the hosting of our website in order to have a more sustainable approach. It was decided to migrate our website to ICOM mini-site.

- Database

UMAC has developed, also in collaboration with the Coordination Centre for Scientific University Collections in Germany at the Humboldt University, an international database of university museum and collections. This database suffered from a lack of updating and visibility so the board also works on a new strategy and environment, this reflection was leaded by Zhao Ke in collaboration with the Coordination Center. It was decided to develop a new website in order to host the database. The board will then adopt a new strategy to implement and update the database. Collaboration with national committees and regional alliances will be develop.

- UMAC digital Archives

The website contains lots of information, files, pictures and videos that though not visible are still host by the website. Those digital archives represent an important material connected to the history of UMAC and have to be preserved. Consequently, the board explore different possibilities to stock this digital archives. The reflection is leaded by Zhao Ke in collaboration with the Coordination Center.

- UMuseum App:

Manage By Zhao Ke. The UMuseum app, the mobile interface of the database, continues to be developed for Android and iOS. New AI-driven functions, including automatic data verification, are currently being tested. Once the web database migration is completed, two-way synchronization.

- Social Media

UMAC use to have different social media. Apart from Linkedin the board was not able to retrieve login and passwords for the others. As a professional network the board agreed to focus on Linkedin rather than creating new profiles or relying on personal social media of the board. It is managed by Sian Tiley-Nel. UMAC Linkedin profile, as a public group, has grown to 442 online members.

- Mailing List

The UMAC network uses a mailing list for its communication, that is managed and moderated by the chair. Each member can send their own message directly to the list. There are currently 3876 subscribers.

- <u>Conferences</u>

Members of the board participated to different conferences as UMAC representant:

UNICAMP Forum, University of Sao Paolo Brazil, April 2026, Giovanna Vitelli

University of Verona, “The fundamental role of networks in enhancing the visibility and legitimacy of U-museums and collections”, 11th May 2026, Sébastien Soubiran

Université de Lubumbashi (UNILU, DR Congo), Workshop “Artistic reinterpretations and community reappropriation: Approaches to a social museology of heritage objects to be returned”, 6-10 July 2026, Nathalie Nyst

Université de Lubumbashi (DR Congo), UNILU Heritage Day, “Questions autour des matri- et patrimoines universitaires” and, with Hugues Dreyssé, « ICOM – UMAC. Des outils au service de la communauté », 14 July 2026, Nathalie Nyst

International Symposium of Cerisy, France, invited by the Musée des arts et métiers (Paris), “Musées, universités et recherche, la singularité des musées universitaires”, 20th Septembre 2026, Sébastien Soubiran

University Museum of Louvain (MUSÉE L), Belgium, Decolonising university collections? Challenges, issues and perspectives, 8th and 9th Octobre 2026, chair of a session, Sébastien Soubiran

- **UMAC future initiatives**

Zhao Ke is currently leading this working group. A specific session will be organised during the annual conference in Patras with junior professionnals.

The IMAGINATIONS interview series was renewed, enabling former interviewees to become hosts. Slađana from Serbia and other UMAC Futures members will participate. Episode #24 - Martin Stricker was interviewed about the history and development of the UMAC database. Interviews with colleagues from Singapore and Brazil are planned for October–December 2026.

An AI-generated video project was launched for five selected university museums. Using their historical materials, the videos will showcase their heritage and collections

- **UMAC-Journal**

The Journal now has two new co-Editors from the UMAC Board, Sian Tiley-Nel and Giovanna Vitelli, who have undertaken to reposition UMAC-J as a publication serving a wider range of ICOM regions and member interests. The Journal will go active with its new vision and mandate in 2027.

- **UMAC AWARDS**

    - The 2025 UMAC AWARDS was attributed exceptionally to two laurates, the University of Canterbury (New Zeeland) & the University of Navarra, Spain.

    - Since their creation in 2016, the UMAC awards were chaired by Akiko Fukuno. She decided to handed over to a new chair. She accomplished a hard job and her contribution to the success of the UMAC awards is tremendous. Our community is very thankful to her commitment.

    - Joshua Gorman, first Executive Director of Harvard University’s Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, accepted to step in as chair of UMAC awards.

A new jury was also choosen:

- Verónica Guadalupe Herrera Rivera (Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City, Mexico)
- Shani Roper (UWI Museum, The University of the West Indies, Jamaica)
- Ayumi Terada (The University Museum, The University of Tokyo, Japan), UMAC board member
- Muthoni Thang'wa (National Museums of Kenya, Kenya)
- Sian Tiley-Nel (University of Pretoria Museums, University of Pretoria, South Africa), UMAC board member

- **Collaboration of UMAC with networks and other institutions**:

As an ICOM entity, UMAC is able to interact with all international committees, national committees and regional alliances. A specific group is animated by ICOM with a WhatsApp group and regular webinars. Discussions were also engaged during the ICOM AGM in Paris in June.

Together with NATHIST and SUSTAIN we submitted a recommendation to ICOM executive board: "Advancing Ecological Literacy and Nature Conservation in Support of ICOM's Climate and Sustainability Commitments".

In alignment with the ICOM Strategic Plan and 2025 Resolution No. 4, ICOM is committed to supporting climate action and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As 2030 approaches, the window for meaningful action is narrowing. With biodiversity loss now clearly recognized as inseparable from climate change, addressing these issues is essential to ensure that ICOM activities remain aligned with scientific knowledge, professional ethics, and the organization's stated commitments to biodiversity protection. It is therefore concerning that gaps in ecological literacy have been evident in some recent ICOM programming. In particular, framing the feeding of free ranging domestic predators as "wildlife care" is not aligned with established scientific evidence. Such practices are associated with declines in native vertebrate species, particularly in urban contexts, as well as impacts on natural and bioarchaeological heritage and increased zoonotic disease risks. These issues are directly relevant to the One Health framework. With 2030 as shared horizon we recommend building a foundation now by:

• Creating a dedicated section within the Member Space - to ensure members have access to the latest knowledge resources;

• Establishing a working group bringing advice from nature conservation scientists, Indigenous and local knowledge holders - to keep ICOM's communications credible and to support members in taking well-informed actions.

This recommendation was endorsed by ICMAH, ICOM CC, ICME, ICETHICS, ICOM EXHIBITIONS, CIPEG, ICOM STORAGE, AVICOM, ICOM SECURITY, ICAMT, ICOM MUSIC, ICFA, ICMEMOHRI, GLASS.

UMAC also endorsed three others recommendations:

Harmonizing National Membership Interpretations of Statutes (Article 3, Section 3) ; Proposed by ICOM CONSERVATION,

Strengthening Governance and Electoral Integrity through consistent IC By-law ; Proposed by ICAMT & ICME,

Enhancing Equity and Mobility for Transnational Museum Professionals within ICOM ; Proposed by AVICOM, ICOM UK.

UMAC is also partner of a SAREC project successfully submitted by NATHIST entitled Confluence of Knowledge Across Time: Workshop for Reciprocal Engagement with Living Knowledge Systems in Museums. The project seeks to move museum practice beyond the historical prioritization of static specimens. Its core goal is to formalize the simultaneous application of Indigenous and Western perspectives—to establish practical suggestions for exhibitions or museum outreach that display natural environments as a vital, reciprocal connection rather than a mere resource.

Three workshops were organized online. UMAC Chair, Sebastien Soubiran, participate to one of the workshops: "The Quiet Beasts in the Living Territory: Rukai Forest Knowledge, Colonial Forestry History, and Decolonial Futures". All of them are available on NATHIST Youtube chanel. Saturday, 11 July 2026.

- **Memberships**

So far there was 171 new individual member and 21 institutional members in 2026.

The total of individual member listed so far as UMAC members is 917 and the total of institutional member listed so far as UMAC members is 192. However, the exact number will only be known early 2027.

In 2026, there was 660 individual and 140 institutional members registered.

- **Working Groups**

“Teaching with Objects”: https://www.teachingwithobjects.org/

Initiated by the European network Universeum, UMAC joined and financed the project to enrich the platform with international perspective. The objective of this working group is to foster and support innovative Object-Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) methods and practices in higher education by collecting, evaluating, enhancing and sharing concepts, methods and tools for teaching with academic heritage objects, including in digital and hybrid didactic situations. The platform provides a toolbox for object-based teaching in order to establish a sustainable network, a community of practice supporting teaching with objects from university museums and collections.

- **Annual Conferences:**

  - The 2025 annual conference organized by the previous board took place during the 27th ICOM General conference in Dubai.

    The theme was “The future of museums in rapidly changing communities”. Three sessions were co-organised with other international committees :

Session A-23| “Reconsidering the division between natural and cultural heritage: The role of natural history collections in reactivating intangible knowledge”
NATHIST-UMAC
Chairs: Anita Hermannstädter and Giovanna Vitelli

Session B-14 | “Collecting the digital: Rethinking materiality in science and university museums”
CIMUSET-UMAC
Chairs: Zhao Ke and Jacob Thorek Jensen

Session C-6 | “Ancient civilisations and the contemporary academy”
CIPEG-UMAC
Chairs: Tine Bagh and Andrew Simpson

A specific UMAC session was organised at the at the American University of Sharjah: “Rapid change in higher education: The strategic value of museums and collections”
Chairs: Andrew Simpson, Gina Hammond and Zhao Ke

There were 37 contributions in total with representants from 20 countries all over the world.

More information is accessible on UMAC website:

https://umac.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/UMACj-17-2-2025-web.pdf

- 2026 annual conference is hosted by the University of Patras, and co-organized with ICOM Greece. A post-conference tour is organized in Athens. A complete report will be done in the 2027 annual report.
- 2027 annual conference will be held in Sao Polo, Brazil, 7th-14th Novembre as voted during the Ordinary General Assembluy organized on the 10th of June. The conference will be co-organized by the three public universities in the state of São Paulo —USP, Unicamp, and Unesp- and ICOM-Brazil.
- 2028 annual conference will be organized during the ICOM international conference and will be located in Rotterdam
- 2029 annual conference: call for candidates is open and the host will be voted in 2027.