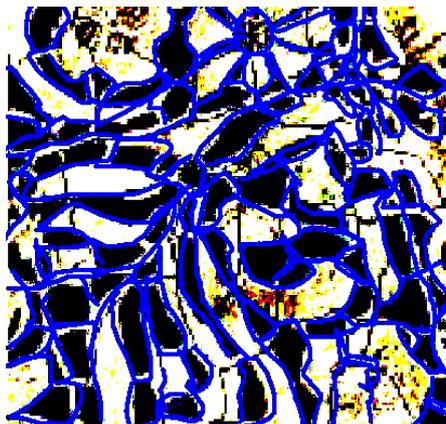


COLLECTINGNET

*An international museum network
for collecting issues*



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Formation of an international museum network for collecting issues

Eva Fägerborg

Welcome to the first issue of Collectingnet Newsletter. This international museum network for collecting issues was created at a conference in Stockholm 15-16 November 2007. As a basis for the work the following declaration was presented and agreed upon:

All over the world museums are engaged in contemporary issues, collecting, and research. Creating knowledge through continuous and well thought-out collecting is a basis for the future development of museums. Questions arising today are how museums can study and collect the global society, and how museum collections can represent the increasingly complex and diverse audiences that they serve. New conditions, scientific, ideological and ethical considerations have consequences for collecting policies and practices – for the cultural heritage, embracing both material and immaterial aspects of human life that museums produce and preserve. The challenge is common and museums need to learn about each other's views, methods, and experiences.

Collecting issues are relevant for all museums, irrespective of their size and subject field. Collaboration across borders is essential for the development of museums as knowledge institutions. Therefore, museum professionals from nineteen countries, gathered at the

conference Connecting Collecting at the Nordiska museet, Stockholm, Sweden, have initiated the formation of an international collecting network. The aim is to become a forum for extended dialogue and collaboration on the meanings and implications of the museums' mission to collect, on collecting policies and practices, and on the role of collecting in museum work in general.

In connection with the conference a working group has been formed, with the commission to develop the tasks of the network and to initiate a dialogue with ICOM regarding the forthcoming application process for the establishment of a new international ICOM committee.

Register to join the network by e-mail to:
collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se

Collectingnet invites museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the network to a vital association and mouthpiece of international cooperation. The Newsletter will be published four times a year. We welcome contributions with reflections, conference/seminar reports, project presentations, specific questions you wish to raise, literature tips, invitations to cooperation or other themes. Please send your contribution to the next issue by 1 June to collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se. You can also contact the editors personally: catherine.marshall@artscouncil.ie, eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se, lotta.hylten-cavallius@mkc.botkyrka.se.

Connecting the Collecting: New Challenges and New Possibilities in the Age of Globalisation

Peter du Rietz

There are two phenomena that probably more than any other put a mark on our contemporary society – globalisation and computerisation. For museums involved with documenting the contemporary, these two processes mean both new challenges and new possibilities. Never before has cooperation between museums in different parts of the world been so easy to perform, largely due to the new computerized communication technology. Never before has that very cooperation between museums across the globe felt so important and relevant, largely due to rapidly increasing globalisation.

Connecting collecting on a global scale does however meet many challenges, as does documenting the computerized world. One challenge concerns the dematerialisation that the computer systems and software represents – how do we collect what are perhaps the foremost tools and meeting places of our age, when they are basically immaterial? Another challenge concerns the despatialisation that the

globalisation process represents. Most museums are rooted in local, regional or national locations, but today we consume goods from around the world, work in global companies, our pension funds represent ownership spread around the globe, we travel world wide and spend our leisure time in virtual worlds and global communities in a computer system called the world wide web. In order to fully understand and to document this aspect of human life, the spatial and cultural perspectives we all bring with us need to be met by perspectives from other parts of the world. International cooperation between the museums concerned with documenting our age is therefore an absolute necessity.

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In search of common grounds

Elin von Unge and Britta Söderqvist

Nearly 140 delegates from nineteen countries participated in the international conference *Connecting Collecting*, held at Nordiska museet in Stockholm, November 2007. One aim of the conference was to search for common grounds for creating an international forum for knowledge development and collaboration on issues concerning contemporary collecting. This would hopefully be the starting point for establishing a new ICOM Committee. The speakers at the conference presented a variety of contemporary museum projects as well as different approaches to collecting and collections management showing the connections between cultural heritage, collection practice and political and academic structures and ideals.

As the conference invitation implied the aim was to stress the importance of “collecting as a key to the future of museums in a global community”. However, the concluding discussion, although interesting and important, focused on general *collection* issues, from the care and value of collections to repatriation, acquisition and de-acquisition, rather than the *act of*

collecting itself. There seems to be a need to reflect upon certain key concepts such as *collecting*, *global* and *network*. This text aims to outline some of the important questions that should be addressed when searching common grounds for the international committee.

First off, what does heritage work in a global context require? How can we find fruitful and balanced ways of approaching global heritage work, including issues of relevance and representativity, in an international context? Also, do all types of collection issues belong in the network/framework or should there be demarcations? If so, which aspects of collections’ work are included in the practise of collecting? Further, is the aim of an international network to share the museums’ individual collecting experiences at an international arena, or the museum’s individual experience collecting in a global context? Or is it a way to initiate international collecting projects about global issues? Or is it all three? Finally, as an international network how will the collaboration take place? Will it be just a network or perhaps

provide a framework for contemporary collecting as well? In either case, how can the participants be assured of dialogue and discussion?

These reflections are written by Britta Söderqvist and Elin von Unge, both students of the Masters program of International Museum Studies in Göteborg, Sweden. Britta Söderqvist is currently working within the ongoing Renewal Scheme at the Maritime Museum of Göteborg. Elin von Unge has been involved in the proceedings of the conference Connecting Collecting

and is currently writing her Masters dissertation about the use of the heritage concept within Samdok. It is our hope that the questions proposed above can be helpful in the process of establishing the new network.

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Rationalising our collections at the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA)

Rebecca Thomlinson

It is vital for the future survival of any museum to ensure its collections grow and develop and not to let them stagnate. Museums are not static organisations and not only collect the past but also the present and the future. A major problem for most museums is lack of space and museums have realised that to carry on collecting into the future they must regularly review and rationalise what has been collected in the past. Disposal has become a subject of much controversy in UK museums in the past few years. Traditionally there has always been a presumption against disposal but in the last few years this traditional stance has been much modified.

The Museums Association Code of Ethics

The Museums Association (MA), through consultancy with the museum sector, has recently produced a *Disposal toolkit* which provides guidance on disposal for museums and has also published a new version of its *Code of Ethics for Museums* which includes a revision of its ethical advice on disposals. This new Code of Ethics states that “Responsible, curatorially-motivated disposal takes place as part of a museum’s long-term collections policy, in order to increase public benefit derived from museum collections.” (P16). For more information on this see: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/disposal>

Collection Reviews at the BPMA

The BPMA has a very proactive contemporary collecting policy but to continue collecting the BPMA must regularly review and appraise what they already have. Not to undertake such reviews would stunt development and growth of the collection in the future and prevent the acquisition of new material. Like many museums, the tradition of accepting everything that we were offered in the past means that there is often much duplication of objects

and also large gaps in the collection. To run along side the *BPMA Contemporary Collecting Policy*, the BPMA has recently produced a *Museum Collection Review Policy and Strategy*. This divides the collection into subject groups and sets a timetable for the next three years for reviewing each group individually. This procedure not only aims to identify items for disposal but also to identify gaps in the collection that can be addressed during contemporary collecting.

How decisions are made

Obviously the decision of whether to keep or dispose of an object is not easy. This important decision has to be made by all three BPMA curators and often with help from external experts in the subject area. These experts help identify typologies, duplicates and what is important to represent in that area. The first stage is for the review team to agree the criteria for review, for example what falls inside and outside the collection group. Then the objects must be brought together, physically where possible and ordered by type, often with help from the experts.

The BPMA bases its decisions for disposal on three main criteria: Duplication, Condition and Relevance or importance to the collection. For example questions that may be asked of an object are: Is this object already represented in the collection? Could better examples of this object be obtained? Is it unsafe, is it broken beyond repair, does it have a postal connection? Would the BPMA ever ‘use’ the object for exhibitions, research, education etc? Could the object be better cared for elsewhere?

Often the criteria may overlap, for instance if we do have duplicates we would normally keep the one(s) that are in better condition. If a duplicate, the merits

of keeping more than one example for the collection must be considered, for example if the object is particularly rare or important or if it exists as part of a group of multiple objects. Likewise if an object is in a bad condition the advantages of having it repaired must be taken into account, especially if it is an essential part of the collection or the only example of a rare object. Further research into provenance and object paperwork is always needed and particularly the wishes of the donor at time of donation or any conditions that accompanied the donation or purchase (e.g. conditions of external funding). Some donors specify to return the items to them if no longer needed by the BPMA (this is an option on our Transfer of Title form). Other objects may tell a story or have a greater significance as part of a larger group of objects. All decisions are documented at every stage of the review and reasons for disposal clearly stated. The final decision of disposal lies with the BPMA Board of Trustees.

How the BPMA disposes of objects

The BPMA follows the MA *Code of Ethics for Museums* in how it disposes of objects. The Code of Ethics advises keeping the objects in the public domain as far as possible and so the BPMA first advertises the disposals as free transfers to other registered museums in the MA's publication, *The Museums Journal* and also approaches relevant museums directly.

If these methods are not successful other ways can be used such as offering to non-registered museums, other public institutions, private collectors or specialist groups (only if no museum or public institution will take the item), returning to the donor or transferring to the BPMA's Access and Development Department for use as a handling collection for educational activities and events. Recycling or destruction of items are the very last resort or when security or safety reasons dictate. The MA Code of Ethics states that disposal must not be undertaken principally for financial reasons, except in exceptional circumstances. The BPMA makes sure it does not dispose of items solely for financially motivated purposes and if sale is the only option when disposing of an item, it ensures the funds raised are used solely for the benefit of the museum collection.

For more information on our *Museum Collections Review Policy and Strategy*, please see our website at: <http://www.postalheritage.org.uk/aboutus/organisation/downloads/Museum%20Collection%20Review%20Policy%20and%20Strategy.pdf>

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Remembering Migration

Charlotte Hyltén-Cavallius

Migration is one of the largest processes in societies all over the world today. It has effects not only on the receiving countries, but also on the countries people leave. When we in the future commemorate this historical period, migration will be a process that many people will have to engage with strongly. Migration will then be part of family background and kinship history for a large part of the global population. But we have not yet established how best we should describe or give form to these experiences made by the generations of people who have migrated.

The project *Remembering Migration* is a collaboration between the Multicultural Centre and the Nordiska museet in Sweden. Our aim is to develop a framework for a large-scale collection of written life history narratives related to the international migration to Sweden. Another purpose, beside the collection itself, is also to discuss biographical writing as a collecting method and as a specific

means to express experiences. The first phase of the project consists of creating a sustainable scientific framework, an organizational structure and the development of a form of "keys" that the narrators could use when they write their life histories. The second phase consists of the difficult task of spreading knowledge about the project. It is, though, important that the project is presented as a matter for society as a whole. All persons – young and old, women and men – with personal experience of migration are urged to take part in the personal life history writing. The project *Remembering Migration* is an attempt to reach another narrative, a new contemporary history of migration.

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Citizenship ceremonies – a theme for international cooperation?

Cecilia Hammarlund-Larsson

The Nordiska museet and the Royal Armoury are currently studying citizenship ceremonies in Sweden and collecting material regarding this rather new phenomenon in our country. Since the beginning of the 21st century many local communities and cities have developed special ceremonies for welcoming new citizens, to be held on the National day of Sweden, the 6th of June.

We would like to ask if any of you have studied this kind of ceremony in your own country, or if you know of other institutions that are studying this phenomenon. We have already been in contact with researchers in Denmark and Norway, and some other Samdok museums in Sweden are preparing to document ceremonies in different parts of the country.

Now we are approaching colleagues outside of Scandinavia who are interested in these kinds of ceremonies. If you have information to share, if you wish to discuss this phenomenon or are interested in some kind of collaboration on the theme, please contact:

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Flower decoration in Stockholm City Hall for the ceremony 2007. Photo: Eva Fägerborg, Nordiska museet.



Collected items from the citizenship ceremony. Photo: Cecilia Hammarlund-Larsson, Nordiska museet.



In Stockholm, the citizen ceremonies take place in the City Hall. New citizens and representatives of the city are waiting for the ceremony 2007 to start in the Blue Hall. Photo: Ann Grönhammar, the Royal Armoury.