

COMCOL



International Committee for Collecting

www.comcol-icom.org

COMCOL is the International Committee of ICOM with the mission to deepen discussions and share knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections development. COMCOL is a platform for professional exchange of views and experiences around collecting in the broadest sense. The mandate includes collecting and de-accessioning policies, contemporary collecting, restitution of cultural property and respectful practices that affect the role of collections now and in the future, from all types of museums and from all parts of the world. COMCOL's aims are to increase cooperation and collaboration across international boundaries, to foster innovation in museums and to encourage and support museum professionals in their work with collections development.

COMCOL Newsletter (formerly *Collectingnet Newsletter*) is published four times a year and is available at COMCOL's website <http://www.comcol-icom.org>, at ICOM's website <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-committees/international-committees/international-committee/international-committee-for-collecting.html> and at the Swedish Samdok website <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213&topmenu=143>.

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With this issue, COMCOL Newsletter editorial group has a new member, Judith Coombes. The Swedish-Irish-Australian team is looking forward to contributions from museum professionals and scholars all over the world, to use the newsletter as a forum for developing the work of COMCOL. We welcome short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to cooperate, new research or other matters. Please send your contribution for the next issue by **1 October 2011** to the editors, and contact us also if you wish to discuss a theme for publication.

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Statement from the Chair

Dear colleagues and friends,

Our committee is one year old now and about to organise its first regular annual meeting. It is exciting to work with so many competent people in and around the board. Gradually a community of interest is emerging, or perhaps I should say a “community of passion”. We share a common interest or even passion for collecting issues. At this very moment you are a reader of our newsletter. I do hope you are also a member of COMCOL – if not, you are very welcome to join us! I also do hope you are willing to contribute to our work, by participating in our working groups, by participating in our conference, or by writing a contribution to our newsletter. Please share your ideas and experiences with colleagues from Mongolia to Brazil, from Finland to South Africa. Our newsletter is not a peer-reviewed academic journal. It is an open forum, a place for dialogue and reflection. So, I invite you all to contribute. And, please, do inform us about publications, conferences, events, etc.

I have the pleasure of inviting you all to participate in COMCOL’s first international conference. The conference will be dedicated to “participative strategies”. It will be held in Berlin, 31st Oct.-3rd Nov. 2011. The conference will take place at the **Dahlem Museums** (National Museums in Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation).

COMCOL Conference 2011

International Conference on “Participative strategies”

General information

The ICOM International Committee of Collecting (COMCOL) invites you to register for the joint conference of COMCOL, CAMOC and ICOM-Europe entitled “Participative Strategies” at Dahlem Museums, Berlin/Germany from **October 31st to November 1st, 2011**.

From **November 2nd to 3rd, 2011** each committee will organize its own programme and excursion. COMCOL will stay at Dahlem Museums on November 2nd to have lectures and discussions concentrating on the topic “Participative Strategies in Documenting the Present”. On November 3rd the group will have an excursion by train to the East German city of Eisenhüttenstadt to visit the town and the documentation centre of the everyday culture of the GDR.

The first two days of the conference will be organized jointly with the international committee on city museums (CAMOC) and the ICOM regional committee for Europe. On the last two days each committee will organize its own programme with an excursion. The focus of our COMCOL lectures and workshops on Nov. 2nd will be on “**Participative strategies in documenting the present**”. On the fourth day (3rd Nov.), there will be an excursion to the East German city of Eisenhüttenstadt, not far from Berlin, to visit the city and the Documentation Centre of GDR everyday culture.

You will find more details about programme, call for papers and registration elsewhere in this newsletter and on our website: <http://www.comcol-icom.org/annual-conference-2011>. I am sure you will be as excited to participate as I am.

I hope to see many of you in Berlin!

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch

You may submit a paper on the theme of the joint conference "Participative Strategies" (1/11) or for the workshop day of COMCOL (2/11) on the committee's theme "Participative Strategies in Documenting the Present". See: Call for papers.

Of course you may join simply as a participant. The conference language is English. Please use the registration form to register (<http://www.comcol-icom.org/annual-conference-2011>).

REGISTRATION FEE

Please note: fees are exclusive of commission, banks may charge for money transfer!

	TILL AUGUST 30 TH , 2011	TILL OCTOBER 12 TH , 2011	FROM OCTOBER 13 TH , 2011
JOINT CONFERENCE REGISTRATION October 31 st to November 1 st , 2011	FEES	FEES	FEES
ICOM members	€ 120	€ 140	€ 160
Non-ICOM members	€ 140	€ 160	€ 180
(Ph.D.)Students	€ 60	€ 70	€ 80
COMCOL WORKSHOP November 2 nd , 2011	Fee to be paid in cash at the conference bureau in Berlin		
ICOM members	€ 30		
Non-ICOM members	€ 40		
(Ph.D.)Students	€ 20		
COMCOL EXCURSION to Eisenhüttenstadt, November 3 rd , 2011 (Optional)	One fee for all to be paid in cash at the conference bureau in Berlin		
	€ 20		
COMCOL TOTAL November 2 nd to November 3 rd , 2011			
ICOM members	€ 50		
Non-ICOM members	€ 60		
(Ph.D.)Students	€ 40		

The **joint conference registration fee** includes admission to all academic sessions, the conference pack, lunch (1/11), coffee, and evening receptions (31/10, 1/11), and bus transfer

from Dahlem Museums to the German Historical Museum (1/11).). Registration fee for the joint conference shall be paid by bank transfer (see Registration form at the website).

The **COMCOL workshop registration fee** includes admission to the academic sessions, light lunch, coffee (2/11).

The **COMCOL excursion fee** includes train ticket, light lunch, and visit at the GDR documentation centre (3/11).

Travel costs (to, in and from Berlin) and hotel costs **are not included** in the registration fees.

Travel grants - European participants might try to get a travel grant to Germany:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc1208_en.htm)

Please see the registration form at our website for further information:

http://www.comcol-icom.org/wp-content/uploads/COMCOL_2011_Registration1.pdf (You can also find a WORD version on the website: <http://www.comcol-icom.org/annual-conference-2011>)

Call for Papers

In their collecting policies, civic museums, history museums and ethnographic museums all over the world show a remarkable tendency not only to focus on the present, but also to involve the source communities. Such participative strategies challenge the theory and ethics that underpin traditional practices. Some of the values at stake are institutional autonomy and professional authority. Mirroring the contemporary in collections and exhibitions may require a detached position, but how does reflexivity based on professional expertise relate to the hands-on perspective of communities and individual citizens? In other words, what is the role of the professional curator? Will his/her responsibility move in the direction of facilitator, helping communities to discuss the complexity of their identity?

You are cordially invited to contribute to the conference by presenting a paper. You may submit a paper on the theme of the joint conference "Participative Strategies" (1/11) or for the workshop day of COMCOL (2/11) on the committee's theme "Participative Strategies in Documenting the Present". The conference language is English.

Abstracts should address one of the following questions. Proposals to discuss other issues are also welcome.

- What does "documenting the present" look like in your museum?
- What is your experience of involving individuals or community members in the museum's collection policy?
- What are the methods and techniques for involving external "experts"?
- Should participative strategies be limited to collecting objects and stories or should they be extended to post-acquisition curatorial work?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of involving people as experts of their own culture and time in the museum's collection policy? Does it enhance the traditional cultural institution or is "inclusion an illusion"?

The deadline for submission of the abstracts is **July 15th, 2011**.

The deadline for response by the programme organizers regarding the submission is **August 1st, 2011**.

Please use the registration form (http://www.comcol-icom.org/wp-content/uploads/COMCOL_2011_Registration_form.pdf) for your English written abstract (not more than 300 words) and your CV (not more than 100 words) and send it to:

Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Germany, mek@smb.spk-berlin.de

Conference report

ICOM June Meetings in Paris

Eva Fägerborg

During three intense days, 6-8 June, ICOM annual meetings were held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The June meetings are the occasions when representatives of ICOM's national and international committees, regional alliances, affiliated organizations, and working groups come together to discuss both topical issues for the international museum community and internal ICOM matters. As a new committee, this was the first time that COMCOL participated in this event, represented by its chairperson and secretary.

The annual meetings include the Advisory Committee meeting and the General Assembly as well as several meetings for specific groups, thematic panels, and workshops. Minutes from the formal meetings will be published on ICOM's website, so please check <http://icom.museum/>. Here I just wish to point out some items:

ICOM's *Strategic Plan 2011-2013* was introduced, and adopted by the General Assembly. The plan has four main objectives:

- * Increase membership value and transparency for ICOM members
- * Develop museum and heritage expertise
- * Strengthen ICOM's global leadership in the heritage sector
- * Develop and manage resources to implement the Strategic Plan effectively.

To each objective a number of specific actions are linked, to provide all ICOM entities with guidelines for the next years to come. The Strategic Plan is published on the website.

Three thematic panels were organized, discussing

- 1) Museums and sustainable development: how can ICOM support, in concrete terms, the museum community's sustainable developments projects?
- 2) Museum ethics, new perspectives: how to promote and develop museum ethics?
- 3) Research, training, publications: how to promote ICOM's research and productions through an international exchange platform?

Each theme was further divided into specific questions to be worked on in small groups. This was a fruitful and productive mode of procedure that resulted in many useful recommendations to the Advisory Committee. It certainly makes a difference when participants are part of a discussion group of five persons instead of being among more than 400 in the plenary sessions.

We also participated in a workshop about ICOM's new membership database. For every committee it is very important that we now have access to the database with information of our respective members. This will be helpful in communications with the ICOM Secretariat as well as with the members. (Let me take the opportunity to ask the members of COMCOL who have changed your data – place of work, address, e-mail etc. – to send updated information to the Secretariat in Paris and to me.)

The special guest at this year's meetings was the British artist and film director Peter Greenaway who gave a presentation entitled *The new visual literacy*, with examples of spectacular reinterpretations of classic paintings such as da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and Rembrandt's *Night Watch*.

As in all conferences, the June meetings also meant opportunities for informal talks and networking. Especially for COMCOL as a new

committee, this was an important part of participating in this ICOM event. ■

COMCOL Working Groups

COMCOL is now taking a step further, with establishing working groups for some of the key issues of the committee. It is vitally important to involve as many members as possible in active work for our common mission, and to develop COMCOL as the platform for the professional exchange of experience and innovative thinking on collecting and collections development. We start with four groups, introduced here by their chairs (some of them are already familiar to the readers of *COMCOL Newsletter* and need no further presentation): *Collections Mobility* – Susanna Pettersson; *Contemporary Collecting* – Léontine Meijer-van Mensch; *Resources* – Peter Van Mensch; *Newsletter* – Eva Fägerborg

A number of members have already announced their interest in a working group, and we hope that the presentations below will attract more. Please contact the chair of the group you are interested in! Additionally, specific workings groups for the annual meetings will be formed; for this year the Vice Chair and Chair of COMCOL are busy with preparing the conference in Berlin.

Collections Mobility

Collections form a fundamental basis for understanding our culture and the history of past generations. The responsibility of the museum community is to ensure that the collections communicate to the widest audiences possible. Yet, the major part of most collections is still locked away in storages. This silent wasteland has huge potential: the unused objects may flourish in the right context, in the right collection.

Collections mobility orientation requires new ways of professional thinking, working and learning. To support the work, the museums need not only the new tools that make lending and borrowing easier but also new collection strategies. Collections mobility, that has been one of the key issues of the new millennium, offers practical advice and fresh views for collection professionals.

This working group invites members of COMCOL to join the collections mobility think tank. We will organise a session on 2 November at COMCOL's annual conference in Berlin, where also non-members of the committee are welcome. The discussion will start with a number of ice-breaking addresses and will then invite ideas and questions from the floor. If you wish to join the Collections Mobility working group and/or participate in

the preparation of the session, please contact the chair.

The Collections Mobility working group has its origin in the European project “Collections Mobility 2.0, Lending for Europe, 21st century” (see www.lending-for-europe.eu) and the work is now developing on a global basis.

Susanna Pettersson

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Susanna Pettersson specialises in museum history and collection studies and has published widely on the subject. She has been working with collections mobility issues since 2005 as the chair of the long-term-loans working groups 2006-2007 and 2008-2010. She is editor-in-chief of *Encouraging Collections Mobility. A Way Forward for Museums in Europe* (2010), published also at www.lending-for-europe.eu.

Contemporary Collecting

COMCOL is deeply rooted in the Swedish Samdok project on documenting contemporary life. It is self evident that the committee treasures this (pre)history and intends to continue supporting the international discourse on contemporary collecting. Since the 1970s, we have seen an increasing number of projects on the topic, either of individual institutions or as national (or regional) collaboration projects.

Different methods have been developed in the course of time, such as the biographical approach, the participatory approach, the “time capsule” approach, the “guide fossil” approach, and others. The aim of the COMCOL working group on Contemporary Collecting is to identify these methods and to make a comparative study. This comparative analysis will extend to different types of museums. The ethnographical approach of ethnographical museums and historical museums, will be compared to the policies of museums of science and technology, contemporary art museums and natural history museums. The working group will also critically evaluate methods as developed outside the museum field (archives, libraries, monuments and sites), and methods as applied by non-institutional collectors.

A quick scan of the material available shows a strong emphasis on project in Western Europe and North America. The COMCOL working group on Contemporary Collecting is particularly interested in projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Within the given framework, the COMCOL working group on contemporary Collecting will pay special attention to the problem of museum specific forms of documenting the radical political changes in areas such as Central Europe and the Arab World. For example, what to do with the huge number of monuments dedicated to the key persons of a rejected regime? Does contemporary collecting also include knowingly and deliberately not collecting?

It is my intention to help to create this working group, but I would prefer another COMCOL member to take over at (or shortly after) our annual conference in Berlin.

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch
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Resources

Much material is available – as hard copy or on the internet – on the practice, theory and ethics of collection development. “Collection development” generates almost 3 million hits with Google, 414.000 hits with Google Scholar and 186.000 hits with Google Books. How are we to know what is useful and relevant? It is

the ambition of the COMCOL working group on Resources to compile annotated bibliographies on the different themes that are relevant to the mission of the committee. The aim is twofold: these bibliographies might encourage and improve the reflexive discourse about the practice, theory and ethics of collection development, and these bibliographies might serve as source and reference material for those engaged in writing collection plans and policies. So, the material to be reviewed will comprise scholarly papers, as well as policy documents of museums, and everything in between.

Only a few of us can read and understand more than two or three languages. Language barriers are important limiting conditions in the development of our professional field. It is the ambition of the COMCOL working group on Resources to identify relevant texts in as many languages as possible with priority over the ICOM official languages (English, French, Spanish). Eventually, it might be possible to make translations of very important texts to foster a discourse that goes beyond the limitations of linguistic skills.

Many bibliographies are already available. The COMCOL working group on Resources does not have the pretention to produce the mother of all bibliographies on collecting issues. It will collect such bibliographies and make them available. This might include bibliographies in articles and books on collection development.

Browsing printed and digital resources will generate information about interesting projects. It is the ambition of the COMCOL working group on Resources to make an inventory of such projects, in particular projects that may serve as model for certain solutions to general problems. Of course, the responsible persons will be encouraged to report on their projects in COMCOL Newsletter.

Finally, the COMCOL working group on Resources is interested in terminology, or rather, in the discussion about basic concepts with regard to collection development. In their *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséology* (2011) André Desvallées and François Mairesse have already provided the basis for a thorough discussion on concepts and terms. The COMCOL working group on Resources

hopes to contribute to the work of the editorial team of this museological dictionary. In addition the working group may analyze the descriptions of relevant terms as given in Wikipedia. This is not just an academic exercise. It may also help those engaged in writing policy documents to use proper, well defined and increasingly used terms.

The working group will use COMCOL Newsletter and the COMCOL website to report on the work and to publish results. It is the intention of the working group to contribute to the COMCOL annual conferences by providing relevant resources, such as thematic (and annotated) bibliographies, key texts and reflections on basic concepts.

Peter van Mensch
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[Call for contacts](#)

Are you collecting digitally born photography?

Elisabeth Boogh

Two museums in Sweden, Malmö Museer and Stockholms läns museum, are collaborating in the project *Images for the future*. The aim of the project is to find strategies for museums to collect digitally born photography. The project is funded by the Swedish Arts Council.

Today, most images are photographed with digital cameras or mobile phones and this has changed both the way photography is perceived and how the images are stored. People are sharing and commenting photographs in social media and the meaning of the photographs is constantly being changed. The images are vulnerable as they only exist virtually and in many cases are stored on cd's and hard drives. We believe that

Newsletter

COMCOL Newsletter is an important forum for debate on all aspects of collecting and collections development. We welcome members to engage in the development of the newsletter as advisors to the editors. The Newsletter working group is especially something for those of you who are interested in – or already have – new ideas about content and form, long term planning, and suggestions for thematic issues, and will help to encourage members and friends of COMCOL to contribute with material from all continents.

Eva Fägerborg
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the photographs of today have to be collected now, otherwise there is a high risk that this photographic cultural heritage will be lost.

We are now looking for museums which are working with digitally born photography. Has your museum done any projects involving the collection of digital photographs, either from amateurs or professionals? If you have, we would like to get in touch with you and learn from your experience!

Please contact **Elisabeth Boogh**,
elisabeth.boogh@stockholmslansmuseum.se
or **Merja Diaz**, merja.diaz@malmo.se

New books

Peter Davies (Ed.): *Museums and the Disposals Debate*

Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc 2011.

Quotation from MUSEUMETHICS-L@LISTSERVS.SHU.EDU:

“With collecting for perpetuity no longer necessarily the norm, and active disposals as much a part of collections management as accessioning, *Museums and the Disposals Debate* brings together international guidance, opinion, best practice and case studies in deaccessioning and disposal policies and practice.

How museums react to their changing role – from public collector to effective manager – and how they review the purpose and role of their collections, will shape the future of the museum sector. What are the issues in relation to disposals, and how can the benefits be weighed against the challenges and pitfalls?

This important new book is a timely addition to current deaccessioning and disposals policies and programmes. Its intention is to be a valuable advocate, critical friend and information source for museum managers and collection specialists across the sector.

Edited by Peter Davies, Cultural Policy Adviser, Canterbury City Council, it brings together a range of authoritative, experienced and thought-provoking voices from many leading organisations, including:

- * Collections Trust
- * Imperial War Museum
- * Institute of Ideas
- * Museums Association
- * National Trust for Historic Preservation

Freda Matassa: *Museum Collections Management. A handbook*

London: Facet Publishing 2011.

Flyer presentation:

“This landmark publication is the first to draw together all aspects of museum

- * Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
- * Smithsonian Institution

For all the information about the book – the editor, contributors, and contents list – and to place your order, please visit: www.museumsetc.com/products/disposals-debate.

The book is in five main sections: The Debate, Specialist Collections, Case Studies, Policy & Practice, and Managing Collections.

Among the many issues covered are:

- * The challenges and benefits of disposals
- * The new role of disposals in modern collections management
- * Designing and implementing an effective, practical disposals policy and programme
- * Ethical, legal and moral implications of disposing of collections
- * The repercussions of disposals mismanagement
- * Public and professional reaction to the disposal of collections
- * Developing an objective collections review framework
- * Managing collections-specific disposals
- * Influencing and managing public opinion on museum disposals
- * Consulting with stakeholders on disposal policies and programmes
- * Case studies of recent disposal programmes”

Graeme Farnell
Publisher | MuseumsEtc

collections management in one handbook. It is designed for anyone with

responsibility for a cultural collection and covers everything a collections manager needs to know. It describes professional practice in managing cultural objects and works of art, whatever the size and nature of the collection.

The book includes:

*Essential information on the legal aspects of collections

*Current ethical issues such as due diligence and immunity from seizure

*Information on up to date concerns such as sustainability, crossing borders and financial constraints

*Descriptions of all collections management procedures such as loans,

acquisitions, inventory and movement in a simple step-by-step process

*Examples of real forms, policies and documents drawn from major museums, which will act as a guide for any transaction

*Practical information, advice and good practice with details of further resources and where to go for additional help.

Museum Collections Management is clear and easy to use with all procedures based on international museum practice and will be essential reading for museum professionals, curators of private collections and museum studies students.”

André Desvallées and François Mairesse (Eds.): *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*
Paris: Armand Colin 2011.

This volume of 732 pages, with 21 articles and a dictionary of 500 terms, is the result of many years of research, analysis and revision by the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM). An abridged version, *Key Concepts of*

Museology (83 p.), is available in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Chinese) on ICOM's website.