

COLLECTINGNET

An international museum network for collecting issues

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Collectingnet is an international museum network for collecting issues created at the conference *Connecting Collecting* at Nordiska Museet, Stockholm in November 2007. Collectingnet invites museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the network into 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 December** to collectingnet@nordiskamuseet.se. You can also contact the editors personally: catherinemarshall5@yahoo.com, eva.fagerborg@nordiskamuseet.se, lotta.hylten-cavallius@mkc.botkyrka.se

From the editors

Welcome to the third issue of *Collectingnet Newsletter*, with articles on an experimental collecting and exhibiting project in Wales, a new museum in Uruguay focussed on the years of dictatorship, contemporary collecting as a subject of university courses in Zagreb, Croatia, and plans in Northern Ireland to collect art on a rolling basis and then give the works to other public institutions.

The two earlier issues of the newsletter are available at <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213>

International bibliography on collecting

Patrick Van den Nieuwenhof, member of Collectingnet's working group, is currently working with the compilation of a bibliography concerning collecting, collections, collection management, and collection policies. We wish to invite the readers of the newsletter to contribute by sending your suggestions of titles and web-sites that should be included in the bibliography to the following e-mail address: patrick.nieuwenhof@hotmail.com. The draft version will be distributed to the network.

During this year the publication from the Connecting Collecting conference in November 2007 has been presented on-line.



Eva Fägerborg & Elin von Unge (eds.): *Connecting Collecting*. Stockholm: Nordiska museet/Samdok 2008. 126 p., ill.

The publication is available at <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/upload/documents/349.pdf>

Pop Peth: exhibiting contemporary music in a gallery context

In March 2007, St Fagans: National History Museum opened Oriol 1, a new gallery to explore themes relating to Welsh identities and belonging. It is an experimental space where collecting, interpretation and display methods are tried, tested and evaluated. Permanent displays juxtapose with constantly changing spaces and a dynamic temporary exhibition programme ensures that eclectic themes are investigated using a variety of approaches and methodologies. In July 2009, this space will showcase a temporary exhibition exploring contemporary popular culture – more specifically, popular music. Called ‘Pop Peth’ (translated from Welsh as meaning ‘Pop and everything’), the exhibition will explore how people use popular music to express personal, shared and even national identities.

The challenge of displaying contemporary music in a gallery context inspired the exhibition team to adopt a radical approach. Building on the success of previous co-curated projects in Oriol 1, it was decided to give the temporary exhibition space over to six individuals chosen by the team, to express their relationships with music and identity. The six individuals are: a collector of Welsh pop music memorabilia dating from the 1960s to the present day; two female fans of different Welsh and English music genres who shared a room at university; an independent Cardiff record shop owner whose family has seen music and fashion trends come and go over the decades; and two members of Llwybr Llaethog, a seminal Welsh bilingual pop group formed in the 1980s, whose work is sometimes political and often challenging with its roots in dub and reggae.

It is hoped that all six individuals will have full control over their own exhibition spaces. Curatorial, technical, conservation and design teams will be on hand to share skills, discuss ideas, advise and facilitate. They will not however control or censor content, suggest ideas or choose objects or soundtracks. The six individuals can select any objects or sounds they wish to display, whether they are their own personal belongings, bought especially for the exhibition, selected from museum collections, or an object they have created themselves. They can play any sounds they wish – choose any bands, any footage; create their own sounds and record their own voices.

Each individual will be asked to document the objects they have chosen for display and provide the stories, photographs, contexts and sounds which will invest them with meaning. They will decide how to communicate these to museum visitors. It is hoped

that each display will capture the unique relationship between person, music, place and time, and provide an insight into transient cultural trends and identities. The six individual spaces will be audio and visually documented by the museum and placed in its archive which forms part of its national collection. Should any of the individuals wish to donate objects, or their entire displays to the museum they would form a valuable part of the social history collections, filling an area of collecting that is currently poorly represented. It is also hoped that the exhibition will raise the profile of the museum’s contemporary collecting activities and inspire future donations which reflect the diversity of lifestyles in today’s Wales, increasing the relevance of the collections to a wider audience.

The Museum’s relationship with the six individuals is well underway. All have seen the new gallery and temporary exhibition space and have all met the curatorial and some of the technical and design staff. Some are beginning to form strong ideas and have already become very passionate about the outcome of their displays. Others need more time to think of the possibilities. They have all been made aware of the possible limitation of the design of the space, the budget available, and the practical constraints that might affect the finished exhibition. It remains to be seen how the relationship between them and the curatorial team will develop over the remaining year before the exhibition. Will the curators shape and censor content more than originally intended? Will the curators successfully manage the individuals’ expectations or will the individuals become disillusioned with museum processes or frustrated by conservation issues?

The evaluation process for this project will be extremely interesting. As the individuals, in theory, have complete freedom over the content of each of their displays, they will also be responsible for setting their own outcomes and defining what they hope to achieve. The curatorial team can provide information about the profile of its visitors, but it will be up to the individuals to try and communicate their objectives effectively. As the exhibition planning process develops, it will be interesting to return to the subject of evaluation in a future edition of the Collectingnet newsletter.

Pop Peth project team, September 2008

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Next page: Images from Oriol 1.



General view of Oriel 1 at St Fagans: National History Museum
Photo: Tony Hadland, St. Fagans: National History Museum



Contemporary art installation featured in a recent Oriel 1 project
Photo: Tony Hadland, St. Fagans: National History Museum

The Bird's Eyes

Graziella Belloni

It was not allowed to give the prisoners letters, drawings or other things with pictures of birds. A child gave her father a drawing of an orange tree. "What lovely oranges!" said the father. The child answered: "They are not oranges, they are the bird's eyes".

(Testimony collected at the recently started museum MUME in Montevideo, Uruguay)

Thirty years ago, at the time when Samdok started, I came to Sweden as a political refugee from Uruguay. Today I am working at the City Museum in Eskilstuna and participating in Samdok and Collectingnet. From colleagues in my home country I received information about a new museum and cultural centre, inaugurated on the 10th December 2007. The aim of the new museum is to collect, save, exhibit and critically discuss testimonies about dictatorship in Uruguay from 1973 to 1985, the years before the formal dictatorship, and the first years after the return to democracy. The museum is operated by the Municipality of Montevideo together with the Department of Culture and an Association of the Museum's Friends.

The testimonies are organised in several areas:

- Dictatorship and the years before it
- People's resistance to dictatorship
- The prisons and the political prisoners
- The disappeared
- Exile
- The reconstruction of democracy
- The struggle for veracity and justice
- Unfinished histories and new challenges

Within the country and all over the world we – the former prisoners, refugees, mothers, fathers, children and friends of disappeared persons – are collecting and sending our testimonies to the museum, where the staff are working with registering, digitisation, exhibition, education and information. After years of silence, the whole society is involved in the process of reconstructing the so long censured parts of our collective memory.

Information is spread and material is collected within the country through the different organisations who have taken the initiative to build the museum. They are: the municipality of

Montevideo, the department of culture, The University of Labour, The Labours Organisation, the Association for Relatives of Captured and Disappeared Citizens, the Association for Former Political Prisoners, the Association for Relatives of Executed Political Prisoners, the Association for Commemorating the Resistance 1973-1985, the Association for Experience-workshop, the Association for Former Female Political Prisoners, the Association for Employees at the University of Labour, The Peace and Justice NGO, The Ecumenical Service for Human Dignity and the Association for Museum Friends.

In the diaspora information is spread and material is collected through the "County Nr 20". Uruguay is divided into 19 counties. County nr 20 was created as a "virtual county" a couple of years ago and it comprises of the ca 500.000 citizens living in diaspora. They keep in touch with County Nr 20 through the embassies and consulates around the world. The Internet is also a medium for spreading information about the museum.

The process is not only occurring in Uruguay. In April 2008, delegates from museums in Paraguay, Peru, Argentina, Chile and Brazil held a meeting in Montevideo and started a network to work at preserving the memory of the people's struggle for human rights in our countries during the period 1960-1990.

"Centro cultural y museo de la memoria, MUME," shall be a centre for culture and a museum devoted to regaining control over the memory of state terrorism and the struggle against dictatorship of the people of Uruguay. It strives to contribute to the knowledge of the contemporary history of the country and to strengthen the construction of a national identity, especially for the new generations.

Gustavo Germano's photographic works (see p. 5) remind us of the horror in Argentina during the dictatorship 1976-1983. They also honour the disappeared, who will remain alive forever in our memories.



1968
Roberto Ismael Sorba
Jorge Cresta
Azucena Sorba



2006
Jorge Cresta
Azucena Sorba



1974
Clara Atelman de Fink
Claudio Marcelo Fink



2006
Clara Atelman de Fink

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Contemporary collecting as a subject of courses in Museum Studies in Zagreb

Žarka Vujić

The Museology Section at the Department of Information Sciences in the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb is without any doubt the most serious resource for museum professional training in Croatia. Because of that it is no surprise that the first information about contemporary collecting and the work of the Swedish Samdok network was given there. Furthermore, the founder of the Section and the leading museologist in the country, Professor Ivo Maroevic, mentioned the whole idea of collecting contemporary life in his book *Introduction to Museology*, as early as 1993. (The book is known to the international museum community as

Introduction to Museology: the European approach. Munich: C. Müller-Straten, 1998). From the mid 90's contemporary studies and collecting became a part of the lectures and seminars in Museum studies courses.

The term 'contemporaneity' was discussed as part of those courses and its relation to contemporary life and culture in earlier times. But the experience of the war in Croatia (1991-1995) and the limitations on research about collecting during that time gave us quite new information and perspectives. This research is presented in "Collecting in time of war",

by Vujić, Z., in Knell, S (ed.), *Museums and the Future of Collecting*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 88-92.

In the war people fundamentally changed their relationship with objects. Instead of gathering the whole material context for the objects around them, they could only take the most essential and carefully chosen objects into the cellars and shelters – documents and essential material. For some of them the loss of material objects, objects of great heritage value, was more painful than the loss of close relatives. The words of Ivan, aged forty, from Vukovar testified to this: *I regret (the loss of) the photographs we have had and many of those material things. I regret...the clothes... Only what is left as memory...those old jeans that I will keep as some exhibit.*

At the same time, full of extreme dangers and uncertainties, curators in Croatian museums also continued to collect. This happened, especially in the Croatian History Museum in Zagreb. From the

beginning of the war and after it museum staff recognised their obligation to document all contemporary historical events. They established some general rules – to collect everything, and to register the new entries, but to leave the conceptualisation of the inventory for later times. Obviously, this was a fruitful example of how to continue with the activity of collecting and representing current human conditions and lives.

During the academic year 2000/2001 we decided to make a temporary collection of objects which could describe student's life in Zagreb. To speak honestly, some of the students were not so active and chose the most convenient rather than the most representative things, like student's cards of all kinds etc, but some of them took the school project very seriously and looked for objects very carefully. Interestingly enough, most of their choices were of different kinds of memorabilia, but no one represented the problems of student life in the capital.



Goran Zlodi, Education assistant, and students of Museum studies in Zagreb, working on the virtual exhibition about student's life in 2001. Photo: Davor Šiftar.

Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to exhibit the objects they collected, but digital photos of all objects were made, and a small virtual presentation was provided on the web site. That was the best way to both give and take a lesson about the collecting of contemporary culture. We are continuing with such practices, although the last experiment (2007) was much more concerned with collecting the intangible heritage rather than the strictly contemporary one.

But the idea and philosophy of collecting contemporary life, as well as the developments in Samdok in Sweden and information about the new international Collectingnet, are still a part of our *Museum collection* (known today as *Collection management*) course content.

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Maintaining Contemporaneity; A new policy for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Suzanne Lyle

The Arts Council Collection has grown organically, through long periods of turbulence which it sometimes reflects. Starting an art collection was one of the highest priorities of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the Arts Council's predecessor.

From the beginning it was intended that pictures purchased should be circulated through-out the country in accordance with the Council's policy of attending to 'the needs of the smaller centres of population' and as such it has always been a loan collection. The collection now has 1200 works and of these some 500 works are currently out on short and long term loans to schools, hospitals and public buildings as well as to local, national and international exhibitions.

This has been a very successful and popular part of our work over the years. The vision to engage audiences in accessible public places meant that the Arts Council could be fairly flexible in its loans policy. Each loan request is judged individually with basic conditions to be met.

After a fundamental review of its collecting policy in 1999 Council decided (due to increasing costs of conservation and storage) to consider gifting the Collection – some 1200 works – to registered museums in Northern Ireland. In order to proceed with gifting Government permission is needed and the business case for this is currently being discussed.

Although the Arts Council will no longer maintain a large public collection, it recognizes the importance of purchasing contemporary work as a means of supporting artists and accordingly there is an annual acquisitions fund. Priority is given to artists whose work is challenging and innovative, by emerging as well as established artists; and artworks in all media are considered. The aims of the [Acquisitions Policy](#) are: to support the individual artist, to contribute to the development of visual arts practice in Northern Ireland, to develop a culture in which visual art is appreciated, to foster knowledge and research, to ensure that contemporary arts are showcased and to stimulate the art market in Northern Ireland.

New works are brought to the attention of the Acquisitions Panel in a number of ways including

visits to galleries and artists' studios and through annual open submission.

If the Arts Council gets permission to gift the works in our older collection then it is hoped that the works collected under new acquisitions will be held for a period of 5-8 years, during which they would be toured and exhibited widely. This gives the opportunity to promote the work of the individual artists as well as introducing the public to good quality contemporary art. When it is gifted it will still be contemporary and as such will contribute significantly to the collections of local museums. Crucially, the artists whose work has been purchased since the new acquisitions scheme began in 2003 were all made aware of this at the time of purchase; they have been very happy with the idea that their work will stay in public hands but will pass to another institution at some point in the future if gifting goes ahead.

Our plan for gifting initially developed from the experience of the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils who have already gifted their collections. In drawing up the plans for our own situation over the last few years we have also been influenced by best practice guidelines issued by the UK Museums Association in their Code of Ethics. We are not a registered museum but we work to Museums Association standards of best practice as far as we possibly can in all aspects of collection management. Recently the Museums Association also published guidelines on de-accessioning in the form of a Disposal Toolkit and those recommendations have already been adopted to a large extent (<http://www.museumsassociation.org/disposal>).

In our gifting scheme it is envisaged that there would be tiers of gifting. Initially all of the works in the Collection would be offered to registered museums and galleries in Northern Ireland. It is anticipated that most works would be selected in this phase. There are many issues to consider in deciding which venue has the strongest case for receipt of an artwork. We will consider for example whether the artist's local significance in relation to a museum is a stronger reason for choosing that museum than keeping a body of work together if requested by several museums. If a single piece fills a significant gap in a collection relating to the work of one artist then that may also be significant. Perhaps the case will be stronger for keeping a

body of work together. Once the registered museums have stated their interest, the works not selected would be made available for selection by schools, hospitals and public bodies. The works would, therefore, remain publicly accessible. Geographic spread of the collection will also be considered. In the proposed contract of gifting recipients will be asked to consider the works for touring exhibitions since their use to date has been flexible and accessible and they have been exhibited in many non-gallery spaces. There are certainly many issues to consider in relation to gifting and we are keen to follow industry best practice in the process.

Details about the broader history of the collection including mention of the sale of some works in the 1990s may be found at <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/collection/over1.htm>. Our current Acquisitions policy is also on the web site at <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/artforms/acquisitionsandcommissions.htm>

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