



Icom International Glass Committee Report of our 2014 annual meeting held in Craiova, Romania

Annual Meeting 2014

Icom International Glass Committee annual meeting 2014 was held in Romania from 6th to 10th October by the kind invitation of Icom Romania and the Oltenia Museum in Craiova. It was organised by our member Simona Gheorghe. The meeting was preceded by a short pre-conference tour in Bucharest on 4-5 October, as the capital city of Romania was not part of the programme for the regular meeting. Our guide for the pre-conference tour was Professor Ioan Opris of the National History Museum of Romania "Radu Florescu", Research and Documentation Centre for Museology.

Pre-conference tour

On Monday 4th we met at the impressive and innovative National Museum of Romanian Peasant for a tour with the Curator. We visited the recently completed - state of the art - storage facilities for ceramics, textiles, dress and woodwork which were all housed in tall rolling cases to make maximum use of the limited space. On the front of each shelf, each object present was represented with a bar-code to facilitate stocktaking. We also saw the documentation centre as well as the study room which could be used by the public and specialist visitors to inspect and study objects.

After that we visited the recently reopened Museum of Art Collections (Muzeului Colectiilor de Artă) which is an amalgamation of over 30 private collections that used to be housed in separate houses in Bucharest between the wars. The collection contains Romanian 20th-century paintings as well as sculpture and decorative arts, including some glass, mostly made in Bohemia during the 19th or early 20th centuries.

We then visited the Cotroceni Museum, which is the former Royal palace. This was heavily damaged during the 1977 earthquake and restored during the Ceausescu period to serve as a palace for State guests. It has since been changed to represent the period when it was lived in by the Romanian Royal family. Unfortunately most of the Museum rooms were closed for seasonal disinfection.

This was followed by a visit to the National Village Museum (Dimitrie Gusti), which is an open air Museum with mostly domestic houses, mills, workshops and churches brought over from various regions of Romania. Most of the buildings were closed, but informative text

panels showed the original location of each building on a map as well as a photograph of the interior.

We ended the day with a dinner at the restaurant of the National Museum of Romanian Peasant.

The following morning we visited the National Museum of Romanian History. Most of the Museum was closed for refurbishment, but we could see the extensive display around the full-scale casts of the Traian column, which deal with Traian's victory over the Dacians, who lived in present day Romania. We also had a tour of the special exhibition of Romanian gold treasures from ancient times until the 19th century. In the afternoon we left by bus for Craiova.

Icom International Glass Committee meeting (main programme)

Day 1

Official opening at the Oltenia Museum in the presence of the former Icom president of the Romanian national Committee, Dr. Virgil Stefan Nitulescu, the present president, Mr. Dan Octavian Paul, the Director of the Oltenia Museum, Mr Florian Ridiche and the President of the Dolj County Council, Mr Joan Priotasa as well as Professor Ioan Opris. The meeting was attended by the local Press and Romanian television.

The Oltenia Museum has recently been completely refurbished into a truly impressive 21st century museum. The Curators had prepared three exhibitions especially curated and mounted for our Icom meeting, each with a specially produced exhibition catalogue, adorned with the ICOM logo. The first exhibition, Icons on Glass, gave an overview of reverse glass painted Icons in Romania during the 18th to early 20th centuries. The second, Glass: Memories and Art, provided an excellent overview of the production of vessel glass in Romania over the same period. Lastly there was a large and impressive exhibition of Contemporary Art glass in Romania.

At the end of the morning we visited the Conservation studios in the Museum of Oltenia, where the highly skilled conservators showed us their work and explained their conservation techniques and approaches. The emphasis was on Research on how the original was constructed, but also on making the object look at its best after treatment. For instance with the conservation of textiles and early books, the object was taken apart completely, with the loss of original stitching etc. After cleaning and conservation it was then reconstructed using, as much as possible, the original methods and materials, which had been carefully researched and documented at the start of the process. There was some discussion about the balance between presentation and the loss of some original information. We were also able to see an exhibition on the restoration of artefacts from the Museum, organised by the Head of Conservation, Dr Țuțu Bărbulescu.

In the early afternoon we visited the Museum of Art in Craiova. This Museum is housed in the Jean Mihail Palace, a recently reopened and beautifully restored and refurbished former residential villa, built between 1900 and 1907. Work is still underway, and so far, only two rooms have opened to the public, which display a number of important works by Constantin Brancusi.

We continued the afternoon by revisiting the Contemporary Art glass exhibition, where we

had the opportunity to meet many of the artists represented in the exhibition. From there we went to the Museum of Ethnology where we were given a tour by the enthusiastic Curator. It was interesting to hear and to see how many of the displays were laid out following the ideas of the Romanian writer and historian of Religion Mircea Eliade and based on the life-cycle of Man. In the basement there was an exhibition on bread and its importance in Romanian life. The Museum also hosts a small exhibition of religious icons on glass donated by Marieta and Stefan Jianu. The collection includes mostly 19th-century icons representing the main production centres in Transylvania such as: Nicula, Tara Oltului, Fagaras, Marginimea Sibiului, Scheii Brasovului, Sebes Valley, Maierii Albei Iulia, Laz, Lancram. This packed first day was followed by a welcome dinner.

Day 2

After breakfast we returned to the Museum of Oltenia for our lecture programme. There were lectures by our members as well as some of our hosts. Elena Bajenaru of the Museum of Fagaras land, spoke about Transylvanian reverse glass painting workshops. Catalin Davidescu, the curator of the Romanian glass art exhibition spoke to us about the present state of Art Glass in the country. There was a last minute addition to the programme by Alina Mandai, who spoke about glass in Brasov.

We hope to publish most of these talks in our 5th edition of Reviews on Glass.

After the lectures we departed for Targu Jiu where we had a late lunch, followed by a visit of the studio of Glass artist Mihai Topescu. The studio was absolutely packed with work spanning over several decades and the artist was there to show us round.

We continued our tour by visiting the Sculptural Ensemble of Constantin Brancusi at Targu Jiu, an homage to the Romanian heroes of the first World War, made between 1935 and 1938. The sculptural elements of this landscape art ensemble have been recently restored, but sadly the essential links with the river and the surrounding landscape and church have been lost due to canalisation and urban development.

Day 3

During the morning we visited the Monastery of Polvragi, originally dating from 1505. Much of the monastery complex has been heavily restored, but the interior of the central church is covered with well preserved frescos.

After this we made an unscheduled stop at Cozia Monastery, erected close to Călimănești, which has the only in Byzantine style fortified cloister, datings from the foundation in 1388, preserved in Romania. The Chapel was painted between 1390 and 1391 and some of the original frescoes are still well preserved. After the visit a treat awaited us of coffee with traditional pancakes and special fortified wine from the monastery, all blessed for us with an incantation by one of the monks.

From there we departed for Sibiu where we visited the Brukenthal National Park Museum. Dating back to 1817, this is the oldest a museum in Romania, with a very rich collection including a world renowned collection of European paintings. After that we had a short while to explore the historic town centre of Sibiu where we could see much evidence of the strong German cultural influence in the area.

Day 4

In the morning we visited the studio of designer and glass maker Ion Tamaian who used to work for 10 years as a designer for the nearby Avrig glass factory. Tamaian runs a very successful studio, employing 27 people including 10 glass blowers. He produces commercial glass in a distinctive contemporary style, mainly for export to the USA.

After this visit we departed for Avrig to visit one of only two or three large factories still operating in Romania. Production has been vastly reduced over the last 10 years and the work force has shrunk from about 1200 to 200 during this period. The factory has problems attracting appropriately skilled workers. They export, mainly to Germany, France and Italy and often produce glass in other people's names, such as Royal Worcester in the UK. After Avrig we departed for Brasov where we had lunch and visited the Fagaras land museum, which holds a small collection of glass and has a special display of glass produced in the local glasshouse during the 18th and 19th century. After a very quick tour around the old town we departed for Bran, where we stayed the night in a Dracula-themed hotel complex looking up to the dramatically lit Bran castle, where we treated with a spectacular mid-night feast in the shape of a lavish local banquet including a whole flaming goat. We were joined for this occasion by Dr Țuțu Bărbulescu, Head of Conservation at the Oltenia Museum.

Day 5

During the morning of our last day in Romania, in the hotel in Bran, we held our:

ICOM GLASS General Assembly

The board of Icom Glass met prior to this meeting to draw up the agenda for the General Assembly and to discuss the Financial Report, the Icom Glass Meeting 2015 and the Icom General Conference in Milano, Italy in 2016.

At the ICOM GLASS General Assembly we discussed the make-up of our board. There were no vacancies and no proposals for new Board Members.

-The first main agenda point was next year's meeting. We had hoped to go to St. Petersburg in Russia, but this idea had not developed well, as our Colleagues in St. Petersburg felt they needed more time and suggested to host us perhaps in 2017.

Jan Kock presented an idea to make an Icom glass tour to India, and he had already finalised the dates for this as 14 – 27 March 2015. The general feeling was that this was too soon for many of our members to secure funds for this and that there would not be enough time to arrange things with Icom India. However, the preliminary programme looked very interesting and Jan Kock invited all of us to join for a reduced fee, but we decided this could not be our main 2015 annual meeting.

As an alternative the Board suggested to join forces with the AIHV (Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre) who are meeting in Romont Switzerland in September 2015. Considering the short notice we have in planning our meeting it was decided that this was a very good plan, especially as it would offer a good opportunity to connect with this larger special interest organisation. Some members expressed a fear that we would lose our identity as an Icom group and we decided to make sure that we would

make sure to organise some parts of the programme ourselves and exclusively for Icom members.

-Next we discussed the ICOM triennial meeting in Milano in 2016 and our Member Maria Grazia Diani who is our liaison with the Board of Icom Italy informed us about the programme and the possibilities for excursions in the area, which included various Museums in Milano, as well as some destinations slightly further afield, such as Brescia.

We also discussed the possibilities of combining some of our time with other International Committees such as ICDAD and DEMHIST and this was generally thought to be a good idea.

-Paloma Pastor talked about our Magazine Reviews on Glass of which she is the editor. The next issue had been ready for print for a while but was still awaiting one interview. It was decided to try to secure the interview during the next month, or to produce the magazine without it.

It was also decided to double to print-run of the magazine to 100 copies, so these could be used to show off the activities of our Committee to colleagues and potential new members.

-Our membership has been stable at around 100 for quite a while and the Chairman urged all to recruit a new member if they could think of potential new candidates.

-Lastly Jan Kock brought up the issue of a small archive that he had been handed when he became Chairman and which had grown during his six years in office. He wanted to hand this over but the current Chair did not think it was a feasible idea to keep handing this material from Chair to Chair. We decided to offer the material to the Rakow Library at the Corning Museum of Glass. All agreed to pursue this cause of action.

-The Treasurer Sven Hauschke read the financial report which seemed to be healthy and in order. The Chair pressed that we must spend the money on appropriate causes such as our magazine and bursaries for younger Icom members to attend our meetings.

The Chairman thanked all and closed the meeting.

We departed to Sinaia to visit the Peles Castle and Pelisor Castle. Peles Castle is a fantasy castle built between 1883 and 1914 as a summer residence for the first King of Romania, Carol 1st of Hohenzollern. The historicist castle and its contents are remarkably complete and well documented. It opened in 2006 as a museum and tourist attraction. We saw some splendid late 19th-century Venetian mirrors for which, our guide assured us, the original bills were still preserved in the archive. As short walk away was Pelisor Castle, built between 1899 and 1902 as the residence for his the King's nephew and heir, the future King Ferdinand. In contrast with Peles castle the atmosphere here was much more intimate and the 'Arts and Crafts' style much more forward looking.

From there we left for Bucharest where we had a farewell diner in our Hotel and said our goodbyes and thank-yous to our members and our extremely generous Romanian Hosts. Special thanks went to ICOM GLASS member Simona Gheorghe, who invited us to Romania and was responsible for much of the excellent organisation. We had been most impressed with the ample evidence of fundamental change over the last ten years with many museums being refurbished and re-organised to suit a rapidly changing society. During our meeting we

met so many enthusiastic, knowledgeable and truly committed museum professionals and we made many new friends.

Other Activities:

Publications

On December 1st the ICOM GLASS publication Reviews on Glass N° 3 was released on our Website. <http://network.icom.museum/glass>

We will also print 100 copies of this issue, rather than the 50 copies we printed of N° 1 and N° 2. The Reviews are edited by Paloma Pastor and edited for English by Jane Shadel Spillman. Reviews on Glass N° 3 contains 51 pages packed with high-quality information including the publication of the papers delivered at our 2012 Annual Meeting in Corning, New York.

Issue 4, which will contain the Icom Glass papers from our meetings in Slovakia (2013) and the ICOM 23rd General Conference Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013) is in preparation and will be published in 2015.

Website

Throughout the year we have improved our website and we have started a programme of scanning back copies of our Newsletters and attaching these to the Website. This will document and improve the understanding of the long history of our Committee.

Reino Liefkes
Chairman Icom International Glass Committee
January 2015