

Re-imagining the Human: exploring best practice in object-based learning at the ethnographic museum

Horniman Museum and Gardens, 28 & 29 November 2018¹

Viv Golding, ICME Chair's Report for ICOM 2 January 2019

Project outline

'What does it mean to be Human? What does it mean to live a human life?'
Horniman Museum, World Gallery introductory text panel, October 2018.

ICME (The International Committee for Museums & Collections of Ethnography) are grateful to ICOM for supporting a 2day conference and workshop event exploring how object-based learning in the context of ethnographic collections can move beyond established notions of 'Self' and 'Other'. Horniman Museum in London proved an ideal venue to examine this theme, as in June 2018 a new World Gallery of anthropology opened to the public, celebrating human creativity, imagination and adaptability, informed by a humanist anthropology. Humanist anthropology starts from the experience of human actors, addressing what it means to be human and to live a human life, as delegates saw in the introductory text panel to the World Gallery noted above. In this ethnographic gallery we saw humanist anthropology supporting and imagining ways of public engagement and education and perhaps most importantly promoting activism.

Central to this conference and workshop event was object-based learning, which has long been a central concern for ICME members and a field that the Horniman has developed a strong programme and reputation for, certainly since 1901 when the founder Frederick Horniman unwrapped an Egyptian mummy during one of his talks in the lecture theatre of his purpose-built museum and gave each participant a piece of the cartonage. Our experience today shared at the conference and workshops demonstrated how object based learning sessions at ethnographic museums around the world can draw strongly on people's ability to employ all their available senses, feelings and intellectual capacities to enquire, deduce and draw conclusions as to what something is, its potential meanings and significance.

Delegates found that with expert guidance audiences of all ages and levels of ability can use a huge un-tapped bank of knowledge and past experiences relating sense, emotion and intellect to the talk of understanding what may initially be unfamiliar objects. We noted that through combining object handling with other techniques including questioning, mindfulness or creative responses, individuals' ideas, curiosity and evidence for understanding could be drawn out. Objects were seen to inspire curiosity and lead people to explore what is important and interesting to them as individuals as well as social groups. We learnt how they can open up conversations and social interactions, trigger long-forgotten memories and get creative thoughts flowing.

¹ The original plan and successful ICOM special project bid was for a one-day workshop in September 2018. SAREC kindly agreed to a change of date as the completion of the Studio space venue was delayed as well as an extension of the project over two days to include a theoretical conference element. Thank you.

At the conference and workshops delegates discussed and shared their research and projects concerning the development of object-based learning practice both within the museum sector and with diverse audiences and communities. The conference and workshops addressed among others the following questions: How can:

- we draw on ethnographic collections to examine established notions of 'Self' and 'Other'?
- dialogical exchange and multisensory engagement triggered by objects encourage critical reflections on 'controversial' issues entangled with ethnographic collections ('primitivism', eurocentrism, colonial legacies such as racism and sexism)?
- imaginative engagement with objects (through poetry, drama, dance storytelling, music etc) help to challenge stereotypes and to promote intercultural understanding?
- object-based learning sustains the development of community collaboration and ownership?

Partners

Most importantly 'Re-imagining the Human: exploring best practice in object-based learning at the ethnographic museum' brought together several ICOM National Committees whose members share a common concern with the positive potential of ethnographic collections to impact on diverse audiences. The conference and workshops built successfully on ICME's work with ICOM Germany, ICOM Norway, ICOM Croatia and ICOM Pakistan, over several years, to address the questions raised above and permitted representatives from these nations to meet face-to-face.

Funding participation

ICME were pleased to fully sponsor the attendance of one fellow, Saamia Ahmed, from ICOM Pakistan. Following the usual highly competitive process Saamia had been awarded a fellowship to attend the annual conference in Estonia but she was unable to take up this award because of visa restrictions. ICME are thankful to ICOM Croatia, Germany and Norway for supported the attendance of representatives from their nations, namely Mario Buletic ICOM Croatia, Prof. Elisabeth Tietmeyer ICOM Germany, and Tone Cecilie Simensen Karlgård ICOM Norway.

Additionally, ICOM funding enabled four awards of £280 each to be made for four paper presentations. The competition for this funding was fierce and Domenico Sergi, Sylvia Wackernagel and Viv Golding found it very difficult to select just four recipients of the awards from the ten applicants received by the deadline. Our final decisions were made, following much email exchange, using the criteria of geography, age, subject range and quality of the proposals that has proved valuable to ICME fellowship funding. The successful recipients of the ICOM special project awards were Raisa Bazanova (youth member's date of birth 05/08/1985), Russia; Alexandra Woodall, UK; Maria Camilla De Palma, Italy and Adriana Russi, Brazil.

Number of Participants

52 including 10 ICOM members

Number of countries

Brazil 1, Croatia 1, Estonia 1, France 1, Germany 2, India 1, Italy 1, Norway 1, Pakistan 1, Portugal 1, South Africa 1, UK 39.

Conference and workshops theme

The theme was 'Re-imagining the Human: exploring best practice in object-based learning at the ethnographic museum'.

Conference and workshops sub-themes

There were four sub-themes for conference papers and the subsequent workshops of the same name: Curation and representation; Encountering objects; Ethnographic objects and controversies; Community Collaborations.

Number of papers and speeches

One keynote paper opened the conference and three papers were presented at each of the following four sub-themes making a total of thirteen papers presented. Two papers were dual-authored making a total of fifteen presenters.

In addition to the papers three members of Horniman staff and the ICME Chair introduced each workshop, nine additional members of Horniman staff welcomed delegates, outlined the aims of the event, gave guided tours of the World Gallery and Studio and summed up each day's work, while ICOM members from ICME, ICOM Croatia, ICOM Germany, ICOM Norway and ICOM Pakistan gave thanks and offered some closing remarks at the end of the second day.

Programme

First Day: 28th November

9.30-10:	Registration and Coffee
10-10.15	Welcome: Tim Corum, Director of Curatorial and Public Engagement, Horniman Museum and Gardens.
10.15-10.45	Keynote: <i>Self and Other</i> Prof. Sandra Dudley, Director and Head of School, Museums Studies, University of Leicester.
10.45-11	Structure of the Conference: Dr Domenico Sergi, Senior Curator (Curating London), Museum of London.
11-12	Session 1: Curation and Representations

Chair: Dr Viv Golding, President of ICME and Honorary Associate
Professor, University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies.

Colonial museum collections, heritage and representations of the self: A case study of Naga textiles at Pitt Rivers Museum. Dr Vibha Joshi, University of Tuebingen (Germany) and Julia Nicholson, Pitt Rivers (Oxford, UK)

First Russians through the Camera Lens. Raisa Bazanova, State Russian Museum and Exhibition Centre ROSPHOTO (St. Petersburg, Russia).

A K-Word: The Visibility of colonial legacies in labelling techniques at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Ivonne Charlotte Marais, University of Oxford (UK)

12-1

Session 2: Encountering Objects

Chair: Kate Oliver, Head of Learning; Julia Cort, Community Learning Manager, Horniman Museum and Gardens.

Things Unbound: sensory encounters with objects in India and the UK. Dr Alexandra Woodall, Independent (UK).

Multaka-Oxford – museum collections as a ‘meeting point’. Abigail Flack and Rachel Harrison, Museum of the History of Science and Pitt Rivers (Oxford, UK).

From objects to artists: relationships between museums in Pacific islands and metropolitan France. Marion Bertin, École du Louvre & Université de La Rochelle (Paris, France).

1-1.30

Q&A

1.30-2.30

Lunch

2.30-3.30

Workshop 1: Curation and Representations

3.30-3.45

Coffee break

3.45-4.45

Workshop 2: Encountering Objects

4.45-5

Closing remarks and next day

Dr Robert Storrie, Keeper of Anthropology, Horniman Museum and Gardens.

Second Day: 29th November

9.15-10.45 **Tour of the new World Gallery and Studio**

10.45-11 Coffee

11-12 **Session 3: Ethnographic Objects and Controversies**

Chair: Dr Sarah Byrne, Deputy Keeper of Anthropology, Horniman Museum and Gardens.

The Time of the Huacas: "Artist" intervention as a site for ethical and aesthetic counter-representations. Rui Mourão, Nova University (Lisbon, Portugal)

Engaging with collections, confronting post-colonial memories. The "Algérie-France, La voix des objets" exhibit and public debates cycle at the Muceum. Camille Faucourt, Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Marseille, France).

Artefacts and the Socially Engaged Museum: A Material Perspective. Cesare Cuzzola, University of Leicester (UK).

12-1 **Session 4: Community Collaborations**

Chair: Dr Domenico Sergi, Senior Curator (Curating London), Museum of London.

Fashioning Africa, Object Journeys; Co-curating post-colonial collections. Rachel Heminway Hurst, The Royal Pavilion and Museums (Brighton, UK).

Hopi Museum Presentation Rethought. Maria Camilla De Palma, Castello D'Albertis Museum of World Cultures (Genoa, Italy)

Museological processes in Brazil and indigenous peoples: the objects and the case of the amerindians Katxuyana. Prof. Adriana Russi, Universidade Federal Fluminense (Rio das Ostras, Brazil).

1-1.30 Q&A

1.30-2.30 Lunch

2.30-3.30 **Workshop 3: Ethnographic Objects and Controversies**

3.30-3.45 Coffee break

3.45-4.45 **Workshop 4: Community Collaborations**

4.45-5 **Closing remarks and thanks:** Dr. Viv Golding ICME, Mario Buletic ICOM Croatia, Prof. Elisabeth Tietmeyer ICOM Germany, Tone Cecilie Simensen Karlgård ICOM Norway, Saamia Ahmed ICOM Pakistan.

Overview of outputs (with thanks to the Horniman reporter's blog and report)

On 28th & 29th November 2018 scholars and practitioners explored and discussed many issues around object-led work with ethnographic collections. The programme above shows the topics covered included the controversies surrounding the curation of ethnographic collections, the complex matter of representing identities and stories, and how best to approach community collaborations. Over 2 days the conference and workshops aimed to explore a range of innovative theories and best practices within these areas.

The format of the conference, with paper presentations, workshops, and a series of guided tours to explore the new World Gallery, Hands On Base, and Studio with the Horniman curators, was designed to permit maximum interaction amongst participants. This format aimed to draw as much as possible upon all of the delegate's knowledge and expertise.

The morning sessions largely consisted of speakers from around the world, responding to the questions posed by the conference noted above. A keynote speech from Professor Sandra Dudley, Director and Head of School, Museums Studies, University of Leicester, opened the conference and set out a theoretical framework based on phenomenology in general and the philosophy of the German scholar Bernard Waldenfeld in particular. Dudley questioned whether there was a tendency in much of our work with ethnographic collections to resolve tensions between self and other too quickly. She suggested Waldenfeld was helpful in highlighting a need to slow down and explore the notions, roughly translated from the German, of 'ownness' and 'alienness' in new more empathetic ways, specifically through object-based encounters. At the risk of over-simplification Dudley saw Waldenfeld's thesis as helpful in positively presenting the notion of 'ownness' as lack and 'alien' as having something that addresses this lack.

The afternoon sessions comprised of practical workshops, where everyone worked creatively and discussed their ideas in small groups before making their group presentations to the whole conference. Each group took on tasks to address some of the complex questions and issues that arise in working in ethnography museums, such as community collaborations and relations of power and control that impact on work with ethnographic collections.

For example delegates discussed what the best practice might be when working with source or diaspora communities to interpret ethnographic collections. They shared their own experiences from around the world in overcoming a range of issues on relevant projects,

and the importance of allowing polyvocality, building long-term relationships, and prioritising the needs of each individual group.

The many issues to consider when commissioning artists and engaging with activism in relation to ethnographic collections were a consistent point of discussion. It was widely recognised that releasing some control to allow these projects to progress naturally, and allowing collaborators greater freedom can be challenging. The need for on-going and good communication was seen as vital in developing trust and building a positive working relationship between institutions and artists.

The complexities involved in representation and constructing object biographies were also consistently noted. It was interesting to think how each individual might represent themselves in a display case, and which objects they would choose to do so. One exercise involved everyone choosing an object they were carrying with them, in their bag, or on their person, to represent themselves. This work highlighted how limiting it can be to sum ourselves up in one or two objects, and how difficult curation and representation is within the museum space.

These incredibly complex issues were addressed throughout the two days. We were able to generate some helpful points for best practice when working with ethnographic collections although this is a point for on-going attention and dissemination in due course.

Overall the conference was full of lively debate and an energising exchange of ideas. Everybody said farewell on the final day with hope to take this energy and learning back into their own museum or university space, certainly we all left with greater inspiration and new ideas for object-led work with ethnographic collections.

Dissemination

ICME and the Horniman Museum will be developing some concise guidelines for object-based work in ethnographic collections in 2019. It is our aim to work with our board members and partners to produce the guidelines in multiple languages, including Croatian, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Urdu. Following translation, these guidelines will be made available at our websites prior to our annual meeting in Kyoto². Meanwhile we are pleased to share our workshop findings to date.

Wednesday 28th November

Workshop 1: Encountering Objects

² An overview of the conference and workshops, prior to completion in November, was given at the ICME annual meeting in Estonia in October, due to the change of the original date from September.

The aims of the first workshop, on Wednesday afternoon, were to generate a list of points to consider when working with source or diaspora communities to interpret ethnographic collections.

This session took place in the Hands on Base, the Horniman's object handling gallery. All of the objects here can be touched and Horniman staff also encourage visitors to use their sense of smell to explore the objects. There is minimal interpretation at the Hands on Base to facilitate an instinctive interaction with the objects.

Much of the Hands on Base Collection is organised in themed series of Discovery boxes that people can access themselves, which enables direct interaction with the objects. These boxes are also used for outreach, and in 2015 the Horniman took the opportunity to revamp them.

The Horniman asked seventeen of their local community partners to curate a box each by choosing a theme, objects from the handling collection they felt related to that theme and a way of interpreting those objects. Every group was given boundaries and constraints, just as anyone would have in a project such as this one, and they discussed cultural considerations, conservation of objects, fragile objects and objects that are hard to replace. They specifically discussed tailoring the objects, theme and interpretation they chose, to the Horniman's main family audience.

This community work also provided the Horniman with a good opportunity to revamp the boxes for a more diverse set of visitors. Most importantly the new boxes should provide families with a way in to talk about some of the pressing social issues that could be presented through the material culture. The Horniman knew that they could not achieve this task by themselves, and that it was necessary to work with community partners to achieve this.

The many benefits for participants in making the boxes included working together as a group, the new skills they might develop through this project and the sense of ownership, empowerment, pride and agency it would provide. The project aimed to make people feel like the Horniman was theirs, as many groups did not feel this when the project started. It was also a chance to change how the Horniman works and help them stay relevant to diverse groups and the local community.

These community groups often had a completely different way of interpreting a theme to the usual ways the staff at the Horniman employed. For example a group of older adults in a mental health in-patient ward designed a 'Welcome to the Horniman' box to introduce the Horniman on outreach projects to similar wards. The objects they chose were very different to those that members of staff would have chosen, so it was a great example of how important those collaborations can be.

There are several questions that this project raises, such as:

- Should we prioritise working with diaspora communities on objects from their own culture?
- If we are doing that, are we only doing it to get their cultural knowledge?
- What are the benefits and challenges of facilitating an imaginative engagement with objects, when there is a public outcome?
- How much control are we going to keep or give away?

Below are three examples of the community partners the Horniman worked with, who could be considered diaspora groups. None of the groups went into the project with a brief about interpreting objects from a certain culture. There were also many facilitation aspects to consider when working with all of the groups.

ReWrite

One of the groups was a creative ESOL group from ReWrite, an organisation who works with young people from different cultural backgrounds on issues of refuge, asylum, prejudice and racism. The theme this group chose was 'A survival kit for people arriving on a new planet'. Again, this was a very different theme and choice of objects to what the Horniman may have chosen.

As an ESOL group, they had a very clear aim of needing to keep learning and improving their English to make their lives work in the UK. The Horniman needed to help them meet this agenda in the sessions. ReWrite uses unique facilitation techniques, which the Horniman needed to use as well, in order to best work with this group.

IRMO (IndoAmerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation)

A community-led organisation based in Brixton, helping Latin Americans to build fulfilled, independent and integrated lives in the UK. This group consisted of family groups and the theme they chose was 'Home', which presented many interesting issues, particularly as lots of them were not where they would call themselves at home. A lot of emotional issues came up, which Horniman staff needed to be prepared to work with.

The language barrier was a main issue, so some of the sessions had to be conducted in Spanish. The intergenerational nature of the group meant the Horniman had to facilitate sessions with that in mind, such as holding sessions after school or at weekends. They also had to account for an on-going change of people each time, which meant working with new groups of people for each session.

People from IRMO were doing this project for many reasons, such as getting their children into school or receiving benefits, so in working with them, the Horniman had to be aware this project was not the highest priority for them.

Pan Intercultural Arts, working alongside the resident Horniman Youth Panel

Pan Intercultural Arts work with young marginalised people who are at risk of exclusion. For this group the Horniman were working with newly arrived young people, in Croydon. This group chose the theme of 'Freedom'.

Issues to overcome with this project included all of the above, as well as bringing two different groups of people together. The main aim for this group was to forge positive relationships and bring people from different cultures together.

Following a brief introduction to these projects the Horniman education team asked delegates to work around the Hands on Base in small groups. Everyone was free to join a group of his or her choice and address a key question that the Horniman had prepared.

How can we apply this learning to approaching objects with source or diaspora communities?

To answer this question, everyone worked in their group to discuss the main issues that arise when working with source or diaspora communities, and list the ways they might overcome these issues when engaging people with an object. This question provided a chance for people to share their own experiences in overcoming the main issues on relevant projects. The key points noted by each of the workshop groups are listed below.

Cultural appropriation

- cultural identity and stereotypes are not the same as nationality
- reluctant identities and mixed identities, we all have varying mixed heritage
- who has issues with cultural appropriation?
- who owns the culture and who has the right to stop that appropriation?
- who are we to say what is allowed?
- to be aware of issues of tokenism, respect and power
- who is making the money?

Communication in sessions

- what types of communication are being used, consider visual or artistic responses
- in relation to language, we need to think about speakers of multiples languages and progress polyvocality
- listening to languages other than the dominant language and valuing those languages
- the output always seems to be in English, for example, all the Discovery boxes are in English, and in doing so, we have taken away the first language of some of the people who have created them
- outputs do not always all have to be in English and we can have a multi-language output
- provide interpretation of materials

Emotional responses to objects

- emotional responses are not something negative, to be overcome, but something to be prepared for
- museums often want an emotional response from objects on display
- understand and consider the performativity of an object and make use of it, artists or community groups may be able to help us imagine this
- think about the long term relationship and have mechanisms in place to make sure these conversations are always developing

Ensuring mutual benefit

- consider power dynamics and make sure people are as equal as possible
- always question and challenge power dynamics
- as institutions we need to genuinely listen to and prioritise the needs of the people we are working with
- be flexible and open to change in our approach, both as we are coming up with ideas for projects and throughout the project
- give up some control and let go of things
- give people agency and allow people to drive the project in their own way
- use the collections and spaces to benefit the people, rather than using the people to benefit our collections
- listen to needs that are not those of the museum

Group benefits vs. public benefits

- does the benefit have to be versus? Benefit does not have to be mutually exclusive
- group benefit comes out of a participatory process, we can not always predict what the public outcome will be
- we need to think differently about public benefit and public outcome, which are not necessarily the same thing
- there is a need to be organised but we can not completely control the process
- work can be about individual benefit, contributing to representation as part of raising new voices
- negotiating with people who want to be included in the museum collection, or something the museum represents, as well as those who do not care about the museum voice
- public outcome can be a valuable motivation for the group

Interpretation - whose voice?

- it is important to think about the challenges between the expert and the non-expert and whose voice has authority in the museum space

- who has ownership of the object
- do diaspora and source communities feel comfortable coming into the museum space and telling the museum they are doing it wrong, does the museum feel comfortable hearing that?
- on-going commitment and to build long lasting relationships with community groups through these projects is important
- listening and reacting to what everyone says as the project develops

Intergenerational logistics

- how do we deliver sessions and workshops that address the learning abilities, and range of knowledges, within a wide range of age groups?
- often we have to devise multiple sessions in one session, to ensure everybody benefits from the process
- encouraging adults or parents to be a bigger part of the process, so we could have children as instigators of the learning process, for example, sharing activities with their parents, or leading them around the museum
- trying to find objects from a museum collection that will provide a great starting point, and not be too tenuous a link, to connect with these groups
- we have to find out what interests all the different members of these groups, adults and children
- awareness of all safeguarding issues and the ratio of staff to under 18s

Who is 'allowed' to talk about what? Who and why?

- power dynamics when working with source and diaspora communities
- working with too many people can feel overwhelming
- the institutions attitudes to change, wanting to introduce new voices, it can be hard to find right the way through the organisation, on every level
- who gives permission for knowledge to be shared?
- finding new voices can be time-consuming, it is a matter of finding the time, and needing to make a big level of commitment
- how we choose the groups we work with, even when we think we are not making choices we are making choices
- access, physically and otherwise

From these points, we compiled a list of top tips, in response to the overall aim of the workshop. These tips can be found in the end summary section.

Workshop 2: Curation and Representation

The Horniman has a large collection of North American objects, and the second workshop started by discussing indigenous voices in the gallery space. When the Horniman's

collections of North American objects were displayed in the previous World Gallery, they were assembled for their aesthetic qualities. This did not convey the specific significance of each individual object, and instead simply provided an aesthetic overview of general Native American culture. These issues were addressed when the new World gallery was planned, in order to create better integration of displays.

The objects were collected in the 19th Century and gave a very traditional idea of Native American communities, rather than showing them to be evolving in the modern day. The Horniman therefore wanted to incorporate native voice into the museum.

To do this, they commissioned a native artist to create totem poles that could be engaged with in a sensory way through touch and smell. They also wanted a native voice to come from the totem poles, to show a living culture, rather than a static display of objects.

The oral storyteller they found needed to be given the right to tell stories by her elders. She had to go back to her community to get permission to record the stories. This was a critical part of the process that she said the Horniman respected.

This example led us on to questions of identity and how we represent identities in museums, which is always an incredibly complex process. How do objects represent the complexity of individuals? We all have many different identities, including personal, social, professional and global.

As well as objects, museums use texts to represent identities, which can be very helpful but also come with many challenges. How do we present a piece of text for diverse audiences?

Everyone was asked to think about how they would represent themselves in a display case of objects. What objects would they choose and why?

Many of us carry objects in our bags, or on our person, which say something about our identity. What objects would people want to be represented by? What would people like a museum space to say about that object, and how it represents them?

To explore this idea, each individual chose an object they had with them and what that might say about them. In groups, everyone shared their thoughts and then looked at the objects as a collection, and what this might say in a museum setting.

What common threads were there between the objects? What do they say together about our common humanity and what it is to be human?

The range of objects people had chosen included earrings, necklaces, purses, watches, hand cream, ID, scarves, keys, a sport bottle, cigarettes, headphones, hairbrush and mirror, pens, notebooks and sketchbooks, an iPad and even a door lock and a pretend Nobel prize.

Common threads between objects included family, travel, memory, everyday life, relationships, and nostalgia. Others linked to home, moving and travelling, having the liberty to have a place to call home, and how some of our objects can provide a sense of security.

People talked about how personal identity speaks through these objects and how that is always connected to others. A lot of the objects related to communication between the objects, ourselves and others. People discussed the emotional value of their object; some objects were heirlooms handed down by family members but we also connect emotions and memories to many other objects, which can hold a memory of a specific moment in time. One colleague explained that the seemingly random piece of paper he keeps in his wallet as a treasured possession is actually his beloved first baby's first piece of 'art' – a postage stamp sized section torn from a takeaway menu!

There were often personal and family associations to the objects, as well as the relationship between objects and professional identities. People talked about how our national identity and nationality is not necessarily the same as our cultural identity. These are all important considerations as we all have multiple individual identities, as well as group identities.

It was interesting to see how people could choose the same object (e.g. a watch or necklace) and have very different meanings, showing how one object can stand for multiple things, with many different interpretations.

Discussions covered what it might mean to lose one of these objects, as well as the tactile and multi-sensory aspect to the objects. What happens to the object when it gets behind glass, does this change it?

A text description can be very fixed and unchanging, and trying to sum yourself up in one object feels very limiting. This exercise highlighted the difficulties in the process of choosing, describing and explaining objects in a museum space.

Thursday 29th November

Workshop 3: Ethnographic Objects and Controversies

In the third workshop we discussed the considerations of commissioning artists to work within the museum space. We noted how it is often not until a gallery opens that you appreciate the push and pull between the individual artistic interventions, the collections themselves and the broader narratives present in the space. Sometimes our artists end up representing the wider community and different perspectives.

The Pacific encounter in the World Gallery provides an example of commissioning and working with artists within the Horniman. To create this display, the Horniman worked with the founder of the Pacific Climate Warriors, an organisation consisting of 14 Pacific nations lobbying governments on issues of climate change, and New Zealand artist Chris Charteris.

When considering the African section of the World Gallery, the Horniman team wanted to show urban, contemporary cities as much as anything else, and in particular the design and enormous creative industry of Nigeria.

To create this encounter, the Horniman worked with artist and industrial designer Alafuro Sikoki-Coleman who works with materiality and nostalgia. Her project 'Private Atlas' focuses on Nigeria in 1960 and reflects on her identity as a Nigerian woman. The Horniman approached her for advice on how best to represent Lagos design in the gallery. She created a design piece based on the Ijo creation goddess Woyingi, images of which can be seen in the gallery.

Following on from these examples, everyone then discussed the following questions:

- 1) What assumptions do we make about artists – how can they or do they destabilise, enhance, debunk, trouble, confront, and unpack alternative histories and meanings embedded in ethnographic collections?**

What might be best practice to follow in commissioning artists when working with ethnographic collections?

- 2) How do we make space for activism in relation to work we do with ethnographic collections?**

How do museums allow for a more flexible approach, to enable activism that is current, responsive, not overly planned or overly controlled?

Groups then shared their ideas and relevant experiences from projects they had worked on, and reflected on best practice.

Feedback for Question 1

- for whom are we doing this? Why are we doing this?
- when working with an artist, there is an idea of freedom and never being able to predict what is going to come out of it, which can be scary but also very productive
- some projects do not work as well as intended or come out differently to how we might have imagined, but we are able to think about how to do things better and learn from the process
- discussion, communication, ethics, debate and access to collections too often find that the arrows are always pointing back to satisfied communities
- positive and negative criticism, provoking reactions from visitors or surprising people, the different perspectives and points of view people might have
- artists' work may be more impulsive and less structured than work the museum might do

- important to have a good relationship with the artist, and ensure that there is trust as well as control
- an artist may present contemporary issues or present something with humour which can be really positive, as long as there is always cultural understanding
- artists can offer a new perspective
- museums can assume artist briefings are clear, but they can be contradictory
- sources of funding can sometimes be controversial
- who is an artist? How do we define an artist? Visitors are often not seen as, or allowed, to be artists within a museum space, we usually just see 'artist' as a professional label
- relationships with artists can be short-term, how do we navigate this?
- anticipate issues that may arise
- provide public speaking training for artists so they are equipped to discuss their work with the press
- we can't expect artists to be anthropologists, so good and on-going communication between museum staff and the artist is vital
- artists can provide an interpretation of collections that museums are unable to
- artists can activate objects in a way that brings them to life
- when commissioning an artist, we have to accept there will be some element of risk
- important to think about how we give freedom to the artist, whilst also keeping some level of control

Feedback from Question 2

- who and why do we want to progress activism in the museum space? What is activism and why do museums want it?
- where does activism start from, does it come from inside or outside the museum, or both?
- recognise that activism is not a controllable commodity, or to be used to help museums do what they think they should be doing, because that is the opposite of what activism should be used for
- in embracing the space for activism, we need to be less output focused
- accept less control and be more flexible
- presently, museums can seem less secure with themselves, and so activism can seem a scary idea
- many staff members are being activists from within museums, consider the emotional impact on staff, when they are trying to push ideas through an institution
- many different ideas of activism, certain people may call themselves activists, but others would not see their positions and views in the same way
- how can we bring people in to museums who don't usually go into those spaces?

- temporary exhibitions may not be enough, how can we work with permanent displays and activism?

Workshop 4: Community Collaborations

In this session we considered the complexity of object biographies in relation to ethnographic collections. How can we deconstruct the complex nature of object biographies? How might we approach the process, to unearth complex stories?

Biographies do not always have a linear perspective. We do not necessarily think of a human biography in terms of birth to death, and we can think about objects in the same way.

We watched a video about Boat 195, a refugee boat that carried 253 people from Libya, arriving near the coast of Sicily on 17 August, 2013. A section of the boat can be seen in the World Gallery. Members of Pan Intercultural Arts and the Horniman Youth Panel, working in collaboration with artists, decided how best to display the boat.

The video prompted us to think about the controversies surrounding object biographies in ethnographic collections, and the need to be transparent about the origins and ownership of objects. We then looked at the following questions -

How can we translate conflicts and tensions into:

- **practices of display – how do we make sure the complex histories of an object are reflected in a display?**
- **engagement with communities –how can we practically nurture and sustain those relationships with community groups?**

Groups discussed each part of the question in order to come up with practical tips to feedback to everyone.

Feedback on practices of display

- using good questions
- multiplicity of voices
- sometimes one object can be used, other times many objects will be required to convey the enormity of a subject
- importance of architecture around an object, how it is presented and displayed, how you experience the object within the environment it is displayed in
- focusing on the emotional responses and humanity that objects can bring out
- acknowledging conflict without pressing for a resolution
- the difficulties in making conflict explicit to visitors, being aware that these conversations will have sensitivities for visitors
- offering visitors quiet spaces and relevant resources, or offering a space within the exhibition for reflection

- it is not the museum's responsibility to resolve conflict, but to help visitors engage with it safely
- it is ok to be upset by what we see in museums
- the idea of having human labels, by inviting people into the museum to talk about their stories in person, although this comes with many difficulties in allowing debate whilst protecting vulnerable people
- re-imagining the visitor experience and inviting voices from different standpoints, such as using guided tours with different points of view

Feedback on Engagement with communities

- museums can be spaces that give status to different voices
- important that the communities we work have control over the objects and how they are displayed
- important for a translator or mediator to be in place for these projects, as museums can be perceived as voices of authority, which can be dangerous
- engagement with communities can be a form of therapy, so providing a safe and neutral space is vital
- allowing people to build relationships with each other and the institution, building trust and confidence
- museums are working with people from communities, not a whole community, so it is important to recognise the differences within as well as between communities, and not to generalise
- to be aware that communities can change very rapidly, and this is not always reflected in museum displays
- there is an assumption that the relationship between the museum and community members will spread to the wider community, but this may not be the case, so to think about building a wider network
- creating empowerment and trust in the long-term
- discovering what community groups want and then working out how the museums and collections can feed into that
- conflict is very complex, exhibitions can be a great way to address it but sometimes are not dynamic enough to address the different perspectives involved
- on-going programmes or live events can help to bring these different perspectives in

Summary

In each workshop we aimed to come up with top tips and best practices for the issues discussed, which are summarised below.

Workshop 1: Curation and Representations – Top tips when working with source or diaspora communities to interpret ethnographic collections

- build long term relationships
- do not anticipate what the outcome is going to be, let it come naturally
- with intergenerational groups, encourage children to lead the learning of families
- the whole organisation needs to change, not just the project itself, and specifically in giving up control and giving time and resources
- allow duality and multiplicity, of language and opinion
- be aware of less obvious barriers in addition to access, such as confidence, and power dynamics
- promote mutual respect
- think about economics, who gets the money?
- make use of what is special about the objects, and do not shy away from emotional responses
- listen to and prioritise the needs of the group
- collections should benefit the people, not the other way around

Workshop 2: Encountering Objects – Key ideas discussed in representing identities within museums

- we connect emotions and memories to objects
- trying to sum yourself up in one object feels very limiting
- because a text description can be fixed and unchanging allow space and time for fresh textual interpretations, perhaps from family and school workshops
- one object can stand for multiple things and have very different interpretations for different people
- our national identity and nationality is not necessarily the same as our cultural identity
- many of us have multiple individual identities, as well as group identities
- there are differences within as well as between groups
- an object can change when it is put behind glass and lose something of its life how can we facilitate diverse audiences to appreciate the many stories it holds?

Workshop 3: Ethnographic Objects and Controversies – Top tips for commissioning artists and allowing space for activism within ethnographic collections

Commissioning artists

- do not delegate all responsibility and expect the artist to do everything for you
- involve the artist early on in the development of the project
- good on-going communication is very important
- build long-term relationships and trust
- forge respect between the institution and the artist
- consider the artist as an activator and an ethnographer

- accept risk
- give freedom to the artist whilst keeping some level of control, stay flexible

Activism

- embrace the loss of control
- flexibility
- do not expect a set outcome, be less output focused
- accept and allow tensions
- consider more permanent displays and activism

Workshop 4: Community Collaborations – Top tips for translating conflicts and tensions into practices of display and engagement with communities

Practices of display

- employ question led dialogical approaches
- design 'the experience' of the object
- choose objects that can relate to personal experience
- do not press for a resolution
- provide training for all staff, importantly including front-of-house, to be able to deal with complex issues and visitor reactions
- contemporary collecting to establish dialogues with ethnographic collections
- acknowledge the difficulties of labelling objects
- invite people from different standpoints into the gallery, with awareness of the controversies this could involve

Engagement with communities

- giving up some control to create a sense of empowerment in community collaborations
- involving a translator or mediator in the project
- consider community collaboration as therapy
- people from diverse communities do not necessarily represent the entire community
- awareness of the transient nature of communities
- establish a wider network with the outside community, to spread information outwards
- the importance of long-term relationships and building trust
- using live programmes and events as a way to address conflict and tension

Closing remarks

Many controversial issues arise in curating ethnographic collections. In his closing speech on Wednesday, the first day of our event, Dr Robert Storrie, Keeper of

Anthropology at the Horniman, talked about how we cannot cleanse the past through current moral actions. He advised us that what we need is to reflect on our moral and ethical positions now, and allow a space for reflection on the impact of our pasts, including the colonial legacies of racism, on the present. This work is about not forgetting and remembering that our work is always in progress.

Viv Golding, Chair of ICME, Mario Buletic ICOM Croatia, Prof. Elisabeth Tietmeyer ICOM Germany, Tone Cecilie Simensen Karlgård, ICOM Norway and Saamia Ahmed, ICOM Pakistan spoke on Thursday, at the end of the second day of conference and workshops. They gave thanks to everyone involved in organising the 2days and offered some final reflections.

One key idea that seemed to have emerged again drew on German philosophy, the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer. This can be employed to present a model of learning about each other and objects in museums through conversations or dialogue, which are never finished but adjourned, to be picked up again and again throughout our lives. Conversations, as hermeneutic philosophy informs us are incredibly important, they are about asking questions, then listening very carefully to the answers. Dialogue or conversations are a dynamic part of what it means to be human.

Conversations can be difficult. We need to approach each conversation with openness and respect as well as an acceptance that we will not always readily agree. Similarly, it was noted that nobody works in the field of anthropology because it is easy. Over two days we demonstrated we are not afraid of facing conflicts and difficult decisions on power relationships. For example in conversation on community collaborations and working with artists we were mindful that individuals should have priority as creators of material and immaterial culture.

In conclusion, it is through dialogue that we can come to a better understanding of each other and of ourselves. We started a conversation during this 2day event, which we aim to continue. Once again ICME thanks ICOM for funding this conference and workshops, which permitted such an energising exchange of ideas as well as new inspiration for best practice in object-led work with ethnographic collections. We will progress this work as noted above in 2019 and disseminate our concise guidelines in multiple languages at our websites before the Kyoto meeting.

Budget (see separate excel sheet and attachments)

The ICOM grant 2,100 Euros £1,891.11 was mainly used to fund the 4 bursaries (roughly £ 280 each) + pay for a documenter (£288) + match fund for food and other expenses. Additional income was generated by ticket sales at £15 p day. We respectfully request Euros 640 be carried over for design work on the guidelines in 2019 since this was not possible to be completed in 2018. We also apologise that because of the very late date

of the conference and workshops (27 -28 November) some invoices and receipts could not be submitted by the report deadline (2.1.19) as so many staff are on annual holiday until 14 January. We will be able to provide the necessary invoices and receipts by the end of January 2019.