

Towards new museum conservation standards?

Re-evaluating our approaches in the light of the climate and energy crisis

13 December 2022 - 6-9 pm
On Zoom

About the meeting

In an article published in Le Monde on 28 October, Michel Guerrin honed in on a sensitive question, openly asking what museums, theatres and festivals are doing to preserve the planet. "The response swings between people burying their heads in the sand and playing the futility card." While this may sound harsh in view of the number of initiatives and publications dedicated to best practices that have appeared in recent months, clearly demonstrating a real awareness and commitment on the part of our institutions, it is no less unsettling. The journalist quotes Samuel Valensi, co-author of a report on the culture sector published in 2021 by the French think tank, The Shift Project, which says "taking small urgent measures does not lead to energy conservation." How do you define energy conservation (or what is referred to as energy "sobriety" in French), the new priority that guides most of our choices today? According to the French High Council for Climate, it is "an approach that aims to reduce energy consumption through changes in behaviour, lifestyle and collective organisation." The government has set a target of a 10% reduction in energy consumption by 2024. However beyond the need to address the energy and economic crisis, profound changes need to be made to our lifestyles and organisations, as stated in the definition of the High Council for Climate.

While we are all preparing to turn down the heating in our museum work spaces this winter and some are even announcing additional days of closure, shouldn't we be taking a step forward (to overcome a psychological barrier perhaps?), going beyond "small measures", and taking a hard look at how we plan to operate in the long term? The viability of our museum conservation standards, established 30 years ago in a very different context, seems to be one of the issues that needs to be re-examined. On 6 September, the French Minister of Culture, Rima Abdul Malak, also called on French professionals and the international museum community to address the issue of air conditioning in museums and the conservation of collections, underlining the need for unified positions on this issue.

ICOM France has therefore decided that our next ethics debate evening should focus on the question of re-evaluating museum conservation standards defined through three decades of preventive conservation. How can we continue to preserve our heritage, while taking into account today's hard-hitting realities? Is maintaining the status quo in this area really still an option? How can we change our ways of thinking without sacrificing the conservation of the objects in our care, for future generations?

Our speakers from France and other countries will present their courageous and ambitious initiatives, avenues to be explored, initial studies on the subject, alongside their concerns and limitations, with the aim of working together in a joint approach to define new standards that respond to the current crisis which is undoubtedly and permanently shaking up the way we live.

Emilie Girard

Access to the session

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84348605072?pwd=UFdnbnNl4SjhlbzU3aldyK2c2bDhKdz09>

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