

Museums Under Pressures: Freedoms, Censorship and Controversies

Tuesday 2nd June 2026 – 6 pm / 8.30 pm

Dürer Amphitheatre, École du Louvre & Zoom platform

Topic of the event

The report by the CESE entitled *Countering Restrictions on the Freedom of Artistic Creation and Dissemination*, published in March, shows that, in recent years, various forms of restriction have multiplied across the cultural sector. These pressures are becoming increasingly intense and sometimes violent, amplified by social media, and originating from an ever wider range of actors.

While the performing arts are particularly affected, spaces dedicated to visual creation, exhibition venues, museums and heritage institutions are by no means exempt from these multiple forms of constraint, which may be expressed more or less explicitly.

As society becomes increasingly polarized and viewpoints are expressed with growing intensity—often without nuance—museums are subjected to multiple pressures, coming from activist groups, political actors, foreign influences, and even from within museums or heritage institutions themselves.

In this context, the risk of self-censorship is significant.

Should certain works or documents be removed to storage? Should certain subjects continue to be exhibited? Should we address topics that may provoke discomfort or controversy? The fear of missteps, misunderstanding, blasphemy, or offense can be experienced by museum professionals as a powerful constraint on programming freedom and interpretive content.

These pressures, and the forms of self-restraint they generate, is a genuine threat to democracy, undermining the social and civic mission of museums. In such a context, how can museums ensure the conditions for civic dialogue, foster critical thinking, and encourage exchange?

The joint initiative by the Comité français d'histoire de l'art (CFHA), the Association professionnelle de l'archéologie et de l'histoire de l'art des universités (APAHAU), ICOM France, and the École du Louvre to organize this ethics-focused debate reflects a collective awareness of the threats to scientific and academic freedom, as well as a shared effort to identify ways of addressing these constraints and developing responses.

How can we continue ongoing projects, initiate new ways of seeing, studying, debating, and sharing, in order to lay the groundwork for the future?

Émilie Girard, President, May 2026