

ICOM DESIGN ANNUAL CONFERENCE CALL FOR PAPERS| BARCELONA 2026

The Architect Beyond the Building: Design and the Decorative Arts

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA (MNAC), BARCELONA

11–12 November 2026

In 2026 Barcelona has been designated the World Capital of Architecture and commemorates the anniversary of the death of the architect Antoni Gaudí, whose imprint has shaped the city and its Mediterranean identity.

Within this context, the 2026 annual meeting of ICOM DESIGN, to be held at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), focuses on the figure of the architect beyond the traditional role associated with architectural and urban projects. The conference will revolve around architectural practice through the lens of design, craftsmanship, and the intimate scale.

This call invites papers that examine the wide range of outputs that architects contribute to as part of, or outside of, building projects, including: furniture, glass, lacquer, ceramics, jewellery, and goldsmithing; fashion and textiles; as well as graphic design, mural painting, *muséographie*, and atmosphere, while also addressing the fields of interior design and architectural ornamentation.

We welcome submissions that explore these multidisciplinary practices beyond the large scale, addressing projects, creative processes, and cultural influences from the Middle Ages to the present day and across the globe.

Could the intimate scale of design be the true space in which an architect's identity is manifested? What does an architect bring to the design of smaller scale objects or interiors that makes their practice unique? How, in which historical contexts and for which audiences have architects employed traditional techniques and crafts to enrich sensorial experience? What are the challenges in conservation, exhibition, and restoration of this heritage? What intimate stories are behind the creation of the designs? How do architects use design as a bridge to imagine and construct other possible worlds or to create playful and imaginative works?

Proposals offering critical perspectives may consider (but are not limited to) the following themes:

- Architecture, a home for the total arts
- Design and architectural photography
- Material practices and intimate craft
- Identity and gender
- Heritage, conservation and collections

- Microarchitectures
- Visionary, utopian, and playful creations
- Sustainability, circularity, and materials

This international congress aims to gather a limited number of contributions, representing original studies and intended to foster discussion at the intersection of academic and curatorial scholarship and professional practice.

Why MNAC?

The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), in Barcelona is an ideal site for this productive dialogue, as an institution dedicated to all artistic disciplines from the Romanesque period to the twenty-first century, and it houses a unique collection of decorative arts by architects such as Antoni Gaudí and Josep Maria Jujol, artists who pushed the boundaries.

The museum is entering a new phase marked by an ambitious expansion project at the Palau Victoria Eugènia, scheduled for completion in 2029 to coincide with the centenary of the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition. This expansion will further strengthen the Museum's role as an institution without chronological or stylistic boundaries, capable of representing and promoting the full scope of Catalan artistic production.

The ICOM DESIGN meeting in Barcelona proposes a rich programme of visits to significant historical sites and museums throughout the city and its surroundings, while engaging with contemporary collections and makers.

How do I apply?

- Abstract of 300-400 words
- Short Resume
- Submit to icom-design-2026@museunacional.cat by June 30th.
- Notification of acceptance: 15 July 2026
- Post-conference tour: 13–14 November 2026

Participants will be expected to give their presentations in English, which should last 15 minutes and include a visual presentation component. Proposals will be peer reviewed and the results of the conference may be published.

Presenters will be expected to cover their own registration and travel expenses. Travel grants for young ICOM members (under 40 years old) will be available. Information will follow for those applications.

Membership requirements

Please note that all participants must be individual members or representatives of institutional members of ICOM DESIGN at the time of the conference.

Find more information about how to become a member of ICOM and ICOM-DESIGN here: <https://icom.museum/en/get-involved>