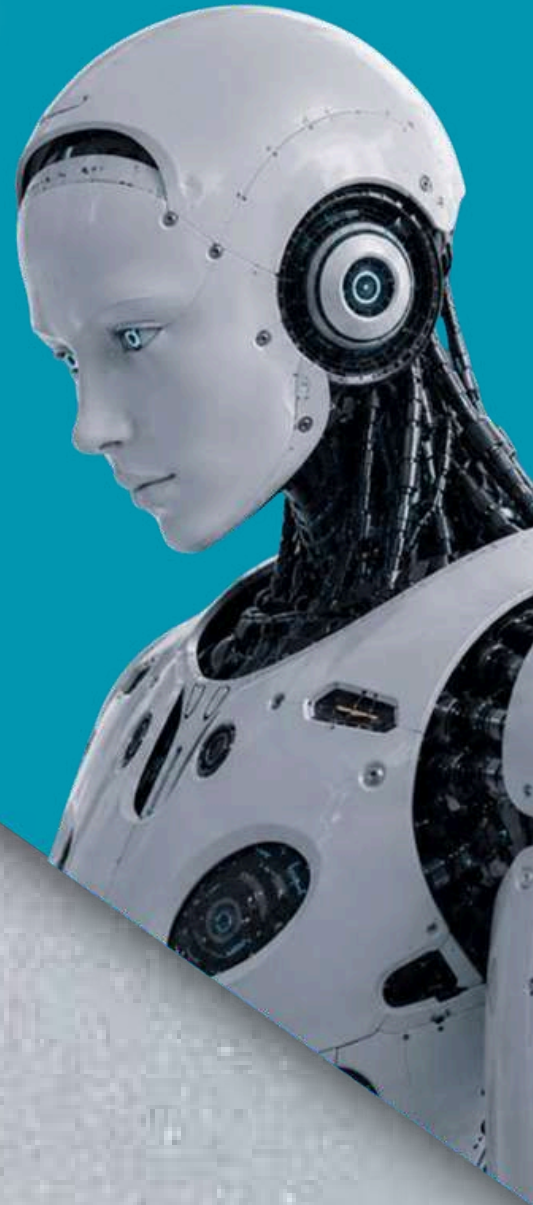


M DEMHIST

SHIFTING LINES
HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS
IN THE AGE OF AI

PROGRAMME



DEM HIST

2026 International Conference

MAIN THEME

"The Three Laws of Robotics: 1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. 2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. 3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law."

— Isaac Asimov (1942)

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

— Arthur C. Clarke (1968)



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS NO LONGER A CONCEPT OF THE FUTURE or the topic of science fiction novels — it is actively reshaping our present, including the world of heritage preservation and museum practice. For those of us dedicated to historic house museums, this shift represents a fascinating confluence of opportunity and introspection. AI tools, from Large Language Models to predictive algorithms and immersive technologies, are opening doors to innovative ways of caring for, interpreting, and sharing these unique places where the building, both as a tangible structure and as the intangible narrative of its history, is the heart of the collection. Yet, they also prompt crucial questions about authenticity, ethics, and our fundamental mission.

THE DEMHIST 2026 CONFERENCE, "SHIFTING LINES: HISTORICAL HOUSES IN THE AGE OF AI" INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THIS DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE.

We seek to move beyond simple advocacy or skepticism, fostering instead a nuanced dialogue about how Artificial Intelligence can serve the specific needs and ethos of historic houses. How can these technologies help us preserve fragile ecosystems, tell richer and more inclusive stories, and engage visitors in profound new ways—all while navigating the practical and philosophical challenges they introduce? **WE ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN HOW AI ADDRESSES THE CORE SPECIFICITIES OF OUR FIELD.** Historic houses demand "invisible interpretation" that respects their spirit of place, a challenge AI can meet through augmented reality and image recognition. They are vessels of intangible heritage—the echoes of past lives—which generative AI can help thoughtfully reconstruct through soundscapes and narrative. As fragile, living organisms, they benefit from AI-driven predictive conservation, analysing micro-climates in real-time to protect collections. Furthermore, AI offers solutions for managing visitor flow in constrained spaces and can provide virtual access to areas too delicate for physical traffic.

Monday 26 October

SESSION 1: OPPORTUNITY

The Augmented Curator

Can AI open opportunities for curators?



The background of the slide is a teal-tinted image of a woman in 18th-century attire, likely a queen or noblewoman, sitting at a desk. She is wearing a large, ornate blue and white dress with a high collar and a large, feathered headdress. She is looking towards the viewer. In front of her is a globe on a stand. The overall tone is historical and elegant.

Monday 26 October

SESSION 1: OPPORTUNITY

The Augmented Curator

Can AI open opportunities for curators?

This first theme will revolve on the following key words: Monitor, Understand, Assess, and Predict. Through them, we want to explore how AI can enhance our own understanding of our collections, as museum professionals. As such, AI tools can facilitate our work behind the scene, making us more efficient, enabling for better informed and faster decision-making, offering new perspectives and ways to consider curatorial issues. This session will explore how AI is reshaping daily preservation work in areas specific to House Museums.

MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITY: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE CURATOR IN THE AGE OF AI

DR. SUZANNE BRAVERY, PRINCIPAL, MAKING MUSEUMS MATTER, AUSTRALIA

To better maximise opportunities of effectively working with AI, it is useful to explore the challenges and opportunities of the role of the curator pre-AI. Harnessing recent research on the role of curators in interpreting and preserving the interiors of historic house museums, this paper argues that the accurate presentation of interiors is the primary method of realising their intrinsic value and that the professional curator is best placed to do so. In which case, an understanding of their current role will inevitably assist with maximising the opportunities of using AI in creating an authentic and accessible historic house experience.



Suzanne is passionate about making historic houses and their narratives accessible. Her extensive experience in curating and managing the conservation and interpretation of historic house museums includes supervisory curatorial positions at the Museums of History NSW, responsible for state heritage properties Elizabeth Farm, Elizabeth Bay House, Vacluse House, Meroogal, and Rouse Hill estate. She writes on conservation housekeeping, historic houses, cultural heritage, material culture, and museum sustainability, and regularly presents on house museums and their interiors to a wider audience.

▼ THE MUSEUMS OF HISTORY NSW



HERITAGE HUNTERS: AI AS A CURATORIAL TOOL FOR IDENTIFYING, DOCUMENTING, PROTECTING, AND INTERPRETING OVERLOOKED HISTORIC HOUSES

MATJAŽ KOMAN, DIRECTOR, ŽIROVNICA INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE, SLOVENIA, PHD CANDIDATE IN HERITOLOGY, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

Heritage Hunters is an interdisciplinary initiative exploring how Artificial Intelligence can support heritage professionals in identifying, documenting, protecting, and interpreting overlooked historic houses before they disappear. The project focuses on residential heritage that often remains outside official protection systems and is lost through neglect, development pressures, or demolition. Combining photographic documentation, archival research, material preservation, and digital recording, Heritage Hunters creates an online museum dedicated to vulnerable historic houses. AI assisted tools help organize and analyse documentation, structure heritage data, and generate visual reconstruction and renovation scenarios based on available evidence. These tools support curatorial decision-making, improve documentation workflows, and make endangered heritage more accessible to researchers and the public.

By focusing on heritage before institutional recognition occurs, the project demonstrates how AI can become a practical tool for the early identification, protection, documentation, and interpretation of overlooked historic houses. The initiative also seeks to raise public awareness and encourage the recognition and nomination of vulnerable sites for official protection, supporting more participatory approaches to heritage preservation.

Matjaž Koman is Director of the Žirovnica Institute for Tourism and Culture (Slovenia), managing some of the country's most iconic and widely visited historic house museums, including the birth houses of France Prešeren, Matija Čop, and Fran Saleški Finžgar, as well as Anton Janša's Apiary. He is a PhD candidate in heritology at the University of Ljubljana, where his research focuses on sustainable management and interpretation of house museums in Slovenia. With over a decade of professional experience, he combines curatorial practice, community-based heritage initiatives, and experimental interpretive approaches. He is the author of the international project House Museum Nerd.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL FOR INTERPRETING CASTLES IN VOJVODINA

ANA RADOVANAC ŽIVANOV, SENIOR CONSERVATOR RESEARCHER,
INSTITUTE FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS, BELGRADE,
SERBIA

Castles in the Vojvodina, once magnificent palaces, many of which are now on the verge of collapse, represent a special category of cultural heritage, as their structure, architecture, and contents can be reimagined for multiple purposes. Interpretation of cultural heritage and interpretative practice are not sufficiently applied in Serbia, the castles of Vojvodina could serve as a pilot project to present the concept, techniques, and methodology of interpretative planning, which would be achieved by artificial intelligence. In addition to presenting individual castles and defining their current state, an insight is also given into an example of good practice where artificial intelligence was applied for reconstruction and interpretation. This was done at the Castle in Beočin. For the purpose of heritage interpretation,



such a model of an object achieved by artificial intelligence would help in the preservation of endangered cultural heritage and should become an inseparable part of modern conservation practice.

▼ CASTLE IN BEOČIN

Ana Radovanac Živanov is an Art Historian and works as Senior Consultant at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia in Belgrade, at the Department for Research, Protection and Documentation. In addition, she is finishing her PHD thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Department of Art History, at the Seminar for Museology and Heritage studies on the topic: *The Jevrem Grujić House as a space for the musealization of civic life in Belgrade*. She is also the coordinator of the Interpret Europe for Serbia and certificate interpretive planner, guide, and trainer for heritage interpretation. Fields of scientific interest: interpretation of cultural heritage, history of architecture in Serbia between two wars, conservation of cultural heritage, interpretative methodologies and concepts, memory studies, history of private life. She is the author of many professional and scientific articles, as well as a participant in domestic and foreign conferences and symposiums. (Member of ICOMOS and Society of Conservators of Serbia).



RECONSTRUCTING THE INVISIBLE: A CASE STUDY ON VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF INTANGIBLE HERITAGE, ANKARA ORCHARD HOUSE

PROF. DR. FİLİZ YENİŞEHİRLİOĞLU, DIRECTOR, KOÇ UNIVERSITY VEKAM, TÜRKİYE (AUTHOR & SPEAKER)

ÖZLEM DENGİZ UĞUR, MUSEUM SPECIALIST, KOÇ UNIVERSITY VEKAM, TÜRKİYE (AUTHOR & SPEAKER)

İREM ALPAY, EXHIBITION SPECIALIST, KOÇ UNIVERSITY VEKAM, TÜRKİYE (AUTHOR & SPEAKER)

ASSOC. PROF. ASIM EVREN YANTAÇ, CO-DIRECTOR OF THE KARMA XR LAB, KOÇ UNIVERSITY, TÜRKİYE (AUTHOR)

IVON BENSASON, CO-DIRECTOR OF THE KARMA XR LAB, KOÇ UNIVERSITY, TÜRKİYE (AUTHOR)

Historic house museums preserve architecture and objects, yet the everyday practices and sensory experiences that once animated these spaces remain largely absent. This paper explores how AI-assisted visualisations can reintroduce intangible heritage into visitor experience without altering the physical integrity of historic interiors. Focusing on the Ankara Orchard House Museum, operated by Koç University VEKAM, the study is developed in collaboration with Koç University's Karma XR Lab. It centres on the orchard house culture of Ankara, a seasonal way of life that had disappeared by the mid-20th century, and specifically on the traditional practice of grape molasses production. Through visual reconstruction, narrative generation, and immersive storytelling, the project conceptualises AI as a tool for invisible interpretation. The paper proposes a scalable model for integrating emerging technologies into small-scale house museums, with insights applicable to similar institutions worldwide.

Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu completed her BA, MA, and PhD in Archaeology and Art History at Paris Sorbonne University. She taught at Hacettepe University from 1975 onward and was a visiting scholar at Harvard University's Aga Khan Program in 1986. Appointed full professor in 1990, she specialised in Ottoman art and architecture. Between 1995 and 1998, she was a lecturer at the University of Cambridge. She taught at Hacettepe until 2003, then founded the Faculty of Fine Arts, Design and Architecture at Başkent University and served as its dean. Since 2014, she has been a faculty member at Koç University and Director of VEKAM. Prof. Yenişehirlioğlu has played active roles in national and international cultural heritage organisations, including UNESCO. She has received prestigious honours such as the Adelaide Ristori Award (1992), Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1991) and the Ordre national du Mérite (2022) from the French government.





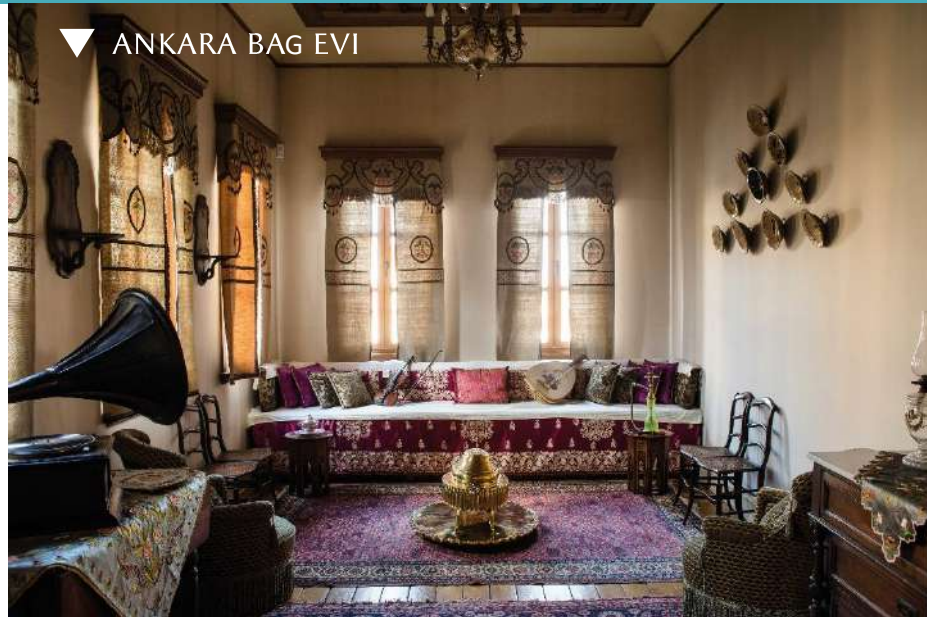
Özlem Dengiz Uğur completed her undergraduate studies in Architecture at Anadolu University in 1993 and received master's degree in Interdisciplinary Museum Education from Ankara University in 2019. Between 1993 and 2020, she worked on architectural design and construction projects. Since 2008, she has been actively involved in cultural heritage and museum education projects engaging children and young people. From 2020 to 2024, she contributed to the establishment of a private museum and served as its manager. Since March 2026, she has been working as Museum Specialist at Koç University VEKAM, focusing on heritage interpretation and interdisciplinary cultural projects.

İrem Alpay is an Exhibition Specialist at Koç University VEKAM, where she recently co-curated the Koç Holding centenary exhibition and co-authored its accompanying book. Blending historical scholarship with digital innovation, her expertise spans cultural heritage management, museum studies, and narrative design. She holds a BA in History from Middle East Technical University and an MA from Koç University. Her research on the Gülhane Medical History Museum led to consultancy work and presentations at the International Association of Medical Museums and Collections (IAMMC) symposia in Leiden (2023) and Ingolstadt (2025). Engaged with international museum networks, Alpay presented at the ICOM General Conference in Prague (2022) and received an ICOM-ITC grant for training at the Palace Museum in Beijing (2024). Bridging heritage and technology, her diverse experience includes working as a historical researcher and game designer for an open-world RPG, executing GIS-based spatial reconstructions, and co-translating a seminal volume on museum design.



▼ ANKARA BAG EVI

Asım Evren Yantaç and İvon Bensason, both co-directors of the Karma XR Lab at Koç University, are the co-authors of this study, bringing together expertise in interaction design and extended reality with intellectual property law and emerging media technologies on the other.

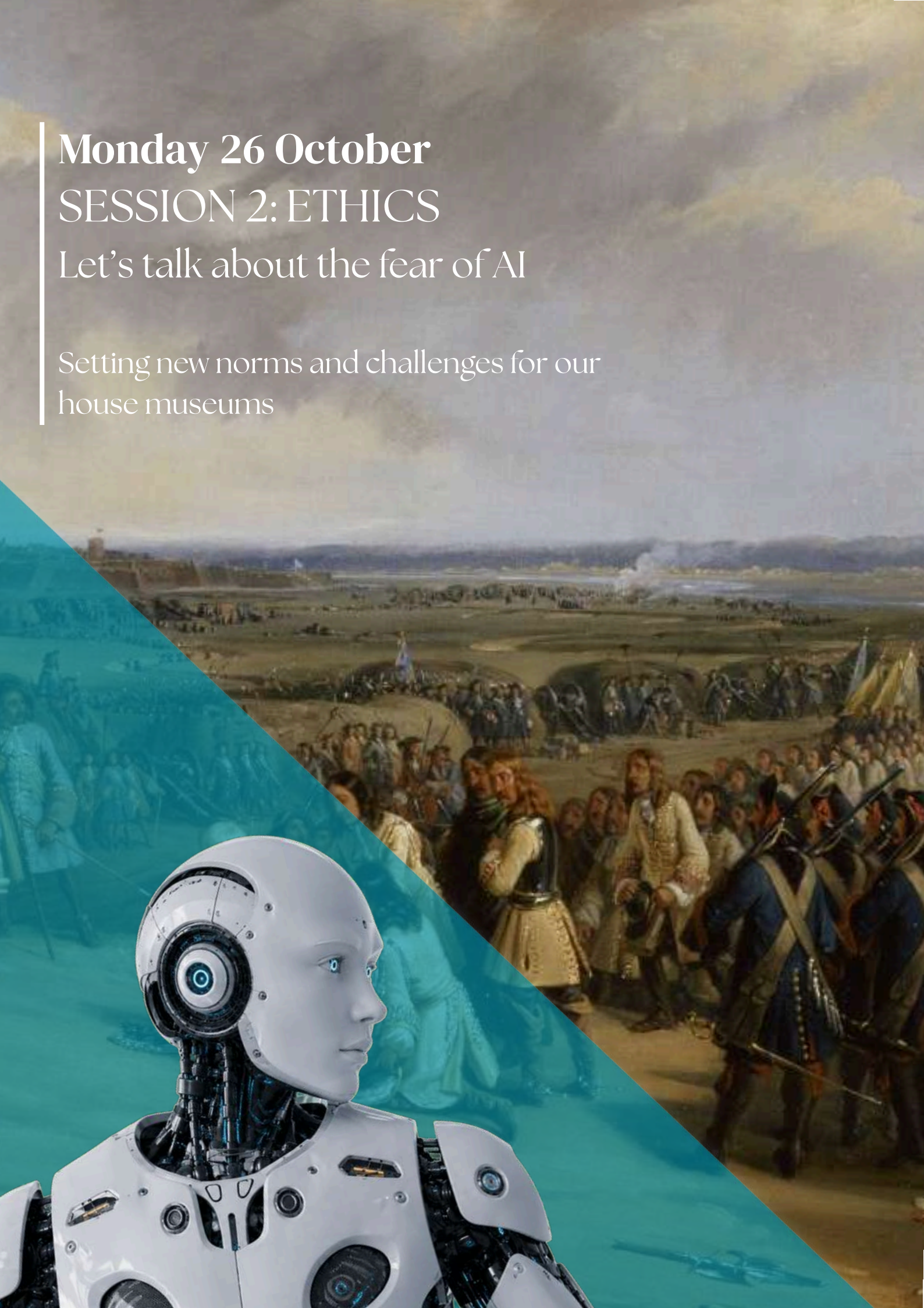
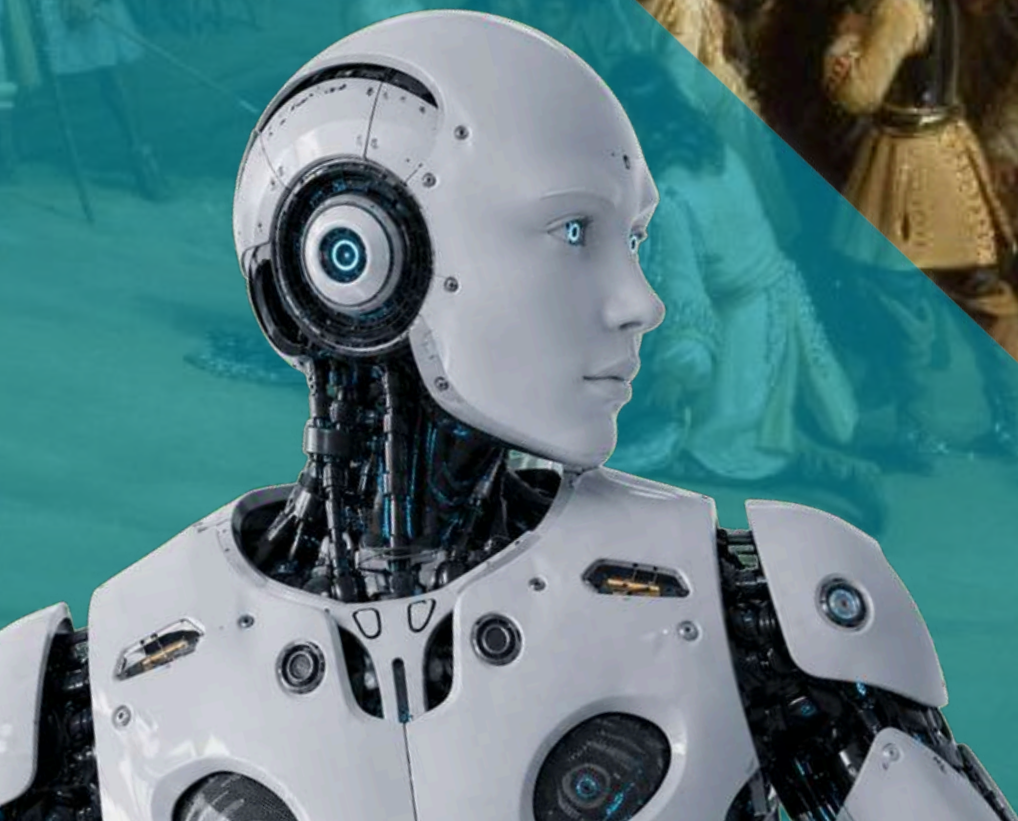


Monday 26 October

SESSION 2: ETHICS

Let's talk about the fear of AI

Setting new norms and challenges for our
house museums



The background of the entire page is a historical battle scene painting, likely from the American Civil War, showing soldiers in formation on a battlefield. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant.

Monday 26 October

SESSION 2: ETHICS

Let's talk about the fear of AI

Setting new norms and challenges for our house museums

Our second session will be inspired by the following keywords: Governance, Ownership, Cost, and Training. It is the theme that most calls to adopt a critical stance, or rather, an enthusiastic yet cautious view on Artificial Intelligence. Implementing AI is not just a technical choice: it is a political and strategic one. As such, it raises questions. Should we implement new norms and regulations for our museums? What are the risks and limits we should keep in mind when adapting our processes to include new technologies?

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT IN ALGORITHMIC ENVIRONMENTS

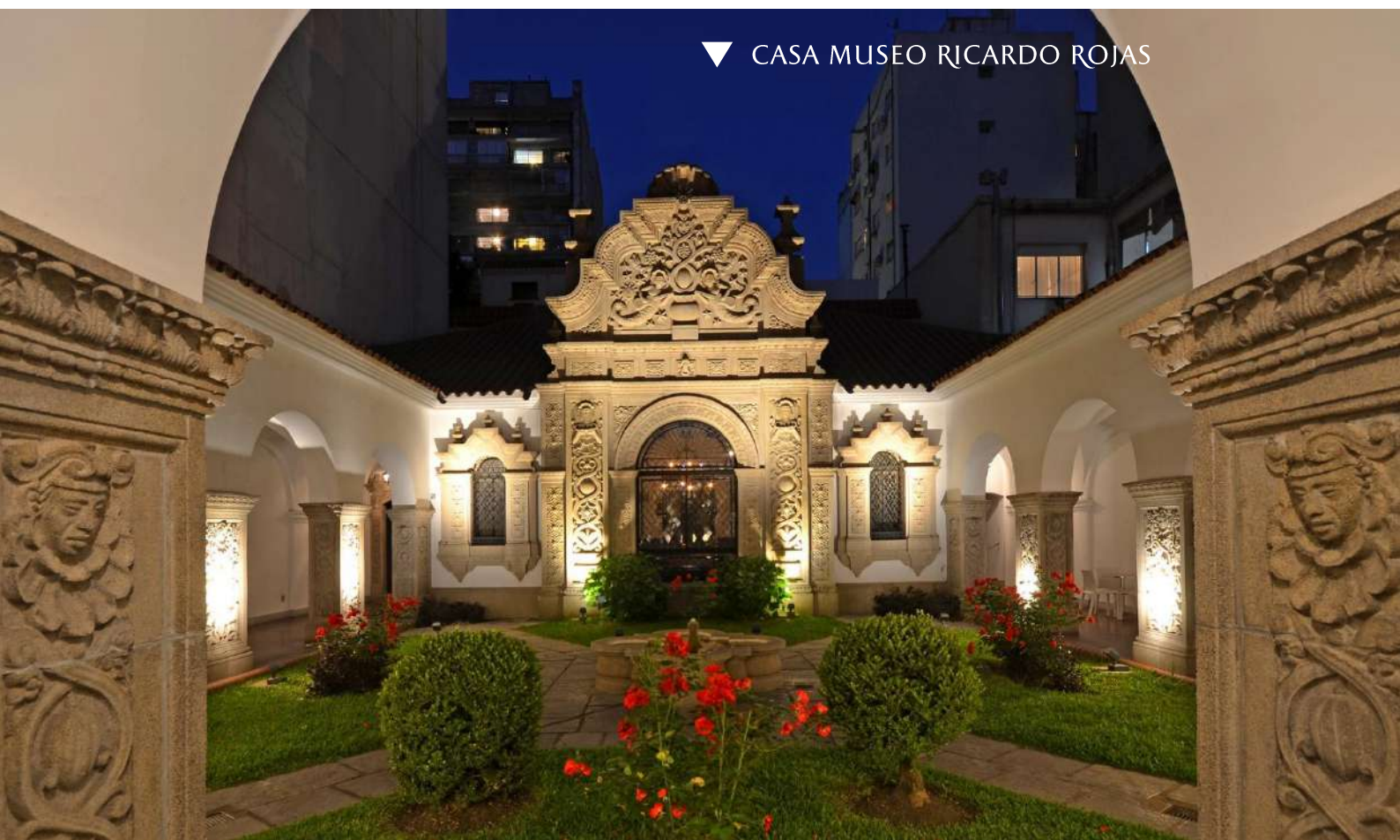
LIC. ANDREA ELÍAS, DIRECTOR OF MUSEO CASA DE YRURTIA, ARGENTINA

LIC. CAROLINA CARMAN, DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEO ROCA, ARGENTINA

PHD MARÍA LAURA MENDOZA, DIRECTOR OF MUSEO CASA DE RICARDO ROJAS, ARGENTINA

This paper analyses the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across three national house museums in Argentina, interrogating the intersection of ethical governance and strategic digital transformation. The study is organized into three analytical pillars: Image Ethics, which evaluates generative AI through the lenses of data protection and algorithmic bias; Digital Heritage, examining how "digital twins" redefine the boundaries between utilitarian assets and heritage collections; and Operational Governance, which critiques the delegation of critical cognition to opaque systems to safeguard data sovereignty.

The proposal concludes that for house museums, AI functions as a critical tool for institutional problem-solving beyond an objective. By utilizing their trajectory in managing complex historical narratives, these institutions are uniquely positioned to lead the design of a responsible digital future. This research offers a vital perspective on maintaining human agency and institutional accountability within increasingly algorithmic museum environments.



▼ CASA MUSEO RICARDO ROJAS



Andrea Elías is the current Director of the Museo Casa de Yrurtia (Buenos Aires, Argentina), awarded the directorship through a public call. She previously served as the Director of the Salta Museum of Fine Arts (2011–2017), following her tenure as Head of Cultural Programming at the same institution. She is an Honorary Academician of the National Academy of Fine Arts (ANBA), a member of the Argentine Association of Art Critics (AACCA), and an active member of ICOM-DEM HIST. She holds a Degree in Arts with postgraduate studies in Art History and an International Postgraduate Degree in Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism from the UNESCO Chair. She brings together extensive experience in museum management and specialized curatorial practice.

*Carolina Carman holds a Degree in History from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where she also serves as a Professor of Argentine History I (1776–1852). She has led numerous seminars focused on the intersection of public history and history museums at the same university. Since 2017, she has served as the Director of the Museo Roca, a national museum in Buenos Aires. An active researcher and manager, she has authored and co-authored several publications, including *The Origins of the National Historical Museum* (Buenos Aires, 2013). She has presented her research extensively at both national and international academic conferences.*

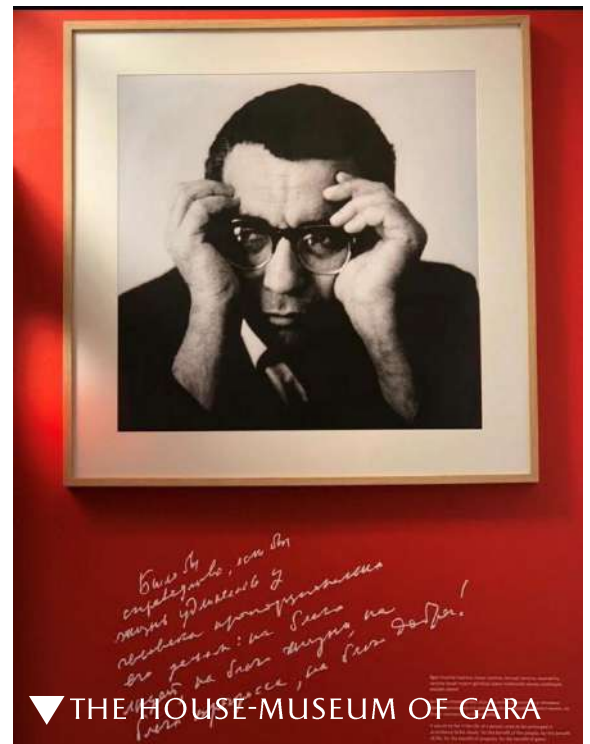


María Laura Mendoza holds a PhD in Leisure and Human Development from the University of Deusto, Spain, along with a Degree in Museology and a MA in Cultural Management and Planning. She is currently the Director of the Museo Casa de Ricardo Rojas and a faculty member at the University of Buenos Aires School of Economics. Previously, she coordinated the Audience Engagement Area and the Visual Arts Department at the Borges Cultural Center. Her independent consultancy includes collaborations with institutions such as MALBA and the Bilbao Museum of Fine Arts. She is a member of ICOM and an active participant in the Argentinian DEM HIST working group.

AI SYSTEM FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY: EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE WORLD.

ULDUZ ALIYEVA, MUSEUM GUIDE, THE
AZERBAIJAN STATE MUSEUM OF MUSICAL
CULTURE, BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

This research proposal investigates and addresses critical gaps in museum accessibility for individuals with sensory and physical disabilities within the global cultural heritage sector. The study introduces an integrated digital ecosystem, powered by Artificial Intelligence, designed to facilitate a holistic and autonomous visitor journey. The methodology focuses on implementing intelligent NFC-enabled interfaces and Augmented Reality (AR) systems to provide tailored interpretative content, including real-time sign-language avatars and nuanced auditory descriptions adapted to specific visual profiles. To ensure institutional integrity, the framework employs AI trained exclusively on verified archival data, preventing the risk of digital misinformation. The proposal advocates for a systemic shift in museum policy, incorporating "Inclusive Hours" and specialised training for museum professionals acting as inclusion facilitators. By prioritising human empathy alongside advanced technological application, this approach seeks to eliminate physical and communicative barriers, establishing a universal standard for social equity and accessibility across the world's cultural heritage sites.



Ulduz Aliyeva is a musicologist and a member of the ICLCM Committee of ICOM. She brings a deep academic and practical understanding of cultural heritage to the museum sector. Aliyeva holds both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree with honours from the Baku Music Academy named after Uzeyir Hajibeyli. Currently, she serves as a museum guide at the House-Museum of Gara Garayev, a branch of the Azerbaijan State Museum of Musical Culture. She specializes in curating and conducting multilingual tours for international audiences and has contributed to major festivals and forums, including the Shusha Global Media Forum and the Uzeyir Hajibeyli International Music Festival. Her current research focuses on enhancing cultural heritage accessibility through innovative digital strategies and international networking.



CURATORIAL TRADITION MATTERS: AI VS. PEOPLE AND PLACES AS ANCHORS OF HISTORICAL FACTS

DENISE MAIOR-BARRON, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR (HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM STUDIES), CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA (USA)

Building on doctoral research at the Petit Trianon, the paper offers a re-evaluation of relevant key findings in the context of parameters imposed by AI-based interpretation models. The main argument concerns the limitations and ethical implications of the AI ‘training’ *input* when facts are not reflected consistently throughout the historical literature published on a subject. In the case of Marie Antoinette, the last queen of France, a general lack of consensus between historical sources published since the French Revolution, endangers an accurate *output*. By contrast, the curatorial tradition at Château de Versailles founded by Pierre de Nolhac (curator 1892–1920), which draws from history and literary skills of reading a place and its past people, anchored historical facts within the expert milieu of the institution. In such circumstances, curatorial tradition, supported by human discernment and dedication, is paramount for conserving and interpreting numen and spirit of place, essential house museum characteristics potentially threatened by AI when used not because one should, but because one can.



Denise Maior-Barron received her PhD from Plymouth University (UK) in collaboration with the Château de Versailles (France) following consecutive internships at the UNESCO Heritage Site. Her doctoral research on heritage interpretation and visitor perceptions at the Petit Trianon was published in 2018 by Routledge in their Heritage Studies Series. Having previously taught at Plymouth University for the Schools of Architecture and Tourism, in 2020 she became adjunct professor at Claremont Graduate University (USA), co-teaching with Edward R. Bosley a postgraduate course on conservation and interpretation of historic house museums with theory pertaining to heritage and tourism studies.

▼ PETIT TRIANON



BALANCING TECHNOLOGY AND AUTHENTICITY IN MUSEUM INTERPRETATION: DIGITAL IMMERSION AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE

DR. HEBA HASSAN AMER, MUSEUM CURATOR, ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL MUSEUM, MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ANTIQUITIES, EGYPT

As museums increasingly adopt immersive digital technologies, they face a growing challenge: how to enhance visitor engagement while preserving the authenticity of historical objects and spaces. This presentation explores the relationship between digital immersion and authentic heritage interpretation through the case of the Oman Across Ages Museum. It examines how multimedia installations, interactive technologies, and digital storytelling can enrich visitor experiences without overshadowing original collections. By discussing both opportunities and challenges, the paper highlights the importance of balancing innovation with authenticity in contemporary museum practice. The findings contribute to current debates on the role of technology, artificial intelligence, and visitor-centered interpretation in museums and historic sites.



▼ ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL MUSEUM

Dr. Heba Hassan Amer is a museum curator and heritage researcher specializing in museum interpretation, museum education, and visitor engagement. She works at the Alexandria National Museum, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Egypt, and holds a Ph.D. in Greco-Roman History from Alexandria University. She has participated in numerous international conferences and professional programs in the fields of museums and cultural heritage. She is a British Museum International Training Programme (ITP) Fellow and a recipient of the NINO Incoming Mobility Grant at Leiden University. Her current research focuses on digital heritage, museum storytelling, visitor experience, and the integration of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence in museum practice.

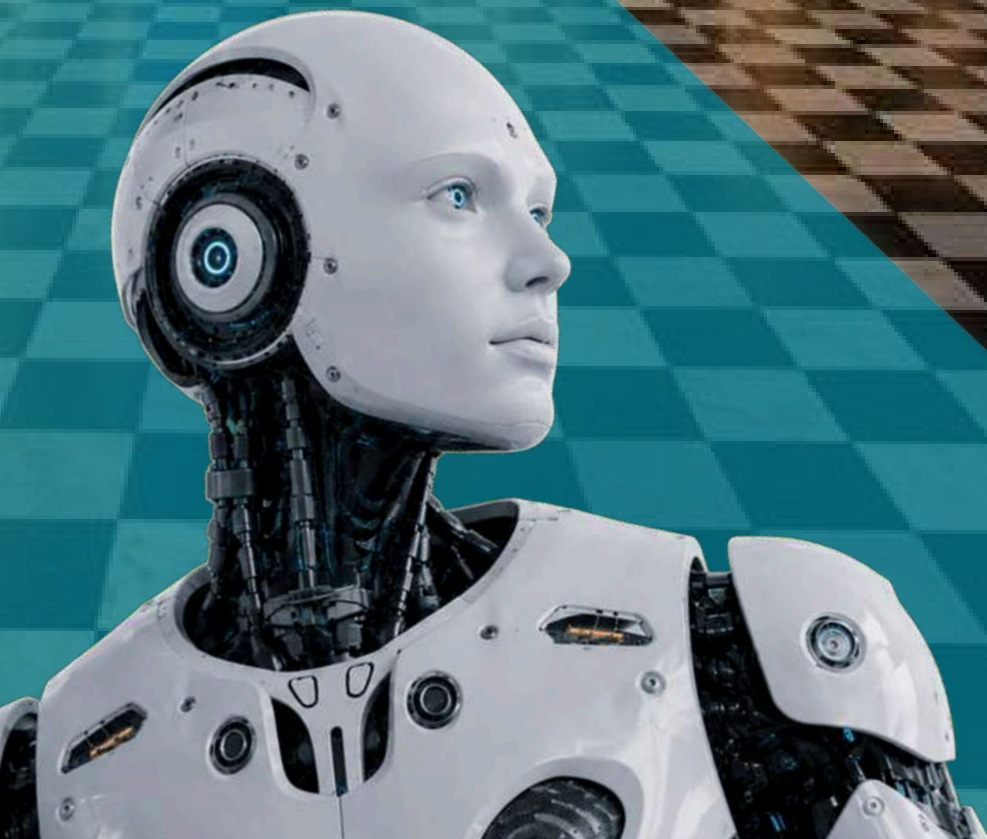


Tuesday 27 October

SESSION 3: EXPERIENCE

Reinventing our Houses

Enabling the audience to relate to house museums in ways never seen before





Tuesday 27 October

SESSION 3: EXPERIENCE

Reinventing our Houses

Enabling the audience to relate to house museums in ways never seen before

Our second conference day will be inspired by the keywords: Immersion, Accessibility, and New Narratives.

Through this approach, we want to explore the opportunities that AI can offer the audience.

Can new technologies enable a visitor to relate to house museums in ways never seen before? Is AI becoming essential to grab our audiences' attention, to engage younger visitors? Can these tools offer better, more immersive or tailor-made interpretive contents, while allowing us to escape the physical constraints that many historic houses face (narrow spaces, fragile interiors, fixed arrangements...)?

INVISIBLE WORLDS IN THE HISTORIC INTERIOR OF HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS: RECONSTRUCTING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE IN THE AGE OF AI

DR. ESTHER SCHMIDT, DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR HISTORIC HOUSES OF
INDIA, NATIONAL EXPERT HERITAGE BODY, OP JINDAL GLOBAL
UNIVERSITY, INDIA

This paper explores how artificial intelligence can help visitors engage with historic interiors in ways not previously possible while respecting the fragile atmosphere of historic house museums. Using the mirrorwork interiors of Amber Fort as a case study, it examines how AI-assisted visualisation, 3D modelling, virtual environments, and conversational interpretation can illuminate aspects of the historic environment that are no longer fully visible, including dispersed collections, lost furnishings, changing light conditions, and intangible experiences based on fragmentary evidence. The mirror serves as both architectural device and conceptual framework. It expands space, multiplies light, creates celestial effects, and engages visitors in relationships with themselves, others, and the surrounding interior. Historically, mirrors amplified the presence and glory of the ruler while also being associated with self-recognition, truth, illusion, and hidden worlds. Like the mirror, AI can reveal hidden connections, reconstruct worlds from fragments, and make visible relationships that can no longer be experienced directly. The paper argues for a transparent and critically informed use of AI that enriches visitor understanding while acknowledging uncertainty and preserving the spirit of place.



Dr Esther 'Mimi' Schmidt is a global design historian, heritage specialist, and Founding Director of the Centre for Historic Houses of India, at OP Jindal Global University, recognised as a National Expert Heritage Body by the Government of India. She holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford and is an alumna of the Attingham Summer School. Her work bridges scholarship and practice through historic house interpretation, cultural programming, research, heritage-led regeneration and partnerships. She is a convener of the lecture series Great Minds in Heritage & Historic Houses and a peer-reviewer for Cambridge University Press. Her research explores historic interiors, room typologies, collecting, and cross-cultural exchange. Awards: Austin Award for services in European Decorative Arts, the German National Merit Foundation (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes), the DAAD, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture-New York, JP Morgan Tech for Social Good Programme and the John Lowell Osgood Prize for research at the University of Oxford.

FROM HOUSE TO EXPERIENCE: THREE CASE STUDIES ON AI AND DIGITAL INTERPRETATION IN MALTESE HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

NICHOLAS GALEA TESTAFERRATA - INDEPENDENT ARCHITECTURAL & CULTURAL HERITAGE PROFESSIONAL, MALTA

MARTA ANGI - INDEPENDENT MUSEUM & CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL, MALTA

CAROLINE TONNA - DRESS HISTORIAN & MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST;
INDEPENDENT CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL & CASA ROCCA PICCOLA COSTUME AND LACE CURATOR, MALTA

This paper examines how artificial intelligence and immersive digital technologies can transform interpretation and engagement in historic house museums. Through three case studies, it explores AI-driven tools, new technologies and mobile applications as strategies for reactivating heritage sites and collections.

The first focuses on Casa Gourgion in Mdina, Malta, where an interactive AI platform and historically grounded digital animations enhance storytelling and immersion. The second presents a practice-based project on the inaccessible costume collection at Casa Rocca Piccola in Valletta, digitally revived to broaden access. The third examines mobile-guided experiences and the activation of hidden archives, enabling self-directed visits beyond physical display.



▼ CASA GOURGION

Together, these studies propose a scalable framework integrating analogue and digital interpretation, bridging tangible and intangible heritage. The paper argues for a more inclusive, participatory, and adaptive model of the historic house museum, responsive to contemporary audiences while grounded in historical authenticity.



Nicholas Galea Testaferrata is an ICOM-MALTA affiliated Museum Professional specializing in the preservation, interpretation, and adaptive reuse of historic house museums and collections. With an academic background in Architecture and Cultural Heritage Management from the University of Malta, he brings a multidisciplinary approach to Museum Curation, Exhibition Design, and Digital Archiving. Having served as a lead historical researcher, exhibition designer, and curator at Casa Gourgion and most recently as a Digital Documentation Archivist at the National Archives of Malta, his work focuses on innovative heritage storytelling that promotes sustainable collection conservation and enhances public engagement with cultural heritage.



Marta Angi is an independent museum and creative professional and the former Senior Operations Manager at Casa Rocca Piccola, a historic house museum and noble residence in Valletta, Malta, with a master's degree in the History of Art and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (Ca' Foscari University of Venice). Alongside her long experience in art galleries and museums, Marta brings innovative methods to operational and general management, visitor services, and event planning while developing multilingual interpretive online and offline marketing communication initiatives that creatively contribute to the museum's public engagement and visitor experience.



Caroline Tonna is an independent dress historian and multidisciplinary artist with an academic foundation in Anthropology and Art History, University of Malta. She previously held a curatorial role at Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum and serves as volunteer costume curator at Casa Rocca Piccola. Her work bridges research and creative practice across art and costume exhibitions. An award-winning author, broadcaster, and educator, she presents lectures and participates in conferences, including the ICOM-DEMIST Online Conference (2021). She currently leads a practice-led research initiative, Fashion Heritage: From Storage to Digital Revival, supported by Arts Council Malta, and serves as Vice-Chair of ICOM-MALTA.



TIMEHOLD AND AI: IMMERSIVE AND POLYVOCAL FUTURES FOR HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

LAUREN WALLIS, PHD CANDIDATE AND DECIE DENHOLM SCHOLAR,
ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA

Historic house museums (HHMs) often face accessibility constraints, physical limitations, and single-story interpretations that overlook marginalised histories. This paper presents Timehold, a framework that reconceptualises HHMs as curated temporal experiences, emphasising polyvocal narratives and multisensory engagement. Leveraging AI and immersive digital technologies, it explores how visitors can access lost spaces, fragile collections, and perspectives absent from traditional interpretation. It also examines strategies for maintaining authenticity in AI-generated content while balancing digital immersion and historic atmosphere. Case studies from South Australian HHMs, including Martindale Hall, Malowen Lowarth Cottage, The Cedars, and Carrick Hill, demonstrate how technology can enhance inclusivity, support decolonisation of narratives, and enable tailored visitor experiences. By integrating Timehold with emerging digital technologies, the paper argues that historic house museums can become more inclusive, immersive, and ethically grounded spaces of learning and reflection, while expanding interpretive possibilities without compromising the authenticity and significance of the historic environment.



Lauren Wallis is a PhD candidate and Decie Denholm Scholar at Adelaide University. Her work focuses on interpretation, temporality, and visitor experience in historic house museums.



▼ CARRICK HILL HOUSE
MUSEUM

AI-ENHANCED VISITOR EXPERIENCE: FROM CO-CREATION TO ADAPTIVE INTERPRETATION IN HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

ANNA MARIE FISKER, HEAD OF RESEARCH & COLLECTION, SKAGENS MUSEUM, DENMARK

DANIELE SEPE, VICE-DIRECTOR OF AMAT (ASSOCIAZIONE MARCHIGIANA ATTIVITÀ TEATRALI), ITALY

This paper explores how participatory and media-driven practices in historic house museums can anticipate the transformative potential of AI-enabled audience experiences. Drawing on a project developed by the Art Museums of Skagen, we have examined how co-creative methodologies can provide a foundation for AI-driven personalization, polyvocal storytelling, and immersive engagement.

Engaging young adults, the project enabled participants to generate dynamic, user-driven narratives that reinterpreted this specific heritage. Central to the approach was the use of performance as an “engine” for co-design.

The paper examines the potential of AI as a tool to address challenges specific to historic houses, while critically addressing the need to balance digital immersion with the preservation of historic atmosphere. By connecting innovative co-creative practices with emerging AI affordances, this contribution demonstrates how historic house museums can engage visitors in immersive and socially inclusive ways.

DRACHMANN HUS ▼





Anna Marie Fisker, Architect MAA, PhD, is Professor Emeritus at Aalborg University, Denmark, and currently Research Director at Skagens Museum. Her research focuses on architectural theory and history, cultural heritage, aesthetics, and participatory practices. She has led numerous externally funded national and international research projects focusing on art, architecture, design, cultural heritage, and museum practices. Her current work explores co-creation, historic house-museums and interpretive methodologies in heritage contexts. Anna Marie Fisker is the author of more than 200 scientific publications.

Daniele Sepe, is vice-director of AMAT (Associazione Marchigiana Attività Teatrali), Italy, the Marche Region's Interdisciplinary Circuit of Theater, Dance, Music, and Contemporary Circus, since 2005 after first graduating in Art and Culture Modern Languages from the "Carlo Bo" University of Urbino. At AMAT, he is primarily involved in management, creation, and development of research-based Programmes and Projects, coordinating actions in support of creativity that include creative residencies and workshops. He participates in the ideation and management of international and interdisciplinary projects approved in the context of European Union Programmes. Daniele Sepe is the author of several scientific articles.



THE VISITOR'S VOICE: INDIFFERENCE, DATAFICATION, OR RECOGNITION?


ZAHAVA DUDNIK DOERING, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, NEW YORK CITY, USA

Historic house museums have long maintained ambivalence with visitor research. Despite purpose-built evaluation tools and a body of scholarship, audience research remains unevenly embedded in institutional practice. Recent studies document both the demographic homogeneity of heritage audiences and the difficulty of integrating visitor knowledge into decision-making (Hayde 2025; Davidson 2025; Nigatu 2024). This condition is best understood as institutional indifference. Artificial intelligence offers new ways of understanding visitors through behavioral data, profiling, and algorithmic inference, while also reshaping how the visitor is known. This paper argues that historic house museums face three institutional options: indifference, datafication, or recognition. The central issue is not whether AI is adopted, but whether visitors are acknowledged as meaning-making subjects or treated as data objects.

For too long, the visitor's voice in historic houses has been a whisper. AI can amplify it, silence it more efficiently than ever, or translate it into something fundamentally different.

Zahava D. Doering is an Independent Scholar focused on audiences of cultural institutions. In 1987, she founded the Smithsonian Institution's Institutional Studies Office, the first sustained, institution-wide audience research programme in a major museum complex, establishing conceptual foundations for understanding audiences as active participants in meaning-making. Doering holds a University of Chicago doctorate in quantitative sociology with postdoctoral training in ethnography. Her research applies methodologies to analyse the attitudes, opinions, emotions, and behaviours of museum publics. In 2021, she conceived and co-directed Vaccines & US: Cultural Organizations for Community Health, a Smithsonian-led, multi-institutional public health initiative oriented towards the COVID-19 pandemic.



A painting depicting a large group of people, likely a roundtable discussion, seated around a long table in a grand, ornate room. The scene is set in a historical or classical setting, with high ceilings and decorative architectural elements. The people are dressed in formal attire, and the atmosphere appears to be one of serious discussion and collaboration. The painting is rendered in a style that suggests a historical or classical setting, with a focus on the interaction between the participants.

Tuesday 27 October ROUNDTABLE

AI Creators

Moderated discussion with experts from the field

Expanding on discussions from the third session, the Roundtable will invite experts from the AI field to present solutions that change paradigms in terms of visitor experience. This roundtable will feature practical examples, innovative solutions, good practices, and advice while asking leading experts to tackle the main issues related to bringing AI into our historic houses.

WHEN WALLS CAN SPEAK: AI, STORYTELLING, AND IMMERSIVE MEDIATION IN HISTORIC HOUSES

LOUIS DE CAROLIS, CEO - CRYPTORS IN THE CITY, FRANCE

This question sits at the intersection of fieldwork and broader inquiry into emerging forms of cultural mediation. Since co-founding Cryptors in the City, combining street art, video game mechanics, and AI in the service of heritage, He has occupied an unusual position: a practitioner who experiments, observes, and critically examines the real-world uses of these tools within heritage spaces, which aligns closely with the questions DEMHIST 2026 seeks to raise.

Historic houses sometimes struggle to capture new generations of visitors: hyper-connected audiences are no longer satisfied with passive visits. Can AI serve as a tool for renewing cultural mediation, not to replace culture, but to breathe new life into it?

This subject explores three axes: enhanced mediation, immersive storytelling and gamification, and personalization of the visitor journey, grounded in field observations from Cryptors in the City, and submitted as a working hypothesis to the collective discussion of DEMHIST 2026.



As co-founder and president of Cryptors in the City, Louis de Carolis is an expert in digital applications for public spaces, tourism, and culture. At the intersection of heritage, AI, and video games, he champions a vision of innovative cultural tourism that enhances heritage sites.

After ten years as a lawyer specializing in culture and new technologies, he co-founded Cryptors in the City: an experience combining street art, video games, and AI to bring historical figures back to life and reveal the secrets of our regions, cities, museums, and castles to all generations.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FIRST: WHAT HISTORIC HOUSES CAN INHERIT FROM A DECADE OF DIGITAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT SCALE

GWENDOLINE KNYBÜHLER, HEAD OF PRODUCT & VISITOR EXPERIENCE, SMARTIFY, UK

What major cultural institutions may have contributed most to historic houses is not only scholarship or exhibitions, but the large-scale testing of digital visitor experience. The infrastructure, accessibility standards, multilingual capabilities, and AI personalisation tools refined through deployments at institutions such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Acropolis Museum are now available to historic houses as proven, cost-effective solutions. They do not need to be first movers.

Drawing on Smartify's work with more than 1,200 cultural institutions, including Leighton House, Upton House, Waddesdon Manor and West Horsley Place, this paper explores what that inheritance enables in practice. It examines the distinctive constraints of historic houses — absent wall labels, fragile interiors, poor connectivity, and limited staff capacity — and shows how modular content, BYOD delivery and AI personalisation can respond. It also offers a practical framework for implementation, while addressing IP, data consent, and AI content quality as essential operational issues.

Gwendoline Knybühler is Head of Product & Visitor Experience at Smartify, where she has spent over nine years at the intersection of cultural heritage and digital innovation. Leading a multidisciplinary team of developers, designers, and data scientists, she has partnered with institutions including the Historic Royal Palaces, the Frederiksborg Castle and Museum, the Smithsonian, and the Acropolis to create award-winning visitor experiences, from accessible and multilingual audio guides to AR experiences.



SHIFTING THE LENS: HISTORAI AND THE CURATORIAL CUSTODIAN

JONATHAN PASTERNAK, CEO AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF HISTORAI, ISRAEL

This presentation explores the work of HistorAI, focusing on the essential collaboration between digital technology and curatorial expertise. Through various case studies, we would like to examine a workflow that prioritises historical precision over technical spectacle. The process involves a deep synergy where the curator acts as a custodian, overseeing the restoration of static archives and the introduction of respectful, lifelike motion. We argue that this human centred approach is vital to prevent digital inaccuracies and preserve the unique spirit of historic houses. The presentation also notes how these methods are being used by municipalities to drive Digital Archive Transformation and create Engaging Educational Content, showing how AI can help museums tell inclusive stories without sacrificing scholarly accuracy.



Founder and chief creative director at HISTORAI with more than 20 years' experience in filmmaking, animation, video editing, and compositing. An award-winning filmmaker who graduated from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. When the AI revolution started, Jonathan Pasternak and HistorAI focused on not creating futuristic or fantasy-like content like most trends, but on History to retell it in brand-new ways out of real passion for history.

HISTORIC HOUSES AS COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENTS: LESSONS FROM THE DIGITAL ALPINE MUSEUM

BARBARA BERTAGNI, FOUNDER AND MANAGING PARTNER, e-REAL LABS AT LOGOSNET (ITALY, SWITZERLAND, UK, USA)

FERNANDO SALVETTI, FOUNDER AND MANAGING PARTNER, e-REAL LABS AT LOGOSNET (ITALY, SWITZERLAND, UK, USA)

Historic houses, museums, and cultural sites are increasingly challenged to move beyond traditional models of interpretation and to become environments where visitors actively construct meaning through exploration, dialogue, and participation. As artificial intelligence enters the cultural heritage sector, the central question is no longer about technological adoption but about how digital tools can support authentic, human-centred interpretation.

This presentation explores cultural heritage sites as cognitive environments where knowledge emerges through interaction rather than passive observation. Drawing on the Digital Alpine Museum (DAM), a cross-border initiative (project under development) that connects cultural institutions across Italy and France through digitization, virtual exhibitions, AI-powered conversational agents, and immersive storytelling, we discuss how technology can foster participation, accessibility, and personalised engagement while preserving curatorial authority and historical authenticity.

The DAM experience suggests that AI should not be seen as a substitute for human expertise but as an interpretive partner that can facilitate dialogue, expand access to collections, and create new opportunities for cultural participation across institutional and geographic boundaries.

Barbara Bertagni is a psychologist, entrepreneur, and researcher working at the intersection of cultural heritage, learning, and experiential design. Her work focuses on how museums and cultural institutions can foster engagement, inclusion, and sense-making through interactive and participatory environments. She designs experiences that support dialogue, interpretation, and emotional connection, helping visitors actively engage with narratives, collections, and cultural contexts. She contributes to projects that integrate artificial intelligence and immersive environments to enhance access, participation, and audience experience in museums, archives, and cultural spaces. She collaborates with international organizations, universities, and cultural institutions across Europe, the US, and the Middle East.



Fernando Salvetti works at the intersection of cultural heritage, epistemology, and emerging technologies, exploring how museums and cultural institutions can evolve from spaces of representation into cognitive environments. His work focuses on the design of experiential systems in which visitors do not simply access knowledge but actively construct meaning through interaction, dialogue, and participation. He develops projects for museums, archives, and libraries that integrate artificial intelligence and immersive environments to support interpretation, expand access, and generate new forms of engagement. His work contributes to the ongoing redefinition of museums as participatory, inclusive, and knowledge-generating environments. He collaborates internationally with cultural institutions, universities, and organizations across Europe, the US, and the Middle East.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES



Sunday 25 October: Pre-conference Tours: Estate of Trianon (Onsite only)

Pre-conference Tours: Estate of Trianon

Before the official start of the conference, we welcome participants to discover the Estate of Trianon for self-guided as well as exclusive guided tours, lead by curators and specialists of Versailles:

- "Marie Antoinette" by Sofia Coppola, self-guided tour of the exhibition in the Petit Trianon

In September 2026, the Château de Versailles will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Sofia Coppola's film *Marie Antoinette* through an exhibition presented at the Petit Trianon, a place intimately linked to the queen and the setting for numerous scenes of the film. Now a cult classic, *Marie Antoinette* profoundly renewed the image of the last queen, helping to shape a cultural icon blending history, modernity, and pop imagination. Awarded the Academy Award for Best Costume Design in 2007, Sofia Coppola's distinctive aesthetic — combining historical rigour, contemporary boldness and pastel refinement — gave rise to a true "Marie Antoinette style", whose influence is still felt in fashion, design, and photography.

Deployed at the heart of the Trianon estate, the exhibition will invite visitors behind the scenes of this cinematic creation: original costumes by Milena Canonero, filming accessories, storyboards, annotated scripts, set photographs and set design sketches. Screenings will allow visitors to revisit sequences filmed in the very rooms where they were shot, offering a unique immersive experience in which the historic space and its cinematic reinterpretation resonate with one another.



· The Queen's Theatre

A great lover of the dramatic arts, Marie-Antoinette eventually grew tired of the temporary stages knocked together for performances in the gallery of the Grand Trianon and the orangery of the Petit Trianon. Once she had decided to commission her personal architect Richard Mique to build her a real theatre, work was completed in spring 1780, and the official inauguration was on 1 June.

Cleverly tucked away amidst the foliage of the gardens, the entrance to the theatre is a discreet portico in the classical style. The theatre itself was large enough to seat two hundred and fifty spectators, in a décor dominated by blue, white, and gold. The sculpted decorations were created using the quick (and cheap) technique of papier mâché, in which the craftsmen of the Menus Plaisirs were acknowledged experts. The various shades of gold blend harmoniously with the false marble panelling dominated by violet tones. The ceiling, painted by Lagrenée: Jean-Jacques Lagrenée (1739-1821), known as Lagrenée the Younger, French painter, etcher and engraver. You can see a copy of his design for the ceiling in the collections database, was completed just a few days before the inauguration of the theatre and depicted Apollo surrounded by the Graces and Muses. The original was replaced by a copy in the 19th century. The vast stage (eight layers, two floors below stage level and two in the rafters), was expertly fitted out by mechanical specialist Pierre Boulet, successor to Blaise-Henri Arnoult, who designed the machinery of the Royal Opera House. The orchestra pit has room for around twenty musicians.



Monday 26 October: Expert Tours: Palace of Versailles (Onsite only)

At the end of the afternoon, our guests will be able to attend one of four tours of the Palace, under the guidance of curators of the Palace of Versailles. All tours are linked with AI projects implemented in Versailles or with our most recent activities:



Les appartements de Louis XV et Louis XVI

Adjacent to his official apartments, Louis XIV had a suite of rooms overlooking the Cour de Marbre and the Cour Royale fitted out for his personal use. There he displayed his collections of works of art and his paintings. Louis XV carried out numerous alterations there and extended his quarters to the upper floors, which he modified on many occasions, creating salons, studies, dining rooms, libraries, scientific galleries, laboratories... This entire complex allowed the sovereign to enjoy a degree of privacy. Louis XVI, in turn, used the premises, adapting them to his own personal needs.

Opera Royal

The Royal Opera is one of the greatest works by the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel. Inaugurated in 1770 during the reign of Louis XV, it was at the time the largest concert hall in Europe, and was also a great technical achievement and an impressive feat of decorative refinement. A theatre for monarchic and then republican life, it has hosted celebrations, shows, and parliamentary debates.



Tuesday 27 October: Concert in the chapel and gala dinner

At the end of the day, our guests will be invited to a concert in the château's chapel, performed by the Versailles Conservatoire, followed by the DEMHIST gala dinner at the Azuli restaurant.



In collaboration with the Versailles Conservatoire, the Palace of Versailles invites DEMHIST members to a musical event in the palace chapel. Completed at the end of Louis XIV's reign in 1710, it is a masterpiece of Baroque architecture. Following this musical interlude, a dinner will be served at the Azuli restaurant for all conference participants.

Wednesday 28 October: Workshops

After two days of conferences, we invite you to smaller-group sessions where you will be able to learn good practices or to test some AI tools used in Versailles. Participants will be able to attend two out of four workshops:

- EPICO programme & Preventive Conservation with AI (Danilo Forleo, Head of Preventive Conservation – Palace of Versailles) - Onsite
- Data security (Olivier Suty, Head of IT Department – Palace of Versailles) - Session in French - Onsite
- AI tools for Visitors (Paul Chaine, Deputy Director of Communications – Palace of Versailles) - Onsite
- How to design prompts for ChatGPT (Caroline Gaillard, Head of Visitor Studies & Mathilde Gentili, Intern – Palace of Versailles) - Onsite
- How to design prompts for ChatGPT (Monica Gaitan Chinchilla, Relationship Marketing Project Manager – Palace of Versailles) - Online

Thursday 29 October: Off site Tours (Onsite only – optional activity, additional fees apply)

On this final day, we are offering an optional tour of various historic houses in the Yvelines. Spanning from the 18th to the early 20th century, we will introduce you to the riches of France's heritage beyond the Palace of Versailles.



BIBLIOTHEQUE CHOISEUL



The municipal library of Versailles is housed in the former Foreign Affairs and Navy building, constructed in 1761 by architect Jean-Baptiste Berthier at the request of the Duke of Choiseul, then minister to Louis XV. The king wanted to bring his administrations closer to the Palace of Versailles and the court. The building, innovative for its time, was designed with flat brick vaults to limit the risk of fire and included a gallery intended to accommodate foreign diplomats. It was here that the treaties ending the American War of Independence were negotiated in 1783.

During the French Revolution, the ministries left Versailles to move to Paris and their archives were relocated in 1792. The building was then used by various government departments. In 1800, part of the premises was allocated to the library of the École Centrale de Seine-et-Oise, which became the municipal library in 1803. Over time, other institutions gradually left the building, leaving more space for the book collections. Today, the library occupies the former mansion, which has been classified as a historic monument since 1929.

Duke of Choiseul (1719-1785)



Étienne-François de Choiseul was an 18th-century French statesman from an old noble family in Champagne. Initially a brilliant soldier, he became a diplomat thanks to the support of Madame de Pompadour and served as ambassador to Rome and then Vienna, where he prepared the reversal of the alliances between France and Austria. During the reign of Louis XV, he became one of the kingdom's principal ministers (1758-1770), heading the Foreign Affairs, War, and Navy departments. He sought to weaken England during the Seven Years' War and undertook to reorganize the army and navy after France's defeat. Having become very influential but also controversial, he was finally disgraced and exiled in 1770.

CHÂTEAU DE LA MALMAISON



In Rueil-Malmaison, on the outskirts of Paris, the Château de la Malmaison was the private residence of Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine from 1799 to 1814. Far from the pomp and circumstance of official life at the Tuileries or Fontainebleau, during the Consulate this “country retreat” became both a political centre and an intimate family home, where councils were held, receptions given, and moments of relaxation enjoyed. Acquired in 1799 by Josephine, the residence, whose origins date back to the Middle Ages, was transformed by architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine into an elegant chateau in the consular style. After her divorce from Napoleon in 1809, Josephine lived there until her death in 1814.

A passionate botanist, Josephine turned the park into a veritable laboratory, introducing nearly two hundred new plants to France and assembling a remarkable collection of roses. Heated greenhouses, orangeries, and exotic species contributed to the estate's European renown. Divided up after her death and then restored at the end of the 19th century by patron Daniel Iffla, the chateau became a national museum in 1905. Today, it houses an exceptional collection of decorations and furniture from the Consulate and the First Empire, reflecting the charm and preserved atmosphere of this historic residence.

Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1814)



Joséphine de Beauharnais, born in 1763 in Martinique, first married Vicomte Alexandre de Beauharnais, then met Napoleon Bonaparte, whom she married in 1796 and became Empress in 1804. Their passionate relationship was marked by mutual infidelities but evolved into sincere affection. Divorced in 1809 for failing to produce an heir for the emperor, she retained her title and retired to the Château de Malmaison, where she died in 1814, remaining one of the most emblematic figures of the First Empire.

MAISON D'ÉMILE ZOLA



In 1878, at the height of his fame following the success of *L'Assommoir*, the famous French author Émile Zola bought a house in Médan, on the banks of the Seine. This “modest country retreat,” as he wrote to Flaubert, quickly became the centre of his work and his life. He had a square tower built there to house his large study and continued writing the Rougon-Macquart series. A group of authors gathered around him, including Maupassant, Huysmans, Céard, Hennique, and Alexis, who published *Les Soirées de Médan* in 1880 as a tribute to their leader and his wife's hospitality. Over the years, thanks to the success of his novels such as *Germinal*, Zola considerably enlarged his property. Médan became a place of creation, reception, and artistic experimentation (it was also there that the writer discovered photography).

After Zola's death in 1902, his widow Alexandrine donated it in 1905 to the Assistance Publique, which set up a nursery there. In the 20th century, the house was used for a variety of hospital activities and cultural projects. Opened to the public in 1985 thanks to the Association du Musée Émile Zola, it closed in 2011 for major restoration work. Restored to its original condition, it reopened in 2021, alongside the Musée Dreyfus in the neighboring building. Today, the house in Médan remains an iconic place of literary memory and the writer's commitment.

Émile Zola (1840-1902)



Émile Zola, born in Paris in 1840, remains the leading representative of the naturalist movement in French literature. Author of the monumental Rougon-Macquart series (twenty novels between 1871 and 1893), including *Germinal* and *L'Assommoir*, he methodically analysed Second Empire society. A committed intellectual, he took a stand in the Dreyfus affair with his famous indictment “*J'accuse...!*” in 1898, which led to his conviction and temporary exile in England. He died tragically of asphyxiation in 1902.

MUSEE DREYFUS



The Dreyfus Affair was a major legal and political scandal that divided France between 1894 and 1906. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer of Alsatian origin, was wrongly accused of passing military secrets to Germany, in a context of heightened nationalism and growing anti-Semitism. Convicted in December 1894, his deportation to Devil's Island for life became a symbol of blatant injustice. The publication in 1898 by Émile Zola of his famous article "J'accuse...!" triggered a massive mobilization of Dreyfus' supporters, known as Dreyfusards, against the anti-Dreyfusards, and launched a long struggle for his rehabilitation, which was finally achieved in 1906. The affair revealed the political and social divisions of the time, highlighted the dangers of anti-Semitism and miscarriages of justice, and profoundly influenced French society.

The Dreyfus Museum, located in the Maison Zola, presents this affair through a documented and interactive exhibition, combining texts and images from the period. It does not merely recount the story: it also invites visitors to reflect on the still-relevant issues of justice, secularism, and the role of the citizen.

Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935)



Alfred Dreyfus was a French officer of Alsatian origin, born into a Jewish family in Mulhouse. A brilliant graduate of the École Polytechnique, he was unjustly convicted of treason in 1894 and deported to the Devil's Island penal colony in French Guiana, where he spent five years proclaiming his innocence. His case deeply divided France and became a symbol of the fight for justice. Rehabilitated in 1906, he rejoined the army, served during World War I, and ended his life in obscurity.

