

Congrès 2026

WHAT ABOUT « DELIGHT »?

Friday, September 25, 2026

Alfieri Auditorium – Musée Fabre & Zoom

In April of this year, a national survey conducted by IFOP for the Art Explora Foundation, in partnership with France Culture, was published, examining the cultural practices of people in France. Based on responses from more than 4,000 participants, the study revealed some encouraging news: an overwhelming majority (86%) consider culture to be essential. Yet this optimism is short-lived. Cultural participation has declined sharply over the past eight years, and 20% of respondents reported having engaged in no cultural activities whatsoever during the previous twelve months.

Museums are no exception to this troubling trend. In 2017, 62% of respondents stated that they had visited a museum or exhibition within the year. In 2026, that figure has fallen to just 43%. Access to culture does not appear to have become more difficult during this period: 66% of respondents consider it easy to access cultural offerings, a proportion unchanged since the previous survey. What, then, explains this decline?

Among the reasons cited, lack of desire or motivation ranks first. The constraints of everyday life (lack of time, increasingly crowded schedules and routines), the effort of planning (having to research programmes and prepare visits), and concerns about potentially disappointing experiences (fear of dissatisfaction, visitor discomfort, overcrowding) all emerge as factors discouraging cultural participation and museum attendance.

For many years, museums have developed rich and varied programmes grounded in rigorous scholarly expertise, which underpins their credibility with audiences. They have expanded mediation and interpretation initiatives centred on the delivery of reliable and accessible knowledge. Museums have excelled in fulfilling their educational role, embracing the mission of knowledge production and dissemination that has been central to the ICOM definition of the museum since 1974.

This fundamental mission remains embedded in the definition adopted by ICOM in Prague in 2022:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically and professionally, with the participation of communities. Museums offer varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

Yet one term, present in the 1974 definition and retained in the 2007 version, disappeared from the most recent text in the French and Spanish versions, replaced by the word “enjoyment”: delight — perhaps considered too old-fashioned a notion.

At a time when the Art Explora study highlights a growing disenchantment with culture, and as discussions surrounding sensory, affective and emotionally engaged forms of mediation continue to develop in museums across France and internationally, it seems timely to revisit the notions of pleasure and emotion generated by museum visits and encounters with places, objects, and people.

In an era marked by multiple crises, psychological insecurity, fragmented attention spans and increasing concern for mental well-being, how might museums be reimagined as spaces of refuge? How can they foster wonder and contribute to the well-being of their visitors?

Museums possess many assets capable of rekindling desire: collections that evoke emotion; protected spaces offering respite; temporalities that encourage slowing down; and a distinctive way of engaging with the world at the intersection of intellectual inquiry and embodied experience.

How, then, can we cultivate the desire to visit museums? What conditions enable its emergence? How can it be sustained over time?

Might delight be a concept worth reclaiming? Could it help museums develop forms of interpretation that are both intellectually rigorous and emotionally resonant, rebuild meaningful and enduring relationships with audiences, and enrich the connections that bind museums and their publics?

Émilie Girard, President of ICOM France

June 2026

Program

08h45

Welcome Coffee

09h30

Official Opening

Alban Zanchiello

Deputy Mayor for Historical Heritage and Enhancement, Promotion of the Occitan Language

Antonio Rodriguez

President of ICOM (video)

Christelle Creff

Director of the French Museum Service, Ministry of Culture

Émilie Girard

President of ICOM France

Juliette Trey

Director of the Musée Fabre in Montpellier

10h00

Opening lecture: **Scholar and busker**

"Poetry is intentional", Genet

To see what we must scheme to obtain the "marvelous", according to Leiris, what rule of the game and what mystery to approach, what to make the reality of the displayed objects say, alongside their cross-contamination, what rhythm and what playful address for what is, after all, a motionless performance within a museum.

Macha Makeïeff

Author, visual artist, and woman of the theatre

10h30

Session 1: **Back to the Source: Reinvesting in Artworks, Re-Enchanting the Visitor Journey**

In our era of psychological insecurity and fragmented attention, how can we re-enchant the museum? How can it adopt strategies that might seem contradictory, combining "entertainment" and "contemplation", by offering engaging experiences while leaving room for deep reflection? As a polysemic concept, pleasure defines a multifaceted personal experience that encompasses sensations, emotions, intellect, sociability, discovery, escape, and delight... It stems from the discovery and joy of being in contact with an exceptional environment and "real things" (F. Mairesse). This encounter between a person, a place, and objects awakens the senses, emotions, and thought - a sensory-driven way of engaging with artworks. Yet, in our performance-driven and utilitarian societies, this capacity for awe remains underutilized, even as psychology underscores the benefits of pleasure and reward circuits, as well as positive emotions (enthusiasm, inspiration, joy), which are key elements in fostering well-being, empathy, creativity, and learning. How are museums today striving to combine enjoyable, accessible experiences (relaxation areas, multisensory mediation, immersive experiences, interactive spaces, mind-body practices, salutogenic design...) without overlooking "art as experience" (J. Dewey), where the artwork is an event in its own right?

Marie-Christine Bédard

Exhibition Project Officer, Programming Department, Musée de la Civilisation, Québec

Eva Chastagnol

Museum and Exhibition Scenographer, Project Director, dUCKS scén

Yoann Cormier

Exhibitions Project Manager, Musée des Confluences

Elsa Durand

Botanical Gardens Project Manager, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle

Marie-Pauline Martin

Director of the Musée de la Musique

Moderator: **Nathalie Bondil**, *Director of the Museum and Exhibitions Department, Institut du Monde Arabe*

12h15

Lunch Break

Free tour of the permanent collections and the "Pierre Paulin" exhibition

14h00

Session 2: The conditions for the emergence of delight: Delight as an attentional experience

Delight is often approached through the lens of what inspires it: works of art, stories, or places. This panel discussion suggests shifting the focus toward the conditions for its emergence: a quality of presence, a resonant relationship, and a sensitive mediation that, by caring for attention, renews the experience of artworks and our relationship with the world. Yet these very conditions seem to be put to the test today. At a time when fragmented attention, a lack of engagement, and sometimes a loss of meaning threaten the museum experience, how can museums become spaces where attention is cultivated, deepened, and shared? Drawing on field returns and research, the speakers will explore the role of mediation, spaces, and relationships in the emergence of delight. For delight is perhaps not merely an aesthetic pleasure: it is the fruit of attention that has been nurtured.

Marie-Hélène Audet

Head of Mediation, musée national des beaux-arts du Québec

Marion Boutellier

Head of Visitor Services, musée Fabre

Valérie Brousselle

Director General of Narbo Via

&

Anne Lamalle

Head of Visitor Services, Mediation, and Communication at Narbo Via

Muriel Damien

Head of Collections Management at Musée L, Louvain University Museum

Moderator: Anne-Sophie Grassin, *Coordinator of the GIS (Scientific Interest Group) Sensitive Mediation & Health, Culture, and Well-being Officer at Sorbonne University*

15h45

Session 3: Maintaining Interest: The Challenges of Communication and Shared Narrative

Communication plays an essential role in sharing what is happening at the museum, but above all in making the public want to visit it, awakening their curiosity, creating emotion, or telling a story. Thus, some museums compete in imagination in favor of unbridled, sometimes offbeat communication, playing on unexpected registers and breaking the codes of traditional culture. Through several examples, it will be interesting to understand to what extent these actions make museums more "desirable".

Laure Barthet

Director of the Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse Museum of Archaeology

Julie Cohen

Community manager & freelance photographe

Véronique Petitjean

Director of Communication, Development, and Major Events at the Louvre-Lens

Dan Phelan

Director of Communications, Digital, Marketing and Publishing at Natural History Museum, London

Javier Sainz de los Terreros

Head of Digital Communication at the Museo del Prado

Moderator: Joëlle Arches, *Director of the Goya and Jean Jaurès Museums in Castres*

17h30

Conclusion

Juliette Trey

Director of the Musée Fabre in Montpellier

Practical information

The Congress will be held simultaneously on-site and online (please select the option when you register).

On-site access - Reception from 8h45

Auditorium Alfieri, Musée Fabre, 39 Bd Bonne Nouvelle – 34000 Montpellier.

Registration for the day is compulsory in order to attend the lectures *in situ*.

Online access

On Zoom, via the following links

MORNING SESSION 9.30 - 12.15

ID reunion: 849 9173 3947

Secret Code: 870316

Web : <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84991733947?pwd=mdAaYpwegbB1zbaw8MAqHnsalbUyal.1>

AFTERNOON SESSION 13.00 - 17.45

ID reunion: 811 0273 3065

Secret Code: 978145

Web : <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81102733065?pwd=pAHu2CPPTBCH5fDXQfaIW5aE1ccdch.1>

The meeting will be available in simultaneous translation online in Spanish, English and French thanks to the support of the French Ministry of Culture (SMF / World Heritage Mission).

Professional Visits

Option of choice: Saturday, September 26, 2026

Musée Fabre :

- **9:15 AM** : *Landscapes and States of Mind* (1 hr 30 min) - Guided tour by Marion Boutellier, Head of Visitor Services, Musée Fabre.
- **9:15 AM** : *Developing and Implementing a Cultural Heritage Safeguard Plan (PSBC): The Example of Musée Fabre* (1 hr 30 min) - Guided tour by Marine Pautier, Head of Exhibitions and Collection Promotion, Musée Fabre.

Meeting Point: Staff entrance of the Musée Fabre, 13 rue Montpelliéret – 34000 Montpellier

- **11:00 AM** : *Sensitive Moments: The Gestalt Method to Bridge the Gap Between Artworks and Visitors* (1 hr 30 min) - Guided tour by Floriana Crocella, Educator, Musée Fabre, and Elisa Lubello, Gestalt Therapist.

Meeting Point: Reception desk of the Musée Fabre, 39 Bd Bonne Nouvelle – 34000 Montpellier

Lattara Archaeological Site - Henri Prades Museum:

- **10:30 AM** : *Behind the Scenes: Enhancing the Lattara Archaeological Site and Creating a Conservation and Research Center* (1 hr 30 min) — Guided tour by Diane Dusseaux, Curator, and Florence Millet, Conservation Officer.

Meeting Point: Reception desk of the Musée archéologique, Site archéologique Lattara-musée Henri Prades, 390 route de Pérols – 34970 Lattes