ICOM international council of museums France

Ecole du Louvre
Palais du Louvre

What New Threats Do Museums Face?
Towards a Risk Mapping

Tuesday, October 6th 2026 – 6 pm / 8.30 pm

Zoom platform

Topic of the event

As the issue of museum security has entered the public debate, we felt it was necessary to revisit the question of risk, its many forms and the ways in which different risks overlap and interact. In 2018, ICOM France had already dedicated a debate to this issue. Entitled “In the Face of Risk, How Can Museums Improve Their Organisation?”, the event highlighted the major risks museums were facing at the time. Reading the proceedings today illustrates how threats continue to evolve and underscores the need to assess them regularly in order to develop an effective strategy tailored to each museum ecosystem.

Indeed, over the past few years, museum professionals have seen the range of potential threats they need to anticipate expand considerably. While natural disasters, fires, terrorism and theft remain key areas of concern, other challenges, driven by an increasingly globalised news cycle, have become part of our everyday reality: a rapidly changing climate that raises questions about the conditions under which museums can remain open and collections can be preserved, while also increasing the risk of fires and flooding; activist actions taking place within exhibition spaces; armed conflicts on our borders; and pressures and constraints exerted by a wide range of stakeholders... It is clear that, in a relatively short period of time, the risk landscape facing museums has become broader and more complex. Prevention has become an absolute necessity.

How, then, should institutions shape their policies in response to a changing and multifaceted reality that varies from one museum to another? How can we move beyond a “one problem at a time” approach towards a more agile, matrix-based strategy that views threats as a set of interconnected indicators that each institution must assess in order to anticipate them more effectively? How can we strike the right balance when applying the precautionary principle, while ensuring that responses continue to enable museums to fulfil their core missions: remaining open to the public, reaching the widest possible audience, and preserving collections?

Recognising that museums are vulnerable is not an admission of powerlessness. Rather, it means acknowledging the sometimes conflicting nature of certain aspects of their missions and learning to address this complexity responsibly—anticipating risks rather than simply reacting to them, and fostering a culture of risk awareness that takes into account the specific nature of museums. Today, the ability to anticipate and the need to take action—which depends on convincing all those involved in decision-making and implementation, from policymakers to frontline staff—are governance challenges rooted in professional ethics.

Indeed, faced with sometimes conflicting demands, the role of museum professionals has become increasingly complex. They are caught between the need to display and share collections, the obligation to preserve them, the duty of restraint, and strong societal expectations that museums should lead by example. Dialogue among all stakeholders is therefore essential to define the contours of emerging threats, clarify lines of responsibility, share information about new practices, and establish a roadmap for addressing these risks.

Could developing and sharing a risk map tailored to each institution, based on its strengths and vulnerabilities, be the path towards establishing and implementing a responsible, transparent and ethical institutional strategy—one that is consistent with the narrative conveyed by the museum?

Émilie Girard, Chair of ICOM France – July 2026

Ethics Debate Evening « What New Threats Do Museums Face? Towards a Risk Mapping »
Tuesday 6 October 2026 - 18h - 20h30

Programme

Official openings

Claire Barbillon, Director of the École du Louvre
Émilie Girard, Chair, ICOM France

Speakers

- **Alain Chevallier**, Vice-president of Bouclier Bleu France
- **Robert Blaizeau**, Director of the museums of the Métropole Rouen Normandie
- **Cédric Polet**, Director of museum buildings of the Métropole Rouen Normandie
- **Muriel Barbier**, Director of heritage and collections at the Palace of Fontainebleau
- **Camille Kirk**, sustainability Director at the J. Paul Getty Trust
- **Sébastien Tison**, education, early childhood, culture, and sports Advisor for France Urbaine

Modération : **Hélène Vassal**, Director of collections support, Musée du Louvre

Practical details

ONLINE (Digital Platform Zoom)

ID of the web-seminar: 858 6903 8333
Secret code: 679494

Direct link to the Zoom webinar:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85869038333?pwd=ZuBSiPvIFyW8UkXvH9WlD57Wy2WvUq.1]

This session will be simultaneously interpreted in English, Spanish and French.

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