

ICOM MUSEUM STORAGE: CURRENT SITUATION AND NEW CHALLENGES

ICOM International Conference, 29 – 31 October 2024, Paris, France



A working group on collections in storage was set up in 2022, made up of 8 members representing ICOM's various national and international committees. Alba has been a member of this working group, representing Aotearoa New Zealand. We identified various outputs including:

- (1) Conduct a survey of the museum storage situation around the world. This objective was achieved, and the results of the survey published in May 2024. The report “Museum Storage around the World” gives a global overview of the situation and shows that, unfortunately, around 60% of these storage places fall far short of the professional standards we would expect for places where over 90% of collections are stored.
- (2) Organize an international conference on the subject based on the survey responses. This conference has just been hosted completed. It took place from October 29 to 31, 2024 in Paris at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, and was attended by nearly 500 professionals from 5 continents and 50 countries. The topics covered were varied, the discussions numerous, and the atmosphere particularly enriching and warm.

With the generous support of various organisations, including MOTAT, National Services Te Paerangi, ICOM Paris and ICOM Aotearoa New Zealand, I was able to attend the conference and play a role in hosting this conference. What follows is a brief synopsis of the experience.

Pre-programme:

I joined the visit to the museums of the city of Reims and the Musée du Vin de Champagne et d'Archéologie Régionale in Epernay, focusing on their respective conservation and storage centres.

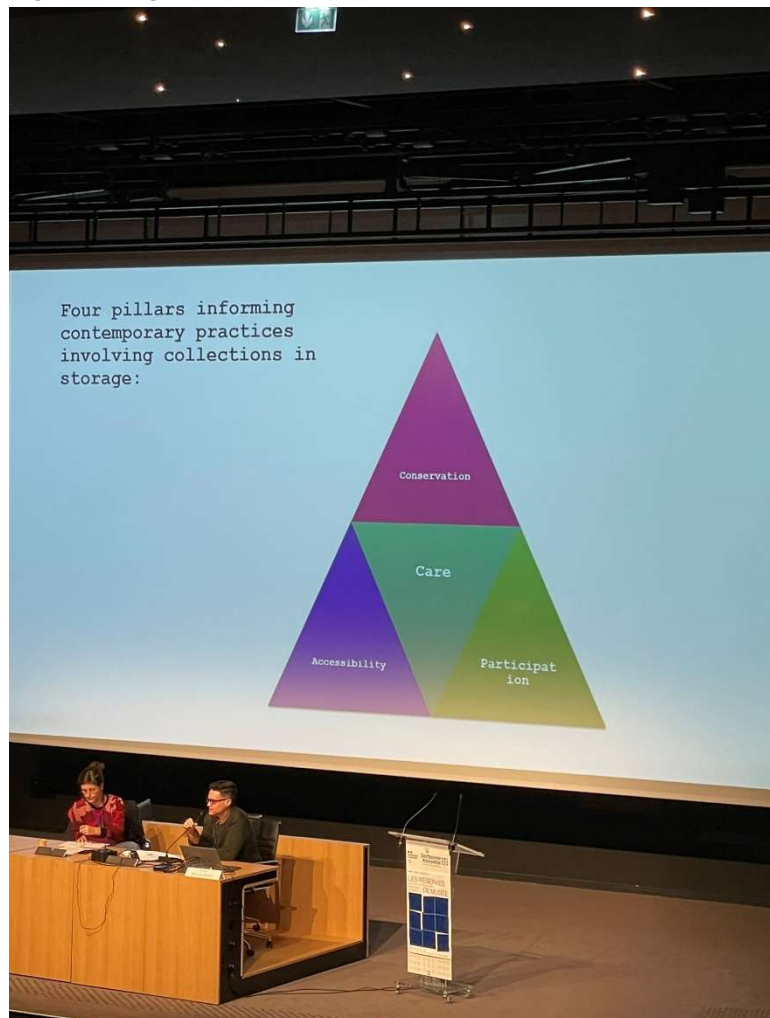
Conference programme:

The aim of the conference was to bring together professionals and researchers to discuss the issue of museum storage, to debate the current state of the sector at the heart of the museum system, its evolution and the main challenges associated with it, so that ICOM can best respond to these issues. It brought together nearly 500 people in plenary, parallel and poster sessions.

Plenary session topics included opening of storage facilities, repatriation of collections, the role of the collection and the right to store. Parallel Sessions topics covered included museum storage through a territorial lens, transforming spaces, reorganising: management, inventory and reorganising: the RE-ORG project

There were numerous key learnings from the conference, and I note but a few:

- Storage is the HEART of the museum – the place where knowledge can be shared – can attract visitors e.g. V&A East storage project that is putting public access as priority
- Sustainability: Climate change debate is escalating and includes sustainability in collecting as a major focus
- Visible storage: focus on what people do in storage (vs trying to be another exhibition space). Access to storage increases transparency, putting museum work on display:
 - Develop (how collection is developed) – role of Curators
 - Manage: role of Registrars
 - Preserve: Role of Conservators
 - Share: Role of exhibition teams and public programmes
- A participatory approach is essential for museums to engage diverse audiences and communities, encouraging them to explore the multiple meanings of objects.
- Challenges faced by museum storage facilities, such as lack of space, hazardous collections and unsuitable environments for conservation.



- Open Storages: Open storage was a recurring theme, with museums generally expressing positive visitor experiences. The concept of open storage creates new dialogue opportunities between visitors, professionals, and objects.
- Local communities are consulted, educational programs are introduced, and interactive activities are developed. The shift to open storage spaces allows visitors to reconnect with objects, enhancing their engagement with museum collections.

What next?

The Working Group has proposed the formation of an official ICOM Committee on Storage to bring together museum professionals working in the field of storage.

Alba says: “The conference was a fantastic experience, offering me the chance to not only play a role in hosting it, but also to represent Aotearoa New Zealand, learn from industry leaders, network with professionals, and gain insights that will undoubtedly benefit museums in Aotearoa, as I share the outcomes”.