

Welcome to the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*



The concept of 'intangible heritage' has taken on great importance within the international museum community (and of course more widely) over recent years. This is apparent in the international effort led by organisations such as UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to protect expressions of cultural diversity such as languages, music, dance, theatre, social practices (rituals and celebrations) and traditional knowledge. The *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, adopted in October 2003 by UNESCO's General Conference, has now entered into force (on April 20, 2006) with a total of 47 countries having deposited their instruments of ratification (16 in Europe, 9 in Asia, 9 in Africa, 7 in Latin America, and 6 Arab states). This overwhelming success for the collaborative international commitment to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is the solid foundation upon which this new *Journal* embarks on its mission.

The recently passed *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* adopted by UNESCO in October 2005 further attests to the aim of strengthening achievements in this domain. In addition, ICOM is intensifying efforts with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to explore new ways of defining intellectual property through an understanding of intangible cultural heritage employing new instruments more suitable for the latter's ultimate protection.

The foundation of ICOM was very much influenced by an appreciation in the museum world, especially in France, of the value of expressions of what was then referred to as folklore, and through an anthropological understanding of the sacred forms of cultural heritage. Theory and practice went hand in hand in Europe between the First and Second World Wars to a degree uncommon today. Especially influential was Marcel Mauss, the leading French philosopher of modern sociology, anthropology and ethnography of the 1920s and 1930s. He was a major influence on Georges Henri Rivière who was to become the founding Director of ICOM. With other followers of Marcel Mauss, such as Yvonne Oddon, creator of the UNESCO-ICOM Documentation Centre, Rivière went from practical involvement in aiding the anthropologist and museum director Paul Rivet with exhibits of Oceanic, Amerindian and African provenance during the transformation of the Musée d'Ethnographie into the Musée de l'Homme in the mid-1930s and then in laying the foundations of what became the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires.

In leading ICOM as its first Director from 1948 to 1965, Rivière developed a cogent theory and practice of the importance of traditional folklore and values. This was carried forward through the *Ethics of Acquisition* (1970), forerunner to today's *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* (adopted in 1986, most recently revised and unanimously approved in Seoul in 2004, and published in 2006). Indeed, the practices of acquisition, documentation, and exhibition were, in great part, the bases for the world's first international museum organisation with expressions of traditional culture (both tangible and intangible) in mind. Though Georges Henri Rivière handed over the directorship of ICOM to Hugues de Varine in 1965, he served as the highly influential Permanent Adviser to the organisation and as head of its Training Unit, while at the same time teaching museology at the University of Paris until shortly before his death in 1985.

In the late 1960s he was at last able to apply his long-held principles and values as director for the development of the new, specially designed museum in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris, for what became independent of the

Musée de l'Homme as the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP), building on what Rivière had first launched as part of the Musée de l'Homme at the Trocadéro in the 1930s. Opened in two stages in 1972 and 1975 (by which time Rivière had officially retired under French Civil Service rules), the new MNATP building accommodated, alongside the Museum and its curatorial staff, a much larger number of ethnographers, linguists, art historians and other experts employed by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France's elite national scientific research service). These worked in parallel with the museum in what quickly became France's national research unit for the study of both the material and the intangible heritage of the country.

Furthermore, Rivière, along with Hugues de Varine, his collaborator and successor as Director of ICOM, promoted very actively the value and potential contribution of museums and the wider cultural sector in community development and empowerment. This was seen in particular in their promotion of what they termed 'ecomuseums' – a word first used during ICOM's 1971 General Conference in Grenoble and Paris. These were seen as expressions of a 'new museology', providing facilities for housing, and promoting equally, much more than what is typically seen within the walls of a traditional museum. This wider context must include, it is argued, the traditions, feelings and artistic and cultural expressions of the ecomuseum's community and territory – their intangible heritage. The 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention's commitment to *communities, groups and in some cases individuals* who recognise the value of the intangible cultural heritage is identical to that of those who create, devise and run these museums and other such 'community' and 'site' museums.

This new *Journal of the Intangible Heritage* will therefore provide a major service to cultural and community development within the field of museums, but also of course far beyond these. It is very much hoped that it will help to shape the discourse, and improve understanding of how intangible and tangible heritage are inextricably linked to one another.

ICOM's living tradition of investigating, supporting, and protecting intangible heritage is demonstrated by its active participation in the technical and scientific evaluation of nominations for UNESCO's Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, in the work of members of its International Committee on Museum Ethnology (ICME) among other ICOM Committees, and the work of ICOM Korea in both its successful organisation of the ICOM 2004 General Conference on Museums and the Intangible Heritage, our first General Conference in Asia, and in promoting the now well established Korean cultural heritage protection model of 'Living Heritage' internationally. All of these, and many similar, initiatives are worthy heirs to ICOM's sixty years of service to, and development of, the cultural heritage in its broadest sense. This common cause of preserving the universal spirit of cultural diversity can be likened to the *spirit of the gift*, as Marcel Mauss termed it in 1924. This also describes ICOM's purpose in supporting this first international journal dedicated to the intangible heritage.

The new *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, which has been promoted by the National Folk Museum of Korea and the Korean National Committee of ICOM with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Korea, is an exceptional initiative. The first scholarly journal of its kind, the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* will not just report but, we hope, will help to create new knowledge that will be disseminated to all corners of the world. We trust that this will help to create an irreducible bond between cultures across the world and consolidate common values by researching, protecting, and celebrating both the differences and similarities that are the intangible treasure of humanity's heritage. ICOM is deeply grateful for this *spirit of the gift* that the promoters of this *Journal* are offering the international heritage community.

Alissandra Cummins
President, International Council of Museums (ICOM)