

BULLETIN of the
European Museum Forum

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EMF's Annual Meeting will be held in Copenhagen from 14–17 May, and registration forms are now available. Our host in Denmark will be the National Museum, winner of the 1994 European Museum of the Year Award, announced at a memorable ceremony in Belfast. The programme is still being finalised, but those attending will visit the Danish Defence Museum and will also take part in an excursion outside the capital, to Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. The meeting provides a unique chance to find out what is happening amongst new museums throughout the length and breadth of Europe, and also highlights the efforts of older-established museums to attract visitors in the 21st century.

The only winner of the 2003 Awards to be announced in advance is the Council of Europe Award, which will be presented at a separate ceremony in Strasbourg on 1 April. It has been awarded to Laténium: Parc et Musée d'archéologie at Hauterive in Switzerland, the first time in 26 years that the Council's Award has gone to a Swiss museum. Laténium features exhibits on a late Iron Age culture from central and north-western Europe named La Tène after the nearby site on the banks of Lake Neuchâtel where its Celtic artefacts were first identified. The permanent exhibition, 'Yesterday – between the Mediterranean and the North Sea', tells a story stretching over 50,000 years, using remains and artefacts from the local lake dwellings. Laténium was commended by the jury as a good example of a modern archaeological museum involving co-operation with experts, local authorities and the public, and with a European dimension in its subject-matter and approach. Our warmest congratulations go to Michel Egloff and his staff.
www.latenium.ch

News from St Petersburg This year will see major changes at the Anna Akhmatova Museum, housed in the magnificent 18th-century Fountain Mansion (Fontanny Dom) in the centre of St Petersburg. It was here, in the flat of the prominent art historian and avant-garde art theoretician, Nikolai Punin, that Anna Akhmatova lived for almost 30 years from the mid-1920s. Opened in 1989 to mark the centenary of the poet's birth, it was the first museum which described the Soviet period in Russian history – the period when poets and artists had to find a way to preserve their identity under totalitarian rule.

Using new technologies and theatrical staging devices, the displays aim to introduce the visitor to Akhmatova's world. A memorial section reconstructs the flat as it was during the 1920–50 period, described as a 'theatre of objects', and is combined with light and sound effects. By bringing together in one space the former aristocratic estate of the Sheremetevs and the communal flat where Akhmatova and Punin lived, the four memorial rooms tell four different stories – how the Fountain Mansion appeared in Akhmatova's life; what the life of the intelligentsia in the Soviet era was like; how the poet worked on her major piece, 'The Poem without a Hero'; and how Akhmatova met Isaiah Berlin, an English expert in cultural studies. The museum aims to show how the poet retained the

ability to live in classical St Petersburg culture while locked into the routine space of a Soviet communal flat.

By contrast, the adjoining literary section allows the visitor into the reality of Akhmatova's poetic world. Original objects and documents behind glass are accompanied by a series of visions, which represent the places visited by Akhmatova. These include Odessa, Pavlovsk, Tsarkoye Selo to St Petersburg in 1913, Leningrad at the beginning of the war to Paris, Oxford and Sicily and, finally, Norinsk village where J. Brodsky received her letters in 1964.

These new displays represent a major effort to overcome the stereotype of traditional literary displays, with all their deadly stiffness that castrates poetry.
Vassily Pankratov, National Correspondent

Museums aren't for the masses Susannah Herbert, writing in The Sunday Telegraph, London, has a novel suggestion for encouraging a wider audience into museums. 'Since the abolition of entrance charges last year, visitor numbers at the Natural History Museum have soared. But the Government still isn't happy, as closer inspection reveals that this isn't the victory for 'diversity' and 'accessibility' it was hoping for. The proportion of less well-off visitors has actually fallen, from a quarter to less than a sixth. The rise in numbers is down to the fact that middle-class visitors, who have always come to the museum, do it more often now, taking advantage of the free entrance to 'dip in and out'. The same appears to be true of all the big museums, to the fury of New Labour's 'social engineers', who refuse to accept that 'museum-going is, for better or worse, a middle-class pursuit'. It seems that the real reason the working classes stay away is not lack of cash, but a conscious decision to spend their free time in other ways. There's nothing left for it but straightforward coercion: 'no housing benefit, say, without at least two proofs of cultural activity a month. If the masses are to be patronised, let it be done openly or not at all.' Reprinted in The Week, 2 November 2002

Flood damage must not be forgotten In the October 2002 issue of the Bulletin there was a report on how the floods in August affected museums in the Czech Republic, and an update has now been received from the Deutscher Museumsbund in Berlin on the situation in Germany.

The floods which hit the Czech Republic and Germany to an unprecedented extent in the summer of 2002 were the worst to occur in that region for over 100 years. Apart from the loss of lives, personal belongings and general infrastructure, cultural life was also badly affected, with museums, libraries, archives, theatres and other cultural institutions suffering damage.

Thanks to almost superhuman efforts, most museums were able to save their objects and collections, but severe damage to the museum infrastructure could not be prevented: buildings as well as storage places were severely damaged and technical equipment was ruined. Apart from this, objects have since been suffering due to hurried evacuation and current storage under problematic climatic conditions.

The State Art Collections in Dresden (Saxony), for example, were able to rescue all their objects but suffered great losses on the technical side. Together with the recently modernised restoring workshop, the whole technical infrastructure of the Old Masters' Gallery – such as the heating system, air-conditioning and safety systems, transport containers and display cabinets – drowned. Castle Pillnitz, the former summer residence of August the Strong, was severely damaged by the high water level; the UNESCO world cultural heritage site of Dessau-Woerlitz and the Castle and Park Luisium (Saxony-Anhalt) were submerged; while the museum of Grimma and its library with approximately 10,000 volumes became victims of the flood.

Immediate and unbureaucratic help for archives and libraries was provided, amongst others by the Service Centre for Stock Preservation for Libraries, Archives and Museums in Leipzig. Books and archive materials that had been exposed to water were quick-frozen and are currently under freeze-dry treatment.

At very short notice the Saxonian Museums Association organised the programme 'Partners after the Flood' ('Partner nach der Flut'), establishing partnerships between smaller and middle-sized flooded Saxonian museums and museums all over Germany which were not affected. The museum of Grimma, for instance, was supported by the Schlossbergmuseum Chemnitz, and colleagues at Zwickau helped the Stadtmuseum Meissen (<http://www.schlossbergmuseum.de/smb/flut.html>). The State Art Collections in Dresden were offered assistance from various national and international institutions. The architectural and technical damage will affect everyday work for a long time. The museums' most important task is to repair buildings and technical equipment, and to establish new, flood-proof places to store collections and equipment. Flood damage amounts to more than 6 million Euros, taking into account only the non-state museums in Saxony. All this will involve a substantial financial undertaking, and it is evident that state, district and municipal administrations alone cannot cope. Various cultural institutions have therefore appealed for donations. In spite of all this, however, the affected museums are trying hard to get back to business and nearly all of them have now reopened.

Museums are now discussing flood problems and their consequences: In October the Saxonian Museums Association held a conference on the topic, dealing with the experiences of various museums affected by the catastrophe and its consequences, and discussing changes to prevent such effects in the future. In November the State Art Collections in Dresden organised a conference on Disaster Management for Cultural Institutions, focused on museums, in which the effects of natural disasters and war on cultural heritage and cultural institutions have been taken into account. Other meetings are already being planned.

Last summer's floods proved how vulnerable our cultural heritage is when it comes to natural catastrophes. Although we were able to keep it safe over the centuries and during times of war, the floods in the Czech Republic and in Germany lead us to appeal to those in authority. We need common feasible concepts to secure the existence of our heritage. Ulrike Balmer and Mechtild Kronenberg

Fray Bentos: a town with the flavour of a meat pie TICCIH, the Bulletin of the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage, continues to be a rich source of information, and Issue 18, 2002 is no exception. Its National Representative in Uruguay, René Boretto Ovalle, lives in Fray Bentos, 300 km from Montevideo, and is the author of this fascinating report.

The name Fray Bentos has a long tradition among Europeans, above all because it is related to a time of particular anguish and insecurity in Europe, during a long period of wars and instability. During these years, the soil of South America produced the vital food that arrived there by ship, pursued by Nazi submarines.

During the middle of the 19th century there was a massive movement to the area of the Rio de la Plata from the capitals of Europe, filled with restless and visionary young people. Here, the cattle ranching was very successful, providing an opportunity to process the meat into a product invented by a German chemist called Justus von Liebig. Working with another German, Georg Giebert, he set up an establishment on the frontier between Uruguay and Argentina which, over more than 130 years, converted millions of tons of beef, poultry, lamb and other animals into meat extract, corned beef, and more than 200 sub-products which were exported to Europe. The most famous product was the meat extract, which at the beginning of the 20th century gave birth in England to the cubes with the trademark OXO.

The Liebig Company achieved a wide fame through the advertising and promotion of their products with 'Liebig's Cards', known as figurinas in Italy and sammelkarten in Germany. Produced in series of six, there were nearly 2,000 different series between 1873 and 1975, and more than 7,000 taking into account the variations of each one for the languages in which they were published. They constituted practically a full colour encyclopaedia, in a period of black and white and difficult communication.

In the opinion of Sue Millar of the Ironbridge Museum [and now of the University of Greenwich, England] Fray Bentos is a complete British industrial archaeology complex. Machinery, buildings, furniture, tools, documents, photos and even a complete chemical laboratory form part of the current Museum of the Industrial Revolution which is being developed in Fray Bentos by the local administration, in the former cold store.

In fact, Fray Bentos is where this type of industrial revolution in the Rio de la Plata was born, with examples of advanced technologies, working arrangements, architecture, transferred from Europe over more than 100 years. Moreover, Fray Bentos was the first place in Uruguay to use electricity, in August 1873, almost three years before the first electric light was lit in Montevideo, the capital.

May 2003 is the bicentenary of the birth of Justus von Liebig, and activities to record the personality of this scientist are being prepared in Fray Bentos. Among the contributions made by the laboratories at his factory were the first studies of condensed milk, instant coffee, and of yerba mate, an infusion characteristic of the villages of Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. For more information, visit www.anglo8m.com

The Museum of Greek Children's Art in Athens was founded in 1994 by an Association of Friends, and displays drawings and 3-dimensional artwork by children between the ages of 5 and 14. Its latest batch of material landed in Bristol with a riot of colour which could not be ignored. The Museum's energetic director, Helen Fay Stamati, tells us that she has been working exceptionally hard to ensure that the Museum can stand firmly on its own feet. In her letter she acknowledges the help given to her by Kenneth Hudson, EMF's founder, whose 'advice and suggestions have been and are still a constant help, extremely valuable in many cases'.

A large part of the Museum's work is the organisation of an annual nation-wide Children's Art Contest, and the 14th Contest, attracted 3,789 children from 40 areas of Athens, 61 areas from the rest of Greece and, mysteriously, pupils from two schools in London. The theme this time, 'A journey in the depths of the earth', was chosen because of two specific recent events – the earthquakes in the Athens area, and changes caused by the introduction of the Metropolitan Underground. The judges were impressed by the children's relationship with nature. In contrast to what might be expected, the artwork mainly presented a world full of strange images of animals, which live harmlessly under the earth's surface. There were few horrible monsters or caves where advanced technology has taken possession. Knowledge of the nature and structure of mineral wealth was also evident, with methods and materials employed, particularly in the three-dimensional artwork, being unconventional, ranging from plexiglas and electric light to unexpected discoveries and fossils. Museum of Greek Children's Art, 9 Kodrou Street, extension Voulis str., Plaka, GR-105 58 Athens. tel 0030 210 3312 621; tel/fax 0030 210 3313 734.

International Museum Day in Germany In a nation-wide campaign, museums in Germany will be celebrating International Museum Day on 18 May 2003. The aim of the initiative is to draw attention to the variety of museums in Germany, now numbering more than 6,000. With 'Museums and Friends' as the theme, it will concentrate on the question of what Friends contribute to museums and to society as a whole. The German Museums Association, ICOM-Germany and the Museum Associations of the Federal States in Germany are encouraging museums to take part in the 2003 activities. This year's partner is again the German Association of Savings and Giro Banks and their cultural foundations. Under www.museumstag.de a central data base will contain information on all activities taking place in German museums on 18 May – a date which has been celebrated by museums everywhere since its designation as International Museum Day by the general assembly of ICOM in 1977.

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum at Telford in Shropshire, winner of the very first European Museum of the Year Award in 1977, continues to expand. After seven years of planning and construction it has launched its National Design and Technology Centre – Enginuity, housed in a 19th-century engineering works adjacent to Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron. In the words of Ironbridge's Marketing Manager, Paul Gossage, 'the centre unravels the seemingly mysterious processes at work in the design and manufacture of all sorts of different objects. Many of the interactives test the visitor's basic knowledge of technology. The

Trust have scoured the world for some of the most exciting exhibits to draw in an expected 100,000 visitors a year to twist, pump, clank, tighten, fix, tweak, click and even levitate their way around the centre.' A new educational facility will benefit the many school groups visiting Ironbridge, and workshops offer opportunities for these groups to design, evaluate and bring engineering to life in focussed practical tasks. It sounds as though visitors of all ages will need to go into training to benefit from this major new attraction.

Summit Meeting 14–16 June 2001 in Gothenburg and Since the meeting of heads of state in Gothenburg there has been much discussion about freedom of speech, the right to demonstrate in public, independence of the judiciary, democracy and power. The makten.nu network [Riksutställningar/Swedish Travelling Exhibitions and about 15 museums from all over Sweden, set up with the aim of focussing the debate within museums on today's society] has hosted a discussion on how museums and galleries can play an active part in public debate. Riksutställningar's three new exhibition towers, to be placed at busy outdoor venues, show symbolically potent objects connected with the events, together with moving pictures and placards. They also allow the public to comment on the future as well as on political power and democracy. The exhibition provides no answers but leaves it up to visitors to decide for themselves. At each new venue there will be a different programme of events: seminars, debates, films, school programmes, joint ventures with voluntary educational organisations and the local council, on-site documentation and parallel exhibitions. The exhibition itself will tour Sweden until May 2003. Riksutställningar, No. 4, December 2002

Pass: Parc d'aventures scientifiques This former coal mine site 50 km from Brussels and 60 km from Lille is now an essential destination for anyone of any age wanting to understand more about history, science and technology. 8,000 m² of exhibitions and interactive displays encourage visitors to play their part in discovering how and why the world is moving on. Natural history enthusiasts must pay a visit to the former slag heap, where the local flora and fauna are swiftly reclaiming their territory. Pass, 3 rue de Mons, B-7080 Frameries, info 0032 70 22 22 52. www.pass.be

Should museums be more like libraries? 'We want not only to experience something but also to be seen and acknowledged, and be able to take part in creating and contributing to the development of museums', says author Sven Nilsson. He visits museums and ponders over why they cannot be more like libraries. In his experience museums and art galleries are often deserted, whereas libraries are full of visitors. He wonders whether one might not, quite simply, turn museums inside out. 'Why don't museums have their staff out among the visitors as they do in libraries?' Svenska museer, No. 5, 2002

Beyond our Eastern limits – at present Vassily Pankratov tells us of a major seminar organised for museum directors in Kirgistan, the first real museum contact with the country since its independence in 1991. The aim of the meeting was to teach museum people how to survive in a new economic situation, and although it took place outside our geographical European limits, we feel it is of interest to our readers.

Background: after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation in the museum field was similar in all post-Soviet countries. Museums started to operate in fairly new market conditions. Crucial lack of funding and decreasing public interest towards culture problems of survival and attraction of new audiences. The question of getting new management and marketing skills was also raised. Radical rethinking on museum training was urgently needed.

History: In St Petersburg the training programme started in 1996. It was initiated by the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum (Great Britain) and was later supported by the Know How Fund and The Open Society Institute. The external British experts conducted a series of seminars for museum directors and mid-level managers. The programme had a certain impact on museum life in St Petersburg. As another result of the programme, a group of Russian trainers was formed and thoroughly briefed. In June 1999 this Russian group organised a similar seminar for East European and Central Asian representatives. In December 1999 a big training seminar for museums of the Leningrad region took place, while in 2000 the Russian team moved on to Uzbekistan in Central Asia, in order to work with the representatives of the Uzbek museums. The Kirgistan project was considered as a further development of the same programme.

Organisations and experts: The programme was organised by the Museum Development Centre in St Petersburg, under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture and Education of Kirgistan and was funded by the Open Society Institute, Budapest. The group of trainers included professionals from the St Petersburg museums (City Museum, the Political History Museum, Ethnographical Museum) and one expert from Great Britain. The team involved working museum top managers rather than professional trainers, thus helping to find a common language between those who train and those who are trained.

After a planning period, the seminar took place on 11–15 November 2002 in Cholpon-Ata in northern Kirgistan. 30 representatives, mostly directors and top managers, from 18 Kirgiz museums participated in lectures, round tables, master-classes, training exercises and competitions. Topics covered included museums as generators of cities' revival; visitor care; forward planning in museums; museum marketing and fundraising; PR in museums; and museums in tourism.

The Bois du Casier, a former colliery complex at Marcinelle-Charleroi in Belgium has become a Museum of Industry. Coal mining activities ceased here many years ago and the site was abandoned, but after 18 months of intensive conversion work the museum is now open. One part is devoted to a memorial to 262 miners, including 136 Italians, who died here on 8 August 1956, the greatest mining disaster in Belgium. Exhibits tell the story of the tragedy, and the daily life of the miners, with former mine workers answering questions from the public. The museum also shows how the Charleroi region was influenced by the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, with sections on iron and steel, glassmaking, metal processing plants, the electricity industry, chemistry and printing. Many projects are planned, and further information can be obtained at www.leboisducasier.be

The 2002 Irish Museum of the Year Awards. Now in their 10th year, this was the final year in which the Gulbenkian Foundation supported the awards. With its departure the opportunity has been taken to review both the funding base and the structure of the Awards. The Heritage Council will increase its financial support and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure will provide additional funding through the Northern Ireland Museums Council. It was agreed to change the categories, bringing them more in line with the objectives of the Heritage Council and NIMC, and reflecting the work and priorities of the museums. This has resulted in a 40% increase in entries compared with the previous year. Five awards were announced in November 2002:

Best Collections Care: National Museum of Ireland

Best Publication for Visitors: Dungarvan Museum Society, for the innovative approach and excellent design of its web site.

Best Exhibition: Kerry County Museum, for its exhibition 'Antarctica', focussing on the exploits of Tom Crean, who took part in three expeditions to the South Pole, and linking this with exploits of 20th-century heroes.

Best Access and Outreach Initiative: Educational Programme of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, 'an extraordinarily ambitious and wide programme which has been created and carried out with exemplary success'.

Museum of the Year Award: The National Gallery of Ireland, for completion of its Millennium Wing and the subsequent programme of exhibitions and associated publications.

Free admission no problem. The national museums in Sweden will introduce free admission from 2004 onwards. In a debate between museum directors Lars Nittve (Moderna Museet), Kristian Berg (National Museum of Antiquities) and a representative of one of the independent museums, the advantages of free admission were considered. A number of fears, apprehensions and misgivings also came out, though, including increased risk of being manoeuvred, rowdiness in museum buildings, 'Stockholm reform' (centralisation), lack of compensation and distorted competition. Svenska museer, No. 5, 2002

Or is it such a good thing? The Times reports that in London Natural History Museum director Sir Neil Chalmers says the museum may reintroduce entry charges just 10 months after it abandoned them. Although visitors have increased, the move was costing the museum £500,000 a year more than the compensation it received. Shop spending has dropped and visitors from less well-off backgrounds have fallen – free entry had apparently simply encouraged the same people to visit rather than new audiences. Sir Neil gave the information to the Commons Culture Select Committee, which is examining the impact of free admission on national museums.

Damage has been reported from the Andrei Sakharov Museum in Moscow (EMYA candidate 1999). Six vandals destroyed art works with paint, wrote slogans on walls and demolished installations of an exhibition entitled 'Be careful: Religion',

which draws attention to religious fanaticism and the relation between church and State. The culprits have been detained.

The museum's director thinks that those responsible believed that the exhibition attacked Russian Orthodox beliefs.