

# Editorial

**B**ehind this issue of *MUSEUM International* lies an old friendship, if one may be permitted to use the expression, between two venerable inter-governmental institutions, UNESCO and ICCROM. Above and beyond their foundational links (ICCROM was created by UNESCO's General Conference in 1956), the justification for this issue on the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property is the commitment that the two institutions share to preserving world heritage. This commitment has created strong ties illustrated both by concrete activities for heritage conservation and discussions on the internal changes in the notion of heritage. So it was natural to decide on a joint publication, particularly to share in the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of ICCROM's creation.

The growing visibility and importance of cultural heritage in international relations has a corollary in the multiplication of the challenges faced by conservation and the increasingly complex provisions needed to meet them. UNESCO is working at this by using a large proportion of its activities and resources to continue constructing a vast legal framework for heritage protection. ICCROM's contribution is to develop sustainable human resources and techniques for heritage conservation through training programmes. Although they have different remits, the two organizations have the same focus on combining the conservation of the most important testimonies to human creativity in each culture with a knowledge and appreciation of those testimonies. So basically, both aim at a rapprochement between conservation practice and an understanding of the values of cultural heritage.

When UNESCO decided in its first ten years of existence to create a specialized centre dedicated to conservation research, it made this one of its core values in its programme of conservation of cultural heritage. This founding act made discussion of conservation science a space where different approaches to the notion of heritage and its role in society could sharpen each other, steel on steel, and a space for exploration and invention. So conservation of cultural heritage became one of the most important and largest showcase programmes of international cooperation in the second half of the twentieth century.

Through the contribution of eminent ICCROM personalities and experts the first section of this issue relates the history of the institution's creation, the guidelines and mechanisms adopted for its operations, the challenges posed by its inter-governmental nature and those arising from its ambition to establish an internationally shared science of conservation. In fact, the history of ICCROM's development has become synonymous with a remarkable exercise in the transfer and renewal of heritage skills and knowledge, resulting in societies gaining a better understanding of the testimonies of their cultural past. The contributions to the second and third sections look at fields such as architecture, artefacts, museography and documentation, in which technical expertise was transformed into a strategy that aims to make societies aware of the role of cultural heritage for their future.

Although this issue looks like a report of the first half-century of ICCROM, it is actually a new step in the intellectual and operational cooperation between the two organizations. This overview of their past is an ideal occasion for UNESCO and ICCROM to consolidate the ties between them, by getting a new perspective on all they have learned over this time. In other words, they are redefining the contours of their field of activity in order to be clearer about their role in it for the future.

So when UNESCO showcases the voices of eminent heritage conservationists, this is far more than simply a symbolic gesture. And in return, through the journal's readers, these voices sharpen discussions in universities, museums and all heritage conservation institutions.

The joint publication of an issue of *MUSEUM International* is an extremely rewarding adventure. It has enabled a cross-fertilization of different tendencies and cultures, and the enthusiasm and investment of those involved has resulted in strengthened ties between the two bodies. Our hope is that many readers will find in the result of this venture renewed ground for sharing this same ideal.

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