

A panoramic view of university museums

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University Museums are hidden treasures of the museum world. They are not well known even by those who work in other sectors of the museum profession. Yet university museums must have surprising strengths: many have survived for centuries; others have grown into large organisations and new university museums are still being formed today. Almost every university has a few museums, if you know where to look. And that is part of the difficulty because for many people universities are imposing institutions to which a visit is only made with some definite purpose. Even those that have the most reason to be there, the staff and students, have their heads bent on specific tasks.

It is important to understand that universities, as well as being places of learning and research, are also a part of the community in which each one is located. As such it is the duty of a university to share

its resources with the population that supports it and with seekers of knowledge everywhere. University museums welcome any visitor seeking to know more about the world in which we all live. University museums are part of the huge family of museums and wish to work closely with their colleagues everywhere.

The articles that follow are papers given at the first conference of the newly formed International Committee of University Museums and Collections (UMAC), one of the international committees of the premier world body of museum professionals, ICOM (the International Council of Museums). These articles show a fraction of the variety of subjects which interest university museums. These subjects encompass an encyclopaedic range of collecting areas and many ways of looking at the intellectual concerns of collecting and collections.

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It could be said that university museums are the same but different to other museums. University museums have the advantage of being close to sources of knowledge and to enquiring students in their prime of life. University museums, however, sometimes are not well understood or resourced by university administrations and are assumed by many outside funding bodies to be financially comfortable because they are within the university. Some university museums struggle to survive and manage to do so only because of the dedication of a single member of staff who understands that every collection is unique and once broken up its uniqueness can never be reassembled.

The tasks of UMAC are to bring university museums to the notice of the public and the professional. UMAC's web page can be found at www.icom.org/umac, where lists of university museums in various countries can be found as well as news of forthcoming events and the aims and objectives of the Committee. These are:

- clarify the role, requirements and relationships of university museums and collections with the university and its communities;
- assist the preservation of academic and cultural heritage;

- promote university museums and collections within governments and their agencies, institutes of learning, the broad museum sector, the professions, business and the population generally;
- Provide advice and guidelines for those collections which are emerging, isolated, deteriorating or otherwise in need;
- Facilitate international and regional collaboration to stimulate networking, partnerships and research and to initiate exchanges of artefacts, exhibitions, standards, practices and other information;
- Encourage staff in charge of university collections to participate in museological training, mentorship and career development.

UMAC is grateful to the editor of *Museologia* for printing this selection of articles written by its members, and invites readers to join UMAC and to subscribe to future issues of *Museologia*. Thank you for reading these pages. I hope you find them stimulating. Please do consider them an invitation to visit or contact some of the university museums in your region.