

## International Curatorial Training Programme



### Report on the 2007 programme

*Picture: participants in the programme with Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum*

## **Report on the International Training Programme (2007)**

### **Introduction**

From June 18 until July 27, eighteen curators and/or specialists, from twelve institutions in eight countries, participated in a curatorial training programme in the UK. The majority of the curators' time was spent at the British Museum, with the final 10 days spent on placements at four Partnership UK institutions: Tyne & Wear Museums, The Collection – Lincoln, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales and Glasgow Museums). Other museums and institutions hosted the curators for shorter visits, usually of one day or part thereof.

The programme represents an expansion and development of the 2006 programme, itself based on a two-year programme originally devised for Egyptian curators. The increased size, variety of countries and differing needs of the participants inevitably resulted in a significant modification of the format of the programme, facilitated through input from colleagues within and outside the museum. Neal Spencer was responsible for curatorial aspects of the programme, with Claire Messenger coordinating logistics.

This document draws on comments and feedback forms, but also individually authored reports, from the participating curators (completed at the BM and at each Partnership UK museum: a document with a summary of individuals' comments is available), British Museum staff involved in presenting sessions who offered feedback, staff from participating Partnership UK museums and observations made by Neal Spencer and Claire Messenger while attending sessions during the programme. A separate document includes recommendations for 2008.

### **Size and funding of programme**

The Museum committed to funding the 2007 programme, including international flights, accommodation, a per diem (£30 per day) for subsistence, costs for printing, paperwork, postage and courier deliveries, books, receptions and other hospitality, and UK travel for the trainees (when it related to the programme). External bodies contribute to the programme: the participation of South African curators was prompted by an initiative by the former Secretary of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell, and is thus funded directly by DCMS. The Barakat Trust funds the participation of an Egyptian curator specialising in aspects of Islamic culture.

The size of the group (18) worked well in general, though for some sessions, space restrictions meant that the group had to be divided into two. This number of participants allowed a fruitful exchange of ideas and dialogue; a larger group might result in less personal interaction. Significantly enlarging the group would exacerbate this problem, and make group trips to other museums more difficult.

## Selection of candidates

The selection of candidates is inevitably one of the most difficult aspects of delivering the Programme. The five key countries who provided participants in 2006 (China, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Iraq) were approached again, with the addition of Iran and Turkey. As mentioned above, places for two South African curators were reserved, to fulfil our participation in the DCMS-funded initiative.

Candidates were interviewed in China (Neil MacGregor, Jane Portal) and Egypt (Neal Spencer, Claire Messenger), leading to the selection of participants. The National Museum of Ethiopia, the National Museum in Tehran and the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums in Sudan nominated candidates, based on guidelines provided by the British Museum. The Ethiopian curators were the same two persons invited in 2006, but were not issued with visas for entry to the UK last year. Invitations were proffered to two archaeologists from Turkey, who have previously worked with Ian Jenkins at Cnidus. The selection of candidates from the remaining two countries proved significantly more problematic. The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in South Africa are responsible for nominating candidates for the DCMS scheme. Despite liaison with DAC, via DCMS, from January, candidates were not confirmed until May 21, less than a month before the programme commenced. The political situation in Iraq, particularly with regards the vacant post of Minister of Culture, resulted in no candidates being proposed. In the end, a university lecturer already on a visit to the UK agreed to take up one of the places. The late confirmation evidently makes tailoring of the programme for these individuals difficult.

With this number of participants and foreign institutions, it is inevitable that there will be delays in the selection process, particularly given the situation with Iraq. The range of nationalities involved works very well, with fruitful exchange of knowledge and ideas happening across the group.

## List of participants

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Firuzeh Sepidnameh       | Curator, National Museum of Iran, Tehran                          |
| Khadijeh Baseri          | Curator of Coins and Seals, National Museum of Iran, Tehran       |
| Candemir Zoroğlu         | Selçuk University, Social Sciences Institute, Turkey              |
| Suhal Sağlan             | Selçuk University, Turkey   |
| Omar Ahmed Mohammed      | Inspector, Supreme Council of Antiquities (Luxor), Egypt          |
| Assayed Mustafa el-Banna | Inspector, Supreme Council of Antiquities (Kafr es-Sheikh), Egypt |
| Fatma Abdelaziz Hegab    | Curator, Egyptian Museum (Cairo), Egypt                           |
| Sahar Ibrahim el-Sayed   | Curator, Textile Museum (Cairo), Egypt<br>(Barakat Trust Fellow)  |
| Haider al-Tegani al-Taib | Curator, Sudan National Museum, Khartoum.                         |
| Aziza Hassan Ahmed       | Curator, Sudan National Museum, Khartoum.                         |
| Abdel Naser Hassan Amin  | Curator, Republican Palace Museum, Khartoum.                      |

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|---------------------|--|
| Aynalem Emiru Aweke | Exhibition and Education Program Team Leader,<br>Authority for Research and Conservation of<br>Cultural Heritages, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia |
| Balew Baye Assefa   | Archaeology Expert, Authority for Research and<br>Conservation of Cultural Heritages, Addis<br>Ababa, Ethiopia                           |
| Rika Stockenström   | Art Project Leader, William Humphreys Art<br>Gallery, Kimberley, South Africa  |
| Khanya Ndlovu       | Senior Researcher, Voortrekker (Msunduzi)<br>Museum, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa  |
| Lu Pengliang        | Curator, Shanghai Museum, China  |
| Sun Miao            | Exhibitions Department, Palace Museum, Beijing,<br>China   |
| Khaled Ismael       | Head of Cuneiform Studies, Mosul University, Iraq<br>( <i>Linda Noe Laine Fellow</i> )   |

### The programme

The participants spent four weeks at the British Museum, followed by a further 10 days at a Partnership UK institution. During the four weeks at the British Museum, the programme of training sessions broadly followed the model initiated in 2006, with some key improvements. Approximately 50% of the sessions were run for the participants to attend as a group; this year these were scheduled for all day on Monday and Tuesday, and Wednesday morning. This consistent scheduling helped with the rhythm of the programme, and facilitated Departments' planning. The following sessions were offered:

- Introductory day, including presentation by DCMS, and by each of the participants, on their own work and institutions
- Tour of the principal galleries, for orientation
- Interpretation: assessing how audiences use galleries
- Exhibitions: planning and project management
- Security at the British Museum
- CDS: conservation laboratories and scientific analysis techniques
- Education Programme for Schools
- Lifelong Learning programmes at the British Museum
- Volunteers at the British Museum, including Hands-On Desk
- Portable Antiquities Scheme and the Treasure Act
- Packing museum objects for travel, and airport procedures (with Constantine)

These sessions are intended as introductory, to expose the curators to various aspects of the Museum's work, the opportunities and problems for curators in dealing with these areas, and particularly to allow individuals (and thus their institutions) to make contacts with experts in various areas. Time for discussion is always included, as the exchange of ideas between museum staff and the visiting curators, and between the participants, is one of the key aims of the programme: these sessions are not prescriptive presentations of

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'the British Museum way'. The participants are encouraged to follow up with experts in areas of particular interest to them. Though some variation in enthusiasm for any one session was to be expected from such a sizeable group, most of the staff members who hosted sessions found the curators engaged well in such discussions.

Those giving sessions are recommended to provide handouts, or copies of presentations, for the participants. Each trainee received a list of *Course Resources* detailing online resources relevant to the sessions they attended at the Museum. At the end of their stay, the curators were presented with books valued at £100, from a list drawn up by each curator. Additional books were presented to them by curators from different departments. Each curator was provided with network access and a British Museum email, allowing collections research and facilitating communication to, and within, the group.

Excursions to several other institutions in the London area were arranged, most notably the Horniman Museum, which offered the trainees the opportunity to see a sizeable museum whose audience profile, and thus strategy, was very different to that of the British Museum. Informal group visits were also made to Kew Gardens and the London Eye. Social events included receptions in the Hartwell Room and Enlightenment Gallery, as well as a lunch hosted by Neil MacGregor, and Sunday tea at the home of Frances Carey following a visit to Kenwood House.

Each curator was assigned to a department for the time outside the joint sessions described above, consistent with their specialities, thus seven curators were hosted by AES, four by AOA, three by ME, two by GR, one by Asia and one by Exhibitions. A representative in each of these departments (Neal Spencer, Claude Arduoin/Julie Hudson, Paul Collins/Sarah Collins, Ian Jenkins, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Neil Casey respectively) developed and co-ordinated a programme tailored to the individual needs of the curators, which included presentations on Departmental research and projects, discussion groups and research time. Sessions were also arranged at Blythe House and Orsman Road. In some cases, visits were arranged to other museums in the south-east, to see collections of particular relevance to individual curators, and meet specialists: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, Sir John Soane's Museum, V&A, British Library, Palestine Exploration Fund, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, Bath Museum of Far Eastern Art, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Ashmolean Museum, Pitt-Rivers Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum, the Avebury Heritage Site Museum (Wiltshire) and the *Ancient Greeks* exhibition in Gosport.

An innovation in the 2007 programme was the concentration of all these sessions in weeks 1, 2 and 3 of the programme; week 4 was intentionally left free from scheduled sessions. It was intended this fourth week would offer the participants more research time, and the opportunity to follow-up areas of particular interest. Others sought meetings to discuss activities not within the main programme, such as fund-raising. This fourth week worked very well, though it evidently makes time-planning more difficult for Museum staff.

All of the curators expressed a desire for more research time, to avail of the library resources at the BM. UCL kindly provided library passes, allowing access to libraries in the evenings and weekends.

The number of Partnership UK museums was increased to four, to take account of the larger number of participants: Lincoln – The Collection (two Egyptian and two Turkish curators), Tyne & Wear Museums (two Chinese and two Sudanese), Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales (two South Africans) and Glasgow Museums (one Iraqi and two Egyptians). It was intended that the two Iranian curators would also travel to Cardiff, but visa problems meant their stay in the UK was cut short. The British Museum met all costs with regards this part of the programme, which encompassed two days travelling, seven working days and a weekend.

The programme at each of these institutions was developed in co-ordination with the BM.

### **Lincoln**

- The Collection and Usher Gallery
  - Loans boxes, Art Loan and Handling Collections
  - Archaeology
  - Conservation
- Stamford Museum
- Burghley House
- Church Farm Museum, Skegness

### **Tyne & Wear Museums**

- Opening of *Matisse to Freud* at Shipley Art Gallery (BM touring exhibition)
- Exhibitions and conservation
- The Great North Museum Project: project development, stores, site visit
- Archaeology and Roman pottery
- Beamish Museum
- Bowes Museum
- Visit to Hadrian's Wall, Segedunum and the Stephenson Centre
- Visit to Durham Cathedral and the Oriental Institute

### **Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales**

- Opening of *Industry to Impressionism* exhibition
- Collections management at the National Museum
- New gallery development at St. Fagan's Museum of Welsh Life
- Numismatics, ceramics, and planning for new archaeology displays
- National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
- Studying for location of iron age roundhouse reconstruction at St Fagans

### **Glasgow Museums**

- Kelvingrove
- Museum of Transport
- Gallery of Modern Art
- Burrell Collection

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Glasgow Museums Resource Centre  
Research  
Collections storage  
'The Open Museum'  
St Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art  
National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh

Feedback from the curators and the participating museums indicates how successful these placements were, though exhausting. While offering an insight into how other museums work and thus embodying the non-prescriptive nature of the programme, these placements are also of benefit to the curators as the institutions involved are of a scale more similar to those they are familiar with at home, and the multi-site and/or multi-museum model found at Newcastle, Cardiff and Glasgow also resonates with many of the participants, as it echoes the setup of their own institutions. The extensive collaboration that takes place between the British Museum and other museums within the UK was an area of particular interest to several curators. Tyne & Wear Museums perceive the Programme as a means of further staff development, and all four institutions were unanimous in stating their staff benefited from hosting the curators, in some cases with the transmission of specific knowledge relating to parts of their collections (particularly Sudanese material in Sunderland, Chinese ceramics in Durham and Assyrian objects in Glasgow).

Providing the Partnership UK museums with detailed information on each participant's skills and research interests has not been easy, but is seen as a key area in improving the experiences of both the curators and host institutions, through focused tailoring of the programme to individuals' needs.

Abdel Nasser Amin from Sudan was unable to stay in the UK for the duration of the programme, and as a late addition, he was not included in arrangements with the partners. During his stay however, at the suggestion of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, it was possible to arrange a one week placement at that institution. Sessions included discussions on community liaison, the development of the Institute of Cultural Heritage, and a project to advise the Petrie Museum on a collecting strategy.

### **Logistics of the programme**

The logistics of the programme, co-ordinated by Claire Messenger, broadly followed the model introduced in 2006, with some improvements. In brief, all travel was arranged by the British Museum, with support for visa applications where necessary. One of the Turkish visas was far from straightforward, with a work permit application being rejected, despite advice that this was the best method. The two Iranian participants were only granted one month visas, and their extension was rejected. An appeal was not lodged, as it was felt this could undermine the curators' chances of being successful with future applications. Otherwise the visa process worked fairly smoothly, perhaps in part due on account of letters to the British Ambassadors from Neil MacGregor, and ongoing liaison with consular officials.

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Accommodation was again in self-catering flats at Schafer House (UCL Halls of Residence near Euston); while some participants were unhappy with the quality of accommodation, the proximity was much appreciated. Each participant received a per diem of £30, distributed weekly, to cover maintenance. This amount was agreed with HMRC.

The modified programme format ensured all travel occurred on weekdays, reducing the impact on museum staff.

### **Aims, objectives and legacy**

In presentations to the Management Group and Keepers' Committee in 2005 and early 2006, the following aims, objectives and desired legacy were set out for the programme. The 2006 and 2007 programme has met many of these criteria, though some aims will only be measurable after a period of years. It is already clear that the participants stay in contact with us, and with each other, long after their participation in the programme. The British Museum programme was said by many to compare favourably with experiences they have had at other museums, such as the Musée du Louvre and the Getty Museum. The most rewarding aspect of the programme is seeing the level of exchange of ideas, about museums, research and wider cultural and social issues, between the curators. This aspect is something they recognise too: the majority mentioned this on their evaluation forms. The Museums Journal interviewed several participants for a future article, and local press coverage was generated in Lincoln. A reception for the curators was hosted by Margaret Hodge, Minister for the Arts, at DCMS.

The programme represents one part of the British Museum's policy to engage with colleagues in institutions abroad, complemented by training and other capacity building which takes place on-site, notably in Sudan, Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia.

#### *Aims*

- Disseminate best practice at the British Museum and elsewhere in the UK to curators from abroad.
- Create, develop and enhance relationships with curators in foreign institutions, through the programme, leading to future collaborations in areas of research, conservation, and the presentation of collections.
- Respond to priorities of British Museum international strategy.
- Increase understanding of countries who provide curators for the programme, both in terms of their institutional structures but also from a broader viewpoint.
- Act as a conduit for Partnership UK museums wishing to develop relations with international colleagues.
- Strengthen British Museum's UK partnerships, through collaboration on the programme.

#### *Objectives*

- Streamline international exchange programme to ensure consistency of delivery and increased efficiency in resource deployment.
- Deliver programme in which selected curators from foreign institutions are immersed in the workings of the British Museum, experiencing approaches to the collections and the



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interpretation, presentation, conservation and management thereof. Methods of education and outreach through the collections will form a core element in the programme.

- Arrange for a placement in addition to the above, at a Partnership UK museum, to provide trainees with experience of a different museum environment, particularly museums based at multiple sites.
- Enable access to research libraries in central London.
- Supply course resources for further learning and reference in areas covered by programme (particularly internet resources).
- Further develop and refine programme in response to evaluation from participants, BM staff; Partnership UK museums' staff.

### *Legacy*

- A network of colleagues in international institutions with first-hand experience of the British Museum and its partner institutions, and close links with curators in relevant fields. The British Museum website can host resources for trainees to use after attending programme, and aiding links between participating curators in different countries.
- Improve research links with relevant countries, including collaboration in archaeological fieldwork.
- Constructive relationships with foreign governments' antiquities/culture/heritage departments, particularly in the area of reciprocal exhibitions, collaborative research and ongoing fieldwork.
- Enhanced international profile for British Museum, and participating Partnership UK museums. Emphasises the nature of Museum outreach aimed at international audience as well as UK community, both scholarly and the general public.

Neal Spencer  
International Curatorial Training Programme  
The British Museum  
London WC1B 3DG  
[nspencer@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:nspencer@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)