

**International Training Programme  
Conference support grant 2025  
Final Report**

**2025 ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES | NOVEMBER 11-17, 2025



PHOTOGRAPH BY APRILLE TIJAM

**APRILLE P. TIJAM**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AND HEAD OF EXHIBITIONS AND COLLECTIONS  
AYALA MUSEUM, PHILIPPINES (ITP2019)

*Supported by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust*

**INTRODUCTION**

I am Aprille Tijam, Associate Director and Head of Exhibitions and Collections at Ayala Museum, Philippines. In my concurrent role, I continue to lead the development and implementation of programs that are vital to the sustainable transfer of knowledge while supporting preventive conservation practices. One key direction I have been actively exploring is enhancing creativity in museum practice—reinvigorating existing programs to make them more inclusive, responsive, and reflective of our community’s evolving interests and trends. I am optimistic that this approach is responding to the ongoing challenge of sustaining audience engagement—encouraging visitors to return to familiar programs with renewed interest—while simultaneously sourcing funding to implement these initiatives with fresh perspectives, all in alignment with our mission of preserving Philippine cultural heritage.



APRILLE TIJAM AT AYALA MUSEUM, MAKATI CITY, PHILIPPINES.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY REX REYNALDO CABUGON

I was particularly keen to attend the 2025 ICOM General Conference, as it serves as a critical platform where ICOM convenes museum practitioners, scholars, and cultural heritage advocates from around the world to meet and discuss emerging trends, pressing issues, and the codes and guidelines that shape global museum practice. The conference theme, *“The Future of Museums in a Rapidly Changing World,”* strongly resonated with both my institution’s priorities and my role as a leader. It offered invaluable opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives, case studies, draw inspiration for potential adaptations or innovations, and critically assess whether existing programs should be recalibrated—or maintained—amid the evolving cultural heritage landscape in the Philippines. These insights will hopefully support informed decision-making, ensuring our initiatives remain relevant, practical, and sustainable within our financial capacities, as we navigate museum practice now and in the years to come.

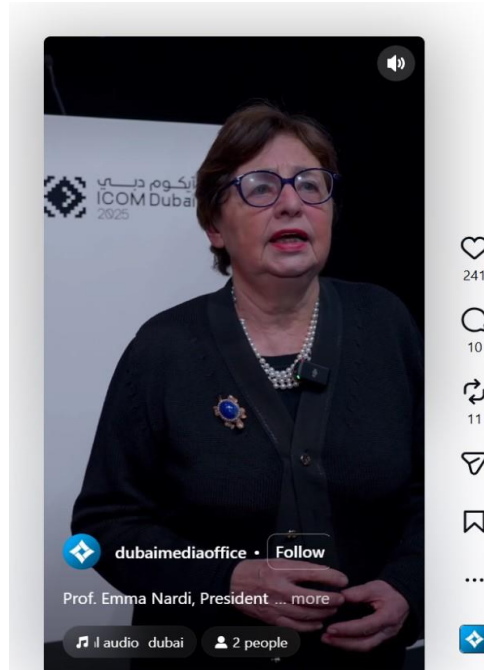
There is a prevailing assumption that adaptation to contemporary contexts necessarily entails extensive reliance on advanced technologies—an expectation that can be particularly challenging for resource-constrained institutions. More recently, the rapid development of artificial intelligence has added another layer of complexity, raising important questions about ethics, research, and concept development in curatorial and collections management practices. I was keen to learn how museums globally are navigating the intersection of AI and museum work, including how such tools are being optimized, the challenges and benefits they present, and their implications for digital programs, applications, and audience engagement.

I applied for a Conference Grant under the BM-ITP legacy programme, as funding for international conferences and professional training opportunities is limited both within my institution and more broadly in the Philippines. BM-ITP supported my round-trip airfare to Dubai, hotel accommodation, and conference registration fees. These funds were supplemented by personal savings to cover visa

# The British Museum

application costs, meals, travel insurance, and local transportation in Dubai. My participation in the conference was formally recognized as official travel by the management of Ayala Museum, a division of Ayala Foundation, Inc.

Prof. Emma Nardi, former ICOM President, expounds that the “General Conference is the highlight of our triennial calendar and for the first time, this year, it will take place in the Middle East, and South Asia (MEASA) region”. In the Instagram link below , she further emphasized that “the ICOM General Conference in Dubai is the right location for this kind of conference”  
—(6) [Instagram](#)



Please visit link (6) [Instagram](#)

For more information about the **27<sup>th</sup> ICOM General Conference** held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from November 11-17, 2025, please visit [Shaping the Future of Museums and Heritage | ICOM Dubai 2025](#)



# The British Museum

For more information about Ayala Museum, please visit <https://www.ayalamuseum.org/home>  
Ayala Museum is the first in Southeast Asia to be featured on the **Bloomberg Connects** app. Launched in August 2025, our participation in the platform was an outcome of my introduction to the app during the 2023 Museums Association Conference in Newcastle upon Tyne, supported by BM-ITP Conference Grant.

A promotional poster for the launch of a free digital guide. The background is dark with a large, stylized face of a person. In the top left, the logos for Ayala MUSEUM, FILIPINAS HERITAGE LIBRARY, and Bloomberg Connects are displayed. The main text in large, bold, yellow letters reads "JOIN US AS WE LAUNCH OUR FREE DIGITAL GUIDE!". Below this, it says "Museum Admission is FREE August 17, 2025 (Sun) 4:00PM - 7:00PM". A QR code is provided with the text "Slots are limited. REGISTER NOW AT" above it. At the bottom, the website [ayalamuseum.org/freedigitalguide](http://ayalamuseum.org/freedigitalguide) is listed. The right side of the poster features images of a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "Welcome" message, a "Buwan ng Wika" section, and a "What's On" section.

A promotional image for the free digital guide. The top left corner has the text "DIGITAL GUIDE" in a brown box. The top right corner has the "Bloomberg Connects" logo. The main image shows three people in a museum setting looking at a smartphone together. Below the image, the text "FREE DIGITAL GUIDE" is prominently displayed. Underneath, it says "Experience the Ayala Museum and Filipinas Heritage Library's digital guides on the Bloomberg Connects app!" and "Reacquaint yourself with old favorites, take self-guided audio tours, and explore connections between objects across the entire museum!". At the bottom, it provides download links: "Download Ayala Museum's Digital Guide: [bit.ly/amdigitalguide](http://bit.ly/amdigitalguide)" and "Download Filipinas Heritage Library's Digital Guide: [bit.ly/fhl-digitalguide](http://bit.ly/fhl-digitalguide)".

## CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

The conference drew more than 4,500 cultural heritage practitioners from around the world, making it the largest ICOM General Conference to date. The Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) served as a fitting venue, offering expansive halls capable of accommodating the number of attendees and the program's multiple and simultaneous sessions—more than 100 sessions. This was also the first time the conference was held in the Middle East, underscoring the region's growing presence in the global cultural sector and reflecting the strong support of the United Arab Emirates government for arts and culture. The UAE demonstrated its capacity to host a major international conference of this scale, notably by making the program accessible in both Arabic and English.

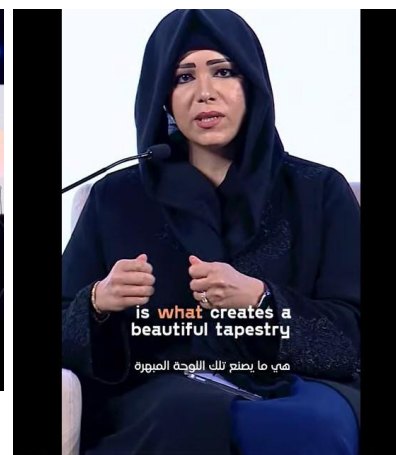
# The British Museum



PHOTO SOURCED FROM ICOM LINKEDIN | (42) International Council of Museums (ICOM): Posts | LinkedIn



I was particularly drawn to the statement of Her Highness Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairperson of the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, who spoke during the session on “The Spirit of Exchange: The UAE’s Unique View of Cultural Diplomacy” –of “how the differences of cultures connect us in a tapestry of colors... the beauty in the world lies in the differences of cultures... and how we are connecting across borders through our similarities”. These words may seem simple, but I found them deeply meaningful. She further emphasized that museums play a vital role in fostering these cultural connections and in shaping our vision for the future. The overarching message shared was clear: “multiculturalism lies at the heart of the UAE’s cultural diplomacy”. <https://web.facebook.com/ICOMGC>



Her Highness Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum  
Chairperson of the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority

<https://web.facebook.com/reel/859875116507188>  
ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE

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While the overall logistics were well organized—registration desks, conference kits, staff support, and venues were clearly identified—some challenges were encountered. Members of the organizing team were not always fully familiar with all activities and spaces within the DWTC, which at times resulted in confusing information and missed sessions. Additionally, the DWTC was not an exclusive venue for the ICOM conference, as other events were held concurrently in different areas of the complex. The meals were particularly appreciated, providing an enjoyable experience of Middle Eastern cuisine.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY APRILLE TIJAM



# The British Museum

One of the most significant sessions I attended was the *Roundtable Discussion on the Revision of the Code of Ethics for Museums*, organized by the ICOM Standing Committee on Ethics and moderated by Hilary Carty (United Kingdom). The revision working group was headed by Sally Yerkovich (USA), with members Dr. Julie Higashi (Board Member, ICOM Japan), Dr. Kathrin Pabst (Member, ETHCOM; Germany), Dr. Luisa de Pena Diaz (ICMEMOHRI Vice-Chair, Dominican Republic), and Dr. Bruno Brulon Soares (Chair, SOMUS; United Kingdom), and was chaired by Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, Director of the City Museum of Rotterdam.

**Stated in ICOM's website [Outcomes of the 27th ICOM General Conference: ICOM Sets Strategic Direction for the Museum Sector - International Council of Museums - International Council of Museums](#)**

The [ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums](#) is ICOM's essential reference text, guiding museum professionals worldwide. At the 27th ICOM General Conference, the Standing Committee on Ethics (ETHCOM) presented the latest stage of the Code's ongoing revision, which responds to evolving professional values and global challenges.

During a dedicated Roundtable session, ETHCOM outlined the main directions of the revision and engaged members through an open Q&A exchange. This dialogue reaffirmed that the Code is a living document shaped by the collective expertise and shared ethical responsibilities of the global museum community.

The updated Code will continue to serve as the ethical foundation of the museum profession, strengthening ICOM's commitment to accountability, inclusiveness and trust.

In retrospect, this session might have been more impactful as a plenary, as it addressed an issue central to the very essence of our mission—both in theory and in practice—and would have benefited from broader participation. Though time was limited, I appreciated that the session allowed space for questions and exchanges, and that the forthcoming ratification process will provide ICOM members with the opportunity to closely review the proposed revisions.



PHOTOGRAPH BY APRILLE TIJAM

# The British Museum

Press coverage related to the conference may be accessed through the following sources: [Press - ICOM 2025](#), <https://dubai2025.icom.museum/press-releases>

During the **International Committees Day-Committee Conservation (ICOM-CC)** on Saturday, November 15, 2025, the sessions at ICCROM Sharjah featured several distinguished panelists. Dr. Satish Pandey, Professor and Head of Art Conservation at the Indian Institute of Heritage, who advocates for sustainable conservation practices and inclusive heritage management, delivered a paper titled “Need for Integrating Generational Knowledge in Heritage Conservation Practices.” I particularly appreciated his emphasis on localizing preventive conservation approaches and highlighting a critical oversight—the 11th agent of deterioration: the “human factor.” This encompasses staff turnover, knowledge gaps, improper handling, and other human-related risks that often go unrecognized in heritage management.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY APRILLE TIJAM

Vinod Daniel, a global museum specialist in Risk Management and Preventive Conservation and Chair of AusHeritage, also moderated discussions on practical approaches to preventive conservation. He encouraged identifying short, medium, and long-term solutions, with careful consideration of funding and ease of implementation. These approaches reflect the fundamental tenet of preventive conservation: to extend the life of objects while saving costs in the long run, while acknowledging the realities faced by practitioners.

Both speakers advocated a responsible and practical approaches to finding a balance between conservation and sustainability. Their emphasis on localized risk-management strategies—

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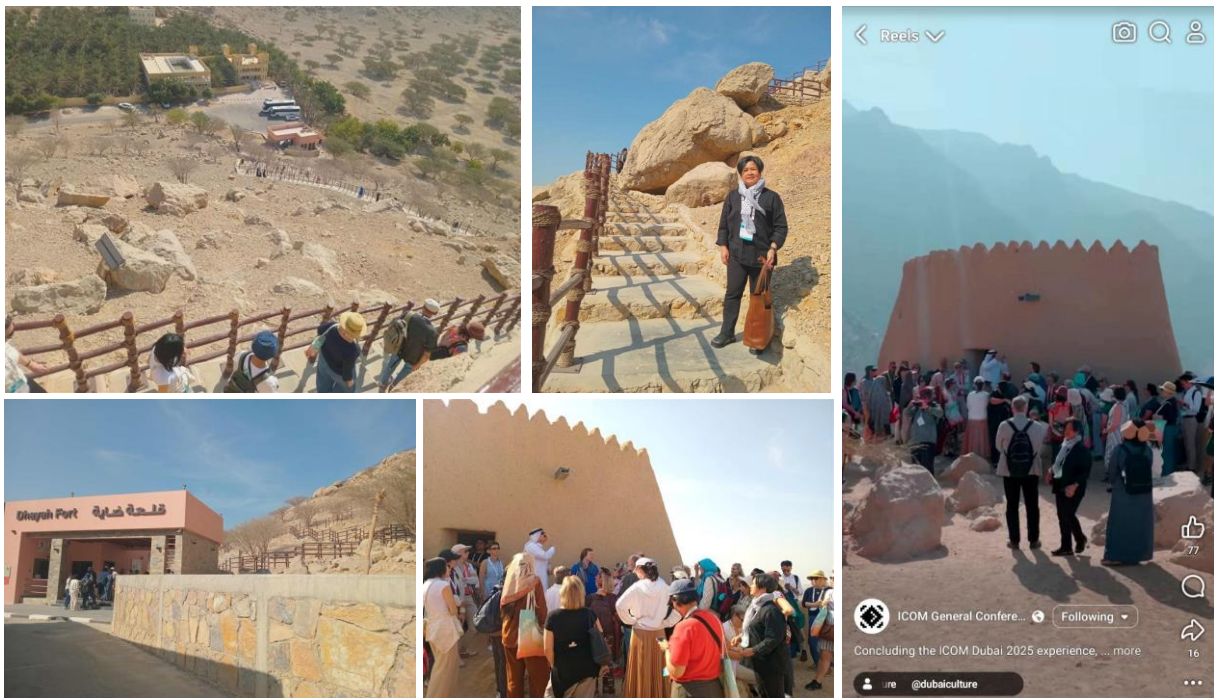
underscored by the idea that “the ten agents of deterioration are universal, but their solutions must be local”—offers a framework that can be applied in the Philippine context.

On Sunday, 16 November, I participated in a **heritage trail in Ras Al Khaimah**, one of the seven emirates of the UAE, which allowed me to experience what life was—and in many ways still is—like in other parts of the country. The trail highlighted places that reflected traditional ways of living, shaped by the environment and history, community practices, and long-standing cultural traditions.

These are destinations that might not be included in the itinerary of a typical tourist visiting the United Arab Emirates, which I found very interesting. I also appreciated the warm welcome, marked by the hot tea offered at the heritage sites before the start of each tour. It set the tone for the visit, serving as a gentle reminder of the culture and traditions that would unfold before me.

## HERITAGE TRAIL : DHAYAH FORT

Long before skyscrapers rose to offer views of the cosmopolitan cities of the United Arab Emirates, there was Dhayah Fort—an 18th-century fortification in Ras Al Khaimah, recognized as the highest hilltop and the only remaining hilltop fort in the country. The site was the setting of a battle and was captured by British troops in 1819. After climbing more than 230 zigzagging steps to the top, pausing every 10 steps to enjoy the stillness of the landscape, and again on the way down, I was rewarded with a breathtaking landscape, free of contemporary buildings, and offering a view of how the surroundings may have appeared in the past. The fort stands as a monument to the people’s pride in their land, symbolizing their determination to protect it from invading forces.



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## HERITAGE TRAIL : NATIONAL MUSEUM OF RAS AL KHAIMAH

This museum is housed in a building that was originally constructed as a fort in the early 1800s during conflicts with British troops. In the 1920s, it was converted into the residence of the ruling family, who lived here until the 1960s. The building was eventually transformed into a museum in 1987, showcasing the royal family's history, as well as artifacts related to the pearling or pearl-diving profession that flourished in the Gulf for thousands of years. The museum also features the Madbasa, a room dedicated to date syrup extraction; artifacts used by early settlers, including ceramics, pottery, gold, and utilitarian objects; and traditional architectural elements, such as a courtyard and endemic plants, reflecting the traditional designs of houses in the region. A story on Beatrice de Cardi, pioneer and patroness of archaeological research in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah also formed part of the exhibition. Her initiatives led to the formation of the National Museum of Ras Al Khaimah,



**الفوس على اللؤلؤ**

تعتبر مهنة الفوس على اللؤلؤ مهنة الأجداد في الخليج العربي، حيث عُثر على أقدم سجل لصيد اللؤلؤ في الخليج من الموسى الأثرية التي يعود تاريخها إلى عام 2000 قبل الميلاد. وفي العام 1984 اكتشف الأيريسس أن بطنه (المطاطة) كانت مزودة باللؤلؤ الذي يبلغ طوله 18 إنشاً. فظهرت عبر أوروبا قبل اكتشافها في العالمين 1930 - 1920 من ذلك الوقت. كانت رحلات الفوس على اللؤلؤ تستغرق من عدة أيام إلى عدة أشهر وتضمن السفر المصنوعة من الخشب المزدوج استخدموا معدات وقائية متقدمة مثل بجان الفوس. تحميم الخطم المصنوعة من من خشبيات خشك إلى الخيمة للوقاية.

رقم التسجيل: RAK 0702 (1)  
 رقم التسجيل: RAK 0702 (2)  
 رقم التسجيل: RAK 0702 (3)  
 رقم التسجيل: RAK 0702 (4)

**Pearling**

Pearling is a historical profession in the Gulf that lasted for thousands of years. The oldest record of pearling in the Gulf is in Assyrian texts dating to 2000 BC. In 1194, Arab writer Al Isbah wrote that Juffar (al-Matal) was already a major pearling centre and by the 16th century, it became famous across Europe before declining in the 1800s. Back then, pearl diving expeditions may take ten days to four months journey. This display shows that the trained pearl divers used modest protective equipment for their dives. All are collections of Ras Al Khaimah National Museum.

(1) RAK 17507, Diving Bell  
 (2) RAK 18257, Diving Gilt  
 (3) RAK 52332, Carved coconut used as a water container to wet finger covers  
 (4) RAK 11545 - 11548, Finger Covers

(5) RAK 2154, Diving Weight  
 (6) RAK 1485, Diving Basket to bring the shells  
 (7) RAK 2202, Pearling Knife





## المديسة هي غرفة مجهزة لإنتاج الدبس من التمور

تعرف كلمة المديسة على أنها مصغرة لعصر التمور نسبة للطريقة المستخدمة. يتم استخراج الدبس من التمور بالاستفادة من قوة الجاذبية على الكؤوس التي يتم تركيبها في أرضية مرتفعة في غرفة مغلقة لا يدخلها الهواء. نتيجة لهذا الضغط سيتم دفع الدبس خارج الكؤوس عن الثقوب وصحو لا إلى الوعاء أو الجرد. يجب أن تبقى التمور حوالي 7-3 أيام على الأقل في الغرفة للحصول على الدبس. يمكن أن يبقى الدبس في حالة جيدة لمدة تصل إلى عامين. الدبس ذو جودة جيدة سيحافظ على قوامه إذا تم تخزينه لمدة شهرين.

مدة الإنتاج  
تدوم حوالي 45 يوم  
حتى التخمير

أرضية مائلة  
يتم التخلص من الكؤوس في المديسة  
كل 20 يوماً إلى شهر

تقليد كؤوس التمور  
أرضية إنتاج الدبس  
LIGUID RUN  
DOWN TO  
POT/JAR

الجاذبية  
LIGUID DRIPPING

أنواع التمور  
نوع حباتها  
نوع الكؤوس  
نوع التمور  
من النوع العالي أو العادي

نوع التمور  
نوع الكؤوس  
نوع التمور  
من النوع العالي أو العادي

**MADBASA**

Madbasa is a processing room for extracting date syrup.  
Madbasa is often translated as "date press" for the extraction method that is being used.  
The date syrup is extracted by taking advantage of the force of gravity over bags of dates that are being piled in an elevated floor in a closed and non ventilated room.  
The pressure created will push the syrup out and flow through indented channels to a pot or jar. The dates should stay at least around 3-7 days in the room to get the date syrup.  
The date syrup can stay in good condition up to around 2 years. Good quality syrup will not go bad after storing at least two months.

## HERITAGE TRAIL : AL JAZEERA AL HAMRA, RAS AL KHAIMAH

Listed on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, this village was the last surviving pearling community in the Gulf region, with origins dating back to the 16th century. Now preserved as an open-air museum, it revives the way of life of the village, which was abandoned in the 1970s due to the discovery of oil. The site offers a glimpse into the architectural design and functionality of traditional houses—originally around 500 in number—constructed from coral stone, sandbrick, and palm fronds, with inner courtyards, a mosque, and markets.



# The British Museum

While continuing to embody the collective past, these heritage sites serve as a repository of Emirati culture amidst the region's rapid development. They connect the community not only to its past, but also to its present and the near future. This idea is further reflected on the ICOM General Conference aptly described as—"Rooted in heritage, we move towards new horizons, carrying our stories forward. In museums, preservation is only the beginning. Through creativity, we reimagine the ways heritage can be shared, bridging past, present, and future in meaningful ways. Together, we're shaping a museum landscape that is alive, relevant, and open to new possibilities."

## NETWORKING

With more than 4,000 participants and a packed program, engaging in extensive, in-depth conversations was challenging. I exchanged warm greetings with as many people as I could make eye contact with, but I focused primarily on reconnecting with practitioners I had met before—those with whom we have collaborated or have ongoing projects—revisiting earlier conversations about potential partnerships. For me, these interactions were particularly valuable, since they were not first-time meetings. I also found it difficult to remember all the names of those I spoke to for the first time, unless they represented an institution I was already familiar with.

I had the opportunity to greet several colleagues whose work and connections have been significant in my professional journey. These included Manuel Rabaté (Director, Louvre Abu Dhabi), with whom we are collaborating on an extended loan of pre-colonial gold objects from the Ayala Museum collection, and Dr. Guilhem André (Acting Director for Scientific, Curatorial, and Collections Management, Louvre Abu Dhabi), who delivered a talk at the Sharjah Archaeological Museum during the ICOM-CC Committee Day; Dr. Thomas Learner (Head of Science, Getty Conservation Institute), who was the Getty representative when I was a Getty Travel Grantee at the ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in Melbourne, Australia, in 2014; Vinod Daniel (Chairman, AusHeritage), former ICOM Board Member, whom I first met at the 2016 ICOM General Conference in Milan, Italy, and with whom I collaborated through AusHeritage in 1998 during my affiliation with the Museo ng Maynila, a city government museum; and Dr. Deepakshi Sharma (Curator and Archivist, Dedicated Freight Corridor Cooperation of India, Ministry of Railways), whom I have met at the 2016 ICOM General Conference in Milan.

I also reconnected with Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, Chair of ICOM ETHCOM and Director of the City Museum of Rotterdam, who was one of the facilitators of a two-week training program on Collections Management I attended at the ICOM International Training Center in 2016 in Beijing, China. Her book *New Trends in Museology II* (2015) has guided me in both the theoretical and practical applications of collections management since 2017 and has been referenced in many of my knowledge-sharing sessions with colleagues and museum practitioners in the Philippines. In passing, Leontine mentioned a potential exhibition collaboration exploring maritime history linkages between the Philippines and Rotterdam.

# The British Museum



LEFT PHOTO: AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAY HELLO TO **PROF. EMMA NARDI**, OUTGOING ICOM PRESIDENT. PHOTOGRAPH BY APRILLE TIJAM.  
RIGHT PHOTO: DELEGATION OF ICOM MEMBERS FROM THE PHILIPPINES. I WAS RECENTLY ELECTED TO A 3-YEAR TERM AS BOARD MEMBER OF ICOM PHILIPPINES. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ARCH. CARLO SAYCO.

## ITP REUNIONS



L-R: APRILLE WITH **DR. NAGWA BAKR** (ITP 2019), **DR. FATMA SEZIN DOĞRUEK** (ITP 2009), AND **WILLIAM GMAYI** (ITP 2021).

# The British Museum

Under the ICOM-CAMOC (International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities) session, I attended a panel on *Urban Heritage and Contested Landscapes and City Memory*, featuring talks by two ITP fellows. Dr. Nagwa Bakr, Director of the Training Department at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilizations, presented “*Where the City Speaks: People, Memory, and the Intangible Heritage of Al-Mu'izz Street, Cairo.*” Dr. Fatma Sezin Doğruer, Culture and Tourism Expert at the General Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Museums, Türkiye, delivered a paper titled “*Reframing Urban Memory: Emotional Mapping of Istanbul’s Changing Historical Neighborhoods.*” These presentations resonated strongly with my work at Ayala Museum, particularly in how museums can engage communities in interpreting urban memory and intangible heritage. They offered valuable perspectives on integrating lived experiences, emotional mapping, and community narratives into exhibition development and public programming—approaches that are relevant to the Philippine context, where cities continue to evolve amid layered histories.



## THE FUTURE

Attending the ICOM-CC Committee Day sessions at ICCROM Sharjah inspired me to explore the possibility of bringing the discussions on the “*Need for Integrating Generational Knowledge in Heritage Conservation Practices*” by Dr. Satish Pandey and *Risk Management and Preventive Conservation* by Vinod Daniel to the Philippines—a potential project for the ICOM Philippines Board if the opportunity and funding allow. These conversations are particularly relevant, as many Philippine museums continue to face challenges in heritage preservation due to a declining number of trained conservators and limited resources. Moreover, this initiative could encourage a renewed appreciation of indigenous practices, which have often been overlooked with the advent of new technologies, and a platform to engage the younger generations who are most drawn to digital innovations and interactive experiences.

For now, their talks serve as important reference points, helping to recalibrate my preventive conservation practice within the context of Exhibitions and Collections Management. These insights also inform my knowledge-sharing advocacy on ethical practices in preventive conservation and collections stewardship, which I promote through talks, in-house sessions, blogs, and social media posts—efforts that, in turn, support cultural diplomacy in my work.



<https://web.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1157360673269588&set=pcb.1157360756602913>  
ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE FACEBOOK

I look forward to attending the 28th ICOM General Conference in the Netherlands, where I hope to continue participating in conversations on emerging trends, pressing issues, and the codes and guidelines that shape global museum practice. Most importantly, I would be honored to represent ICOM Philippines, having recently been elected to a three-year term as a member of its Board. If given the opportunity, this would be my third attendance at an ICOM General Conference: the first in Milan, Italy, in 2016, supported in part by the Grace Morley Participation Grant and Ayala Foundation, Inc.; and the second in Dubai, UAE, supported by the British Museum–International Training Programme.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the generous funding support of the **British Museum–International Training Programme Conference Grant** and the **Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust**, I was able to attend the 2025 ICOM General Conference in Dubai. I greatly value the guidance and support provided by Claire Messenger, George Peckham, and Amelia Kedge. I am also grateful that my seven-day participation was officially recognized by the management of **Ayala Museum**, a division of **Ayala Foundation, Inc.**