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International Training Programme Conference support grant 2025 Final Report

The 27th ICOM General Conference “The Future of Museums in a Rapidly Changing Communities”

The National Committee of ICOM United Arab Emirates (ICOM UAE), International Council of Museums

World Trade Centre in Dubai, UAE



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Introduction

Since 2016 I have been the Director the Russian Art Museum (Prof. A. Abrahamyan Collection) SNCO. Starting from 2024, I also lead the Association of Museum Workers and Friends, combined with some teaching classes as a Professor of Museum Studies at the State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia. As Director of the Russian Art Museum, I have succeeded in establishing an effective management system, developing public programs, and—through targeted fundraising—implementing contemporary and international exhibitions. In carrying out each initiative, I have relied on modern museum management approaches, placing particular emphasis on motivated teamwork.

My professional background has been significantly influenced by international training programs such as the “Museum Management” Summer School at the University of Antwerp in 2010, the British Museum’s International Training Program in 2014 as well as International Visitor Leadership Program in United States of America in 2017.

Active involvement and professional representation at the conference made it possible to present more broadly the activities of the Museum of Russian Art, its innovative programs, and prospects for international cooperation. More than 4000 museum professionals from across the Globe participated in the largest ICOM General Conference ever titled “The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities”.

These types of conference are giving numerous opportunities to start new projects, invite experts to your country, and start cross-country collaborations.

There were two reasons why I wanted to attend the conference. First, because I was invited to moderate one of the International Committee Sessions organized by ICOM INTERCOM held in 16th of November in EXPO City Dubai 2020. The session gave me an opportunity to talk about possible annual meeting of ICOM INTERCOM in 2027 in Yerevan.

The second reason was “ICOM Museum Fair 2025” which took place between 12-14th November. For the first time in the history of ICOM’s triennial conferences, one of the museum fair pavilions represented Armenia - through the Museum of Russian Art (Prof. A. Abrahamyan Collection). The Museum of Russian Art presented the “Moment of Art” program at the “ICOM Museum Fair 2025.” The project highlights the collaboration between art and fashion, inspired by museum collections.

Since my participation in the International Training Programme in 2014, I have proactively been involved in various legacy projects organized by the ITP. In 2016, I have been a co-organizer of ITP International Workshop in my country engaging almost 14 fellows and UK Partner museum colleagues to Yerevan. I thought my proactive involvement in the ITP will give me a chance to get the funding. In the frames of the organization where I work it was not possible to cover these costs since it is a budgetary organization and you have to predict these costs in the very beginning of the financial year.

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Another proportion of the funding by Lunaria LLC supported the Museum of Russian Art to participate in Museum Fair in the frames of the General Conference.



<https://dubai2025.icom.museum/>
<https://rusartmuseum.am/en/>

Conference experience

During the ICOM 27th General Conference in Dubai, I attended a wide range of lectures, panel discussions, workshops, committee sessions, and IC Days held both at the Dubai World Trade Centre and at off-site venues throughout the city and region. The overall theme — “The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities” — was explored through the three subthemes of Intangible Heritage, Youth Power, and Digital Technologies.

My favourite session was “Reframing Power: Whose Stories Do Museums Tell?”. I found this particularly compelling because it tackled critical questions around **representation, voice, and narrative authority** in museums. "Reframing Power: Whose Stories Do Museums Tell?" focused on how museums shape narratives, address representation, amplify diverse voices (like those of Dr. Natalie McGuire, Farid Rakun, Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi), and redefine their cultural responsibilities to move beyond traditional, often colonial, perspectives to include global, community-focused stories. It's a central theme in modern museology, questioning power dynamics in collection, interpretation, and exhibition.

The conference was a great opportunity to meet colleagues from across the globe. I had meaningful exchanges with museum directors and senior curators from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, particularly during plenary sessions, International Committee meetings, and networking events. These interactions were particularly productive, as they allowed for in-depth

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discussions on best practices, joint research initiatives, and possibilities for future co-curated exhibitions, publications, and exchange programmes.

In the frames of the conference, I have visited Expo City Dubai where ICOM INTERCOM was organizing Committee elections and panel discussion on Emerging next – step leaders: Museum Leadership House.

Study trips included important museums such as Louvre Abu Dhabi. Understanding how museums in the Gulf region address issues of identity, rapid urban development, sustainability, and audience diversity was a very educational experience. The harmony between strong narrative frameworks based in local and regional history and state-of-the-art architecture and exhibition technologies really impressed me.

During the conference and site visits, a number of significant observations were made: The UAE's museums function at the nexus of local cultural duty and global aspirations.

Innovation, digital tools, and immersive exhibition design are highly valued, frequently backed by significant institutional resources; audience engagement strategies place a high priority on inclusivity, multilingual interpretation, and accessibility, especially for younger and international audiences.

I provided professional experience from the Armenian museum and cultural sector to the conference, along with a perspective developed by working in an environment with significant cultural legacy but few resources - by providing examples of community-based projects and institutional resilience.

<https://mediaoffice.ae/en/news/2025/november/11-11/icom-dubai-2025-the-world-largest-gathering-of-museum-professionals-to-open-tomorrow>

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<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/11/07/icom-dubai-2025-future-of-culture>



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Networking

During the Conference and Museum Expo I have had a number of opportunities to meet various museum, companies and country representatives.

I will particularly highlight the Business Development Company Lyndsay White, DMG Events, and representatives from the Government of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman and many others.

These communications provide valuable resources for future partnerships which are based on mutual interest of the both sides to showcase the culture and heritage of our countries through our museums. The project Moment of Art exhibited during the ICOM Museum Fair was one of such potential partnership points.



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The project of combining the art and fashion became one of the interesting stop-overs for many guest of the conference. My Museum's pavilion visits included ICOM Vice President Nasir Al Darmaki, ICOM

President Antonio Rodriguez, ICOM Former President Emma Nardi, ICOM DG Medea Ekner, ICOM Board Member, Director of the Hunterian Museum in Scotland Steph Scholten, Charalampos Chaitas, ICO Treasurer Goranka Horjan and many others.



ITP reunions

During ICOM DUBAI 2025 I have had an opportunity to connect with ITP fellows from various countries and cohorts. Thanks to the group chat on WhatsApp we could easily connect and plan our meetings across the venue.

Some of the fellows have come across the Museum Fair and that was a perfect opportunity for me to introduce them my museum project and get to know many of them such as Julian Roa Triana (ITP 2025), Mattie Reynolds (ITP 2024), Astghik Marabyan (ITP 2017), Nagwa Bakr (ITP 2019), Heba Alders (ITP 2024), Hayk Mkrtychyan (ITP 2014, SF 2017), Noor Hasan (2017) and other fantastic fellows. These meetings always gives us the chance to remember wonderful days in London and partner museum but also find a chance to discuss what we can create together.

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The future

One of the important outcomes of the conference for me personally and professionally was the preliminary agreement of organizing an annual conference in Yerevan, Armenia in 2027.

During ICOM INTERCOM IC Day I was given the floor to introduce ICOM Armenia's activities during past 15 years. Having organized 3 ICOM Annual meetings and a number of workshops and other projects I have proposed of having ICOM INTERCOM Annual meeting in Yerevan in 2027. This request has been widely welcomed in the Board and it would be discussed during IC Board meeting in the coming weeks.

Acknowledgements

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust for their generous support to participate in ICOM General Conference in Dubai from 11-17 November, 2025.

This support means a lot for museum leaders from countries such as Armenia which opens up numerous opportunities to reconnect with other ITP fellows, create meaningful connections and create a legacy projects.

Thank you very much.

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