

Reflections on the 27th ICOM General Council Conference
11-17th November 2025
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

‘The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities’

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ICOM UK Travel Bursary Report



Wow! I can't quite believe the 27th triennial, ICOM 2025 General Conference is over.

Therefore, I won't - as the future actions for the international community of museum practitioners are just beginning and through ICOM, I am a humble, proud and energised museum creative and participant in global, positive change. As a recipient of an ICOM UK bursary

(supporting my accommodation costs), this award gave me the valuable opportunity to be present, to use my voice and to be part of a movement of inspirational leaders of culture.

My attendance at what might have been considered by non-attendees as 'just another conference' was much more than expected or deemed possible over five days, with over 4500+ delegates, Emirati royalty, volunteers and the host nation welcoming team for the UAE co-creating to ensure the most memorable collaborative, learning space at the Dubai World Trade Centre was the first class venue for museum and heritage creatives and collective to exchange knowledge and best practice.

I witnessed a global, shared vision with commitment yet urgency, energy and honesty to 'keep things real' and to recognise the professional, practical, geopolitical, ideological and economic challenges and barriers faced by many nations with goals of interpreting, sharing and celebrating our shared heritage through accessible and engaging museums and cultural heritage sites.

The united effort and leadership displayed on all levels for the conference to happen as it did, I hope to emulate as a model my future museology journey and heritage leadership output, within and for the global museums and heritage sector.

I thank the people of the Emirate of Dubai and the UAE for their high-quality in service for others, quality accommodation, hospitality, catering, public transport and sincere, warm welcome each day. I must add here that I heard the words 'you are most welcome' and actions to mirror, more than any other words or expressions throughout my visit, which have helped restore hope in kindness, citizenship and cultural exchange.

ICOM General Conference 2025 reinforced my continued belief and dedication to in-person (as well as digital) dialogue, cultural connection and the potential for the prosperity and growth for all people through the notion of 'museums without borders' and ICOM's approach to social renewal through inclusion.

My ICOM 2025 Conference highlights:

- 4500+ delegates, the largest conference I have attended in my museums and heritage career
- The presence, participation and speeches from members of the Al Maktoum family, the royal family of Dubai, UAE
- The welcome, hospitality and professionalism of the host nation, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- The community spirit, unity, dialogue and networking among delegates, organisers and volunteers.



Professional networks and new friendships through ICOM

Some of my favourite images of conference delegates together (below), on our shared learning journey as museum/ heritage creatives, made possible through ICOM membership.

THANK YOU to everyone I had the opportunity to converse and connect with, sharing experiences and plans and ideas for future projects and proposals to enhance museum spaces of the present and the future.



Conference Opening Event at the iconic Al Wasi Dome of Expo City Dubai, UAE



Key takeaways – Museums are:

- *Active networks with 'no borders' that can help prepare us for the future*
- *Creative spaces to inspire, educate, empower and connect with/for/by diverse communities*
- *Realised through concepts of co-created storytelling interpretation that reflect (ALL) the communities they could/should/must serve – with no exceptions!*
- *People-centred*
- *Spaces of influence, capacity building, transparency, accountability and inclusivity*
- *Vehicles of change that adapt - are accountable and transparent.*

Conference speeches and presentations:

There was much to absorb and reflect on the action-packed conference programme - the speeches, presentations and knowledge-sharing outputs and activities delivered throughout the conference.

I especially enjoyed the opening address by former ICOM President, Emma Nardi and the handover address by the new ICOM President, Antonio Rodriguez (2025-2028), who both highlighted the continued progression, vision and mission for ICOM and the geopolitical challenges and opportunities ahead.

The speech (Honorary Address) by Her Highness Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairperson of Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, was inspiring, courageous and relatable for the masses. Also, the inclusion of museum creatives and artists from diverse communities, namely El Anatsui, Ghanaian sculptor and Mulenga Kapwepwe, writer and social activist from the Women's History Museum of Zambia to name a few.



My Standout Excursion: Women's Museum ICOM Committee (Ethics), Saturday 15th November

As part of the conference programming immersive experiences were offered and I pre-selected a visit to the only museum in the UAE about the contributions of women, curated and preserved by women; founded and directed by Professor Dr Rafia Obiad Ghubash.

It was a major highlight for me as I learnt about personalised experiences and self-discovery journey explored in a museum context. The exhibitions celebrated women's multifaceted knowledge, skills, acumen, creativity, entrepreneurial talent and sense of relationship with the world. The ICOM group viewed archive footage, explored the exhibition galleries, reflected and discussed academic papers presented and speakers with specialised knowledge in ethical themes and dilemmas.

Women's Museum, Dubai personal highlights:

- The use of integrated authentic and meaningful artefacts donated from the founder's family collections, friends and from Emirati women
- My personal contributions to the day – reading selected poetry and texts on display for the group/ at the request of Professor Dr Rafia Obiad Ghubash, founder and director of the Women's Museum Dubai, UAE
- A group tour led by Professor Ghubash and thought-provoking papers presented with time for questions from the audience.

Key takeaways from the Women's Museum:

- *Women must be part of any decision-making process (especially within museums) that affects their lives*
- *Museum professional relationships/connections must be sustainable, long-term and consistent with consent through co-creativity and accountable actions.*
- *Seek out new, human-centred experiences to combine and intertwine new interpretations of the human experience*
- *Don't be afraid to question, review, reframe, rethink and even 'unlearn' traditional narratives and storytelling approaches – consider 'gaps' in history and silence/silenced voices waiting to be heard and unearthed.*





My museum and heritage career plans for the future...

- Strengthen partnerships and support for museum professionals overseas and in the UK
- Explore and test the potential of AI integration in my heritage /museums creative practice (for example, its potential use in oral history, exhibition curation, new audience engagement, strategic planning and archiving collections)
- Be a delegate at ICOM UK Conference, Oxford England UK, April 2026
- Be more active as a member of the ICOM Committee (Ethics)
- Be a delegate at the 28th ICOM Conference, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2028.