

Symposium Title: **Discovery, Display and Debate: New Agendas for University Museums**

Period of Symposium and Location:

25 to 26 October 2012 at the Norwich Cathedral Hostry (25 Oct) and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, UEA (26 Oct)

Names of Invited Speakers:

UK:

Rt. Hon Charles Clarke (Visiting Professor, University of East Anglia, and former Secretary of State for Education and Home Secretary responsible for 2004 University Museums Advocacy Document)

Professor Nick Merriman (Director of Manchester Museum, and Chair of UK University Museums Group)

Dr Ken Arnold (Director of Public Programmes, Wellcome Collection)

Professor Chris Gosden (University of Oxford, formerly of Pitt-Rivers Museum)

Professor John Mack (University of East Anglia)

Dr Veronica Sekules (Deputy Director, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts)

Dr Simon Kaner (SISJAC and UEA Centre for Japanese Studies)

Dr Akira Matsuda (School of World Art and Museology, UEA)

Japan:

Professor OHNO Terufumi (Director, Kyoto University Museum)

Professor NISHINO Yoshiaki (Director, University Museum, University of Tokyo)

Professor IWASAKI Naoko (Kyoto University Museum)

Professor OHARA Masahiro (Hokkaido University Museum)

Dr NAGAMASU Hidetoshi (Kyoto University Museum)

Dr MOTOKAWA Masaharu (Kyoto University Museum)

Objective of Symposium and Outline:

The objective of the symposium was to discuss and debate the roles that university museums should play in contemporary society by taking a Japan-UK comparative approach, and to explore the possibility for collaborations between Japan and UK university museums. The questions that were addressed included: Should university museums be different from other museums? If so, how?; How do university museums express the missions of the universities of which they are a part?; What is the relationship between a university and its museum(s)?; How do we classify different kinds of university museums? Are there any limitations in this classification?; What are the commonalities and differences, advantages and challenges between the 'comprehensive' museums found in Japan and the discipline-specific museums more common in the UK?; How do the collections acquired and donated by university researchers materialise particular fields of research?; How can university museums contribute to interdisciplinarity?; What are the advantages (and the disadvantages, if any) of the collaboration of university museums? What if this collaboration is international?; What funding strategy should university museums adopt?

Report of Event:

On 25 and 26 October 2012, museum and academic professionals from the UK and Japan met in Norwich to discuss the future of university museums in a symposium titled, "Discovery, Display and Debate: New Agendas for University Museums".

On 25 October 2012, the evening lectures by Professors Ohno and Nishino at Norwich Cathedral Hostry introduced the two speakers' views on the university museum and presented various activities carried out at the Kyoto University Museum and the University Museum of the University of Tokyo. The lectures were open to the public and well attended – the large venue was almost at full capacity. The Q&A sessions were fully animated thanks to the skilful chairing by Rt. Hon Charles Clarke, and there were a series of thought-provoking questions from the audience and perceptive responses given by the two lecturers. The evening lectures prepared the ground for more specialised discussions to take place in the workshop, which was held the following day at the lecture theatre of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, within the campus of the University of East Anglia.

The workshop generated a number of intellectually sophisticated discussions and debates. The discussions initially centred on the characteristics of university museums. The consensus appeared to be that university museums are similar to 'other' museums in that they can contribute to teaching and research. What makes university museums unique is primarily their ability to draw on the many strengths of their parent institution, namely universities, with which they share a negotiated relationship. Two areas that were particularly focused on during discussions and presentations were the topics of interdisciplinarity and the future of university museums.

Regarding interdisciplinarity, most participants agreed that many projects undertaken by university museums, in particular exhibitions, are opportunities for experts from various disciplines to come together to work on collections in ways they otherwise would not, and this often results in actively promoting interdisciplinary research.

In discussing the future of university museums, the need to first identify the mission of the university was recognised. Taking into consideration that many collections held by university museums used to have very different roles in universities from they have today, the participants concurred that university museums must be reflexive and progressive in adapting to the current and future needs of those they serve in using their collections.

The symposium thus stimulated a lot of insightful discussion and contributed to refining our understanding of the mission of university museums in the 21st century, both in Japan and the UK. While the participants thus gained great intellectual benefit from such discussions, there were also suggestions about actual collaborative projects between Japanese and UK university museums. Among these the most notable was the idea of bringing a “mobile museum” exhibition of the University Museum of the University of Tokyo to the UK. The mobile museum projects aim to put up small exhibitions displaying university museum collections that are otherwise deactivated in places usually not associated with museums or universities. Evoking an image of a museum that moves around freely, over 80 mobile museums projects thus far implemented in various parts of the world have proven attractive for sponsors and economically efficient. Ideas are currently being exchanged between Japanese and UK participants about the feasibility of realising a mobile museum exhibition in multiple venues in the UK – this is arguably one of the biggest outcomes of the successful symposium.

Dr. Akira Matsuda, School of World Art Studies and Museology, University of East Anglia



Q+A during public lecture at Norwich Cathedrale hostry



Symposium participants