ASEF — Unplugged Conversations on the Arts in Asia and Europe

Singapore
As repositories of collections and works, and as centres of learning and knowledge open to the public, the role of museums changes as societies evolve. In recent years, many museums have increasingly promoted participatory activities, used technology to digitise and present their collections, collaborate among them and enable more active user engagement, and have reflected on their social and educational value. In many places, museums can be seen to contribute to strategies in economic development and in urban and regional regeneration and sustainability. From an external perspective, they also face increasing demands to be accountable and to respond to social and political issues, as recent debates on colonialism and the return of objects, and on private sponsorship of exhibitions have shown.

How does the function of museums change when information and knowledge, from all sorts and in many formats, become increasingly widespread? How can they compete with the extensive offer of cultural, educational and leisure activities available in our cities and countries? What are the drivers and the challenges for collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders, including schools, community groups, and public authorities? As public funding decreases in many countries, what are the implications of reliance on private sponsorship, e.g. in terms of programming and accessibility? How can museums continue to balance continuity and change, in a world that is constantly evolving? What priorities can be established for international museum cooperation in this context?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed at the 13th edition of ASEF Unplugged, a discussion on the role of museums in the 21st century. The conversation is part of the ‘ASEF Unplugged – Conversations on the Arts in Asia and Europe’ event-series, an initiative of ASEF, which offers open and authentic peer-to-peer conversations on themes of mutual interest. This 13th edition of ASEF Unplugged results from the partnership between ASEF and the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). Some of the museums involved are members of the Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS), a network currently chaired by the ACM and which ASEF has supported since its inception in 2000.
Born in March 1976, Manuel Rabaté is a graduate of the Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po, 1998), and of HEC Business School (2001). He began his career as a Deputy Director at the auditorium of the Musée du Louvre from 2002 until 2005. He participated among other things in the creation of new programmes on Islamic Arts in the context of the first performance contract concluded between the French government and the museum for its modernisation. He joined the Musée du quai Branly as a Deputy Director of Cultural Development a year before its opening in 2006, and structured the administrative and financial management of many key issues for the opening. After the opening, he led the launching of the first exhibitions abroad including "Masques - Beauté des Esprits" exhibition at the Bahrain National Museum, 2008. Manuel Rabaté joined Agence France-Muséums in 2008, a year after the signing of the intergovernmental agreement between France and the United Arab Emirates marking the birth of the Louvre Abu Dhabi project. Subsequently, he has followed the project from its conceptual phase until its operational implementation as a Secretary General and the acting CEO since 2010. He was appointed CEO of Agence France-Muséums in 2013 under the proposal of the Board of Directors and its Chairman, Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, to set up in Abu Dhabi a multidisciplinary team of museum professionals and follow through the phases of the project realization in collaboration with the major French museums and their UAE partners.

In September 2016, Manuel Rabaté was appointed Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi by Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi). Aside from his duties in the service of museums, Manuel Rabaté has also chaired the reflection group-Culture & Management, in which he had created the museum department. He has also taught Arts and Cultural Management at various universities in France and Abu Dhabi (Paris-Dauphine University, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi since the establishment of the Master in "History of Art and Museum Studies").
Ann Follin is the Director General of the Swedish National Museums of World Culture and leads a dedicated staff in four different museums situated in the two largest cities in Sweden; the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm as well as the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. Follin has more than 30 years of leadership experience in various senior positions in the cultural sector, mostly in the field of museums and exhibitions. She is passionately dedicated to leading and transforming institutions by involving the staff in formulating and implementing challenging visions. She was the Director of the multi-award winning National Museum of Science and Technology in Sweden (2008-2015), Director General of the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions (2002-2008) and the Deputy Director as well as Head of Exhibitions and Head of Information and Programme at the Museum of Work (1989-2000).

She has been active on the boards of various institutions, including the University of Gothenburg, Gotland University, the Swedish National Maritime Museums, chairman of the Swedish Science Centres, Advisory Board RePublik - Audience Development, Digisam – a National coordination of digitisation, digital preservation and digital access to cultural heritage, vice chairman of the Asia-Europe Museum Network and member of the Board of Trustees at Deutsches Museum.

Kennie Ting is the Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum, and concurrently Group Director, Museums at the National Heritage Board (NHB) Singapore, overseeing national museums and festivals managed by the NHB. As Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum, he has overseen the shift in the museum’s curatorial approach from a geographical focus to a thematic, cross-cultural focus, and has helmed recent exhibitions on the Arts of Myanmar, Angkor and Korea, on Buddhist and Hindu Art across Asia, and on the material culture of cosmopolitan Asian Port Cities. He is presently the Chairperson of the Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS), which aims to promote mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe through collaborative museum-based cultural activity.

Before NHB, he worked in the former Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, where he was involved in developing strategies for heritage and the arts, including the Renaissance City Plan III and the recent Arts and Culture Strategic Review. He is interested in the history of travel and the heritage of Asian port cities and is the author of the books, The Romance of the Grand Tour – 100 Years of Travel in South East Asia and Singapore 1819 – A Living Legacy.