

THE UNESCO Courier

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Reimagining museums

- "The museum acts as a temple of belief in the future"

Interview with
Krzysztof Pomian

- In **Ghana**, Nana Oforiatta Ayim's mobile museum

- In **Australia**, the future on display

- Exhibiting living heritage in **China**

OUR GUEST

Data scientist
Rumman Chowdhury:
"We could be entering a post-truth world"



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Editorial

The digital revolution gives us access to the works of the greatest artists at any time, from anywhere. And yet, more and more visitors are queuing for hours on end to see paintings or sculptures they could be viewing on a screen in the comfort of their own homes.

True, today's museums have little in common with the curiosity cabinets of yesteryear, reserved for a privileged few. As living, open institutions, they have adapted to the technological and societal issues of their time. Much more than mere display cases for visitors to gaze into, museums have become major economic and cultural players, and cities have recognized their power of attraction.

And besides, the primary missions of museums (preserving objects, research, education, etc.) cannot be accomplished via internet, as emphasized by the Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, adopted by UNESCO in 2015.

Museums remain, more than ever, a link between past and present, a place of transmission between generations, the repository of collective memory. And when they are looted or destroyed, as has happened in recent years in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is not simply heritage objects that disappear: part of the very identity of these countries is undermined. This viewpoint dictates UNESCO's efforts to help these countries rehabilitate their damaged museums.

Another reason why the public still flocks to see the paintings of the great masters today is that the emotion they emanate is only truly palpable when we stand face to face with them, in the singular and unique relationship that is established between the artist's original work and the viewer. Only in the museum can we perceive what the German philosopher and art historian Walter Benjamin called the "aura" of a work of art: "the unique appearance of a distance, however close it may be".

Agnès Bardon
Editor-in-Chief

Jean-François Spricigo's shadow theatre



Photos:
Jean-François Spricigo,
courtesy of Galerie
Camera Obscura Paris

Text:
Agnès Bardon,
UNESCO



“ Let nothing come between you and the light.” Nothing could better describe the work of Belgian photographer Jean-François Spricigo than this injunction from American poet Henry David Thoreau, which is highlighted in Spricigo’s book *Nous l’horizon resterons seul*. The series he shot on his travels to Reunion Island, Mayotte and French Guiana follows this dictate to the letter.

A sovereign light makes faces spring out of nature, sculpts shadows, pierces the tropical night. Captured in black and white outline, far from the usual colourful exuberance, his landscapes become life, movement and breath. More than any other, his silent poetry tells us about quivering twilight, a sultry afternoon, the density of silence. It has the power and fragility of a dream.

Human, animal and tree are treated as equals, without judgment or hierarchy. With the same respect. A caiman’s jaws emerging from the river, a human silhouette, foliage – these are just some of the apparitions in this shadow theatre, where all are in their place and boundaries are blurred. Between day and night. Between the wild world and the human world. Between dream and reality. These images aren’t to be looked at. They have to be lived.

Jean-François Spricigo is a multidisciplinary artist who also writes, creates soundtracks and performs in theatre. In 2023, he won the Prix Nadar Gens d’images, awarded every year to a book of photography. ■



















