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EXHIBITION*

Proceedings of the ICOMON meetings held in: Stavanger, Norway, 1995, Vienna, Austria, 1996 / Memoria de las reuniones de ICOMON celebradas en: Stavanger, Noruega, 1995, Viena, Austria, 1996

[Madrid] : Museo Casa de la Moneda, [1997]
269 p. – ISBN 84-88298-03-X., pp. 56-61

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In institutions such as ours we aim to optimize the space available in the best way. This is not always so easy as we depend on a wide variety of organisms (central banks, mints, etc.), and as our installations are not always the most suitable for our function as a museum. We have to look for a more reasonable location for the items, whether in storage or permanent exhibition in such a way that at any moment the most suitable conservation, localization and protection of the collection as well as the anticipated gradual increasing of the collection pieces is assured. Although throughout the course of these intense sessions we have seen interesting specific cases regarding conservation, we do not consider it superfluous if we make a brief review of some basic considerations that we should anticipate when facing a real or desirable situation for the collections of our respective museums.

STORAGE

1. Reserve room/deposit

When preparing the reserve room/deposit we have to take the following aspects into account:

A. Space and location conditions

The deposit should be located as near as possible to the place of work of the conservation team, without architectural barriers that might prevent for example, the use of trolleys. It should also have enough free space in case it should be necessary to increase the number of containers (cabinets, monetaires, shelves, compacts, etc.) or to locate the working station inside.

B. Security

If the place is not located inside a burglar-proof room or the door is not reinforced, in addition to a safety lock device, a set of magnetic balances in each of the possible accesses should be added. In all cases and depending on the budget available, ultrasonic presence detectors, closed circuit TV, infrared, smoke detectors, etc., all of them connected to a central alarm, should be installed as well. Likewise the fire systems (extinguishers, gas, water, etc.) should be chosen in regard to the physical characteristics of the items kept there. This is to avoid, in case of fire, that the remedy should not be worse than the cause that triggers off the system.

C. Climatization

The main objective of our intervention will be to give the deposit a stable environment around the clock and for a year, since what is really

harmful for the collections are the sudden changes in humidity and temperature levels.

When the air contribution is provided directly from outside or from another room without climatization, filters should be used in order to avoid pollution, dust or prejudicial gases. Also the appropriate thermo-hygrometric control device should be placed to detect possible variations at any time. This would also affect a statistical control by periods. In any case, we must keep the real situation of our collection in mind when implementing a generally expensive climatization project, since on many occasions and because of the specific characteristics of the building or of the history of our museum, the pieces can be perfectly stabilized and adapted to apparently adverse climatic conditions. A hasty search for museology-manual-ideal conditions can cause problems and provoke the appearing of conservation pathologies until then non-existent. Another environmental factor to be taken into account is the illumination system that, depending on the type chosen (fluorescent, incandescent, halogens, etc.) can alter the relation between temperature and humidity. Though the intensity of light will allow the curator to work without experiencing eye strain either by excess or mainly by defect of light.

D. Containers

We call containers the furniture or shelves in the deposit store, the trays, the monetaires, albums, envelopes, etc. (supports). Depending on our budget, the physical characteristics of the collection and the available space, may be mobile or fixed which is very important when moving around inside the deposit. A large cabinet/monetary safety-case may have its interior full of trays, or a cabinet or shelf may contain several monetaires of smaller size and possibly, more manageable. The use of mobile compacts has provided a solution to the lack of space.

2. Supports

Once the room is ready, it is necessary to decide the support which will contain and be in direct contact with the pieces and that, amongst other functions, will have to protect the items against pollution, dust and, even insects. They also have to create an interior microclimate in which temperature and humidity levels are maintained on a constant level. The supports should supply protection against possible harmful luminescent radiations. The chosen support should give us as far as possible, the control, access and study of the pieces.

A. Coins and Medals

In general, for the storage of coins and medals and depending on their size and material, we have monetaires, albums and envelopes.

- Monetaires - with plastic, metal or wood trays.

Trays have the advantage of an easier access and contemplation of the pieces as a whole, although it is clear that a wrong movement, very closely connected with the size of the pieces, can cause the coins to finish on the floor with the corresponding disorder and possible damage to the pieces. The monetaires with large metallic trays usually give the biggest handling problems (swaying) although

we will not be able to use wood monetaires if manufactured of oak or with certain types of resins or varnishes. In addition, in certain climates the wood will swell. Certain plastics which produce corrosive vapours are also forbidden in the manufacture of trays, although those with neutral behaviour, such as the plexiglas, have many advantages of duration and handling.

- Envelopes of plastic, paper, cardboard, etc.

The paper/cardboard envelopes – neutral - have the advantage of having a greater surface to include data for classifying. Though, depending on the material used, the handling and contemplation of the piece can become complicated. In general, we should avoid those made of plastic because they retain humidity and may even destroy the pieces, especially, those made of iron or lead. The envelopes are usually kept in boxes - cardboard, metal, plastic - and depending on their size, in pages of albums.

- Albums

The pages of albums are generally of plastic. The pieces are received either in cardboard, in an envelope or directly in the spaces provided for this purpose in the page itself. This simplifies the viewing of obverse and reverse of the piece. As in the case of envelopes, the plastic sheets can harm the piece and encourage the environmental water vapour condensation. Furthermore, the piece can become blurred. Moreover, they will gradually lose flexibility and become opaque as a result of their degradation process.

B. Paper money

Concerning the storage of paper money we will basically deal with albums and envelopes. For albums, the pages should be preferably of transparent polyester for the viewing of both sides. This will also avoid unnecessary fingering of the piece. Moreover, because of their interchangeable condition, they will facilitate the storage of banknotes according to the criteria we establish (country, city, historical period, etc.). The envelopes or covers when not transparent - in any case of neutral paper - will oblige us to take out the piece for its study with consequent handling.

C. Other collections

For specimens of a different nature from the above-mentioned, we will apply the general criteria for storage stipulated for collections of an archaeological or ethnographic nature. Therefore the relative humidity should be between 40-45 to 50-55% and temperature between 18 and 22°C. They should be stored in containers able to resist the weight of pieces such as blanks, ingots, tools, machinery, etc.

More generally, we will have to be very careful with the basic products of which all the existing elements in our stores have been manufactured. Materials with neutral behaviour (metals, woods, plastics, resins, paints, paper, adhesive, cardboard, etc.) will be used at the moment of acquisition. They should not react in a negative way when in contact with air or with the material of the items (for example, with banknote inks). For this reason, in each case we will verify the contraindicated materials and we will study the technical specifications to be given by

the supplier in detail. The results of this research will be compared with the analyses carried out by ourselves and in case of doubt we will renounce the use of these materials.

EXHIBITION

Whether or not an exhibition is permanent, for numismatic museums in general it is expected that we provide at least a minimum of showcases with a sample of coins and/or banknotes. However, depending on the nature and size of the exhibition serious museographic problems will arise, since the coin is one of the most difficult to locate in an exhibition. Furthermore, and let us not deceive ourselves, the numismatic exhibition is usually without interest to the non-enthusiast. The cooperation of designers and curators is of great importance in obtaining a final result satisfactory to all.

1. Museography basic guidelines

The professionals in charge of numismatic collections and museums when faced with an exhibition plan have to take the following aspects into account:

A. The object and nature of the exhibition

Evidently, from the conceptual, design and constructive point of view, a show planned as a permanent exhibition is not the same as one of a temporary nature and limited duration. We will also have to keep in mind the richness, quality and interest of our collection, the type of museum or exhibition room which will lodge the display as well as the subject itself: basic numismatic script, monetary economy, general economy, or if our pieces will be framed as a complement (on occasions ornamental) within an exhibition of artistic or historical nature, etc.

B. Intention and public objective

That is: What are our/their aims in exhibiting our collections: to educate, to amuse, to inform? What economic and human resources are at our disposal? How much time will we have? To whom are our efforts addressed? What is expected from us?

C. Fixed and itinerant exhibitions

The development of the script and the design of the exhibiting and informative elements should be adapted to the criterion with which the show is prepared. Depending on the available budget and later requirements, the different elements may be temporary or reusable. In the latter case, they should be of a polyvalent design adaptable to different spaces. The dimensions and weight should not pose a permanent problem.

D. Vertical or horizontal conception of the elements

A vertical or horizontal conception of the elements is decisive to fix the pieces to the supports/bottom of the showcases. If, for example, the set

up is purely horizontal, it will be sufficient to deposit - without fixing - the piece on the bottom. If there is a slight inclination inside the showcase, we will have to arrange fulcrum to avoid a movement. If, on the contrary, the exhibition or its interior is totally vertical, we will have to consider fixing elements or substances to avoid any possible movement or fall of the piece.

E. Argumental focus

Museographically speaking, the way in which the script is approached and the original idea is developed, can solve a lot of problems and, above all, may provide an answer to the critical voices that always arise.

For example, if we are explaining the Greek world and we say that through its coins we can get to know aspects of its flora, fauna, divinities, etc. we should use a thematic approach. In this way the public can only see the image we are interested in, showing only the obverse or reverse of the piece concerned. Thus we will avoid having to satisfy those who always regret being unable to contemplate the hidden face, which would oblige us to provide two similar coins - if we have them - or a mould, a photo or the well-known mirror, which can be useful in certain specific cases, but not in the case of an exhibition with hundreds or thousand of pieces.

2. Showcase

As in the case of the storage support, the showcases should be designed and provided with sufficient elements to protect the pieces against pollution, dust, insects and corrosive agents. The showcase should also create a microclimate that maintains the most suitable levels of humidity and temperature, as well as the most appropriate lighting to dramatize those aspects or details we think necessary. In addition it should assure a minimum protection against attempted robbery. If we do not have a type of display case which assures us a certain reliability in all aspects it will be impossible to show the pieces in our museums due to their nature, value and size.

Possibly one of the most important functions of a showcase, and very especially in the case of coins and banknotes, is to provide the piece with a frame bringing it nearer to our human level and height and reducing the large spatial differences between the room, the object and the observer himself. If not, the exhibition itself - the content - would lose all its importance and our interest.

A. The design

Our showcase, in addition to carrying out the functions we have commented for this or for the storage of pieces, should fulfil the following requirements:

1. It should be adapted to the environment or to the type of exhibition in which it will develop its function. Excessively vanguard designs tend to become obsolete long before others which are more classic or simple. Likewise, through the design some problems should be

solved such as the tendencies or requirements of the different types of public.

2. It should be stable and of solid construction, to absorb the possible vibrations which cause the fall, turn or movement of the coin. This problem is very well known by Mint Museums with production areas in our environment, or else by museums located in old buildings or with wooden floors and where alarms go off without apparent cause. It is also important that the showcase is able to resist possible movements without damage.
3. It should be hermetic, not only because of environmental concerns but for security as well. Therefore, it should have a structure without weak points and with reliable glass and with a break detection device. Locks should also be inviolable but of simple use and maintenance and with alarm contacts. It is very important that the opening method of the showcase does not jeopardize - because of its weight or complexity - the curators working, since we are very often asked for pieces to be studied, photographed or loaned which are in the display cases.
4. The illuminating system and its accessories will be placed, whenever possible, outside the case in order not to alter the environmental conditions and to facilitate maintenance. Depending on the type of light and the material of the most delicate pieces, the use of filters should be anticipated according to the different radiations and will even be applied to glass to control the external light whether natural or artificial.
5. The design of the showcase should take the following aspects into account: the environmental intervention, control devices or apparatus for application of substances in specific treatments etc. These elements should be supplied without the need to open or to take down the display case.

B. Constructive, ornamental and fixing materials

Our recommendations for storage are applicable to the exhibition. Oak, lightly cured woods, and conglomerates carried out with a resin or adhesive basis, emanating organic acids or corrosive gases are out of the question, as well as silicones, lacquers, varnishes and paints with similar problems. Fabrics, felts, wall fabrics and velvets that may retain humidity, will be full of acids; the same applies to cardboard and papers - if cotton based - will have an optimum behaviour in time.

As far as the different fixing systems of the pieces are concerned, pulps and adhesive tapes, microcrystalline waxes, plastic capsules, pins (of copper, steel - with or without protection - plastic, etc.), corner bands and covers, and polyester bands - banknotes, and all that our imagination can create may be used, although it also may be very harmful for our collections. In any case, whether using fixers, constructing display cases or storing pieces, it is very dangerous to generalize solutions or to make recommendations. The best we can do is to ask our colleagues or prestigious specialists, since it is better "to learn from the mistakes of another collection" than to experiment with one's own.