



## SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

### **Achieving the Freer Circulation of Cultural Artifacts**

Session 453

May 9-14, 2008



#### **Session Summary:**

From May 9-14, 2008, the Salzburg Global Seminar convened its 453<sup>rd</sup> session – and its annual arts and culture session - on “*Achieving the Freer Circulation of Cultural Artifacts*” at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg. Sixty two participants from twenty-nine countries gathered for the five-day session, aimed at building consensus among cultural authorities and museum representatives from around the world on ways to overcome legal, political, and practical obstacles to the circulation of cultural objects. Participants worked together to identify and assess new and better ways to promote the sharing of art and artifacts – from virtual access to practical strategies for significantly expanding loan programs worldwide. Whereas there are many museum conferences worldwide, few strive to bring together a multi-disciplinary and truly global group of participants for an open, informal exchange of thoughts and ideas in a neutral setting. The gathering in Salzburg, generously supported by The Edward T. Cone Foundation, succeeded in providing an evaluative international forum of this type, which brought diverse experts from a range of national and professional contexts into dialogue and gave them the opportunity to reflect deeply and openly on ways to increase the international exchange of cultural artifacts.

The session faculty was co-chaired by **Michael Conforti**, director of The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and president-elect of the Association of Art Museum Directors and **Neil MacGregor**, director of the British Museum. Formal presenters included **Maxwell Anderson**, the director and chief executive officer of the Indianapolis Museum of Art; **Idle Farah**, director general of the National Museums of Kenya; **Yves Le Fur**, deputy director responsible for permanent collections at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris; **Laurent Lévi-Strauss**, chief of the section of museums and cultural objects at UNESCO; **John Mack**, professor of world studies and museology at East Anglia University in the United Kingdom; **Ilber Ortayli**, director of the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul; **Norman Palmer**, a visiting professor of law at King's College London and chair of the United Kingdom's Treasure Valuation Committee; **Anne Imelda Radice**, director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington; and **Kavita Singh**, associate professor of arts and aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi.

The participants included emerging and established leaders in the museum field, all with a strong interest in improving communication among and cooperation between museums around the world. Participants were selected - through an application and nomination process - to bring a diversity of professional knowledge, experience and focus, as well as regional, cultural and gender diversity to the gathering. Participants included museum professionals, cultural historians, art history scholars, journalists, public sector representatives, and members of non-governmental organizations involved in cultural exchange. All participants and presenters were housed on-site and took meals together, maximizing the opportunity for sharing and learning through informal and loosely structured discussions alongside the formal presentations and working group sessions.

The seminar proved to be highly interactive, encouraging cross-cultural comparisons of data and experiences and providing many opportunities to discuss and share best practices. The format included a series of panel presentations given by the members of the faculty, followed by lengthy plenary discussions, during which all participants were encouraged to ask questions and share additional insights from their professional experiences and their specific contexts. Presentations focused on the following questions: 1) how can the goal of improved access for all be achieved? 2) what role can international organizations play in supporting the freer circulation of cultural artifacts? 3) how can we create the political will and public support for improved access; what is the role of cultural ministries and policymakers in this endeavor? 4) what can museums and their associations do? and 5) what case studies show this can work and what best practices can be identified for application in a variety of contexts?

In addition to the series of presentations, three sessions were devoted to working groups focusing on specific aspects of the session theme and providing an opportunity for sustained, specialized discussion in small groups. The groups were facilitated by several of the presenters and focused on the following questions: 1) how to overcome legal obstacles? (*Palmer*) 2) how to overcome political obstacles? (*Radice*) 3) how to overcome logistical and institutional obstacles (*Anderson, Farah*); and 4) how to approach ethical and moral issues? (*Conforti, Singh*). On the final afternoon of the seminar, each workshop group presented its findings which are summarized in the complete session report.

In conclusion, the participants agreed on the following list of areas where further efforts are needed to advance the freer circulation of cultural artifacts:

The Seminar participants affirm a responsibility to advocate for increased exchange, to circulate the objects in our care as widely as possible and to multiply the contexts in which they are shown. However, participants acknowledge that existing inequalities may inhibit the exchange of cultural objects. We suggest that special attention should be given to the difference between the ownership of cultural objects and other commodities. To advance the freer movement of cultural objects further effort in the following areas is needed:

**I. Indemnity**

Creation of an international indemnity scheme

**II. Immunity**

Development of an international convention on anti-seizure

**III. Regulation of Loans Process**

Creation of an equitable international standard of loan procedure

**IV. Environmental Consciousness**

Minimization of the long-term environmental impact of the freer circulation of objects

**V. Illegality**

Development of international tools and principles concerning the handling of illicit objects

**VI. Building a Community of Practice**

Nurturing of international networks and sharing of knowledge among cultural institutions

The full session report is available at:  
<http://www.salzburgseminar.org/go/453report>