

First of all I would like to say that I am honored to be here today, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers for inviting me.

To see so many people gathered here is very impressive, and although we are cultural professionals, I can imagine we also are from sometimes very different specific professions. Even within the museums I am going to talk about, we face different realities.

That is why I wanted to be pragmatic, and keep what follows simple, because beyond our differences of means and context, we share intentions.

I will talk about Museums

Museums are conservatories, places where objects produced by humans or nature are preserved from the vicissitudes of time for their historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, technical, or aesthetic value.

We preserve material and immaterial objects because we find them remarkable in some way and want to pass on this remarkable quality to future generations.

There is a dual approach here—which may seem contradictory—of

- isolation and accumulation, protection, conservation
- sharing, making available, understandable

This dual approach exists wherever museums have emerged.

In France, for you to understand where I speak from, these two ambitions have historically been taken to the extremes.

- **very long term preservation** (in fact it is supposed to be forever) was ensured as early as 1566 with the Edict of Moulins, which separated some royal assets, originally real estate or part of the Crown Jewels, and recognized them as belonging not to the king personally, but to the whole kingdom. This was the first recognition that certain treasures belonged to the entire nation and could not be sold or given away.

There lies the origin of the current status of French museum collections: their inalienable nature, which protects them by law from being sold or dispersed.

This is the first and most important way of safeguarding cultural heritage for us French people.

This is what has enabled French collections to become so rich and helped to protect so many treasures throughout Time.

- **Concerning sharing, the second cardinal objective for museums**, we have had individual initiatives in France starting with the Renaissance in the 16th century, but things became systematic during the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century (which also destroyed a lot but quickly changed paradigm).

Museums that were before under royal patronage became at that Time the property of the nation and were made accessible to all, with an ideal inherited from the period we call Enlightenment (in the early 18th century) of universality and equal access.

This universality applied to the public, but it also developed quite rapidly to the collections themselves.

Today, it seems to me that museums around the world, regardless of their individual or national history, share this dual focus.

The role of museums in sharing is taking on a more important dimension than before, thanks to

- progress in Education (intellectual access to a wider audience)
- scientific advances in technical analysis, materials, and dating (which provide more in-depth access to the works)
- and the development of means of communication and networks for broader technical and virtual access

It is this sharing I believe that will ensure the preservation of Heritage in the long term.

To preserve Heritage and establish culture as a stand alone goal in the post-2030 global development agenda, we must, as cultural professionals, think collectively, on an international scale.

I know this may sound naïve and optimistic, but I strongly believe that if we want to achieve great goals, we must first allow ourselves to dream big.

We all face the same challenges of

- Illicit trafficking of cultural property
- Political dangers (wars, vandalism, etc.)
- Disinformation, manipulation, and radicalization of opinions
- The direct or indirect impact of Climate change on Heritage preservation

Museums have tremendous potential to welcome different communities and build resilient cultural

Identities, because Museums play different roles for each category of people, and their role changes over a lifetime time depending on the age and trajectory of every person.

They are among so many other things

- A place of wonder and early socialization for young children
- A place of inspiration for artists, and creative people
- A database, repository, and source of analysis for scholars such as historians, archeologists, materials scientists and technical historians
- A place of learning, a place of reflecting on one's own cultural identity
- **A place where everyone can encounter Alterity, whether it be chronological, geographical or sociological**

It seems to me that our role is to create the conditions and encourage dialogue.

- first between us Heritage professionals from all countries (to share concerns and recipes)
- also between different professional specialities (Here I include artists, academics, engineers and technicians, all of them can benefit from one another particular insight)
- between those specialists and audiences, for meeting and confrontation bring new questions for the first ones, and the joy of sharing last scientific discoveries for the last ones
- among audiences themselves. Because of our important commitment to be inclusive and to address everyone's needs and specificities, we tend to put them into groups (physiological for disabled ones, sociological, geographical, or even cultural). But we have to keep in mind that we should in the end not discriminate and that the more fundamental objective is to foster a sense of broader belonging, of wider community.

This multileveled dialogue creates innovation, particularly for artists from different disciplines: theater, music, dance, and other collective performances

This multileveled dialogue creates understanding and respect ; it is specially true when we think of welcoming different spiritualities.

Museums are widely distributed throughout the world, they are a recognizable landmarks and they share the same values of dialogue and openness, enshrined in the International code of ethics that we all adhere to.

Universal museums are an essential element in deepening dialogue between cultures—there is nothing worse than everyone staying in their own corner and prejudices, nothing more dangerous for the challenges we face.

Their universal distribution, on the other hand, seems to me to be an indispensable element in the balance and the efficiency of this dialogue.

In short, **I personally advocate for the universal distribution of universal museums**, and as a consequence for ethical stewardship in conserving Southeast Asian artifacts wherever they are.

On a personal level, I also believe that mid and long term cross-deposits between museums constitute an excellent way of ensuring the safety of art objects in an unstable world (whether in terms of politics, natural disasters, or even incidents that can occur anywhere on the planet). It also facilitates access to original works for scientists and experts from all countries.

Technical advances in documentation, contextualization, recording, digital reproduction are quite extraordinary today. For example, the exhibition on khmer bronzes at Guimet Museum that will travel to Minneapolis was the occasion for scientific specialists from France and Cambodia to analyse elementary traces on the Great Vishnu sculpture that was under restoration in France in an exemplary joint project. These analyses allowed to have a precise idea of the original polychromy of the sculpture, and helped the 3d reconstitution by a computer engineer along with an art historian who proposed a very probable and

amazing original aspect of the God to the public, that can be seen on screen in the Exhibition and that is really different from the wonderful archaeological piece we see today.

I believe that, beyond the irreplaceable human encounters, the use of recordings and multimedia productions to provide context, and although this way sound not new, the use of high-quality facsimiles, should be developed, for it is a very efficient support for mediation.

Documentation and contextualization must respect both scientific needs and communities of origin of the pieces cultural values, when these are known or still exist. International collaboration is essential to achieve this goal.

Facsimiles for example

- give the general public access to very important but not so well-known works of Art,
- avoid the need to travel to certain fragile masterpieces,
- and can be of great educational value in discourse (reproductions, models, etc.).

They also can serve as a reference state for long term conservation.

For example, at the Guimet Museum, we have old plaster casts of Borobudur reliefs that give an idea of the condition of some sculptures at the time of the 1900 Paris World's Fair. Lastly, and this is not new either, facsimiles on archaeological sites can provide a good idea of the original landscape while protecting the original pieces in a Museum.

In conclusion

We have to keep our mind as open as possible to dialogue.

- Dialogue gives rise to creativity.
- Dialogue allows understanding and respect.
- Dialogue gives rise to the possibility of recognizing past blunders, injustices, and the desire to resolve conflicts.
- **Finally and more broadly, meeting and dialogue give rise to love for Heritage and the subsequent desire to preserve it for the Future.**

Thank you very much for your attention.

You can contact me at

Evelise.bruneau@guimet.fr