

Dubrovniks Museum of Modern Art



# A festival of the human spirit

## The Best in Heritage

If the question to be posed of this event were - 'Can the heritage business justify an international showcase for its wares?' - then the answer provided, this September in Dubrovnik, was a resounding yes. If the question were - 'Should this event be repeated each year, in Dubrovnik?' - again the answer would be an emphatic yes.

But the real question was begged by the event's name: was this The Best In Heritage? As long as you are not looking for a comprehensive answer or a quibble-free zone, then again, most participants would have voted yes, in spirit above all. But there is more to come, in the years ahead. That much is clear.

### What is it?

This was the first Best In Heritage event ever staged and in this first incarnation it bore little resemblance to conventional awards festivals. In particular, there was less competitiveness, primarily because there were not a lot of awards given. Everyone who made a presentation had already won an award from Europa Nostra, Gulbenkian Foundation, Council of Europe, whoever. The reason for attendance was, primarily, to share best practice.

Twenty four presentations were made, over three days. Presenters arrived from 18 different countries but almost everyone presented in English, remarkably, and afterwards mixed in many tongues.

### Who is behind it?

The founding father is an inspirational, enterprising academic by the name of Professor Tomislav Sola, who holds the chair of Museology at Zagreb University, deserves great credit for making Best In

Heritage happen, and is well known to long-serving members of ICOM (the International Council of Museums). He it was who inveigled support from ICOM, UNESCO, Europa Nostra and Croatia's Ministry of Culture. He it was who stood out at the British Embassy's March event in Varaždin, persuaded Julius Bryant to speak and ensured this coverage. A 'typical' Croatian combination of dogged northern logic and seductive southern flair and, as such, a remarkable man of vision.

### What was in it for participants?

Research amongst those who paid their fees and those who sang for their supper showed an overwhelmingly positive response, with the usual feedback on practical issues that organisers expect. Even complaints about time management spoke volumes about the overall attitude: most participants wanted more time for discussion, for exchange of views and experiences. Above all, there was enthusiasm for the concept of the event, for the opportunity to meet peers and learn from each other, and for the venues.



The fourteenth-century Cloister where a Franciscan brother transported participants with his lute.

## What about the location?

Everyone raved about Dubrovnik, especially those who were lucky enough to get rooms at the Hotel Excelsior. (There should be more top hotel options in years to come.) The airport and local transport connections worked well, as did the town's restaurants. Star billings went to individual venues, however; just by the Rector's Palace, the extraordinary Marin Držić Theatre, in which the presentations took place (named after Dubrovnik's great comic writer of the Renaissance) the nearby island of Lokrum where Richard III was given sustenance, as were participants in The Best In Heritage; the fourteenth-century Franciscan monastery, where brother Antun Mrzlecki transported us on lute one evening; the dramatic Museum of Modern Art, overlooking the bay, where one contributor finally did win an award.

## Why 'The Best in Heritage'?

The winner of an award at this event was decorated for his presentation, not just for the heritage project he represented. However, there was rhyme and reason in this particular choice of hero. What this event had demonstrated was how broad the definition of 'heritage' has become. Julius Bryant has spoken of his view that heritage has shifted from 'nostalgia tourism to social identity'. Nicholas Hytner and I debated his description of The Globe's 'heritage' approach to Shakespeare, contrasted with the National Theatre's 'contemporary' stance, and in the end he accepted that he meant 'nostalgic' and that 'heritage' was now more about *identity* than just history. The Best In Heritage embrace can and should be enlarged, to cover more examples of natural heritage and more countries beyond Europe for instance, but already it boasts

a variety of heritage expressions - all of an award-winning standard - that represent the best *idea* of heritage. For what is it that connects Anne Frank House, Amsterdam to the National Palace Museum website, Taipei? Or Haus der Musik, Vienna to Space City, Toulouse? They all tell the story of man and his identity in relation to place.

So it was somehow appropriate that the most applauded presentation was a modest, timely and witty piece from the Isle of Man. (Coincidentally, this was featured in the very first issue of *Locum Destination Review*.) It was not the biggest spender or the most visited heritage project or the glitziest show, but it was called The Story of Man. (Or was it The Story of Mann?) Along with the spirit of Dubrovnik itself, this was the true message everyone took away about The Best In Heritage.

## The Best in Heritage participants

### A PERSONAL SELECTION

Here we cover only a quarter of the presentations shared at the Dubrovnik event, chosen in part because they at least illustrate the sheer breadth of projects that today exemplify 'heritage'.

My apologies to those who have not been covered - be it the Europa Nostra medal winner from Cyprus (Lions House) or the Council of Europe's prize winner from Helsinki (Theatre Museum) or the radical from Runkelstein Castle of Bolzano, Italy. We work with the space and materials at our disposal.

Most of all, my apologies for not covering more examples to those who could not attend this inspirational event. All I can do is suggest that you make it to Dubrovnik next September, either as an award winner or, like me, an interested observer.

## The L.N. Tolstoy Museum Estate

### YASNAYA POLYANA, RUSSIA

#### In touch with greatness

In the room you see here, Leo Tolstoy planned *War and Peace* and wrote its beginning. He noted at the time: 'I have never felt my mental and even all my moral powers so free and so capable of working.' In the theatre where the presentation of Tolstoy's museum took place, sat Vladimir Tolstoy, the great man's great great grandson. And because the presentation showed Leo Tolstoy's estate as it truly was and is, we in the audience felt we were in touch with greatness.

The project itself and the manner of its presentation - in English, with great charm, by Olga Kleshchevnikova - together made the man and his work tangible. The estate is more than one museum; it covers 54 hectares (well over 100 acres) housing more than 40 memorial buildings and 40,000 memorial items. Yet its prestigious 'Window into Russia' award and its special award in the European Museum of the Year competition were not for its scale. The size and fabric of Tolstoy's house, at the heart of this cultural institution, make it impossible for the estate to handle millions of visitors a year. So it applies ingenuity, and in ways that make the vaunted UK 'outreach' programmes look faltering.

The estate takes the Tolstoy brand beyond its lands, most meaningfully to provincial cities like nearby Tula, where its branch works as publishing house, gallery, book store and souvenir shop: it makes profit for the museum and relieves visitor pressure. Back in Yasnaya Polyana, the estate can focus on its cultural, educational and ecological priorities. Beyond the museum is an orphanage, and kindergarten, a budding school; a working farm; apple orchards, stabling for 20 horses; at the restored local station, a special new train, easing the passage for visitors, introducing them to the exhibition 'Tolstoy And His Railway'. To cope with volume, visitors are taken out to the family cemetery, put up in a burgeoning hotel, shared amongst important outposts based on estates which used to belong to the Tolstoy family.

Those responsible for this unique site and the name behind it are restoring the estate and extending its reach with great sensitivity, but what is most engaging - particularly in their contact with children - is the way in which the great writer's work and persona and times are brought to life. It is all so real you could touch it.

Above: Tolstoy in his vaulted study

Below: The Vaulted Room today

Copy of a painting by Ilya Repin, 1891



## La Piscine, Museum of Art and Industry

### ROUBAIX, FRANCE

#### Beyond Musée d'Orsay

Turning a Parisian railway station into a great gallery for Impressionist art is one thing - now it seems a perfectly natural thing to do - but converting a public swimming pool into a gallery for art and industry does seem delightfully, wackily French. It works, brilliantly, and not just because the architect behind the conversion (Jean-Paul Philippon) was also involved in the Musée d'Orsay.

The presentation of La Piscine in Dubrovnik was powerful, not just because the museum itself but also because of the presenter, Ms Goranca Beslac, who claims Croatian heritage herself and, as a girl, used to swim in the pool where she is now curator.

Roubaix in the nineteenth-century became the textile capital of France and from 1835 it had put together a showcase of fabric samples that evolved into a museum. World War Two closed the museum, in 1940, but the repatriation of its unique collection became glorious fact when this ideal, unique home was found. For the public swimming pool in Roubaix was no ordinary building; it had been designed in 1923 by Albert Baert to be 'the most beautiful swimming pool of France', a great Art Deco temple to hygiene, the body and social interaction. The pool had been closed since 1985 for safety reasons but its restoration has been inspired.

A sculpture garden occupies the space where once was water but like the original pool it is framed by *pâte-de-verre* mosaic. Movable stage décor creates catwalks for spectacular 'poolside' fashion shows. In what were shower rooms, custom-made showcases house the cloth and textile collections. The museum's nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings and sculptures occupy the wings where once stood bathtubs. The changing stalls on the first two floors, all around the pool, were transformed into windows, showing off displays of drawings, jewellery, ceramics, fabrics...

Just as the building was a meeting place for all classes and its design took ecclesiastical ideas to a secular end, so the collection encourages unusual dialogues itself: between applied arts and fine arts, decorative arts and painting, fashion and sculpture, furniture design and architecture. There is a wealth of visual treats here, from Starck to Bonnard, from Kenzo to Rodin. From industry to art and back again.

One of the key venues for Lille during its year as European Capital of Culture, La Piscine is a remarkable expression of a unique city culture. This bastion of the industrial revolution was once called 'the sacred city of socialism'. Putting fine art in a swimming pool somehow feels quite a sensible idea after that. Almost predictable, like turning a railway station into an art gallery.

Converted by an architect previously involved in the Musée d'Orsay, the celebrated Roubaix swimming pool takes on a new and surprising lease of life



## Liverpool Football Club, Museum and Tour Centre

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### ANFIELD ROAD, ENGLAND

#### You'll Never Walk Alone

Anyone in any doubt that the Liverpool Football Club Museum merits attention as a heritage centre has never heard the Anfield crowd sing their hymn or understood what Pele meant when he called football 'the beautiful game' or watched the legendary Liverpool manager Bill Shankly, point to the Anfield terraces and declare: 'There's a man's ashes buried there.'

Never mind that most people associate 'You'll Never Walk Alone' with football and Gerry and the Pacemakers, when it is in truth a Rodgers and Hammerstein classic, its anthemic qualities mark it out as a 'Jerusalem' *de nos jours*. This is the sound that heritage makes when identity matters, really matters, to the choir involved.

Football is a remarkable contemporary expression of identity: first, local, then regional or national, then - in the case of Manchester United or Real Madrid - global as well. In England, where football was invented, a crisis of national conscience accompanied the appointment of a Swedish coach (swiftly followed by blushes amongst the nationalists when he averted a crisis of footballing proportions and ushered the national team to the World Cup Finals in Japan). In Europe, where the memory of great teams matters, the most celebrated club is still Liverpool, because this is the English club that won the European Champions' competition (then called the European Cup) more often than any other, the club of Keegan, Dalglish and now Owen.

This heritage project originally won its qualifying award for customer care, which is understandable when you consider that, with its fan base, it could not fail as long as it satisfied its demanding and knowledgeable visitors. In keeping with the presentation by its curator, Stephen Done, the Liverpool show is based on film, trophies and a stadium tour (behind the scenes as well as on the pitch).

It was inspired choice for The Best In Heritage, since it exemplified the breadth of this church.

## Museo De La Paz De Gernika

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### THE BASQUE COUNTRY, SPAIN

#### Beyond Picasso

For us it is spelt Guernica. It is one of the most powerful, harrowing masterpieces of Picasso's canon. Yet even that painting does not prepare you for the reality of this Basque town's grief, after it was so brutally razed by air attack in April 1937. Or for its 2002 commemoration in this peace museum.

This heritage project represented the third graphic comment on war and peace - excluding Tolstoy - to be shared at The Best In Heritage event. On the first day came Anne Frank House from Amsterdam; on the second, the NS Dokumentationszentrum from Cologne, with which Gernika struck so bold a contrast. The German presentation of what had been the Nazi data bank was deliberately, masterfully cool: its thesis is that only by the unemotional procession of film and documentation can the full horror behind the facts be appreciated and repetition prevented. The Spanish presentation, though sensitively handled by Iratxe Momoito

### Anfield heroes across the generations



Astorkia, took the road more travelled and confronted its audience with pain and sorrow undiluted. I understood the intelligence of the German approach during the Gernika presentation when tears prevented me from taking notes. This was a powerful exposition.

Yet I came away with one clear message about Gernika, the first peace museum in the Basque Country and in Spain: that positive relationships between human beings can emerge from war - witness the reconciliation of Gernika families with German visitors - to inform today's debates about, for instance, human rights, religious beliefs, even the Basque heritage itself. Iratxe quoted Mahatma Gandhi: 'There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.' Which is why so many protestors gathered recently in Florence and we were able to gather in Dubrovnik. And why the Gernika project works.

## NMSI: The Science Museum

### EXHIBITION ROAD, LONDON

#### Giant with a human face

Janet Carding clearly enjoys a challenge. Not just in her job as Head of NMSI Planning and Development, based at the Science Museum. (Not even in having to live with the mechanistic abbreviation that is her employer's name - why do initials always make institutions sound inhuman?) But most vividly, in the way she addressed an audience of hard-pressed heritage professionals, from (mostly) less well-endowed centres of excellence, on the subject of giant museums which attract over 3 million visitors and have a budget of about 50 million euros per annum.

As if to make the challenge even tougher, Janet's presentation was as slick as a PowerPoint could be and then she had to cover for

her colleague from the National Railway Museum in York to boot. (European Museum of the Year and London Visitor Attraction of the Year being covered by one presenter. Imagine the jealousy.)

Yet this was an exceptional presentation that met all its challenges. Admittedly it had great assets to reveal: the Wellcome Wing in all its properly funded vision; the Bullet Train brought from Japan to York (more jealousy, particularly from the British contingent); great live ideas like the Pregnant Man and electronic formats like the 'bloids'. Yet though all these examples were impressive, the truly tough challenge which Janet - and her NMSI colleagues - had pulled off was a statement of VISION that made sense and mattered to people hearing it for the first time. Consider its rarity: a vision statement of human value. Allow me to quote it: 'We engage people in a dialogue to create meanings from the past, present and future of human ingenuity.'

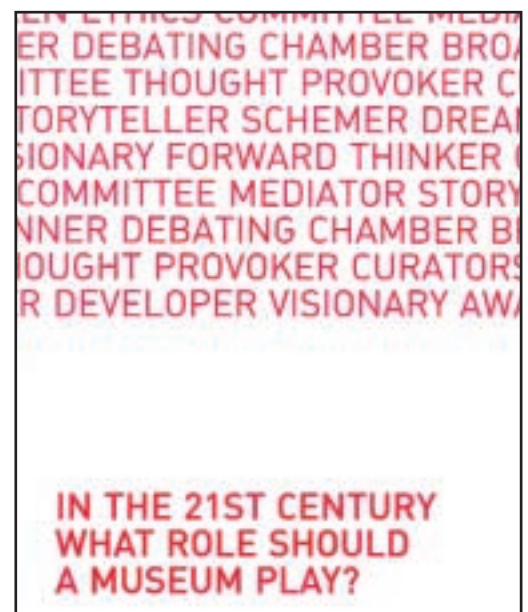
This appears in a remarkable document, the cover of which you see on this page. This 'manifesto' asks: 'In the twenty-first century, what role should a museum play?' Within it there are many gems. I particularly liked the focus on stories and the art of making meanings: 'Inside every *object* there's an *idea*, and surrounding it are endless human *stories* ....'

Everyone at The Best In Heritage event should enjoy and value this little book, as should anyone in the museum business anywhere. It is providing a lead, in an important debate and in a human way. NMSI may be a giant but it clearly has a human face. Here it was Janet Carding, who came, gave and conquered.

## Peace in the Basque region



## NMSI: Leading the debate





[www.npm.gov.tw](http://www.npm.gov.tw): You start with access ...

## The National Palace Museum Website

### TAIPEI, TAIWAN

One of the world's four great museums. On line

With great patience, Tzu-Feng Liu waited for the AVICOM review of audio-visual awards to finish. With typical Eastern manners and with reason, since his website featured strongly in the AVICOM awards.

The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, is a great museum. Think Louvre, think British Museum, but devoted to Chinese art and the world's largest collection of Chinese artefacts, 700,000 in all. The physical displays are rotated every three months but even so, with space for only 15,000 on view, it would take nearly 12 years to show them all.

No wonder this great museum needed - and created - a great website.

There is, of course, another reason. This great Chinese collection resides in a country to which virtually no citizens of China travel. It was finally moved here at the end of World War Two having been shuttled hither and yon, between emperors' palaces and Beijing's Forbidden City, from Shanghai warehouse to a Yangtze mooring, since its beginnings in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279).

## City Museum, Zagreb: Standing up for civic pride

Both reasons are to do with access. Neither explains the website's great success. Except that excellence breeds excellence (consider the quality of the British Museum's literature). The litmus test of this museum's ethos of access is their approach to children. Click on yourself (but give yourself an afternoon), preferably with a young screen partner. Here be dragons of great charm, games of great ingenuity, education programmes of infinite, unceasing variety.

If any crusty old curator complains about 'dumbing down' in the age of access, send him or her to the National Palace Museum website. It puts a smile on the face of authority and almost makes 'outreach' sound attractive.

## City Museum

### ZAGREB, CROATIA

Handsome face of a handsome place

To stroll the streets and squares of Zagreb is to discover how difficult it is to categorise Croatia and Croatians. Not an unpleasant challenge because both place and inhabitants are invariably handsome. But a challenge, nonetheless, for Zagreb is as far from Dubrovnik as Paris is from Cannes, or Turin from Pisa. Further in fact, geographically and culturally.



## The Isle of Man; the Story of Mann

Croatia, like France, Italy or even England, is an ethnographic melting pot. It is just that its melting was more recent and the world's gaze has only now been turning to consider and understand the result.

The City Museum in Zagreb does a fine job of helping us understand what lies behind the fine city of Zagreb, back to prehistory, but its more important role is helping us to understand Croatia and Croatians. The city is a symbol of its country.

To the north of Zagreb are the marches of Austro-Hungarian Imperial history. To the south the hard won shipping lanes from the Adriatic to the east. Here in Croatia, Slav strengths from the north marry Mediterranean impulses from the south. Reason meets passion, logic clasps *élan*.

You see this mix in the museum, an upstanding house in the seductive old part of the city. The layout is simple, clear, logical, user-friendly. The exhibits are displayed with taste, style and, sometimes, flair. In a defining set, the footprint of the city's streets is illuminated by models of the buildings you pass today, standing proud from the museum floor to greet the visitor at eye-level. A stunning, simple device to bring a cityscape to life.

Beyond artifice, what makes this city museum stand out from others is its particular archaeological finds shown *in situ*. As with the artifice, what you see is where you are.

Back in the streets and squares of Zagreb, you pass a compact, tanned man escorting a raven-haired young woman with alabaster skin, then a group of the tallest, most elegant teenagers you have ever seen. They are all Croatian and their city museum shows you - and them - precisely how and why. It succeeds, not as a traditional exercise in civic pride, but as a revelation of a people's identity, expressed through that people's place.

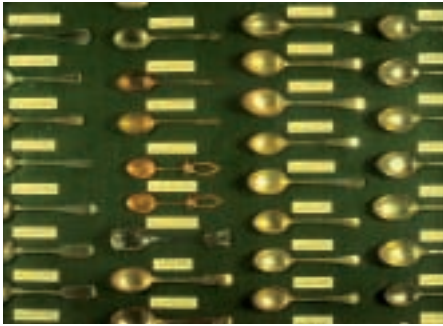
## Manx National Heritage

### DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN

#### Battle hymn of a republic

It was a quietly sung hymn but a hymn it was nonetheless. The representative from Manx National Heritage chose his hymn carefully and well. He was meant to sing about Rushen Abbey but instead we heard the ballad of Man, the Isle of Man, and the Story of Man (or Mann as perhaps it will be re-styled).

Stephen Harrison may be called the Director of Manx National Heritage but now the truth is out. He is nothing but a shameless troubadour who charms birds from the trees, technocrats from their screens and heritage experts from their reality.



## Objects as Art. Art as Object



Photograph courtesy of Julian Walker

Every evening, visuals from Best in Heritage were also projected on the City tower screen, above the glittering stone of Dubrovnik's famous Strada

First, he identifies that the participants from Dubrovnik, let alone Croatia, let alone most of the remaining audience, are proud of their republican heritage. So is the Isle of Man, he sings, neatly separating his heritage from the English elephant across the water.

Second, he is not only a republican but a successful radical, leading his underfed troops in the battle of heritage against the fattened property developers who had threatened his fair isle.

Third, this is a ballad of new Europe, *sans frontières*, as the Manx Viking heritage is burnished by a Cultural Charter with Norway, plaudits from the Council of Europe, awards galore from all over.

Crucially, his performance cuts across all juries because his composition demonstrates that cultural heritage can spell economic rebirth for a declining tourism destination. The whole island becomes a heritage attraction. A decaying castle at Rushen, a declining fishing port at Peel, a dying village at Cregneash, all breathe new life. Peel Castle features on a £10 note; visitors dine out overlooking lovely Calf Sound; the House of Keys is open again, in style, for the Isle's business.

Throughout, the song is about people. The people of Manx past, the Norsemen and monks; and the people of Manx present, taking pride in their eight new museum sites, their new fount of education, their own national monuments. (And their improved local economy.)

Stephen Harrison sang a terrific ballad in the Story of Mann, with or without the detail of Rushen Abbey, and he deserved to win

another award, for his presentation - as he did - from those who gathered at The Best In Heritage event in Dubrovnik. He sang of the human spirit and its expression in a particular place. His song was full of hope, for all.

## Julian Walker, intervention artist

### LONDON, ENGLAND

The Best In Heritage event closed with a provocative view of the role art can play in the world of heritage. Julian Walker knows both worlds, having been artist in residence at the Natural History Museum in London and intervention artist on film in what has been described as 'the civilised face of reality television'.

Whilst his museum displays have clear artistic merit, his interventions challenge the role of the artist in society and so, disconcertingly, raise issues about the future of art in tomorrow's heritage.

His projection of an image on the Old City wall in Dubrovnik posed questions about heritage that the past cannot answer. Will tomorrow's artists create The Best In Heritage?