

**XXXIII Annual Conference of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History (ICOMAM) - ICOM (UNESCO)**



Lisboa, 02 November – 06 November 2026

The annual ICOM Arms & Military conference will take place in Lisboa at the Museu de Marinha, (Navy Museum), in November 2026. It is organised by the Museu do Ar (Air Museum), jointly with Museu de Marinha and the Museu Militar de Lisboa (Lisbon Military Museum).

# Museums as Agents of Reconciliation & Social Cohesion

## Call for Papers

Museums today occupy a unique position at the intersection of memory, identity, and public dialogue. Once regarded primarily as custodians of objects, they are increasingly recognized as active participants in the social and political life of the communities they serve.

As trusted public institutions with deep roots in local communities, they are well positioned to model the difficult work of listening across difference, acknowledging harm, and imagining shared future.

Arms, armour and military history museums and heritage sites in particular are custodians of past conflicts, holding objects that can be powerful symbols of identity, pride, trauma, and grievance. Yet precisely because they work so close to humanity's most divisive experiences, they also have an extraordinary and underexplored potential: to help audiences practise empathy, to understand how violence is produced and remembered, and to create spaces where difficult conversations can be held with care.

In a divided world, such collections can support reconciliation when interpretation moves beyond celebration or condemnation towards shared inquiry. By presenting multiple perspectives—combatants and civilians, victors and defeated, colonisers and colonised, those who served and those who resisted—museums can challenge simplistic narratives and counter polarising "us versus them" frameworks. Arms and armour also offer a concrete means of addressing responsibility and consequence: who designed, funded, and used these technologies, who was harmed, and how these experiences were later justified, memorialised, or silenced.

This potential is strongest when objects are connected to human stories and participatory practice, including co-curation, oral histories, transparent provenance research, and facilitated dialogue on memory, accountability, and the ethics of force. Through trauma-informed and inclusive approaches, exhibitions on weapons can encourage mutual recognition, civic trust, and social cohesion.

The organisers of ICOM Arms & Military's 2026 conference accordingly invite proposals for papers on the theme of "Museums as Agents of Reconciliation & Social Cohesion". Proposals for panel discussions as well as individual presentations will be considered.

Potential topics for papers include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Curatorial Practice & Difficult Heritage:** How do curators navigate competing stakeholder interests when presenting histories of violence, oppression, or displacement? What ethical frameworks guide decisions about what to display, what to omit, and how to contextualize contested objects?
- **Community Participation & Co-Creation:** In what ways can affected communities shape exhibition narratives, collection strategies, and educational programming? What models of co-curation have proven

effective—and what tensions arise when institutional and community priorities diverge?

- **Transnational Memory & Shared Legacies:** How do museums address histories that transcend national borders—colonial entanglements, refugee movements, diasporic identities? What role can international networks play in facilitating cross-border dialogue and mutual understanding?
- **Education, Outreach & Intergenerational Dialogue:** What pedagogical approaches help visitors—especially young people—engage critically with histories of conflict and injustice? How can museums create safe yet challenging spaces for dialogue across generational, ethnic, or political divides?
- **Digital Technologies & Inclusive Access** How do online exhibitions, virtual tours, and digitized archives expand—or limit—access to reconciliation-oriented content? What opportunities and pitfalls arise when museums use digital tools to reach audiences who cannot visit in person?
- **Measuring Impact:** What methodologies allow museums to assess their contribution to social cohesion? How can institutions move beyond visitor counts to evaluate deeper outcomes such as attitude change, trust-building, or community empowerment?
- **Transparency and Accountability of AI Editorial Decisions:** The ethical demand for transparency when AI systems make curatorial decisions — selecting which stories surface, which objects are highlighted, and which perspectives frame a visitor's journey — without the editorial accountability expected of human curators.

## Publication

The proceedings of the conference will be published, and all those selected to present will be expected to provide a written version of their presentation following the event. Papers should therefore be written to a standard suitable for academic publication, with appropriate referencing and should be submitted by 14 December 2026.

## Submission

To submit a proposal, please send an abstract (maximum 300 words) and a biography (maximum 150 words) via <https://forms.gle/7iw1PJ2n2qHNYZbv5>

- Papers should last no more than twenty minutes
- Papers should be delivered in English
- The deadline for submissions is 5 June 2026 (23:59 GMT)
- All submissions will receive a response and or confirmation of inclusion by Monday 22 June 2026
- For any questions relating to the conference or abstract submission, contact: [ICOMAM\\_2026\\_Lisboa@museudoar.pt](mailto:ICOMAM_2026_Lisboa@museudoar.pt)
- Bursaries for participation are available through ICOM Arms and Military: [The Piet De Gryse Memorial Bursary - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY](#) and [The Eva Sofi Erntstell Memorial Bursary - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY](#)

**The Museu do Ar** (Air Museum) shares the history and heritage of History of Portuguese Civil and Military Aeronautics, highlighting the role of the Air Force in national defense and development. Its origins date back to 1971, when it was formally established in Alverca, later undergoing reorganization and expansion leading to the inauguration of its current main site in Sintra in 2009.

While maintaining the Alverca site, the museum preserves a vast collection of aircraft, equipment, and archives that document the evolution of aviation in Portugal, from the earliest military flights in the early 20th century to contemporary missions.

Over the decades, the Air Force Museum has played a key role in safeguarding the national aeronautical heritage, accompanying the transformation of the Portuguese Air Force itself.

Beyond its exhibition role, it establishes itself as a space for the preservation and appreciation of aeronautical heritage, promoting knowledge of aviation and highlighting the human stories connected to flight.

Its mission is to preserve, study, and communicate this legacy, inspiring the public to recognize the importance of aviation in society. [museudoar.pt/home](https://museudoar.pt/home)

**The Museu de Marinha** (Navy Museum) was created by a decree of July 22, 1863, enacted by King Luís of Portugal. His father, King-consort Fernando II, had a strong interest in cultural matters, which influenced his children. King Pedro V shared this passion, while Prince Luís pursued a naval career until his brother's death led him to the throne. His naval experience and cultural interests explain the foundation of the Museum during his reign.

Initially installed near the Naval Academy, the Museum served mainly didactic purposes. On April 18, 1916, a fire in the Sala do Risco destroyed many items, but the Museum continued operating with remaining pieces, changing names until 1934, when it became the Portuguese Naval Museum.

A major turning point came in 1948 with the donation of Henrique Maufroy de Seixas's collection, including models, objects, and about 20,000 photographic plates. To house such collection, the Museum reopened in 1949 at the Palace of the Counts of Farrobo, while Sala do Risco remained its headquarters.

Finally on August 15, 1962, the Naval Museum it was inaugurated at Jerónimos Monastery Today, it presents maritime life broadly - military, commercial, fishing, and recreational - focusing especially on the Portuguese Age of Discoveries and the enduring relationship between Portugal and the sea. <https://cultura.marinha.pt/pt/museu>

**The Museu Militar de Lisboa** (Lisbon Military Museum) was created in 1842. Through the Royal Decree of 10 December 1851, issued by Queen Maria II, the Artillery Museum was officially established in the Royal Army Arsenal.

In 1926, the designation “Artillery Museum” was changed to “Military Museum.” In 2006, the name “Military Museum” was again altered to “Military Museum of Lisbon (MML), following the redistribution of the museum’s collection among other military museums located on the mainland and islands, thus geographically limiting the former Military Museum to the city of Lisbon.

The building—adapted to its museological purpose due to its imposing architecture, rich exterior and interior decoration, and its possession of several works of art, as well as the importance of its military-themed collections—was deemed worthy of protection. It has been classified as a Property of Public Interest since 1963.

In addition to its collection of ancient weapons and equipment (the oldest piece on display dates from the 14th century), comprising around 2,000 exhibited items and more than 28,000 in storage, the Military Museum of Lisbon (MML) holds a rich collection of realistic sculptures and paintings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with more than 100 works on display by over forty renowned sculptors and painters of that period. It's the oldest museum in the city of Lisbon.  
<https://www.exercito.pt/pt/quem-somos/organizacao/ceme/vceme/dhcm/lisboa>

**The International Committee for Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History (ICOMAM)** is an International Committee of ICOM which specialises in Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History and is dedicated to the study and preservation of arms, armour and military history.

Its aim is to encourage research about arms, armour and militaria. It actively stimulates professional standards of collection care, management and conservation in line with internationally recognised good practice and ICOM guidelines.

It is the only International Committee of its kind dealing comprehensively with this subject area in the field of museology. ICOM Arms and Military holds triennial congresses, annual symposia, conferences and serves as a crucial international platform for professional exchange among museums, collections, and scholars in the field. ICOM Arms and Military’s approach is historical, scientific and objective but always within a social context. It seeks to explore both the technical development of the material culture of its subject area and the often-profound impact this has had on national and international politics and economics, society and art.

[What is ICOM Arms & Military? - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY - ICOM ARMS & MILITARY](#)