

2008 EUROPEAN MUSEUM OF THE YEAR AWARD

PRESS RELEASE

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EMYA 2008: Kumu Art Museum scoops the Award in Dublin

The European Museum of the Year Award, organised by the European Museum Forum, has celebrated its 31st year with a Presentation Ceremony and associated activities based at various venues in Dublin, Ireland hosted by The Chester Beatty Library, The Heritage Council, The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and local sponsoring organisations.

The 2008 Awards were announced on Saturday 17 May, during a ceremony attended by more than 200 people from 27 European countries at the National Gallery, followed by a Gala Dinner. The winners were announced by Sir Neil Cossons, EMF's President and presented by the Forum's Patron, Her Majesty Queen Fabiola of Belgium.

The results of the 2008 Awards are as follows:

The 2008 European Museum of the Year Award is given to *Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia*. The history of this museum is also the history of a new country reaching independence and reflects the events which led up to it. The establishment of such a large museum at a time of transition was questioned, but as a working museum rooted in a diverse society, which influences all its activities, it has been aware from the beginning of its responsibility to reach out to groups which do not normally visit art museums. For example, it has paid special attention to the Russian minority, which is particularly relevant in the context of Estonian society. Another important aspect is the museum's skill in first having gathered a collection which represents a crucial aspect of the Estonian cultural heritage, and then integrating it into the wider European cultural network. The museum is an excellent example of how to communicate with its visitors, which sometimes proves a problem for modern art museums. Its holistic approach illustrates the importance of museums and arts in the complex process of mass communication, and the overall excellence of its building, its exhibitions and management makes it a worthy winner this year.

Specially commended

- Catharijneconvent Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands
- Museum of Almeria, Almeria, Spain
- Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, London, United Kingdom

These three museums received a special diploma recognising their excellence in conception, innovative approach to interpretation and attention to the needs of their visitors.

Following the two days of public interviews before the Ceremony, those museums which had passed the first stage of the judging each received a certificate in recognition of their innovatory achievements. The full list of these museums can be seen on the website of the European Museum Forum.

The Micheletti Award for the most promising technical or industrial museum among the current year's candidates goes, unusually, to a science museum this year. The *Science Museum at the University of Coimbra in Portugal* impressed the judges with its sensitively restored and designed neoclassical Laboratorio Chimico. With its theme of 'secrets of life and matter' the museum has crossed scientific discipline-lines and the integration of the historic building and objects with thoughtfully chosen computer interactives and experiments has

proved very successful. Add to this a very varied programme of activities and a high standard of publications, and the resulting experience for visitors is excellent.

The Council of Europe Award, a bronze statuette by Miró, goes to *Svalbard Museum at Longyearbyen in Norway*. This lively museum has an unusual presentation of Svalbard's 400-year history, with a scenically designed inner sector allowing the visitors to make their own discoveries, and an educational outer ring that can be reached easily from outside, with easy access between the two. The museum is a source of expertise in natural research and education and is convinced that its exhibitions on the conditions necessary to support life and activities in the Arctic, and on global climate can influence the future behaviour of its visitors. The result for those who come to the museum is entertaining, instructive and thought-provoking. This award was presented at a separate ceremony in Strasbourg on 15 April 2008.

The European Museum Forum: what it is and what it does

The Forum is responsible to the European Museum Forum Trust, a charity registered in the United Kingdom (282158), and operating under the auspices of the Council of Europe. In addition to holding the European Museum of the Year Award, it organises Museum Workshops at different places in Europe, publishes a quarterly Bulletin and runs an advisory and consultancy service.

Its day-to-day operation is controlled by an international committee, composed of men and women influential in the museum and cultural fields and it is a wholly independent body, deriving its income from membership and entrance fees and various forms of sponsorship. It considers that its main duty is to the public, but it maintains good relations with both national and international professional organisations.

The candidates for its Award are new museums, established within the past two or three years, and older museums which have been completely reorganised during the same period. It receives applications from between 50 and 60 candidates a year, all of whom receive assessment visits from members of the Forum's judging committee, who constitute a European flying squad, which goes from country to country encouraging, comforting, criticising and offering practical advice. This is something new and unique in the museum world. So far more than 1500 museums in 40 countries have taken part in the EMYA scheme.

The Forum considers itself to be European in the most profound sense of the word, a focus of cultural understanding. Its opinions are expressed in plain terms, and its aim each year, in selecting the European Museum of the Year, is to discover and publicise a museum which has succeeded outstandingly well in dealing with the problems that are facing museums everywhere, problems of imagination, money, staff morale, bureaucracy, integrity and professional pride, taste, social responsibility and planning for the future.

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