Virtual collection of Masterpieces
Annual Report of Activities 2009

Introduction

The VCM has been gradually expanded during the period October 2008–October 2009. Major events were the talks with the Chinese Museum Society who pledged to add 30 – 40 major Chinese museums as participants to the VCM before the ICOM General Conference in Shanghai in November 2010. Another major event was the decision of the National Museum of Korea to become VCM's Leading Partner in Asia.

In the report you will read that new features have been added to the website in the past year, for example “News” and “Reactions”. A widget is the latest service to our visitors.

Since October 2008 seven new participants have joined the VCM. This is less than expected. Many museums were invited; some museums indicated by themselves the willingness to join. But the majority of them failed in the end to deliver an adequate number of Masterpieces or saw the task of providing good quality texts (in English) as too difficult or time consuming. Many Japanese museums were enthusiast but did not manage to get the green light from their management or produce texts in English. However the VCM will get a major boost from the Chinese participation. There is also hope that our Leading Partner in Asia may manage to engage more museums, for instance in Korea. Nevertheless, participant expansion remains an important point of attention.

During the year five more “Stories” have been added. These are articles featuring Asian art cooperative projects between Asian and European museums. Stories are popular among VCM visitors. A few more videos in which curators show and explain a Masterpiece have been added as well.

The Learning Zone has seen some positive initiatives in the past year, but it remains to be seen whether concrete results will be possible in the short term.

A Facebook Group of curators from participating museums has been created with 29 participants, but so far the exchange of experiences and ideas between its members is low.

A variety of technical issues has been addressed and the website is kept up to date on a daily basis. Links with Wikipedia have been made for the content of a group of museums, enhancing the information value of the texts. This is time-consuming work and will continue until all Masterpiece texts have been provided with these relevant links.

Many participating museums have now a VCM banner on their museum’s website and this has resulted in growth of high quality visitors (who visit more pages and stay longer) as the new VCM newsletter. Whether 20 000 visitors a year is a reason for disappointment or joy is difficult to say. Whichever the case, aiming at more and more quality visitors should be a major concern of ours. It is significant to see that the Guimet Museum website generates a
lot of traffic for the VCM, with visitors who stay long and visit many pages and a number that remained positively stable during the year. The Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Ayala Museum in Manila, the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna and the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin show more or less the same pattern.

The VCM is a unique endeavour to bring Asian museums and European museums together on a cooperative platform. It is exemplary for its success in bringing museums together. The database of Masterpieces and its website are equally unique. There is no similar project of this quality and scope to be found on the Internet. Its basic functioning is stable and guaranteed thanks to the supporting museums.

Nevertheless major challenges lie ahead, among which expanding its database and its number of participants as well as adding more additional content and services are prominent. The following activities have been realised by the core-VCM team in 2009 and have been financed exclusively by the consortium of trustees.

The National Museum of Korea as a Leading Partner

Steven Engelsman (Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden) and Manus Brinkman (VCM Chiangmai) held talks with the National Museum of Korea. Choe Kwang-shik, the director of the National Museum will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the VCM during the second VCM trustees’ board meeting in order to become the VCM Leading Partner in Asia. The role of the National Museum as a Leading Partner will greatly enhance VCM’s prestige and outreach. The National Museum is by far the most important museum of Korea and has an extensive international network.

On 12 and 13 May Steven Engelsman and Manus Brinkman visited the National Museum of Korea to discuss the implementation of the National Museum of Korea’s role as the Asian Leading Partner of the VCM.

After a few meetings, the National Museum of Korea confirmed its decision to take up its role as a Leading VCM Partner in Asia. It is planning to pay 10 000 Euros in cash on a yearly basis and to hire a staff member working for the VCM at the equivalent of 15 000 Euros per annum for a period of three years. For the time being Mr. Kim Jongsok will be the contact person and the National Museum coordinator for the VCM.

Possible priorities for the National Museum’s contribution were discussed:
- Enlarging the VCM database by adding first more Korean museums and later more from other Asian countries as participants.
- Promoting the VCM website, especially in Asia
- Adding innovative features to the VCM:
  a. Examining the possibility of adding video material to the VCM with the aim of developing a database of Masterpieces of Intangible Asian Heritage.
  b. Working out a proposal for the addition of a programme for young visitors on the VCM.
All this will be worked out in close coordination with Jos Taekema, Manus Brinkman, and Julie Trebault.

It was discussed that the new staff member for the VCM in Seoul needed to have good English language skills, especially in reading and writing. Further, the person would need strong communication skills and be at ease with the Internet and its various innovative opportunities. The possibility of establishing a VCM light version was also discussed. This would indeed increase the access speed of the VCM in Asia, which is sometimes rather slow.

**The extension of the VCM community**

**New participants**
As of 31 August we have 1364 entries with 2098 object-images and 171 images of museum buildings from 68 participating museums. 32 Museums are from Asia and 36 from Europe. Since January, 5 new museums have joined the VCM:
- Museum of East Asian Art, Bath, UK
- Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands
- British Museum, London, UK
- Musée Cernuschi, Paris, France
- The Museum of Cultural History, Lund, Sweden

The Palace Museum in Beijing has added new Masterpieces so that their total is now 25.

The guest participants (non-ASEF countries in Asia and Europe)
The VCM is open to museums from ASEF member countries. At ICOM’s General Conference in Vienne (2007) museums from non-ASEF Asian countries asked to be allowed to participate. ICOM ASPAC supported this request. ASEF was of the opinion that VCM needs to remain closely connected with ASEF, but may want to explore a more open, global
and inclusive approach aimed at all Asian countries and European countries who are no ASEF members under certain conditions. At the VCM trustees-meeting in Manila at 3 November 2008 it was agreed that museums in non-ASEF countries could participate, if they requested to do so, however they would clearly be marked by a “guest” status. ASEF would not appreciate active promoting of the VCM in non-ASEM countries. Ms. In Kyung Chang, director of the Iron Museum in Korea and the Chairperson of ICOM-ASPAC has been requested to indicate which one of the non-ASEM museums would wish to participate and forward their contact data. As active promotion was not appreciated, no non-ASEM member has been added as a guest yet.

The campaigns

China
The VCM China campaign to enlarge the masterpieces database with an important number of Chinese museums started already two years ago, but gained momentum after funds became available in July (Museum of Ethnology, Leiden and Gerlach Art Packers, Schiphol, Netherlands).

In December the VCM received a letter from the Director General of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Shan Yixiang. He stated among others: “The ASEMUS Virtual Collection of Masterpieces proposed in your letter will enhance people’s understanding of the Chinese time-honored history and splendid civilization and promote the communication and cooperation among international museums. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage is in favour of this and will spare no effort to support it.” Steven Engelsman (National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden), Shane McCausland (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin) and Manus Brinkman (VCM content editor, Chiangmai) visited Shanghai and Beijing from Friday 8 May – Monday 11 May. The talks in Shanghai with Zhou Yanqun of the Shanghai Museum were meant to prepare the meeting in Beijing. Zhou Yanqun is the person in charge of organising the ICOM 2010 General Conference as well as coordinating the VCM China project.

On 11 May a meeting was held at the State Administration of Cultural Heritage with the following participants: Prof. Zhang Bai, Vice Director General of State Administration of Cultural Heritage and President of the Chinese National Committee of ICOM Prof. Chen Xiejun, Director, Head Curator of the Shanghai Museum and Vice-President of Chinese National Committee of ICOM; Mr. Zhang Chunyu, Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the Chinese Society of Museums Prof. An Laishun, Secretary General of Chinese National Committee of ICOM; Mr. Hu Chui, Director General Information Department of the Palace Museum, Beijing and Director of the Audio-Visual & New Technologies Committee of ICOM-China. Mrs. Zhou Yanqun, Chief Cultural Exchange Office, Shanghai Museum Mr. Qi Qingguo, director Information Research Department, Capital Museum Beijing Mrs. Grace Ai, contact person ICOM China And from the VCM side: Steven Engelsman, director National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden Shane McCausland Head of Collections / Curator of the East Asian Collections, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin Manus Brinkman, VCM content editor, Chiangmai.
The VCM was presented and the Chinese side expressed its support and indicated that China would make up a list with 30-40 museums that would participate in the VCM. Each museum will select 25 Masterpieces, provide texts in Chinese, and if possible in English. When English is a major stumbling block, help will be provided by Bettina Zorn, Curator of the Chinese collection from the Viennese Museum of Ethnology (Shane McCausland is not working anymore at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin) and Manus Brinkman during a working session in China where the museum representatives would discuss the texts and Bettina and Manus would then translate, edit and upload these in the VCM database.

The working session with the first ten museums will take place in Shanghai in October/November. The Shanghai Museum (Mrs. Zhou Yanqun) will be coordinating the VCM project from the Chinese side. Its director Mr. Chen Xiejun will be responsible for the success of the VCM China project.

The participation of the Chinese Museums should culminate in a special presentation at ICOM’s General Conference in Shanghai 7-13 November 2010. VCM also needs to see whether a special feature on its Homepage can be made on this occasion.

At the Shanghai working session in October/November 2009 a Cooperation Agreement between the Chinese Society of Museums and the VCM (represented by the Museum of Ethnology, Leiden), in which the details of the VCM China project will be outlined, will be signed. Needless to say that all this is a major breakthrough in VCM’s enlargement and long-term relevance.

**Mongolia**

A proposal has been made to help Mongolian Museums with adding masterpieces to the VCM by exploring the possibilities to add intangible heritage in the form of video presentations. This proposal has been presented by letter to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Chair of the Art and Cultural Policy’s Department, Mr. G. Erdenebat. T

The proposal has been prepared in close cooperation with Mrs. Damdinsuren Tsedmaa, director of the Theatre Museum and Chair of the National Committee of ICOM. Mrs. Tsedmaa was present at the VCM Launch in Gyeonggi. In the proposal we suggested to start with adding ten Mongolian museums, all from Ulaan Bator, to the VCM. This would be done during a working visit of Manus Brinkman in autumn of 2009.

Later the National Museum of Korea expressed its interest to participate in this working meeting, given its good and frequent relations with Mongolian museums and heritage institutions. Therefore the exact date of the visit may be altered.

**Japan**

Manus Brinkman was invited by the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, to give a presentation on the VCM during the Conference "Innovation of Image Database and Museum Networks" on 27 and 28 February.
The organiser, Professor Ryo Akama of the Ritsumei University, leader of the Japanese Culture Research Group said about the conference: “There are numerous works and research material related to Japanese art and culture in Western countries. With the exception of collections in a few large scale museums, most of those that are owned by small to medium-sized museums catch the eye of only a very limited number of people... (one of the things to do is) to link museums through networks and let them share a range of information.” There were presentations from the British Museum, the National Museum in Prague and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, all by the curators responsible for Japanese art in those museums. All elaborated on digitising their collections and offering them on-line. The various Japanese speakers had a University background and focused mainly on how web-presentation could be enhanced by using avatars or by increasing the quality of images.

Manus Brinkman presented the Virtual Collection of Masterpieces as a unique cooperation project with a value of its own through genuine contributions of curators in various museums, but also as a portal where links can be made between the museums and their activities. The audience was impressed by the VCM and stated that they did not know of any such international initiative which such a high quality, both in content and design.

Ryo Akama offered to help in promoting the VCM among museums. He considered the VCM as a unique opportunity to share collections and collection-awareness. He would start with contributing the collection of the Ritsumei to the VCM. He offered to distribute VCM-information in museum-meetings (the VCM flyer).

Helena Honcoopova, curator of Japanese Art, Collection of Oriental Art from the National Gallery in Prague promised to contribute to the VCM. She saw the Naprstek Museum prominently present at the VCM and thought that the National Gallery should also participate.

In sum, it was worthwhile to attend the conference. Apart from being able to present the VCM, we have some concrete results: the National Gallery in Prague and the Ritsumeikan University Collection will participate, but more importantly we have a contact in Japan willing to assist us with promoting VCM participation.

**Expanding the VCM with special content**

**Stories**
We added five “Stories” that highlight special cooperative projects between museums in Asia and also between European museums and Asian collections.

The new stories are:

1. **The Smile of Buddha - 1600 years of Buddhist art in Korea**
   
   The Belgian Center for Fine Arts in Brussels contacted the National Museum of Korea in Seoul in 2006 and proposed a special exhibition and other activities. "The Smile of Buddha" brought for the first time 130 extraordinary Korean pieces of art to Belgium and explained the history of the development of Buddhism.
2. In northern Sumatra: the Batak
This exhibition (musée du quai Branly) is an invitation to discover a collection of remarkable artefacts created by a people from the Sumatran highlands: the Batak. Highly finished works, created with an evident care for ornamentation, the artefacts in the exhibition invite the visitor to lose himself in the intricacy of their detail, to share in the secrets they contain.

3. Made in Japan
To celebrate the 2009 Japan year, the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna has planned a yearlong program series, "Japan for All Seasons". The exhibition "Made in Japan," assembled from the most important Japanese collections in the Viennese Museum of Ethnology, illustrates cultural contacts between Austria and Japan during the two last centuries.

4. Sharing cultural memory
“Sharing cultural memory” is a cooperation-project of the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna and the Museum Siwalima on Ambon. Objectives are indexing and research on the conjoint heritage of ethnographic objects of the Moluccas, the publication of the outcomes of this research, and therewith to deepen the cultural relations of Austria and Indonesia.

5. Self and Other: Portraits from Asia and Europe. The ASEMUS travelling exhibition in Japan
“Self and Other: Portraits from Asia and Europe” exhibition is a travelling exhibition, which has been created through collaboration between museums and art museums in 18 countries in Asia and Europe, who are members of the Asia-Europe Museum Network. In Japan the exhibition was held simultaneously at two venues in Osaka, the National Museum of Ethnology and National Museum of Art, at one venue in Fukuoka, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, and finally, again simultaneously, at two venues in Kanagawa, the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History and the Museum of Modern Art, Hayama.

Wiki links
On the stories, several “key words” have been linked to the Wikipedia. A selection of subjects (like Ming Dynasty, Sumba, Yogyakarta, Jan Cock Blomhoff, etc) has been selected in each Masterpiece and direct links with Wikipedia have been made for the masterpieces of these following museums:

**Europe**
- Vienna, Museum of Ethnology
- Prague, National Museum
- Helsinki, Museum of Cultures, National Museum of Finland
- Paris, Musée Cernuschi
- Paris, Musée du quai Branly
- Paris, Musée National des arts asiatiques Guimet
- Hamburg, Museum of Ethnology
- Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library
- Rome, Giuseppe Tucci National Museum of Oriental Art
- Rome, Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini"
- Riga, Museum of Foreign Art
- Lisbon, National Palace of Ajuda
- Ljubljana, Slovene Ethnographic Museum
- Lund, The Museum of Cultural History
- Gothenburg, Museum of World Culture
- Amsterdam, Tropenmuseum
- Leiden, National Museum of Ethnology
- Bath, The Museum of East Asian Art

**Asia**
- Shanghai, Shanghai Museum
- Jakarta, Museum Sumpah Pemuda
- Yongin city, Gyeonggi Provincial Museum
- Vientiane, Si Saket
- Manila, National Museum of the Philippines

- Singapore, NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts
- Singapore, Asian Civilisations Museum
- Singapore, National Museum of Singapore
- Singapore, Singapore Art Museum
- Singapore, National Archives of Singapore
- Chiang Mai, Chiang Mai National Museum
- Chiang Rai, Rai Mae Fah Luang Art and Cultural Park
- Hanoi, National Museum of Vietnamese History
- Hanoi, Viet Nam Museum of Ethnology
- Hanoi, Vietnam Fine Arts Museum

This work is still in process for the other museums and has greatly enhanced the information value of the VCM.

**Videos**

We started with videos of curators explaining why an object is a masterpiece. (see the video from the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore on the VCM website as an example: click “World of Masterpieces”, click “Select a Video”, click “Heidi”).

This year, four videos have been added:

1. **MuSEA**
   Karl Magnusson, International cooperation manager at the National Museums of World Culture in Sweden and Nguyen Hai Ninh, Researcher at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Vietnam present the MuSEA cooperation programme. A MuSEA story will be added to the Stories page next year.

2. **ASEMUS General Conference, Manila**
   Interview of Corazon Alvina, Stéphane Martin and Steven Engelsman

3. **Christine**
   Christine Hemmet, curator at musée du quai Branly (Paris), discusses the concept of masterpiece by presenting two masterpieces.

4. **Pierre**
   Pierre Baptiste, Curator East Asian Collections at Musée Guimet (Paris), discusses a masterpiece by presenting a Head of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, Champa, South Vietnam, 8th Century.

As a further development we will upload videos of Intangible Heritage, Mongolia being the pilot.
The Learning Zone
A group of four VCM participants is in the process of brainstorming about a joint educational programme on-line which would (also) feature on the VCM. The four participants are:
- Jenny Siung, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland
- Esther van Zutphen, Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands
- Karen Chin, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore
- Kook Sungha, The National Folk Museum of Korea, Seoul, Korea

On the basis of an original proposal by Jenny Siung, the four participants will take the Silk Road as a basis for a first programme.

A further exploration of ideas and practical use was organised on 13 May in Seoul, where Esther van Zutphen, Kook Sungha and other staff members of the National Folk Museum of Korea sat together with Manus Brinkman. Esther van Zutphen is working in the Folk Museum in the framework of an exchange programme. A Facebook discussion group for the Learning Zone group has been set up. A manual will be written by our Learning Project partners in close cooperation with the VCM team for the attention of the educators, curators and teachers.

The promotion

The Google referencing
Google's search engine is a powerful tool. Without search engines like Google, it would be practically impossible to find the information you need when you browse the Web. Google has indexed around 111 pages of the “Virtual collection of masterpieces”. 196 websites have added an effective link toward the VCM:

- The participating museums have been invited to join this campaign and to promote the website within their own networks by adding the VCM link to their website and sending the press release to their relevant press media.
- Libraries and universities have been invited to add a VCM link on their website as well. In fact, the main target audiences are researchers and students of all ages and their teachers, instructors and facilitators. This campaign has been launch in September 2008:
- Blogs: many VCM posts have been written on personal blogs. Here are few examples:
  - http://visual-resources.blogspot.com/
  Visual Resources at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, Ireland
  This blog is intended as a resource for the staff and students of the National College of Art & Design, Dublin, Ireland. The Visual Resources Centre is located in the Library of the NCAD and is the successor to the slide library. The centre provides non textual resources by way of digital images, video and audio media.
“A collection of things I find that interest me” personal blog of an Australian man named Tellurian
Children blog to share ideas and links. They are interested by the museum area.

Communication tools

1. VCM Newsletter
The first VCM newsletter has been created and sent on the 5th of June to 818 VCM contacts. This publication will regularly be distributed: every three months (due to the summer break, the second VCM newsletter will be sent on October, 19). General sections of the VCM newsletter include VCM news and upcoming events, the new contributors, contents, features and functionalities added to the VCM as well as contact information for general inquiries.

The aim of this newsletter is to inform our contacts of the VCM news and to spread the word of the VCM to every person interested by Asian art. It would be appreciated if the trustees could share their contacts with the VCM team.

2. The ASEMUS widget
The widget of the masterpiece of the day will be available to download for the Vista Sidebar in the course of October. This widget will be found on Yahoo Widget Engine, iGoogle, Mac Dasboard Widget, Windows mobile and Iphone before the end of this year. Widgets are interactive virtual tools that provide single-purpose services such as showing the user the latest news, the current weather, the time, a calendar, a dictionary, a map program, a calculator, desktop notes, photo viewers, or even a language translator, among other things.

3. VCM media pack: press releases, banner and poster
The latest up to date VCM press release has been sent to all our 67 contributors with the poster in June. More than 30 of them have already published it on their museum website. Around 80% of the contributors have added the VCM link, the banner and the press release to their website. 8 of them do not have a website. They have received this media pack by post. We have invited them to send the press release to their relevant media and to stick the poster in their libraries or in their information room to promote VCM to their public in a visual way.

4. VCM flyer
A bilingual flyer has been designed for the need of the Japanese campaign. During the Conference "Innovation of
Image Database and Museum Networks" was held at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan on 27 and 28 February, this flyer has been distributed to the participants. This year’s meeting theme was “Let’s enjoy data basing art contents.” On the first day, Prof. Akama gave a keynote speech. During his speech, he referred to the VCM project, for which he will start uploading the Center’s masterpieces soon. This flyer will be reused for other events in particularly for the conferences and symposiums of our partners.

5. VCM article on the Wikipedia
The Wikipedia article is now up to date and has been modified following the Wikipedia guidelines. This article will be translated in French, Spanish and German before the end of this year. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_Collection_of_Masterpieces
Many VCM visitors come via Wikipedia (between 10%-12%).

6. Special links:
We have published specific contributors’ links on the VCM site directing to their shop, their publications list, online database, image gallery, library, etc.

VCM Facebook group
In the Facebook group we initiate debate while information and knowledge can be exchanged and shared. The topics deal with Asian cultural heritage and museum related subjects. The following subjects are being discussed: “sharing of exhibitions”, “new ways of using the VCM and the large database Europeana”, “should we pay a fee for museum images on-line?” and “Facebook is more than a fad”. So far 29 participants have joined the group but the exchanges are not as intense as they could be.

The news paragraph on the “Home page”
A "News block" has been created on the VCM Home page to share with the visitors the latest news about Asian art. Each week, news are published on the Home page. This feature reflects the VCM news as well. We already invited our contributors to announce their News about Asian art activities.

“Contact the VCM”
This year we received 34 queries, two of which asked how a museum can participate in the VCM: Anthropological Museum from the Vietnam National University in Hanoi, Maidstone Museum & Bentlf Art Gallery in Kent, Museum Kolong Tangga in Yogyakarta (Indonesia); Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen: GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Völkerkundemuseum Dresde, Völkerkundemuseum Herrnhut and the Czech National Museum in Prague, one suggested to have a widget, one wanted to publish an image of one of the participants in a Secondary Education school book, etc.

“Reactions”
A "Reaction page" has been created to post visitor-opinion on VCM and/or his definition of a masterpiece and choose his favourite masterpiece by completing an online form. The reaction page features only 6 visitors’ reactions.

The Calendar of Events features around 48 exhibitions and events in participating museums per month.
**Site analysis & statistics**

Tracking of users has been made more sophisticated so that it is now possible to see from which countries users come and which pages they view.

Between the 1st of September 2008 and the 1st of September 2009, 20416 visitors have surfed on the VCM.

- bounce rate is 43,59 %
- average time spent is around 4 minutes
- new visits: 75,36%,
- returning visitors: 24,53%

The VCM visitors are coming, in decreasing order, from France, the Netherlands, United States, Spain, Philippines, Sweden, Germany, Vietnam, Austria, Thailand.

Among the top ten of VCM visits-generating sites are the websites of the Musée Guimet in Paris, the National Museum of Vietnam, the Museum of Anthropology in Madrid, Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna, and the Chester Beatty Library (these two museums appeared high in the list only since August) a joint Korean museum website and the Ayala Museum in Manila.

**Sponsorship Campaign**

We have sent proposals to a number of companies, but did not manage to receive support for various reasons.

A sponsorship file has been created (annex) and has been sent to the following companies:

1. Microsoft (France)
2. Royal Dutch Shell (The Netherlands)
3. TNT Post (The Netherlands)
4. Heineken (The Netherlands)
5. Philips (The Netherlands)
6. Ahold (The Netherlands)
7. Hagemeyer (The Netherlands)
8. Akzo Nobel (The Netherlands)
9. Rabobank (The Netherlands)
10. Barclays Bank (The Netherlands)
11. Sony (France)
12. HP (France)
13. Ricard (France)
14. BNP Paribas (France)

We received polite refusals from the majority of them. They find the VCM interesting but they are not able to provide funding at this time. Most of them are not starting any new sponsorship in 2009. Unfortunately, when businesses need to cut expenses, the voluntary obligations are the first to go.

Only one, BNP Paribas, is still considering our request.

**New VCM sponsor:**

Gerlach Art Packers and Shippers is a Dutch company specialised in art shipping. Gerlach is fully engaged in the cultural world in art handling and shipping. It is known for its customer-oriented approach and expertise. Gerlach's president, Fred Weijgertse, has underlined Gerlach's commitment to culture by sponsoring the VCM Chinese campaign (7500 euros).
Basic operations and common functionalities

This year, the VCM-team has sustained and strengthened the existing activities by:
- keeping the website online and up to date
- giving support to the contributors and adding new content
- providing Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

The SEO improves the volume and quality of traffic to the VCM website from search engines via "natural" ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results. Our SEO targets different search modalities, including image search and geographic search. This gives the VCM a web presence that can be controlled and continuously improved. A web crawler gateway for objects and museums has been added as well as page descriptions and keywords; we now submit new content to Google thanks to Google Webmaster Tools. Before the implementation of the SEO, the VCM was referenced by Google 64 times, now 203.

- solving problems:
  o on the Home Page
    a. The random selection of the masterpieces of the day has been fixed. Due to a technical problem, the masterpiece of the day was stuck in Europe for a while.
    b. In order to add the widget to the VCM page, the menu has been modified. The orange part is dedicated to the VCM contents and the blue part to applications and the other contents.
  o Calendar of Events. Previously, only the museum’s name was shown on the home page. It was therefore possible to show an event at several National Museums of Ethnology in another one at the Museum of Ethnology, without giving the user any idea where they were. The city name is now visible on the home page. On the Calendar page itself, both the city name and the country are given.
  o Videos page: a scroll bar has been added to this page. More than 4 videos can be added to this page.
  o Reactions page: a scroll bar has been added to this page. More than 4 reactions can be added to this page.
  o A VCM “wiki disclaimer” has been added: “the VCM website contains indeed links to third party websites. The VCM is not responsible for any content of any linked website. The VCM provides these links as a convenience only, and a link does not imply endorsement, sponsorship, or any affiliation with the linked website.”

Implementation of a governing structure for the group of trustees

The core-VCM team has performed the day-to-day work as decided by the VCM trustees by:
- continuing the contracts of Manus Brinkman, content editor and Julie Trebault, liaison and innovation officer
- supporting content management and editing
- covering the travels and meetings expenses
- reporting to the board of trustees
- planning, preparing and arranging the board meetings