

# Looking Ahead: A Year for **Action** towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Museums should...

*"Lead by Example"*

*"Proactively Engage"*

*"Have Stubborn Optimism"*

A Global Webinar on Museum Action during the UN Climate Week 2020 by:



American  
Alliance of  
Museums

Environment and Climate





賽馬會氣候變化博物館  
JOCKEY CLUB MUSEUM OF CLIMATE CHANGE

"The Environment and Climate Professional Network of the American Alliance of Museums is a volunteer community working to establish museums as leaders in environmental stewardship, sustainability, and climate action."

**1** AAM Blog. (2020, April 21). Earth Day during COVID-19: Green Tips for Closed Museums. Retrieved from <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/04/22/earth-day-during-covid-19-green-tips-for-closed-museums/>

**2** Forsythe, M. (2015, May 21). Director of Climate Change Group Looks to Hong Kong for Museum Ideas. Retrieved from <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20150521/c21museum/en-us/>

#### **Resources:**

-  Museums can manage what they can measure
-  Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide

**“Museums have enormous carbon footprints. In 2019 we estimated they emitted almost 12 million<sup>1</sup> metric tons of carbon emissions in the US alone.”**

American Alliance of Museums Environment and Climate Network (AAM ECN)

*“That is the equivalent of 2.6 million cars on the road and that does not include museum transportation and embodied carbon.”*

**Joyce Lee**

Chair of Benchmarking and Carbon Committee, AAM ECN



Learn about Embodied Energy with the Museum of Modern Art, New York:



Click [HERE](#) for a 1-min Video

## Overview

The **United Nations (UN) Climate Week** encourages individuals and organizations to collaboratively reflect on their roles in climate action. Despite the 2020 global pandemic, Climate Week continued the discussion online to engage multiple stakeholders in workshops and remote meetings.

### **Joyce Lee**

Chair Elect, American Alliance of Museums Environment & Climate Network  
President, IndigoJLD Green + Health  
September 21, 2020

**Museums** have a huge role in the climate conversation. **To encourage solution-oriented thinking on museum sustainability**, the American Alliance of Museums Environment and Climate Network (AAM ECN) and the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (MoCC) co-sponsored this webinar event during the UN Climate Week in September.

During the **two-hour live** discussion, three renowned museum professionals shared insights on how they have been addressing operational sustainability while preserving cultural heritage and engaging communities. **Hundreds of people across several continents** tuned in to learn about best practices and interact in the live Q&A.

## **Museums for Sustainable Development**



**Ms. Kerr** is the Chief of Conservation and a Senior Paintings Conservator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C. She oversees museum programming in the Lunder Conservation Center, a facility with floor to ceiling glass walls that allow the public to observe the conservation staff caring for the collections.

## Amber Kerr

Smithsonian  
American Art  
Museum

Washington D.C.



## Cecilia Lam

Jockey Club  
Museum of  
Climate Change

Hong Kong



**Mrs. Lam** is the Founding Director of the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (MoCC), the world's first museum<sup>2</sup> dedicated to the theme of climate change. She is concurrently the Director of the Campus Planning and Sustainability Office and directs the CUHK secretariat of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's Hong Kong chapter.

**Dr. Newell** is the Manager of Climate Change Projects at the Australian Museum, Sydney. She works on the cultural dimensions of climate change, focusing on communities in Australia and the Pacific, as well as contributing to international museum networks.

## Jenny Newell

Australian Museum

Sydney







countries across Asia,  
America, Europe, Australia  
live streamed the webinar



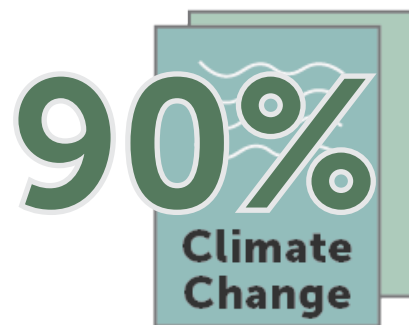
audience members  
engagement online



of participants suggest that  
museums could more  
actively pursue the UN SDGs



of participants believe that  
museums are in a good  
position to promote pro-  
climate behavioral change



of participants better  
understand the power  
of museums to deliver  
climate action messages



## “Cultural Heritage is a Climate Action issue, and Climate Action is a Cultural Heritage issue.”

“**Stemming the Tide**” is a two-day symposium that engages experts and the general public in the discussion of global strategies for sustaining cultural heritage through climate change. From an organizer’s perspective, Ms. Kerr shared her planning insights and takeaways.

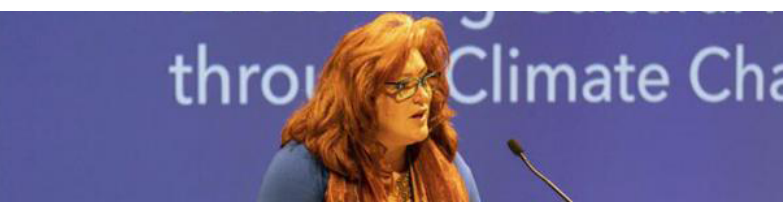
The symposium couldn’t have happened without **close collaboration between SAAM and many cultural institutions**, including the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Institute for Conservation (IIC), and the American Institute for Conservation (AIC). These organizers adapted lessons from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement into **a heritage change impact table**. This outlined the discussion framework and provided a benchwork to tackle climate change challenges. Approaching the audience as a part of **the Earth Optimism Event Series**, the symposium attracted not only professionals but also the public who are keen to hear stories of success and directions for positive changes. Indeed, the online streaming, the in-person breakout sessions, and the post-event webcasts gathered hundreds of participants whose voices were heard and addressed.



**Keynote speakers** are both the field experts and the breakout-session leads. The symposium featured Ken Kimmel, Ashley Robbins, Isabel Rivera-Collazo, Carl Elefante, Victoria Herrmann, Janene Yazzle, Nicole Heller, and Alison Tickell, each of whom spoke to **the importance of cultural heritage in his/her work**. Multiple **in-person breakout sessions** invited the audience in an unscripted, **open dialogue** around six topics. The participants then **tweeted** their takeaways to empower people in a larger community.

**Ms. Kerr** also appreciated the **strategic partnerships outside the symposium** that amplify cultural heritage’s voice in climate action. **Climate Heritage Network** is a free-access platform that engages heritage preservation professionals at all levels.

**Learn more about the 2020 symposium here.**





CECILIA LAM

**“MoCC shares the same vision as the UK in its 2020 Year of Climate Action, timely and collective action by all.”**



**The Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change** (MoCC) strives to inspire pro-climate action through a series of carefully organized engagement programs. Targeting museum goers, young people, and the general public, Mrs. Lam shared **the three-fold strategy of MoCC**.

**The first strategy – “Communicating climate change”** includes exhibitions that call for actions to achieve the SDGs. While **Mobile MoCC** proactively brings the exhibitions to the community, **the Virtual Tour** allows visitors to explore the museum anytime remotely or participate in a live guided tour online even during the COVID-19 lockdown. The strategy aims to stimulate the museum goers to rethink climate emergency and inspire behavioral change in their daily life.

**The second strategy – “Nurturing sustainability leaders”** aims to provide **experiential and service**

**learning opportunities to university and high school students.** The strategy aims not only to deliver knowledge but also to challenge future leaders to be change agents who lead SDG action.

**The third strategy – “Engaging the community”** adopts online resources and SDG community action activities to familiarize the public with the SDGs and inspire community action to achieve goals.

Mrs. Lam concluded the presentation with real life stories of a university student helping a secondary school on pro-climate activities inspired by MoCC’s programs.



MoCC encourages pro-climate action in local communities, such as recycling paper wraps and operating hydroponics.



**Cultural institutions** build cultural and environmental resilience through diverse programs and policies that connect and encourage people to learn from each other. **As institutions well connected to communities, museums** often promote powerful dialogues and open up imaginations for solutions that address hotly debated issues, such as climate change.

Dr. Newell highlighted **three Australian cultural institutions that use the SDGs to establish strategic priorities in the era of climate change.** **The Sydney Opera House** is focusing on 9 of the 17 SDGs. The staff are implementing strategic plans in the areas of sustainability, access and inclusion towards **First Nations Reconciliation** and **new standards for heritage building operation.** Another example is **Questacon**, the National Science and Technology Centre in Canberra. While making the SDGs visible in the exhibits creatively, Questacon is **advancing partnerships to deliver sustainability leadership programs for young people.**



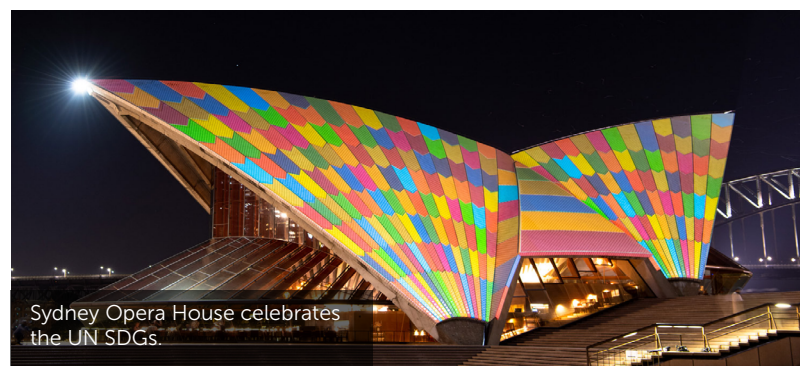
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**"It's about sharing powerful stories and inspiring ideas to generate positive futures."**

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Speaking to her work at the Australian Museum, Dr. Newell reflected on **the programs and exhibitions that amplify a diverse range of voices on climate change.** She outlined the ways in which SDGs are implemented. One example is that **the museum's education programming enables equitable, open access** by hosting both in-person sessions and digital platforms. Such programming includes educator-led workshops on site, the traveling "Museum in a box" for schools, and the sharing of powerful stories and images through "**Capturing Climate Change**", an online photographic exhibition.

To improve building sustainability, **the Australian Museum is reducing the carbon footprint of its operations.** It has just become **carbon neutral** and set next steps to **adopt renewable energy (2021) and an electric fleet (2023/24).** But the approach to climate solutions does not stop at these commitments. The Australian Museum is creating **new programs to connect to communities who are harder to reach on climate change.**





## COP26\* is delayed to 2021, so what could museums do in your region?

**Jenny:** We will continue to galvanize people across Australia to take climate action. We **reach out to people through multiple channels**, e.g. exhibits, social media, and discussion events. There are also international events like the design competition **Reimagining Museums for Climate Action**. The winners will be shown at the Glasgow Science Centre during COP26.

**Amber:** We host **collaborative symposia**, like “Stemming the Tide” which gathers people from different professional backgrounds together at the intersection of climate change and cultural heritage.

**Cecilia:** There is a positive angle in the delay, as we have more time to **design educational activities and collect data** that could generate insights from our community voices.

\*: COP26 refers to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in 2021 (originally planned for in 2020)

## What are the most straight-forward changes that make organizations more sustainable?

**Amber:** We **surveyed** our community on “where we are the most wasteful”. **Packaging and construction** have been common waste-generating sectors, where the disposal of plastics during installation and transportation has been huge. But the **silver lining exists in the reduction of air travel and energy use**, with measures like electronic ticketing.

**Jenny:** Allow **more temperature drift** in the collection storage. Research has shown that a **slightly wider margin is safe** and **saves a lot of power**.

**Cecilia:** Museums could certainly operate more sustainably. One example is the **Low Carbon Operation**, which advocates for low impact designs such as applying natural light, LEDs, and shading to maintain the optimal building temperature. **Paperless operation** is another crucial carbon reduction measure.

## What could museums do in the climate change movement around the world?

**Cecilia:** As a university-affiliated museum, we **picked relevant targets within the 17 UN SDGs** based on our time and capabilities. In this context, we keep **engaging people in the local communities** and maintain a dialogue around the SDGs.

**Jenny:** Developing **networks of museums** that work on climate and social justice. The **Museums & Climate Change Network** is one. Museums can create **digital hubs or databases** for the public to contribute to and to support climate action.

**Amber:** I think that it is crucial for museums to **recognize a diverse scope of artist works**, as their creativity from different aspects of life is very important. I can’t wait to see what the artists can do!

# LIVE Q&A Session:

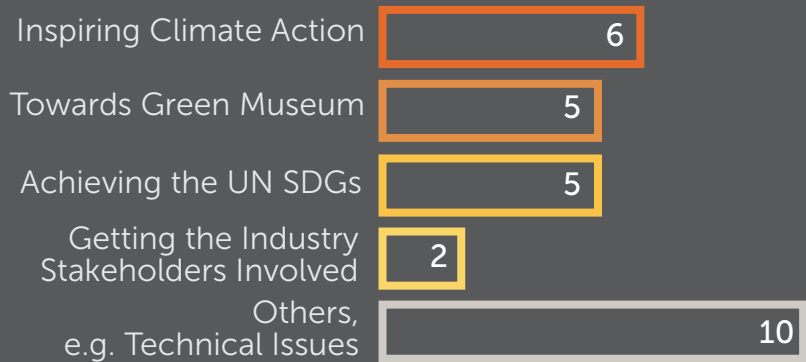
The webinar received an overwhelming response from our audience worldwide. Our audience expressed **three main topics of interest** in the live discussion:

How can museums...

- 1) inspire and initiate **climate action**?
- 2) incorporate **sustainability** into **their own operations**?
- 3) help achieve the **UN Sustainability Development Goals** (SDGs)?

28

Total Questions Asked



## Our Audiences Said...

*"Organize more webinars related to SDG engagement!"*

*"How do museums in old buildings improve sustainability in their operations?"*

*"I wish to hear from other museums on Climate Action and Sustainability too."*

*"I would love to engage in a continuous dialogue around museum sustainability through a series of events and talks."*

*"Could we create a Green Museum Forum?"*



Let Us Know Your Interest



# In Closing

To say COVID-19 has brought tremendous hardship and heartbreak is an understatement. It has also provided **an unparalleled opportunity to invite these speakers to spend time with us** - they would normally be on a plane or traveling otherwise.

For those who plant trees for every mile flown, we can now water other trees instead. But we do need to find ways to help our economy and our environment, the two more intertwined than ever before.

The building of a **Green Museum Community** is both feasible and urgent. The programming

leading to COP 26 is already pointing in that direction. **We need all of you in the audience for your innovation, your commitment and your ingenuity.**

Thank you.



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





**Considering** humanity's current demands on the planet are unsustainable; the planet and all its inhabitants, human and non-human are facing an entangled series of unprecedented environmental and societal crises, the impacts of which: rising inequality, wars, poverty, climate change and loss of biodiversity, are serving to amplify these crises.

**Recognizing** the members of the United Nations have unanimously agreed to implement Agenda 2030, Transforming our World, to address the crises and to initiate the creation of pathways to a sustainable future.

**Understanding** that museums, as trusted sources of knowledge, are invaluable resources for engaging communities and are ideally positioned to empower the global society to collectively imagine, design and create a sustainable future for all.



**An excerpt from  
the Resolution adopted by  
ICOM's 34th General Assembly  
Kyoto, Japan 2019**



[See Full Resolution Text](#)

"Museums offer many social, cultural and scientific benefits for our society. As the epitome of learning and ingenuity, it seems only right that these buildings should also be making the transition to a net zero future. By ensuring that museums provide positive benefits for climate action, we can make sure that cultural assets can continue to be an important symbol of sustainable innovation."

**Cristina Gamboa, CEO, World Green Building Council**



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**賽馬會氣候變化博物館**

**JOCKEY CLUB MUSEUM OF CLIMATE CHANGE**



**WORLD  
GREEN  
BUILDING  
WEEK  
21-25  
SEPTEMBER  
2020**

**SAAM**  
Smithsonian  
American Art  
Museum

*Lunder Conservation Center*

**AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM**

#### **Support Team** (Alphabetical Order)

**Ms. Carmen Chan**, Assistant Manager, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

**Mr. Joey Chan**, Site Manager, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

**Ms. Kate Fugett**, Assistant Objects Conservator, American Museum of Natural History, Sustainability Committee, American Institute for Conservation

**Ms. Joyce Yuqi Liu**, University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design

**Dr. George Ma**, Associate Director, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

**Dr. Matthew Pang**, Science Communication Manager, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

**Mr. Eric Tam**, Information Technology Officer, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

#### **Editorial Team** (Alphabetical Order)

**Ms. Joyce Yuqi Liu**, University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design

**Dr. Matthew Pang**, Science Communication Manager, Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

#### **Acknowledgement**

**Mr. Mark Keen**, Co-chair, AAM ECN

**Ms. Megan Lantz**, Director, Content and Community Engagement, AAM

**Ms. Elizabeth Merritt**, Director, Center for the Future of Museums, AAM

**Mr. Dean Phelus**, Senior Director, Special Projects, AAM

**Images** are sourced from presenters' slide presentations.

#### **Contact Us**

[environmentandclimate@aam-us.org](mailto:environmentandclimate@aam-us.org)  
[mocc@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:mocc@cuhk.edu.hk)