

Book review: Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections

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Aparna Tandon et al. ICCROM & UNESCO, 2016, ISBN 978-92-9077-247-7 (ICCROM) / 978-92-3-100162-8 (UNESCO)

Some books and publications are to be pored over at leisure and savoured at length. Others are for immediate consumption and reference. This booklet – 55 pages including annexe – is available for immediate download from the ICCROM web-site (<http://www.iccrom.org/downloads>) and sometimes, one imagines, for immediate referral ‘in case of need’.

The best summary of what the publication is about and for is provided by the publishers, thus: “ It is a simple and practical handbook available for free download that is intended to offer a step-by-step guide on how to evacuate valuable objects in the face of an imminent threat, from emergency documentation to safe transport to temporary storage.” It is also a publication that the new technologies of the internet and electronic distribution allow to be a real service to those with immediate needs and situations to sort out.

Starting from the same point that IIC’s founders did, the terrible loss to cultural heritage that took place in the Second World War, this book turns to the current day threats to heritage from war, terrorism, earth events and climactic disasters and shows how those with responsibility for protection of their cultural heritage can best mitigate what may be to come, or is unfolding in front of them.

In its style and presentation it is hugely practical and to the point – the authors having realised that a resource like this needs to be of immediate use and be clear, calm and considered in its recommendations. Those needing to use this publication may not have time to reflect and cogitate. Workflows and processes are laid out using effective graphics, in a calming blue shade, and there are useful coloured tabs to take one through the stages and processes suggested. Flow charts and tasks are summarised then enlarged on, with brief and useful text and photographs showing the ways that mitigation and protection can be put in place. Simple lists of the basic equipment and processes that will assist in planning a response to an unplanned emergency and, for those who have time, some very useful references to more detailed information resources.

While it is sad that such a guidebook is necessary it is a great service to us all that this has been produced so well and thoughtfully, and made so accessible. A very useful resource to have available; ICCROM and UNESCO are to be congratulated on compiling and publishing this.