

French-American Chamber of Commerce - Philadelphia Chapter

Resiliency to Preserve Art and Culture

The Paris Agreement and How Museums are Preparing for Climate Risk

Museums act as reminders. They remind us of the incredible ability we have to create beauty and meaning. They also remind us of fragility. We mourn when important pieces of art are lost, like in the tragic fire of Brazil's National Museum. The pressing reality of climate change warns of the possibility of losing transcendent artwork. The French-American Chamber of Commerce of Philadelphia hosted a timely event to discuss the intersection of climate change and art. *Resiliency to Preserve Art and Culture: The Paris Agreement and How Museums are Preparing for Climate Risk* focused on how museums across the world are working to preserve art and combat climate change.

Matt Mahoney, Vice President of External Affairs for SUEZ North America, led off the evening by discussing the role of both the public and private sector in fulfilling the Paris Agreement. Water access will be hugely impacted by climate change, with a worldwide increase in water scarcity predicted. SUEZ has worked to bridge the gap between businesses and cities to lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Utilizing strategies like conserving water with smart meters and transforming waste into energy, SUEZ has worked with diverse actors like the government in Azerbaijan and Mars Candy to achieve success in combating climate change. Although the United States pulled out of the Paris Agreement, there is optimism because American companies and cities are still being aggressive to exceed the accords of the agreement.

Raphaël Gernath, MA, The Urban School of the Paris Institute of Political Studies (SciencesPo), followed by discussing the iconic Louvre in Paris. The Seine River makes the Louvre vulnerable to flooding. Museum closures due to flooding in 2016 and 2018 cost the museum over 1 million euros in lost revenue. The Louvre has planned for flooding with a detailed strategy to relocate artwork in case of emergency. Additionally, water pumping stations and large steel doors are employed to keep water at bay. Moreover, the Louvre plans to reduce its annual consumption of electricity by 73% through its utilization of LED lights in the courtyard. The Louvre's efforts to not only preserve its artwork, but also to conserve energy show that this historic museum can adapt to modern environmental issues.

Joyce Lee, President of IndigoJLD, contended that museums are key community and economic actors, adding \$50 billion to the U.S. GDP, producing 726,000 jobs, and paying \$12 billion in tax revenue. She discussed how museums from the Dali Museum in Florida, to the Getty Museum in Los Angeles are showing resiliency in planning for natural disasters. She and the head of facilities at the Whitney Museum in New York City, Peter Scott, spoke on how the Whitney was able to withstand Hurricane Sandy. Constructed to LEED standards, the Whitney was able to use a water tight door and a mobile wall to resist storm surges. Museums can be more energy intensive than hospitals, so preservation and environmental considerations are of paramount importance.

Lastly, **ZeeAnn Mason, Chief Operating Officer**, and **John McDevitt, Director of Design & Construction, at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia** spoke about lessons they have learned in the eventful, early days of their museum. A nearby fire tested this LEED gold standard museum's preparedness. McDevitt was able to control systems from the touch of his cell phone, like shutting off the outside air system so that smoke was not sucked inside, which greatly increased responsiveness. Although McDevitt will admit some level of luck in the response, the incredible monitoring technology saved a great magnitude of art.

The distinguished speakers left the crowd with a fitting mixture of inspiration and concern. While it is clearly concerning that art and our planet are in danger, inspiration came from museums' dedication to reducing their GHG emissions and carbon footprint to combat climate change. There is an inspiration to the fact that buildings that hold beautiful artwork are working to preserve the beauty of our planet in addition to their art.

-- Written by Alexander David Bervik
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