

International Exhibitions | The official showcase of the nations

| Communication and self-representation

The Universal Exhibitions represent one of the first forms of mass communication.

Each International Exhibition produced its own official iconography relating to the innovative message that characterised it, both in terms of industrial and technological progress and also as propaganda to promote various political objectives. The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 attracted six million visitors, representing mass communication, a forerunner to mass media, never witnessed before. Promotional activities undertaken by the press along with the issue of many dedicated handouts published in the participating countries were central to the popularity of these exhibitions, while manifestos and satire documented the excesses of self-congratulation, popular perceptions and the changing mood. On a political level, the exhibitions offered an excellent international stage for self-promotion; good examples of this are seen in the coverage of the official visits of Isma'il Pasha of Egypt and that of the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-'Aziz (Abdülaziz) as a guest of Napoleon III to the exhibition held in Paris in 1867. Two years later there was a similar ceremony at Ismaïlia to mark the opening of the Suez Canal.



Working Number: RO 023

Name: Medal – The Great Exhibition Palace, London 1851

Holding Museum: National Museum of Romanian History

Date: 1851

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Crystal Palace symbolised the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. The verso of this celebrative medal reads: "Proposed by H.R.H Prince Albert. Designed by Josh Paxton. Erected by Fox Henderson & Co. Occupies 18 acres." The recto details the measurements of the building and the weights of the steel and glass.



Working Number: AT 043

Name: Medal of Emperor Franz Joseph I

Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Coin Cabinet

Date: 1873

Materials: Zinn

Curator Justification: The celebrative medal struck for the exhibition held in Vienna in 1873 depicts the "Rotunda" pavilion designed by Scott Russell; there is a portrait of Emperor Franz Joseph I on the obverse. The medal commemorates the 25th anniversary of the emperor's reign and, after several military defeats, it also represents the Austrian Empire's integrity, while also celebrating the renovated city.



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Working Number: TR2 126

Name: Ottoman Clothing Album

Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date: Late 19th century – beginning of the 20th century

Materials: Photograph

Curator Justification: Pascal Sebah, a pioneering photographer working in Istanbul, prepared The Ottoman Clothing Album as an exhibit on the Ottoman stand at the exhibition held in Vienna in 1873. Through modern photographic technology, Ottoman Turkey proposed to occidental visitors a series of “realistic” male and female portraits to provide a powerful image of Ottoman culture.



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Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date:

Materials: Late 19th century – beginning of the 20th century

Curator Justification: Photograph

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Working Number: TR2 123

Name: Portrait Album – Ottoman State Officers

Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date:

Materials: Late 19th century – beginning of the 20th century

Curator Justification: Photograph

Pascal Sebah, a pioneering photographer working in Istanbul, prepared The Ottoman Clothing Album as an exhibit on the Ottoman stand at the exhibition held in Vienna in 1873. Through modern photographic technology, Ottoman Turkey proposed to occidental visitors a series of “realistic” male and female portraits to provide a powerful image of Ottoman culture.



Working Number: FR 114

Name: The Exhibition!! The triumph of industry

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1867

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This caricature pokes fun at the “universal cult” of Industry, which here is seen seated on a throne alimented with carbon, while all the people of every nationality that surround her are totally oblivious to the pollution. It seems that even works of art can now be produced by machines!



Working Number: FR 115

Name: The opening of the exhibition, by Blass. M. Carnot and his entourage, pass under the Eiffel tower

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1889

Materials: -

Curator Justification:

The iconography connected with individual International Exhibitions was sometimes employed by magazine and newspaper journalists to reveal the “hidden side” of the official narrative connected with them. In France, for example, this cartoon was published to mock good naturedly the auto-celebrative use of the 1889 exhibition which was held during a difficult political period in France.



Working Number: FR 113

Name: Gustave Eiffel. The Eiffel Tower in 1889.

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1889

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Eiffel Tower, depicted on a poster for the exhibition held in Paris in 1878, is seen as a symbol of France’s industrial innovation and vitality. The other images represent the Palace of Industries where the “Dôme Central” was the first building to use electricity to large extent, and the “Machine Gallery”, intended to promote modern industrial machines, had some exhibits that looked well into the technological future.



Working Number: SP 073

Name: Interior of Kairouan Mosque, Tunis

Holding Museum: National Archaeological Museum

Date: 1850–1892

Materials: Albumen paper; albumen print

Curator
Justification: Photography was one of the most effective mediums for each country to document itself, not only in terms of artistic heritage but also to show elements of popular culture, such as costume for example. This is one of 89 photos taken by the Tunisian Antiquities Service for the European Historic Exhibition held in Madrid in 1892.



Working Number: FR 112
Name: Programme card for the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre.
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1900
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The invention of Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre made the dual-projection of sound and images possible for the first time. Thanks to a phonograph, Henri Lioret and Clément-Maurice Gratioulet were able to synchronise the voices of famous actors of the time (e.g. Sarah Bernhardt) with the images.



Working Number: FR 143
Name: The great celestial globe. 1900 Exposition Universelle.
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1900
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The Grand Globe Céleste, situated on the Champ de Mars, became a dominant symbol of the Paris exhibition of 1900. Created to represent France's progress in scientific research, inside the 50-metre diameter sphere, visitors could discover astronomy. Apart from the huge dimensions of the globe, the poster also illustrates the affluence of the viewing public.



Working Number: IT1 007
Name: The Committee of Tunis for Milan Exhibition 1906
Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)
Date: 1906
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The Italian community in Tunisia was given the opportunity to take part in the exhibition held in Milan in 1906. The people in the photo, whose names are listed below the image, are all Italian professionals and entrepreneurs who ran commercial activities in Tunisia.



Working Number: IT2 026
Name: Poster for the International Exhibition of Milan, 1906, depicting the opening of the Simplon Tunnel
Holding Museum:

Date: State Library of Modern and Contemporary History

Materials: 1906

Curator -

Justification: Leopoldo Metlikovitz's Manifesto was created for the exhibition held in Milan in 1906. Through use of a heroic style of Michelangelo-esque inspiration, the personifications of Progress and Science guide a train toward a light seen at the end of the tunnel. This is an allegory to the future, where, finally, thanks to human endeavour, civilisation reigns and great constructions are achieved, such as the Sempione Tunnel linking Italy and Switzerland.



Working Number: IT2 106

Name: Le Esposizioni del 1911: Roma, Torino, Firenze Milan: F.lli Treves Editori, 1911. Book about the Italian international exhibitions

Holding Museum: Central Institute for Ethno-Anthropology, National Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions

Date: 1911

Materials: 1911

Curator -

Justification: Electricity played a decisive role at the exhibition held in Turin in 1911, a city with an industrial vocation. An image by Luigi Bompard was chosen for the cover of the volume to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Italy's unification. It collated all the illustrated dossiers from past exhibitions held in Turin, Florence and Rome.



Working Number: PD 043

Name: Egypt, Opening of the Suez Canal, Blessing the Canal at Port Said in the Presence of the Imperial and Royal Visitors

Holding Museum: The Library of Congress

Date: 1870 (published)

Materials: -

Curator -

Justification: Khedive Isma'il Pasha invited European sovereigns to the various events to mark the opening of the Suez Canal, celebrations that lasted for over three weeks and included a ceremony at Ismaïlia. Three pavilions were designed in the occidental style based on those seen at past European exhibitions: there was one for sovereign guests, another for the Catholic Church and one for the Muslim 'Ulama.



Working Number: TR2 171

Name: Memorial Volume – Dedicatory and opening ceremonies of the Chicago World's Colombian Exposition – 1893

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archeological Museums

Date: 1893

Materials: Paper

Curator -

Justification: This is a memorial volume for the World's Columbian Exposition, or Chicago World's Fair, which was held in 1893 to celebrate the arrival

of Christopher Columbus to the New World in 1492. The Ottoman Empire was invited to participate in this extremely influential social and cultural event.
