



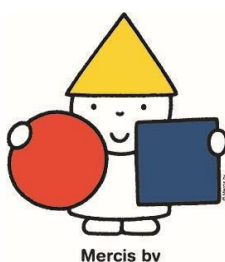
Hands On! International
Association of Children in Museums



European Museum Academy
A European Museum Expertise Foundation



THE 2026 JUDGES' REPORT



CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD

The jury is looking especially for museums, exhibitions, programmes and museum environments that show:

- a commitment to children, to encourage children's curiosity and to stimulate their imagination
- creativity and innovation
- quality learning experiences

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD

- Permanent space designed for children up to the age of 14 years.
- Age-appropriate exhibitions and/or programmes based on the cognitive, social and emotional development of children.
- Permanent staff/ management.
- Dedicated budget.
- Interactive learning experiences and exhibit strategies engaging as many senses as possible.
- Specialist provision for children within the museum sector internationally.

INTRODUCTION

This is the fifteenth year of the Award, and members of our judging panel have visited the shortlisted museums in person. We consider there is no substitute for face-to-face visits which enable us to have spontaneous discussions with the participating museums.

The Children's Museum Award was established in 2011 by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International for the recognition of excellence in the specific sector of international children's museums. In 2014 the name of the Award was changed to the Children in Museums Award, to reflect the wider range of provision for children in today's museums. Applications are welcomed from children's museums and from education, children's and youth departments in museums and science centres, both long-established and recently opened.

The European Museum Academy (EMA) is a non-profit Foundation established to reflect museums at the international level, to promote research on museography and museology as a high cultural activity, to provide constructive criticism and promote discussion on new exhibitions and museums, and to diffuse museological knowledge and ideas among members of the profession. It aims to promote the conception and development of new as well as of traditional museums as tools of social change. EMA co-operates with Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums for this Award. Judges representing the European Museum Academy are also active members of the Academy in a number of roles. www.europeanmuseumacademy.eu

Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums (HOII), is an international professional organisation representing and advocating for its non-profit member institutions. It actively stimulates the creation and development of children's museums (including science centres and large collections-based institutions serving young visitors) and more space for cultural and educational activities for children and young people. HOII supports the important role of children's museums as centres where play inspires creativity, informal and lifelong learning. www.hands-on-international.net.

THE JUDGES' REPORT

The panel of judges considered carefully all the material submitted by the candidates, paying special attention to the ways in which a candidate is likely to change the course of museum thinking or museum practice, nationally and internationally, with imaginative interpretation and presentation being marked highly. From 15 applications the judges reached a varied shortlist of candidates. All are museums of the highest quality and show no compromises in subjects and approaches which are interesting for children, stretching their imagination and range of interests. They tackle subjects from aerospace to art and from wildlife to chocolate. Museums are increasingly consulting children on their programmes, enabling them to become protagonists, and others create many playful and meaningful activities for adults and children to share. New standards have continued to be set this year for what museums working with children can achieve, and what children can aspire to under online guidance, learning in a playful and interactive way.

After an intensive period of exchange of views, a shortlist was announced and all the museums on the list received a visit from members of the judging panel. Reports were written, shared and discussed at a meeting in August, and a list of Finalists was confirmed, together with the overall winner.

- **Technopolis, Mechelen, Belgium**
- **House of Stories, Paris, France**
- **Alice – Museum for Children, Berlin, Germany**
- **Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor, Cricoteka Kraków, Poland**
- **POLIN – Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, Poland**

TECHNOPOLIS, MECHELEN

Technopolis is one of Belgium's hands-on science centres, its mission to spark curiosity and confidence in STEM through playful, embodied and interactive experiences that make complex ideas tangible and accessible. WANDERHEAD, the new permanent exhibition, is aimed at 4–8-year-olds in both school and family settings. Every aspect of the exhibition, from spatial layout and graphic design to games and interactives, has been carefully considered. The visual language is consistent and attractive, combining bright colours, clear signage, minimal text and playful navigation tailored to young children and families. The main innovation lies in its focus on emotional, affective and embodied learning, moving beyond traditional role play towards deeper and more meaningful experiences, through a wide variety of interactive activities. A clear educational concept underpins the exhibition, balancing intuitive learning for children with supporting information for adults. Its focus on younger children and alignment with Belgium's new curriculum demonstrates a strong commitment to educational relevancy. Inclusion planning includes a gender- and race-neutral mascot, multilingual exhibition content, audio guides for visitors with visual impairment and sign-language resources for deaf audiences. The centre has also introduced a thoughtful scheduling policy, reserving certain days for younger children and others for slightly older age groups, ensuring experiences are better tailored to visitors' developmental needs. A notable feature is the personalised card that visitors print using their admission ticket and then use during interactive activities.

The judges said: The project is exemplary in its combination of play, education, and the long-term cultivation of curiosity through embodied learning and emotionally engaging approaches to interpretation. It demonstrates a forward-looking understanding of how meaningful learning experiences can be created by connecting knowledge in a beautiful and engaging space with physical experiences, emotions, and active participation for the youngest children.



Technopolis
(Director: Stéphane Berghmans)
Technologielaan 1
BE-2800 Mechelen
Belgium

CENTRE FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE ART OF TADEUSZ KANTOR CRICOTEKA, KRAKÓW

The museum is housed in a beautiful modern building completed in 2014, whose architecture reflects the ideas of its founder, Tadeusz Kantor. It offers an inspiring example of how an art museum can place children at the centre of cultural participation. Through its exhibition, *Wild Frolics: An Exhibition for All*, Cricoteka has consciously embraced a new and innovative direction. Rather than focusing on Kantor's objects, photographs or paintings, the exhibition places his ideas and his commitment to adventure, dialogue and creativity at its core. Inspired by the artist's concept of the *Anti-exhibition*, the project shifts attention away from objects and towards artistic processes such as experimentation, imagination and play. For the institution, this represents a major step, taken with considerable enthusiasm and confidence. Children were involved from the beginning, through workshops, testing sessions and prototype evaluations. Their ideas and reactions inspired the exhibition's development and the artist's creative processes: their role was largely limited to the initial stages, as the children were not involved in the subsequent design process or in the evaluation. The exhibition is a shared space where children and adults participate on equal terms. It promotes intergenerational dialogue and respect while removing barriers often associated with contemporary art. Visual orientation tools, playful language, interactive prompts and activity-based signage encourage independent exploration and active engagement.

The judges said: This institution demonstrates a willingness to actively push its boundaries. In a region and country where museums are largely traditional and conservative, this is of significant and inspiring value. Cricoteka does not know where *Wild Frolics* will ultimately lead, but its success, both internally and externally, is opening new doors. Existing objects are given new narratives and contemporary relevance, yet still in keeping with the vision of its avant-garde founder.



Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora CRICOTEKA w Krakowie
(Director: Natalia Zarzecka)
2-4 Nadwiślańska Street
PL-30-527 Kraków
Poland

POLIN - MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS, WARSAW

This is a major cultural institution in Warsaw, co-founded by the City of Warsaw, the Polish Government, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland. Its core exhibition is complemented by exceptionally well-designed, child-friendly educational spaces. While many cultural institutions scaled back their support for displaced communities after the initial wave of solidarity in 2022 and the conclusion of dedicated ministry funding, POLIN stands out as a rare and courageous exception. The museum has maintained uninterrupted, cyclical and long-term programmes dedicated to Ukrainian and Belarusian residents, while openly displaying the Ukrainian flag on its façade. It has used its strong institutional position and social reach to develop a sustained and inclusive approach to working with minority and displaced communities, particularly Ukrainian and Belarusian children and families. Its approach combines multilingual communication, participatory programming, community involvement and long-term relationship-building to create a safe, welcoming and meaningful environment for children experiencing displacement and social change. This child-centred quality is exemplified in the mini-exhibition *POLIN: Space to Relax and Create*. Developed in four languages in response to research highlighting the importance of maintaining children's connection to their native language, the space directly involved children in its design. Young visitors co-created tactile typographics that inspired elements of the exhibition and contributed their personal thoughts on leaves displayed throughout the space, giving them a visible and authentic voice in shaping the environment.

The judges said: POLIN should be recognised as a highly significant example of crisis-responsive and socially engaged museum leadership. Its ability to combine a major historical institution and collection with inclusive educational practice, multilingual community engagement, participatory approaches and sustained support for displaced communities offers valuable inspiration for museums internationally. Particularly noteworthy is its willingness to adapt the institution itself – not merely its individual programmes – in response to changing social needs.



POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews
(Director: Dariusz Stola)
6 Mordechaja Anielewicz St.
PL-00-157 Warsaw
Poland

2026 CHILDREN IN MUSEUMS AWARD SPECIAL COMMENDATION

ALICE – MUSEUM FOR CHILDREN, BERLIN

Nestled within the larger FEZ-Berlin complex, for 20 years the museum has been creating interactive children's spaces and hands-on experience areas where visitors can touch and participate. It now shows new pathways to enlarge subject matters, with fresh findings on art/history/science education, on imagination and creativity developing suitable learning strategies and working methods, building of new audiences and contribution to contemporary discussions on learning theories. *Green Planet Berlin* takes an innovative approach by positioning the exhibition as a space for children to explore possible futures rather than simply learn about climate change. The concept of a 'future workshop' encourages children to imagine, experiment and contribute their own ideas around issues such as sustainable cities, food, energy and climate change. About 250 children and young people participated in 10 workshops, exploring topics including sustainable architecture, urban planning, mobility and upcycling. Their ideas and perspectives contributed to shaping the exhibition, demonstrating a genuine commitment to involving children beyond their role as end-users. The exhibition also considers the emotional dimension of learning about climate change. Rather than presenting the subject primarily through problems, consequences or fear, it creates a sense of possibility and encourages children to think about what could be done differently. This is particularly evident in spaces designed for discussion, reinforcing the ideas that there can be multiple perspectives on complex contemporary issues.

The judges said that the museum demonstrates a strong and consistent commitment to respecting children as capable thinkers, contributors and active citizens. Particularly commendable is its willingness to address complex and socially relevant issues in ways that are accessible, engaging and hopeful for young audiences. This Special Commendation is awarded to *Green Planet Berlin* because it offers a compelling model of how museums can address complex issues while supporting children to develop knowledge, critical thinking, empathy and a meaningful sense of agency. Its resilience and ongoing work with challenging topics over the years are to be commended.



Alice – Museum für Kinder im FEZ-Berlin
(Director: Claudia Lorenz)
Straße zum FEZ 2
DE-12459 Berlin
Germany

THE 2026 CHILDREN IN MUSEUMS AWARD WINNER

HOUSE OF STORIES, PARIS

The museum operates two independent venues - each with its own identity and separate ticketing. The original venue, opened in 2023, is a compact children's space within Chantelivre, Paris's historic children's bookshop. Maison Bastille, opened in July 2025 following the success of the first site, occupies a converted early 20th century industrial building. In both venues, the largest area is devoted to the children's exhibition space – a sequence of walk-in scenographies drawn from the publisher's picture books. The installations were developed by designers specialising in children's museums in close co-operation with the original authors and illustrators, resulting in child-height, life-size environments of notable aesthetic coherence and emotional authenticity to the source books.

The deliberately screen-free, tactile approach gives the spaces a distinctive material warmth that sets them apart from other digital 'immersive' venues. Within its own context, the House of Stories is the first child-centred museum for the under-sevens in Paris and one of the very few experiences of this kind in France. The second genuinely original element lies in the curatorial format. Each exhibition brings together 9-12 books by different authors, spanning periods, themes and graphic styles, staged side by side in one continuous landscape. This multi-author approach is reinforced by the constant presence of the physical book. For children, the focus is on a first approach to reading; the second, less obvious element is addressed to adults. Parents and carers are drawn into the world of children's publishing.

The judges felt this is an outstanding project, demonstrating that a private, independent cultural institution for early childhood can achieve excellence without any public funding. It serves as a model for independent private initiatives of this kind internationally – illustrating how publishing expertise, artistic co-creation and museum practice can be woven into a self-sustaining, literary ecosystem for young children. Its screen-free environment encourages a close connection between parent, child and the physical book, providing the foundation for a lifetime love of reading, critical at a time when reading for pleasure, particularly among young people, is in decline. For these reasons it is a worthy winner of the Award this year.



La Maison des histoires
(Directors: Camille Kiejman & Agathe Jacon)
11 rue de Sèvres
FR-75006 Paris
France

THE TROPHY



The trophy is a bronze statue of Miffy, the world-famous children's character, which was created by Dick Bruna (1927-2017). The sculptor is Marc Bruna, Dick Bruna's younger son. This (only existing) statue is a scale model of the original statue that is in Utrecht, the home of Dick Bruna in The Netherlands. The statue was donated to the city by the Soroptimist Club of Utrecht in the 1990s.

Miffy still appeals to children all over the world – the Miffy books are now translated into more than 50 languages. As a character, Miffy embodies the principles of creativity, fantasy, openness (she looks at you), positivity, freedom of thinking and child friendliness.



100 years Dick Bruna

2027 celebrates 100 years of the life and work of the Dutch author, artist, illustrator and graphic designer Dick Bruna. His enduring influence reaches far beyond his most famous creation, Miffy. Bruna developed a distinctive visual language defined by bold lines, flat colour and a profound simplicity that shaped both his children's books as well as his ground-breaking graphic design. Over a long and disciplined career, he approached every project with clarity and care, creating work that remains instantly recognisable yet deeply thoughtful. A unique opportunity to look beyond the familiar and appreciate the full breadth of an artist whose quiet innovation continues to resonate across generation.

APPENDIX ONE: LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR THE 2026 AWARD

Austria	Vienna: Belvedere Museum www.belvedere.at/games
Belgium	Mechelen: Technopolis www.technopolis.be
China, Republic of	Shanghai: Neobio Museum no website
Czech Republic	Prague: National Gallery in Prague www.ngprague.cz
France	Paris: House of Stories https://en.lamaisondeshistoires.com
Germany	Berlin: Alice – Museum for Children www.fez-berlin.de
	Berlin: Children’s Museum Under the Roof www.kindermuseum-imterm-dach.berlin
	Hamburg: Wildlife Embassy https://www.BotschaftderWildtiere.de
Greece	Athens: Industrial Gas Museum, Technopolis City of Athens https://gasmuseum.gr
Italy	Milan: MUBA – Children’s Museum Milan www.muba.it
	Venice: The Home of the Human Safety Net www.thehomeofthehumansafetynet.org
Latvia	Riga: Latvian War Museum – Christmas Battle Museum www.karamuzejs.lv
Poland	Kraków: Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Cantor CRICOTEKA www.cricoteka.pl
	Warsaw: E. Wedel Chocolate Factory Museum https://fabrykaczekolady.pl
	Warsaw: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews https://polin.pl
South Korea	Seogwipo-City: Jeju Aerospace Museum https:// www.jdc-jam.com/main.do

APPENDIX TWO: WINNERS OF THE AWARD

2012	Tropenmuseum Junior, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
2013	Please Touch Museum, Philadelphia, USA
2014	National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Copenhagen, Denmark
2015	Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to: ZOOM Kindermuseum, Vienna, Austria <i>and</i> Boston Children's Museum, Boston, USA
2016	GeoFort, Herwijnen, The Netherlands
2017	National Museum of Science and Technology, Stockholm, Sweden
2018	Keppel Centre for Art Education, National Gallery Singapore
2019	Ker ImagiNation, Dakar, Senegal
2020/2021	Dutch Open Air Museum, Arnhem, The Netherlands
2022	Creaviva Children's Museum, Bern, Switzerland <i>and</i> Liverpool Museums & Galleries, Liverpool, United Kingdom
2023	Tokyo Toy Museum, Tokyo, Japan
2024	The Museum of Solutions (MuSo), Mumbai, India
2025	La Nube STEAM Discovery Center, El Paso, USA
2026	House of Stories, Paris, France

APPENDIX THREE: THE 2026 PANEL OF JUDGES



Elaine Chan is the Assistant Director of Early Years at National Gallery Singapore, where she oversees the Keppel Centre for Art Education as well as the Gallery's preschool and family programmes. She played a key role in the development of the Keppel Centre, which was awarded the Children in Museums Award in 2018 for its innovative approach to art education. Most recently, Elaine led the full revamp of the Centre - from concept to execution - including the creation of new interactive spaces and refreshed educational content designed to deepen young children's engagement with art. The refreshed Centre reopened in December 2023 and welcomed over 480,000 families in its first year. With over 14 years of experience as an early childhood practitioner and museum educator, Elaine is passionate about the transformative power of the arts in shaping how we understand ourselves and the world around us. She believes that early exposure to art nurtures curiosity and empowers children to explore and make discoveries beyond the boundaries of traditional curricula. Elaine holds a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. [HO!!]



Dr Helen Charman FRSA, MA, Dip is Director of Learning, National Programmes and Young V&A at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A creative and cultural learning professional for 35 years, Helen's professional portfolio encompasses schools, universities, galleries, museums, festival organizations, local authorities and charities. She was a founder member of the education team at Tate Modern and on the directorate that mobilised the new Design Museum, London. Her remit at the V&A Museum includes leadership of Young V&A, the nation's premier national museum and creative powerhouse designed with and for the young from birth to early teens and winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2024 and Council of Europe Museum of the Year 2026. The broader scope of her role also includes overall responsibility for Learning & Digital, Interpretation and National Programmes. She holds degrees in English Literature (BA Hons), History of Art (MA) and Education (Doctorate). [HO!!]



Laura Diamanti is the Multimedia Editor for a Specialist Master's programme in New Media, Museology, and Museum Communication at IULM University in Milan. She is also on the team for the Heritage in Motion Award, a prestigious competition promoted by EMA that celebrates innovative and creative multimedia projects related to cultural heritage in Europe. She has spent many years as the Head of Cultural Activities and Events for the 'Genus Bononiae' project, a cultural initiative that turned seven historic buildings in Bologna (Italy) into museums and cultural venues. During this period, she also worked to establish the museum's educational department to improve community engagement and educational outreach. Over her career, Laura has worked with the European Museum Academy (EMA) and Kriterion Consulting, contributing to museum-related projects and supporting various European cultural initiatives. She holds a bachelor's degree in communication sciences and two Master's degrees in Innovation and Organisation of Culture and the Arts and European Museology.[EMA]



Jörg Ehtreiber studied physics, chemistry and museum education at the University of Graz, Austria. After that, he became head and curator of the energy department at the Technical Museum in Vienna, followed by the position as Head of the hands-on exhibitions unit. Ehtreiber completed a management training and founded MTC (Museum & Technology Company). He worked several years as a consultant for museums and governmental institutions, planning and implementing large-scale exhibition projects. In 2003, he became Director and CEO of KIMUS, which includes the Graz Children's Museum FRida & freD and the Fairy Tale Express Graz. Since 2015, he is President of Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums and serves on various boards in an advisory capacity. Ehtreiber was in charge of Science Center CoSA - Center of Science Activities - that opened in Graz in 2019. [HO!!]



Anita Elefsen was appointed Director of The Herring Era Museum in Siglufjörður, Iceland in 2016. She began her museum career at that very same museum as a young student and later as curator. In 2004 The Herring Era Museum won the Luigi Micheletti Award, at the time administered by the European Museum Forum. Anita holds a BA degree in History and an MA degree in Museology from the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. She was Chair of The Icelandic Museum Association 2020-2024 and serves on the boards for The Icelandic Association of Maritime Museums; *Sarpur* – The Icelandic Museum Collections Database; North-East Iceland Culture Committee and serves as Iceland's National Representative for the European Museum Academy. [EMA]



Nils M. Jensen graduated in Journalism, Archaeology and Museology from the University of Aarhus, Denmark in 1987. He started the same year as curator at the Open-Air Museum, Odense, and later at Odense City Museums as Head of Communication (1991-99). Then he worked as Assistant Professor at the Danish Museums Training School, leading the Nordic Museum Leadership Training. From 2002 to 2008 he was Director of Communication at the National Museum of Denmark and from then Director of the Association of Danish Museums. He has been involved in national and international associations and boards including the Association of Interpretation and Learning in Danish Museums, ICOM CECA, executive positions within the Association of Danish Museums, Network of European Museums Organization, the National Danish Centre of Excellence for History and Cultural Heritage – and now as Danish Ambassador of the Hands On!, embodying his belief in making cultural heritage accessible and engaging for all. [EMA]



Pia Lädach studied anthropology and has a postgraduate degree in cultural management. Due to her long professional experience as a human resources consultant and business coach as well as a project manager and curator in various educational and cultural institutions, topics such as cultural leadership and audience engagement are particularly close to her heart. As managing director of the Schulmuseum Bern, she led this institution, which is supported by 60 volunteers, until 2021 before taking over the management of the Kindermuseum Creaviva at the Zentrum Paul Klee until 2024, where she hosted the 14th International Hands On! Conference 'CREATE THE MAGIC. for a better tomorrow' in 2023. In 2026 she took over as Head of Education at Kunstmuseum Thun / Thun Panorama, Switzerland and has been commissioned by Kunsthau Zürich to help build a network in the field of art and health. She is a board member of Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums and co-founder of the network 'AMI - art + museums interacting', which aims to promote playful mediation and gamefication. She believes that children can strengthen their self-confidence through their own artistic creation and also wants to create opportunities for co-creation so that young people themselves can contribute to a better world. [HO!!]



Adam Langer is a curator and author of exhibition concepts, as well as the Director and Chief Dramaturge of Sladovna Písek, a centre for children's culture in the Czech Republic, where he has been active since 2016, focusing on connecting artists from various countries with local communities. Since 2018 he has been a member of the board of Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums. He has initiated project collaborations with leading foreign institutions such as the ZOOM Children's Museum in Vienna, MUBA in Milan, and the Hamada Children's Museum of Art in Japan. Under his leadership, Sladovna has hosted international artists and cultural professionals who co-create exhibitions and programs in collaboration with children. Adam believes in the power of shared experiences and the creative process to bridge generations, cultures, and disciplines. He strives to create environments where children and adults, locals and visitors, professionals and enthusiasts can learn from one another and discover new perspectives through encounters with art and culture. [HO!!]



Herman Tibosch Since 2020 he has been the director of Museum Jan Cunen in Oss: a small, idiosyncratic museum with a pioneering role in innovative audience engagement and educational impact. The distinctive programming, with a central role for the city, led to the museum winning the prestigious VriendenLoterij Museum Prize in 2023. Herman studied Art History and Dutch Language at the University of Nijmegen, followed by a degree in Primary Education. After five years in Special Education, he served for 16 years as Head of Education at the Kröller-Müller Museum. There, he introduced philosophy through art and the power of playful learning. In this context, he developed several teaching methods, a series of art festivals, and a successful board game. His educational project 'Digitale Scheurkalender' (now: 'Culture Snack') also became a European success and is still continuing to deliver new results. As a board former member, Herman was active in the Dutch Museum Association and ICOM Netherlands. He also advises the government and various cultural funds. [EMA]



Elia Vlachou is an Archaeologist-Museologist. Director of Projects, Partnerships & Development at the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece; Museum & Cultural Management Consultant, Co-founder and Gal Secretary of the Hellenic Steam Institute, a non-profit association dedicated to the preservation and valorisation of industrial heritage. As Head of the Museums Department at the Piraeus Cultural Foundation (2007 – 2017), she has coordinated a Network of nine museums, numerous projects and activities. Elia gives lectures on cultural management at graduate and postgraduate level. Member of the Pool of Experts of the European Museum Academy and member of international juries awarding prizes to museums and cultural projects. Main research interests: cultural management; innovative methods of interpretation of material and intangible culture; audience development; analysis of the visitors' experience; protection and valorisation of the technological heritage. [EMA]