

National museums and the negotiation of difficult pasts (Bruxelles)

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Jan 26–27, 2012

Deadline: Nov 14, 2011

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26-27 January 2012

Université Libre de Bruxelles

Organised by Eunamus and Pr. Dominique Poulot, Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne.

This conference aims to take a transnational and comparative perspective on the conflicts that national museums have dealt with as holders of contested objects and as places where disputed or difficult pasts are displayed.

Objects of contested possession

How have European discourses of ownership developed in national museums over the last century in relation to the possession of artefacts that are subject to restitution claims? Cases of contested objects in Europe can be related to contexts of colonial appropriations of material culture and post-colonial claims, to processes of secularisation of church property, to situations of war and plunder, to archaeological finds in territories where national frontiers have changed or are disputed. From a methodological point of view case studies will be privileged that go beyond legal aspects to examine the historical significance of using objects from the past as expressions of national identity.

Difficult pasts

What role do national museums play in handling historical issues that are socially and politically sensitive and liable to give rise to contestation? Particular attention will be given to individual or comparative cases related to the construction of national territories and to conflicting representations of “natural” and ethnic communities, which have become the subject of specific revisions in light of political and intellectual developments.

Furthermore, national museums are increasingly being called upon to provide forums for dealing with highly sensitive issues of traumatic past events – particularly those related to situations of political criminality. In light of the increasing importance of memory studies, this conference will examine how museums attempt to represent the “unspeakable” elements of the past.

Please send proposals of no more than 500 words, for 20 minute presentations to eunamus3@gmail.com or Felicity.Bodenstein@univ-Paris1.fr by the 14th of November 2011.

Reference:

CFP: National museums and the negotiation of difficult pasts (Bruxelles). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 26, 2011 (accessed Mar 15, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/1914>>.