

100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object

Deadline: Nov 15, 2020

100histories100worlds.org

Dr Mirjam Brusius

How many stories can an object have? Neil MacGregor's BBC Radio 4 programme and subsequent book "A History of the World in 100 Objects" of 2010 was a resounding success with the British public, as well as internationally. Reaching new audiences with the aim of providing a global outlook and presenting history through the lens of objects the argument, however, had its flaws.

The British Museum reinstated the idea of a 'view from nowhere' and everywhere at the same time. It was presented as a place to see the world; yet without any reflection on how the institution itself obtained and reframed the objects in order to create its own seemingly universal narrative. Critics particularly pointed to a failure of the museum to engage with the provenance and repatriation of objects. Many saw their view confirmed that colonialism ultimately produced not just inequalities of power but also a distorted view of history.

Ten years after the radio programme was broadcast, our project 100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object returns to its narrative. Focussing on voices from 'the Global South' and the formerly subaltern people it left out: where are the stories of the objects presented as seen by people who once used them? How was knowledge about an object informed by colonial collecting practices; and how is this context presented in museums today? Could an entirely new History of the World in 100 Objects be told, and if so, how? Can a history of the world be told through a certain number of objects at all? How can formerly excluded voices be empowered to tell their own histories beyond these frameworks?

Our long-term publication project will take a selection of the 100 Objects as a starting point to then move beyond them in material, archival, and philosophical terms. We start from the premise that an object's original function and its later (colonial) appropriation are integral parts of its biography. Seeking new methods, research approaches and formats in dealing with museum object histories, we will also develop a new vocabulary and discourse for an ongoing debate. This means that we will gather new object biographies with the ultimate goal of addressing broader questions that concern the role of museums in the multicultural societies of tomorrow. Our goal is therefore to achieve more than an alternative history of the British Museum but instead work towards a multilateral fusion of object histories and present legacies in museums and their collections through and with scholars, artists and curators in the 'Global South' and previously excluded diaspora groups.

We will also seek collaborations with museums in the West (including the British Museum) and throughout the world to implement our contributions. In doing so, we support the democratization

of museum spaces, which seeks to recognize and empower audiences and their material past.

We are seeking writers, researchers, curators, artists, and activists who will pick one object from the British Museum podcast and present ideas on how their narrative could be expanded through new stories and formats (e.g. Cartoons, Photo essays, Poetry, or alternative museum labels) for a new multi-language and multi-format publication project. Our priority is contributors who identify as of colour. We welcome marginalized voices, minoritized writers, and in particular contributors from communities of origin or association of these objects. We would encourage contributors who do not have community connections to the object to seek co-authors who do. Contributors who do not have community connections to the object can be considered in collaborative projects, i.e. with leading co-authors who do. To ensure accessibility we plan to publish contributions through a range of different media, including website, podcasts, and a book. We encourage authors to draw on methods and literature beyond the 'Western canon' and English, with an output being a refreshed bibliography (possibly with translated texts) for 'object biographies' with a more inclusive range of philosophies that might inject much needed critique into a discourse dominated by Western-style scholarship.

Case studies might address local resistance to colonial, metropolitan or elite collecting and preservation practices; 'alternative' and personal engagements with material culture; the role of anthropology, archaeology, and ethnography as colonial field-sciences; the aftermaths of scientific exploration and 'race theories'; the role of ancient empires and their material legacies in identity-building in modern empires and nations; oral histories or traditions surrounding or emanating from these objects; evocations of the landscapes or memoryscapes in which these objects were once made meaningful; or future imaginings of their return or representation; to only name a few of many possibilities

Submission can and should be multilingual. Submissions in languages other than English are welcome and will be translated. We are also able to consider posting anonymous contributions if the content might compromise individuals' positions in their home countries. Contributions should address a general audience, not experts, and inclusive language is required, i.e. authors should avoid racist, sexist, transphobic, ableist, classist and/or insulting language (unless contextually relevant with regard to quoting historical sources). Final decisions lie with the editors.

Please submit your 250-400 words proposal and a 100-word author biography (with whatever information you feel relevant or comfortable with). Contributors may pick one object from the original podcast series, and explain how you will depart from the original narrative through new approaches, stories, and different or comparable objects. We welcome the choice of a different object from the British Museum or even another museum where the proposal, and paper, can demonstrate why the 'original list' is inadequate and how your choice will fill the gap in the objects list and approach.

Please submit your proposals by November 15, 2020. Final contributions should follow soon thereafter, and, if submitted in text form, should be approximately 2500 words long.

Contact:

info@100histories100worlds.org

ArtHist.net

Web:

<https://100histories100worlds.org/>

Reference:

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