

Museums and the Market (Leeds, 10–11 Sept 10)

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MGHG Annual Conference, Sept 10th and 11th 2010
Leeds City Museum

MUSEUMS AND THE MARKET

Ever since the historian Frank Herrmann first directed attention to the important role that the market has played in the changing fashions for collecting, in his *The English as Collectors* (1972) (recently republished, in 1999, by Oak Knoll Press), it has become increasingly clear that the market has been no mere ancillary factor in the history of museums and the development of their collections. A real interest has recently re-emerged in questions of the influence of the market on how we understand, consume, interpret and value objects. These developments can be seen as a part of the drive for an ever deeper contextualisation that emerged as part of the "New Museology" in the 1980s. This "market turn", if we can suggest that such a shift in academic focus is occurring, offers the exciting prospect of a reinvestigation of the historiography of museums and their collections.

In the history of nearly every museum there has been a significant engagement with the wider market structures and yet these engagements rarely feature in the interpretation of the history of the objects as we encounter them in the modern museum. Indeed, whilst relevant studies have often focused on the art market, it is increasingly clear that other markets, such as those pertaining to natural history and specimen collecting, scientific instruments and the collecting and display of archaeological artefacts, are also part of the museum's engagement with market structures. The historiography of collections illustrates this engagement, reflecting the changing relationships between curatorial interests and the wider field of consumption. It is therefore appropriate, given the current academic interest in the commercial aspects of the history of collections and the wide range of objects that museums collect, interpret and display, to look anew at the role played by commerce in museum acquisition practices. Can such an approach offer a different way of interpreting collecting and the individual objects in museum collections? Why has the role of the market often been downplayed, ignored, or even suppressed in museums? Could an approach to interpretation that includes reference to the market help the visitor to understand why specific collections have been assembled? This conference proposal, therefore, focuses on the intersections, the formal and informal

spaces where the market and the museum meet and overlap.

The conference invites papers on themes such as;

- The role of agents and dealers in the development of museum collections.
- The intersections between the market, the museum and evolving discourses; art history, the history of science and museography/museology.
- The market and its relationship to the role of patronage and philanthropy in the museum.
- The influence of the market in the history of museum practice; for example the developing influence of the blockbuster exhibition.
- The role of museums, galleries and heritage in local and national economies; for example in culturalled economic regeneration.
- The relationship between museums/heritage, the market and evolving national and international legislation; for example restrictions on the ownership, movement and circulation of cultural property, such as the Waverley Criteria.
- The relationships between museums/galleries and contemporary commodity culture.

We invite papers on a wide range of museums, galleries and collections, such as: fine art; decorative art; natural history; social history; industrial history; local history; heritage; military history; anthropology and science collections. (this list is by no means meant to be exhaustive).

We also invite session proposals which map onto the themes listed above. For example we are hoping to have a session which, due to the location of the 2010 conference, considers the history of museums and the market in Leeds, 1830-1930. Session proposals should include a brief outline of the session (300 words) as well as three or four abstracts (300 words each) for the proposed session.

Please send a 300 word abstract for proposed papers to Dr Mark Westgarth and Dr Abigail Harrison Moore, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT.
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Closing date for papers: 1st February 2010.

Reference:

CFP: Museums and the Market (Leeds, 10-11 Sept 10). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 21, 2010 (accessed Dec 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/32197>>.