

PhD Position, Contemporary Artistic Practices / Colonial Heritage, VU Amsterdam

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Sep 01, 2021

Application deadline: May 23, 2021

Katja Kwastek

PhD Position

Contemporary Artistic Practices Reflecting on Colonial Heritage

FTE: 1

Job description

This four-year PhD student position is based at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam's (VU) Faculty of Humanities (Department of Art & Culture, History, and Antiquity), within the framework of the NWA funded project "Pressing Matter. Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums". This collaborative, interdisciplinary project responds to the growing contestation over what to do with the colonial heritage held in museums.

This PhD position will be part of the subproject New Relationships approaches the project's themes from the perspective of creative practices.

The PhD research will consist of an in-depth analysis of contemporary artistic and curatorial practices that have experimented with (and/or reflected on the possibility of) different modes of repairing colonial injustice and envisioned various forms of reconciliation. It will explore these strategies in relation to the different types of museums that act as custodians of colonial heritage, and on different types of collections within museums. Alongside writing their dissertation, the PhD student will be involved in the organization of the artist in residence program to be done collaboratively with the Rijksakademie Amsterdam, and the Repair Labs (TRL) that form part of the overall project.

The PhD student will be employed by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands and enrolled in its doctoral programme, which is part of the Graduate School of the Humanities.

They will be supervised by dr. Katja Kwastek (Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History, at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and dr. Chiara de Cesari (Associate Professor in European Studies and Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam).

Your duties

- submit a PhD thesis on the abovementioned topic within the period of appointment
- complete and submit at least one article for an international, peer-reviewed journal within the period of appointment
- participate in meetings, conferences, and labs organized in the framework of the Pressing Matter project
- co-organise the project's Repair Labs

- co-organise and work with the artist in residence program developed in the framework of the project
- contribute to authoring reports and other documentation in the context of the Pressing Matter project
- participate in the PhD training programs of the Graduate school of Humanities
- assist in teaching during the 2nd and 3rd year of the appointment (max. 0,2 FTE per year)

Requirements

- a relevant Master's degree in the Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences (obtained by the latest on August 31, 2021)
- outstanding research qualities, manifested in strong transcripts and a high-quality Master's thesis
- familiarity with the methods, theories and history of (contemporary) art, evidenced through a university diploma in art, art history or theory, professional practice, or a considerable number of academic courses followed
- familiarity with aspects of colonial history and/or colonial legacies / Affinity and/or experience with material culture studies and provenance research / Interest in conceptual approaches and ethical issues with respect to museological dilemmas and guidelines
- a high level of proficiency in the English language, both in oral and written communication
- keen interest in critical, interdisciplinary, research methods and approaches;
- ability and willingness to work in a team
- willingness to travel abroad for fieldwork, research stays, conferences and workshops
- strong organizational skills

Eligibility criteria

Our recruitment policy takes into account the individual curriculum vitae of applicants as well as the research team composition as a whole. We seek to create a diverse team, in terms of disciplinary background, with a solid representation of researchers embedded in / related to countries from where colonial collections originate. In line with this policy, eligible applicants can be of any nationality, but for this position, upon equal qualification, priority will be given to candidates with a strong relationship with communities / countries from where colonial collections originate.

What are we offering?

A challenging position in a socially involved organization. The salary will be in accordance with university regulations for academic personnel and amounts €2,395 per month during the first year and increases to €3,061 (PhD) per month during the fourth year, based on a full-time employment. The job profile is based on the university job ranking system and is vacant for 1 FTE.

Appointment of selected candidates: August-October 2021 (late appointments due to COVID related delays will be considered).

The appointment will initially be for 1 year. After a satisfactory evaluation of the initial appointment, the contract will be extended to a total duration of 4 years.

Additionally, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam offers excellent fringe benefits and various schemes and regulations to promote a good work/life balance, such as:

- a maximum of 41 days of annual leave based on full-time employment
- 8% holiday allowance and 8.3% end-of-year bonus

- solid pension scheme (ABP)
- optional model for designing a personalized benefits package

About Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The ambition of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is clear: to contribute to a better world through outstanding education and ground-breaking research. We strive to be a university where personal development and commitment to society play a leading role. A university where people from different disciplines and backgrounds collaborate to achieve innovations and to generate new knowledge. Our teaching and research encompass the entire spectrum of academic endeavor – from the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences through to the life sciences and the medical sciences.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is home to more than 26,000 students. We employ over 4,600 individuals. The VU campus is easily accessible and located in the heart of Amsterdam's Zuidas district, a truly inspiring environment for teaching and research.

Diversity

We are an inclusive university community. Diversity is one of our most important values. We believe that engaging in international activities and welcoming students and staff from a wide variety of backgrounds enhances the quality of our education and research. We are always looking for people who can enrich our world with their own unique perspectives and experiences.

Faculty of Humanities

The Faculty of Humanities links a number of fields of study: Language, Literature and Communication, Art & Culture, History, Antiquities and Philosophy. Our teaching and research focus on current societal and scientific themes: from artificial intelligence to visual culture, from urbanization to the history of slavery, from 'fake news' in journalism to communication in organizations. We strive to ensure small group sizes. Innovative education and interdisciplinary research are our hallmarks.

Working at the Faculty of Humanities means making a real contribution to the quality of leading education and research in an inspiring and personal work and study climate. We employ more than 250 staff members, and we are home to around 1,300 students.

About the project "Pressing Matter"

The four-year research project "Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums" is collaborative across five academic institutions and five Dutch museums, in collaboration with national, and international partners from across the world. The project is led by Prof. Susan Legêne and Wayne Modest at the Faculty of Humanities at VU and funded by the Dutch Research Agenda (NWA).

Pressing Matter responds to the growing contestation over what to do with the colonial heritage held in museums. This growing controversy reveals the need to account for the polarised positions of these debates, ranging from scholars, activists and community members championing the return of objects to correct historical wrongs, to those who contend that objects should be retained irrespective of circumstances of acquisition by museums in light of their (universal) cultural and scientific value. In the middle are advocates of more relational heritage practices, comprising dialogue and sharing in how objects are distributed. Pressing Matter has identified various approaches to this problem, and to the different categories of collections in collaborating muse-

ums that will be the starting points for research.

Researchers start from this shared research framework, while doing research for their own individual research output, including a PhD thesis. While developing their own views and insights, they commit themselves to the overall programme through collaborative multidisciplinary approaches, based in shared access to research findings and result based research. Pressing Matter has been developed within the context of the National Science Agenda of the Netherlands. A large team of PhD candidates, postdocs, museum staff, and senior academics will be organized across 8 work packages, hosted in five different universities and collaboration with five museums and several societal stakeholders.

About the sub-project

As part of Pressing Matter, Work Package 4b: New Relationships will explore the potential of artistic practice to scrutinize colonial heritage and work towards reconciliation. Historically, the relationship between colonial heritage and 'art' (as a Western discursive formation) has been a complex and ambivalent one. In recent years, artists and art-based interventions have played an important role within broader campaigns to decolonise museums. These interventions have addressed arts' relationship with colonialism, attempting to remediate colonial relations in both the past and the present. Not only in the Netherlands, artists' interventions have helped reformulate and offer answers to the key question of what to do with colonial heritage in museums and other public spaces. Grounded in specific collections, and yet spanning the globe, WP4b aims to review and build on this work to advance different modes of object-based repair and reconciliation. This will be achieved within a set of experimental Repair Labs, which comprise ongoing on- and offline and (trans)national workshops. The foundation of Work Package 4b is the PhD project that will focus on an in-depth analysis of contemporary artistic practices that have experimented with different modes of repairing colonial injustice and envisioned various forms reconciliation. This analysis will thus survey and contextualize exemplary artistic positions (globally), in order to develop a theoretical framework specifying the role of artistic strategies such as speculation, visualization, imagination, re-enactment, appropriation, reconstruction, and co-creation in encouraging reconciliation. It will explore these strategies in relation to the different types of museums and collections that hold colonial heritage, including those in the Pressing Matter consortium.

Application

<https://workingat.vu.nl/apply/phd-contemporary-artistic-practices-reflecting-on-colonial-heritage/i2y8mz>

If you are interested in this position, please apply via the (apply button of the) website indicated above until 23 May 2021. Your application should be a single pdf consisting of the following documents, in the following order:

- a detailed letter of motivation, describing how you would approach this research project, your motivation for applying, and why you make an excellent candidate for the role (no more than 1,000 words)
- your curriculum vitae, listing at least: full address and contact details; education; professional information and employment (if relevant); language proficiency; grants/honours; conference presentations and publications (if applicable), names and contact details of two referees familiar with your academic record and research skills
- a copy of your Master's degree certificate (and English translation). If you have not graduated yet, please provide a copy of your Bachelor degree certificate

- a copy of your grades list (and English translation). If you have not graduated yet, please include Bachelor grades and available grades for your Master
- a summary of your Master's thesis/project (250-500 words)
- a writing sample, such as an essay, project paper, or a chapter of your MA thesis, between 3,000-10,000 words

Applications received by e-mail will not be processed.

Vacancy questions

If you have any questions regarding this vacancy, you may contact:

Name: Prof. dr. K. (Katja) Kwastek

Position: Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art

E-mail: k.kwastek@vu.nl

or

name: Dr. C. (Chiara) de Cesari

Position: Associate Professor in European Studies and Cultural Studies

E-mail: C.deCesari@uva.nl

No agencies

Reference:

JOB: PhD Position, Contemporary Artistic Practices / Colonial Heritage, VU Amsterdam. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 20, 2021 (accessed Sep 9, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/33918>>.