

Museums & Social Issues: Contested Conservation

Deadline: Mar 15, 2023

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Museums & Social Issues - Contested Conservation.

Guest editors:

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Museum conservation in the West has long focused on the physical preservation of objects. Today, the heritage regime is being questioned and challenged in many ways. If collecting, storing, and exhibiting have participated as epistemological tools in the classification of the world, can artifacts be reconnected to living practices? What changes are needed for concerned communities to take agency in storage? How can we rethink cultural transmission and reconceive the role of collections without reconducting the cultural hegemonies inscribed in their history?

The special issue focuses on how conservation approaches and conceptions can be transformed by opening them up to multiple, even divergent, approaches. We aim to discuss object conservation not only as a Western practice with scientific ambitions starting in the late 19th century, but as a set of proceedings for preserving and transmitting, transforming and recontextualising in museums and beyond. Access to collections and rights to decide upon cultural heritage, even if this leads to its physical alterations or disappearance, are key questions.

Since the 1990s, object conservators have challenged the narrative of Western supremacy in the field of conservation (Clavir 2002; Wharton 2012). Scholars and activists have long underlined the need for critical reconsideration and 'decolonizing' the discipline (Sully 2007). The need for collaboration with concerned groups, especially indigenous communities, is included in the Burra Charter, which focuses on cultural heritage preservation and was adopted in 1979. Today, conservators and curators are increasingly aware of the benefits and necessity of shared expertise, and decisions are often made in discussion with different stakeholders that include creators and their descendants (Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2018-2019; German Museum Association 2021; Fowler Museum 2021). Nevertheless, so-called "inclusion" also has limitations and its own political agenda (Ahmed 2012; Singh 2018).

Ideally, conservation decisions should be made in consensus between different constituencies, such as indigenous communities, conservators, curators, scholars, and other stakeholders. But what if the conservation process produces disagreements? What are the troubles, controversies, discontinuities, brought, among others, by the coloniality (Quijano 2007) of museums? What toxic traces did the conservation process leave in the collections? Can different conceptions of conser-

vation coexist, and transform each other? The special issue aims to foster transdisciplinary knowledge circulation and exchange ranging from decades-long Indigenous activism to contexts where debates are only beginning. Furthermore, we seek to bring together museum practitioners, artists, academics, and activists. Thus, along with full articles, we will also encourage more conversational pieces such as interviews.

Among possible topics:

- Transmission and living practices in and beyond museums
- New materialist approaches to conservation
- Indigenous collections care
- Museum as places for stewardship
- Chemical conservation, its toxic remnants, and alternatives
- Conservation and human remains
- Co-curation and collaboration

Ways of Caring

“Conservation”, “preventative conservation”, “curative conservation,” or sometimes “restoration” are among the terms used to describe object preservation in museums. They carry social implications related to expertise and science. But many ways of caring do exist, based on different epistemologies and terminologies. The special issue will explore diverse ways of taking care of material and immaterial culture outside of the Global North, in the museum and beyond. What words could be used to describe ways of caring for material culture in these contexts? And how, for instance, can Indigenous care practices inform/transform other cultures?

Indigenous rights and museum collections

In several countries, primarily with internal colonization, such as the USA, New Zealand, and Australia, years of advocacy by Indigenous groups have resulted in changes to heritage and land regulations and have allowed, to varying degrees, concerned communities to take part in museum decisions and practices. This includes rights to access, maintenance requirements, spaces for cultural or spiritual practice, including feeding, touching, dancing, soaking, fumigation and fire, or taking artifacts out of the museum, exhibition co-curation, repatriation, and burial. The editors invite contributions on transformed practices in storage and beyond, or conversely, on situations where museums are reluctant to involve concerned external individuals and groups or to change practices.

Conservation and Ecology

Today, ecological concerns are reaching the field of cultural heritage. Conservators are working towards using more sustainable products. Advocacy for decolonizing conservation practices encourages this movement. Indigenous fumigation, for instance, employs natural products. Which new connections exist between ecological and postcolonial sensitivities? How is artifact conservation and the conservation of animals, minerals and nature articulated (similarities and differences in terms of highly regulated policies, colonial supervision, and dispossession of Indigenous knowledge)?

Toxic collections

In many collections, decades of chemical treatments have left heavy residues. How to think about

and deal with the poisonous effects of conservation? How do museums address these legacies? What questions do they raise in the context of restitution and open storage practices? What policies of decontamination could be employed? How do museums in the Global South and elsewhere address the consequences of chemical modernity in their practices and collections?

Alternate Histories

Not only are the histories of conservation often focused on the West but key actors have predominantly identified as white male were leaders in the field of conservation science, publishing widely and consulting internationally. Yet a variety of actors do exist, from the material supplier to the local crafts(wo-)man. Strong traditions of conservation exist outside Europe and the United States. How to tell the story from the point of view of missing actors? What alternate conservation histories remain to be written?

Submission guidelines:

Authors are encouraged to send an abstract and brief biography to the editors at arndt@tu-berlin.de and noemie.etienne@univie.ac.at by March 15, 2023. Selected authors will then be invited to elaborate a full manuscript and send it through the journal's website: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/ymsi20> . Please respect the journal guidelines: <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=ymsi20>
All texts will be subject to double-blind peer review.

Important dates

Abstract & bio – 500 words for abstract

March 15, 2023

Notification to authors

April 1, 2023

Submission of full papers – 5000-8000 words

June 30, 2023

Peer-review

Final submission

March 1, 2024

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