

Taboo in Cultural Heritage (Amsterdam, 1–2 Feb 24)

Amsterdam, Feb 1–02, 2024

Registration deadline: Aug 1, 2023

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The conference "Taboo in Cultural Heritage: Reverberations of Colonialism and National Socialism" will take place on February 1st and 2nd, 2024, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It is organized by the Open University of the Netherlands as well as Reinwardt Academie, University of the Arts and the University of Amsterdam.

Theme description:

In the spring and summer of 2020, a wave of statue defacements and removals spread across the world. As part of the Black Lives Matter protests, monuments in many countries were labeled as inappropriate due to their relationship with colonial histories and racial injustices. This 'burdened heritage' was considered taboo: something that should not have a physical presence in public space. In that same year, as a direct reaction to the Black Lives Matter protests, the exhibition *Are Jews white?* (Jewish Museum, Amsterdam) tried to break a taboo by discussing color and the question of where Jews find themselves in the identity politics spectrum of Black and White.

Soon after, a controversy about the 'uniqueness' and 'comparability' of the Holocaust arose: 'Historikerstreit 2.0' as it was frequently called, with reference to the debate of the late 1980s. A number of historians pointed to the taboo against challenging the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust by comparing it with colonial violence, which is also present in the memory of these histories in today's society (e.g., in monuments, exhibitions, restitution issues, debates about apologies and reparations, etc.).

Taboo is a subject, word, or action that is avoided or forbidden for religious, social or political reasons. Although there are certain taboos that appear to be virtually universal, most taboos vary with cultures and times. Objects, sites, or practices appropriated as cultural heritage, can at a later moment in history be redesignated as problematic, no longer conforming to certain norms and values. Conversely, (former) taboos can be contested, eventually triggering the 'heritagization' and display of hitherto banned objects and sites.

Unsurprisingly, taboo and tabooed issues get less attention in humanities and heritage practices than the canon or the canonized. However, canon and taboo could be considered two sides of the same coin; they are interdependent. For that reason alone, it is important to address the subject of taboo as well, and not turn a blind eye to it. For example, the canonization of modernist art after World War II went hand in hand with tabooing art produced under National Socialism. Nowadays, there is a renewed interest at museums in exhibiting these works, sparking controversy and debate.

This international conference aims to reflect on the concept of taboo in relation to cultural heritage in the context of colonialism and national socialism and their reverberations in society. What can the dynamics of taboo convey about today's globalizing world? How have taboos shaped (and continue to shape) and impacted the process of cultural heritage making? How do taboos generate heritage dissonance (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996)? How does the concept apply to 'difficult heritage' (Macdonald, 2009)? How do/could/should cultural heritage professionals deal with questioning the display, adjustment or removal of such 'burdened heritage', and is every heritage professional and scholar 'allowed' to address every topic?

Paper submission:

We welcome abstracts for papers from all humanities and social sciences. It is our contention that by focusing on taboos in cultural heritage from an interdisciplinary and international perspective, they will become, again, negotiable.

Apart from emerging and senior scholars in academia, we also invite heritage professionals to present a paper. They are often at the center of public debates, and need to take a position on tabooed issues in their daily practice. Professionals might benefit from current academic discourse and vice versa. We are looking for theoretical and philosophical approaches, terminological and conceptual reflections as well as representative case studies from all disciplines.

Artistic contributions:

We also warmly invite proposals for contributions from artists working with the themes of the conference. Formats to share artistic research are open but might include workshops, films, and performance-lectures. However applicants should be aware that we do not have capacity to provide extensive technical and production support.

Proposals may include, but are by no means limited to:

- Issues of taboo and transgression
- Interrelationships between tabooization and canonization
- Tabooed cultural heritage related to national socialism and (post)colonialism
- Rejected heritage
- Tabooing art and cultural heritage for political and ideological reasons
- Stigma and taboo
- Taboo and positionality (Global North/South; gender and sexuality)
- Taboo in museology
- Looted art and restitution

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (Stellenbosch, South Africa)

Sharon Macdonald (Berlin, Germany)

Submission:

Abstracts of max. 400 words and biographies of max. 150 words can be sent to taboocongress@gmail.com

Deadline: August 1st, 2023.

We will publish contributions of this conference in a peer-reviewed edited volume.

For questions contact Gregor M. Langfeld (g.m.langfeld@uva.nl) or Judy Jaffe-Schagen (judy.jaffe-schagen@ahk.nl).

Reference:

CONF: Taboo in Cultural Heritage (Amsterdam, 1-2 Feb 24). In: Arthist.net, Apr 21, 2023 (accessed Jul 26, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39093>>.