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Boxerloot! (Munich, 22–23 Feb 24)

Munich, Feb 22–23, 2024
Deadline: Sep 30, 2023

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This conference aims to open an international dialogue on objects in museum collections that were looted in the context of the so-called "Boxer War" in China 1900–1901. We are looking forward to discussing methods, results and challenges of provenance research on these objects.

Boxerloot! Museum collections, the "boxer war", and practices of plunder

Many museums and private collections around the world contain objects that a variety of actors looted in China in the context of the so-called boxer war between 1900 and 1901. A military coalition known as the eight-nation-alliance invaded northern China in order to suppress the anti-imperialist Yihetuan movement. Subsequently, extensive looting took place in imperial palaces, temples, shops, and private homes in Beijing and Northern China. A flourishing trade of looted objects in the streets of Beijing in 1900, which included daily auctions of looted objects, involved not only foreign soldiers, but also diplomats, missionaries, businesspeople, museum staff as well as members of the local population. They shipped vast quantities of imperial porcelain, religious artefacts, paintings, weapons, books, and everyday items around the world. Many of these objects were gifted or sold to museums, some in the years following the Yihetuan movement by actors who had been in Beijing themselves, others later via more complicated trajectories. Some of these looted objects circulated in the international art market for decades. In many cases, the problematic provenance of these types of objects remained unknown, as the topic has only recently come into focus in the wake of broader debates concerning museum objects stemming from colonial contexts. Tracing the pathways of these objects can be a difficult task, especially as systematic research on looting practices during the "boxer war" and on the circulation of objects looted from China is still in its early stages.

This conference aims to open an international dialogue on "boxer loot" in museum collections with a focus on historical looting and trading practices. We are looking forward to discussing methods, results and challenges of provenance research on objects suspected to have been looted in China in the context of the "boxer war." As we understand provenance research as going beyond research on individual objects, we especially welcome contributions illuminating the broader context of looting in China in 1900 and 1901 and the continued circulation of these looted objects in the following decades. We are also looking forward to discussing questions of museum practice such as identifying or exhibiting potential "boxer loot."

The conference is organised by the research project Traces of the "Boxer War" in German Museum Collections – A Joint Approach, which is funded by the German Lost Art Foundation and con-

ducted in collaboration with the Palace Museum in Beijing. The project is headed by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin's Zentralarchiv and is being carried out in collaboration with the following seven museums: Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich, which is hosting the conference, Museum für Asiatische Kunst and Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum am Rothenbaum: Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) and Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg (MK&G), GRASSI Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Leipzig, and Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main. The discussions at the conference will also contribute to guidelines being prepared by the project team on how to deal with objects in museum collections suspected of being "boxer loot."

We are especially looking forward to contributions that fall into one or several of the following subject areas:

- practices of looting in Beijing and Northern China 1900–1901
- places of looting and methods of identifying and mapping these places
- types and characteristics of looted objects
- actors involved in looting during this period and in the sale of looted art
- communalities and differences between the members of the eight-nation-alliance
- the circulation of "Boxer loot" via auctions and the art market
- infrastructures and mechanisms of transportation of these looted objects
- methods and specific challenges involved in researching this topic
- exhibiting and contextualising objects from the "boxer war" in museums
- looted objects from the "boxer war" in non-museum related contexts

We invite both early career and established professionals to submit twenty-minute presentations. Please send a 300-word proposal and a 250-word professional biographical statement as a single word document to boxerprojekt@smb.spk-berlin.de by September 30th, 2023.

We will notify selected speakers by November 15th, 2023. Preference will be given to proposals that stimulate dialogue and engage with broader topics.

The conference will be conducted in English. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Dr. Christine Howald and Kerstin Pannhorst: boxerprojekt@smb.spk-berlin.de.

F u r t h e r   i n f o r m a t i o n :
https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-asiatische-kunst/collection-research/research/traces-of-the-boxer-war/