

Early women curators and the making of institutional collections (1890s–1970s)

Deadline: Sep 6, 2024

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“The museum is me!” Early women curators and the making of institutional collections (1890s–1970s). Edited volume.

Between the 1890s–1970s, women began accessing decision-making roles in museums worldwide. This edited volume proposes a transnational exploration of both the contributions and the challenges of pioneering female curators regarding museum practice, collection-making, and display design. As scholarship (Diaz-Andreu, 2005; Hill, 2016) starts unearthing the distinctiveness of women’s curatorial practices, we aim to define and explore the extent of this potential gendered approach to collecting and curating. What did pioneering women curators achieve, and what can a gender perspective on museum history contribute to uncover?

Beyond describing obstacles to women’s agency in curatorial work (such as “marriage bars”, salary gaps, and prejudices against female leadership), this volume aims to analyse the collective, transnational impact of female management in the shaping of museums and public galleries. In that respect, we welcome contributions reflecting on women’s institutional collecting patterns, as well as on the public reception of their curatorial choices. What did female curators collect, exhibit and research? What were their networking strategies with regards to the museum world, the art market, art criticism, and academic scholarship? How did they dialogue with wider society? Also, to what extent did gender-related restrictions influence and shape the collections of women-led museums? What strategies have women employed to successfully carry out their curatorial duties?

Engaging with the current interest in marginalised histories and diversification within the museum field, we particularly welcome case studies from the Global South and Eastern Europe, as well as proposals addressing excluded narratives in the shaping of institutional collections worldwide. Likewise, we would like to encourage contributions from both academic researchers and museum practitioners, especially those exploring alternative approaches to historical research, such as first-hand accounts, digital humanities, visualisation of quantitative data, creative writing, and oral histories.

Please provide a working title and a proposed research topic (500 words maximum), together with your name and academic or museum affiliation (if any).

The deadline for submissions is 6 September 2024, with notification of acceptance or rejection by 27 September 2024.

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