

Returning Looted Heritage (online/Madrid, 7.-28. Nov 24)

Online / Museo Nacional del Prado, Nov 7–28, 2024

Deadline: Oct 27, 2024

Itziar Arana Cobos, Madrid

Lectures of the Cátedra del Prado. Returning Looted Heritage: 1815, the Dismantling of the Louvre and the Rebirth of Museums in Europe.

by Bénédicte Savoy (Holder of the Prado Museum Chair 2023).

Museo Nacional del Prado. Hybrid. November 2024.

Between 1794 and 1811, successive French governments seized “works of art and science” from different states of Europe. This policy of appropriation, made legitimate by the belief that works of art, the natural by-product of freedom, should be returned to the land of liberty (i.e., France), gave rise to a major flow of cultural objects (paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, exquisite incunabula, etc.) from the countries involved towards France.

The vast majority of these objects, grouped together in the Louvre and the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, were claimed by and returned to their rightful owners after the fall of the Empire (1814-1815). The restitution of 1815, a major historical and cultural event in Europe, mobilized the European intelligentsia and had a major impact on the cultural geography of the continent. The passions unleashed at the time fueled the European historiography of disentanglement and confiscations during the 19th century. Most of the arguments exchanged then continue even now to structure the contemporary debate on restitutions. The lectures seek to identify the transnational concerns and consequences of this important event.

// REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION

The registration period for the lecture programme of XII Cátedra (12th Chair of the Prado Museum) with Bénédicte Savoy is from 2 September to 27 October 2024. Registration must be made through the online form available on the MNP website during the indicated period. Applications will be dealt with on a first-come, first-served basis. A certificate of attendance will be awarded at the end of the course (after confirming attendance at the four lectures).

Schedule:

11/7/2024 at 7:00 p.m.

11/14/2024 at 7:00 p.m.

11/21/2024 at 7:00 p.m.

11/28/2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Recipients: University students, researchers, professionals and the general public.

// PROGRAM

07 Nov 24: Reclaiming Cultural Heritage

The first lecture delves into the concept of restitution, especially from the point of view of those persons who traveled to Paris in 1815 with the intention of demanding the return of the plundered treasures. We shall study the relationship between post-conflict gestures of restitution and processes of reclaiming the objects of value. Among the key ideas to be discussed are the following: What steps are taken to actually reclaim the works of art? Who takes the initiative? In what circumstances? What resistance strategies are carried out by the possessing institutions?

14 Nov 2024: The Interplay of Law and Morality

This lecture examines the complex relationship between legal principles and moral considerations as evidenced in the 1815 restitution debates. These discussions have profoundly influenced contemporary perspectives on repatriating looted assets. We contrast the legalists, who argue from a legal standpoint against the repossession of goods by Napoleon's adversaries, with the moralists, who champion the rights of nations to their heritage and advocate for cultural justice. The enduring tension and the relevance of these two-century-old arguments will be critically analysed.

21 Nov 24: The Dilemma of Universality

In 1814 and 1815 European intellectuals praised the Louvre's model for its intellectual, emotional, and historical significance while acknowledging the ethical dilemma it posed: the presence of these treasures in the museums in Paris was possible only because of their absence from other cities. This session explores the paradox of the universal museum concept and the ensuing debate over whether cultural assets should be centralized or dispersed to foster cultural development. The dismantling of the Louvre and the debates it sparked offer insights into museum discourse that echo through subsequent decades.

28. Nov 24: Paths to Reconnection

Following the upheaval of 1815, within a drastically transformed geopolitical landscape, there ensued diverse approaches to cultural reappropriation. They varied from nation to nation, community to community, spilling over even to academies and universities. The return of artworks to their places of origin opened up then, as it continues to do now, the possibility of finding a multitude of destinations beyond that of museums, including their reinstatement in original locations such as churches. This lecture will address how societies navigate the post-conflict recovery of their heritage and the time it takes to determine the rightful place for these works of art.

Contact: centro.estudios@museodelprado.es

Reference:

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