

Reframing the Museum. Decolonial Practices (Warsaw, 13-14 Nov 25)

State Ethnographic Museum, Warsaw, Nov 13–14, 2025

Deadline: Sep 22, 2025

Magdalena Wróblewska

Reframing the Museum. Decolonial Practices in the Context of Central and Eastern Europe.

Conference

The process of decolonizing museums began in the 1960s, in the wake of independence movements in Africa, with demands for the restitution of cultural property exported from the continent during the colonial era. These were ignored at the time. Today, the decolonisation of museums is not only about increasingly successful restitutions and repatriations, but also about a paradigm shift in research work on collections and curatorial work on exhibitions. It is an epistemological decolonisation, the object of which are not only artefacts, but also clichés and stereotypes, reproduced from colonial times to the present day.

Contemporary decolonisation movements and processes incorporate a local perspective. The postulates formulated about museums in former colonial empires are not always valid in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. A central starting point for reflection on the colonial entanglement of this region is the recognition that, although its countries did not have overseas colonies, they functioned in accordance with the imperial model by imitating and applying colonial patterns and practices.

During the conference, we would like to reflect on the specificity of this region in relation to activities aimed at decolonization in the broadest sense. We therefore propose a broader reflection on how museum collections were built in the region, and what part people from Central and Eastern Europe played in the global colonial system. As an Ethnographic Museum, we would like to reflect on the systems of knowledge construction and transmission in institutions that were entangled in the colonial system.

The aim of the conference is to initiate a platform for the exchange of perspectives, experiences, and knowledge between museum researchers and other museum professionals from the region. Together, we will reflect on how museums function today and redefine their role in a changing social and geopolitical context.

Proposed thematic areas:

- Museum decolonisation practices
- Decolonisation strategies chosen by cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe
- Provenance research and the redefinition and reconceptualisation of collections

- Restitution and repatriation processes
- The role of language in the decolonisation process
- Educational activities and decoloniality
- Participatory activities in the museum decolonisation process
- Building relationships with communities
- Shaping attitudes – empathy, vulnerability

The thematic fields cited above are illustrative, and conference presentations may go beyond them.

Presentations should last 20 minutes. Please submit abstracts by September 22. Abstracts should be up to 300 words, attached as a Word document (Docx), and accompanied by a short biographical note, sent to reframingmuseum@ethnomuseum.pl. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at the email address indicated above.

Reference:

CFP: Reframing the Museum. Decolonial Practices (Warsaw, 13-14 Nov 25). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 12, 2025 (accessed Feb 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50567>>.