

Visiting the Museum (Brighton, 16–17 April 26)

Centre for Design History, University of Brighton, UK, Apr 16–17, 2026

Deadline: Jan 9, 2026

Andrea Potts

We are pleased to announce a Call for Papers for the upcoming interdisciplinary conference on "Visiting the Museum: New Perspectives and Future Directions", 16-17 April 2026.

Hosted by the Centre for Design History, University of Brighton, UK, this international event will bring together researchers and practitioners to critically explore museum visiting as a contemporary cultural, social and political practice.

Conference Organisers:

Dr. Claire Wintle (University of Brighton)

Dr. Andrea Potts (Goldsmiths, University of London, and Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for Design History, University of Brighton)

New agendas in Museum Visiting:

Museum practice is currently in a state of flux. Across the world, shifting political and cultural contexts have radically reframed public expectations of museums, and understanding of the roles and identities of their visitors. In response, practitioners are experimenting and innovating to respond to visitor agendas and reframe the ways that visitors engage with museums. This includes providing platforms for visitor-led social justice agendas, addressing visitor wellbeing, sustaining a diversity of approaches to learning, and creating more welcoming and accessible spaces. Visiting the Museum will learn from and interrogate this museum practice and develop a new framework for understanding museum visitors.

In the late-twentieth century, museum visiting emerged as a distinct research area that shed light on visitors' needs, interests and agency. Today, this scholarship is still valid, but in the context of changing political and cultural demands on museums and complex sector responses, the idea of 'the visitor' has become more complex and diffuse. In parallel, research on visitors has become more dispersed across disciplines and fields of practice and scholarship. This conference will reassert museum visiting as a distinct subject of research and build an interdisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners. In doing so, we aim to understand what is distinctive and significant about museum visiting as a contemporary practice.

We hope that this conference will establish new theoretical, practice-orientated, and methodological foundations for future practice and research on museum visiting. We welcome submissions from researchers and practitioners, including papers that critically evaluate lessons learnt from practice and make recommendations for the sector. We are open to diverse formats of presentation as well as proposals for workshops, roundtables and in-conversation pieces. Submissions

will speak to one or more of the following themes:

Theorising Museum Visiting:

We welcome papers that interrogate how museum visiting has previously been conceptualised and develop more expansive, inclusive, and nuanced approaches which speak to the changing purpose and value of museums in a global context. Papers might consider what constitutes visiting, explore the roles that visitors can adopt, expand understanding of the socio-spatial boundaries of visiting, or shed light on visiting's emotional and embodied nature.

Learning from and Interrogating Museum Practice:

We welcome papers that consider the impact of museums on visitors, including through the lenses of harm, care, and barriers to access, and explore how visitors themselves act upon or otherwise shape museum practice.

Methodological Approaches to Understanding Museum Visitors:

We encourage all submissions to discuss their methods and modes of analysis to strengthen the methodological foundations of visitor research.

We very much look forward to building an interdisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners dedicated to understanding museum visiting.

Submission guidelines:

We invite proposals of 300 words for 15-minute presentations (in person). Please email proposals, along with a short speaker biography, to: centrefordesignhistory@brighton.ac.uk

Deadline for proposals: Monday, January 9, 2026

Details about publication plans of conference papers, including a toolkit designed to support the museum sector, will be announced in due course.

Registration Fee:

Registration for speakers will be charged at £20.00.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Bursaries to support Museum Practitioners:

A very limited number of bursaries of up to £100 will be available to support the participation of practitioners without institutional support. This might contribute to travel or accommodation costs. Please indicate in your submission if you are a museum practitioner (including volunteer and freelance) and would like to be considered for financial support.

For informal enquiries, please contact: a.potts4@brighton.ac.uk

Confirmed speakers include:

Professor Laurajane Smith, Professor of Heritage and Museum Studies, Australian National University

Dr Porchia Moore, Assistant Professor of Museum Studies, University of Florida, and Co-Creator of The Visitors of Color Project

Professor Divya Tolia-Kelly, Professor of Geography and Heritage Studies, University of Sussex

Professor Emily Dawson, Professor of Education, Science and Society, University College London

Professor Alison Eardley, Professor of Museums, Inclusion and Psychology, University of Westminster

Professor Rhiannon Mason, Professor of Heritage and Cultural Studies, Newcastle University

Professor Theano Moussouri, Professor of Museum Studies, University College London

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Reference:

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