Inclusion/Exclusion (Johannesburg, 11-13 Nov 26)

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Nov 11–13, 2026
Deadline: Mar 15, 2026

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Inclusion/Exclusion:: Redressing a lack of representativity in public art, monuments, museums and exhibitions.

This is a call for papers for a conference hosted by the SARChI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture at the University of Johannesburg. It is envisaged that the conference will begin on the early afternoon of 11 November and will end at lunchtime on 13 November. Selected papers from the conference will be developed into either a special issue of a journal or an edited volume.

The keynote speaker for the conference is Erika Doss, Edith O'Donnell Distinguished Chair at the University of Texas at Dallas, USA.

THEME

Debates about historical monuments and statuary have often centred on their glorification of the agendas and ideals of privileged and powerful individuals and groups. And as movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter have made clear, they often in fact venerate individuals and events that have been involved to a greater or lesser extent in social and political wrongdoings. Much emphasis in the making and commissioning of contemporary public art and monuments is consequently directed at countering the preponderance of works associated with authoritarianism, injustices or biases with representations of leaders or events associated with resistance against oppression or prejudice. A similar orientation is often at play in museums and exhibitions. There is increased recognition that processes of collecting have been embroiled in acts of oppression, or how racial, gendered and class prejudice have historically underpinned both collecting and curatorial practices. As in the domains of public art or heritage sites, museums often reconfigure their collections to remedy past injustices or omissions. Curators are focused on producing exhibitions that challenge the biases or occlusions that may have shaped displays historically, instead giving focus to the perspectives of different groups and social sectors.

Accompanying such reckonings about injustices and exclusions that have shaped representation, collecting and curating, and redressing them, has been a focus on attracting and accommodating diverse viewers. In the domain of public art, new works may be conceptualised with strategies in mind for actively involving viewers and recognising their potentially varied positionalities. Or works have been developed spontaneously or informally in response to popular sentiment. Likewise, heritage sites have been devised or reconfigured to enable viewer involvement as well as diversify audiences. Similar concerns often underpin contemporary exhibitions or the displays of collections in museums. Rather than viewing exhibitions as narrowly didactic, curators may

devise them to be interactive, affective, or with open-ended meanings. There is also increased awareness of the varied positionalities of viewers and how this may inform their experiences of exhibitions. A prevalence of trigger warnings at recent exhibitions not only speaks to increased sensitivity to how viewers may respond to works: it is also underpinned by contemporary recognition that visitors bring diverse experiences to the viewing process.

In this conference, we are seeking papers that critique exclusionary tropes or practices in public art, monuments, heritage sites or museums, and which explore initiatives to remedy or challenge these omissions or marginalisations. Discussion may be focused on who or what is afforded recognition and exposure, and who or what may be omitted or obscured, and how these scenarios are challenged. Or the emphasis might be on viewer involvement and on how recent initiatives endeavour to be more inclusive in their approach and to offer ways of experiencing public art, monuments or museums that take cognisance of diversity.

We are especially interested in proposals that identify and consider complexities involved in enabling inclusion. For example, are there some kinds of monuments, heritage sites and museums that cannot readily be recuperated/reworked towards progressive ends and, if so, how have they been managed? What are the challenges posed by groups with vested interests in monuments and museums who resist reinterpretations of their narratives? Are there thus instances in which corrective steps towards inclusion necessarily generate new forms of exclusion within public art, museums or heritage spaces, and what are the consequences? Also, what happens when redress becomes mainstream? Are decolonial, reparative or participatory strategies able to retain their critical force once they are absorbed into institutional policy, curatorial programming, collecting or public art commissioning? Or (an antithetical question): what happens when decolonial, reparative or participatory strategies are no longer officially sanctioned? Papers that address difficult questions – whether these or others – are especially welcome.

PROPOSAL

A prospective presenter is invited to offer a 30-minute paper focused on any geographical setting worldwide. We encourage focused engagement with issues through specific case studies rather than broad surveys. Presenters may in fact want to focus on just one monument, public artwork, heritage site, museum or exhibition.

Papers must be in English.

Papers must be on material that has not already been published. A prospective presenter must also be willing to develop the proposed paper into an article or chapter of a book emanating from the conference, should it be selected for potential inclusion in this publication.

Please submit your proposal with “Inclusion/Exclusion” in the subject line, and send it to , Brenda Schmahmann (brendas@uj.ac.za) and Irene Bronner (ireneb@uj.ac.za), also copying it to the administrator at the offices of the SARChI Chair of South African Art and Visual Culture, Neelofir Nagdee (nnagdee@uj.ac.za), by 15 March 2026. Please submit a single WORD document with the following information:
1. a title for your paper

2. an abstract between 350 and 500 words in length for a 30-minute paper
3. a short biography, including your current institutional affiliation (up to 200 words)
4. your contact details, i.e. e-mail address, postal address, mobile phone number
5. a statement confirming that your paper has not been previously published and that, should it be selected, you would be willing to develop it into an article or book chapter emanating from the conference.

Applicants will be notified of decisions by the end of March.

FUNDING

Presenters will need to organise and pay for their own travel costs to the University of Johannesburg. However, international presenters and those from out of town will be provided with bed & breakfast accommodation sponsored by the host on the evenings of 11 and 12 November 2026. Additionally, there will be no conference fee, and meals and transport within Johannesburg during the conference will be provided by the host. A post-conference outing to an exhibition or museum, paid for by the host, will be organised for the afternoon of 13 November.

Reference:

CFP: Inclusion/Exclusion (Johannesburg, 11-13 Nov 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 17, 2026 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51420>.