Religion, Art, and Provenance in Museums (Chicago, 14–16 Oct 26)

University of Chicago | Smart Museum of Art | Divinity School (Swift Hall), Oct 14–16, 2026

Abigail Hooks

About the Symposium

The University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art and Martin Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion are excited to bring together a group of international experts in provenance research, museum practice, religious studies, and cultural heritage for the symposium "Religion, Art, and Provenance in Museums." This symposium is part of a multi-year project supported by Lilly Endowment Inc.

Free and open to the public, this multi-day gathering will feature keynote lectures, panel discussions, and roundtables that explore the lives and afterlives of religious objects within museum collections. Together, participants will engage critical questions around display methodologies, community-engaged scholarship, emerging technologies, and ethical policies for restitution and repatriation.

Keynote Speakers

The symposium will feature two keynote lectures by leading voices in the field, offering critical perspectives on the provenance research of religious objects and their implications for museum practice, cultural heritage, and public understanding.

Joanna Gohmann | Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art
Ciraj Rassool | University of the Western Cape

Full schedule below:

DAY ONE | WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2026

3:30 – 4:00 p.m. — Sign – in Table Open
Swift Hall, 1025 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637

4:00 – 4:15 p.m. — Opening Remarks

4:15 – 5:30 p.m. — Keynote Lecture: “Beyond Ownership: Rethinking Provenance through Sacred Objects”
Joanna Gohmann, Associate Curator of Provenance and Object Histories, National Museum of Asian Art

6:00 – 7:00 p.m. — Welcome Reception
Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S Greenwood Ave, Chicago, IL 60637

DAY TWO | THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026

Swift Hall, 1025 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637

8:45 – 9:00 a.m. — Sign-in Table Open

9:00 – 9:15 a.m. — Opening Remarks

9:15 – 10:45 a.m. — Panel | Religious Objects, Provenance, and Methods of Display

Jacques Schuhmacher, Executive Director of Provenance Research, Art Institute of Chicago

Alexandra Watson Jones, Provenance Research Curator, Victoria and Albert Museum

Patrick Polk, Lilly Endowment Curator of Art and Religion, Fowler Museum at UCLA

Moderated by Galina Mardilovich, Curator, Smart Museum of Art

10:45 – 11:00 a.m. — Coffee Break

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. — Panel | Approaches to Community – Engaged Research

Laura Van Broekhoven, Director, Pitt Rivers Museum and Professor of Museum Studies, Ethics and Material Culture, University of Oxford

June Carpenter, NAGPRA Director: Repatriation, Field Museum

Rebekah Coffman, Curator of Religion and Community History, Chicago History Museum

Moderated by Allison Martino, Curator, Smart Museum of Art

12:30 – 1:30 p.m. — Lunch Break

1:30 – 2:45 p.m. — Roundtable | Case Studies in Community Collaboration: Religious Objects, Museum Collections, and Restitution

Erica P. Jones, Senior Curator of African Arts and Manager of Curatorial Affairs, Fowler Museum at UCLA

Thupten Kelsang, Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Buddhism Public Scholar, Courtauld Institute of Art

Kwasi Ampene, Professor, Department of Music, Tufts University

Moderated by Allison Martino, Curator, Smart Museum of Art

2:45 – 4:00 p.m. — Roundtable | Legal Perspectives on Art and Cultural Heritage

Patty Gerstenblith, Distinguished Research Professor of Law, DePaul University

Jennifer Morris, Founding Partner, Morris Art Law

Bradley J. Gordon, Managing Partner, Edenbridge Asia

Moderated by Laurie Stein, President, L. Stein Art Research

4:00 – 4:15 p.m. — Coffee Break

4:15 – 5:30 p.m. — Keynote Lecture: “Repatriation, Restitution and Rehumanisation”
Ciraj Rassool, Senior Professor of History and Director of the African Program in Museum and Heritage Studies, University of the Western Cape

5:30 p.m. — Closing Remarks

DAY THREE | FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026

Swift Hall, 1025 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637

9:00 – 9:15 a.m. — Sign – in Table Open

9:15 – 10:30 a.m. — Roundtable | Questioning Provenance: Asian Religious Objects in Western Museum Collections

Christine Howald, Deputy Director, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Qamar Adamjee, Provenance Researcher| Asian Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art

MacKenzie Mallon, Head of Provenance, Nelson – Atkins Museum of Art

Moderated by Donato Loia, Postdoctoral Researcher and Instructor in Art and Religion, University of Chicago Divinity School

10:30 – 11:30 a.m. — Breakout Session | Building Connection

11:30 – 12:30 p.m. — Lunch Break

12:30 – 2:00 p.m. — Panel | Ethical Considerations for Provenance Research and Restitution

Renée Albiston, Provenance Researcher and Head of the Provenance Research Department, Denver Art Museum

Dan Hicks, Curator and Professor of Contemporary Archaeology, University of Oxford

Chip Colwell, Program Director for Public Anthropology, Wenner-Gren Foundation

Moderated by Emily D. Crews, Executive Director, The Martin Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion, University of Chicago Divinity School

2:00 p.m. — Closing Remarks

Please RSVP here (No deadline for registration):
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdin7fhWwMUDvmF2Xroq9R1HHFlwRh5Hk9BvPZB

QV0j6Qwp-w/viewform?usp=dialog

More information is on our website:
https://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/events/symposium-religion-art-and-provenance-in-museums/

Reference:
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