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The Repairing Museum

Edited by: Dominique Poulot

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MMD - Museum, materials, discussion. Journal of Museum Studies is an open access academic journal in English, French, and Italian devoted to museology, museography, Cultural Heritage as well as research on audiences and fruition with an international outlook, addressing both the life of museum institutions and collections, and the latest challenges they face in their broad cultural and social dimension. MMD aims at promoting and enhancing the collaboration among researchers from the field of humanities, social sciences, architecture, and Digital Humanities through their complementary perspectives. It is addressed to scholars, students and professionals working in these specific disciplinary fields, but also readers interested in the current evolution of the debate on issues, methods and tools related to the material and immaterial aspects of museology in its relation to history and contemporaneity, and in connection with the progress of public welfare. All published articles are subjected to the double-blind peer-review process.

Cover:
Photo of the Weltkulturen Museum by Wolfgang Günzel

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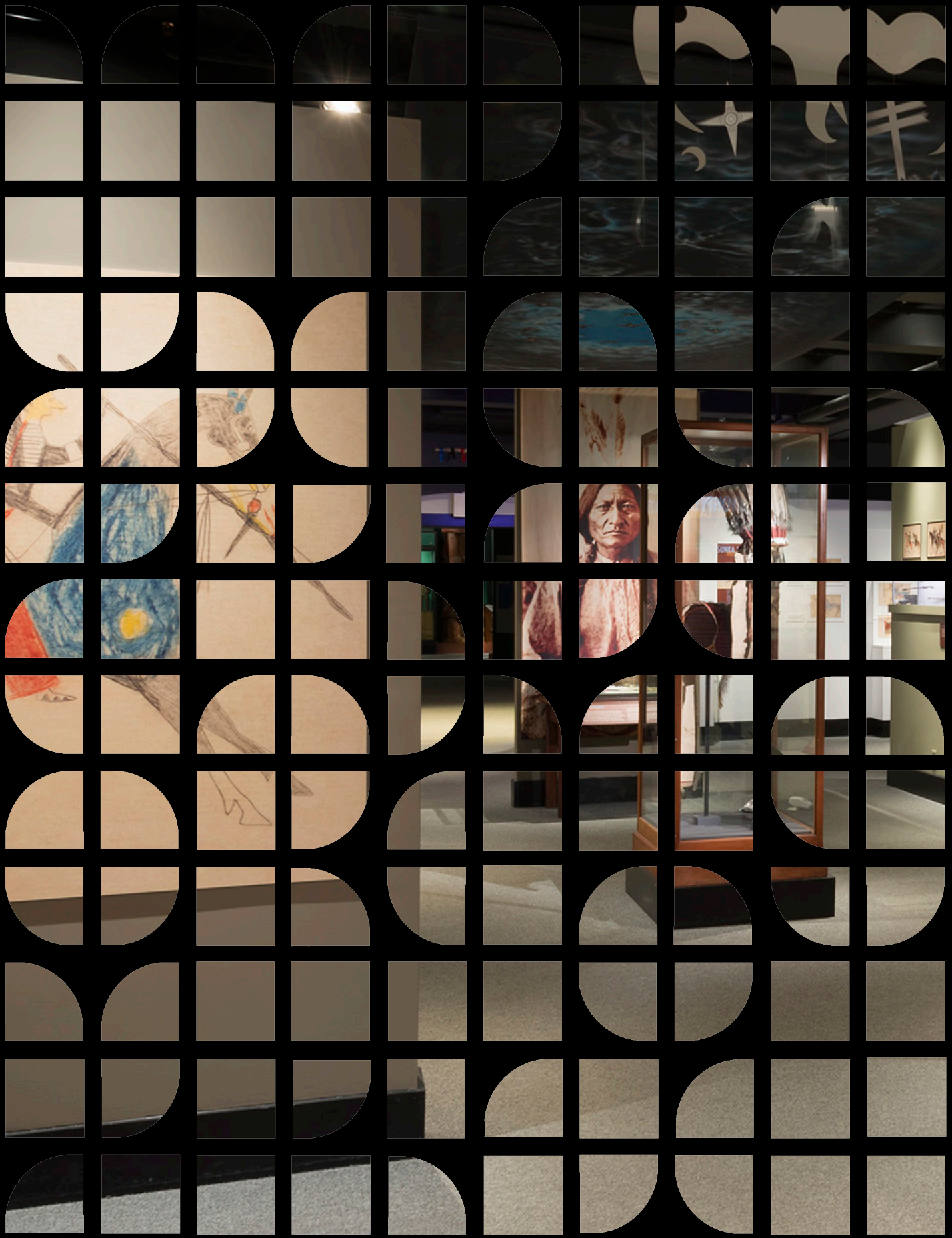

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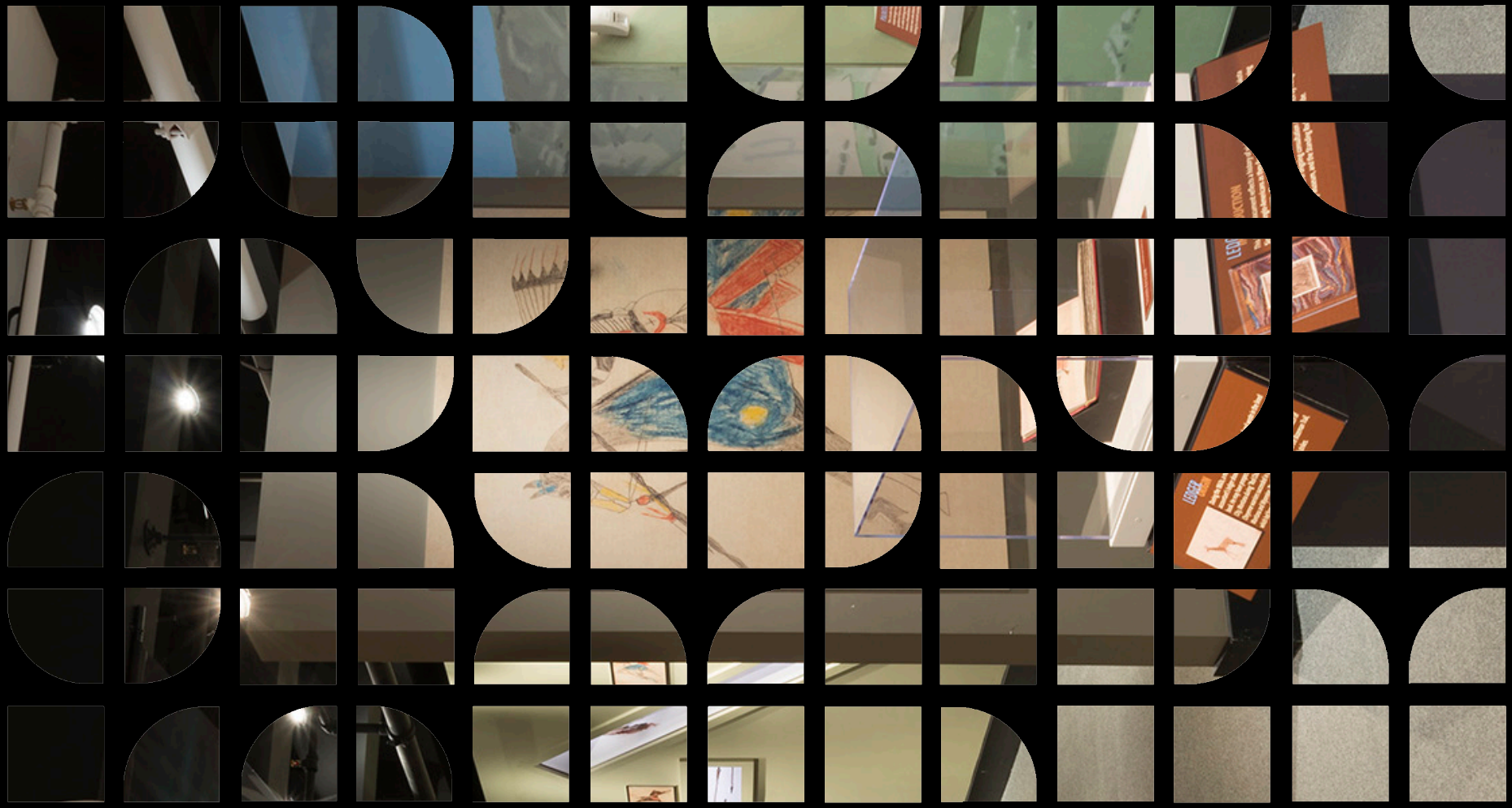
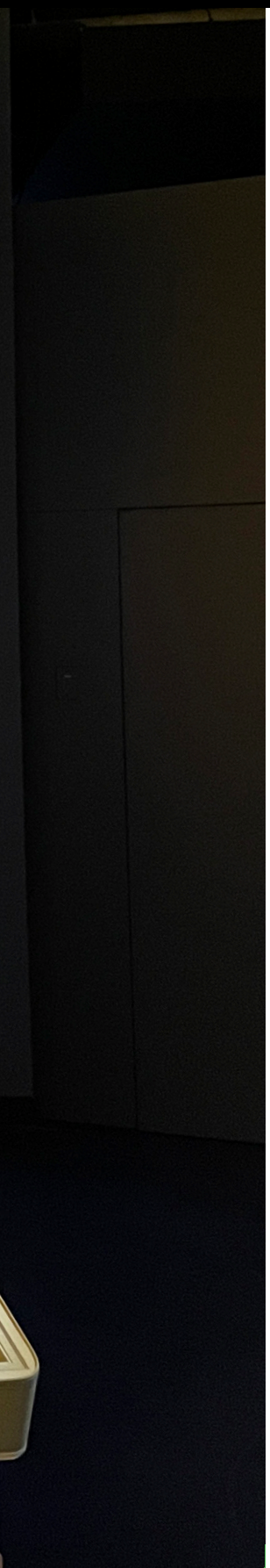



« Montréal était la ville où j'avais hâte d'aller. À 18 ans, [en '78,] je sortais les fins de semaine et j'allais voir des spectacles à Montréal. »
"I couldn't wait to go to Montréal. When I was 18, [in '78], I would leave home on the weekends to go see shows in Montréal."
"[In '92], Mom and Dad let me leave on my adventure. They trusted me and I trusted myself, even though I was only 15."
Tant d'histoires dans une valise !
So many stories in a suitcase!

At the museum: care for visitors, care for collections[1]

Dominique Poulot

Keywords:
Museums, Repair, Care, Inclusion, Diversity, Indigenousness, Museology, Therapy.



ABSTRACT:

The introduction to this issue provides a comprehensive overview of the various interpretations of the restorative museum in recent decades. This novel configuration is part of a broader context of reflections and projects for museums, which have emphasised the values of inclusion, diversity, and, ultimately, care. These diverse concerns manifest in various forms on different continents and across different generations of museums.

L'introduction du numéro fournit un panorama des différentes acceptions du musée réparateur au cours des dernières décennies. Cette nouvelle configuration s'inscrit dans un contexte plus général de réflexions et de projets pour les musées qui a mis en avant les valeurs de l'inclusion, de la diversité, et finalement du care. Ces différentes préoccupations connaissent des formes variables selon les continents et les générations successives d'établissements.

Opening Picture:

Figure 11. *Montréal, c'est quoi, c'est qui?* Permanent exhibition, Centre des mémoires montréalaises, Montreal, 2024.

All photos by Dominique Poulot.

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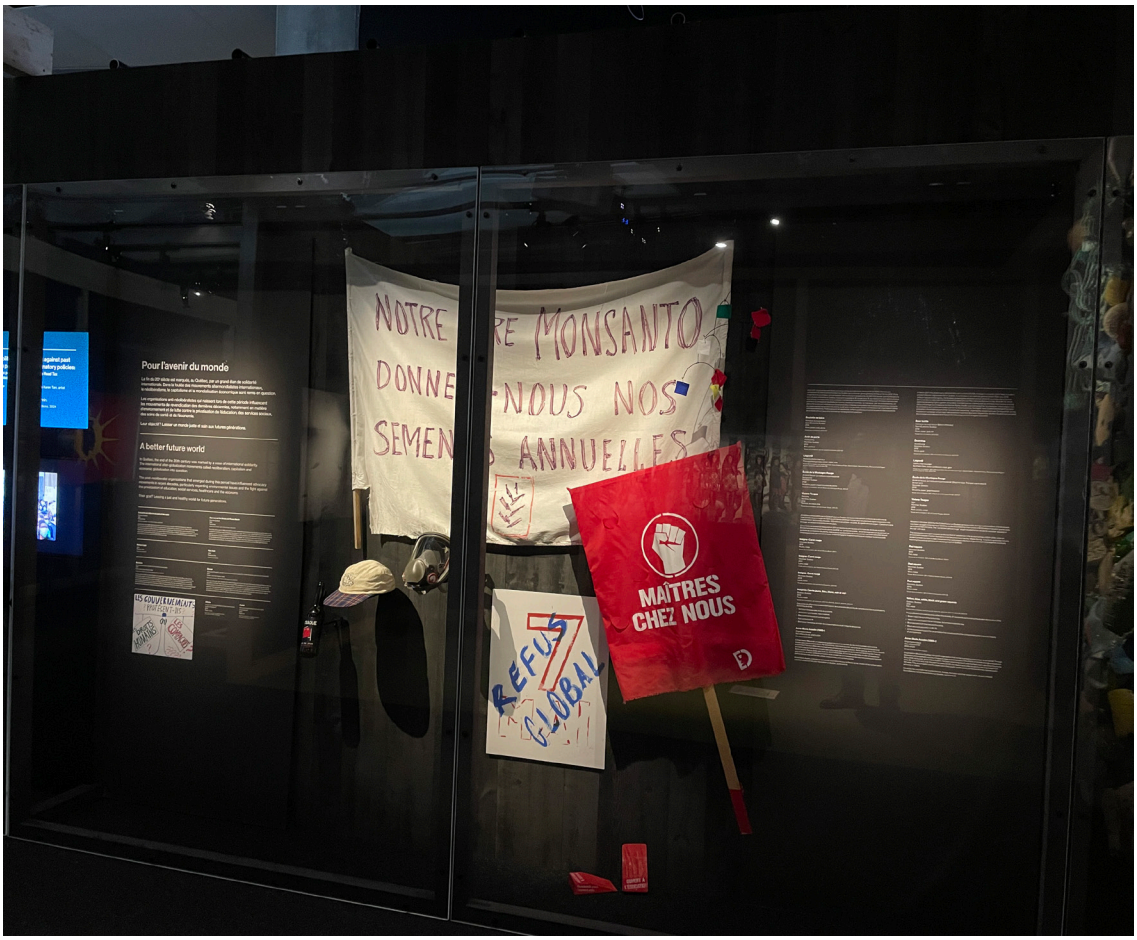
The museum is a cultural seismograph that records tremors and major shifts in interest, knowledge, admiration, values, and political commitments. In many traditions, the institution has been understood to participate in an educational process with civic or patriotic pride at its core. Over the last generation, however, the question of the purpose of the museum has been raised with renewed strength. The curatorial world has seen a series of debates about the expectations placed on museums and the responsibilities of those who manage them. The very definition of the museum concept has pitted the national sections of ICOM against each other in an international politics of models and commitments.[2]

In 1999, the North American museologist Stephen Weil wrote that the museum had gone from being an institution devoted to objects to one devoted to people.[3] The bold hyperbole of the claim was not fair to the history of the institution, and might well have overstated the current situation. It ignored pioneers around the world, such as John Cotton Dana, and many museums worldwide, including institutions like the V&A under Henry Cole, and French rural museums at the end of nineteenth century, that began with democratic impulses.[4] Also, many of those institutions that claim to be visitor-centric today might to various degrees be - as Pierre Bourdieu's sociology has argued -fundamentally elitist, able to make only symbolic efforts towards the communities they claim to serve.[5] Nevertheless, the procla-



01

Fig. 01:
Le Québec, autrement dit. Territoire de rencontres, Permanent exhibition, Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City, 2023.

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mation of such an inversion was a timely counterpoint to the critical position that held that museum-going was inevitably the privilege of the few. The insistence on the centrality of the public Weil identified, which was intended to represent a modernization as unprecedented as it was decisive, has been taken for granted by museum managers for a generation.[6] In France, it provided the impetus for the official forward-looking report of 2016-2017, which sought to compile "society's main expectations of museums".[7] The post-pandemic period, with a return to "real" attendance levels and a redoubling of funding requirements, has reinforced, if there were any need to do so, the imperative to clarify the social mission of the institution.[8]

Recent years have seen many museums attempt to fully engage with the implications of the centrality of the public, given new ideas about the various publics towards which the institution might be understood to have a responsibility. The issue of access to the common good as a cultural right[9] has been joined by the issue of repairing the harm done to individuals, communities and cultural groups - for example through the recovery of their objects. Compensating for material damage, repairing what has been ruined or broken, often leads to the challenge of healing a torn social fabric. This approach may be understood to reflect the replacement of pedagogical democracy with "performative" democracy. In the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, "while the pedagogical model of democracy emphasises the citizen's capacity for abstract reasoning and imagination, the performative model highlights the realm of the embodied and the sensual".[10]

This issue brings together heritage professionals and university curators and museologists from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, the United States, Canada and Brazil, with the aim of providing an account of this turning point in the history of Western museum, from both theoretical perspectives and practical experiences. The opening discussion between Mark O'Neill, Jonah Siegel and Nora Sternfeld outlines the issues and perspectives at stake. Although the authors come from different disciplines and are shaped by their participation in distinct professional, institutional and national contexts, they nonetheless share common convictions about the evolution of the global museum landscape and the present and future tasks of museums. Having inherited the obligation to preserve collections for future generations, and being subject to political and administrative constraints as much as to scholarly standards, museums today also find themselves needing to take into account newly urgent ethical considerations, including the legitimacy of ownership, the identification of provenance, the criteria for purchase, and the place of community voices. Determining the equity or inclusivity offered by the museum also comes to involve reflection on the relevance of visitor experiences, including the democratization of access, the relational values of *care* in the institution, and the violence that might be understood to be inherent in the history of objects and archives or in their acquisition. Georges Perec,

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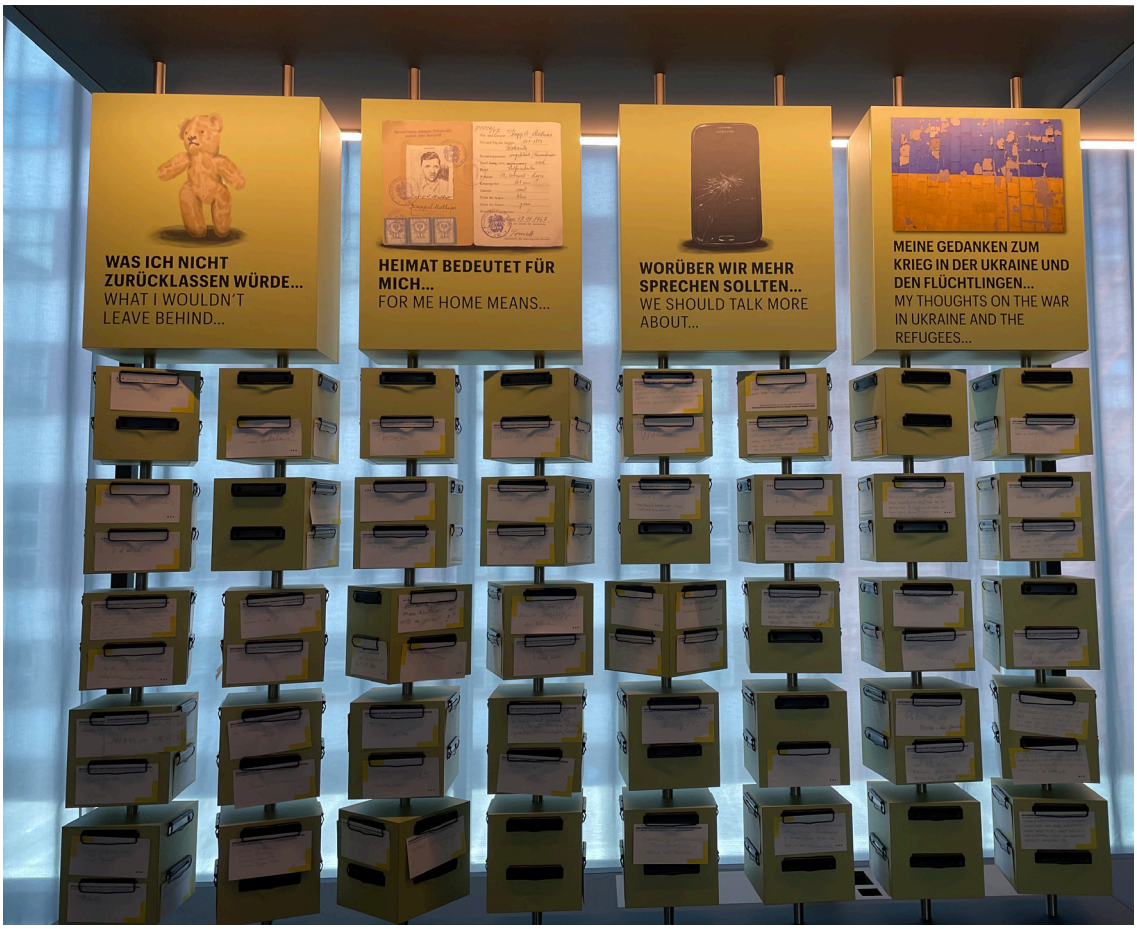

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Fig. 02: *Routes and Camps*, German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), Berlin, 2017.

Fig. 03: *Forum*, German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), Berlin, 2017.

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with his emphasis on the infra-ordinary and its political implications, should be evoked here: he seeks to capture "what is not noticed, what has no importance" - or what could be apprehended as a haunting.[11] For one of its commentators, "it is on the one hand a rehabilitation of the small scale in the age of the grandiose, and on the other a considerable space for contesting the field effects of government planning".[12] It is on these two scales that the sense of care unfolds, opposed as much to the architectural grandiose of the establishments and their panoramic views, as to a geopolitics of masterpieces and their worldwide circulation thanks to a multiplication of branches.

The place given by museums to the stories of objects, whatever they may be, is in any case a prerequisite for guaranteeing and consolidating the trust of specific audiences. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the horizon of care remains difficult to identify, distorted as it is by the contradictions inherent in a site, in which an economy of objects in exile generates emotions ranging from panic to the desire for limitless accumulation. The round table concluded with the need to preserve the achievements of previous generations of critics, while guarding against forms of critique that neither reform the institution nor improve its workings.

The remedial exhibition

When, in January 2025, the president-director of the Musée du Louvre made headlines in the French press with a memo to the Ministry of Culture calling for new resources she not only pointed out the danger posed to specific works of art by various conservation faults, she deplored "the inadequacy of the services offered to the public". "Visiting the Louvre," she declared, "is a physical ordeal; access to the works takes time and is not always easy; visitors have no space in which to take a break".[13] This recent intervention goes beyond the specific case of the Parisian palace, which was faced longstanding challenges that the Peï pyramid of 1993 was ultimately unable to resolve. The President-Director's words testify to the pursuit of a quality visit as an ongoing concern, after the museum reached a peak figure in 2018 of 10.2 million visitors. However, while the individual experience of the place has become the reference point for managers, such an emphasis no longer leaves out another pressing question, with which it is more and more connected in recent thought, concern for the objects in the collection themselves.

In the past, the drives for improvements in the treatment of objects and people have typically been kept separate in. This is no longer the case. The material turn in art history, the emergence of multidisciplinary provenance studies, justified where necessary by projects for restitution or at least for justice, and finally the triumph of an anthropological perspective that has become almost hegemonic in the field of museum studies, have certainly brought the concern for artefacts to the fore. Far from arguing for a return to the previous situation – the exclusive priority of collections to the detriment of

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public policies (for example, in the name of a higher respect for art) – the point is to emphasise the need to repair the previous failure to articulate, and to demand an obligation of cross-care.

Some museums are committed to repairing the world in line with their ethical and professional aspirations or specific missions[14] (Figure 1). Sometimes they have been given a specific mandate to do so, like the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva,[15] or they integrate the approach into their treatment of contemporary history, focusing on humanitarian interventions, or reconciliation processes[16] (Figure 2). In France, a terrorism memorial museum devoted to the judicial, political and cultural invention of the status of victim is planned for 2027: it is part of the museology of human rights, or of sites of conscience[17] (Figure 3). Other types of museums, such as the Hygiene Museum in Dresden, which hosted the *Fake* exhibition in 2022, are fighting disinformation and conspiracy in the name of civic and scientific values, to restore truth to the public sphere.[18] Still others evoke the prospect of personal healing, or even sacrifice themselves to individual hedonism.[19] These may all be understood as incarnations of the idea of using the museum to heal difficult or even dangerous emotions by mobilising the trust that public museums have earned over the past two centuries (Figure 4).

A museum's confidence in its objects, like that of its visitors, varies over the course of its history according to the expectations it has raised, the disappointments it has experienced, and the aesthetic or scholarly controversies it has provoked by its exhibitions.[20] While, in most cases, a museum is built in relation to the heritage of an area, its owners and

Fig. 04:
City.history. afresh: Eight questions. In the past, today and tomorrow, Kölnisches Stadtmuseum, Cologne, 2024.

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its context, within any institution works and objects are given a new meaning beyond or distinct from their original purpose or location.

The invention of the revolutionary museum was a key moment in this respect. In the 1790s, what came to be seen as the unjust confiscation of masterpieces by tyranny - royal, aristocratic and religious - was to be rectified in order to return these prized objects to the whole of humanity and ensure the progress of the arts and sciences. Thanks to the regeneration undertaken, the new era would benefit from the works inherited from the past. But, in many cases, this new use called for a fundamental dissociation between the artist and his original sponsors. Even if they are masterpieces, monuments from the past are nonetheless evidence of bad government. Conversely, hitherto neglected works might reflect the contempt in which truth and beauty have been held: their very obscurity is likely to reveal a talent that has gone unrecognized, or has been stifled. Restoration work is then supposed to eliminate the ravages of this ancient malevolence.

Regarding the libraries of the Old Regime, Abbé Grégoire explains that "guides to the peerage, genealogical treatises, works in which despotism has recorded its extravagances and fury, have almost always been bound in Morocco, while immortal books [...] have only escaped the compass of censorship, the pursuits of the inquisition of the courts, by taking refuge in unknown corners, under a modest parchment cover".[21] The museum was understood to justify its glory by repairing the works both materially and morally, removing them beyond culpable ignorance and blameworthy alterations. At the Louvre, new values were asserted through the restoration of the paintings on display, which were as much evidence of revolutionary energy as they were of skill or ingenuity. The success of confidence in the museum was based on the exaltation of French patriotism.[22]

Museography as a remedy

Such a celebration inevitably provoked a reaction: as soon as the decade was over, a radical *museophobia* called for the closure of the revolutionary museums. The most vulnerable, the Museum of French Monuments, was dispersed under the Second Restoration because it was the legacy of vandalism, having brought together monuments taken from Parisian churches that had been suppressed. Later, Napoleon III's dynastic museum, the "museum of sovereigns" that Zola compared to a "royal thrift shop", was closed when the regime collapsed.[23] In the course of contemporary history, changes in regime or ideological or philosophical condemnations have led to proposals for the outright abolition of museums in the name of a *damnatio memoriae*, though these are rarely carried out. There is no lack of literary translations, in the form of allegories. In Siegfried Lenz's novel *Heimatmuseum*, the destruction of the institution seems to be the only way out when you can't get rid of objects that are thought to poison the present and even contaminate the future.[24] On the other hand, the opening of new museums on an *ad hoc* basis is a convenient

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solution: the historical museum of the citadel in Spandau[25] collects the condemned statues of Prussian militarism, Nazism and Stalinism, with a view to repairing German history (Figure 5).

However, consolidating or renewing trust in an institution more commonly involves repairing its exhibitions, with contrasting results. When what visitors see is precisely what needs to be repaired, the exhibition strategy must call on a variety of museographies - short of simply making the exhibits disappear. The effect of such processes of re-signification of images and artefacts can be uncertain, even counter-productive: the articulation between the visible and the legible is in any case crucial. At the beginning of the 1990s, interventions by curators at the Museum of Natural History in New York led to new arrangements of objects, display cases and texts. For the critic and artist Mieke Bal, who observed the repairs, "certain labels succeeded better than others in suggesting a different approach to the metamuseum, in other words an approach that integrates the transmission of knowledge about the object with an understanding of the construction of this object by subjects. There are parts of the exhibition where the text panels do not contradict the visual displays. There are also displays whose visual persuasiveness is such that no panel can counter their rhetoric. Finally, there are areas where the objects on display benefit fully from the critical light shed by the textual accompaniments".[26]

The 1989 exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto was no less exemplary of such discrepancies. The professional skills of those in charge were worthy of the best specialists on the subject, the quality and significance of the pieces presented in the coun-

Fig. 05:
Unveiled. Berlin and its monuments. 1849-1986, **Proviant Magazin, Spandau Zitadelle.**

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try's most famous institution were indisputable, and the institution's postcolonial and multicultural commitment was obvious. But the event was taken as an affront by many in the communities concerned; it prevented the Canadian museum from attempting the same exercise for decades, and its memory still weighs heavily on the institution. Caught off-guard by its audiences, the exhibition seemed to support and propagate precisely what it set out to denounce.[27] Everything seemed to indicate that, in this case, the cure could be worse than the disease - if those administering the cure don't work with the audiences and/or do formative evaluation to find out if their curatorial intentions will be effectively communicated.

The new "museography" that arose during the inter-war period sought to use museums to serve political projects as much as purely artistic or scientific ones. A generation of curators and architects were mobilizing museums for communication purposes, if not propaganda, while at the same time seeking to use them to promote individual development. Federico Maria Giorgi highlights the first studies carried out in the early 1940s to scientifically identify 'pleasant' light and visual comfort.[28] The pursuit of visual 'satisfaction' was taken up again and developed further at the beginning of the 21st century, when lighting in museums was regulated according to physiological and psychological constraints, but also considering visual memories specific to the cultivated *habitus* - what some call the eye of an era.[29] From this point of view, Paul Valéry's comments in 1923, when he deplored the fact that the cane had been banned from the museum - he was stripped of it at the entrance - testify to the malaise of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, for him, this initial gesture was the prelude to a growing unease about the accumulation of works and a didactic purpose that prevented him from exercising his aesthetic eye in the course of a comfortable stroll through the collection.[30] In contrast, the *Association populaire des amis des musées* [APAM], founded in 1936, sought a few years later to "revive the museum" for the benefit of popular education.[31] The uneasy articulation of these perspectives, within a widespread desire to repair the museum, demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between the feelings of an amateur - or the pure spirit of Valery's *Monsieur Teste* - and the pursuit of a democratisation project through schools or similar mechanisms.

The avenues opened by the meetings and publications of curators' associations springing up all over the world, as well as the international cooperation structures developed within the League of Nations lead to new foundations or restorative redevelopments. Susana Stüssi discusses the ways in which scholarly research was translated into exhibition practice, and how the enhancement of Amerindian and pre-Columbian collections played a key role in museum reform. The aim was to ensure the best possible publicity for the progress of Americanist studies in France, which was tantamount to a demonstration of the privileged status of French science *tout court*. The story continued

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with subsequent moves, starting with the founding of the *Musée de l'Homme* - which replaced the old Trocadéro in 1937. The episode illustrates some of the characteristics of the modernization of European museums in the first half of the twentieth century, which combined social adaptations and scientific improvements, minor repairs and maintenance, and sometimes even the relocation of collections.

Writing in 1930 in the avant-garde magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille defined the museum as fundamentally a social space: "[...] the rooms and the works of art are only a container whose content is formed by the visitors: it is the content that

Fig. 06: Granville, Illustration of the chapter "Le Louvre des marionnettes", *Un autre monde*, Paris, Fournier, 1844. Source: Wikipedia Commons

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distinguishes a museum from a private collection. A museum is like the lungs of a great city: every Sunday the crowds rush into the museum like blood and come out purified and fresh. Paintings are nothing more than dead surfaces, and it's in the crowd that the interplay, the sparkle and the trickle of light take place, which are technically described by authorised critics".[32] It should be noted that Georges Bataille accompagned his article with an illustration by Granville entitled *Le Louvre des Marionnettes* (The Puppet Louvre) - dedicated to transforming visitors into real puppets in the encounter between objects and people, in a reversal that was provocative at the time, but can be heard differently today (Figure 6).

Fig. 07: Humboldt Forum, Berlin, 2021.

Writing for the artists and ethnographers who read *Documents*, Georges Bataille insists on the collective, socialised, urban character of this apparatus, a clear reflection of the new socio-economic conditions of the first twentieth century, in other words of an unprecedented urban civilisation. Visitors to the museum perform a ritual essential to the equilibrium of the social body, like the movement of bodily fluids, a process illustrated above all by the circulation of blood. Bataille suggested that the main benefit of visiting a museum is the regular purification of the body. Each visitor participates in a series of exchanges with the collections in which even the pedagogic mission of the museums is simple part of a more material social process. In 1939, Georges Salles, curator at the Louvre, in *Le Regard*, a work much celebrated by Walter Benjamin stated that "the museum has invaded the street".[33] Even if the idea that the museum contributes to urban prosperity, through its power to attract tourists, culture and politics, is a commonplace in specialist liter-

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ature, a phrase such as Salles' suggests the institution's entry into the realm of urbanism and the politics of the body, a development which itself may call for repairs in order to fully participate in a process of a broader social replenishment.

Social revitalisation

At the end of the twentieth century, museums were built into the urban fabric on a variety of scales, sometimes in the form of new constructions, sometimes as inventive restorations of existing buildings. In Berlin, the transfer of two of Dahlem's museums to the new Humboldt Forum was tantamount to an attempt to repair the recreated building, perhaps to attenuate its normative force, and at the very least to invent a convenient and indisputable utility for this empty form of an imaginary past.[34] The colonial history of their collections was a contributing factor in the initial debates about the legitimacy of rebuilding the palace, which, as far as its opponents were concerned, risked becoming a concentrate of historical criminalities[35] (Figure 7). In Nantes, after several decades of legal disputes with its neighbours, the Musée Dobrée is now fully integrated into the urban landscape, opening its garden and redesigning the sensitive landscape of the neighbourhood. The success of this latest project is characteristic of a more general trend, which sees programs to repair not just museums, but their entire neighborhoods, with a view to revitalizing the area, often from a political, economic and social perspective.[36]

On the theme of urban ornamentation, Jesus Pedro Lorente looks at the revitalisation of a neighbourhood in Bilbao thanks to carefully-labeled installations, which allow passers-by to become aware of the museum's role in the invention of a 'distinguished' cultural landscape. The relevance of this development, he argues, lies in a "fourth place", in reference to the typology of sociologist Ray Oldenburg.[37] Oldenburg distinguished three kinds of place: the first are homes, the second workplaces or schools, while the "third places" fulfil different roles that are essential to local democracy and, beyond that, to the vitality of any community. Today, an unprecedented hybridity of cultural establishments - such as libraries and museums - that have become, on occasion and for a time at least, medialabs or workshops, poses fresh questions about their role in carrying out other social functions.[38]

In fact, thinking about museums and collections, whether documentary or otherwise, has never ceased to take an interest in the most favorable arrangements to introduce into them - just as thinking about justice has never ceased to weigh on the architecture and furnishings of judicial courts or political assemblies.[39] An emblematic place in this respect is the famous laboratory imagined by Warburg in Hamburg: an "arena of science [Arena der Wissenschaft]" – at once a reading room, an exhibition space and a conference venue.[40] But contemporary critics take a different approach to work on museum collections: the aim is often to bring to light their suspect provenance, or even to

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identify the violence inherent in objects that have not been typically seen from that point of view - like Fred Wilson's work in 1992.[41] Such an approach treats museum collections as a virtually involuntary resource from which to extract items to redress the injustices of the past and the inequalities of the present, while ensuring future sustainability.[42] These endeavors, which might bring together artists and researchers, philosophers, architects and design specialists, and which often include structured engagement with potential users will require us to rethink the way the museum space is arranged and used.

Curator Clémentine Deliss, who ran the Frankfurt Museum of Cultures from 2010 to 2015, drew inspiration from the university and art school there. In 2013, she curated *Object Atlas*, a manifestation of artistic engagement with ethnographic artefacts housed in the collection.[43] Her 'metabolic museum' designs an institution engaged in research based on the collections to be explored, thanks to a specially designed arrangement of rooms and furniture. The arrangement of the metabolic museum in favor of productive uses is reminiscent of a domestic utopia of modernity, such as that of Apollinaire, who professed that "in order to work well, one would need a flat furnished in the futuristic manner of pneumatic furniture that one would inflate and deflate after use. In the moment of inspiration, all the furniture would be flat and perched on the ceiling by means of pulleys. The field would become free for intellectual work and the walking that is its necessary complement".[44] For Clémentine Deliss, furniture is not intended to fit in with the ar-

Fig. 08: *Voie libre*, permanent space, Musée de la civilisation, Québec.

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chitecture of an exhibition, or to accommodate the regulated paths of visitors, but to allow fruitful extractions.

As Manuel Borja-Villel points out, “reading, working, chatting and resting are performative acts that museums generally try to suppress”,[45] but Clémentine Deliss mobilises the logistics of her ideal museum for these very purposes, making collections and storerooms, tables and comfortable chairs available. She imagines visitors individually projecting images between the works, to “spam the display” - less as a form of piracy than as a way of repairing or complementing the official collection. Such proposals establish the museum as a space for precarious experiments, serving the object, the artist and often diasporic communities.

The “Resonant Museum” proposal launched in 2024 by the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac provides a material instance of these kinds of conceptual aspirations, while nevertheless respecting the more conventional itinerary of the museum visit[46] . As Louis Petitjean points out, the parisian museum wants to give a voice back to its collections, particularly of musical instruments, while at the same time remedying colonial erasure, through collaborations with artists[47] . New installations will enable sounds (whether music, voices or environmental noises) to enrich the experience of dissonant heritages. An artist’s sound residency - in this case Youmna Saba’s project, with the emblematic title “La Réserve des non-dits” - illustrates the challenges of this remediation. The initiative is part of a context in which museums are asking questions, as the Geneva Museum has done in its temporary exhibition *Tuning in - Acoustics of Emotion*: “What voices are we preserving, and why? Who speaks, who has the right to be heard? (...) What kinds of emotional links can be conveyed by the voice? (...) How can we hear a voice that does not produce sound?”.[48]

Fig. 09:
To All the Unnamed Women, temporary exhibition, curated by Michaëlle Sergile, Montréal, McCord Stewart museum, september 2024 - january 2025.

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Post-colonial treatment

Within the reparative turn embodied in multiple practices around the world, Nada Guzic identifies, in North America, "a series of interrelated themes and issues, including restorative justice, healing and well-being, restitution and repatriation, decolonisation in its many forms, and the demand for more caring institutions" (Figure 8). The multiple meanings and challenges of reparation touch on issues as varied as inclusive purchasing policies, the treatment of collections and exhibitions, indigenous rights, and the challenge of *re-enacting* intangible cultural heritage - whether on the initiative of a guest artist curator or that of source communities (Figure 9). All these practices aim, in some measure, to "repair the living"[49] by establishing new relationships to objects on display.

In Canada, the museum has played a role in diversity policies from the adoption of multiculturalism in the 1970s to the latest Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies. Initiatives have focused on both accessibility and the promotion of indigenous institutions, with the aim of redressing inequalities of an ideological, physical or cultural nature. Both the development of collections and their documentation have been marked by a triptych of resolutions: the modification of acquisition criteria to reflect the aspiration to model diversity within museums, the change of terminology to represent the plurality of identities of visitors, and a revision of the discourse on objects to make room for the expression of emotions and promote new narratives (Figure 10). Collection management, with a view to EDI, must therefore bridge the gaps in representation to compensate for the invisibility of certain communities. Identifying artists and works in indigenous languages, in exhibition titles and object descriptions, is one of the most notable requirements.

The museum is seen as a potentially restorative institution, in both

Fig. 10: *Sur paroles. Le son du rap queb*, Temporary exhibition, Québec, Musée de la civilisation, november 2023 - september 2024.

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material and symbolic terms, one which should aim to "encourage the emergence of a representative, just and equitable society".[50] As Thierry Ruddel has pointed out in relation to the various "civilising" museums in the country, this decision will have to face several challenges.[51] Nada Guzic stresses the "contradiction between policies aimed at establishing a national collection that is supposed to reflect the country's identity and the fragmentation of that identity, as manifested in political demands for the inclusion of under-represented groups identified by their country of origin" (Figure 11). The play of nomenclatures and classifications specific to the different types of museums weighs particularly heavily on this program. Compared with museums of society or ethnology, art museums are clearly out of step, even though some of them, which according to the available surveys are very much in the minority, "have begun to incorporate cultural categories, attempting to segment identities in the same way as databases of cultural objects". Inventories of collections, for example at the *Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, provide "a breakdown of artists by gender, cultural origin, year of birth and regional distribution".

Jean-Philippe Uzel shows that in recent years there has been a shift in the demands of the First Nations, from reconciliation to decolonisation, leading to new debates and new oppositions. The first period saw the introduction of a policy of including "indigenous voices" - to varying degrees of effectiveness, depending on the museum - thanks to the new care taken in the way objects are discussed, from their origin to their final treatment. A second era was characterized by an emphasis on the genocidal nature of the colonial project, leading to an emphasis "between post-trauma medicine and social justice", to collaborate in "healing" through "reconciliation". From 2017 onwards, the abandonment of this vocabulary, deemed unsuitable, has led to an increasing adoption of the postcolonial perspective, drawing on a tradition begun a generation earlier.

The Canadian Aboriginal movement's approach to "coloniality" aims to create a museum that is not so much reconciling as healing following the national trauma of the discovery, in May 2021, of the hidden remains of children who had died at residential schools. Some institutions, at the forefront of reconciliation processes in their early days, do acknowledge their colonial origins. But, when no concrete conclusions are drawn, the reference to decolonisation risks becoming merely metaphorical, and even tokenistic. Some museums have begun to call for real indigenous intervention in at least some of their spaces in the name of the principle, affirmed by David Garneau in 2022, that "museums are non-colonial, indigenous, when they place the needs of living people before the goods conserved".[52]

Such an alternative is found in many contemporary museums, which are confronted with the questionable provenance of their objects, from colonial looting to police raids. In Canada process of confiscation was

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set in motion after the potlatch was banned, leading to the seizure of property now being kept in museums in Western Canada, and then, depending on circumstances, to restitution or repair.[53] In Brazil, the five hundred or so pieces confiscated by the police at the end of the nineteenth century as part of social and religious repression were first placed in a museum of "black magic" but were later transferred to the *Museu da República* in Rio de Janeiro. Pedro Marco Gonçalves and Arantxa Ciafrino retrace the successive episodes in a demonstration of decolonial museology. Today, their conservation is part of a process of reparation for Afro-Brazilian religious traditions and their memory. In concrete terms, the custody of the collection, because of its specific characteristics, is in the hands of the Afro-Brazilian temples, commonly known as *terreiros*, with the museum providing them with its

Fig. 12: *Art sur ordonnance*, MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain.

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support. This partnership, theorised by a particularly inventive new Brazilian museology, aims to respond to the gesture of faith without depending/insisting on the scientificity inscribed in previous repressions. As museologist Bruno Brulon Soares writes, "uncertainty about collections is never an easy burden for museums to bear, but it is a fundamental part of any ritual in a *terreiro*. Understanding these objects in their process of objectification, rather than attached to fixed and stable classification systems, can free the museum from its own colonial methods and procedures".[54]

Caring for others

This is the beginning of new ways of treating objects, opposed to the longstanding views of conservation-restoration, and aimed at creating a framework in which fairness is newly valorized.[55] A new horizon of practices is taking shape, that of the *bientraitance* of objects, according to a recent neologism[56] which tolerates certain material deteriorations, if not losses.[57] From this perspective, Noémie Etienne defends the idea of an "active and polyphonic conservation" in museums devoted to the display of puppets. Rejecting the classic paradigm of heritage protection, these establishments illustrate the possibility of a social participation in the management of their collections, in forms of negotiation between museum professionals and puppeteers invested in their games. Like art libraries, or museums of religion or music, which allow some of their artefacts to be used in private practices or in collective ceremonies, these collections willingly sacrifice parts of their mission (protection or conservation) to the demands encouraged by the recognition of intangible cultural heritage. In this way, these museums fall into the category of popular spectacle, somewhere between community at-

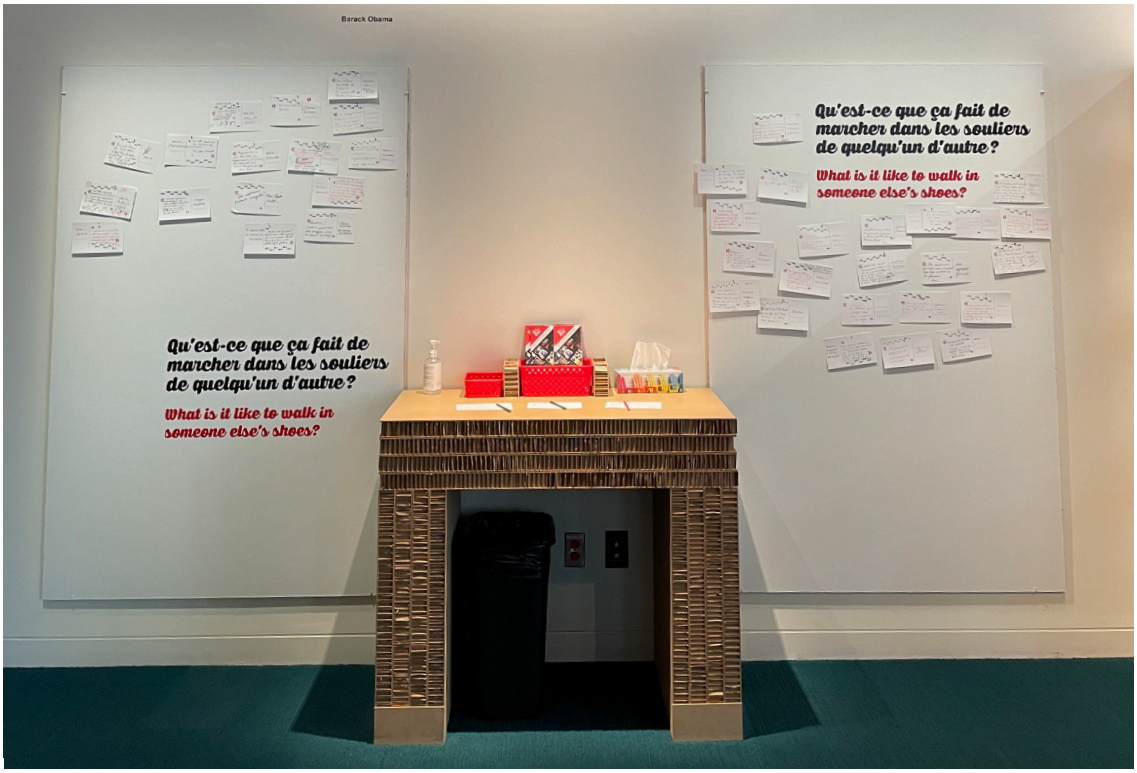

Fig. 13: *Un mile dans mes souliers*, Temporary exhibition, Centre des mémoires montréalaises, Montréal, february 2024 - august 2025.

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tachment and folk tourism.

To guarantee the documentary value of the material, the involvement of conservators is crucial at every stage of the process, as is the choice of the people who take temporary charge of the objects. The practices permitted are subject to very precise limits in terms of the original condition of the instruments, which must be guaranteed. They also depend on the legitimate players - and, in the case of ethnological collections, the source communities - respecting the practices. However, this last condition may prove impossible to achieve. Anthropologist Carole Delamour has defended the principle of returning to the Innu Indians of Mashteuiatsh the drums they can no longer play because they have lost their skills.[58] "This is perfectly understandable in a given situation," remarks Joelle le Marec, "but it is difficult for the organisations responsible for investigating claims for restitution to take into account: how can you justify the quality of a relationship with the objects claimed by claiming that they have not been used?".[59] To accept this weakness, on the part of the museum, would be to acknowledge that people can see their know-how disappear, without calling into question their properties: after all, owning musical instruments that you don't use but are attached to is a commonplace phenomenon. As a French historian once wrote about the social classes of the 19th century, the bourgeoisie is defined by the presence of a piano in its interior.[60]

Restorative museology is a necessary result of the politics of care when brought to the cultural field.[61] Almost a generation ago, in an article co-authored with Berenice Fisher, Joan Tronto suggested that "care should be seen as a generic activity that includes everything we do to maintain, perpetuate and repair our 'world', so that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to link into a complex network in support of life".[62] The response in museums, in the form of care for the public through the collections, has been remarkable. This trend is part of a wider context, illustrated since the 1960s by specific proposals such as "bibliotherapy".[63] This is the case at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, with the opening of a pavilion dedicated to art therapy,[64] and free tickets on prescription.[65] Since this pioneering initiative in 2018, the movement has quickly spread to Brussels, Switzerland and France, where in various places doctors can prescribe visits. In Montpellier, the "Art sur ordonnance" project has developed between the contemporary art center and the psychiatric emergency and post-emergency department, as well as in Rennes and the Yvelines department[66] (Figure 12). Art on Prescription distinguishes itself from art therapy by offering visits and activities at the museum (totally detached from the medical world) rather than hospital sessions.

Care also ties in with older concerns about diversifying museum offerings. The *Doppio Senso* programme at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which offers tactile experiences and educational activities

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for people with visual impairments, is one instance of the policies of inclusive access that have marked recent decades around the world. However, as Valeria Bottalico insists, this is not just another service added to the museum's organisational chart, but a provision designed in collaboration with users, to meet their real needs. Alessandro Paolo Lena points out that the initiatives to promote touch in the museum are part of a wider effort to take account of the body and the senses from a perspective of care that refers to classic philosophical debates from the sensualism of the Enlightenment to the current perspectives of neuroscience.

Here and there we are now seeing collaborations[67] between museum professionals and the medical world, particularly around mental health treatments.[68] The Museums of Liverpool have devised a digital collection of museum objects and everyday items combined with sounds, under the title *My House of Memories*. Irene Di Pietro describes how, along with other similar projects, the initiative is working to care for people with dementia, through the development of interpersonal skills within a community setting. A philosophy of *care* such as this has given rise to professional training courses: in France, through the *Institut national du patrimoine* (National Heritage Institute)[69] , and through the Association of Museum Curators.[70] The museum, thanks to its objects and their different histories or biographies, is defined as a place for therapeutic work on people - on a par with other practices, such as the storyteller's workshop (Figure 13).

Relying on the museum

Walter Benjamin defined the storyteller in terms of the art of recounting experience[71] and distinguished two types: the sedentary ploughman (guarantor of traditions) and the merchant navigator (involved in voyages and discoveries). Both share a set of traits that, for him, define "the nature of the true narrative": "It always has, overtly or tacitly, a utilitarian aspect. This is sometimes expressed as a moral, sometimes as a practical recommendation, and sometimes as a proverb or a rule of life - in all cases, the storyteller is a man of good advice for his audience".[72] In this case, a museum's good advice to its guests could be that of healing through objects, of which Western literature has left some remarkable examples.[73] In chapter CX of *Moby-Dick*, Melville recounts how during his grave illness Queequeg asks for a coffin to be made for him. The creation of the coffin seems on to strengthen him, however, so that he recover and he later makes himself a chest out of the object: "Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And this tattooing had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them;

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and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last".[74]

The episode of a vanished wisdom evokes the "paradigm of the last", dear to the French anthropological school.[75] For Jean Jamin, who has written an acute commentary on the topic, Queequeg's coffin - which survives the shipwreck of the Pequod, gutted by the white whale, serves as a lifeline for the hero, and therefore provides the basis for the possibility of Ishmael's story being told at all - is "an allegory of the collection and storage of objects from the farthest reaches of the civilised world, (...) seen as covers for cultures in mourning, obviously doomed to disappear if not already gone (...), but whose deeper meaning, whatever was done or said, would remain forever buried, unreachable, indecipherable".[76] From the perspective of the "last romantics", the *Musée du Trocadéro*, in the discussion of which Jean Jamin cites the tale of Queequeg's coffin, exhibits the relic of an elsewhere lost to all and ultimately useless. But today's restorative museology wants to imagine the positive force of Queequeg's coffin. The radical alteration of the original context of the tattoos – when the prophet spoke and was understood – renders his chest indecipherable, but does not prevent it from being faithfully preserved by those who still claim it, nor does it prevent the captain, a foreign viewer, from respecting it as an enigma or a myth. The combination of their care and respect is undoubtedly utopian, but isn't that always the case in museums?[77]

In studies of museum and library audiences, sociologists have long identified a gap between authorised commentary and ordinary practice. In fact, "sympathetic attention to places, people and practices that are subject to power or relegated to the margins," Joelle Le Marec has pointed out, is often lacking both in the studies carried out by institutions and in the critical viewpoints of intellectuals and specialists. In other words, in the vast body of contemporary museum evaluation, "it is hard to take seriously that the museum or the library can engender trust and even produce it on a daily basis, and we are even saddened by the naivety this implies".[78] In the end, writes Le Marec, this lack "exempts us from thinking about and considering the nature of an embarrassing form of trust". And yet the challenge facing museums today is precisely to inspire confidence, or to continue to do so, in the absence or confusion of identifications and belonging. For the museum, it is a question of what care its collection obliges it to take; for the visitor, it is a question of whether he or she can trust the museum and rely on its care.[79]

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Endnotes

1 I'd like to express my deep gratitude to Mark O'Neill and Jonah Siegel for their invaluable contribution to the proofreading and commentary of this text. Their expertise has significantly enriched the content and improved the quality of the translation.

2 Portin, Grinell 2021.

3 Weil 1999.

4 Poulot 1985.

5 Bourdieu, Darbel 1966.

6 About the French case: Galard 2000; Fourteau 2002; Donnat, Tolila 2003.

7 https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/36387-inventer-des-musees-pour-demain-rapport-de-la-mission-musees-du-.

8 As the pandemic episode showed, in an emergency, priority is given to the collections rather than the public, and the museum once again becomes an invisible treasure, except in very small ones: Poulot 2020.

9 https://www.icom-musees.fr/sites/default/files/2019-11/Publication%20Muse%CC%81es%20et%20droits%20culturels.pdf.

10 Chakrabarty 2002.

11 Perec 2010.

12 Smith 2019.

13 *Confidential note…* 2025.

14 Sterling, Larkin 2021.

15 The *A World to Heal* exhibition was presented at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum from November 2021 to April 2022.

16 Guzin Lukic 2004; for an example, see the exhibition *Enfants en guerre, guerre à l'enfance?* at *La Contemporaine*, Nanterre, http://www.lacontemporaine.fr/.

17 https://musee-memorial-terrorisme.fr/. On the phenomenon Barrett, Alba, Moses 2025.

18 https://www.dhmd.de/en/exhibitions/preview/fake.

19 Šveb, van Zomeren, Hansen 2024.

20 Lemieux 2007.

21 *Rapport sur la bibliographie 22 germinal an II* (1794), quoted by Poulot 1996, p. 279.

22 Etienne 2012.

23 Lethbridge 1992.

24 Lenz 1978.

25 Poulot 2025.

26 Bal 1992.

27 Riegel 1995; Forni 2020, pp. 59-71. For the general context Tator, Henry, Mattis, 1998, chapter 2, pp. 36-61.

28 The first one of this kind being Benjamin Ives Gilman's article on "Museum Fatigue" from 1916, https://archive.org/details/jstor-6127/page/n13/mode/2up

29 Baxandall 1972.

30 Valéry [1923] 1960.

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31 Buttier, Roullier, Sandras 2022.

32 Bataille 1930, p. 300; Debaene 2002.

33 Salles [1939] 2022, p. 133.

34 Flamm 2007, p. 692.

35 See the poems by Volker Braun, translated and edited by Jean-Paul Barbe: Braun 2023.

36 Gasnier et al. 2022.

37 Oldenburg 1999.

38 Besson 2017.

39 Among others, Fischer Taylor 2013.

40 Interview with Céline Trautmann-Waller: McEwan, Trautmann-Waller 2018.

41 *Mining the Museum* was an exhibition installed by Fred Wilson, invited by The Contemporary, Baltimore, using the archives and resources of the Maryland Historical Society in October 1992: Corrin et al. 1994.

42 *Report of the World Commission…* 1987

43 Deliss 2013.

44 Faure-Favier 2018.

45 Quoted in Dercon, Lecuyer 2023.

46 On the complexity of actual museum experiences, see Debary, Roustan 2012.

47 https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde.

48 *Tuning In*, temporary exhibition 2024-2025, International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, https://redcrossmuseum.ch/exhibitions/tuning-in-acoustique-de-lemotion-exhibition-redcrossmuseum/.

49 *Réparer les vivants* is a novel by Maylis de Kerangal published in 2014 by Verticales.

50 *Report by the Canadian Museums Association*, cited here by Nada Guzic.

51 Ruddel 2005.

52 Garneau 2022, p. 245.

53 Assu et al. 2018; Loget 2021.

54 Brulon Soares 2024, p. 83; Russi 2024, p. 5.

55 Phillips 2011.

56 Garcia Gomez 2023.

57 Arndt, Etienne 2023.

58 Delamour 2019.

59 Le Marec 2021a, p. 21.

60 Chaline 1983.

61 Owens 2024,.

62 Tronto 2008; Brugère 2023a; 2023b.

63 Detambel 2017; 2023.

64 https://www.mbam.qc.ca/fr/seances-dart-therapie/.

65 https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/news/museum-prescriptions/.

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66 https://www.moco.art/fr/art-sur-ordonnance; https://metropole.rennes.fr/prescriptions-museales-quand-lart-devient-un-remede.

67 Cowan, Laird, McKeown 2020.

68 Chatterjee, Vreeland, Noble 2009; Holzritter 2024.

69 https://mindful-art.eu/care-et-cure-au-musee. A bibliography has been compiled by Célia Corbet and Nathalie Bondil, as part of the continuing education course: "Museothérapie - Art et santé dans les musées", 2024 by the Institut national du patrimoine in Paris. See the collection of articles edited by Joëlle Le Marec: Le Marec 2021b.

70 *Le caring museum…* 2023.

71 Benjamin [1936] 2016.

72 Benjamin [1936] 2016, p. 119.

73 Orlando 1994.

74 Melville 1851, Chap. 110, "Queequeg in His Coffin".

75 Wendling 2021.

76 Jamin 2014.

77 See the chapters by Donald Preziosi and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in Rüsen, Fehr 2004; Michael Conforti 2018.

78 Le Marec 2021a, p. 16.

79 It's worth noting that the entire issue was composed before the recent political upheavals in North America, which are calling into question the previous orientations of many museums.

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Sportacus

Roundtable: Caring Museums Today

edited by Dominique Poulot

Keywords:
Museums, Care, Diversity, Indigenization, Exhibition, Inclusion, Contemporary art, Violence.

ABSTRACT:

The round table convenes a British museum professional, a North American philosopher and critic, and a German curator, to deliberate contemporary museum issues. The discourse focuses on contemporary museology and its challenges, particularly regarding the democratisation of visits and practices. The presentation of several case studies of institutions mobilising to present their collections and address the violence that may be associated with them is also a feature.

La tavola rotonda riunisce un professionista britannico dei musei, un filosofo e critico nordamericano e una curatrice tedesca, attorno a temi legati all'attualità dei musei. Presenta scambi di opinioni sulla museologia contemporanea e le sue sfide, in particolare riguardo alla democratizzazione delle visite e delle pratiche. Riporta diversi esempi di mobilitazione delle istituzioni per mettere in scena le loro collezioni e rendere conto delle violenze eventualmente ad esse associate.

La table ronde réunit un professionnel britannique des musées, un philosophe et critique nord-américain et une curatrice allemande, autour de thèmes relatifs à l'actualité des musées. Elle expose des échanges de vues sur la muséologie contemporaine et ses enjeux, en particulier à propos de la démocratisation des visites et des pratiques. Elle rend compte de plusieurs exemples de la mobilisation des institutions pour mettre en scène leurs fonds et rendre compte des violences qui leur sont éventuellement associées.

Opening Picture:

A Day at the Seaside: workshop for children inspired by paintings stored in Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (2004), which holds the city's collection of 1.4 million objects and is visitable seven days a week. Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

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Jonah Siegel

Jonah Siegel, Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University, is the author of many publications on art and its institutions and on literature, including *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth Century Culture of Art* (2000), *Material Inspirations: The Interests of the Art Object in the Nineteenth Century*, (2020) and *Overlooking Damage: Art, Display, and Loss in Times of Crisis* (2022). In 2008 he published *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (2008). He has held fellowships at the National Humanities Center, and at the American Academy in Rome, where he was a Rome Prize Fellow in 2004. In 2005 he will be at Oxford, Bogliasco, and Università Iuav, completing work on a book on the destruction of art objects in popular culture.

Nora Sternfeld

Nora Sternfeld is an art educator and curator. She is professor of art education at the HFBK Hamburg. From 2018 to 2020 she was documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. From 2012 to 2018 she was Professor of Curating and Mediating Art at the Aalto University in Helsinki. In addition, she is co-director of the /ecm - Master Programme for Exhibition Theory and Practice at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, in the core team of *schnittpunkt. austellungstheorie & praxis*, co-founder and part of *trafo.K*, Office for Education, Art and Critical Knowledge Production (Vienna) and since 2011 of freethought, Platform for Research, Education and Production (London). She publishes on museums, contemporary art, educational theory, exhibitions, historical politics and anti-racism.

Mark O'Neill

Mark O'Neill worked for over 30 years in museums, mostly in Glasgow, serving as Head of Museums from 1998-2009. He led a number of large scale, award-winning projects, including: in 1993 the only museum of world religions in the UK ("In terms of interpreting and inspiring society afresh... probably the most important museum to have been opened in Britain since the V & A", *The Spectator*); in 2006, the £35 million refurbishment of Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum (one of the "few memorable paradigm-shifting museums that come along in any lifetime" Elaine Gurian); and the £74 million Riverside Museum (European Museum of the Year 2013). He has lectured worldwide and published on museum philosophy and practice, on social justice and inclusion in museums and on the health benefits of cultural participation.

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How should we view the notion of "care" for collections in museums today?

Jonah Siegel: The responsibilities of curators have evidently multiplied to an extraordinary point. As in the past, those in charge of collections still need to protect objects in practical ways so they survive, and to display them effectively for various audiences. But curators are also called upon to explain or justify the value of the ownership and display of objects that in the past might have been assumed – often in response to shifting concepts of ownership and display that have been more effective at raising challenges than at reaching any kind of consensus. Today "care" includes the justification of value – as well as a related transparency and openness about provenance.

Nora Sternfeld: If we understand the task of a museum as a critical faithfulness to the material, then how can institutions be faithful to their objects? Is this really mainly about protecting materiality? Or is it perhaps, after all, more about the sedimented histories they carry within them and what the works are about? And would "care" not also touch the responsibility of the institutions and their relations to violence? We could think about questionable processes of acquisition, but we could also think of all the artistic works that have understood themselves in terms of collective processes, critical interventions, or ephemeral actions; they actually contain a potential. I propose that curatorial "care" really ought to apply to these processes and suggest therefore a new para-museological understanding of "care".

Mark O'Neill: Understanding of the task of caring for the vast number of objects in the 100000 or more museums across the world are changing along with the epistemologies through which they are interpreted and with the political economy which supports the burgeoning number of museums. They are now seen less as archives where inert objects wait to be given life in displays or through the attention of researchers. Their meanings as well as their materiality now needs to be cared for, so that indigenous epistemologies can influence how they are stored and how – and to whom – access is provided. Just as visitors are no longer seen as passive recipients of sense impressions of objects (based on a *tabula rasa* theory of mind) but instead as contributing actively to the process of sense making, objects, in the language of Bruno Latour, are seen as having agency; they actively shape our lives by the affordances they provide and the limitations they impose.

In political terms, there have been demands for increased accountability from a public who are not entirely convinced of the value of these vast repositories – especially when incidents like the recent thefts from the stores of the British Museum reveal that many objects in even the most august museums are not adequately documented. Surely these institutions were not simply accumulating and hoarding in the name of scholarship – without doing the basic work of recording? In Glasgow in 2004, to justify one of the poorest

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cities in Western Europe spending £ 7 million on a new store (phase 1 of a repository which eventually held as 1,4 million objects – all fully inventoried! – at a final cost of £ 22 million), we decided to make it fully accessible to the public, with guided tours seven days a week. The approach to caring for the collection was transformed by taking seriously the fact that it was owned by the people of the city. "Care" means the museum is less a gatekeeper to publicly owned treasures and more enablers of access – both physical and intellectual.

What is the difference between this notion of "care" and the ordinary concern for technical and scientific conservation?

Jonah Siegel: Practical and ethical burdens increase as curators recognize their work as fundamentally educational and possibly even polemical. The need to care for the public has also grown, given the extraordinary expansion in the concepts of harm that have become available in recent years. The experience of the viewer has become an occasion in relation to which the claim of injury can be advanced – and possibly even felt – leading to the need for a new level of care in imagining where harm may be experienced and how it might be mitigated or prevented through modes of display.

Nora Sternfeld: Caring would be a faithfulness to the unarchivable aspects of the museum: to the emotional and conflictual dimensions of the material, to the history of its "way" to the museum, to the sedimented histories they carry. I would opt for a "care" for the conflictual and unarchivable dimension of the material – precisely that which cannot be stored in archival boxes, but should nonetheless not be forgotten – also because the historical tension and conflictuality that is part of what the museum is can erupt once more.

The custodians' and curators' contradictory and always also somewhat impossible task would be to "care" for the conflictuality and performativity of the works – a "care" focused on the fact that there needs to be room precisely for the "*unarchivable*" element of art and history in the museum – because this is what actually distinguishes a museum from a police archive. The museum as para-museum would therefore be precisely a place in which a renewal of the material's current relevance – and not just its immobilization or, alternatively, exploitation – can become possible.

Mark O'Neill: The key shift in this notion of "care" is from an epistemology based on the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the positivism of the Scientific revolution, the dualism of Descartes and the utilitarianism of Bentham, to one that emphasizes relationships, systems and ecologies. The museum is no longer an island of civilization, occasionally visited by worshippers, but an active agent in a complex web of cultural, social and economic networks and systems.

This reflects the increased political valency of museum objects, no longer seen as neutral specimens, but as embodying the values of

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the cultures which collected them which, at the time of the formation of public museums, were dominated by imperialistic and patriarchal norms.

Do you see a new ethical concept in this concern for "care"?

Jonah Siegel: Practical considerations come to the fore initially when the concept of the museum itself needs support, but the challenge also may be viewed as an occasion for serious self-reflection.Why save this thing? Why display it? What values are we supporting by what we preserve, display, and explain – and by the terms we use to explain or justify ourselves? If we think of self-consciousness as a fundamental ethical responsibility, this process of reflection is revealed to be deeply ethical. I am not sure it is a new concept that recent ideas of "care" will require, so much as the recognition of a very old one.

Nora Sternfeld : The ethics of this concept of "care" are related to the ethics of Derrida's *Archive Fever* and of Benjamin's *Theses on History: Ethics of the "archival unconscious"*. I would speak about ethics that are based on the admission of intrinsic violence and a history of struggles that are haunting the archive.

In this sense I would speak about ethics as a faithfulness to the "unarchivable" – a concept that I owe to and have been working on together with the theorist Irit Rogoff.

But when we confront the unarchivable that haunts the archive, we encounter contradictions, uncanny contradictions. With Jacques Derrida I would refer to these contradictions as the ghosts in the archives. And what I would call care and ethics would be to be faithful to these contradictions instead of silencing them: We don't want to admit them, because we are looking for an order that legitimizes our lives, our positions, our points of view, we are looking for an order in which it is clear who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. But if we work with archives we encounter contradictions and struggles. And these will never legitimize what is. They may motivate what is, they move us, but they cannot legitimize it, even if the archives always try to do so in a certain way with their orders and structures.

Mark O'Neill: Newer notions of "care" in museum culture derive from movements to revise and enrich our understanding of human life, reflected in a series "turns" – cultural, linguistic, embodied, material, ecological, spiritual, spatial - a search in the humanities equivalent to efforts by Mahbub ul-Haq, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum to replace metrics based on GDP with the Human Development index, and a legalistic version of human rights with one rooted in human capabilities. The philosophy of "care", largely derived from feminist thinking aspires to be more than a "turn" however, and to function as a paradigm shift, in the full Kuhnian sense, of a transformed way of thinking which re-frames everything and provides a new basis for "normal science". Virginia Held, for example, has argued that the feminist ethic of "care" is not

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an approach which can be added to more established philosophies such as Kantianism, utilitarianism or virtue ethics. It has something in common with the latter, but "in its focus on relationships rather than on the dispositions of individuals, the ethics of "care" is distinct".[1]

Insofar as museums are adopting a relational ethic of "care", museum theory is moving beyond the hermeneutic of suspicion and the deconstruction of the ideological role of museums to a focus on relationality, using terms like community, engagement, empathy, co-production, visitor centered, social justice, and cultural democracy.

The pandemic exposed a widespread hypocrisy about "care", where the (majority female) workers in homes for the (majority female) elderly, were exposed with their charges to higher risks than any other profession, for wages that were at or near the legal minimum. While many museums have engaged with the ethic of "care" through projects, the great majority delegate these to the largely female staff who previously had delivered school programs, and later art/engagement programs derived from Community Arts. During COVID most museums tried to adapt and provide caring services online, but some, most notably MOMA in NY, made their real priorities clear. Despite being one of the wealthiest museums in the world, within days of the first lockdown, and delivering "care" projects, including one focused on individuals living with dementia, MOMA sacked their entire education and engagement team – again mostly female, and from global majority backgrounds. In the UK, any time there are budget cuts, the engagement staff are always the first to go, in order to preserve the museums' *core* functions. Dementia care is of course very fundable, so it costs the "core" nothing. Despite values espoused in mission statements, museums like MOMA deny relational ethics and are driven by a desire to retain unilateral control over the institution and its environment, not to engage and to learn in order to contribute, in the words of the old ICOM definition, *to society and its development*.

"Care" in museums is focused on interpersonal care, working with small groups, selected from communities under-represented amongst museum visitors, through volunteering programs or time-limited projects. These are often linked to mission statement objectives involving contributing to social mobility, social cohesion or democratization. Where these engagements are designed to reshape the museum as a whole, there may be some truth in these claims. If they are just projects, these claims are not tenable – the numbers involved are simply too small to have any impact. As Nick Merriman, now CEO of English Heritage put it.

> *"If we are honest with ourselves, …we like talking about socially engaged projects because social change is part of the accepted discourse and reward system of museology, and we feel better about ourselves when we're doing this kind of work. However, we have not found a way to translate this small*

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scale but important work into mass participation that makes a change in the wider society".[2]

Embedding "care" in museum institutional culture would mean recognizing the unchanging gap in visitation between upper and lower socioeconomic groups, and that a strategic response to structural inequalities is required, in particular to the fact that the single most important predictor of museum visiting is prior level of educational qualification. Despite the huge focus on improving access to museums over the past 50 years, I don't know of any museum which puts this core insight of cultural sociology at the centre of its engagement strategy. For every increased level of educational attainment, people are proportionately more likely to visit museums, and there is a big jump for people with degrees – especially those with humanities'degrees. Very few museums have mediation programs (involving all aspects of display, marketing, PR, outreach, inreach and visitor welcome) designed to create access for people with few or no educational qualifications. This means that, while museums can enhance the education of those who are already educated, the people who get the most out of them are the most educated. And the people who could most benefit from an enhanced education are the least likely to be addressed by the museum. And of course, education intersects with other vectors of inequality, compounding their exclusionary effects.

How can we link the notions of provenance and "care" for objects?

Jonah Siegel: Clarity about provenance and even about uncertainty as to provenance is vital. The history of an object includes the vicissitudes it has experienced. Caring for the museum itself requires frankness in these areas – and I anticipate that the burgeoning importance of the question of provenance will ultimately lead us to move beyond simply endorsing fairly primitive notions of cultural property, of group blame or responsibility, or of the ethics of individual ownership.

Nora Sternfeld: If we admit that conflictuality is somehow part of every process of musealization then we will see that provenance and "care" are intrinsically linked: The objects come to the museum with their histories. And musealization consists in a revalorization of values: It is doing something with the objects, and this "something" becomes part of them, for the better or for the worse. Caring for objects means caring for their histories – as violent (or as mundane) they might be.

Mark O'Neill: A relational perspective also emphasizes context, including provenance. The focus on the context of objects has been influential in museums from a number of perspectives – ecological in natural history, historical and cultural in human history collections. The role of context in art collections is still unresolved. The great English art historian, Michael Baxandall, ar-

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gued against providing context in museums, despite writing inspiring work on how culture shaped the *period eye* which enabled works of art to be understood and appreciated.[3] For different reasons, the evocation of context for non-European objects was disavowed by the Musée de l'Homme, in an assertion of the primacy of the European category of "art" over cultural meanings. This echoes arguments put forward by museum directors like James Cuno and Neil McGregor that, in effect, non-European peoples should be flattered by having their objects elevated to this status. This denial of the importance of context led many American museums, including the Getty and the Met to collect unprovenanced antiquities from Italy and Greece, many of which they have been forced by the courts to return, most famously the Euphronios krater.

One of the puzzling aspects of provenance studies is how wide acceptance that objects spoliated by the Nazis should be returned to the descendants of the original owners, is often combined with a vigorous insistence that the same principle does not apply in the contexts of other, relatively recent atrocities. *Reductio ad absurdum* arguments invoke claims for the return of objects taken by the Roman legions or marauding Vikings, with no recognition of the links of the objects with identifiable living descendants of their original owners. In 1999, Glasgow City Council agreed to return a Lakota Ghost Dance Shirt which had been removed from a corpse after the Massacre of Wounded Knee (1890) to descendants, mainly as the result of provenance research which showed that there was no way the object could have been legally acquired by the donor, as well as because of its religious, cultural and historical significance.

What contradictions or connections do you see in contemporary museum situations?

Jonah Siegel: The museum can be seen as a culminating point of a general education – a structure containing objects one understands or appreciates if one has been educated to the point at which doing so is possible. It can also be seen, on the other hand, as precisely the location at which that instruction should be carried out, one that should not require prior knowledge as a price of entry. To these extremes, between which museums and thinking about museums have moved since their inception, we might add the pres-

Fig. 01: Lakota Ghost Dance Shirt repatriated to the Wounded Knee Survivors Association in 1999. The shirt was probably removed from the body of someone killed in the massacre in December 1890. This was the first ever repatriation from a UK museum to a Native American organisation. Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

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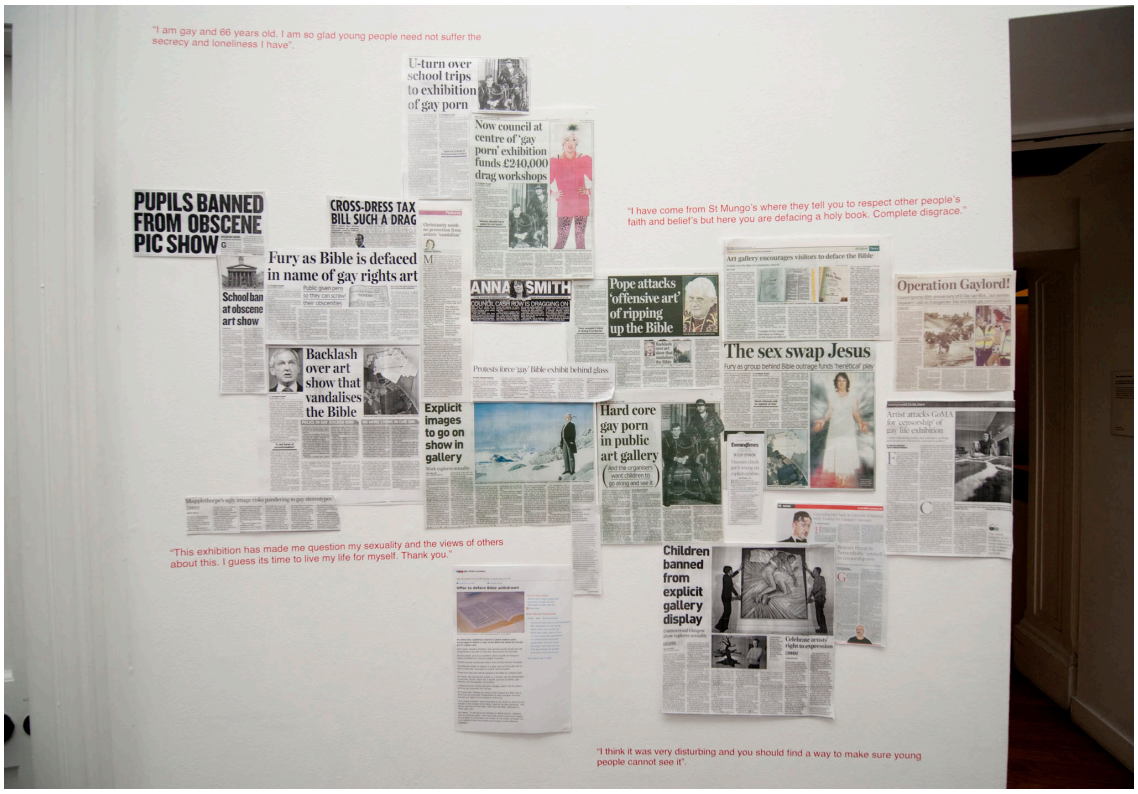

02

Fig. 02: In response to the backlash triggered by the exhibition SH(out), on LGBTI issues and art, we commissioned artist Anthony Shrag (http://www.anthonyschrag.com) to make a rapid-response display documenting the controversy and inviting public comment. Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

sures for instrumental value on the one hand, which is one characteristic manifestation of the educational mission (we must train our designers or citizens) and the claims for broader general values (such as the aesthetic, the ideal, universal culture, etc.) which are manifestations of that culminating quality of the institution, but which have been put under a great deal of pressure by recent reflections on the social interests inherent in the institution. The embrace of multicultural and inclusive values in European and American cultural institutions along with new sensitivities about the politics of ownership and display have tended to reveal the fault lines dividing the never truly harmonious elements that made up the cultural logic of the museum. Who is it for? What is it for? These basic questions are easy to answer in broad terms, but are less straightforward in practice than it is sometimes thought. I'd add that the same might be said about other important social structures that matter (the family, the nation, and so on). To put the matter in the terms offered in the original question: in some ways the museum might be better understood as a good example of the inevitability of contradictions that will be manifested at the junction point of all important connections rather than as an especially troubled instance of contradiction.

Nora Sternfeld: Since the beginning of the 21st century, critical theories have spread like wildfire in the practice of institutional texts and contexts: feminism, anti-racism, environmental policies, institutional criticism, inclusion debates, decolonial and queer theories are omnipresent – while structurally, however, little has changed for the better and a hard-earned critical vocabulary often becomes a label. The question remains: How can the

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critique of the museum have actual consequences within the museum?

Mark O'Neill: Critical theories have indeed had a strong influence on the exhibitions and activities of some museums, with many claiming radical reinvention. There is little evidence that these changes are anything other than performative, validating the identities of the staff and those sections of the public which share their values. I know of no museum which takes a visitor-centered, experimental approach to progressive displays. This would involve ascertaining the attitudes towards, and the knowledge and understandings of, the issues involved amongst a wide public (not just minoritized groups) and then using formative evaluation to implement effective public education in the sense described by both Nora and Jonah. This is all the more important in our polarised society. The aim would be to reduce public bewilderment about many culture war issues, offering accessible information, reducing rejection and nurturing the reflection which is essential to active citizenship.

In Glasgow we learned the need for this approach the hard way. After three successful exhibitions in our Gallery of Modern Art on the theme of Contemporary Art and Human Rights, in 2004, 2006 and 2008, we added another to the sequence, celebrating LGBTQI art. We mismanaged the risks very badly, resulting in really negative experiences for staff and in damage to our capacity to address difficult issues in the future.[4]

What examples of (good) treatment could you cite in this context?

Jonah Siegel : An example of a recent display that I found rich and thought-provoking even as it addressed difficult questions in American history is *Wiyohpiyata: Lakota*

Fig. 03:
Visitors in 2009 to Sh(out): Contemporary Art and Human Rights at Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art admire 'Memorial To A Marriage' by Patricia Cronin. Despite the controversy triggered by the exhibition, this work was acquired by the city and is now on long-term display in Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery.
Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

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04

Images of the Contested West, at the Peabody museum at Harvard as I write, an exhibition that shows a museum leading with new ideas about its holdings and the relationships those holdings can illustrate. Among the effective strategies the curators used are some that I would describe as more phenomenological than conceptual. The exhibition has been given pride of place, occurring as it does near the beginning of the museum, which ensures the primacy of its account of difficult unresolved contact. The display is beautifully designed, indicating a material commitment to the concepts it strives to illuminate, thereby making a politically-charged and morally complex topic immediately interesting to the viewer.

At the heart of the exhibition is a complicated document, a Lakota Sioux ledger book (on loan from the Houghton library, also at Harvard), said to have been found on the battlefield where Custer was defeated at the Battle of Little Big Horn. The book contains illustrations by and of Plains Indian warriors that the exhibit presents along with historic Lakota objects from the museum's collections, and work by Butch Thunder Hawk, a contemporary Lakota artist, who was also a co-curator of the exhibition.

It would be difficult to describe in detail the many intelligent and effective design elements of this exhibition, but what is unmistakably clear is that the display begins with conflict, with unresolved and unresolvable issues that it does not attempt to close off or resolve, but instead leaves open in a productive way. The object at its heart was recovered from a scene of battle and displays warriors, so it does not only acknowledge conflict, but leads with it. The provenance of the object – and even its likely uses – are clearly indicated to be not fully established. The display includes works of art of the Lakota people, so it does not make conflict or conquest the only topic that matters about indigenous

Fig. 04: Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

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Fig. 05-06: *Wiyohpiyata: Lakota Images of the Contested West*. © Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University.

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communities. The inclusion of contemporary art that is directly related to the material on display illustrates in the most concrete way the continuity of Indian life – that the topics raised by the works on display are in no way merely retrospective. The exhibition thereby makes a contrast – to cite just one local example – with the images of indigenous people at the Fogg Museum that were painted – as so many fantasies and documentations of indigenous life were in the nineteenth century – to capture a culture presented as inevitably vanishing by the very people who were working to make it disappear.

Ultimately, what stands out to me about this example at the Peabody is that the most interesting responses to the ethical challenges of ownership and exhibition at a museum – and to historic violence and displacement – may well be the care taken in the organization and display of material. It bears saying that the success of this exhibition to my mind is not unrelated to the clear discussions of NAGPRA (the Native American Graves Repatriation Act) elsewhere in the museum, or the display of archeological work undertaken at Harvard as a site, and – of course – to the capacious collection of objects from different regions and cultures present in the rest of the museum.

Museums of anthropology carry a high burden when it comes to the recognition of practices of political power and of collecting and display that can no longer be passed over, given their complicity in practices of conquest and control, and in the development of racialized analyses used to justify those practices. The Peabody, a nineteenth-century foundation with troubling holdings and controversy in its recent past, is to be commended when it creates a display that tries to do more than merely reflect on its own failings. Needless to say, one display does not atone for decades of injuries or for centuries of conquest, but this one is to be applauded for the effective use of the resources of the museum (material, conceptual, phenomenological) to suggest new kinds of relationships between the past, present, and future.

Nora Sternfeld: With the collective *schnittpunkt. Exhibition theory and practice* and within our publication series "curating" in the publishing series of the University of Applied Arts Vienna we thought a lot about these questions. In our book on "Curating as Anti-Racist Practice", Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamińsky and I ask how curatorial practices refuse to play the game of "getting over it". We discuss anti-racist curating as a practice that is faithful not only to objects, but to existing social struggles that encounter the ghosts of historical violence. And I think that the Kreuzberg Museum in Berlin, that Natalie Bayer is actually directing, is dedicated to these questions in its entire practice. Another example could be the Volkskundemuseum in Vienna that has reworked its collection presentation from an anti-racist perspective and is now in a process of restructuring thinking together with the collective *MUSMIG*. *MUSMIG*, the acronym for Museum of Migration is a museum

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in Vienna that does not (yet) exist. *MUSMIG* is a collective, an attempt at post-migrant self-historicization and a performance of the demand for a museum for migration. *MUSMIG* describes itself as "the blind spot of traditional museums, the thorn in the flesh of nation-state institutions. *MUSMIG* is the gap that comes into the world performatively, the utopia that is only realized in the act of speaking, in debate and in celebration". Since February 2024, *MUSMIG* has had a room in the Vienna Volkskundemuseum (Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art), its "director's room" is a meeting room for *MUSMIG*, which is currently headed by the first elected – six-member – director collective. The manifesto of the *MUSMIG* collective states:

A museum about migration is a museum about wars.

A museum about wars is a museum about exploitation.

A museum about exploitation is a museum about resources.

A museum about resources is a museum about capitalism.

A museum about capitalism is a museum about power.

A museum about power is a museum about fascism.

A museum about fascism is a museum about annihilation.

A museum about annihilation is a museum about pain.

A museum about pain is a museum about racism.

A museum about racism is a museum about borders.

A museum about borders is a museum about movement.

A museum about movement is a museum about people.

A museum about people is a museum about migration.

A museum about migration is a museum about wars. [5]

At this very moment we are preparing a book on the difficulty of working with the history of nazism in an era of *post-nazism*.[6] Luisa Ziaja, chief curator of the Belvedere in Vienna, writes in her text about some of her collection exhibitions. Her text "on historical and institutional critique in curatorial work with a collection" has the title: *Not following, not not showing, breaking, challenging*. And she describes her very careful curatorial practice against the grain and the weight of the canon.

How do the notions of "care" for objects and "care" for visitors fit together? Are there any contradictions between the two approaches?

Jonah Siegel: While safeguarding the objects in their "care" is a prime duty of curators, their responsibility to visitors is no less important. Given the state of general education today, it is challenging to know what positive information or knowledge a culture-worker can rely upon. People may or may not know clearly why they are in the museum, or even why something is of interest. In every public institution, the curator needs to teach and inform in order to safeguard the ongoing value of the institution itself and of the objects it contains.

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Meeting people where they are, informing, and inspiring them are all key elements for the future health of the museum. Finding the balance between confidence (in the good the institution can do), humility (when it comes to historic museal practices inextricably associated with acts of violence) and respect (for the public as moral and intellectual subjects, for objects and their histories) will always be challenging and lead to policies and practices characterized by compromise and contradiction. The question is whether our intellectual communities are willing to see contradiction and compromise as powerful conceptual tools, or whether they will be unable to do more than judge them for being in the end what they were to start with—the main elements shaping culture.

Nora Sternfeld: This is a very good question. I think that a museum is a place of contradictory tasks and negotiations. If we think about "care" in the museum as a "care" for the conflictuality that comes with the relation to history this contradiction is exactly what has to be lived and negotiated in the process of museums. This is why I think that we should imagine new museum practices that I would call "progressive conservation" in which conservators, curators and educators work closely together.

Mark O'Neill: Any formulation of museum practice that posits a contradiction between care for objects and "care" for visitors is an admission of failure; the core task is to reconcile these obligations. When we were planning to move Glasgow's

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Museum of Transport to a new Zaha Hadid-designed museum on the river Clyde, the most consistent request for improving the old museum was to allow access onto the trams and buses, which had been prohibited to preserve the vehicles. The conservation team did an ethical assessment of the issue and recommended partitioning the interiors, screening off half with Perspex, and allowing the other half to be very gradually eroded by visitors.

Many people do not visit museums because they find them uninteresting, but the inequalities in museum visiting by class, race, ethnicity, level of education etc. are not the result merely of individual choice, but of structural, systemic inequality in society. This implies that museums are up against strong forces and it is important not to make excessive claims about the capacity of museums to change these structural barriers. But some museums – of art, science, history or other subjects - have much more representative audiences than others, so there is scope for change. The restriction of "care" for visitors to one group of staff is a way of avoiding working out how the museum as a whole would need to change to reduce the attendance gap and attract more representative

Fig. 07: Patricia Cronin 'Memorial to a Marriage' on display in Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum. Image Credit: Glasgow Life Museums.

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audiences. Just as museums are required by law to make changes to enable access by disabled people on equal terms with the non-disabled, an ethic of "care" would require equivalent adjustments be made to enable educationally disadvantaged people to benefit from museums in all their dimensions.

How can "care" in the museum relate to the notion of expenditure - you can give your own definition of this concept - as the Surrealists, Georges Bataille, etc. might have thought of it between the wars, or to classical economics, etc.? So how do we think about the obsolete, or even the waste, in this utopia of "care"?

Jonah Siegel: The question of expenditure and waste is always going to be of most interest when understood to be a matter not of value (what is this worth?), but values (why does this matter?).

Contemporary culture is obsessed with efficiency, and shows an ever-renewed (and extraordinarily naïve) faith in novelty and in the genius of inexpert solutions. The museum stands athwart these tendencies and demands attention to what has been left behind *schnittpunkt* and – respect for expertise. These elements that make the institution feel atavistic are key to its moral function today – to stand against the pressures of aggressive ignorance and the valorization of financial profit and loss as the measure of all things.

What are we caring for and about when we care for and about museums? What is a museum when it cannot take either desire nor complacency for granted? The answers to these questions will make the next decades among the most exciting in the history of the institution, or contribute to the ongoing emptying out of its purpose.

The dictionary tells us that in English at least, "expenditure," not infrequently brings along with it the idea of waste (in *Oxford English Dictionary:* "The expending or laying out (of energy, labour, time): often with notion of waste"). It strikes me that this question makes most sense in a world in which any expenditure that is not aimed at satisfying some basic need or pleasure will be a waste. In that world, the museum will always be a waste: it makes demands on our memories, it offers pleasure depending on effort, and sometimes unpleasure as well, following reflection. It does not make us richer or (*pace* Pierre Bourdieu and his followers) place us in a superior position in our society from which we can benefit practically.

A fundamental question is whose desire is being recognized, generated, and satisfied in the museum, and how to make the experience of the viewer one in which passions are activated but not cloyed. If we think of the matter this way, literature may be as good or better a guide than the theorists of museum design or economists. William Shakespeare lays out in one long complex sentence in his Sonnet 129, one account of the nature of desire (he calls it "lust") in relation to expense. The sentence

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is stylistically complicated because the poet is trying to capture a deeply dynamic relationship in which cause and effect, emotion and experience, are deeply and complexly intertwined, but the point is relatively straightforward as a description of experience. "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," he tells us in a grim vision of the psychological effects of desires satisfied, "Is lust in action.".[7] He also reminds the reader however, that before the expense and waste that is the moment of desire satisfied comes the truly powerful experience of lust: "and till action, lust / Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame, / Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust." Satisfaction is not the end of the cycle, however: once satisfied, desire tends to turn on its object: "Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight, / Past reason hunted; and, no sooner had / Past reason hated as a swallowed bait" Is it possible to escape the cycle of violence to the object of desire –or to route desire differently so that it escapes the moralized structures that make its workings a waste of shame? The museum will provoke such questions when we allow it to – and perhaps some of the ongoing antipathy to the institution may be traced to a complex including both the regrets of satiation and – the prude's fears disguised as economic prudence.

Influential economic models aside, the question of excess has also been shaped by the ongoing influence of some residual avant-garde sensibilities. Modernists tended to take the museum for granted, to push against the pressure of the past, as the Futurists did most flamboyantly, imagining an institution characterized by the charisma of antiquity on the one hand, and by the excess of material it gathered together on the other, a place in which the prestige of history justified the assembling of a profusion of objects that crowded out the emergence of important and deeply necessary responses to the dynamic new world technology was bringing into being. There is something perverse in the fact that the museum sometimes is still met with an attitude that made far more sense in 1909, when the technology being celebrated was the car and airplane. It should be difficult to argue not only that the cachet of history or of art is where it was in that earlier era, but even that the museum will provide the most copious kind of experience of culture available to us today. After all, almost everyone carries in their pocket access to more objects and experiences than all the museums that have ever been could relay to them in many lifetimes—though the result of all that access amounts to one experience over and over again. The crowding to be feared, it turns out, is not that of the museum—and technological innovation today has evidently not led to the new engagement with life celebrated by F. T. Marinetti and those who followed his lead.

Nora Sternfeld: What is waste and obsolete now, might mean something completely different later. This is why I think that all that seems obsolete is part of a certain uncontrollable and ungovernable relation to history – that is exactly the reason why it might be able to carry the "unarchivable".

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Mark O'Neill: In terms of Bataille's grand guignol philosophy of energy, the images that come to mind are from the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics, which featured three of the city's great museums: the mocking headless Marie Antoinette figures dancing at the Conciergerie; the paintings and images of the Louvre coming to life to the sound of Saint-Saëns' Danse macabre, implicitly acknowledging their death and denial of jouissance in the museum; and the Musée D'Orsay, a converted railway station, built on the site of Palais d'Orsay which was burned by the Communards during the Paris Commune of 1870. Expenditure on what Veblen might have called this conspicuous heritage was not matched by adequate investment in the most basic need of civilization- effective sewage systems, so that the swimming events in the Seine had to be postponed numerous times because of excessive amounts of human waste. This cultural contradiction is also evident in the UK, where in 2023, 265 conservative MPs voted against an amendment to stop private water companies from dumping raw sewage into the England's rivers and coastlines, reflecting how much neoliberal values had changed the meaning of "conservative" to such a degree that it no longer includes conserving the countryside, in a nation where the natural heritage of "this green and pleasant land" is a key part of its traditional identity.

In terms of classical economics, I think of museums as social institutions like the family, friendship or religion, which are outside the market and essential for its functioning – but constantly transformed by market forces. In the current era of market fundamentalism, where economics functions in a closed-off world of transactions which generate profit and loss, any impact on society or nature outside this cycle is called an "externality". Increased pollution and mass redundancies, for example, are "negative externalities". The core of society is the economy; all other aspects of life are "external", and by implication, secondary.

In this interpretation, the ethic of "care" can be seen as a resistance to this vision of society as a mere external effect of the market, rather than the market being a servant of society. This neoliberal ideology claims the authority of Adam Smith, but it is a travesty of his thought, and not only because it discounts his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and its celebration of empathy as the basis of civilization. Even in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776), he argues that the endless repetition of simple tasks resulting from the division of labor leads to a "torpor" of mind which renders the worker "not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life".[8] The need to remedy this, Smith argues, even justifies state expenditure on public education. Museums in this view are instruments of human development, but as mere "positive externalities", the "invisible hand" of the market constantly demands that they justify themselves in terms of

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economic utility. It is a key paradox of museum culture that they carry out this humanizing function, and also, as instruments of modernity, take part in the destruction of traditional ways of life which modernity entails, transforming modes of landownership and human relationships with objects and nature as more and more aspects of life are commodified and absorbed into the market economy. Museums function as an extractive industry, collecting the flotsam and jetsam from the wreckage of cultures in the wake of modernization, in processes often conceived of as rescuing these remnants for the benefit of humanity, and romanticizing cultures which they have helped destroy. Jonah's quotation of a Shakespeare sonnet, reminds me of another, no 64, which may help to account, in part, for the muting of desire which is often apparent in museums. The obsessive gathering of artefacts may less an acquisitive response to the proliferation of artefacts, and more a manic flight from the fear that this hoarding will not, after all, keep an awareness of mortality at bay:

Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,

That time will come and take my love away.

This thought is as a death, which cannot choose

But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

How can we think about distance from objects, or even their detestation/condemnation, within this framework of "care"?

Jonah Siegel: Evidently the ethical museum has to be ready to separate itself from the works of art it values if those works have been acquired unethically. And yet, there may be more to the responsibility of the museum than abdicating "care" to an owner. Might "care" for an object mean letting it go? Certainly. Might "care" argue for retention? In some cases. There is no necessary relationship between "care" and property, as Solomon demonstrated when it came to identifying the parent of the baby.

It seems to me that the question of the condemnation of objects, which has been a controversial topic in museums for decades now, has taken on new urgency in very recent years, that the premises on which opprobrium and suppression have been based may need to be revisited. To condemn specific objects for the memories they carry of past ethical failures to the point of no longer displaying them is to make a decision that ignorance is better than knowledge. This extreme proposition may evidently be reasonable in specific cases (in the display, for example, of works designed to sustain a dangerous lie about history and to suppress a people, as is the case with confederate monuments in the American South) and has perhaps been worth entertaining more broadly for the fundamental challenge it presents to any complacent sense that knowledge will match up in an easy way with virtue. But it is probably time to move on from the idea that removal of objects tainted with evil amounts to an authentic act of care. Such decisions imply ethical claims about curators (we

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are ethical because we protect you from the possibility of harm), about objects (they may cause harm), about museum visitors (they are liable to be harmed) and about one version of "care" (to care is to anticipate injury and to prevent it from happening). All of these claims tend to suggest that either the broader world has moved on from harm, so that the museum is the location for vestigial possibilities of ongoing harm (like unexploded ordnance after a conflict) or that it has at least recognized harm reduction as a good that should be carried out in the museum as well as elsewhere. Alternatively, they amount to a proposal that in an incurably cruel world the museum should work towards a compensatory safety not available outside the institution. In recent years, when we have seen the bold and open embrace of irrational forms of cruelty in situations and locations where we had thought such things had been superseded pretending that anyone is better off by being ignorant about any part of the past risks embracing blindness not only about what is behind us, but what looms in our near future, not to say what is here right now.

Nora Sternfeld: In our next book "not only exhibiting"[9] we try to face the fact that the museum is a place that has so many traces of violence in its storages… "Care" – as I tried to explain – is care exactly to these contradictions.

Mark O'Neill: One of the most pervasive fantasies of museum workers, especially those in art museums is that, despite their elaborate training in the skills involved, reading objects is something that people can do without training or mediation. This may reflect one of the major blind spots in how museums understand their audiences. With the rise of identity politics and a reduced prominence of class politics, a great deal of effort in museums goes into addressing ethnic, cultural and sexual identities, often framed by equalities legislation. It is not our job, say "traditional" art museums, to reduce the distance between objects and people by attracting less unequal, more representative audiences, to compensate for inadequate state education or to undertake social work to boost the self-esteem, identity and self-efficacy of social groups based on their socioeconomic position. This is dishonest: these museums work very hard to address the inadequate education and self-efficacy of potential donors, and to offer privileges to Friends and Members. This is precisely social work for the well off and the well-educated.

In our increasingly individualistic, globalized, geographically mobile society, fragmented by rapidly changing forms of identity- what Zygmunt Bauman has labelled "liquid modernity"[10] – museums can provide relief from the anomie of an atomized existence, anchoring people in time and place, reinforced by the potentially inclusive civic ritual of museum visiting. The cultural richness of museum collections has the potential to de-escalate polarizing and fragmenting forces by creating spaces where all are welcome and which offer multiple perspectives. But, as noted above, this will not happen as a side effect of progressive displays: museums need to learn how to make it happen.

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In terms of the issues Jonah raises about the tensions which arise from the museum's need "to separate itself from the works of art it values if those works have been acquired unethically", the most prominent event in my experience was when Glasgow City Council agreed, in 1998, to return a Lakota Ghost Dance Shirt to the Wounded Knee Survivors Association. There was no legal obligation to make the return, and there was considerable pressure not to create a precedent – this was the first repatriation from the UK to Native Americans. The Council, however, recognized that possession is not an absolute value, and, given that there was no legal way the Shirt could have been acquired, repatriation was the only ethical thing to do.[11].

Is an anti-museum of opprobrium conceivable?

Jonah Siegel: Certainly – but I do not believe it is worth the effort. On the whole, it is probably better to build institutions for admiration than otherwise.

The public is less interested in being scolded than it is sometimes thought. If culture will only tell them that our old institutions are sites for negative judgments and for storing the evidences of past evils, they are likely to seek out more positive cultural messages where they can, which will often lead them to too-simple or dangerous versions of nationalistic chauvinism. Life is short; most activities do not quite match up to their ideal aspirations. It is not clear that the current preoccupation with historic moral failings has eventuated in more than in encouraging the most pernicious forms of reactionary thought.

Nora Sternfeld: I think that not to reflect the violent histories of the museum is and would be a shame.

Mark O'Neill: Apart from memorial institutions such as Holocaust museums, the Gulag Museum in Moscow, the House of Terror in Budapest, or the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, museums of opprobrium are very rare. Jonah is right, the public don't like being scolded, and this was evident from the early days of public museums. In 1852, reasoning that to learn about good design, visitors needed to see bad design, a precursor exhibition to the Victoria & Albert Museum in Marlborough House showed 87 objects in what the Times called a "chamber of horrors". It illustrated "decorations on false principles of design, such as vulgar and inharmonious coloring, want of meaning and unity and pattern, graceless imitations of natural forms etc". Visitors did not appreciate seeing objects they owned judged as being in bad taste and the backlash was such that the display was soon removed. I am unaware of any museum that has attempted to enhance their educational impact by showing art and design that has been explicitly labelled as bad (excluding Nazi anti-modern exhibitions).

Memorial museums clearly signal to visitors before they enter what their focus is – and many millions are interested in these topics, will-

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ingly to expose themselves to the pain involved in exploring them. Other museums, however, especially art and "universal" museums find themselves unable to move beyond positive, utopian visions of the past, denying Walter Benjamin's insight that every document of civilization is also a document of barbarism. The questions memorial museums ask about who we humans are and why we are capable of such violence would be much more challenging if they were embedded in the British Museum, the Louvre or Munich. The denial of complexity to create utopian spaces clearly has a psychological cost – in the psychic energy required to repress awareness of the barbaric – which includes a muting of intensity of the museum experience, and the well-known phenomenon of museum fatigue.

In psychoanalytical terms this splitting is a form of dissociation. Laurajane Smith has shown that attempts to address this dissociation by, for example, interpreting the role slavery played in Southern plantations in America or the wealth that great country houses owned by the National Trust in the UK, struggled to engage the largest museum visiting demographic – middle-class, well-educated white people whose identity is tied up with what she calls the Authorized Heritage Discourse.[12] If museums are to contribute to reducing toxic polarization, we need to find ways of supporting visitor – and staff – confidence in reflecting on more complex narratives. Many museums, like the National Portrait Gallery in London, are attempting to do this, but, as I said, we need a lot of rigorous experimentation to understand how this might become more effective.

Is it possible to conceive of a museum of exiled objects?

Jonah Siegel: Of course. In fact, it is harder, I think, to do the opposite: to imagine a museum of objects that are at home. New ethical dimensions open up when we recognize the inescapable condition of exile, and the privileged position of the museum as locus of exile.

Nora Sternfeld: Isn't every museum a museum of exiled objects? And shouldn't we reimagine ownership under the conditions of exile? Very interesting projects think at the moment about practices of shared ownership.

Mark O'Neill: With the exception of artworks specifically commissioned to be part of a museum (such as the Rivera mural in Detroit Institute of Art), all museums are made up of objects which are exiled, in place, time, context or meaning. This is inherent in the nature of museums and has been an issue since their earliest days. Quatremère de Quincy complained about religious objects being ripped from their contexts in the days after the French Revolution. Theodor Adorno made a similar point more than 150 years later in his essay on the Valéry Proust Museum, when he noted the homology between the words museum and mausoleum.

The idea of exile implies a forced

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rather than a willing migration, with a sense of loss – no matter how reconciled one is to one's new home, the ache of longing for the place of origin endures. Thinking of objects in this anthropomorphic way is alien to the positivist tradition, but it may be a useful approach, in terms of creative interpretation, helping to focus both on what they meant to the people of their originating contexts and what they mean to contemporary visitors. If this exiled object could speak, what would it want to say to people today? Labels written in the voice of the object would be partially fictional, but if well researched they could support more accurate, less presentist labels, and go beyond mere identification.

What is the relationship to reparation - of objects, of societies, of history - in the politics of museum "care"?

Jonah Siegel: As noted above, "care" and property rights have no necessary relationship. Indeed, some of the most important moral guidelines we live with have to do with the limits of property. Society steps in when individuals treat their animals in abusive ways, or use their factories to pollute the environment more than the approved amount. I cannot do what I want to my own home because there are building rules constraining my actions. When we do not enforce such rules in relation to architecture, propertied vandals destroy our urban fabric. In short, ascertaining ownership is only a very limited basis on which to build an ethics. In the cultural realm it tends to lead to a very narrow, and sometimes pernicious brand of politics, involving as it does quite short-sighted views of nationalism and property.

True reparations would be a project of such extraordinary complexity given the practical, political, and moral issues it raises, that one suspects that the tendency to focus on the entirely limited version of the practice that might be achieved by museums shipping objects from one place to another is just a way to avoid doing the actual work.

While it is clear that for the foreseeable future and with good reason the question of reparations will be an urgent topic for the museum, there are real limits that need to be recognized: 1. Caring for an object and establishing the rights of owners are different things because law and ethics are not the same thing. 2. True injuries are not liable to repair, which means there is a limit to what institutions of culture can do in this direction. 3. There are real risks to the museum and to the ethical moment if a ritual of sacrifice is seen as the main work of the institution, thus freeing the rest of society from its moral burden while placing an unsatisfiable demand on structures that will inevitably fail in response. To ask curators to serve as priests tasked with the symbolic work of expiation is to confuse ritual with ethical action and care with atonement.

Nora Sternfeld: Contrary to many understandings of "healing" and "care" in connection with museums and decolonization I would like to propose a different approach: What

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if we were to approach the decolonization of museums from a perspective of the inconsolable? What would the debates and concepts for the decolonization of museums look like? What would they tell? How would they deal with their epistemic violence and their stolen artefacts? And how can a museum of the inconsolable be conceived against this background, in which restitution is not thought of as reparation while instead serious work is constantly being done not only on restitution, but also on the consequences that the history of colonialism demands?

The German author Max Czollek speaks about a "reconciliation theatre".[13] By this he means the cultural and social staging of a certain element of German "memory culture": The imperative "that everything should be good again," without any actual and real consequences. What Max Czollek outlines in his book as a counter-image, is "inconsolability." He refers to Vladimir Jankélévitch, a French philosopher who thought a lot about the irrevocable, about what can't be taken back, away, or be deleted. The inconsolable is the bitter realization that nothing is and can actually be "good again" anyway. Sarah Ahmed, said: "Don't get over it, if you are not over it".[14] And in this sense the inconsolable is not an end. On the contrary, it is consolation that is actually the expectation of an end. The inconsolable is a beginning. The inconsolable is the bitter realization that nothing is and can actually be "good again" anyway.

But what can happen in the museum, and what Max Czollek outlines in his book as a counter-image, is "inconsolability". I would argue that this is exactly what the museum can actually do: If we insist and persist in an emancipatory museum perspective, that doesn't want to tell history as the story of victors, then we will encounter a history full of violence, of pain, of wars and defeats – full of lacks and cracks and breaks and histories that were silenced.

Mark O'Neill: The traditional account of museum history tells of a transition from cabinets of curiosities or wonders to rationally systematized, scholarly collections, which emerged as part of the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries and in response to Europeans' "discovery" of new worlds full of alien cultures, and innumerable hitherto unknown plants and animals. These discoveries evoked a predatory response, embodied in the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, which held that lands whose peoples did not mix their labor with the land were "empty" and could therefore be legitimately appropriated by those who practiced Western agriculture. The doctrine of racial inferiority authorized a similar predation of the inhabitants. Underneath the veneer of Enlightenment rationality museums gave to these processes we may see, not so much, or not only, a new process of knowledge production, but a manic response to the unanticipated cultural diversity of humanity and the fecundity of tropical flora and fauna - an effort to impose control in the face of excess, and the anxiety it generated. Museums have proliferated more or less in line with the scale of globalized anxiety.

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Many museums began with ideals of reparation - the Louvre healing the French nation after the violence of the Terror and the Revolutionary Wars, royal collections opened up voluntarily by royal families to enlist the newly wealthy bourgeoisie into the public sphere, civic museums designed to inspire and heal the new industrial cities with their anomie and social fragmentation. Perhaps the most obvious healing museums were open air museums of rural life, beginning with the prototype in Sweden – Skansen. Significantly sited, not in the countryside but in the heart of Stockholm, it was designed to recover some of the traditional ways of life that had been destroyed by modernization, not only mitigating the pain of these losses, but romanticizing the rural past as the authentic soul of the nation. A similar task was performed in Bucharest much more recently when the Museum of the Romanian Peasant was redisplayed to recover a sense of life before the depredations of the Ceausescu regime.

While the revolutionary impetus behind the opening of the Palais du Louvre as a public institution, were Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, as Andrew McClellan has shown, bourgeois hierarchy was rigidly enforced and the significant numbers of the "lowest classes" who visited in the early days soon came to understand that they were not welcome;[15] the social role of the museum, as identified later by Bourdieu, of reproducing elite cultural capital, became firmly embedded. Malraux's pre-internet vision of the democratization of access to art, so that everyone could form their own "collection of works with the power to help us live" has not materialized, even in the age of the internet, which mirrors and often amplifies real world inequalities.

The museum of healing became less convincing after World War I. For anti-modern modernists like Ezra Pound, the mass slaughter "and of the best among them" was a "wastage as never before" for a "botched civilization…for two gross of broken statues". Towards the end of *The Wasteland* (1922), TS Eliot, another conservative (and antisemitic) modernist lamented the costs of progress, writing of "These fragments I have shored against my ruins". Against this background the self-perception of many museums, especially those which see themselves as "universal", is simplistic and likely to fail to deliver any kind of repair. While museum collections do, in many ways, represent the greatest achievements of human creativity, the results of the human desire to understand nature and the aim of documenting human histories and cultures, they are also an inventory of what has been lost; even the most positive change involves loss. For museums to embrace an ethic of "care" they need to find ways to acknowledge and encourage reflection on this reality, and to enable much more representative audiences to benefit from the reparative power that this implies.

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Endnotes

1 Held 2006, p. 4.

2 Merriman 2020.

3 Baxandall 1991.

4 Hollows 2013.

5 English Translation of the manifesto in *schnittpunkt*, Baur 2020, p. 93.

6 The term *post-nazism* is used with the prefix "post-" in reference to postcolonial theories and denotes the examination of continuities after the break – the defeat of the nazis and the liberation by the allies. It seems particularly relevant in the context of the resurgence of right-wing parties in the successor states of nazi Germany. The book asks about curatorial ways to deal with continuities of nazism in the 21st century. It is dedicated to curatorial formats and strategies that address and deal with the mechanisms of repression and denial of nazi history. The contributions analyze the normalization of fascist aesthetics and discourses. They position themselves within new debates about the politics of memory, seek possibilities for confronting histories of violence, and reflect on contexts and projects in museums, universities and public spaces.

7 Shakespeare 1997, Sonnet 129.

8 Smith [1776] 2008, p. 560.

9 Griesser-Stermscheg, Sommer, Sternfeld, Ziaja 2004.

10 Bauman 2000.

11 O'Neill 2006.

12 Smith 2006.

13 Czollek 2003.

14 *Diversity Work as Emotional Work*: Lecture at the University of Vienna within the framework of Gender Talks on 22 November 2013.

15 McClellan 2008.

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Défense et illustration du Musée d'Ethnographie. Repairing Ethnography and exploring the notion of "French" American Collections through museum genealogies

Susana Stüssi Garcia

Keywords:
Ethnographical museums, Pre-Columbian art, French national collections, Américanisme, E.T. Hamy.

ABSTRACT:

This article brings together four episodes of French 19th century museal history through which to explore the tensions inherent to incorporating the (material) culture of others – in this case Pre-Columbian America – into national collections, and the process through which they become part of a national patrimoine. As a guiding thread, we use not a particular collection but the idea of "American French collections" and their association to a specific type of national institution that used them abundantly in its historical genealogy: the idea of a "French national museum of ethnography." We offer a historical panorama where Amerindian and Pre-Columbian French collections found themselves at the heart of several debates regarding the definition and function of the museum and during which the need to "repair" – either an object, a national institution or a concept – was invoked.

L'articolo riunisce quattro episodi della storia museale francese del XIX secolo, attraverso i quali è possibile esplorare le tensioni insite nell'incorporazione della cultura (materiale) di altri – in questo caso dell'America precolombiana – nelle collezioni nazionali, e il processo attraverso cui essa diventa parte del patrimonio nazionale. Come filo conduttore, non utilizziamo una collezione specifica, ma il concetto di "collezioni americane francesi" e la loro associazione a un particolare tipo di istituzione nazionale che le ha ampiamente utilizzate nella sua genealogia storica: l'idea di un "museo nazionale francese di etnografia". Offriamo un panorama storico in cui le collezioni francesi amerindiane e precolombiane si sono trovate al centro di numerosi dibattiti sulla definizione e la funzione del museo, durante i quali è stata invocata la necessità di "riparare" – riferita a un oggetto, un'istituzione nazionale o un concetto.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 02: Ancient Peruvian figurines at the Cabinet des Médailles, ca. 1830-1840, by Jean-Baptiste Muret. In Recueil. Monuments antiques (1830-1866), vol. 1 folio 131. BnF département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, RES-MS-70100-MUR-GF- (1).

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In 1930 the newspaper *L'Intransigeant* called, in a scathing article, for a "sweeper" to come save the collections of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro from being buried under "filth and dust".[1] Paul Rivet (1876-1958) and Georges Henri-Rivière (1987-1985), then at the head of the museum, answered by recalling the recent inauguration of the "Galerie Américaine" which presented the Trocadéro's considerable Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections in a new and modern space, experimenting with novel museographical techniques set against a simple and minimalist aesthetic. They noted that "[the project] gardened great sympathy and interest in France, both amongst the members of Parliament and the public".[2]

If the situation of the Musée d'Ethnographie was particularly dire,[3] the need to *repair* and *rethink* the museum reflected a larger crisis of the nature and function of the "modern museum", which included topics such as the modernisation of infrastructure, the difference between "scientific" and "fine arts" museums, the pedagogical value of the institution, the professionalisation of its staff, and the role reserved to visitors and the public. The 20th century already appeared, to the protagonists of this debate, "the 'century of museums' (...) weather one finds in this epithet cause for celebration or regret".[4]

The favourable response from the public gave Rivet and Rivière hope in their project of "repairing" their museum beyond this first gallery: to "repair" the physical damage the collections had suffered over the last few decades of neglect in the old, dusty and non-insulated exhibits and storage. But also hope that by "repairing" the museum they would also repair French Ethnography and reflect the new directions the discipline had undertaken since the turn of the century.[5] Chiefly amongst these, the need to develop fieldwork and collecting and, in turn, enrich the museum and contribute to France's "admirable colonial efforts".[6]

That Rivet and Rivière chose to start their project by "repairing" the Galerie Américaine is not a fortuitous choice. Since the beginning of the century, interest in non-European arts and artefacts had been steadily increasing amongst intellectuals and artists, as well as amongst collectors, gallerists, and art dealers. This was also the case for Amerindian and Pre-Columbian objects, especially after the success of the exhibit *Les Arts Anciens de l'Amérique* organised in 1928 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs by Rivière and other collaborators, and which featured pieces from private collectors and museums, including the Musée du Trocadéro.[7] The American collections (*fonds américains*) of the museum had been the largest since its inauguration in 1882. The old Galerie Américaine thus became a viable testing-case for Rivet and Rivière's project to "repair" the museum.

This was not the first instance in which calls were made to "save" the ethnographic and archaeological collections from the Americas that were kept in different French national institutions. I want to explore four instances throughout the 19th century where French Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections found themselves at the heart of different attempts to (re)define the

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museum and during which the need to "repair" – either an object, a national institution or a concept – was invoked. Far from being an exhaustive historical survey, and more in the spirit of an essay, I will try to bring together different episodes through which to explore the tensions inherent to incorporating the (material) culture of others – in this case mostly Pre-Columbian America – into French collections, and the process through which they become part of the national *patrimoine*. As a guiding thread, I will use not a particular collection but the idea of "American French collections" and their association to a specific type of national institution that used them abundantly in its historical genealogy: the idea of a "French national museum of ethnography."

1. *Après la Révolution*: "Repairing" Royal Collections

"Exotic" or "curious" objects from the Americas have been collected in Europe since the first contacts with the New World. Prior to the Latin-American Independencies of the early 19th century, objects sent to France came mainly from Brazil, the Caribbean, the Guyana and the territories in North America and Canada where France had been engaged, with varying degrees of success, in colonial enterprises during the 17th and 18th centuries.

French royal collections of antiquities and curiosities were dispersed amongst a variety of spaces, such as the "Bibliothèque Royale" (rue Vivienne) and the "Cabinet du Roi" at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. "A treasure of nature and a triumph of good taste", according to the Abbé Expilly (1719-1793), who in 1768 visited the Cabinet: "[It is] a superb gallery; hanging from the ceiling are all kinds of arms, utensils and clothing from the savages (…) the cupboards, in total twenty-two, are crowned (…) with clothing and feather-works from the Indians".[8] Even if detailed inventories from this period are scarce,[9] some information survives of what became of the objects from the New World after the French Revolution. Considerable archival work was already undertaken in the 1880s and 1890s by Ernest-Théodore Hamy (1842-1908), the first director of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. An Americanist[10] and ethnographer by training, Hamy dedicated his later years to documenting the collections his museum had inherited from other institutions and writing a history of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro.[11]

More than an institutional history, Hamy was writing the genealogy of French ethnography – deeply interwoven with the history of Modern France – and of which the last and crowning chapter was the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro at the end of the 19th century. We will come back to Hamy later. For now, let us point out that a considerable amount of his research into the earliest non-European collections in France – which he playfully calls *raretés, singularités, curiosités* in a nod to "pre-scientific" usages[12] – relate to Amerindian and Pre-Columbian objects.

Hamy attributes the first true attempt (*essai*) at creating an ethnographical national museum to Barhtélemy de Courçay (1744-1799) and Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison (1759-1818) and their "Museum des

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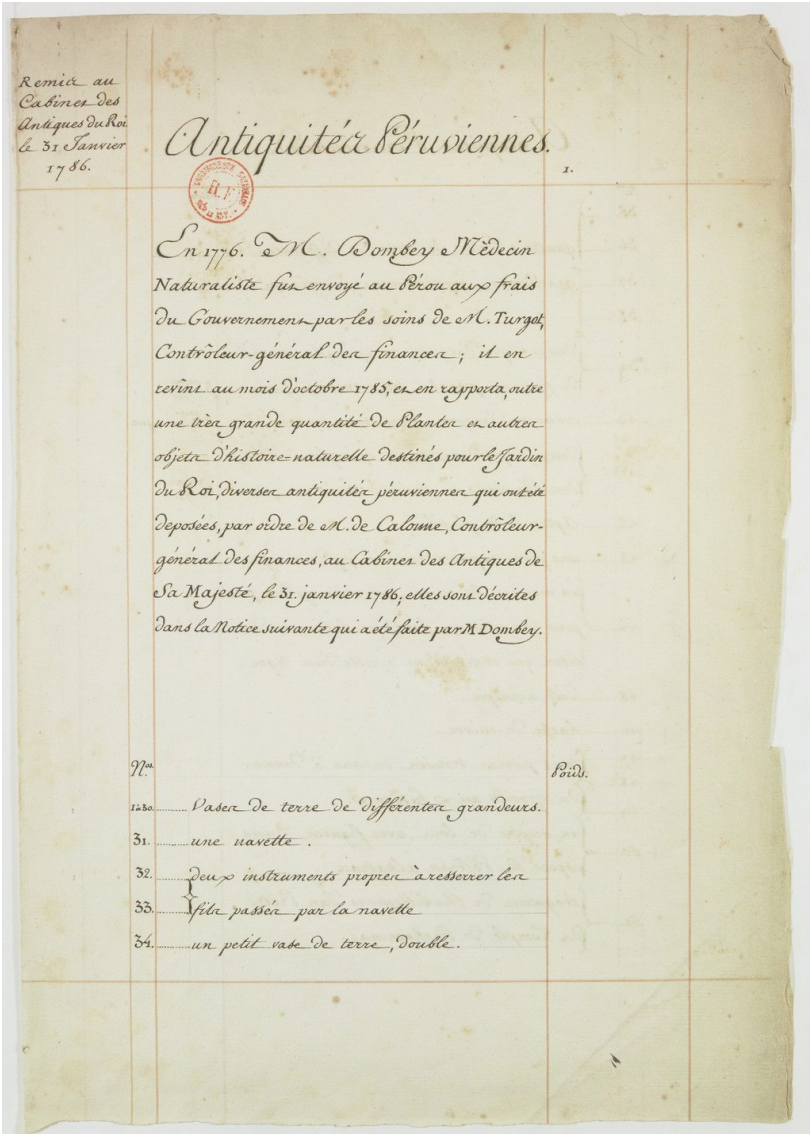
Antiques", located in the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques of the Bibliothèque Nationale (rue Vivienne).[13] Albeit short-lived, this new *museum* was born from the state of disrepair in which numerous collections confiscated during the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars in Europe had been left in. Contemporary sources paint an image of accumulation and clutter: "[on the upper floor] there is a vast attic filled with small idols, vases, busts, lamps and many other interesting fragments of antiquities [...] another larger and more voluminous group is simply left on the floor, in a small, humid room on the ground-floor", writes Villar de la Mayenne, reporting in 1794.[14]

This situation was unbearable in a context where museums had become an integral part of the revolutionary project seeking the regeneration and edification of the new *citoyen* through education and instruction. Thus, Villar de la Mayenne despairs: "this collection is lost for the benefit of instruction and curiosity. How can the public be made to go into such an indecent place, where no object is safe from the perils of clumsiness and infidelity?" He calls for something to be done in the interest of science and in the name of the Republic: "for a long time and especially since the Revolution, for the sake of science and of the arts, this *dépôt* needs to find an appropriate destination (...) a *Muséum des Antiquités* (...) [bringing together] the considerable collections that now belong to the *Republic*". He calls for a project to: "gather here all the monuments of antiquity declared national property".[15]

It is in this context of effusive national reorganisation of collections that the Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections from the *Ancien Régime* and the *saisies révolutionnaires* came to be part of the Museum des Antiques. Barthélemy de Courçay and Aubin-Louis Millin intended to "revitalize the study of antiquity" by bringing together Greece and Rome and all other "monuments (...) useful to understanding the customs and traditions of various peoples (...) separated by time and space."[16] Taking a comparative perspective, they sought to present "classical" and non-European antiquities together with "exotic" objects in a cabinet of encyclopaedic ambitions. While it is impossible to re-


Remis au Cabinet des Antiques du Roi le 31 Janvier 1786.

Antiquités Péruviennes. 1.

En 1776. M. Dombey Médecin Naturaliste fut envoyé au Pérou aux frais du Gouvernement par les soins de M. Turgot, Contrôleur-général des finances ; il en revint au mois d'octobre 1785, et en rapporta, entre une très grande quantité de Plantes et autres objets d'histoire-naturelle destinés pour le Jardin du Roi, diverses antiquités péruviennes qui ont été déposées, par ordre de M. de Calonne, Contrôleur-général des finances, au Cabinet des Antiques de Sa Majesté, le 31. janvier 1786, elles sont décrites dans la Notice suivante qui a été faite par M. Dombey.

N.os		Poids.
1 à 30.	Vases de terre de différentes grandeurs.	
31.	une navette.	
32.	Deux instruments propres à resserrer les fils passés par la navette	
33.		
34.	un petit vase de terre, double.	

Fig. 01:
Joseph Dombey's catalogue of Peruvian collections, deposited at the Cabinet des Antiques du Roi in 1786. BnF département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, 2011/091/ACM04-04.03.

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constitute the exact contents of the Museum des Antiques, André-Louis Cointreau notes that the "Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, Roman and Peruvian" antiquities numbered more than six thousand.[17]

One of the most "remarkable" collections[18] came from the "Cabinet du Roi" and was formed by the archaeological artefacts brought to France by Joseph Dombey (1742-1794) in the late 1780s. A doctor and naturalist, Dombey had accompanied the Spanish expedition led by Hipólito Ruiz López (1754–1840) and Jóse Antonio Pavón (1754–1814) that travelled through Perou, Chili and Brazil between 1778 and 1785.[19] The abbé Barthélémy himself had written *instructions* for Dombey, summarising the current knowledge on pre-hispanic Peruvian monuments and history and suggesting the kinds of studies Dombey could carry out in his terrain – drawings of monuments, information on indigenous vocabulary, for instance.[20] Upon returning to France, Dombey deposited the collection at the "Jardin du Roi." It included ceramic and metal vases, gold and silver jewellery, intricately decorated woodwork, a pre-Hispanic mummified body with its garments, statuettes and more modest assorted utensils such as loom-weights (fig. 1).[21]

Dombey's collection was of special value because of the age and the quality of its contents. It was one of the first collections of "true" Pre-Columbian antiquities from the Spanish territories to arrive in France, which until then possessed mostly "ethnographical" objects from North America, Canada and Guyana, even if some of these dated back to the 17th century. Hamy furthermore valued Dombey's collection amongst others at the Museum des Antiques because they had been "excavated by [Dombey] with method".[22] For Hamy, Dombey's collections, arriving on the eve of the Revolution, were the linchpin between pre-modern and modern ethnography, and between *Ancien Régime* and *National* museal collections.[23]

Apart from Dombey's collection, the Museum des Antiques contained other objects from the Americas, both archaeological and ethnographical. Most were assembled between 1795 and 1799, coming from *saisies* in France and in Europe. Amongst the collections of the Cabinet of the Stadtholder of Holland were treasures from the "American savages" as well as pre-Hispanic Mexican ceramics.[24] From the aristocratic collections sent to the Hôtel de Nesle were "ancient Peruvian vases" (some anthropomorphic and zoomorphic) from the collections of the Comte d'Angiviller (1730–1809), as well as textiles, jewellery, weapons and adornments.[25] Barthélemy de Courçay and Millin also requested objects from the newly nationalised Museum d'Histoire Naturelle – mostly from Canada, North America and the Guyana - and some which had been sent to the Musée Central des Arts (the Louvre).[26] If we add the gifts and donations they received,[27] there were at least between one and two hundred objects from the Americas in the Museum des Antiques at the turn of the century.

Thus, for the first time, artefacts from the Americas – both Amerindian and Pre-Columbian – found themselves part of a new national museological project through which

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02

the newly formed Republic was reclaiming collections, until then neglected and sequestered in aristocratic and royal hands, to ensure their preservation and make them useful to the comparative study of Antiquity. This new museum was intended to serve as a counterpart to the Musée Central des Arts, which was still mostly a collection of artistic works.[28] At the same time, the Museum des Antiques also became the first chapter of Hamy's genealogy of French ethnography. By bringing together archaeological and ethnographical collections to offer a comparative and historical overview of the products of the arts and industry of humanity, Barthélemy de Courçay's project was the "begging of the museum of ethnography" (as a new category – "le musée d'ethnographie naissant"), "later imitated by almost everyone in France and (…) by most of the great ethnographical museums [which still] follow the [geographical principle] established in 1799 at the small Cabinet in rue de la Loi".[29]

However, and despite its ambitions, the Museum des Antiques was short-lived and did not survive long after the death of Barthélemy de Courçay in 1799.[30] As for the American collections, at least some remained at the Cabinet des Médailles throughout the following decades, as attested by drawings from the 1830s and 1840s by the artist Jean-Baptiste Muret (1795–1866) (fig. 2).[31] Part of the collections were later transferred to the newly created Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in the 1880s.

2. "Repairing" French Americanism. The Musée Américain du Louvre and the hope of a "Deuxième Egypte"

A brief lull follows this first efflorescence of museal activity as far as objects from the Americas, both old and new, are concerned. The Latin-American independences of the beginning of the 19th century precipitated a first qualitative and quantitative change in the types

Fig. 02: Ancient Peruvian figurines at the Cabinet des Médailles, ca. 1830-1840, by Jean-Baptiste Muret. In *Recueil. Monuments antiques (1830-1866)*, vol. 1 folio 131. BnF département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, RES-MS-70100-MUR-GF- (1).

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of Pre-Columbian and Amerindian artefacts available to collectors in France. With the opening of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies to travellers, scholars, businessmen and diplomats, new collections began arriving in Europe and found both popular and institutional interest, a memorable example being William Bullock's 1824 London exhibition, evocatively titled "Ancient and Modern Mexico". In Paris, collections of Mexican, Mesoamerican and Peruvian antiquities belonging to collectors such as Latour Allard (1799-?),[32] Maximilan Franck (ca. 1780 – ca. 1832)[33] and Léonce Angrand (1808-1886)[34] were offered to the French state, which struggled to find a place to exhibit them.

The old rooms of the Museum des Antiques had become too small and crowded. At the same time, a new institutional repartition of national collections was underway. Indeed, at the Bibliothèque Nationale – once again "Royale" under the *Monarchie de Juillet* – the ethnographer and antiquarian Edmé-François Jomard (1777-1862) was lobbying for the creation of a "Dépôt géographique" where ethnographical non-European artefacts would be reunited with drawings, plans, manuscripts and maps.[35] Jomard was however overruled in favour of the Louvre, which was no longer primarily a museum for artists and connoisseurs to admire the masters and complete their education, but was rapidly becoming the great repository of France's treasures.

Three projects for the growing non-European collections were proposed. One by the Comte de Chabrol (1773-1843), who wished to install a collection "of monuments related to the history and customs of the peoples inhabiting the Great Ocean"[36] and were disappearing under the progress of industry and colonialism. And a second project, championed by the Baron de Férussac (1786-1836), whose project more broadly included "the monuments of art", antiquity and industry. If Chabrol and de Férussac disagreed in the nature and precise organisation of these collections,[37] both agreed that the Louvre should be their home. "Our aim is to give France an institution that will be the envy of all European intelligentsia," writes de Férussac.[38] He is against leaving the American collections acquired over the last years with Jomard and Raoul Rochette (1790-1854), newly appointed curator of the Cabinet des Médailles: "their true placement should be at the Louvre since [the Louvre] has become the repository of our rich collections of antiquities".[39]

In this, de Férussac was supported by eminent personalities such as Alexandre Lenoir (1761-1839)[40] and the Comte de Clarac.[41] He imagined the American collections – at least the archaeological ones – as a continuation of the Egyptian and Greco-Roman series and would serve to write the "history of different peoples through the monuments of art".[42] This comparative project, however, never came to be. The Pre-Columbian and Amerindian collections acquired or gifted to the Louvre since 1825 were installed at the Musée Naval or Musée de la Marine. Inaugurated in 1827 in the Louvre, it presented ancient and contemporary models of ships, scientific instruments of navigation, and artworks of historical significance for France's naval forces.[43]

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The ethnographic artefacts and curious souvenirs obtained through exploratory missions and colonial expeditions were added to the Musée Naval, in a space consecrated both to technical *savoirs* and to curiosity.

The Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections – now several hundreds of objects[44] – stayed at the Musée Naval until 1850, when Adrien de Longpérier (1816-1882) requisitioned them to create a new "Musée des Antiquités Américaines" at the Louvre. The origins and evolutions of this Musée Américain are now well studied[45] and we will only comment on a few elements of this temporary "divorce" of the archaeological and ethnographic series in the Musée Américain. The creation of a Musée Américain can be understood in the context of the developments of the Louvre in the middle of the century, with the multiplication of new "museums" dedicated each to a new *Antiquity* beyond that of the Greco-Roman world. These included a "Musée assyrien," a "Musée algérien," a new museum for the collection of casts of Egyptian monuments, and a "Musée d'antiquités chrétiennes".[46] The Louvre had become the domain of Antiquity, where each ancient civilisation had its own set of rooms visitors could admire, but where the comparative framework between the old and the new, the local and the exotic, between the *antique* and the *primitif* of the Museum des Antiques was no longer the structuring principle.

Secondly, the critical reception of the Musée Américain was ambivalent, hesitating between praise for the novelty and ambition of the project, and the confusion of visitors unfamiliar with the aesthetics and iconography of Pre-Columbian arts. However, scholars were mostly enthusiast, especially in Americanist circles, who were keenly aware that their field of study still lacked an established museal collection.[47] Brasseur de Bourbourg (1814-1874) for example congratulated France for "repairing" this omission and being "the first [in Europe] to open its palaces" to American antiquities.[48] There was also hope that the Louvre would keep growing its American collections and that the Americas would become a "second Egypt" for France. This idea would know special favour in the 1860s with the Second French Intervention in Mexico (1861-1867).

In 1861, emperor Napoléon III (1808-1873) launched an invasion of Mexico, which, in the image of Napoléon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign, was accompanied by a scientific expedition.[49] Scholars and field-agents joined the troops, tasked with undertaking a scientific survey of the country.[50] New collections of Mexican antiquities made their way to France in the following years. And although the military campaign ended with the defeat of the French troops in 1867, the work of the "Commission Scientifique du Mexique" illustrates how a scholarly discipline was (re)framed as a national and imperial project. Both in political discourse and amongst erudite circles, the moment had come for France to have its "deuxième Egypte" thanks to the discovery and collecting of the Mexican past and its monuments. Victor Duruy (1811-1894), minister of l'Instruction Publique celebrates in his speeches how "[the Emperor] has the noble ambition to conquer this great country [Mexico] through science"[51] and

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"Your Majesty's desire is: that which was accomplished by the Nile by Napoléon Ier should be accomplished in Mexico under Napoléon III".[52]

For French Americanists, the hope was that the Mexican campaign would "repair" both the lack of a great national collection of American antiquities - on par with the Egyptian, Greek, Romand and Near Eastern collections - as well as "repair" and bring together the scattered groups of French Americanists and create a national discipline. Drawing once again from Brasseur de Bourbourg, who was one of the explorers sent by the Commission to Mexico: "everyone [is interested in the Mexican past] but France will be the first to raise its flag [in its conquest]" and "[as we have done for] Egypt, Persia, Syria and other nations (...) so shall we rescue Mexico's past from oblivion."[53] Similarly, another agent named *voyageur pour l'archéologie*, Léon Méhédin (1828-1905) argues to Mexican authorities that by letting the Commission take antiquities and archaeological collections to Belgium, Austria and especially France, Mexico's monuments would finally be raised, in the eyes of the worked, to the "level of those from Egypt, Greece and Italy."[54]

In the end, the Mexican war was a disaster. The French defeat in 1867 was considered a personal embarrassment for Napoléon III, and the political crisis precipitated soon after by the end of the Second French Empire put on hold any projects of new acquisitions for the Louvre. Nevertheless, the idea of Americanism as a fundamentally French discipline endured and would again play a significant role in the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in the last third of the century.[55] As for the Musée Américain at the Louvre, despite its initial success and considerable developments throughout the 1850s, the collections suffered over the following

Fig. 03 : Ethnographic curiosities, naval models and paraphernalia in the "ethnographical section" of the Musée Naval at the Louvre in the 1870s. In Adolphe Joanne, *Paris illustré en 1879 et 1876. Guide de l'étranger et du Parisien*, Paris: Hachette, 1876, p. 703. BnF département Philosophie, histoire, sciences de l'homme, 8-Z LE SENNE-4595.

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decades. Longpérier was preoccupied with other projects and lacked the time and the resources to maintain it. Beginning in 1859, the museum was relocated several times before a part was unceremoniously installed in a corridor adjacent to the "Section Ethnographique" of the Musée Naval (fig. 3). The rest was either moved back into the curators' office or put in storage.[56]

Both scholars and the general public made calls to "repair" the state in which the Musée Américain had been left in. Collector and critic Eugène Piot (1812-1890) complains that already in 1862 access to the American collections was difficult.[57] In 1877, Léonce Angrand, who had gifted part of his extensive collections of Peruvian and Bolivian antiquities to the Louvre over the previous decades, was appalled to see the conditions in which they were kept and, fearing further damage, threatened to bequeath his remaining pieces to the British Museum instead.[58] In 1876, Orientalist scholar and archaeologist Emile Burnouf (1821-1907) called for the American collections to be moved to a new museum rather than having them suffer in defective conditions at the Louvre.[59] Caix de Saint-Aymour (1843-1921) in turn proposed the American collections be integrated into a new museum reuniting ethnographical, archaeological and prehistoric artefacts.[60]

3. "Repairing" French Ethnography. Ernest-Théodore Hamy and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro

At the same time, critics were also concerned with the state of the "Ethnographical section" of the Musée Naval and the lack of a distinct ethnographical museum in France – a category now present in most European capitals -. The Musée Naval, with its mismatched collection of naval models, exotic curiosities and souvenirs brought back from Asia and Oceania was, in the eyes of contemporary scholars - for whom ethnography was no longer the domain of curiosity but a historical science, - terribly outdated if picturesque. Furthermore, the question of whether the Louvre should be strictly a museum of *beaux-arts* and of Classical civilisations was once again raised. A report from 1871 notes that "many of the ethnographical objects (…) are mere curiosities and thus of little interest to an institution dedicated to the highest works of art".[61]

Amid this debate of weather – or rather *where* and *how* – a new ethnography museum should be built, the American collections would play an unsuspecting role, both in the discourse justifying the creation of the museum, and in its material realisation. This is where we once more find Ernest Théodore-Hamy and his museal genealogy of French ethnography.

As stated before, for Hamy the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1878 was the culmination of France's long tradition of ethnographical inquiry throughout the Modern Age. The museum was the "heir by right of birth" of the Museum des Antiques de Barthélemy de Courçay and of the Ethnographical section of the Musée Naval organised by Morel-Fatio (1810-1871) at the Louvre. For Hamy, the development of ethnography, constituted as a *savoir*, would always have an

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anchoring point in a museal institution. The reader of his history will therefore note that Jomard's "Dépôt de Géographie" is only included because it was a failure – reflecting Hamy's diverging opinions on ethnography and his unabashed dislike for Jomard.[62] Similarly, the Louvre chapter focuses on the Musée Naval, since Longpérier's museum was concerned with antiquities and not with ethnography. The Musée Américain is only mentioned to point out its state of disrepair and disorder.

In this section I want to explore two things. First, how thanks to a fortunate convergence of circumstances – namely the ongoing debate regarding the Musée Américain and the ethnographic collections on the one hand, and the arrival in Paris of Charles Wiener and his extensive collection of South American collections on the other – precipitated the long-awaited creation of a national ethnography museum. And secondly, how Hamy's history of the museum, which draws extensively from France's early colonial relations with the New World, contributes to the idea, already formulated in the 1850s and1860s, that Americanism was fundamentally a product of French science and French erudition. And that by incorporating the history of French collecting *of* and *in* the New World to France's Modern History, these objects become part of France's national *patrimoine* by essence and by virtue of their history, and not because of their physical placement in a French museum.

Regarding the first question, that of the role played by American collections in the founding of the Musée du Trocadéro. The decision to create the museum was made following the success of the *Exposition spéciale des missions scientifiques* (Special Exhibition of Scientific Missions) of 1878. Organized under the auspices of Oscar de Watteville (1824-1901), the director of the *Service des missions de la Division des Sciences et Lettres*, this special exhibition aimed to display ethnographic and archaeological collections obtained through missions sponsored by the Service or donated to the French state.[63] It also sought to gauge public opinion on creating a permanent ethnographic museum. Initially organised at the Palais de l'Industrie, the exhibition was subsequently relocated to the Champ-de-Mars for the 1878 World's Fair.

This exhibition is particularly noteworthy for the prominent role given to American archaeological and ethnographic collections, as well as for its scientific and museographical choices, which were later incorporated into the museography of the Musée du Trocadéro and especially in the Galerie Américaine. At first, the exhibition was intended to feature the archaeological collections from Perou and Bolivia brought back by Charles Wiener (1851-1913).[64] The explorer, together with artist Emile Soldi (1846-1906),[65] designed an exhibition space with life-size reproductions of some of the most famous monuments of pre-Columbian Perou and Bolivia, such as the gates of Huánuco Viejo and the Gate of the Sun in Tiahuanaco. The facsimiles of archaeological monuments were accompanied by mannequins representing the most "characteristic" physiognomies of South America Amerindians (Hamy 1890, p. 57) and the background featured large-scale paintings of monuments and landscapes by artists Alexandre

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de Cetner and Paul-Louis-Joseph Roux. This was the backdrop to the hundreds of vases, ceramics, wooden sculptures, gold figurines and adornments, ancient textiles, weapons and even a pre-Hispanic mummy brough back by Wiener (Riviale 2001, p. 287).

The show was a success, and it was quickly decided to incorporate it to World's Fair and install it on the left wing of the newly built Palais du Trocadéro in the Champ-de-Mars. Hamy was entrusted with coordinating the project. New American collections were added first, followed by more modest contributions from Oceania, Africa and even prehistoric Europe.[66] The colossal "Gate of the Sun" dominated the rear wall, complemented with the reproduction of a "Peruvian hut." The walls were lined with antiquities hanging from panels or stacked in shelves. As they progressed through the hall, visitors could see the Mexican and South American collections of other explorers of the *Service des missions*, such as Alphonse Pinart (1852-1911) and Léon de Cessac (1841-1891) (fig. 4). A series of lectures delivered by the explorers was also organised. The museography of this new installation pushed the immersive effect and picturesque "dépaysement" of the first installation even further, aiming to create a didactic experience without sacrificing aesthetics and atmosphere.[67]

This second iteration of the exhibition decided in no small part the creation of a permanent and national "ethnographic museum". Installed later that year in the same Palais du Trocadéro, Hamy was named its first director. If the 1878 exhibit was important for the role the American collections played in promoting the museal project, it also reflects Hamy's vision of ethnography as a modern scientific discipline and its museographical realisation in the new museum. First, Ethnography was conceived fundamentally as a historical science and thus encompassed the study of all material products of human activity, both past and present. It is what Hamy defines as an *alliance intime* (intimate alliance) of archaeology and ethnography and why, for him, Barthélemy de Courçay's project was superior to Jomard's.[68] Similarly, Oscar de Watteville clearly states that "the ethnography museum shall be a history museum".[69]

This definition of ethnography as encompassing both the products of the past (including antiquities) and present justifies the transfer of the Louvre's collections to the new Musée d'Ethnographie in the 1880s, despite opposition from Longpérier's successor, Ravaisson-Mollien (1813-1900). For Ravaisson-Mollien "the Louvre should encompass the artistic products of all peoples up to our contemporary era. [...] The Ethnographic Museum would logically commence when the former concludes; in other words, while the Louvre collects all elements that contribute to a comprehensive and comparative overview of past civilizations, the Ethnographic Museum would provide a similar overview of present-day civilizations."[70] Jules Ferry (1832-1893), minister of l'Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts, responds that it was not a question of chronology but of disciplinary boundaries: "The philosophy behind the Ethnographic Museum is not to provide a synthesis of contemporary peoples (...) but to

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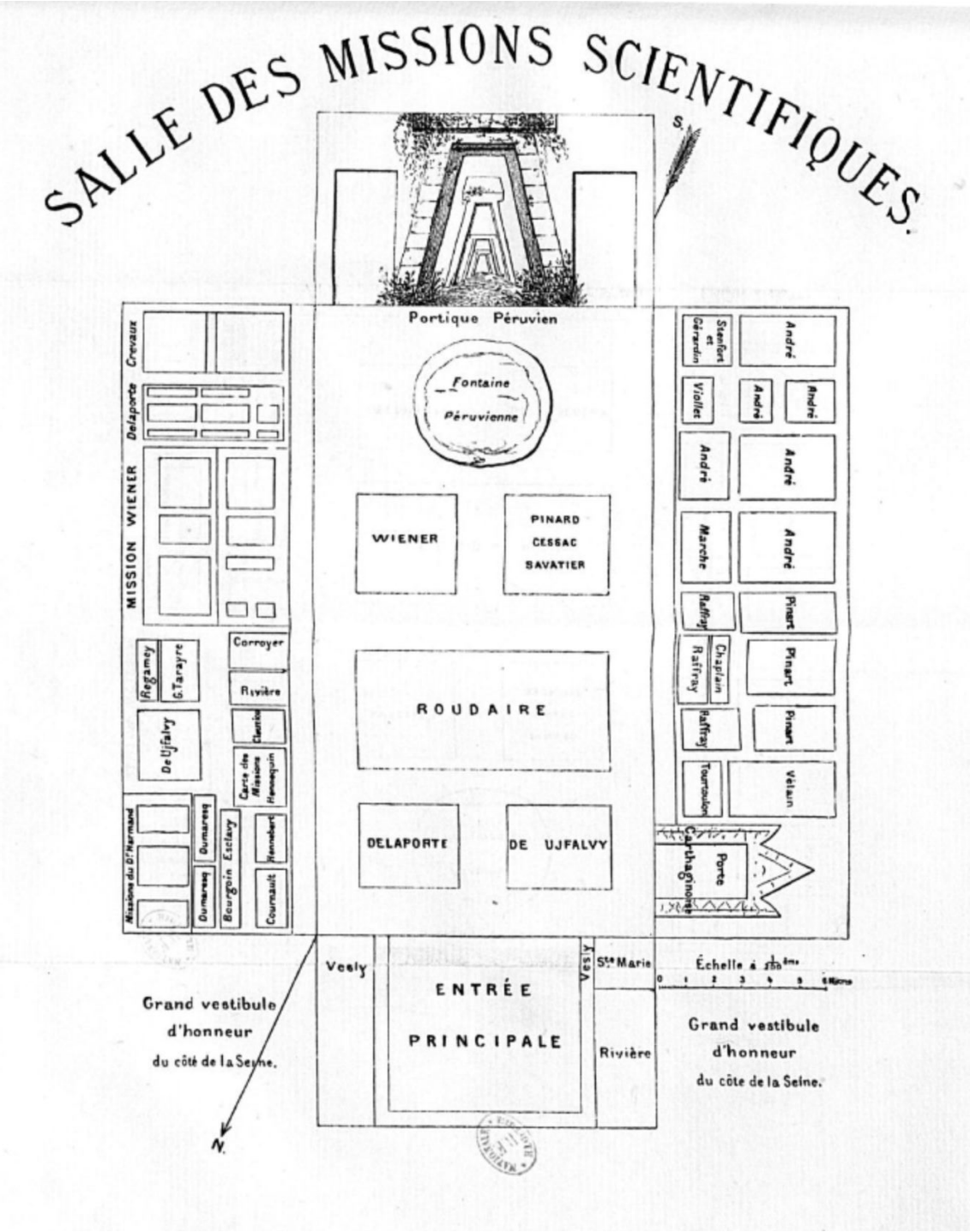

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Fig. 04: Layout of the exhibit "Missions ethnographiques" with labelled sections and contributors, designed by Wiener, Soldi and Hamy installed at the Palais du Trocadéro in 1878. In *Exposition universelle de 1878. Catalogue du Ministère de l'Instruction publique, des cultes et des beaux-arts*, tome 2/2 (Missions et voyages scientifiques), Paris: imp. de la Société de publications périodiques, 1878, n.p. Bnf , département Philosophie, histoire, sciences de l'homme, 8-R-1429 (2,2).

present the history of customs and practices of all peoples across all ages, just as the Louvre does in relation to their works of arts".[71]

Furthermore, ethnography as a science was intimately linked to the promotion of national and patriotic sentiments. As Oscar de Watteville explains in his inaugural speech of the Muséum ethnographique des Missions Scientifiques, "it is the love of Science and the love of France" which inspires French explorers and scholars, and the Service des Missions scientifiques who makes their work possible.[72] Thus, the Musée d'Ethnographie was destined to play an active role in promoting

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France and its global interests. Consequently, it was deemed essential that the museum serve the public: beyond its scientific and pedagogical mission, it was necessary to present ethnography in an attractive manner. De Watteville asserts then that "[the collections] are put to the eyes of the public first, and of scholars second".[73]

In the end, it was a combination of ideological *parti-pris*, shifts within disciplines, and practical reasons that determined the transfer of the Pre-Columbian collections from the Louvre to the Trocadéro. Antoine Héron de Villefosse (1845-1919), curator of Roman and Greek antiquities, finally agreed that it was preferable to lose the collections rather than keep them in their current state of neglect and entrusted them to Hamy in 1887.[74]

At the new Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, this alliance between archaeology, ethnography, and a science fuelled by national-patriotic sentiments is reflected in the museography of the Galerie Américaine. When the museum opened in 1882 it was the largest section, measuring fifty meters in length and twelve and a half meters in width. The gallery proposed a geographical journey through the Americas from Brazil to British Columbia, even if the "classical" civilisations of Mexico, Central and South America were the largest (fig. 5). The American collections were overall the most extensive the time of the inauguration: around 10,000 objects, which did not include part of the Wiener, Pinart, Crevaux and Charnay collections which had not been installed in time for the opening in 1882.[75] The collections kept growing and expanding through donations and archaeological and ethnographical fieldwork sponsored by the French state.[76]

Thus, "ethnographical" artefacts and "antiquities" came together in the Galerie Américaine to offer a historical and synthetical overview of the material productions and cultural practices of the Americas (fig. 6). The museography was completed, like in the temporary exhibition, by large panels adorning the walls depicting landscapes and ancient American monuments from "Bolivia to Ohio".[77] The Galerie Américaine also reflected France's political and historical interests in the New World. The "colonial cause" was, to Hamy, "the perfect expression of the alliance between scientific knowledge and national interests".[78] The case of the American collections is particular in the sense that, at the time of the inauguration of the Trocadéro, France no longer had colonies in the New World, except for territories in the Caribbean and South America.[79] With the exception of the Second French Intervention in Mexico, French ethnography and archaeology in the Americas is more aligned with practices of informal imperialism than direct colonisation.[80]

This does not mean that the New World was free from colonial rhetoric and indeed the ambitions of French science were linked with economic and industrial interests in Central and Latin America. As discussed earlier, the 1860s and Napoléon's III incursion in Mexico was essential to the efforts of finally crystallising Americanist studies in France. This idea was further developed in the last third of the cen-

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Fig. 05: Peruvian and Mexican antiquities at the Galerie Américaine of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. In *La Nature. Revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie* n. 471 (10 juin 1882, p. 25) and n°483 (2 septembre 1882 p. 213), BnF : Gallica.

tury, with commentators opining that the Americas were "the most fruitful terrain for the deployment of French science"[81] and that "(Mexico) has, from an early stage and to a considerable extent, been the domain of French scholars".[82] The Galerie Américaine paid homage to the greatest of French heroes – explorers, scholars and collectors – whom, since the 16th century, had explored the New World – with their names inscribed in gold letters in the archways of the gallery.[83]

Before looking at the last case-study, lets return briefly to Hamy's *Origines du Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* and why it is that in this genealogy many of the earliest episodes of ethnographical enquiries he recounts relate to the Americas. If Charlemagne's court had received curious gifts from faraway lands of the "Orient", the first true "modern" cabinet – associated with a particular kind of expansive and erudite curiosity – is that of François Ier (1494-1547), often considered France's first Renaissance (or modern) king and under whom the first French explorations of the New World took place. François Ier "never stopped sending travellers far and wide to bring him back *news* of faraway lands", notably the explorations of the coast of the United States by Jacques Cartier and of Brazil by Bizeret.[84] Similarly, Hamy compiles every French contribution to the "discovery" and exploration of Mexico dating back to the early 16th century, "correcting" the impression of a Spanish and Portuguese monopoly before its independence.[85]

Hamy then presents a summary of the explorations undertaken under each French monarch. He condemns Louis XIV's disinterest in the New World, despite the potential for French expansion in the recently discovered expanses of Canada and the Mississippi basin. Hamy's

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critique of Louis XIV's "obsession" with Classical Antiquity should then be understood as a condemnation of his abandonment of "ethnographic" exploration and collecting, only supporting missions to the Levant to enrich his collections of medals, engraved stones and manuscripts.[86]

This interest in showing the close parallels between the history of French ethnography and the exploration of the Americas is in part explained by Hamy's own preferences as an Americanist. However, it is not surprising either that French collections from the Americas reappear as a guiding thread in a work that intimately associates "history of (French) ethnography" (and its museal realisations) with the "history of (Modern) France", seeing as the "discovery" of the New World became one of the hallmarks of the conceptualisation of the Modern Age in Western thought. Others shared Hamy's interpretation: thus Léon Lejeal (1867-1907) alludes to the same idea in his inaugural lesson at the Collège de France when he remarks that the sailors from de Gonneville's exploration to Brazil around 1500 were "Americanists, even if they did not know it".[87]

Finally, by retracing the history of "French ethnography" to François Ier, Hamy is "repairing," or reconciliating, the collections from the *Ancien Régime* with Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary French heritage (in the sense of *patrimoine*), now redefined as "national". Thus, it is significative that if Barthélemy de Courçay's project at the Cabinet des Médailles is the first "revolutionary" project of nationalisation of (ethnographic) collections, Hamy is insistent that "long before Barthelemy (…) other efforts had been made" and that "one has to delve deeply into the history of the monarchy to unveil the first of these royal collections (…) which represent the first stage of the history of our national museums, and of the Musée d'Ethnographie in particular".[88]

4. "Repairing" a National Omission: Eugène Goupil's gift to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Finally, I want to shift the perspective from institutional museal histories and present one last case where a private collector come to "repair" a glaring omission in French Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections: that of a documental collection, and more precisely of Mesoamerican

Fig. 06: An exemple of the mannequins conceived by Hamy for the Galerie Américaine. "Costume de fête d'un chef coréguaje du Rio Ica" in E.-T. Hamy *Choix de pièces archéologiques et ethnographiques décrites et publées. Galerie Américaine du Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*, Paris: E. Léroux, 1897, LIX. BnF: Gallica.

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and Mexican codices. If in the last third of the 19th century the archaeological and ethnographical series in the Musée du Trocadéro continued growing, the collections of codices were much more modest, despite a now century-long interest in deciphering and translating the writing systems of Pre-Columbian Americas. Until 1896, the Bibliothèque National had only sixteen manuscripts from the Americas.[89] The situation changed drastically with the bequest of Eugène Goupil's (1831-1896) *Bibliothèque américaine*. Goupil's gift contained over three hundred documents, endowing France with a unique collection in the world. This gift was celebrated as a gesture of patriotic devotion. I want to briefly go over this episode and discuss the implications of this legacy in both France and Mexico – where most of the collections originated from – in terms of narratives of heritage, national identity and national collections.

A prominent industrialist, Eugène Goupil amassed one of the largest collections of Pre-Columbian antiquities in Paris in the latter part of the 19th century. He closely collaborated with art and antiquities dealer Eugène Boban Duvergé (1834-1908), who served as Goupil's personal supplier and undertook a significant part of the practical management of the collection.[90] Goupil was born into a French-Mexican family, of Aztec lineage in his mother's side. This Aztec heritage was of great significance to Eugène and his brother Louis – also a well-known collector – and it was the personal connection to the objects and the history they invoked which, according to Goupil, fuelled his passion for collecting and his predilection for Mexican antiquities.

Eugène Goupil returned to France in the early 1860s and started a factory of glass beads and pearls which gave him the financial means to pursue his passion for collecting. Other than antiquities and curiosities, Goupil amassed a vast *bibliothèque* of literature pertaining to the Americas: history books, travel accounts, natural history treatises, novels, books on linguistics and dictionaries of modern and historical Amerindian languages… As well as a number of important manuscripts and codices from the early Colonial period or from Pre-conquest times, such as the *Mapa Tlotzin*, the *Codex Xolotl*, the *Codex Azcatitlan* and the *Relaciones de Chimalpáhin*.[91] His great-nephew, the muralist artist Jean Charlot (1898-1979), remembers visiting the family house where one could not escape "his idols, his books, his facsimiles and his codices, and his *catalogues raisonnés*".[92] Upon his death, Goupil bequeathed his *bibliothèque* to the French state, a gift that brought the "fonds américains" from 17 to over 400 items in 1898.

It is on the public discourse about the bequest that I want to focus on. In the preface of his *Catalogue raisonné*, Goupil insists that he was merely the "dépositaire" of this unique collection and that he intended to make it accessible to scholars and "useful to science and history".[93] But how are we to understand Goupil's choice of leaving his collection to France and not to Mexico? Despite Goupil's pride in his Aztec heritage, his relationship with his Mexican identity was complex and full of contradictions. He justifies his choice by arguing for

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the superiority of French scholarship and an easier access, for both the scientific community and the public, to the collections in France, rather than Mexico. He hesitates in his private notes: "I am French, but my hearts is French and Mexican".[94] The final version in *Documents pour servir (...)* however, reads: "I believe I am rendering Mexico a greater service (...) Mexico is very far away (...) Paris is the centre of the intellectual world, the unavoidable stop for all scientific travellers (...) may Mexico appreciate my efforts in contributing to a better understanding of my homeland".[95]

The situation is further complicated if we consider the dubious history of how these documents were taken out of Mexico and came to be in Goupil's possession. Indeed, most of the treasures in Goupil's collection had belonged to Joseph Marius Alexis Aubin (1802-1891). Aubin's library was well known for being the largest of its kind, containing part of the collection from 18th century scholar the Chevalier Boturini Benaduci (1702-1753).[96] Aubin had obtained his collection in Mexico in the 1830s and illegally took them back to France, where he only rarely admitted visitors.[97] In the late 1880s, Aubin's was plagued by debts and his mental and physical health were much diminished.

The conditions under which Goupil and Boban acquired the collection from Aubin are also suspicious. Upon learning that Antonio Peñafiel (1839-1922)[98] had approached Aubin to buy the collection and repatriate it, Goupil and Boban pressured Aubin to sell to them instead. If, years later, they presented this acquisition as a "rescue mission" to ensure the collections would remain in France for the sake of Americanist scholarship, Goupil's private correspondence shows he and Boban went to questionable lengths to ensure their victory over Peñafiel and did not hesitate to exploit Aubin's diminished state in their favour.[99] They went so far as changing the locks of Aubin's study and calling for a police escort to be present to avoid any "trouble" while the sale contract was being signed.[100]

Throughout, Peñafiel is painted as a scheming individual driven only by personal ambition, whilst Goupil's efforts and onerous financial sacrifice are framed as being in the interest of France and Americanists studies. "These documents must remain in France whatever the cost," writes Goupil. And Boban, despite recognizing that Peñafiel was acting out of duty to his country, accuses the Mexican archaeologist of hubris: "he dreamed only of return the Boturini collection to Mexico when he had only just arrived in Paris and was unknown to European scholars. He believed he could immediately distinguish himself [by buying the collection] and announce to Mexico, as if he were Julius Cesar, *veni, vidi, vici*".[101] In private letters to his friends, Goupil boasted of having "outmanoeuvred" that "dog" Peñafiel: "We have just saved the Aubin collection,"[102] he writes, recounting a conversation with explorer Désiré Charnay (1828-1915). In another letter, Goupil excuses himself for not having included Hamy in their scheme, as a "delay of even twenty-four hours would have led to an irreparable loss," adding as a peace offering that "it is very probable that my entire collection will (eventually) come to the Tro-

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cadéro."[103]

There is no doubt that the acquisition of the Aubin collection by Goupil represented a significant loss for Mexico. It is interesting how in public Goupil always justified his actions as being of "national interest" and as a patriotic sacrifice towards France and French Americanist studies. This celebratory discourse was perpetuated after Goupil's death, when his bequeath to the Bibliothèque Nationale was confirmed.[104] Albert Réville (1826-1906), a close friend of Boban and Goupil, drafted an article titled "Les Aventures d'une collection" which perfectly embodies the celebratory narrative adopted by posteriority. Here Réville tells the "rather curious story" in which the valiant intervention of French patriots ensured that these treasures were rescued from "oblivion" and from the greed of those who would "steal them from science for their own gain" (an obvious reference to Peñafiel). "Mr. Goupil… did not hesitate to make the necessary sacrifice to ensure that this scientific treasure remained in France." Thanks to Goupil and Boban, France had been bestowed the most "authentic and instructive" of collections of Amerindian and Pre-Columbian documents and manuscripts, the only type still severely underrepresented in French national collections. "From this point onward, it will be in France [and] under the auspices of French scholarship" that the history of ancient Mexico and of the Americas would be "brought back to life," concludes Réville.[105]

In this text, we attempted to bring together several episodes in which French Amerindian and Pre-Columbian collections were mobilised in the context of creating or reforming national museal institutions. In every case, these projects were associated to the need to "repair" physical spaces - and ensure the preservation of material objects – but also to "repair" or renew intellectual thought. The American collections are particularly interesting for the development, throughout the 19th century, of Americanist studies in France and the parallel calls for "repairing" museums/collections and "repairing" Americanism. These calls to "repair" are characterised by moments of high enthusiasm and activity followed by periods of "stasis" or neglect, often due to economic difficulties and/or concrete shifts in scholarly interest.

These examples traversed the 19th century, but, as we have seen, the same collections were mobilised in the early 20th century as Rivet and Rivière attempted to repair the "old Troca" – both the physical museum and its disciplinary and ideological foundations.[106] Similarly, if we were to extend Hamy's genealogy of a French National Museum and the evolving definitions of ethnography into the 20th century, we could continue by exploring the Musée de l'Homme – which replaced the old Trocadéro in 1937 – and, more recently, the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac. The creation of the Quai Branly was marked by its own set of controversies.[107] But, almost twenty years later, the question of whether a museography openly embracing the aesthetic of the

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"arts premiers" would imperil the documental value of its collections and perpetuate "othering" images of the cultures it represented seems to have been mostly settled by assuming the inevitability of the current museal state of affairs. That is, the new constellation of collections and disciplines shared between the Quai-Branly, the renewed Musée de l'Homme, and the MUCEM in Marseille.

In the last two decades, the field has been marked by reflexions on the need to decolonise collections and deconstruct national narratives. The potential of museums to be reparative of the social tissue needs to contend - especially in the case of museums of the "Other" – with a myriad of political and legal hurdles as well as complex colonial and imperial legacies. Recently, at the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, discussions concerning the provenance and the decolonisation of the museum have been anchored by an explicit desire to "historicize" its collections,[108] ideally a first step towards accomplishing a "reparative" function. It is, perhaps, within this context that we might see what the next call to "repair" American French collections could resemble.

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Endnotes

1 S. 1930, p. 9

2 Rivet, Rivière 1931. All translations into English are by the author, unless otherwise stated.

3 One of the texts Rivière consecrated to the question was suggestively titled *Défense et illustration du Musée d'Ethnographie* (roughly, "Defense and Exemplification of the Museé d'Ethnographie"), which can be read as referring to the "Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro" but also to the very idea of ethnography museums, in Rivière 1931.

4 D'Espezel, Hilaire 1931, p. 5.

5 Mauss 1913; Laurière 2003; Grognet 2013.

6 Rivet, Rivière 1931.

7 Faucourt 2013; Peltier-Caroff, De Sevilla 2016

8 Expilly 1768, p. 464.

9 On the natural history and exotic collections of the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle at the turn of the 19th century: Daugeron 2009a.

10 Understood as the scholarly discipline concerned with the study of the Americas, including both continents and all periods, and drawing mostly from anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics.

11 Hamy 1890. Despite his careful research, Hamy's writings are now over a hundred years old, and much work has been done since trying to better understand the history of the museum's collections. However, I am interested in what Hamy considered to be the defining moments of the history of French ethnography and its collections, which he used to structure his history. I will therefore, after this word of caution, work from the information given by Hamy and considered, at the time, to be factually correct.

12 Hamy 1890, p. 5.

13 See also on the *Museum des Antiques*: Daugeron 2009b.-

14 Report from Villar de la Mayenne to the Comité d'Instruction publique, 10 frimaire an III, or Novembre 30 1794. The report seems to have been since lost according to Daugeron, but it was partially transcribed by Hamy in his *Histoire* (p. 21). Ernest Babelon and J.-Adren Blanchet however cite the same report but dating it to the 3 frimaire an III, Babelon, Blanchet 1895, p. XXXIV.

15 Hamy 1890, pp. 22-23.

16 De Courçay B., Millin A.-L., *Les conservateurs du Muséum des Antiques aux représentants du peuple composant le Comité d'Instruction publique*, document reproduced in Hamy 1890 "Pièce IV".

17 Cointreau 1800, p. 31.

18 Cointreau 1800, p. 16.

19 Bleichmar 2012; Cabello Carro 2013.

20 Riviale 2022, paragr. 3-6.

21 "Antiquités péruviennes remises au Cabinet des antiques du roi le 31 janvier 1786", Paris BnF, Archives du Cabinet des médailles (1664-1886), 2011/091/ACM04-04; Archives du Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris, "71.1878.5 Dombey. Ancienne collection du Cabinet des Antiquités du Roy"; "Notice des Antiquités de la Bibliothèque Nationale," hand-written catalogue by Cointreau, BnF, Département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Registres produits pour la gestion des collections, Ms. 285, 1796.

22 Hamy 1890, p. 18.

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23 Hamy adds that Dombey's collection had inspired a new classification and organisation of the collections at the Museum des Antiques but regretfully does not elaborate or provide any archival references to this supposed project. See Hamy 1890, p. 19.

24 Hamy 1890, p. 25.

25 Inventory by Millin *État des objets d'Antiquités conservés au dépôt de la rue de Beaune, qui d'après arrêt du comité d'Instruction publique de l'an 3° de la République, ont été transportés au Muséum des antiques*, BnF, 5AMC 13; *Etat des objets enlevés au dépôt de la maison de Nesle pour le Muséum des antiques, le 5 thermidor an cinq de la République française (23 juillet 1796),* BnF 5AMC 71. Hamy further mentions other collections from the Duc de Noailles and the "Cabinet Bertin" which can be found in *Catalogue des objets chinois provenant du cabinet du citoyen Bertin, enlevé à la maison de Nesle le 17 fructidor an 5 de la République (3 sept 1796) pour le Museum des Antiques de la Bibliothèque Nationale,* BnF AMC 74.

26 Daugeron 2009a.

27 Notably a gift from M Gauthier in 1796 with more than a hundred objects from the French Guyana that Barthélemy de Courçay arranged to hang above the entrance (Cointreau 1800, p. 35).

28 Despite several attempts, until 1803, of incorporating the Museum des Antiques into the Louvre: Daugeron 2009, pp. 171-174. See also Bresc-Bautier, Fonkenell, Madrus 2016, pp. 581-640.

29 Hamy 1890, p. 35.

30 Whether the museum was truly open to the public is difficult to ascertain. Daugeron cites the official decrees of opening and closure (2nd June 1795 and 7 October 1795 respectively). However, the collections were in part accessible in the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques at the Bibliothèque nationale, overseen by Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison after Barthélémy's death. See Daugeron 2009b, p. 143. On the history of the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques, see Bodenstein 2015.

31 See the project digitalizing Muret's work: https://digitalmuret.inha.fr/.

32 Offered several times to the Louvre during the 1830s and 1840s, it was finally acquired in January 1850 for 8.000 fr. See Fauvet-Berthelot, López Luján, Guimarães 2007.

33 Acquired in 1832 for 8.000 fr. The collection contained approximately 542 objects, mostly from Mexico. What survives is at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (coll. 71.1887.159).

34 Two large donations in 1839 (201 pieces from Perou) and 1850 (140 pieces from Perou and Mexico); and two smaller donations in 1851 (2 pieces) and 1855 (4 pieces). Today at the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac (coll. 71.1887.115).

35 The "Dépôt" was created in 1828. One of the main figures in the development of French ethnography in the first half of the 19th century, Jomard proposed a classification system based on provenance, epoch and usage, rather than a primarily geographical order. He also more strictly distinguished "ethnographic" collections from "natural history collections" (vs. objects altered for economic or domestic use), "collections of antiquities" (vs. objects of contemporary production and use belonging to the "époques modernes") and "fine-arts collections" (vs. objects of "industrial arts"). This was a significantly different definition of ethnography to Hamy's, which in part explains the latter's rejection of Jomard's project and its exclusion from his "genealogy" of French Modern Ethnography. See for a detailed analysis of Jomard's system, Dias 1991, chap. 4.

36 Guimarães 1994, p. 9.

37 Bresc-Bautier 1999.

38 De Férussac 1831, p. 393.

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39 De Férussac 1831, p. 396.

40 Lenoir 1832.

41 Guimarães 1994, p. 10.

42 De Férussac 1831, pp. 393-394.

43 Dion-Tenebaum 2016; Barron 2017.

44 Guimarães 1994, tab. IX.

45 Duclot 1993; Guimarães 1994.

46 André-Salvini 2016; Bresc-Bautier 2016.

47 On the difficulties of creating a perennial Société Américaniste throughout the second half of the 19th century, including an attempt to fund a new "Musée Américain" in Nancy: Riviale 1995, pp. 207-229 and Logie, Riviale 2009, pp. 151-171.

48 Brasseur de Bourbourg 1852, p. 419.

49 The Second French Intervention in Mexico began as a joint military effort of the United Kingdom and Spain to ensure debt repayments from Mexico (Convention of London of 1861). France also aimed to install a regime in Mexico that would be more favourable to its economic interests and counterbalance the growing influence of the United States in Latin America.

50 Riviale 1999.

51 Letter from Victor Duruy to José Urbano Fonseca, director of the Mexican Institute of Geography and Statistics, from the 8th of February 1864, announcing the creation of the Commission Scientifique du Mexique, *Archives de la Commission scientifique du Mexique, publiées sous les auspices du Ministère de l'Instruction Publique*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale,1865, vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

52 Victor Duruy, "Rapport à l'Empereur" on the 27th of February1864, *Archives de la Commission (...)*, 1865, vol. I, pp. 6, 8.

53 Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, "Esquisses d'Histoire, d'archéologie, d'ethnogrphie et de linguistique pouvant servir d'instructions générales. Première partie: Histoire ancienne," *Archives de la Commission (...)*, 1865, vol. 1, p. 92.

54 Letter from Méhédin to the Minister Victor Duruy, 28th of March 1865, Paris, Archives Nationales, F17 Commission de l'exploration scientifique du Mexique, 2913.

55 We do an in-depth analysis of the Mexican war and the emergence of French Americanism in Stüssi Garcia 2023, pp. 121-139.

56 Guimarães 1994, p. 21, 35-38.

57 Piot 1863, pp. 347-348.

58 Guimarães 1994, p. 37. Angrand did not change his mind and although he lent Hamy his collections in 1878 for a special exhibit, he refused to leave the rest to the Musée du Trocadéro and donated them to the Comte de Paris and the city of Genève instead: Hamy 1890, p. 61.

59 Dias 1991, p. 175.

60 Guimarães 1994, p. 37.

61 Jacquemin 1990, p. 51.

62 "[Jomard] did not seek to create a new institution to conveniently represent the science he so cherished, but rather the establishment, under his direct authority, of a cabinet – where access would be limited and controlled [by him]– and where he could rule according to his whims", Hamy 1890, p. 39.

63 A service of the Ministère de l'Instruction publique, the *Service des Missions* financed and encouraged scientific missions abroad. See on the missions sponsored in the

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Americas: Riviale 2000, pp. 53-78, 79-139.

64 Riviale 2001.

65 Soldi was classically trained as a sculptor and was keenly interested in ethnography, archaeology and the history of artistic techniques. He established himself as a specialist of ethnographic sculpture and wrote extensively on sculpting and decorative techniques in non-European artistic traditions. See Stüssi Garcia 2020; Jarrassé 2009.

66 See the catalogue: *Notice sur le Muséum…* 1878.

67 De Watteville 1886, pp. 25-26.

68 Hamy 1890, p. 24.

69 De Watteville 1877, p. 5.

70 AN Paris F21-4489, Letter from Ravaisson-Mollien to the Ministre de l'Instruction publique of the19th of November 1880.

71 AN Paris F21-4489, Letter from the Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat aux Beaux-Arts to Monsieur le Président du Conseil, 28th of May 1881.

72 *Procès-verbal…* 1878.

73 De Watteville 1877, p. 4.

74 Guimarães 1994, p. 41.

75 Drapeyron 1882; *Le Musée d'Ethnographie…* 1882; *Nouvelles. Musée d'Ethnographie de Paris* 1882; Dias 1991, p. 175.

76 Nevertheless, the museum was chronically underfunded and suffered in its ability to acquire new collections, relaying mostly on donations and gifts to grow its collections in later years.

77 Hamy 1885a.

78 Dias 1991, p. 233.

79 The territories that today still form the "DROM-COM" and known as the "France d'outre-mer".

80 Shawcross 2018.

81 *Le Musée d'Ethnographie…* 1882.

82 Hamy 1885b, p. 498.

83 Hamy 1880,

84 Hamy 1890, pp. 2, 6-7.

85 Hamy 1885b.

86 Hamy 1890, p. 14-15.

87 Lejeal 1903, p. 226.

88 Hamy 1890, pp. 2, 5.

89 The *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* was gifted by Monseigneur Charles Maurice LeTellier, archbishop of Reims, in 1700. The remaining documents came from 19th century acquisitions (Baradère in 1829 and Pinart in 1884) and gifts (Charencey, several donations between 1893 and 1919). See De Durand, Swanton 1998.

90 Stüssi Garcia 2023, p. 247-422.

91 Charlot 1963, p. 178. Paris, BnF, Département des Manuscrits: Mexicain 355, 1-10, 46-58, 59-64 and 74.

92 With Boban's assistance, Goupil published an extensive – and expensive – *catalogue raisonné* which included eighty coloured reproductions of some of the rarest

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and oldest documents in his collection. Considered by both Boban and Goupil as the crowning achievement of their careers, the *Documents pour Servir à l'Histoire du Mexique* was published by Ernest Leroux in 1891.

93 Boban 1891, p. vii.

94 Notes by Goupil for the introduction of *Documents pour server (…),* Paris, BnF, "Correspondance de l'Américaniste Eugène Boban-Duvergé (1869-1899) NAF 21476-21481, NAF 21480 December 1888-January 1889.

95 Boban 1891, p. viii.

96 Cañizares-Esguerra 2004, p. 135-160; Keen 1990, p. 227-238.

97 Aubin was not the only one to more or less illegally return to Europe with Mexican archaeological or historical artefacts. See for example Achim 2013.

98 A respected Mexican archaeologist and official representative of the Mexican state to the World Fair of 1889.

99 Stüssi Garcia 2023, pp. 378-392, 415-419.

100 Paris, BnF, NAF 21480, Letter from Goupil of April 9 1889.

101 Boban 1891, p. 11-13.

102 Paris, BnF, NAF 21480 Letter from the 18th of May 1889.

103 Paris, BnF, NAF 21480 Letter from the 18th of May, with a transcription of the letter from Goupil to Hamy on the question of the Aubin collection.

104 Paris, BnF, NAF 21477 Letters of Augustine Goupil to Boban on the bequest, January the 26th and 4th of February 1898. Léopold Delilse, administrator of the National Library, officially accepted the bequest on the 24th of June 1898.

105 Réville 1898.

106 Paris, Archives du musée du quai Branly, Série G, Exposition universelle de 1878 et création du Musée d'Ethnographie jusqu'en 1937, "Plan du département d'archéologie américaine", DA000288.

107 Dupaigne 2006; Clifford 2007; Price 2007.

108 Rolland 2023.

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Symbol of an era?: The Guggenheim Bilbao as an epitome of new museum tendencies at the turn of the millennium

Jesus Pedro Lorente

Keywords:
Museums, Contemporary art, Urban revitalization, Cultural districts.

ABSTRACT:

The Guggenheim Bilbao, inaugurated in 1997, soon became the most talked-about museum in the world, a global benchmark characteristically postmodern, for its architecture and its rupture with the introverted modernist canon, recovering all sort of connections with the city. Greater allure, spatial permeability and visual interrelations would be common features of new art museums, with 'iconic' artworks decorating their façades and surroundings. It was part of a formula of arts-led urban boosting replicated worldwide, looking for the so-called 'Bilbao effect'. This role-model has been broadly emulated but also contested. Perhaps it is about time for a reassessment of its critical reception and for a museological reconsideration of the 'Bilbao era', pointing out some controversial issues and idiosyncratic curatorial 'effects' in cultural districts. It is a legacy worth keeping, while other features are no longer seen as culturally desirable or politically palatable –to the point that some scholars have coined the term 'post-Bilbao era'.

Il Guggenheim Bilbao, inaugurato nel 1997, è presto diventato il museo più discusso al mondo, un punto di riferimento globale caratteristicamente postmoderno, sia per la sua architettura sia per la sua rottura con il canone modernista introverso, ristabilendo ogni sorta di connessione con la città. Maggiore attrattiva, permeabilità spaziale e interrelazioni visive sarebbero diventate caratteristiche comuni nei nuovi musei d'arte, con opere 'iconiche' a decorarne le facciate e i dintorni. Questo modello faceva parte di una formula di rilancio urbano basata sulle arti, replicata in tutto il mondo alla ricerca del cosiddetto 'effetto Bilbao'. Questo modello di riferimento è stato ampiamente emulato, ma anche contestato. Forse è giunto il momento di una rivalutazione della sua ricezione critica e di una revisione museologica dell''era Bilbao', mettendo in luce alcune questioni controverse e gli effetti curatoriali idiosincratici nei distretti culturali. Si tratta di un'eredità da preservare, mentre altri aspetti non sono più considerati culturalmente desiderabili o politicamente accettabili, al punto che alcuni studiosi hanno coniato il termine 'post-Bilbao era'.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 01: 1 View of the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Nervión riverside (Photo: J. Pedro Lorente).

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In a recent book, Julian Rose repeatedly uses the label 'post-Bilbao era',[1] although not intending to express a watershed partition, comparable to the 'Post-Pompidou Age' devised by Douglas Davis –Prof. Rose considers Guggenheim Bilbao one of the four milestones that have marked paradigm shifts in recent museum architecture. Certainly, the inauguration of a Basque branch of the Guggenheim Foundation in 1997 was not the beginning of new period, but could be considered the epitome of a cultural tendency. Frank Gehry's dazzling building features in countless publications as emblematic of the exploits of postmodernism, although not all experts in architecture would share the enthusiasm of Herbert Muschamp, who acclaimed it as a miracle in a famous article published by the *New York Times* on September 7th, 1997. Some authors have pointed out that the 'Guggenheim-mania' experienced at the turn of the millennium then stirred 'anti-Bilbao' reactions by setting alternative countermodels.[2] Whatever the case, Guggenheim Bilbao has become a benchmark for museums involved in city boosting,[3] which could entail some curatorial reconsiderations breaking new ground in arts-led urban regeneration policies.

1: Conspicuous museum architecture and urban entanglement: the 'Bilbao effect'.

Jean Baudrillard coined the expression 'Beaubourg effect' to warn against the political deterrence supposedly operated by an institution, which he feared would become a populist cultural buffer in the revolutionary capital of France, but the philosopher failed to acknowledge its urban novelties. Modernist architects had favoured introvert and rather shy buildings, often in the shape of cube-like boxes. Yet in 1977, the extravagant appearance of the Pompidou Centre in Paris set a new trend, whose momentum peaked in the final decades of the 20th century when postmodern architecture pursued audacious plasticity. The sculptural forms of the Guggenheim Bilbao were ranked by Victoria Newhouse among the most evocative ever made;[4] such boastfully 'iconic' eminence, seeking greater visual attention from outside while offering captivating views, was the quintessence of 'the city as spectacle'.[5] In part, this urban entanglement is precisely what the now omnipresent idiom 'Bilbao effect' mostly refers to. A former industrial city, once identified by its factory chimneys and blast furnaces, has become one of the most glamorous cultural destinations in the world since Frank Gehry erected an outstanding museum rising spectacularly above its urban setting, which has, in turn, been successfully transformed, particularly the Nervión riverside area (Fig. 1).

Competing with other 'iconic' buildings, new museums in the 'Bilbao era' were to become increasingly prominent in the urban scenery as proud icons of the city and the cultural district into which they are inserted. This quest for urban visibility found another landmark in London's Tate Modern, inaugurated in 2000 with a stunning view of the Thames and St. Paul's cathedral from the museum café, to which a new tower was added in 2016, commissioned to the same architects, Herzog & de Meuron. They were also

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the authors of the Young Museum in San Francisco, whose elevated tower is both a privileged vantage point over the Golden Gate district and a new emblematic feature on the skyline. Another outstanding American instance is the 2007 expansion of the Akron Art Museum, an unusual city landmark by Coop Himmelb(l)au with a spectacular steel and aluminium cantilever, known as the Roof Cloud, which connects the new building with the institution's headquarters. Between 2002 and 2008, Frank Gehry himself devised a most remarkable telescopic gallery called Galleria Italia in the expansion of Ontario's Art Gallery, while the rear façade, finished in titanium and glass, is enhanced with an external helical staircase towering over a historical park and the Toronto skyline. Truly enough, museums are not the only 'iconic' buildings competing for urban prominence, which is now sought for all types of temples of consumerism.[6] This is obvious in Bilbao, particularly around the cultural and leisure riverfront, which became a prototypical architectural showcase for international 'starchitects' at the turn of the millennium.

Yet the 'iconicity' concept in museum architecture could have a deeper meaning because it should be attributed to, above all, buildings that are a formal sign of a museological ideal. This is the case of Guggenheim Bilbao which, according to Gerardo del Cerro, in addition to being exuberant, is also welcoming and liberal, wanting to be a cherished symbol of regeneration and progress for all citizens, even those who do not visit museums, but finance them with their taxes.[7] Thus Basque people not only celebrate their 'Guggy' for its photogenic architecture, but also for the new values that it stands for, combining cosmopolitanism with increasing local cultural attachment and social permeability.[8] In fact, it can be traversed with no need to buy entrance tickets, going from the main entrance through the museum shop to the riverside door. A precedent was set in Paris by the Pompidou Centre, conceived as a continuation of the plateau Beaubourg, whose inclined ramp guides our steps into the large lobby, fittingly called *Forum*. Similarly, transit spaces, balconies and other points of connection were paramount for Frank Gehry, both in Bilbao and in Seattle, where his concomitant project for the Experience Music Project would be another landmark of what he termed 'gateway buildings'.[9] *Muséologie de passage* is the French academic designation in museum studies for this structural arrangement, where visitors flow by forging their own wandering paths: an international trend reaching the apex with the ramps of Jean Nouvel's Musée du Quai Branly.[10] Indeed, Nouvel calculated gradients for that museum by the Seine in Paris much better than those designed by Gehry in Bilbao, where the stairs leading from the La Salve bridge to the restaurant door and riverside are too steep, while the museum main entrance is flanked on both sides by very gently sloping steps, which are so long that they can be unnerving because one tends to descend each and all with the same foot.

Hence protruding passages and interconnections at different heights became typical of postmodern museums, entwined with the respective urban milieu. In Helsinki, the Museum of Contemporary Art designed

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by architect Steven Holl, who named it *Kiasma*, the Danish word from the Greek χίασμα meaning crisscrossing, consists of an intertwined geometry of curved and straight lines with internal spiral stairs providing views of the urban context, which were celebrated worldwide when it opened in 1998. Similarly, Peter Cook and Colin Fournier's striking biomorphic building of the Kunsthaus Graz, inaugurated in 2003, established daring contrast with the typical Austrian houses in the old town, but also deferential panoramic interactions with the city from the Needle gallery. Another extrovert museum, created in 2003 by Zaha Hadid, would be the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, which features gently sloping stairs in the manner of an 'urban carpet' that zigzags from the sidewalk up to the atrium and onto the building's six floors. Many other highly influential North American examples followed suit, but the most acknowledged Bilbao-like emulator is perhaps the expansion of the Denver Art Museum because the director had been at the inauguration of Gehry's Guggenheim and asked Daniel Libeskind to connect the new Hamilton Building to the rest of the museum with a walkway that flies over the external esplanade offering views of very postmodern works of public art.[11] Bilbao also proved inspirational in Canada to Randall Stout, an associate architect and follower of Frank Gehry, who expanded the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton with a building of contorted shapes in shiny enamelled zinc that opens onto a new pedestrian area and the Sir Winston Churchill Square.[12] Similarly, Zaha Hadid's most famous museum project, the MAXXI in Rome, has also delimited a square open to the public (Fig. 2): a peaceful *piazzale* with benches to sit on while the museum 'is about movement inside, not rest'.[13] Akin architectural/urban strategies were adopted everywhere, including Central Europe, where new museums of contemporary art looking for the 'Bilbao effect' could not always emulate Gehry with striking buildings, but would often relate with the street and engage in a visual dialogue with it, as in Torun Centre for Contemporary Art inaugurated in 2008.[14]

In the meantime, urban entanglement also grew indoors. The turn of the millennium was a historical moment of triumph for what has come to be known as 'hysterical atria',[15] one of the greatest exponents of which would be the central atrium of the extension of the Hunter Museum of American Art opened in 2005 in Chattanooga, where architect Randall Stout, emulating the Bilbao precedent of his admired Frank Gehry, created a striking multifunctional lobby with flowery geometries that provides access to the auditorium, café/shop and exhibition halls by also allowing the passage of pedestrians to the river and gardens. Another very spectacular case is the large semicovered piazza designed by Mario Botta as the nucleus of his Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, inaugurated in 2002 near Corso Bettini, with public transit spaces. It seems as if every museum of the 21st century aspires to hold a covered agora! Good museums are even better if they open to the city *via* walkways and atriums to boost interconnectivity with their neighbourhood and to promote urban

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Fig. 02: Piazza of the MAXXI in Rome (Photo: Mika Stetsovski, Wikipedia)

permeability. Hopefully, as Robert R. Janes claimed in his book *Museums without Borders*, museums are becoming good conductors of citizen movements and their concerns.[16] Their architectures are "designed with the urban flaneur in mind", as Charles Saumarez Smith stated, referring as his favourite examples to the new Whitney Museum embracing the High Line in New York since 2015 and the 2016 expansion of the Tate Modern in London.[17] All the more important was symbolic urban connectivity in typically postmodern buildings of deconstructivist architecture, with their sculptural shapes protruding outwardly, such as the Pablo Serrano Aragonese Institute of Contemporary Art and Culture built in 2008-2011, whose windows on the north side mirrors offer stunning views of the bell towers of Saragossa, while the southern front faces the Caixaforum, which also features a balcony looking back at the IAACC (Fig. 3). Such visual interconnections that induce returned gazes are inspired by the northern terrace of Guggenheim Bilbao, where museum visitors can take photographs of the Nervión riverside and the crowd and, at the same time, would inevitably attract the attention and cameras of waterfront strollers. The same happens now at the Bilbao Museum of Fine Arts thanks to the viewing deck terraces added in 2025 by Norman Foster.

In parallel, even architects not at all identified with postmodern effusive rhetorics have followed similar trends by designing new museums that are more plastically and visually interconnected with their urban environment. Some cases of such are: the Museum of Modern Art built by Tadao Ando in Fort Worth (Texas), inaugurated in 2002, with views to/from the pond and the plaza, decorated with a huge steel sculpture by Richard Serra, followed by other outdoor artworks from the collection; the new headquarters of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston Harbor, designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and opened in 2006, with an overhanging structure and transparent glass walls by the waterfront. In Europe, a cele-

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brated instance is the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) inaugurated in 2011 in Antwerp, a ten-storey building in the old port. The city erected this block to house several museums whose different collections are interconnected by a so-called 'vertical boulevard' with glass walls affording spectacular views of the city. This public space can be accessed from 9:30 a.m. to midnight, much longer than usual museum opening hours, and is frequented by many residents who also take out of town visitors there.[18] A comparable case is the MuCEM in Marseille, inaugurated in 2013, with its impressive panoramas of the coastline and urban landscapes, not only from the box-like museum building, but also along the *passerelles* linking the quay to Fort Saint Jean or to the Saint Laurent church in the Le Panier district. Another stunning example is the Botín Centre in Santander, built by Renzo Piano between 2010 and 2017: the rear opens up and extends over the bay with a metal structure of public walkways called *pachinko,* while the front advances towards the park and city centre. The limits between architecture and urbanism seem quite blurred in the new civic spaces typical of what some museologists have called the 'connecting museum'.[19]

"It is no longer acceptable that the museum should be presented as a secluded sanctuary disconnected from the wider world", sentenced Charlotte Klonk, who added: "For this reason, many more art museums now have windows, so placed that the spectator can put his or her art experience into some kind of geographical context".[20] Windows, beyond their functional use for ventilation and lighting, have always held artistic significance in all types of constructions, including museums, but modernist architecture often preferred mirrored glass façades and windowless 'white cube' galleries inside. Yet most austere cube-like museums are now keen on establishing visual interrelations with the surrounding urban district, as in the case of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, inaugurated in 2001 with strategically located holes peering towards Cologne Cathedral and other heritage attractions. Even New York's MoMA, which used to be the paradigm of the enclosed 'white cube' museography, has now some rooms employed to house the permanent collection with windows allowing urban views, a novelty gradually developed there since Yoshio Taniguchi's penultimate expansion carried out in 2004. Furthermore, external views of Lake Michigan can be enjoyed at the Milwaukee Art Museum from the pavilion and walkway designed by

Fig. 03:
South façade of the CAACC in Saragossa (Photo: J. Pedro Lorente)

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Santiago Calatrava, and from the new expansion created by local architect James Shields, also allowing reciprocal views of the interior from outside (Fig. 4). Such double visual exposure becomes very significant at the Acropolis Museum in Athens, designed by Swiss-American architect Bernard Tschumi and his Greek partner Mijalis Fotiadis. Their arty edifice provides beautiful views of the surrounding archaeological complex while, on the other hand and seen from the city, this 'site museum' also acts as a beacon of light and a showcase by displaying since 2009 its treasures to the outside world, as well as its flagrant gaps of great symbolism, to support the call for the return of the Parthenon marbles kept in the British Museum. More than an artistic choice, architectural transparency has generally become a political metaphor for public-minded institutions. Not surprisingly, museum buildings are often eager to demonstrate 'openness', which is a key concept for Renzo Piano,[21] proven at the Whitney Museum of American Art with its huge glassed façade engaging with the Meatpacking District in New York since 2015, or the Istanbul Modern Museum over the banks of the Bosporus since 2023. Similarly, the Museum of Contemporary Visual Culture (M+) in Hong Kong by Herzog & de Meuron and Farrells, inaugurated in 2023, has some transparent galleries towards the West Kowloon waterfront.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's M+ that faces the harbour with impressive moving-image screens shows that, in addition to being architecturally iconic, a museum front can present arts on its external face. Just as the visage is the mirror of the soul, a museum façade also reflects its museological spirit: contemporary art museums are no longer restrained containers of unwavering principles; hence little or nothing remains of the hermeticism that characterised the modern idea of the museum as a neutral box.

The quintessence of it is Guggenheim Bilbao, whose external walls are used as backdrop for emblematic sculptures and technologically experimental art interventions. Re-

Fig. 04: Windows of the Milwaukee Art Museum, with urban vistas and reciprocal views of the interior.

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markably during Jenny Holzer's solo exhibition in 2019, texts in Basque, Spanish and English were projected onto the façade, which was the origin of her augmented reality work *Like Beauty in Flames*, permanently visible since 2021 inside and outside the museum through a mobile phone application. Meanwhile, technological experimentalism has become commonplace in the latest generation of art museums all over the world. Rather than serving as mere support for artworks, their outer skins now function as the media used to produce them. A pioneering instance was the Zentrum für Kunst und Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, proudly engaging with technological art, both inside the building and through a large transparent cube added in front of its façade, situated in the Human Rights Square. Another media façade was installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, as well as many artworks playfully interacting with the museum interior, in particular Carsten Höller's *Double Slide*, transporting riders from the 3rd floor to the outside. In Spain, the most notable case is the Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía (C3A) in Córdoba, which opened in 2016 with a large multimedia wall, for which visual artists were commissioned moving images, visible every night from the other side of the Guadalquivir River, while in daylight, arabesque-inspired cells and windows pierce this vast façade.

By the way, such homages to household idiosyncrasies are frequently added to museums façades now that former modernist cultural homogeneity is being substituted by particular features honouring local distinctiveness. When Guggenheim Bilbao bought a monumental version of Jeff Koons' *Tulips* for five million dollars, it was conspicuously installed in 2007 on the north-side main terrace, where its bright colours contrasted with the titanium coating. A steel sculpture by Richard Serra, *Plow*, was also added the following year to the eastern front, facing the Abandoibarra Avenue, on another balcony where a work by Chillida had been temporally on show. Understandably, criticism was voiced by local artists and nationalist opinion makers, whose mental association of rusty Corten steel with the Basque metallurgical industry were closely linked with autochthonous sculptors.[22] Complaints of colonialism from those considering Guggenheim a bridgehead for US cultural dominance had always been serious reproof.[23] Thus in 2022, the museum replaced Koons' monumental bunch of Dutch flowers with two large works by Eduardo Chillida *Aholkua espazioari V* [Advice to Space V] and *Besarkada XI* [Embrace XI] (Fig. 5). Analogous art additions, highlighting local traits, are actually gaining significance on museum façades throughout the world. Documented instances abound in, for example, Australia, where the affirmation of plural identities and cultures is a patriotic priority by paying particular attention to native heritage. This emphasis is reflected in the commissioning of artworks with indigenous symbolism to adorn the most emblematic buildings of power and culture. The Monash University Museum of Art in Melbourne is installed in a converted modernist building completed in 2010 with an art installation by Callum Morton covering its façade, conceived as a ceremonial welcome to the MUMA.

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Similarly, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney sought distinctive renovation and its purpose-built extension was adorned by local artist Brook Andrew, of Wiradjuri background, with an installation entitled *Warrang*, the Aboriginal name of this port city.

As a culmination, let's consider how emblematic art pieces from a museum collection placed outside its building are also adding identity reinforcement in many ways. Surprisingly enough, the intervention commissioned by Guggenheim Bilbao from conceptual artist Daniel Buren to ornate the neighbouring La Salve bridge in 2007 immediately won popular estimation because its white and red colours –chosen by a voluntary response poll– match those of the local football club. Everybody also seems to admire, for whatever reasons, Louise Bourgeois' *Maman*, the colossal spider whose iconic figure is a prevalent background for selfies and a best-seller souvenir in shops or stalls. Such is its popularity that further versions of this gigantic arthropod have been purchased by different museums, and some have also placed them by the respective entrance; e.g., the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, the Samsung Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC or the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Nothing new under the sun here seeing that the early history of museums was already marked by a recurring type of eminent monuments in threshold areas. Modernist architects imagined museums in quite retreated isolation, often surrounded by enclosed sculpture gardens, described by Marcel Breuer as buffer zones, withdrawn from traffic hustle: his secluded terrace at the Whitney Museum entrance was separated from the street by a 'moat'. Derivative inheritances of such modern enclosures are the not-to-be-stepped-on greens and water ponds, dully ornated with sculptures, around Guggenheim Bilbao. Beyond them however, in well-trotted areas much frequented by passersby, the museum literally cultivates the arts by regularly changing the 40,000 flowering plants of Jeff

Fig. 04: Rear portico of the Guggenheim Bilbao publicly enshrining collection highlights (Photo: J. Pedro Lorente)

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Koon's *Puppy*, another iconic sculpture well loved by tourists and local people, who pose in front for photographs with family and friends. In surrounding streets, everyone can find a museum piece to their liking, strategically placed to attract public attention with enticing iconographies, style and material, or immateriality, in the case of Fujiko Nakaya's mysterious fog activated every hour and the fire fountains by French artist Ives Klein lighted at nightfall. You can be in Bilbao and decide not to enter the Guggenheim, but you will not miss the chance to see around its building the conspicuous appetizer to the cultural banquet served indoors. All in all, this very variegated assortment of artworks scattered outside the museum walls constitutes a visual lure and a wonderful strategy of audience development for contemporary art, which is now adopted everywhere, starting at the surrounding waterfront.

In public places near the Guggenheim, monumental sculptures and ´perimuseal' heritage have proliferated, installed by private and public initiatives, particularly along the 'Paseo de la Memoria' [Memory Walk], which spreads 3 km down the estuary.[24] Besides, not only has the Itsasmuseum placed some maritime materials in public spaces, but also a sculpture by Jesús Lizaso entitled *Ozeanoaren Sustraiak* [Ocean roots], made in 2010. Further artworks surround the Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao, increasingly conscious of its thresholds and outer spaces, after its glamorous architectonic 2025 extension, designed by Norman Foster and Luis María Uriarte. Moreover, much to Gehry's concern, who would have preferred to keep the rusty industrial ruins in the surroundings, striking new buildings have sprung up around it, from the Euskalduna Auditorium by Federico Soriano and Dolores Palacios to the Iberdrola Tower by Cesar Pelli, plus some hotels and establishments designed by starchitects in adjacent streets. Prof. Iñaki Esteban diagnosed here a 'logic of ornament', which assumes that embellishing an emblematic area will boost beauty around it.[25] This

Fig. 06:
The Albert Dock in Liverprool (Photo: Mika Stetsovski, Wikipedia).

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notion could somehow act as the reverse of the 'broken windows theory' posited by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling: just as misdeeds spread, the cultivation of beauty might, through aesthetic empathy, foster an atmosphere of civility. Thus Guggenheim Bilbao has not only been the museographical epitome of iconic architectural and sculptural urban entanglement, but its 'effect' has created a booming cultural district by the Nervión estuary, where there were once shipyards and other manufacturing facilities.

2: The 'museum effect' and other curatorial idiosyncrasies of the Bilbao era.

Port cities around the globe compete to make their waterfronts uniquely attractive to citizens and visitors. The North American model of transforming degraded port areas into cultural, recreational and commercial hubs has been replicated worldwide. Such a strategy typically includes some kinds of museums, aquariums, planetariums and other facilities alongside offices, hotels, shops, cafés and restaurants. This formula has been successfully applied at various sites, such as the docks of Boston Harbor, New York's South Street Seaport, Pittsburgh's riverfront, Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco Bay, Chicago's North Pier, Boston's Quincy Market and the Inner Harbor of Baltimore.[26] Following these examples, cultural and recreational uses have brought new life in Europe to the ports of Malmö, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Liverpool, Bordeaux, Porto, Marseille, Genoa, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, etc. (Fig. 6). One particularly spectacular case is Barcelona, which underwent significant transformation in preparation for the 1992 Olympics. This period saw extensive investments and monumental public art commissions, especially along the maritime coastline. The urban renewal strategy, championed by Mayor Pasqual Maragall, who had previously been a visiting professor at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, was inspired by the North American model. Its influence is evident in the Maremagnum aquarium and shopping centre opened in 1995 in the old port, where the museum of History of Catalonia was inaugurated the following year in a port warehouse. Hence exploiting the popularity of Gaudí and other cultural assets, Barcelona became the trendiest tourist destination among European ports for large cruise ships, but also a favourite choice for fairs and conferences. This accelerated the redevelopment of Poblenou, a former manufacturing district rebaptised in 2000 as *22@Barcelona Districte de la innovació*, where the Universal Forum of Cultures took place in 2004, leading to the construction of a gigantic convention centre and several museums at the mouth of the Besós river.

Another example of this global trend, also mirroring the American model, would be the regeneration of the Nervión estuary, where the Guggenheim Museum became the catalyst of a cultural hub. This new area is called Abandoibarra, which in Basque means riverside of Abando, the latter being once a township assimilated as a homonymous district of Bilbao. In the 20th century, Abando became the economic and commercial heart of the city, now expanded

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to the riverbanks and beyond. In Spain, as in Britain, city-branding strategies tend to use different urban terminologies by distinguishing, on the one hand, pre-existing quarters with historical heritage and perhaps a trade concentration resonant with older medieval times, specialised in particular crafts, cultural or ethnic activities, as distinct from new adjoining districts, which are characterised, on the other hand, by state-of-the-art infrastructures, amenities and cultural facilities like theatres, museums or other leisure 'attractions'.[27]

The latter is obviously the case of Abandoibarra, a regenerated waterfront, where little remains of its past activities. Other ports have more carefully preserved some remnants of industrial heritage, such as chimneys, old pipes, pieces of cranes and anchors as public ornaments along coastal promenades, sometimes converted into museums and tourist attractions. While some view these old heritage relics as Proustian mementoes, others perceive them as mere stage props in an urban 'theme park' setting. In any case, only a single port crane named Carola has survived in Bilbao, now a protected monument, and serves as a visual lure to the Maritime Museum, Itsasmuseum, inaugurated in 2003 in the old Euskalduna shipyard premises. This museum displays many other outdoor exhibits, although none as large as the colossal anchors that hold a place of honour in the docks of Baltimore and Barcelona. The term 'anchor' is, by the way, a recurrent metaphor in many texts on urban revitalisation, while other nautical tropes are also commonly used to describe cultural facilities on waterfronts: e.g. Guggenheim Bilbao is usually considered the 'flagship' project in the renewal of the whole conurbation, while the architecture of the Euskalduna Conference Centre, erected at the nearby site of the old shipyard, is said to evoke the shape of a boat.[28]

The pairing of art and maritime museums with a convention centre, plus other amenities, might remind us of tourist attractions in old ports, such as the docks of Liverpool and the nearby zone of former warehouses that became the Creative Quarter. Yet urban speculation, based on quick real-estate profits, has eliminated not only such buildings in Bilbao, but also the creative people who were reusing them. Artists-run alternative art spaces were thriving around 1995 in numbers 35 and 29 of Alameda Mazarredo by revitalising old industrial buildings on the left River Nervión bank and many more down Deusto, especially in Zorrotzaurre.[29] Few artists can now afford to have their dwelling or studios in the Abandoibarra area, where a more noticeable presence of the 'creative class' would be, according to Richard Florida's theory, a luring asset of attraction. Nevertheless, apart from peculiar-looking people, eye-catching buildings and arty entourages could be cleverly used as a marketing strategy by entrepreneurs and city councils spreading colourful murals, street lamps and signposts, which happened in Birmingham to foster Digbeth as a Creative Quarter or in Leicester with St. George's Cultural Quarter.[30] To be identified and 'labelled' is indeed crucial, according to Hilary Anne Frost-Kumpf: "A cultural district is a well-recognized, labelled, mixed-use area of a city in which a high concentration of cul-

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tural facilities serves as the anchor of attraction".[31] Therefore, the first detectable evidence to take into account is explicit designation, which must be publicly stated, whether in municipal ordinances and/or in urban signage, and even on websites promoting tourism or cultural dissemination. This was accomplished by the agencies in charge of regenerating the Nervion waterfront, which coined the designation Abandoibarra and distributed street signs pointing directions to museums and other cultural venues (Fig. 7).

One swallow does not make a summer and a vibrant cultural district requires more than a single museum. Even a triangle of excellent institutions, such as the Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao, the Guggenheim and Itsasmuseum, could have been too constrained in urban scope and activity terms. In his famous book *The Image of the City*, social urbanist Kevin Lynch railed against precincts exclusively dedicated to self-absorbed cultural consumption.[32] In contrast to the monofunctionality of such arts complexes American cities developed mixed-use cultural districts, where people could stay, meet, shop, eat and drink round the clock. In 1978, a lively New York neighbourhood devised a local festival with the label 'Museum Mile', which the city would officially use henceforth to mark the area on Fifth Avenue between 82nd and 105th Streets, home of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and many other amenities, shops or services. In Europe, a trend-setting case was established in Frankfurt with its Museumsufer [museum shore] created in the 1980s with thirteen museums integrated into the urban fabric along the Main River. Another notable example is Vienna's Museumsquartier, inaugurated in 2001 next to the Museums of Art History and Natural History, in the former court stables, with the Kunsthalle, the Leopold Museum and the Museum Moderner Kunst, as well as shops, offices and galleries and artists' studios. Other cities switched to this scheme. For example, Amsterdam which had the traditional

Fig. 07: Street signs in the Bilbao district of Abandoibarra, pointing to the Guggenheima and other museums.

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Museumplein, but opted for a post-modern mixed-use complex at Blauwe Museumplein in the port area of Oosterdok. Similarly, Barcelona had the cultural acropolis of Montjuic, but the latest arts scene is now bustling around the MACBA and the Centre for Contemporary Culture in the Raval neighbourhood, or in the area of Calle Montcada with the Picasso Museum, the European Museum of Modern Art and the MoCo, alongside vivacious art spaces, shops and bars and street art. Similarly, the vibrant ecosystem of Abandoibarra is made out of a mixture of museums, conference/concert halls, university venues, shopping areas, hotels and other amenities, including public art.

Regarding the latter point, what makes Abandoibarra a special case is the fact that every item of the Guggenheim Bilbao art collection installed in public places has a museum label detailing *in situ* the title and author, and also adding QR codes for further information available on the museum website. Similarly, both Itsasmuseum and the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum have placed cherished treasures outdoors with their respective museum labels. Furthermore, standard signage accompanies every single artwork in the so-called 'Paseo de la Memoria', landmarked with sculptures by Anthony Caro, Chillida, Dalí, Garraza, Lüpertz, Rückriem, Tücker and Zugasti, whose authors and titles are detailed on respective labels (Fig. 8). Analogously, such information is provided for other public art installations clustered on this waterfront. The resulting assortment could be called 'perimuseal' because of its location around museums, but also 'paramuseal' due to museum-like identification labels: however concise, they serve a crucial social function, especially regarding some conceptual pieces, which uninitiated passersby may otherwise not remark as art. This could be considered another version of the so-called 'museum effect', an expression academically used referring to the conceptual transmutation of objects that, detached from their original function and context, are in the museum perceived merely as works

Fig. 08: Conceptual sculpture in 'Paseo de la Memoria', with museum-like label identifying is an artwork made in 2002 by José Zugasti with the title: A la deriva (Photo: J. Pedro Lorente).

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of art.[33] In the same way, thanks to sprawling curatorial policies like these para-museal labels, Abandoibarra is being transmuted into a distinguished cultural landscape.[34] Definitely, the human hustle and bustle inside and around Guggenheim Bilbao are characteristic of a museum-like social space. Inspired by the nomenclature of postmodern geographer Edward Soja, who made famous the term 'third space', as differentiated from home –the 'first space'– and the workplace –the 'second space'–, other geographers and sociologists consider a third category for some public spaces frequented by regular users: café gatherings or social clubs, temples where a community of parishioners regularly meets for worship or other regular points of socialisation between neighbours/acquaintances in squares and parks. Yet it can also be considered in and around great museums a 'fourth space' in which all sorts of people, who may not know one another, can mingle without feeling threatened or uncomfortable.[35]

Great museums are indeed catalysts of arts-led vitalisation to boost urban areas, often located on waterfronts. Although other remote historical precedents can be cited, it might be argued that the openings of the Tate Liverpool in 1988 and Guggenheim Bilbao in 1997 marked a turning point in the spread of national and international branches. In the case of private North American foundations, the comparison to the franchises of large brands of global capitalism, such as McDonald's, sparked controversy –inspiring the sarcastic nickname 'McGuggenheim'.[36] Thomas Krens' favourite counter-argument was that the McDonald's sign, package and menu are identical anywhere, while every Guggenheim branch has a peculiar identity. Guggenheim Bilbao has set the standards for this idiosyncrasy by combining cosmopolitan character with Basque traits so as to counter accusations of cultural imperialism. Having learned this lesson, international trends in international museum developments have followed suit.[37] French cultural diplomacy took the cue, firstly with the Rodin

Fig. 09: Pompidou Centre in Málaga, with intervention by Daniel Buren and sculptures by local artists around (Photo: J. Pedro Lorente).

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Museum branch, opened since 2009 by the port of Salvador de Bahía, with 62 statues by the French sculptor, although many other works by Brazilian and Latin American artists are also on show. This was followed in 2015 by the brand of the Pompidou Centre opened in the docks of Málaga showcasing blockbuster exhibitions exported from Paris, but with tactful selections regularly featuring contemporary Spanish art (Fig. 9). Then the diplomatic ideal of 'French universalism' was hailed for the Louvre Abu Dhabi, inaugurated in a huge building by French architect Jean Nouvel with an impressive sample of some 300 works lent by French national museums in 2017, then incremented by abundant acquisitions paid for by Abu Dhabi through its Tourism Development & Investment Company.[38] The same happens with Guggenheim Abu Dhabi designed by Frank Gehry, in a similar architectural style to that in Bilbao, but three times larger, which is also shaping its own collection with a singular profile: signature pieces by established Western artists will be combined with post-1965 contemporary art from the Middle East.[39] Eventually, the pearl in the museum crown of Saadiyat Island will be the Zayed National Museum, dedicated to recount the history and development of that emirate, with advice from the British Museum.[40] Even more on the defensive against any hint of colonialist dependence are the Hong Kong authorities, although they intend to recreate the 'Bilbao effect' on a grand scale with seventeen cultural institutions clustered in a large park reclaimed from the sea, according to an ambitious project by Norman Foster on the West Kowloon peninsula.[41] China keeps at arm's length all partnerships with great Western museums in urban regeneration policies by not allowing direct managerial dependence: British collaboration has been regular at the V&A in Shenzhen, but its administration is the responsibility of a Design Society instituted within the Shekou Harbor regeneration framework, where the institution has been open to the public since 2020 on the ground floor of the new Sea World Culture and Arts Center, a mixed-use building whose six floors are filled with restaurants, luxury shops, apartments, etc.[42]

All over the world, cultural policies of territorial museum expansion encourage arts-led urban regeneration with 'situated' curatorial policies. Instead of spontaneous urban boosting from the bottom-up, the 'Bilbao era' consecrated top-down art policies of cultural branding, implemented by political powers hand in hand with urban developers. It remains to be seen whether the proposed territorial expansion of Guggenheim Bilbao in the Biosphere Reserve of the Urdaibai estuary will mark a different model, an epitome of a 'post-Bilbao era'.

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Endnotes

1 Rose 2024, pp. 26-27.
2 McClellan 2008, p. 98; Marshall 2012, p. 45.
3 Gómez, Juan, Lorente 2022.
4 Newhouse 1998.
5 Giebelhausen 2003, p. 9.
6 Sklair 2017.
7 Del Cerro Santamaría 2020.
8 Plaza, Tironi, Haarich 2009; Moya Valgañón 2015; Caso, 2022.
9 Gehry 1999, pp. 176, 187.
10 Mairesse 2015, pp. 366- 369.
11 Lindsay 2016, p. 102.
12 Uffelen 2010, p. 28.
13 Lindsay 2016, p. 250.
14 Jagodzinska 2011; 2018.
15 Skellon, Tunstall 2018.
16 Janes 2015, pp. 325, 330.
17 Saumarez Smith, 2021, pp. 183, 189.
18 Lindsay 2016, pp. 214, 220-221.
19 Stuedahl 2015.
20 Klonk, 2009, p. 206.
21 Rose 2024, p. 235.
22 Aguirre 2011, p. 183.
23 McNeill 2000.
24 Lorente, Juan 2023.
25 Esteban 2007.
26 Bonillo, Donzel, Fabre 1992; Brownill 2013.
27 Evans 2015.
28 Marshall 2001.
29 Aramburu 2023, pp. 260-267.
30 García Carrizo 2023.
31 Frost-Kumpf 1998, p. 7.
32 Lynch 1960.
33 Alpers 1991, pp. 26-7; Poulot, 2022.
34 Lorente 2024.
35 Kirschberg 2010; Jagodzinska 2018; Saumarez Smith 2021, pp. 183, 189.
36 McNeil 2000; Zulaika 2003, p. 109.
37 Grincheva 2020a.
38 Grincheva 2020b.

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39 Ersoy 2010; McClellan 2012.

40 Doherty 2012.

41 Lam 2019.

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Repairing Canadian art museum collections with equity, diversity and inclusion

Nada Guzin Lukic

Keywords:
Equity, diversity, inclusion, EDI, policies, collection, repair, crise, Canada.

ABSTRACT:

In Canada, museums play an important role in recognizing cultural pluralism through the implementation of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles. How does the recent development and impact of EDI on museum approaches contribute to redressing inequality and exclusion? Issues of identity and social representation challenge collection development policies, acquisition, documentation, discourse, and exhibition practices. The study reveals shifts and ruptures in museum perspectives on diversity, as well as new practices related to collections. This article highlights policies over the past decade and museum practices of EDI in the context of crisis and the reparative turn.

In Canada, i musei svolgono un ruolo importante nel riconoscere il pluralismo culturale attraverso l'applicazione dei principi di equità, diversità e inclusione (EDI). In che modo lo sviluppo recente e l'impatto degli EDI sugli approcci museali contribuiscono a correggere le disuguaglianze e l'esclusione? Le questioni legate all'identità e alla rappresentazione sociale mettono in discussione le politiche di sviluppo delle collezioni, l'acquisizione, la documentazione, il discorso e le pratiche espositive. Lo studio rivela cambiamenti e rotture nelle prospettive museali sulla diversità, oltre a nuove pratiche legate alle collezioni. Questo articolo mette in evidenza le politiche adottate nell'ultimo decennio e le pratiche museali degli EDI nel contesto della crisi e della svolta riparativa.

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Museums are called upon to use their resources and collections to repair the injustices of the past and the inequalities of the present. The inclusion of those forgotten by museums, the repairing of hurtful terms, and the adoption of new collection practices to remedy contemporary exclusions and injustices are fundamental aspects of the museum's commitment. There have been a number of developments in the promotion of diversity and equity in Canadian museums, the most recent coinciding with the health crisis and a heightened awareness of the social and environmental issues arising from it. The evolution of museums is currently marked, on the one hand, by challenges related to diversity and, on the other, by those related to the environment. In Canada, these challenges are accentuated by growing public and museum awareness of justice and inequality following the various social issues: Black Lives Matter[1] (2013 and 2020) and Me Too (2017) movements, and by the discovery of unidentified graves at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia in 2021 and the COVID-19 health crisis (2020 and 2022).

The relationship between the crisis and the museums' engagement has been explored by several authors,[2] the new social role of reparation in the face of violence[3] and the resilience of museums in the face of crisis[4] are among the most recent studies. The reparative turn in museology refers to a set of activities and approaches that illustrate the aspiration to repair and restore through the museum.

> *"The reparative turn as we understand it here loosely gathers together a series of interlocking themes and questions in current museological theory and practice, including restorative justice, healing and wellbeing, restitution and repatriation, decolonization in its many forms, and the demand for more caring institutions."*[5]

In Canada, the museum plays an essential role in the symbolic recognition and representation of cultural pluralism. Diversity policies have evolved significantly since the adoption of multiculturalism[6] in 1972 and through the 1990s, 2000s, and 2020s. The principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in museums are consistent with values such as accessibility, justice, decolonization, and eco-responsibility. This leads to transformation within collections and the emergence of a new vocabulary manifested in the way objects are approached, acquired, and described. This raises the following question: how do the EDI approaches and practices adopted by Canadian museums reflect the new social ambitions of these cultural institutions? How do these practices fit in with the museums' reparative turn?

The social role of the museum are reaffirmed, as evidenced by the recent definition adopted by ICOM in 2022, which incorporates the notion of inclusion, diversity and sustainability[7] and, consequently, that of repair. If we follow this logic, the idea of the repairing museum would stem from a global point of view

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of a state of the world in crisis that requires commitment and concrete action. This situation contributes in part to the acceptance of the idea that the museum can play a role in repairing society. Although this notion is not new—claims for a museum committed to the development of society date back to the 1970s—it now seems to enjoy a broader consensus.

From this perspective, this study examines the impact of the EDI principles, which aim to compensate for inequalities of an ideological, physical, or cultural nature. Social representativeness, according to EDI criteria, challenges collection development policies as well as acquisition and documentation methods. To remedy the lack of minority representation in their collections, museums engage in societal acquisitions. The new terminology associated with EDI is influencing museum discourse as well as reparative description within collections.[8] The analysis of policies allows us to understand the orientations and values of museums, as well as their alignment with cultural and governmental policies. This article highlights EDI museum policies and activities over the past decade for understanding current museum practices and emerging trends of reparative turn.[9]

The first part of this article presents our perspective on the reparative turn in relation to the crisis. One of the engagements of museums is to guarantee accessibility and promote the inclusion of the diversity of the citizens they are there to serve. How do museum EDI policies affect museums, particularly art museums? A brief literature review on this topic, as well as on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (EDI), is followed by an analysis of museum policies between 2018-2024, focusing on acquisition, recognition policies and representation of diversity. Examples of repair strategies for reverses, the underrepresentation of minority groups through social acquisition, and the repair of descriptions, catalogues, or labels illustrate the actual actions museums undertake on EDI issues in Canada.

Museum mobilization in times of crisis

The crisis is described as systemic, simultaneous, permanent, as well as a polycrisis[10] based on its interactions. Janes[11] examines the phenomenon of societal collapse and considers the potential role of museums in reimagining a new society. The crisis calls for action, reflection, and engagement.[12] In this context, the museum appears to be a restorative space, both materially and symbolically. The global polycrisis is prompting a search for solutions, particularly within cultural institutions. According to a report by the Canadian Museums Association, “Recent socio-political, economic, public health, and environmental crises worldwide have exposed systemic shortcomings in government and private-sector efforts to foster a representative, just, and equitable society”.[13] Historically, mobilization is more important in times of crisis. Thus, after the Second World War, the search for solutions led to the introduction of heritage preservation policies, the creation of ICOM in 1946 to support the museum sector, and initiatives aimed not only at restoring destroyed or damaged

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heritage but also at contributing to the creation of a better society. In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, was subsequently enriched by the right to education and culture. The *Canadian Human Rights Act* was adopted in 1977. Human rights give rise to constant debate, as well as institutions dedicated to their study and promotion. Since its creation in 2014, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg has generated criticism and controversy, particularly with regard to its location, the representation of Indigenous Peoples[14] and the way it deals with the Holocaust. Since then, it has continued to evolve according to its guiding principles: "be sustainable, relevant and engage". [15] Like many institutions in Canada since the 2020s, the museum created a new position in 2021: Director of Equity and Strategic Initiatives.

Social, cultural, and environmental issues are increasingly interdependent. Sustainable development, as defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report[16], aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is based on the principles of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Social sustainability aims to promote equity, inclusion, and justice in order to contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities. The inclusion of the cultural dimension of sustainable development in 2010 underlines the importance of culture in the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly with regard to education, heritage preservation, and cultural creation and diversity. The most recent ICOM definition, dating from 2022, encompasses identical principles: inclusion, diversity, and sustainability. The Société des musées du Québec (SMQ) advocates the expression *ecological transition*, which implies rethinking our ways of consuming, producing, working, and living together.[17] This new approach, which integrates social and environmental issues, aims at transforming society and has recently manifested itself in museum discourse. Indeed, the new sustainable development policies for the 2022-2024 period integrate dimensions of social and cultural responsibility, social equity, and solidarity, including diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization within several museum institutions, such as the McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec (MNBAQ).[18] The MNBAQ, for example, states: "We see this enhancement as cross-cutting and integrated across our various sectors of activity". It remains to be seen how these new policies will be implemented through specific measures aimed at ensuring the representativeness of diversity within collections and exhibitions.

Evolution of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues in Canadian art museums

Diversity policies in Canada were inspired by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the multiculturalism policy implemented in the 1970s. In the 1990s, a number of initiatives were put in place to support marginalized groups. However, EDI policies have gained in importance in recent years, particularly through public sector research

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initiatives. According to the Guide for Best Practices in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Research Practice and Design, which has spread to universities and museum institutions:

> *"Equity is defined as the removal of systemic barriers (e.g., unconscious bias, discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc.), enabling all individuals to have equitable opportunity to access and benefit from the program; diversity is about the variety of unique dimensions, identities, qualities and characteristics individuals possess along with other identity factors; and inclusion is defined as the practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are supported equitably in a culturally safe environment."*[19]

Several pieces of legislation, such as the *Employment Equity Act*,[20] support these policies, which have had an impact on recent hirings of people from diverse and Indigenous communities within museums and on the creation of new EDI positions. These general policies Museums interpret them according to their context, using a varied vocabulary and targeting individuals or groups according to equally heterogeneous criteria are gradually being incorporated into cultural institutions and museum policies.

Studies on EDI in cultural institutions, approached from different angles, examine organizational dynamics[21] as well as their evolution and limitations, especially the "persistent lack of diversity in museums".[22] The critical examination of these practices evokes a sometimes meaningless discourse that is not accompanied by concrete changes[23]. The term tokenism refers to superficial diversity in the absence of systemic change within an institutional culture.[24] The issue of symbolic inclusion of individuals within institutions without real inclusion or recognition, particularly in relation to women and ethnic minorities reinforces exclusion.

The requirement to represent minorities and diversity is based on the principles of social justice, initially founded on the postulates of human and cultural rights. In this context, representation is a form of recognition of marginalized or oppressed groups. According to Nancy Fraser, "collective identity replaces class interests as the locus of political mobilisation, and the fundamental injustice is no longer exploitation but cultural domination".[25] Museums have contributed to cultural domination, particularly in terms of misrepresentation and the invisibilization of certain individuals or groups.

Our research into the vocabulary of EDI in the museum policies of Canadian art museums has revealed a rapid evolution in its use, as well as an expansion into other concepts such as accessibility and indigenisation. The analysis of the collection management policies and strategic plans of a sample of ten Canadian art museums revealed a great diversity in the use of terms and highlighted the inequities that need to

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be corrected. The diversity of terminology revealed the values, priorities, and causes that each museum chooses to defend. In addition to the concepts of EDI that are commonly invoked, accessibility is also widely recognised. Four museums include themes of anti-racism and visible minorities, while only three out of ten museums address gender diversity and related approaches, such as intersectionality[26] and the systemic approach. The representation of diversity appears to be the aim of these policies. However, the notion of diversity is generally not clearly defined. What identity can be recognised? What criteria should be used to make this determination? Which underrepresented groups or individuals should museums prioritise in their initiatives?

Examining the politics of recognition within a single state forms the basis of the critique of multiculturalism and its limits.[27] The notion of complexity, which stems from multidimensional and dynamic diversity, particularly that resulting from migration, clashes with the rigid categories of identity. According to Steven Vertovec,[28] the notion of superdiversity is not limited to a single identity. These plural identities go beyond the classification categories of art museums, particularly when it comes to artists of immigrant origin. The intersectional perspective adopted by some museums in Canada and the United States seeks to transcend and interconnect various dimensions of social identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality, citizenship, and religion. In its literal sense, this term refers to the intersection of identities and is used in the social sciences. However, the concept developed by Kimberly Crenshaw as part of feminist research in the 1990s establishes a link between the elements that influence the construction of identities and the mechanisms of discrimination and domination faced by minorities. Conceived as a tool for the critical analysis of power dynamics within a society, it is concerned with challenging traditional conceptions of the neutral and universal museum, which tends to obscure the plural narratives relating to objects, their provenance, their use, and the individuals who created them. This term has recently appeared in the discourse of museum associations and in museum policies. In 2023, the Canadian Museum Association (CMA) published a report on workplace diversity in museums.[29] This quantitative study was inspired by a similar study carried out in the United States by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Mellon Foundation, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The report aimed to assess the 'representativeness and inclusion' within the collections and the people who work in them. The survey was conducted from an intersectional perspective: "By transcending frameworks based on race or gender, an intersectional lens enables museums to develop policies that take into account the relative power of the people who work within these heritage sector institutions in all aspects of their identity". It aims to highlight the fluidity and social construction and intersectionality of identity categories such as race, gender, and class, with other dimensions such as "indigenousness, ability, sexuality, gender expression, immigration status and religion. This will enable the sector

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to develop policies that will undermine or even eliminate systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism and heterosexism".[30]

The representation of diversity is a complex challenge for museums, which are obliged to adapt their policies and practices to take account of these underrepresented categories. EDI approaches are transforming museums by encompassing the entire process, from acquisition, description, and documentation in databases to interpretation and exhibition. The transformations involve revising the discourse on objects, modifying the criteria for acquiring works to reflect diversity within art museums, and changing terminology to represent plural identities.

Repairing the discourse on objects and artists

Canadian museums have undertaken the most important change in the way they preserve and interpret the objects and heritage of Indigenous Peoples. This shift in thinking began in the late 1980s in the context of the struggles for Indigenous rights and manifested itself notably in the media coverage of the boycott of the exhibition *Spirit Sings: Artistic Tradition of Canada's First Peoples*, which was presented at the Glenbow Museum by the Lubicon Lake Cree First Nation. Nevertheless, the transformation of museums accelerated significantly after 2015, following the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and Call to Action 67 on museums.[31] The CMA responded to this call by undertaking a national review of museum policies in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007 and ratified by Canada in 2021. The CMA report, published in 2022, makes a number of recommendations. For example, in order to support the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples: "Ensure the proper use of terminology, including names for nations, communities, clans, families, and place names, throughout museum spaces, as well as archives and collections, as discussed in the Repatriation and Collections section. Use appropriate orthography or syllabics".[32]

Museums are currently working to remedy a considerable backlog in the management of Indigenous collections and objects. However, it is clear that the relationship between museums and Indigenous communities has undergone a significant transformation since reconciliation and decolonisation approaches. The Winnipeg Art Gallery was the first to implement the "Artworks Renaming Initiative". The project began in 2019 with the identification of colonial titles or *culturally inappropriate*[33] with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and language keepers who renamed a work. Indigenous self-determination and self-representation and renaming initiatives are now commonplace in Canadian museums, whereas 15 years ago the situation in art museums was fundamentally different.[34] One of the first museum exhibitions to tackle this issue of self-representation is *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, October 31, 2008 - March 22, 2009. A collaborative project, curated by Steven Loft, a Mohawk curator, and Andrea Kunard, a non-native curator. The exhibition presents

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portraits by twelve First Nation and Métis artists. '... Steeling the Gaze is about using portraiture—a European convention that controls the subject—to explode Aboriginal stereotypes and clichés".[35] That colonial representation has been so radically challenged at the National Gallery of Canada. The self-determination of Indigenous artists was presented notably in the labels. The curators asked the artists how they wanted to be presented.[36] This exhibition is an indicator of the changes to come in this field. In fact, Several important exhibitions at this institution have marked the evolution of Indigenous Art in Canadian museums: the first major exhibition, entitled *Land, Spirit, Power: The First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* in 1992, Sakahàn International Indigenous Art, presented in 2013 followed by Àbadakone in 2019. [37] *Steeling the Gaze*, on the other hand, illustrates the shift on identity discourse, highlighting the importance of self-definition and the need to repair labels. The appropriate use of terms to identify artists and works, as well as a reparative vocabulary and the inclusion of indigenous languages in the exhibition titles (Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art, 2013 and Àbadakone, 2019-20), testify to the ongoing evolution of reparative practices. Today, attention is being placed on identifying the names and origins, as well as revising the titles and descriptions of objects in museum collections and archives. Institutional criticism has emerged from the analysis of colonial discourse and exhibition texts that use outdated, inappropriate, or offensive language. Questions about labels, titles, and descriptions of objects are of interest to many museums particularly in North America, Australia and Europe.

Classification and naming of collection objects

Our study conducted between 2023-24 focused on the influence of EDI policies on acquisition and documentation processes within art museums. The analysis covers the ten-year period of collection management policies (2018-2024), strategic plans and annual reports, as well as searches of online collection databases. "A collection management policy serves as a guide and reference for museum staff and is, in a way, the commitment the museum makes to the citizens and bodies that provide funding for the heritage for which the institution is responsible".[38] The majority of the policies date from 2017 or 2018 and need to be renewed. Policy renewal is linked to government funding. In 2022–23, Heritage Canada conducted an extensive consultation on the renewal of the national museum policy. The results of this consultation confirm the concerns reflected in recent museum policy and documentation analysed.

> *"Since the 1990 policy there have been important societal shifts, including the need to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, addressing issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, and the ongoing digital transformation of the heritage sector. Several policy considerations have emerged from the consultations, over 3,000*

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> *participants across Canada which, through the following key areas, can help inform a new national museum policy. Sustainability, Preservation, access and collections management, Reconciliation, Equity, diversity and inclusion."*[39]

The results of this consultation corroborate the concerns that had previously been articulated by the museums in question. Sustainability, collections preservation and management, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and EDI were among the issues raised. Museums are also conducting research within their collections to better address these issues, sometimes under pressure from funders and citizens' groups. In recent years, Canadian art museums have been reviewing their collections in light of representation and inclusion.

Bridging the diversity representation gaps: acquisition policies

Inclusion practices have been diversified and refined around participatory approaches, particularly in acquisitions whose committees include people from minority backgrounds, as is the case in Canada and Australia. The question of how to represent diversity raises issues for ethnological museums first and foremost: the postcolonial critique of their collections and the documentation, classification, and description of cultural objects. Ethnological collections bear witness to diverse cultures, encompassing issues of identity, otherness, and cultural plurality. On the other hand, art museums that acquire works identified by their creator have recently begun to address the issue of diversity and inclusion within their collections. Underrepresented artists are still largely invisible in collection databases, despite increasing efforts by museums to acquire their works.

The institutional critique formulated by artists also raises questions about social inequalities and identity-related issues. In 2018, Stanly Février highlighted ethnocultural inequalities within the collection of national museums, notably the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal (MAC) as part of his Master's degree[40] and installation entitled *Invisible community*, Artexte, January 2018. The analysis of the MAC's collection highlighted the presence of a single work by an Afro-Quebec artist, illustrating the prevailing inequalities. Since then, the issue of the invisibilization of culturally diverse artists has been pursued in other works, notably at the Musée d'art actuel/Département des invisibles (MAADI) from June 15 to August 28, 2022, presented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Février acquires works from artists of diverse origins to exhibit in his museum. He sees his approach as a tool for social change. The *MAC-Invisible*[41] takes the form of an online museum or collection, showcasing artists from diverse backgrounds who are often invisible in traditional museum collections.

Acquiring to represent cultural diversity

The integration of artists from underrepresented groups is a recent phenomenon in art museums. The

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collection and acquisition policies developed in 2017-18 incorporate the postulates of EDI in a very limited way. In contrast, these principles are clearly present in more recent documents, such as strategic plans and annual reports, published after 2020. Curators are implementing a variety of strategies to reach these lesser-known artists, who lie outside the traditional art circuits. As part of acquisitions aimed at remedying the lack of representation of cultural diversity, selection is based on the demographic profile of the population, taking into account quantitative criteria such as the size of the most represented community or that of a visible minority, as demonstrated by practices at the MAC. In 2022, the museum added to its contemporary Quebec art collection Stanley Février's 2018 work *An Invisible Minority*. At the time of the pandemic in 2020, this museum decided to dedicate its entire acquisition budget to acquiring works by artists who are active and established in Quebec, wishing to support the artistic ecosystem affected by the crisis. Marie-Ève Beaupré, curator of the MAC, explains the institution's intentions: "The face of the collection had to better represent the cultural diversity of practitioners in Quebec. What is obvious in 2021 was already deeply felt in 2017. It wasn't just good intentions; it had to be put on paper, in the form of a policy".[42]

The *MAC Répertoire* database launched in 2022 features the category: nationality/nationalities (plural), which allows multiple nationalities to be added to identify artists from immigrant backgrounds in particular. In addition, the 2022 acquisition summary table, an internal document, includes several other criteria, such as the distribution of artists according to gender, cultural origin, year of birth, and regional distribution. This example demonstrates the kind of transformations in collection practices brought about by the integration of EDI principles.

Other museums, such as the National Gallery of Canada, have integrated EDI concerns in recent years. Acquisition policies (2018) were adopted before the pandemic period of the 2020s, during which the Gallery developed *Transforming Together. A Guide to the National Gallery of Canada's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan*[43], in which it presents the values upheld by the institution and a statement concerning the principle of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (JEDI & A) without however providing a precise definition or detailing the methods of implementation. In point 3. 5 of the Gallery's Acquisitions Policy (2018), it is stated that, with regard to contemporary Canadian art, post 1985, "A great strength and an organizational priority, acquisitions of new Canadian art should encompass the finest contemporary work in all media by major Canadian artists active today" [44] and that " Diversity in every aspect of the term remains a significant priority in the development of the national collection". And in the same section on international contemporary art, it is stated that the Gallery "We will also make a special effort to acquire works by major artists from the regions of origin for new Canadians, such as Asia, the Middle East and Africa".[45]

In the Annual Report 2022-2023 on JEDI&A initiatives, "A collections

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gap analysis was initiated to examine areas of underrepresentation in the collection of art that we steward. A new acquisitions policy is being developed to ensure a JEDI&A lens is applied when the Gallery adds to its collection".[46]

Acquiring works representative of a community in an art museum is a complex and delicate task. Complex because of the plurality of identities and their intersections, and delicate because of the symbolic and political impact. The majority of the collection management policies analyzed date between 2016 and 2018. According to an analysis of the most recent post-2020 museum annual reports and several curators, these policies no longer reflect the current reality of art museum acquisitions. The representativeness of minorities or underrepresented groups is a current concern. After the pandemic, museums acquired more works by artists from diverse backgrounds. This challenges evaluation criteria and categories, notably the criteria of excellence (the quality of the work), as well as acquisition strategies for marginalized groups. This is a recent process, and there is currently little data available to explain these ongoing transformations. The terminology of EDI is evolving rapidly. However, it is clear that art museums are integrating this responsibility.

Still, it should be noted that overall, a minority of institutions actually apply equitable or inclusive acquisition practices, as indicated by the study based on The Art Newspaper's list of the 100 most frequented art museums in 2022[47]. Twenty-nine of the 100 museums were selected on the basis of the existence of acquisition policies or EDI policies, which have led to the development of specific acquisition protocols designed to strengthen the representation of artists from underrepresented groups within their collections. On the other hand, inclusion practices have been diversified and perfected, notably through participatory approaches, especially in acquisition processes where committees include individuals from minority backgrounds, as is the case in Canada or Australia. For some museums, the artist's identity has become the overriding criterion for remedying gaps in the diversity of their collections. The study of international societal acquisitions identified several examples of this type. For example, the Stedelijk Museum's inclusive acquisition policy, introduced in 2021, aims to redress imbalances within the collection by devoting over 50% of the purchase budget for the period 2021-2024 to artists and creators of color as well as those of non-Western origin.[48]

In reality, there is a contradiction between policies aimed at establishing a national collection that is supposed to reflect the country's identity and the fragmentation of this identity, as manifested in political demands for the inclusion of underrepresented groups, identified by their country of origin. The objective of comprehensively including artists from diverse backgrounds in accordance with the terms of the policies analyzed, appears to be a complex and ambitious task. It is an ongoing, long-term effort within museums.

Respectful terminology: evolving nomenclature

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The inclusion of underrepresented individuals and groups within museums is fraught with difficulties relating to classification and naming. Museum classification systems help institutions to manage their collections in a standardized way. The epistemology of classification is regularly examined, primarily in relation to ethnological collections and the lexicon associated with material culture. According to Hannah Turner, 'classification can be used to discriminate'.[49] The rejection of colonial vocabulary implies a revision of the categories and lexicon used in collections management. To address these issues, classification systems such as the Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing are being updated.

> *"Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging is a structured and controlled list of object terms used for indexing and cataloging collections of human-made objects in North American history and culture. It is the most extensively used museum classification and controlled vocabulary for historical and ethnological collections. The American Association for State and Local History and the Canadian Heritage Information Network seek to update Nomenclature with respectful terminology."*[50]

On the organization's website, an invitation is issued to contribute to improving the vocabulary. The reparation associated with EDI includes the integration of respectful terminology to ensure a more balanced representation.

Research on the representation of immigration in museums focuses mainly on history, society, or immigration museums that collect immigrant heritage memories and objects.[51] Few studies have examined migration in relation to art collecting. Immigrant artists blend into cultural diversity. On the other hand, art museums are increasingly taking an interest in the theme of migration in order to interpret their collections or include artists from this migratory phenomenon. The search for immigrant artists in art collection databases has revealed gaps in existing documentation. It also raises the question of the social and cultural hybridizations implicit in the migratory condition. Categories not included in the classification are grouped together in the databases under "Other". Doesn't the debate about otherness and difference constitute an aporia, an impasse? For it addresses often paradoxical questions about the nature of the Other and the notion of difference. Plurality and hybrid identities remain invisible in classification systems. Art museums have begun to incorporate cultural categories, striving to segment identities in the same way that databases of cultural objects do. The integration of cultural categories, as well as the use of plurals to denote nationality, helps to enrich information. Despite criticism of these practices, museums reflect the complex issues brought by the hybridization of societies, which coexists with phenomena of crispation and identity closure.

According to Umberto Eco, "The list

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is the origin of culture. It is part of the history of art and literature. What does culture want? To make the infinite comprehensible. It also wants to create order. Not always, but often. And how do we, as human beings, face the infinite? How do we try to grasp the incomprehensible? With lists, files, museum collections…".[52] Inventory and documentation in museums are the basis of collection management. It is precisely this order of things and Western classifications, especially those of colonial ethnology, that are being questioned. An updating and, in some cases, reparation of injustices is underway, and their intersection opens up new possibilities for management and interpretation. On the other hand, this process of reparation, even if it preserves the old inventories that testify to the history of the collections and the treatment of the objects, remains a delicate operation. The EDI vocabulary and the concepts associated with it are likely to evolve, as are societal values. Classifications are under constant review, and revisions aim to fill gaps in documentation, such as identifying missing or misclassified objects, and to create new categories that better meet the contemporary needs of the museum.

Conclusion

Reparation is discussed in the context of polycrisis or global crisis, which raises the question of its impact and the museum's commitment to addressing it. This questioning is partly provoked by the recent transformation of museum discourse within art museums, which sets out to improve societies marked by inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. The EDI approach has been integrated into Canadian art museums to address these issues in the political context of multiculturalism and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Over the past ten years, and particularly in the wake of the health crisis, art museums have affirmed their social commitment by integrating these concerns into the way they think about collections and their management.

Museums committed to repairing their collections and practices are also looking to the future. Strategic plans display ambitions such as "helping to shape the future", while museum associations adopt similar approaches: "our quest for a more equitable, just, and inclusive museum sector is therefore not just about rectifying the present but about shaping the future – a future where every voice is heard, every story is told, and every experience is valued".[53] This posture reflects the revalorization or logic of the long term, after the presenteeism that focused on events and increasing the number of visitors. Is it a symptom of a new emancipation for this institution, which is moving away from the colonial museum and the Western model as the sole model of the museum to an institution that is taking its place to repair through the perspective of both cultural and social sustainability? This emancipation, expected or desired since the new museology of the 1970s, has since been reinforced by crises that have raised awareness in favor of a revision of the role of the art museum and its social commitment. The emergence of a *reparativ turn*, notably within collections, is manifested by the gestures of societal acquisition or the reparation of injustices

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in the way we name, categorize, or describe objects in collections and a concern for the exact names and plural identities of their creators or producers.

Analysis of museum policies, annual reports, and strategic plans allowed us to understand how the inclusion of underrepresented groups has evolved over the past decade. Museum association documents aimed at museum professionals were also used to identify recommendations for museums. This method works well for researching the framing of practices and the transformation of vocabulary in museums. However, museum professionals don't necessarily wait for guidelines to be updated, as they take longer to change. They adapt practices, experiment, and create their own ways of doing things, as demonstrated by the diversity of current approaches. A real transformation is underway: we could call this process repairing the gaps or blind spots in the representativeness or visibility of artists from underrepresented groups. On the other hand, we should also mention other practices, such as tokenism or the EDI issue without any real commitment to changing practices.

Finally, the issue of EDI and sustainability constitutes a major challenge within Canadian museums, a concern also shared by the international museum community. The reparation of diversity representation within museums constitutes a continuous process, rooted in the sociopolitical and cultural context specific to each institution. On the other hand, it is worth questioning the possibility that the current importance of these issues within museums may be called into question in light of political and societal developments that do not support EDI perspectives.

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Endnotes

1 Anderson 2020.

2 Janes, Sandell 2019; Mairesse, 2023.

3 Triquet 2023.

4 Kübler, Arezki, Soldo 2021.

5 Sterling, Larkin 2021, p. 1.

6 Unlike Canadian multiculturalism, the Quebec model of interculturalism has no legal status. However, several authors believe that Quebec interculturalism responds to the specific context and needs of Quebec (Emongo and White, 2014, Bouchard, 2012). Interculturalism in Quebec encourages interaction between different cultural communities and members of the host society, while respecting the values of Quebec society and the creation of a common culture.

7 "Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability". International council of museums (ICOM) https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/.

8 Luke, Mizota 2024.

9 This study is part of the New Uses for Collections in Art Museums Partnership funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. https://cieco.co/en. Research assistants: Michel Cheff and Anne-Laure Pin, doctoral students at Université du Québec en Outaouais.

10 Morin, Kern 1993, Tooze 2022.

11 Janes 2020; 2024.

12 Arendt 1972.

13 Kamat 2023, p. 4.

14 "Indigenous peoples is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution recognized 3 groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuits, and Métis. These are 3 distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs", https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013785/1529102490303.

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21 Bérubé, Dioh, Cuyler 2024.

22 Cole, Lott 2019.

23 Dymond 2019.

24 Bennett *et al.* 2009.

25 Fraser 2011, p. 13.

26 Bilge, Hill Collins 2023.

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place-Diversity-Survey.pdf.

30 Kamat 2023, p. 1.

31 https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-8-2015-eng.pdf.

32 Recommendation 22, https://museums.ca/uploaded/web/New_Website_docs/MTA-Standards_Poster-EN.pdf.

33 See the example of artwork whose title has been changed with the Indigenous community. WAG, Decolonizing the collection, https://www.wag.ca/decolonizing-the-collection/#:~:text=The%20Artworks%20Renaming%20Initiative%20addresses,Knowledge%20Keepers%20and%20language%20keepers.

34 Regarding Indigenous Art at the NGC see Phillips 2011.

35 https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/your-collection/steeling-the-gaze-portraits-by-aboriginal-artists.

36 Kunard, Loft 2008.

37 Hill, Hopkins, Lalonde 2013.

38 Bergeron 2022, p. 297.

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44 https://www.gallery.ca/sites/default/files/upload/acquisitions_policy-eng.pdf.

45 https://www.gallery.ca/sites/default/files/upload/acquisitions_policy-eng.pdf.

46 https://www.gallery.ca/sites/default/files/upload/ngc_annual_report_2022-23_en.pdf, p. 41.

47 Lee, De Silva 2023.

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52 Eco 2010.

53 CMA 2023, p. 10.

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Le musée guérisseur
Les musées canadiens face à leur passé colonial

Jean-Philippe Uzel

Keywords:
Canadian Museums, Healing Museum, Reconciliation, Decolonization.

ABSTRACT:

From 2008 to 2015, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) sought to shed light on the residential school system to which 150,000 children were sent over the course of a century, with the aim of forcibly Christianizing and "Westernizing" them. The TRC's final report, which concludes that a veritable "cultural genocide" took place, proposes 94 calls to action to right the wrongs of the past. Many of these are addressed to the Canadian art world and museums and have the particularity of placing the museum in the role of healer. This healing, a key element in the reconciliation process, is primarily concerned with the "survivors" of the residential schools, i.e. the indigenous students who suffered physical, sexual and psychological abuse, the after-effects of which are still felt today. In recent years, however, the theme of reconciliation has gradually given way to that of decolonization. This paradigm shift affects all Canadian institutions, but particularly museums, whose colonial history is at the very heart of their collections. But what of the curatorial function of museums in this paradigm shift? The aim of this article is to show that, in the age of decolonization, the healing museum is subject to a divided understanding that lies at the heart of the recent crisis in Canadian museums.

De 2008 à 2015, les travaux de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada (CVR) ont cherché à faire la lumière sur le système des "pensionnats indiens" dans lequel 150 000 enfants ont été envoyés pendant un siècle, dans le but de les christianiser et de les "occidentaliser" de force. Le rapport final de la CVR, qui conclut à un véritable "génocide culturel", propose 94 appels à l'action pour réparer les erreurs du passé. Nombre d'entre elles s'adressent au monde de l'art et aux musées canadiens et ont la particularité de placer le musée dans un rôle de guérisseur. Cette guérison, élément clé du processus de réconciliation, concernant en priorité les "survivants" des pensionnats, c'est-à-dire les élèves autochtones qui ont subi des abus physiques, sexuels et psychologiques dont les séquelles se font encore sentir aujourd'hui. Cependant, au cours des dernières années, le thème de la réconciliation a progressivement cédé la place à celui de la décolonisation. Ce changement de paradigme touche toutes les institutions canadiennes, mais particulièrement les musées, dont l'histoire coloniale est inscrite au cœur même de leurs collections. Mais qu'en est-il de la fonction curative des musées dans ce changement de paradigme ? L'objectif de cet article est de montrer qu'à l'heure de la décolonisation le musée guérisseur fait l'objet d'une compréhension clivée qui est au cœur de la récente crise des musées canadiens.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 10: Thontenonhkwa'tsherano'onhnha [Aire de soins]. Espace présenté dans le cadre de l'exposition Alanis Obomsawin: les enfants doivent entendre une autre histoire au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, du 26 septembre 2024 au 26 janvier 2025. Conception : Katsitsanoron Dumoulin-Bush, en collaboration avec ohisse – atelier de design social.
Photo : Michael Patten.

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Jean-Philippe Uzel is a professor of art history at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). He is also director of the GRIAAC-Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les affirmations autochtones contemporaines and co-researcher of the Partenariat Des nouveaux usages des collections dans les musées d'art. His area of expertise is the history and theory of modern and contemporary art, with a focus on the relationships between art and politics. For the past 25 years, he has focused on Indigenous and culturally diverse contemporary art in North America. From 2012-2013 he was Chair of Contemporary Québec Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3; his research program addressed differing perspectives on contemporary Indigenous art in North America. He is the author of the study Professional practices in visual arts arising from Indigeneity and diversity in Montréal (Conseil des arts de Montréal, 2017) and he was the supervisor of the MOOC Ohtehra', l'art autochtone aujourd'hui (UQAM/MBAM) on the French platform FUN-France Université Numérique (2022-2024).

- Vous souhaitez même que le musée devienne un lieu de guérison. N'est-ce pas beaucoup demander à une institution culturelle ?

- Tout un mouvement en muséologie se questionne sur cette idée. Personnellement, tout ce que je fais en développant des pratiques collaboratives vise ce but de guérison des Premières Nations. Si j'ai un mandat avec un musée, le travail en préparation doit devenir une entreprise de guérison.

Élisabeth Kaine (Wendat), entrevue donnée au quotidien québécois Le Devoir (13 décembre 2022)[1]

Fig. 01: Pensionnat de Morley - Orphelinat McDougall, élèves, Morley (Alberta), vers 1885-1890
Collection David Ewens / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada / PA-182270.

Fig. 02: Enfants autochtones au pensionnat indien de la mission catholique de Fort Providence
Oswald S. Finnie / Fonds du ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien / Bibliothèque et archives Canada / a100530-v8.

01-02

De 2008 à 2015, les travaux de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada (CVR) ont cherché à faire la lumière sur le système des "pensionnats indiens" dans lesquels furent envoyés 150 000 enfants, pendant un siècle, dans le but de les christianiser et de les "occidentaliser" de force (Figg. 1-2)[2]. Le rapport final de la CVR, qui concluait à un véritable "génocide culturel", proposait 94 appels à l'action en vue de réparer les erreurs du passé. Parmi ceux-ci, plusieurs étaient destinés au monde de l'art et aux musées canadiens. Si ces derniers n'ont pas attendu les recommandations de la CVR pour entreprendre leur "autochtonisation", celles-ci ont néanmoins la particularité de placer le musée dans un rôle de guérisseur dont les vertus curatives sont mentionnées à plusieurs reprises dans le rapport final. Cette guérison visant très précisément les "survivants" des pensionnats, c'est-à-dire les personnes autochtones[3] qui ont été envoyées dans ces écoles résidentielles et qui ont subi des sévices physiques, sexuels et psychologiques dont les séquelles se font toujours ressentir. La guérison était donc un des éléments clés du processus de réconciliation. Toutefois, en l'espace de quelques années, le thème de la réconciliation a fait l'objet de plus en plus de critiques et a laissé place à celui de la décolonisation. Ce changement de paradigme touche l'ensemble des institutions canadiennes, mais tout particulièrement le monde des musées, dont l'histoire coloniale est inscrite au cœur même des collections. Mais qu'en est-il désormais de la fonction curative des musées ? On constate que celle-ci n'a pas disparu, mais

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fait désormais l'objet d'une compréhension clivée. Pour les conservateurs et les artistes autochtones, la guérison concerne avant tout les personnes survivantes et passe par une transformation des politiques et des modes de gouvernances des musées afin de reconnaître et de respecter la souveraineté autochtone. De l'autre côté, les directions de musées tendent de plus en plus à comprendre la décolonisation comme la façon de guérir le musée de son passé colonial pour tourner au plus vite la page d'une histoire envahissante qui ne cesse de le hanter. Ces divergences de compréhension du rôle du musée guérisseur à l'ère de la décolonisation ne vont pas sans créer des tensions. Plusieurs voix contestataires autochtones mettent en doute l'authenticité des musées à entreprendre leur mue décoloniale et les soupçonnent de rechercher par là une rédemption à bon compte en vue de retrouver "un état d'innocence"[4] précolonial. Les directions de musée, de leur côté, commencent à montrer des signes d'impatience par rapport à la décolonisation, et ont du mal à laisser les revendications autochtones empiéter sur leurs prérogatives. Ces divergences sur la guérison décoloniale s'expriment de plus en plus ouvertement sur la place publique et ont eu pour conséquence, ces deux dernières années, le licenciement de plusieurs conservateurs autochtones de premier plan. Notre article, en se focalisant sur la mission curative du musée, vise à mieux comprendre le passage de la réconciliation à la décolonisation dans le monde muséal et les divergences auquel il donne lieu.

I/ La guérison au cœur du processus de réconciliation

Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que jusqu'à la fin des années 1980, les musées canadiens se sont posé la question de savoir où placer l'art autochtone contemporain : dans les musées d'ethnologie ou dans les musées d'art ?[5] La célèbre controverse qui a entouré l'exposition *The Spirit Sings : Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* organisée par le Glenbow Museum de Calgary lors des Jeux olympiques d'hiver de 1988, aura eu le mérite d'obliger les musées à répondre à cette question[6]. Afin d'en finir une fois pour toutes avec le primitivisme du monde de l'art canadien — les œuvres les plus récentes de *The Spirit Sings* dataient du début du XXe siècle —, un groupe de travail composé de représentants de l'Association des Musées Canadiens (AMC) et de l'Assemblée des Premières Nations a été mis sur pied dans les mois suivants la fin de l'exposition. Le rapport qui en a découlé, *Tourner la page : Forger de nouveaux partenariats entre les musées et les Premières Nations*[7], a servi de guide à tous les musées canadiens pendant plus de deux décennies. Comme d'autres rapports sur les relations entre les artistes autochtones et les musées publiés dans les années 1990[8], *Tourner la page* insistait sur la nécessité d'une plus grande inclusion de l'art autochtone dans les musées d'art canadiens. En l'espace d'un quart de siècle, il est certain que des progrès ont été faits en ce sens, aussi bien au niveau de l'intégration des œuvres autochtones contemporaines dans les collections, que de l'embauche des conservateurs autochtones dans les musées.[9] Si cette politique d'inclusion des "voix autochtones" a

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connu de réels succès dans certains musées comme le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada (MBAC) ou le Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario (MBAO), elle a aussi eu ses ratés.[10] Elle a également été plus laborieuse aux États-Unis qu'au Canada, comme le remarquait en 2005 la théoricienne Nancy Marie Mithlo (Apache) en notant que "les musées sont des institutions qui s'autoperpétuent et qui maintiennent la plupart du temps leur autorité, malgré les efforts déployés pour 'donner une voix aux Autochtones' ".[11]

Toutefois, la tenue des travaux de la CVR entre 2008 et 2015 a radicalement changé la relation entre les Autochtones et les musées canadiens.[12] Dans le cadre du processus de réconciliation il n'a plus seulement été demandé aux musées de corriger les oublis et les erreurs du passé en donnant une voix aux peuples autochtones. Les musées ont été invités à participer, au même titre que d'autres institutions comme les universités ou les médias, à une entreprise nationale de justice sociale visant à surmonter les traumas du "génocide culturel" découlant du système des pensionnats.[13] Le rapport final de la CVR mentionne à de nombreuses reprises que "les musées ont la responsabilité éthique de favoriser la réconciliation nationale" et que tous les musées canadiens ont "un rôle crucial à jouer afin d'examiner les injustices historiques subies par les Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis, d'engager un dialogue public à propos de ce qui a été fait et de ce qu'il reste à faire pour remédier à ces souffrances".[14] Il insiste sur le fait que cette réconciliation doit être centrée sur la guérison des survivants des pensionnats, et plus largement sur l'ensemble des Autochtones qui ont été impactés par les politiques coloniales, mais reconnait également que c'est le "pays tout entier" qui doit guérir des blessures du colonialisme.[15] Tout au long des travaux de la CVR, qui se sont étalés sur huit années, les musées et l' "expression créative"[16] (terme privilégié à celui d' "art") ont donc été invités à participer à ce processus de guérison. Ainsi, dès 2010, la CVR a lancé un appel aux artistes pour recevoir des œuvres destinées à être montrées lors des événements qui se sont tenus dans les grandes villes canadiennes au cours desquelles ont témoigné 6500 personnes (survivants et témoins). Au cours de ces grands rassemblements, qui ont été retransmis en direct à la télévision, les survivants ont été invités à évoquer publiquement les sévices qu'ils ont subis dans l'espoir de se libérer de la charge traumatique liée à ces souvenirs[17]. Les œuvres commandées par la CVR étaient destinées à accompagner ce processus de guérison qui se situait à mi-chemin entre la médecine post-traumatique et la justice sociale. L'artiste Carey Newman[18] a répondu à cet appel et a produit une des œuvres les plus emblématiques du processus de réconciliation, *La Couverture des témoins* (*The Witness Blanket*) (Figg. 3-8) conservée aujourd'hui par le Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne de Winnipeg. L'œuvre est une installation à grande échelle, prenant la forme d'une couverture en courtepointe, qui contient plus de 800 objets offerts par les anciens pensionnaires ou récupérés sur le site des anciens pensionnats.[19] On remarquera qu'une telle œuvre ne relève pas de ce que l'on qualifie traditionnellement d' "art thérapie",

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03

Fig. 03:
La Couverture des témoins
Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

dans le cadre duquel les patients se livrent à différentes pratiques créatives à des fins psychothérapiques. De la même façon, la fonction de guérison des musées, mentionnée par la CVR, a peu à voir avec les activités thérapeutiques qui ont lieu aujourd'hui au sein de certains musées en Europe ou en Amérique du Nord qui accueillent des visiteurs munis d'une "ordonnance muséale" et dont la visite des collections est censée soulager leur stress ou tout simplement améliorer leur bien-être.[20] Elle consiste principalement dans l'organisation d'espaces muséaux consacrés à l'histoire des pensionnats et conçus en priorité pour que les personnes autochtones puissent s'y recueillir et échanger entre elles. Il s'agit donc avant tout d'une mission d'accompagnement du musée dans le processus de guérison[21] des anciens pensionnaires qui par ailleurs ont bénéficié tout au long du processus de la réconciliation des services de différents organismes de santé autochtones fournissant des soins relevant des techniques thérapeutiques modernes (accompagnement psychologique, thérapie cognitive et comportementale) ou traditionnelles (cercles de guérison, rituels de la tente à sudation, cérémonies du tambour).[22]

Au-delà des nombreuses références faites aux musées dans les différents documents de la CVR, deux appels à l'action, parmi les 94 que contient le rapport final, interpellent directement le monde des musées. L'appel 67 est adressé à l'AMC à laquelle il est demandé d'"entreprendre, en collaboration avec les peuples autochtones, un examen national des politiques et des pratiques exemplaires des musées, et ce, dans le but de déterminer le degré de conformité avec la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones et de formuler des recommandations connexes". Quant à l'appel 68, il demande que les musées canadiens mettent la réconciliation au cœur de la commémoration du 150e anniversaire de la Confédération du Canada qui aura lieu deux ans après la fin des travaux de la CVR, en 2017: "Nous demandons au gouvernement fédéral, en collaboration avec les peuples autochtones et l'Association des musées canadiens, de souligner le 150e anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne en 2017 en établissant un programme de fi-

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04

nancement national pour les projets de commémoration sur le thème de la réconciliation". De nombreux commentateurs ont vu dans cette référence à l'année 2017, à l'instar de l'artiste et théoricien David Garneau (Métis), une "date de péremption"[23] du processus de guérison. À la suite des commémorations de 2017, le processus de guérison devait être achevé et les plaies cicatrisées.

Au cours de l'année 2017, qui devait être la grande année de la réconciliation, les choses ne se passent pas exactement comme prévu par les appels à l'action de la CVR. Tout d'abord, la réconciliation n'est qu'un des quatre thèmes prioritaires retenus par le gouvernement fédéral pour le sesquicentenaire[24] et surtout les événements correspondant à ce thème ne sont pas organisés en collaboration avec les peuples autochtones et avec l'AMC comme le demandait explicitement l'appel n°68.[25] Autre déconvenue, le Conseil des Arts du Canada (CAC),[26] qui avait lui-même son propre programme de commémoration intitulé Nouveau chapitre, se voit dans l'obligation de publier dans le courant du mois de septembre un communiqué mettant en garde contre la multiplication des cas d'appropriation culturelle des contenus autochtones par les artistes allochtones, et demandant à ces derniers "de démontrer qu'ils font preuve de respect et de considération véritables à l'égard des arts et de la culture autochtones à l'occasion de leur démarche".[27] C'est précisément ce qui est arrivé avec le spectacle *Kanata* du metteur en scène québécois Robert Lepage, consacré aux relations entres les Autochtones et les colons européens, qui n'a pas reçu le fi-

Fig. 04:
La Couverture des témoins Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

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nancement demandé dans le cadre du programme Nouveau chapitre par “manque d’information dans l’énoncé du projet quant à la consultation des Autochtones ainsi qu’à leur intégration dans le processus de création”.[28]

Dans les années suivantes, le gouvernement du Canada sera de plus en plus souvent critiqué pour son manque d’implication dans le processus de réconciliation qui apparait désormais comme une opération visant avant tout “à tourner la page sur les événements passés”.[29] Mais ces critiques n’ont pas attendu l’année 2015 et la fin des travaux de la CVR pour se faire entendre. Dès le début des années 2010 des voix autochtones avaient commencé à contester la sincérité des autorités fédérales et le bien-fondé de la démarche de réconciliation. Les artistes et les commissaires autochtones ont été parmi les tout premiers à faire entendre leurs critiques. Le numéro 74 de la revue *West Coast Line*, publié 2012, comportait un dossier spécial au titre évocateur *Reconcile this !* (“Réconcilie ça !”) soulignant de manière ironique l’injonction empressée que le Canada adressait à la CVR. On retrouve dans ce dossier l’article de David Garneau, très souvent cité, qui suggère de substituer le concept de “conciliation” à celui de “réconciliation”, ce dernier laissant entendre le rétablissement d’une relation harmonieuse rompue, comme si l’époque précédant les pensionnats avait été marquée par la concorde et la fraternité entre les peuples autochtones et allochtones[30]. En outre, Garneau note avec perspicacité que le mot “réconciliation” renvoie à l’un des deux sacrements de guérison dans la vie sacramentelle catholique (le sacrement de la réconciliation par lequel un pécheur pénitent peut rejoindre la communauté des croyants). Donner à une commission qui se penche sur les sévices organisés par des congrégations religieuses le titre d’un sacrement chrétien semble, comme le souligne Garneau, pour le moins inapproprié et contreproductif. Dans le même numéro, on retrouve également un article de l’artiste Adrian Stimson (Siksika, Blackfoot), lui-même ancien résident des pensionnats, affirmant que le processus de témoignage de la CVR loin de “ guérir ” les survivants, leur inflige de nouvelles blessures :

> *“J’ai souvent trouvé les diverses idéologies de ‘guérison’ suspectes, souvent trop coûteuses, inutilement enveloppées dans une morale religieuse et tournées vers l’extérieur plutôt que vers l’intérieur. Cette expérience a fait naître en moi une grande méfiance à l’égard de toutes les institutions occidentales, en particulier les institutions religieuses, éducatives, les entreprises, les gouvernements et l’industrie de la ‘guérison’. Je considère qu’elles font toutes partie du projet colonial, des approches systémiques qui continuent à éroder l’être autochtone, un être qui, autrement, me relierait à ma culture Blackfoot, un être qui se connecte au monde naturel et au Grand Mystère.”*[31]

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05

06

Fig. 05:
La Couverture des témoins (détail)
Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

Fig. 06:
La Couverture des témoins
Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

Les musées canadiens, par la voix de leur association, vont également finir par prendre leur distance avec le processus de réconciliation. Paradoxalement, c'est le rapport de l'AMC répondant à l'appel à l'action 67 du rapport final de la CVR, *Portés à l'action: appliquer la DNUDPA*[32] *dans les musées canadiens*, qui formule ces réserves dans les termes les plus clairs. Rendu public en septembre 2022, soit sept ans après le dépôt du rapport final de la CVR, le rapport de l'AMC jette un regard sans concession sur le processus de réconciliation. Dès ses premières pages, le rapport note qu'en l'espace de sept ans moins de 20 appels à l'ac-

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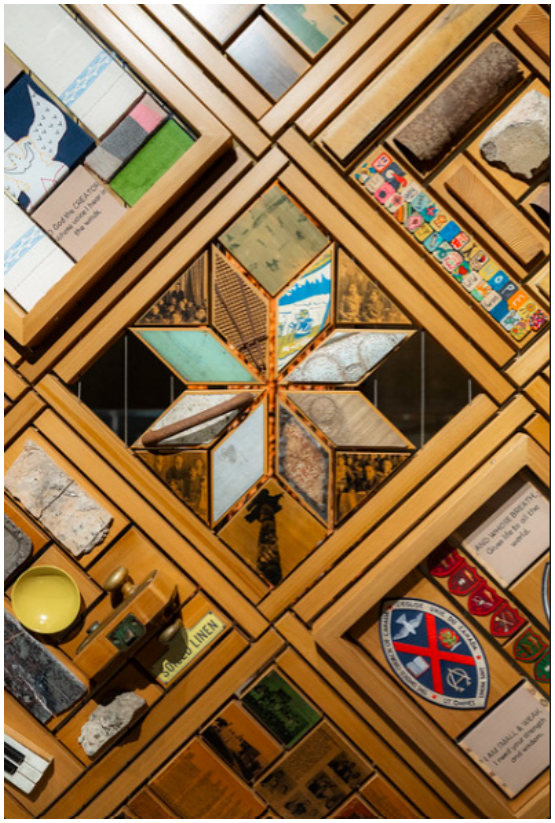
08

Fig. 07: La Couverture des témoins (détail)
Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

Fig. 08: La Couverture des témoins
Œuvre d'art de Carey Newman-Hayalthkin'geme
Photos d'Aaron Cohen et Jessica Sigurdson
Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne, Winnipeg (Manitoba).

tion sur 94 ont été complétés[33], mettant en évidence le peu d'entrain du gouvernement et des institutions à répondre concrètement à ces appels. Le rapport *Portés à l'action* ne se présente pas lui-même comme un effort vers la réconciliation, mais avant tout comme un guide pour la décolonisation des musées : "Dans le cadre de ce rapport, l'AMC a créé et identifié des ressources pour soutenir les musées dans leurs efforts de décolonisation".[34] L'objectif de la décolonisation teinte la plupart des recommandations du rapport, entre autres celles qui touchent à une politique ambitieuse de rapatriement des objets spoliés, tout particulièrement à l'occasion de l'interdiction fédérale des potlatchs entre 1884 et 1951. D'une façon plus générale, le rapport se penche en détail sur le "degré de conformité" entre les politiques des musées canadiens et la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur le droit des peuples autochtones (DNUDPA). Il appelle à la "décolonisation des politiques muséales[35]"



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afin qu'elles mettent en pratique le principe central d'autodétermination des peuples autochtone qui est au cœur de la DNUDPA. Cette souveraineté autochtone[36] passe, entre autres, par la création d'"espaces

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courageux[37]" (*brave spaces*) au sein des musées qui offrent un environnement respectueux pour les Autochtones et, dans certains cas, "qui permet[tent] également au musée de répondre aux besoins des pratiques de soins traditionnels[38]".

Ce tournant vers la décolonisation, qui s'amorce après l'année 2017 et qui touche tout le milieu muséal canadien, peut donc être vu avant tout comme un constat critique sur l'atteinte des objectifs de la réconciliation. Ce constat concerne également d'autres institutions qui étaient au cœur de la CVR, comme les universités. Dans un intéressant article qui compare les politiques d'autochtonisation des universités canadiennes à travers les concepts d'inclusion, de réconciliation et de colonisation, Adam Gaudry (Métis) et Danielle Lorenz déclarent que l'on a assisté au cours des années qui ont suivi la fin des travaux de la CVR à "la perte d'enthousiasme pour une proposition politique transformative [...] trahissant le fait que 'le tournant de la réconciliation' a été plus discursif que substantiel".[39] Les auteurs ajoutant que seule une approche fondée sur la décolonisation peut prétendre dépasser la rhétorique de la réconciliation et transformer en profondeur l'université pour permettre une coexistence égalitaire entre Autochtones et Allochtones. Si l'on voit bien que le discours est unanime pour faire un bilan négatif de la réconciliation, qui finalement n'aurait été qu'une version quelque peu remaniée de l'inclusion, une question se pose. Qu'en est-il désormais de la guérison ? Est-ce que le musée guérisseur de la CVR a encore sa place dans le contexte décolonial ?

II/ De la réconciliation à la décolonisation

Avant de répondre à cette question, il semble opportun de préciser en quelques lignes ce que l'on entend par "décolonisation" dans le contexte des musées canadiens tant ce concept est aujourd'hui polysémique et renvoie à des situations culturelles, historiques et politiques très différentes les unes des unes. En 2018, l'ICOFOM a mis en place un chantier sur la décolonisation des musées et son président de l'époque[40], Bruno Brulon Soares, soulignait quelque temps plus tard que la " 'décolonisation' n'est en aucun cas un terme universel [...]. Les nuances de ce terme et ses interprétations potentielles sont apparemment infinies et continuent d'évoluer au fur et à mesure que les musées se réinventent pour répondre aux nouveaux besoins et aux nouvelles demandes de la société".[41]

Sans entrer dans le détail d'un sujet complexe, on peut dire qu'il existe aujourd'hui trois grandes approches de la décolonisation, et par conséquent de la décolonisation muséale, qui se positionnent différemment en fonction des deux grandes formes historiques du colonialisme[42]. Tout d'abord, le paradigme postcolonial — tel qu'il a été pensé à partir de la fin des années 1970 par des auteurs comme Edward Saïd, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak —, se focalise sur les traces et les survivances du colonialisme d'exploitation aussi bien dans les anciennes colonies que dans les anciennes sociétés coloniales où l'héritage de la colonisation se fait encore ressentir, tout particulièrement sous la forme d'un racisme systémique.

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Cette approche postcoloniale de la décolonisation est bien représentée aujourd'hui dans le domaine de la muséologie par les travaux de l'autrice française Françoise Vergès et tout particulièrement son dernier ouvrage *Programme de désordre absolu : décoloniser les musées*.[43] La deuxième grande approche de la décolonisation a vu le jour au début de la décennie 1990 au sein du groupe Modernité/Colonialité composé d'universitaires sud-américains (Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Arturo Escobar…). Pour les auteurs "décoloniaux", la colonisation est un phénomène qui commence avec la première vague de colonisation des Amériques au XVe siècle, mais qui perdure jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Selon eux, la colonisation ne saurait se réduire à sa seule dimension historique et politique, car la domination de l'Europe sur les autres peuples va imprégner l'ensemble des savoirs, des sensibilités et des croyances. Cette idéologie du colonialisme, qu'ils nomment "colonialité" (ou "colonialité du pouvoir"), est définie comme la part sombre de la modernité.[44] La démarche décoloniale va dès lors consister à remettre en cause l'épistémologie et la rhétorique de la modernité en favorisant la résurgence des multiples voix oubliées et des figures invisibilisées. Dans le champ muséologique, le dernier ouvrage de Bruno Brulon Soares intitulé *The Anticolonial Museum*, qui présente la démarche anticoloniale "comme une occasion de dévoiler la modernité et la colonialité des musées"[45], représente une des publications les plus récentes de ce courant. Enfin, il existe une troisième forme d'approche décoloniale, beaucoup moins connue que les deux précédentes, mais qui nous intéresse ici au premier chef. Elle est composée par des auteurs autochtones issus des différentes colonies de peuplement comme Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Quandamooka, Australie), Glen Coulthard (Déné, Canada), Robert Warrior (Osage, États-Unis) ou encore Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Anichinabée, Canada). Ces auteurs, que l'on regroupe parfois sous l'étiquette de *Critical Indigenous Studies*, critiquent avant tout les effets persistants du colonialisme sur les peuples autochtones (disparition et assassinats des filles et de femmes autochtones, surreprésentation carcérale, conditions de vie dans les réserves), mais participent également d'un mouvement de "résurgence" qui vise à créer des espaces de souveraineté dans lesquels s'affirment les visions du monde et les traditions autochtones. Au Canada, ce mouvement autochtone de décolonisation des musées est certainement le mieux représenté par la commissaire indépendante anichinabée Wanda Nanibush, à la fois par sa pratique de conservatrice — elle a été conservatrice au Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario de 2017 à 2023, nous y reviendrons plus bas —, et par ses nombreux écrits dont *Moving the Museum*[46] qu'elle a coécrit en 2023 avec Georgiana Uhlyarik.

Si les penseurs autochtones entretiennent des affinités avec le mouvement Modernité/Colonialité[47] par le fait que celui-ci prend en compte l'asservissement des peuples autochtones, ils s'en distinguent toutefois, car ils ne prétendent pas déconstruire en priorité la vision de la modernité occidentale, mais mettent avant tout l'accent sur les visions du monde autochtones ancrées dans

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l'expérience vécue des personnes autochtones. Loin, par exemple, du programme de "désobéissance épistémologique" que prône Walter Mignolo[48], — un des auteurs de la décolonialité les plus cités aujourd'hui dans le monde de l'art —, David Garneau remarque que "bien que la critique anti- et décoloniale soit essentielle, ces stratégies ont tendance à se concentrer sur la déconstruction plutôt que sur la production et à placer les colons [*settlers*] au centre de l'attention. (…) s'attarder trop longtemps sur la critique est démoralisant et épuisant. Nous devons également être constructifs".[49] On l'aura compris, la problématique du musée guérisseur ne disparait pas avec l'essoufflement de la logique de la réconciliation qui l'avait mis au premier plan. C'est même le contraire qui se produit. La décolonisation, au sens où l'entendent les auteurs autochtones, est vue comme le moyen de parvenir à une véritable guérison, celle-ci n'ayant été qu'esquissée par la CVR. Ce tournant décolonial affecte même les États-Unis dont la reconnaissance du système des pensionnats autochtones a été beaucoup plus lente qu'au Canada[50] et qui n'ont pas connu de processus de réconciliation. Dans un des tout premiers ouvrages à traiter de la décolonisation du point de vue autochtone, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*,[51] Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk), insiste sur le fait que l'entreprise de décolonisation des musées étatsuniens ne peut pas se limiter à simplement donner une voix aux peuples autochtones comme le prônait le paradigme de l'inclusion. Décoloniser le musée signifie avant tout que celui-ci doit "aider les communautés dans leurs efforts pour traiter les héritages de la douleur historique non résolue en exprimant les dures vérités du colonialisme et en créant ainsi des espaces de guérison et de compréhension." [52] Selon cette logique, Lonetree n'hésite pas à admettre que le National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) n'a pas opéré son tournant décolonial, précisément parce qu'il ne s'est pas confronté aux réalités du colonialisme: "Le silence de la NMAI n'aide pas les communautés autochtones à (…) reconnaître comment le colonialisme a affecté tous les aspects de leur vie, ni à entreprendre les changements nécessaires pour progresser vers la décolonisation et la guérison de la communauté."[53] Par contre, elle donne cette étiquette au Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways qui se trouve à Mount Pleasant dans le Michigan, précisément parce qu'en disant la dure vérité du colonialisme, "il prend des mesures énergiques dans le sens de la guérison".[54]

Au Canada, comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, le thème de la décolonisation s'est peu à peu imposé à la fin des années 2010 à partir de la prise de conscience que le processus de réconciliation avait été bâclé par le gouvernement fédéral et que la guérison des traumas intergénérationnels produits par le système de pensionnats sera un processus long qui nécessitera une véritable transformation des institutions canadiennes. Cette prise de conscience devient une évidence avec la découverte, en mai 2021, des restes de 215 enfants enfouis sur le site de l'ancien pensionnat de Kamloops (Colombie-Britannique) en activité entre 1914 et 1963. Cette découverte macabre a jeté une lu-

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mière crue sur la réalité des pensionnats. L'événement a provoqué une onde de choc au Canada — les drapeaux canadiens sont restés en berne pendant 6 mois et la journée du 30 septembre a été officiellement déclarée Journée nationale de la vérité et de la réconciliation —, et a rappelé à l'opinion canadienne que la question des pensionnats n'avait pas disparu avec la fin des travaux de la CVR.[55]

Mais avant même la découverte du printemps 2021, le tournant décolonial des musées canadiens était déjà amorcé. Le meilleur exemple en est peut-être le premier plan stratégique du Musée des beaux-arts du Canada intitulé *Transformer ensemble* rendu public en mai 2021[56]. Dans ce document quinquennal, le musée fait de la justice sociale une de ses priorités[57] et entend " placer les façons d'être et les formes de savoir des Autochtones au cœur de [ses] actions".[58] Tout en reconnaissant sa nature d'"institution coloniale", le musée se présente comme "un foyer d'espoir et de guérison" ajoutant au passage qu' "en mettant l'accent sur la guérison, nous ancrons notre présent et notre avenir dans le passé, et dans les savoirs des aîné.e.s et ancêtres autochtones".[59] Mais contrairement à la logique de réconciliation, les promesses sont ici suivies par des actions concrètes. Dès le mois de juin 2021, le musée adopte une nouvelle identité visuelle, "Ankosé. Tout est relié", développée en consultation avec la nation algonquine Anishinabeg dont le territoire ancestral englobe la ville d'Ottawa où se situe le musée. Mais surtout, en février 2022 le MBAC crée un nouveau département intitulé "Voies autochtones et décolonisation" placé sous la responsabilité de deux personnalités autochtones. Le département est doté d'une mission transversale qui touche toutes les fonctions du musée (collection, exposition, éducation, communication). Il s'agit là d'une réorientation majeure par rapport aux enjeux de l'intégration et de la réconciliation[60].

III/ Deux formes de guérison, deux formes de décolonisation

Il aura donc fallu attendre que la logique de la décolonisation s'impose pour que la guérison soit prise au sérieux, comme le demandait le rapport de la CVR. Pourtant ce tournant vers la décolonisation pris dans les années 2021-2022 s'est accompagné d'une profonde crise dans les musées au cœur de laquelle on trouve deux conceptions opposées de la guérison.

La crise s'est cristallisée autour du licenciement de plusieurs conservateurs autochtones dans un laps de temps relativement bref. Le départ en 2019 de la conservatrice autochtone Lucy Bell (Haïda) du Musée royal de la Colombie-Britannique — qui souhaitait ainsi dénoncer le racisme rampant de l'institution à l'égard des peuples autochtones — avait créé un certain malaise dans le milieu muséal, d'autant plus que son successeur, Troy Sebastian (Ktunaxa), avait démissionné deux ans plus tard pour les mêmes raisons. Le Musée royal avait cependant su atténuer les critiques en démantelant ses deux expositions permanentes consacrées d'une part aux populations autochtones (*Our Living Languages: First People's' Voices in BC*) et de l'autre à l'histoire de la province (*Becoming BC*), et en s'accordant une année de réflexion

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et de consultation pour repenser de fond en comble son rapport aux Premières Nations.[61] Par contre, un vrai malaise a commencé à s'établir avec le licenciement abrupt du conservateur de l'art autochtone du MBAC, Greg Hill (Kanien'kehá:ka), quelques mois après la mise sur pied du nouveau département Voies autochtones et décolonisation. Greg Hill, qui était à l'emploi du musée depuis vingt-deux ans, a fait entrer près de 1300 œuvres autochtones dans la collection du musée et organisé certaines des plus grandes expositions d'artistes autochtones au Canada. Le 22 novembre 2022, il publie sur son profil Instagram le message suivant : "J'ai été licencié parce que je ne suis pas d'accord et que je suis profondément perturbé par la façon coloniale et anti-autochtone avec laquelle est dirigée le Département Voies autochtones et décolonisation".[62] Le malaise est amplifié par le fait que le MBAC refuse de donner une explication sur les raisons de ce licenciement expéditif — qui contraste en tous points avec les intentions affichées dans le plan stratégique de mai 2021 —, se contentant d'émettre un communiqué de presse aux termes très généraux expliquant, au nom de l'équipe dirigeante que "nous devions examiner comment nous pouvions faire les choses différemment et nous éloigner des méthodes de travail traditionnelles qui ne reflètent plus le type d'institution dont nous avons besoin et que nous voulons être."[63] Devant cette politique de la langue de bois, la crise dure plusieurs semaines faisant la une des journaux. Il faut toutefois attendre encore un an, et le licenciement de la conservatrice Wanda Nanibush du Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario (MBAO), pour voir la crise atteindre son acmé. Comme nous l'avons dit plus haut, cette jeune femme incarne le visage de la décolonisation des musées au Canada et, plus largement, en Amérique du Nord[64]. Entre son embauche en 2017 par le MBAO comme conser-

Fig. 09: Thontenonh-kwa'tshera-no'onhnha [Aire de soins] Espace présenté dans le cadre de l'exposition Alanis Obomsawin : les enfants doivent entendre une autre histoire au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, du 26 septembre 2024 au 26 janvier 2025. Conception : Katsitsanoron Dumoulin-Bush, en collaboration avec ohisse – atelier de design social. Photo : Michael Patten.

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vatrice de l'art autochtone, et son licenciement en novembre 2023, elle a multiplié les initiatives au sein de musée (expositions, publications, transformations des espaces et des façons de travailler entre conservateurs autochtones et allochtones). Si les raisons de son licenciement font peu de mystères — elle avait publié sur les réseaux sociaux, une série de messages en faveur du peuple palestinien, décrit comme un peuple autochtone, subissant la violence d'une puissance colonisatrice —, celui-ci sonne comme un coup de tonnerre dans le monde de l'art canadien.[65] Plusieurs artistes et institutions annulent leur collaboration avec le MBAO, les lettres ouvertes se multiplient, dont une retentissante signée par plus d'une centaine d'artistes et de conservateurs autochtones du monde entier.[66] Cette lettre conteste ouvertement l'authenticité de l'engagement des musées en faveur de la décolonisation, et se demande si celle-ci n'a jamais été pour eux autre chose qu'une stratégie de communication.

Comment expliquer ces revirements de la part de certains musées canadiens qui étaient les plus en pointe sur la question de la décolonisation? Très certainement parce que la décolonisation, contrairement à la réconciliation, a posé une question très concrète aux musées : jusqu'à quel point étaient-ils prêts à transformer leur façon de faire et à accepter que les Autochtones jouissent d'une véritable souveraineté en leur sein? Comme nous l'avons vu, la question de la souveraineté est devenue très importante à la suite de la prise de conscience que les politiques d'intégration et de réconciliation ne livreraient pas toutes leurs promesses[67]. Or la souveraineté, principe central de la DNUDPA, est elle-même étroitement reliée à la question de la guérison. On peut en effet affirmer que la crise qui secoue les musées canadiens depuis l'automne 2022 est le résultat du choc de deux conceptions antagonistes de la guérison : est-ce que ce sont les survivants des pensionnats qui doivent être guéris par le musée, comme le mentionnait déjà le rapport final de la CVR, ou est-ce que c'est le musée lui-même qui souhaite se guérir au plus vite de son passé colonial ?

Du côté de la direction des musées, on constate que la décolonisation est souvent de l'ordre de la métaphore[68] et tient avant tout de la croyance autoréalisatrice qui était déjà à l'œuvre dans le processus de réconciliation. Reconnaitre la réalité des pensionnats équivalait alors à se réconcilier. Aujourd'hui, reconnaître la nature coloniale de l'institution muséale équivaudrait à décoloniser les musées. Toute action supplémentaire pour implémenter cette décolonisation dans les politiques et la gouvernance du musée étant jugée superflue. C'est entre autres ce qui ressort d'un article du *New York Times* en date du 10 octobre 2023 entièrement consacré aux difficultés des musées d'art canadiens à se débarrasser de leur passé colonial et du sentiment de culpabilité qui l'accompagne.[69] Dès lors, pour de nombreux musées, la question de la guérison est entendue dans une acception bien spécifique : ce ne sont plus les Autochtones, mais les musées eux-mêmes qui doivent se guérir des affres de la colonisation. À la guérison des survivants, pensée sur la longue durée, s'oppose la guérison spontanée des musées.

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Du côté des Autochtones, la décolonisation des musées est intrinsèquement liée à la souveraineté que ceux-ci sont prêts à leur accorder pour accomplir leur guérison. Les premiers critiques du processus de réconciliation, à l'instar de David Garneau, avaient déjà suggéré que la priorité de la CVR ne devrait pas être les collaborations entre artistes autochtones et artistes allochtones, mais bien plutôt les collaborations entre artistes autochtones eux-mêmes dans ce qu'il nommait des "espaces autochtones irréconciliables" qui échapperaient à la volonté d'appropriation du colonialisme.[70] Par la suite, son point de vue a évolué et sa conception s'est faite plus inclusive. Dans un texte de 2022, consacré aux "espaces non-coloniaux" des musées, Garneau définit ces derniers comme des espaces qui prennent en compte la souveraineté autochtone, mais qui sont réalisés et partagés par des Autochtones et des Allochtones.[71] Garneau prend pour exemple la salle conçue pour accueillir la Manitou Asinîy (ou "Pierre de Manitou") au Musée royal d'Alberta en attendant son rapatriement sur son site d'origine. On peut également qualifier d'"espace non-colonial", au sens où l'entend Garneau, l'aire de soins *Thontenonhkwa'tsherano'onhnha* (Fig. 9) qui a été conçue par l'artiste et médiatrice culturelle kanien'kehá:ka Katsitsanoron Dumoulin-Bush dans le cadre de l'exposition *Alanis Obomsawin. Les enfants doivent entendre une autre histoire* au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (26 septembre 2024 – 26 janvier 2025). Cet espace a été pensé en continuité avec les thèmes abordés par l'œuvre de l'artiste Alanis Obomsawin (Waban-Aki) qui "[mettent] en lumière des réalités souvent douloureuses, créant ainsi un espace propice à la guérison"[72], mais il se veut également "un espace polyvalent" ouvert à l'ensemble du public afin d'encourager la réflexion sur les zones d'ombre de l'histoire du Canada. Dumoulin-Bush insiste sur le fait que cette aire, qui se veut "décoloniale", a été conçue avant tout dans un esprit de partage symbolisé par l'installation participative qu'elle a nommée "Éternité" (Fig. 10).[73] Dans une démarche de *storytelling*, chaque visiteur, autochtone ou allochtone, est invité à écrire une histoire personnelle ou un souhait concernant sa communauté sur une feuille de papier dont la couleur correspond à la décennie de sa date de naissance. Il est ensuite invité à rouler et à glisser sa feuille dans un des espaces du mur conçu à cet effet et à prendre en échange l'histoire d'un autre visiteur qu'il peut emporter avec lui.

Admettons, en guise de conclusion, que de tels espaces transforment en profondeur la mission du musée en faisant passer les besoins des communautés avant la conservation des objets, et c'est peut-être en ça qu'ils parviennent à renverser l'ordre colonial, c'est du moins ce que suggère David Garneau, auquel nous laissons le mot de la fin : "Les musées sont donc non coloniaux, autochtonisés, lorsqu'ils placent les besoins des personnes vivantes avant les biens conservés. Lorsqu'ils reconnaissent que les trésors dont ils ont hérité ne sont pas des choses inanimées, mais des désirs faits matière et que certains de ces désirs sont plus porteurs de guérison que d'autres".[74]

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Endnotes

1 Baillargeon 2022.

2 Cet article s'inscrit dans le cadre des recherches du Partenariat *Des nouveaux usages des collections dans les musées d'art* financé par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada : http://www.cieco.co

3 Au Canada, les Premières Nations sont un des trois peuples autochtones, avec les Inuits et les Métis, reconnus par la Constitution de 1982. Le terme " Premières Nations " remplace de plus en plus souvent le terme " Amérindiens " qui a longtemps été en usage. Dans le cadre de cet article, nous utiliserons les ethnonymes des Premières Nations (Wendat, Apache, Kwakwaka'wakw…) pour désigner l'appartenance d'une personne à telle ou telle nation.

4 Tuck, Yang 2012, p. 3, toutes les traductions de l'anglais au français sont personnelles.

5 Phillips 1988.

6 Phillips 2011, p. 48-70.

7 AMC, APN 1992.

8 Martin 1991; CRPA, 1996.

9 Ash-Milby, Phillips 2017.

10 Kaine 2021.

11 Mithlo 2005, p. 46.

12 Rappelons que la Commission de vérité et réconciliation a été mise en place par le Canada dans le cadre de la Convention de règlement relative aux pensionnats indiens signée en 2006. Cette dernière prévoyait, entre autres, la tenue d'une CVR, la mise en place de services de santé et de guérison et l'abandon du recours collectif déposé par 15 000 anciens pensionnaires en 2002 réclamant 12 milliards de dollars de dommages à l'État canadien (l'indemnisation financière des victimes s'établira finalement à hauteur 1,9 milliards de dollars).

13 Le terme de " génocide culturel " est défini dans le sommaire du rapport final de la CVR, intitulé *Honorer la vérité, réconcilier pour l'avenir*, de la façon suivante : " Un *génocide culturel* est la destruction des structures et des pratiques qui permettent au groupe de continuer à vivre en tant que groupe. […] Et pour la question qui nous occupe, des familles à qui on a empêché de transmettre leurs valeurs culturelles et leur identité d'une génération à la suivante. " (CVR 2015, 1). Notons qu'il existe actuellement un débat au Canada pour savoir si l'adjectif " culturel " n'est pas un euphémisme qui cache la réalité d'un génocide pur et simple. Par exemple, le Musée canadien pour les droits de la personne de Winnipeg a décidé, en 2019, de remplacer le terme " génocide culturel " par " génocide ". Voir Radio-Canada 2019.

14 CVR 2015, p. 155.

15 CVR 2015, p. 4 et 5.

16 CVR 2015, p. 199.

17 La démarche s'apparente à ce que la psychanalyse appelle l'abréaction, à savoir une " décharge émotionnelle par laquelle un sujet se libère de l'affect attaché au souvenir d'un événement traumatique ", Laplanche, Pontalis 2007, p. 1.

18 Carey Newman est un artiste Kwakwaka'wakw et Sto:lo. Son nom traditionnel est Hayalthkin'geme.

19 Il existe depuis 2022 une version numérique de *La Couverture des témoins* qui permet d'explorer l'ensemble des fragments de l'œuvre : https://couverturedestemoins.ca/.

20 Baujard 2020.

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21 Comme le dira David Garneau : “ L’art n’est pas un moyen de guérison en soi, mais il peut l’être en relation avec d’autres moyens. ”, Garneau 2012, p. 38.

22 La Fondation autochtone de guérison, pendant ses seize années d’existence (1998-2014), financera ces différents organismes à travers le Canada. Voir le site de la fondation : https://www.fadg.ca/.

23 Garneau 2012, p. 36

24 Voir le site consacré à l’évaluation du programme Canada 150 : https://www.canada.ca/fr/patrimoine-canadien/organisation/publications/evaluations/canada-150.html.

25 Le rapport *Portés à l’action* jette un regard critique sur le programme Canada 150 en rappelant que si le gouvernement canadien affirme qu’il a été complété, d’autres organismes affirment que ce n’est pas le cas, AMC 2022a, p. 129.

26 Le Conseil des arts du Canada, créé en 1957 sur le modèle du British Council of the Arts, est une agence fédérale qui jouit d’une grande autonomie par rapport au gouvernement canadien.

27 CAC 2017.

28 CAC 2018.

29 Cet objectif, loin d’être caché était au contraire mentionné dès la première ligne du mandat de la CVR : “ On observe un nouveau et puissant désir de tourner la page sur les événements passés, afin qu’il nous soit possible de bâtir un avenir plus solide et plus sain “. CVR 2015, p. 371.

30 Depuis cet article de Garneau, il est très fréquent de voir écrit le mot avec le préfixe entre parenthèses ou entre crochets : (ré)conciliation.

31 Stimson 2012, p. 70.

32 DNUDPA est l’acronyme de Déclaration des Nations Unies sur le droit des peuples autochtones.

33 AMC 2022a, p. 7.

34 AMC 2022b.

35 AMC, 2022a, p. 98.

36 Nous utilisons dans le cadre de cet article les expressions “ souveraineté autochtone ” et “ autodétermination autochtone ” comme des synonymes, tout en étant conscient que certains auteurs introduisent des nuances entre les deux ; Voir Rickard 2017.

37 AMC 2022a, p. 99. Le terme “ espace courageux ” (*Brave Spaces*) se distingue volontairement d’“espaces sûrs” (*Safe S*paces) que l’on retrouve surtout dans le monde de la santé et des services sociaux.

38 AMC 2022a, p. 106.

39 Gaudry, Lorenz 2018, p. 222.

40 Brulon Soares, Leshchenko 2018.

41 Brulon Soares, Witcomb 2022, p. v.

42 Tout d’abord, le colonialisme de peuplement qui s’est mis en place lors de la première vague de colonisation des Amériques au XVe et XVIe siècles et qui se caractérise par l’élimination des populations autochtones au profit des nouvelles populations de colons d’origine européenne. La particularité des pays qui répondent aujourd’hui à ce modèle (entre autres le Canada, les États-Unis, la Nouvelle Zélande et l’Australie) est qu’ils n’ont, par définition, jamais connu de mouvements d’indépendance. Ensuite, le colonialisme d’exploitation, qui correspond à la deuxième vague de colonisation, connait son apogée au XIXe siècle et se caractérise par la colonisation de l’Afrique, de l’Asie et du

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Moyen-Orient par les nations européennes, au premier rang desquels le Royaume-Uni et la France. Ce colonialisme d'exploitation se distingue du colonialisme de peuplement par le fait que les pays colonisés ont recouvré leur souveraineté au gré des guerres d'indépendance des années 1950 et 1960.

43 Vergès 2023.

44 Mignolo 2015 ; Mignolo 2021.

45 Brulon Soares 2023, p. 6.

46 Nanibush, Uhlyarik 2023.

47 Mignolo, Nanibush 2018.

48 Mignolo 2015.

49 Garneau 2022, p. 235.

50 Alors que le Premier ministre du Canada s'était excusé en 2008 pour le rôle que le gouvernement fédéral avait joué dans le système des pensionnats, ce n'est que le 25 octobre 2024 que le président américain a présenté des excuses officielles aux Premières Nations pour la politique menée dans le cadre de la *Federal Indian Boarding School* ; CBC 2024.

51 Lonetree 2012.

52 Lonetree 2012, p. 5.

53 Lonetree 2012, p. 120. Ce jugement peut sembler étonnant pour un œil européen qui a l'habitude de voir dans le NMAI le type même du "musée du Nous" opposé au " musée des Autres " ; De L'Estoile 2007, p. 490.

54 Lonetree 2012, p. 167.

55 Des centaines d'autres tombes ont été découvertes dans différentes provinces canadiennes après celles de Kamloops. Une enquête indépendante sur les sépultures anonymes a été confiée en 2022 à la juriste kanien'kehá:ka Kimberly Murray qui a rendu ses conclusions le 29 octobre 2024 dans un rapport volumineux qui réaffirme que la priorité est de favoriser la guérison des Autochtones et de s'opposer à l'amnistie à bon compte des perpétrateurs des crimes. Voir Murray 2024.

56 Le plan stratégique du MBAC ne fait pas référence à la découverte macabre de Kamloops puisqu'il a été rendu public le 25 mai 2021, soit deux jours après celle-ci.

57 On retrouve dans ce plan stratégique certaines idées qui avaient été proposées dans la définition du musée du Comité pour la définition du musée de l'ICOM en 2019, qui affirmait entre autres que les musées devaient " contribuer à la dignité humaine et à la justice sociale, à l'égalité mondiale et au bien-être de la planète ". On se souvient que cette définition avait finalement été rejetée par l'Assemblée générale extraordinaire de l'ICOM la même année ; Marshall 2020.

58 MBAC 2021, non paginé.

59 MBAC 2021, non paginé.

60 Comme le souligne le mot " décolonisation " dans le nom du nouveau département, mais également la substitution de " voies autochtones " (*Indigenous Ways*) aux " voix autochtones " (*Indigenous Voices)* qui était un thème central dans les logiques d'intégration et de réconciliation.

61 Radio-Canada 2021.

62 Watson 2022.

63 Cité dans Watson 2022.

64 Le *New York Times* la décrit en 2018 comme " l'une des vois les plus puissantes pour la culture autochtone au sein du monde de l'art de l'Amérique du Nord ", Loos 2018.

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65 McBride 2024.

66 Couchie *et al.* 2023.

67 Ash-Milby, Phillips 2017, p. 37.

68 Sur cette question, voir l'article très souvent cité " Decolonization is not a metaphor ", Tuck, Yang 2012.

69 Onishi 2023.

70 Garneau 2012, p. 37.

71 Garneau 2022, p. 236. Cette suggestion trouve un écho dans la proposition du rapport *Portés à l'action* d'aménager des " espaces courageux " au sein des musées ;

72 MAC 2024.

73 Nous citons ici, avec son accord, les propos que Katsitsanoron Dumoulin-Bush a tenu lors d'une visite de l'aire de soin en date du 24 janvier 2025.

74 Garneau 2022, p. 245.

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Poetics in Museological Crossroads: Nosso Sagrado, enchantment and the passage of time

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Keywords:
Nosso Sagrado, Museology, Museum; Musealization, Re-Musealization.

ABSTRACT:

The article examines the processes of musealization and re-musealization of the Coleção do Nosso Sagrado, a collection of sacred objects that narrates a history of religious oppression in Brazil within a colonial context. An analysis of three specific pieces and their custodial processes at the Museu da República, managed in shared custody with researchers and religious leaders, serves as a case study for a critical, decolonial, and reparative museology.

L'articolo esamina i processi di musealizzazione e ri-musealizzazione della Coleção do Nosso Sagrado, una collezione di oggetti sacri che narra una storia di oppressione religiosa in Brasile in un contesto coloniale. L'analisi di tre specifici pezzi e dei loro processi di conservazione presso il Museu da República, gestiti in custodia condivisa con ricercatori e leader religiosi, costituisce un caso di studio per una museologia critica, decoloniale e riparativa.

Opening Picture:

São Jorge, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

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Introduction

Museums are fundamental institutions in modern society. They shape realities, *Zeitgeists* and communities, representing and reflecting power dynamics and historical injustices. The processes of reparation in museums are complex, nonlinear and involve a tangled web of interests surrounding objects and their social meanings. This complexity is especially evident when considering religious objects, particularly Afro-Brazilian items from *Candomblé*[1] and *Umbanda*[2] traditions, where the conventional Western notion of an "object" is challenged.

In this article, it is explored the case study of the Collection Nosso Sagrado and the multiple intersections involving its participants. Before and after the abolition of slavery, countless objects from Afro-Brazilian religious communities were forcibly taken and added to collections in Brazilian museums[3]. One particularly complex case involves a group of 519 afro-brazilian religious objects seized from various *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* temples between 1890 and 1946 in Rio de Janeiro. These sacred objects, first designated as cultural heritage in 1938 under the label "Museum of Black Magic", were held in the Museu da Polícia Civil do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Museum of the Civil Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro) until 2020. In September 2020, the sacred objects were transferred to the Museu da República, where curatorial responsibilities are now shared with representatives from different *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* communities. The collection was not only physically relocated but also symbolically transformed as it moved from one museological context to another. This shift can be seen as the construction of a new narrative for the collection. The initial musealization by the police in Rio de Janeiro is subverted by the shared authority of the Museu da República with *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* leaders. The objects are thus "re-musealized" within an ethical framework that prioritises life[4]and care.

It is not an easy task to write about unique cultural manifestations in Brazil for an international audience. Translating the complexity of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* - cosmovisions that offer extremely sophisticated perspectives on reality - is a significant challenge. The collection Nosso Sagrado points to crossroads of interpretation, reevaluation, and, perhaps, healing regarding the museum's role in addressing sensitive aspects of contemporary society.

Examining the non-linear musealization process of these "objects" reveals how the agency surrounding the collection enables new interpretations, even with the same material foundation. This dynamic of intention and perception, both material and immaterial, as displayed in the museum's exhibits, is the focus of the present analysis according to the Collection Nosso Sagrado. How do the possibilities for museological reparation emerge through decentralisation? In what ways can agency be distributed? How can museums become spaces for experimenting with participation and shared authority?

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The history of the Collection Nosso Sagrado

Before examining the group of sacred objects itself, it is essential to recognize that Brazil was the first, largest, and most enduring slave-based society in the Americas. The social inequalities and racial hierarchies established during slavery persisted after abolition, permeating both legal and cultural spheres.[5] Brazilian museums are closely linked to this legacy of slavery, directly or indirectly.[6]

As noted by Julio Braga, police repression of *Candomblé* cannot be reduced to a societal reaction against a religious practice of marginalised classes. It was an ambitious effort to undermine a form of citizenship that existed outside the Western ideological framework.[7] Since the colonial period, religious practices with African roots were persecuted and repressed – referred to as *calundu*[8] and punished by the Catholic Church as heresy. In the Imperial period, the 1824 Constitution did not recognize Afro-Brazilian practices as religions but as sects.[9]

It is also worth noting that in Imperial Brazil, the Polícia da Corte was responsible for confiscating various objects from Afro-Brazilian religions. Afro-Brazilian temples, known as 'Zungus' and 'Casas de dar fortuna', were invaded, with people being arrested and religious objects looted. Between 1880 and 1887, during the last decade of slavery in Brazil, the director of the Museu Nacional, Ladislau Netto, negotiated with the police to have some of these looted objects transferred to the museum for study. A total of 93 objects, violently taken from various *terreiros*,[10] were brought to the museum to 'contribute to the advancement of ethnological studies.' These objects now form part of the "Kumbukumbu" collection at the Museu Nacional.[11]

Analysing Collection Nosso Sagrado involves acknowledging the pervasive impact of institutionalised racism in Brazilian society, deeply tied to its historical context. As Luiz Augusto Alves writes, the 1890 Brazilian Criminal Code, which predated the first Republican Constitution of 1891, criminalised "magic," "witchcraft," and "sorcery". Despite the 1891 Constitution establishing a secular state, this Criminal Code was used to target and violate Afro-Brazilian religious communities and their heritage. In 1912, the Rio de Janeiro Police Academy was established to identify criminal artefacts, creating a museum of crime that included bladed weapons, gambling paraphernalia, and sacred objects from Afro-Brazilian temples. In 1934, the museum underwent reorganisation, and the collection of objects was named the "Museum of Black Magic". In 1938, it became the first collection officially recognized as ethnographic heritage by SPHAN.[12]

Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, Mãe Nilce de Iansã, Mário Chagas and Maria Helena Versiani recount that the objects were seized during police raids on various *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* temples between 1890 and 1946. Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, the *Iyalorixá* of Ilê Omolu Oxum, stated: "This is not a collection. These are our sacred things. They were stolen from us".[13]

The authors explain that these objects were stripped of their original, essential meanings twice: first, by

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being violently removed from their temples and, second, by being dismissed as mere criminal evidence by the police. The sacred objects were stored in boxes, inaccessible even to researchers, for many years. In 2017, the campaign "Liberte Nosso Sagrado" led by *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* leaders and supported by academics, politicians, museologists and museums was launched. This campaign resulted in the collection being transferred to the Museu da República in September 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Mario Chagas, the museum director from 2017 to 2024, emphasised that receiving the sacred objects was not an act of favour but a social responsibility – an expression of care and an active response to the racism embedded in Brazilian history.[14]

In 2017, Pamela de Oliveira Pereira interviewed Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum about the photos of imprisoned objects documented by Yvonne Maggie in the Museu da Polícia. During the interview, Mãe Meninazinha highlighted several errors, including misnaming entities and incorrect identification of certain objects.[15] Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum emphasises that the collection was stolen by the police and the Brazilian State, an action taken against the *terreiros*. Pereira, in her text, highlights this contradiction or inversion of roles. Who, in fact, is the criminal? What, in fact, is the crime?[16]

In her doctoral thesis, Pamela de Oliveira Pereira writes that for 8 decades the sacred objects remained under the Museu da Polícia as "Museum of Black Magic", however some religious objects, and here specifically in afro-brazilian cosmovisions, are people, they have agency and life. Since the late 1980s, there have been efforts to reclaim the religious objects, and since 2014 other museums were open to receive the objects, such as Museu Nacional and Museu do Ingá. The author continues to state that different religious leaders had different perceptions of Nosso Sagrado, to Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum the very perception of "collection" is questionable due to how they were obtained, and to the *Balalawô* Ivanir dos Santos none of the museums should had the collection, instead a new museum should be created for the afro-brazilian religions.[17]

The group of the shared curatorship has the following *terreiros*: Ilê Omolu Oxum; Instituição Filantrópica Abassá Lumyjacarê; Associação Espírita Senhor do Bonfim Oxalá Kupapa Unsaba/Bate Folha; Comunidade de Terreiro Afro-Indígena Casa do Perdão; Ilê Omon Oya Legy; Ilê Axé Omiojuaro; Templo do Vale do Sol e da Lua; Associação Beneficente Ilê Axé Ofá/Axé Iyá Nasso Oká Ilê Oxum/Sociedade N. Sra. das Candeias; Ilê Axé Iyá Omí Layó Egbé Obá Aganju; Tenda Espírita Caboblo Flecheiro Cobra Coral; and Tenda de Umbandista Caboclo Urucutum e Pai Zacarias. Alongside the museological staff of Museu da República, the role of the museum is to mediate the sacred experience with the material and immaterial integrity of the pieces.

In the first meeting between the Museu da República and the religious leaders, three conditions for the preservation the collection were established:

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1. The objects must be received through the lens of reparation. It is understood that the preservation of the collection advocates for religious freedom, life and memory of afro-brazilian religious traditions;
2. The guard of the collection must be shared. The museum recognizes that the specificities of this collection require orientations of *Iyalorixás*, *Babalorixás* and other leaders beyond museological theories and practices;
3. The passage from Museu da Polícia Civil to Museu da República must be led primarily by the *terreiro* communities, with the museum serving in a supporting capacity throughout the process.

On March 21st 2023, the name of the collection was officially changed to Nosso Sagrado.[18]

Although it is not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting the historical context of the Museu da República. The museum building, Palácio do Catete, was constructed by Antônio Clemente Pinto, Baron of Nova Friburgo (1795–1869), one of the wealthiest men in 19th-century Brazil. According to Rodrigo Marretto, the Baron participated in the transatlantic slave trade between 1827 and 1830, a period when the trade of enslaved people was legal in Imperial Brazil.[19] During these four years, he brought 3.074 men, women, and children from West Africa to be sold in the slave trade and to work on his plantations. In 1854, he was granted the title of "Baron" and continued to purchase enslaved people until the year of his death in 1869. At that time, he owned 2.180 enslaved people across his plantations, most of whom worked in coffee production.[20]

The Palácio do Catete, built between 1858 and 1866, served as the official residence and office of the Brazilian president from 1897 to 1960. In 1960, it was converted into the Museu da República. As a *lieux de mémoire*,[21] the Museu da República has become a place where collective memory is revisited, reflected upon, and reframed. It now operates under a new museological ethic that opposes the objectification of Afro-Brazilian communities and their cultural heritage.

Analysis of three pieces of the collection

The following analysis highlights the specific needs and careful attention required for the documentation and custody of these sacred objects. This analysis is based on cross-referencing various readings, conference presentations, and interviews with Mario Chagas and Maria Helena Versiani. When the objects were entrusted to the Museu da República, various terreiro leaders advised Mario Chagas to care for them with respect and affection, as though they were still within the terreiro.

The representation of Nosso Sagrado collection, now managed through a shared curatorship process, introduces a new dynamic in the social construction of Brazilian history. By presenting three examples of pieces from the *Nosso Sagrado* collection, we aim to illustrate possible methodologies for participation and shared curatorship between traditional museums and communities

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historically targeted by religious racism. Through the establishment of shared authority and by challenging the historical silencing of these communities by national institutions, the leadership of Candomblé and Umbanda groups creates opportunities to explore new realities through musealization.

Although the collection was received by the leaders of the *terreiros* at the Museu da República in September 2020, it has yet to be fully exhibited to the public. There has been an online page in Google Arts and Culture[22] and a small exhibition in the museum gardens, but the exhibition is scheduled to open in March 2025. For nearly two years, the exhibition has been in development, with a collaborative curatorial effort involving leaders from *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. A dedicated team has been overseeing the exhibition's organisation, museography, and curatorial narrative.

Alongside the exhibition, the Museology School of the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) has partnered with the Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN) to document the collection's pieces over time and publish a comprehensive dossier of the collection. This initiative is conducted in close collaboration with the religious leaders who are part of the collection's shared curatorship. The research emphasises values of democratic society and religious freedom, while also recognizing the foundational role of African heritage in shaping Brazilian culture.

The collection comprises 519 pieces, 126 of which have been recognised as cultural heritage by IPHAN, with 88 requiring restoration. All restoration and preservation efforts will proceed with the consent of the *terreiro* leaders. Notably, in addition to the collection's items, Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum chose to donate two personal objects: a metal *abebé* and a *fio de contas*. These objects were gifted by the *Iyalorixá* out of her own free will and agency, not taken through force or repression. Her donation contrasts with historical instances of police seizure and represents a shift in the relationship between Afro-Brazilian religious communities and the state, as embodied by the Museu da República.[23] This article examines the musealization process of three pieces from Nosso Sagrado, highlighting the collection's complexity, richness, and how its re-musealization represents a museological reparative and healing process.

1. Exu Ijelú/ Exu Lalu/ Caboclo Lalu (fig. 1)

Although documented by the police as Caboclo Lalú, however different leaders recognize the object also as the head of Exú Ijelú.[24] As a result, the museum now documents the piece under both names, recognizing the importance of addressing the transformations that the piece has gone through while being part of the museum collection. The *terreiro* leaders' authority influences the documentation process. Exú, as the one who comes first and is honoured first, played a key role: Exú Ijelu was the first item prepared for transfer from the Museu da Polícia and the first box opened at the Museu da República, following sacred protocols.

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01

Fig. 01: Exu Ijelú/ Exu Lalu/ Caboclo Lalu, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Mãe Luzia Cardoso. Centro Espírita Nossa Senhora da Conceição e São Jorge (Rua Araújo Leitão, 86, fundos, Engenho Novo). Year of Apprehension: 1934.

The object belonged to Luzia Cardoso, a 28-year-old domestic worker and religious leader who organized meetings as part of the practices of these spiritual traditions at the Centro Espírita Nossa Senhora da Conceição e São Jorge in Engenho Velho. On October 8th 1934, during one of these religious gatherings, the temple was raided by the police following complaints about "health concerns". It is important to highlight the complicity of orthodox medicine, which, driven by racist motivations, sought to suppress afro-religious healing practices. Luzia was arrested and some of the temple's objects were looted by the police as "evidence of the crime". Among these was the clay head of Exú Ijelu/Caboclo Lalu. The name "Lalu", from a line in *Umbanda*, refers to the entity Luzia was invoking at the time of the raid. Pai Roberto Braga and Mãe Palmira de Oyá identify the head as Exú Ijelu. However, as Pai Thiago de Ogum emphasises, the inherent diversity and flexibility within Afro-Brazilian religious traditions allow for varied interpretations of entities. Consequently, Exú Ijelu and Caboclo Lalu should not be viewed as fixed or absolute representations.[25]

The possibilities of a sacred experience of Nosso Sagrado also points at the museological sensibilities of how to respectfully and carefully address these different social readings with attentive ethics. The prescriptive nature of museums is here put in crossroads. Because the sacred objects have their own agency, the experience leads to a new dynamic, a in-betweenness, a turning point in how these museological relationships can be addressed through other cosmovisions.

It is also important to underline that the ambiguity of Nosso Sagrado is not the relativization of afro-brazilian religious as serious cosmovisions, but rather a museological compromise with the multiplicity and diversity that each *terreiro* has and how they express their understanding of material culture.

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2. São Jorge (fig. 2)

Another piece in the collection is a small sculpture of São Jorge slaying the dragon. It's important to note that in the context of *Umbanda*, São Jorge differs from his role in Catholicism. As many other catholic saints in Brazil, it acquired different meanings in *terreiros*. As *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* were violently repressed, its practitioners often used catholic figures to represent orixás and entities from their spirituality. This double meaning that catholic figures held, is a perfect exemplification of Brazil's syncretism and it evidences how it's development is also attached to a history of violence and religious prejudice.

This distinction led to the police seizing representations of São Jorge during raids. In many Umbanda practices, São Jorge is syncretized with Ogun, and the sculpture often allows for the simultaneous worship of both the orixá[26] and the saint. However, a similar sculpture in a church wouldn't have been targeted by the police at that time. It was seized from a *terreiro* because, within the *Umbanda* context, the object takes on a different social and religious meaning. Under the influence of an Afro-Brazilian religious community, São Jorge is framed in a cosmology beyond Christian or Western interpretations, making him a target of religious racism.

In Brazil, a sculpture of São Jorge would not be looted by the police from a Catholic church, but within a *terreiro*, the sculpture acquires a distinct significance, becoming a different object. The context and agency of Afro-Brazilian religions reconfigure the object both materially and symbolically. The experience of São Jorge, as well as Ogun, situates the sculpture within a relational framework, enabling the signifier (the sculpture) to embody multiple meanings (São Jorge, Ogun, or both), without the imposition of a prescriptive or direct museological interpretation.

02

Fig. 02: São Jorge, source: Nosso Sagrado/ Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

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03

Fig. 03: Fios de Conta, source: Nosso Sagrado/Museu da República. Photo by Oscar Liberal. Yet no provenance identified.

3. Fios de Conta (fig. 3)

Fio de Contas are religious objects worn by axé communities. The Contas are specific to each person's religious path and how they learned with their own *terreiros*. As part of the Collection Nosso Sagrado there are some Fios de Contas, which were broken or torn. They are documented as in the photography above, in small transparent bags. If in the museological perspective the material integrity of the object is compromised, as the sacred guiding says, that the Contas should not be repaired. According to the guidance provided by the terreiro leaders, they have completed their spiritual journey and should be respected accordingly, just as within the religious framework.

Fio de Contas cannot be reused, as it is understood that they have fulfilled their mission.[27] This is another example of how the museological practice that deals with these collections needs to consider the immaterial aspect of the object, going beyond the pure historical value of the piece.

The process of negotiating is expressed by Versiani and Chagas as:

> *'Nosso Sagrado' connects a community of meanings, which shares values, affections, common interests, and a certain universe of religious practices, preservation, research, and communication. Museological practices and theories know little about Nosso Sagrado. Thus, to heal and care for Nosso Sagrado, in its multiple dimensions, the guidance of iyalorixás and babalorixás, as well as the caretakers of Axé, is indispensable.*[28]

The community of meanings and sensibilities is shown as a museological ethical standing regarding the social responsibilities of the museum staff and the historical reparation that this process demands.

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Creative Passages in Museums

Museums operate at the intersection of the material and symbolic worlds. Museology, as a discipline, simultaneously addresses cultural objectification and human experience. Early European museums, modern descendants of the 17th-century Cabinets of Curiosities, were exclusive temples of encyclopaedic knowledge, accessible only to an elite, primarily white men. Embedded within the colonial and imperial framework, these museums perpetuated Western dominance worldwide.[29]

The defining characteristic of the first European museums was their power to symbolise the nation publicly and "educate" visitors with authority.[30] For example, the British Museum, established by the British Parliament in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759, set a new standard for communicating universal knowledge to the masses through its collection.[31] In essence, museums became a tool for the State to assert power over modern societies. From the 19th century onwards, cultural institutions were systematically organised to civilise the population according to bourgeois values.[32]

The Western obsession with representation has been widely discussed by academics such as Heidegger and Derrida. In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Europe's construction as the Subject of history led to the creation of the cultural Other through epistemic violence and the erasure of non-European subjectivities. This intellectual discourse, representing postcolonial territories, becomes intertwined with Western economic interests.[33] Museums play a critical role in this Western narrative by representing the cultural Other through museological displays.

This experience, referred to here as "musealization" in museological theory, is central to contemporary debates and reevaluations. Musealization is not merely a representation of reality; it can construct reality itself. Museums do not just inform our worldview indirectly; they create a curated reality for visitors, arranging objects to convey a narrative. Museums shape social perception and function as ritualised performances of realities people participate in. Assigning, reassigning, or removing social value from an object places it within a new dynamic, preparing it to be publicly viewed and communicated. However, this process is complex and ongoing, dependent on the agencies controlling it rather than being an autonomous and immutable force.

Bruno Brulon describes musealization as a "creative passage" - a ritual performed by the museum, transforming objects into a sacred realm that exists simultaneously in ordinary and new realities.[34] In essence, museological exhibitions shape identity. As Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine note, when cultural "others" are involved, exhibitions convey who we are and, more importantly, who we are not. Exhibitions become privileged spaces for constructing images of self and 'other'.[35]

This creative passage can also crystallise experiences of domination. Museums, as they spread through colonial and imperial processes, became guardians of an "official histo-

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ry" endorsed by the State, often silencing marginalised communities. They are ideological instruments in society, despite their professed objective and neutral stance. Museums hold the power to determine whose voices are heard and whose are silenced.

As Donald Preziosi argues, we cannot escape museums because the modern world is the "supreme museological artefact", consuming everything displayed for visitors to experience. For Preziosi, European museums of the Enlightenment "consume" time through their objects, and through this unique relationship, they fabricate memory metonymically:

> Museology and art history are instrumental ways of distributing the space of memory. Both operate together on the relationships between the past and the present, subject and objects, and collective history and individual memory. These operations are in aid of transforming the recognised past in the present into a storied space wherein the past and present are imaginatively juxtaposed, where their virtual relationships cannot be construed as succession and profession; cause and effect. Where, in other words, the illusion that the past exists in and of itself, immune from the projections and desires of the present, may be sustained.[36]

> Understanding museums as standpoints for our societal narrative and collective memory means acknowledging their material and symbolic responsibility. Therefore, it is crucial to contest musealization processes, especially when they involve social inequality or historical violence.

The concept of musealization, as proposed by George Stocking, suggests that musealized objects exist in different dimensions. They originate from the past but are timeless, crossing temporal boundaries and encompassing both the values assigned to them in new contexts and their original meanings.[37] Museums are inherently political spaces. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach argue that museums "transform ideology in the abstract into living belief".[38] They often serve political agendas, including reinforcing racism in Brazilian society.

The analysis of museums as spaces of magic and devotion, despite their apparent contradiction with the Enlightenment paradigm of modern science, becomes more expansive with the inclusion of non-Western perspectives. The involvement of *terreiro* leaders as authority figures in Nosso Sagrado introduces the Museu da República to a new dimension of democratic use, accessibility, and social function - a process that is both political and poetic, animated by the transformative power of *axé*.

The notion of enchantment, as described by Luiz Rufino and Luiz Antonio Simas, is both a poetic and political stance that connects nature, the visible and the invisible across different temporal and spatial dimensions. According to the authors, the opposite of life is not death but rather disenchantment. Disenchantment represents a form of devitalization, silencing and a colonial politics of scarcity.[39] Through collaboration and negotiation, the objects

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in Nosso Sagrado are re-enchanted and revitalised by a new approach to musealization.

The practice of enchantment in Nosso Sagrado is a collective and collaborative effort that establishes a new material and symbolic condition, ensuring the continuity of *axé* within the pieces. Through the partnership between *terreiro* leaders and the Museu da República, this re-enchantment marks the beginning of a transformative phase for both the collection and Museology as an academic discipline. Nosso Sagrado envisions a museology shaped by diverse cultural matrices - a new path for the field that fosters dialogue between different systems of knowledge and, most importantly, redistributes the authority over the musealization process to new agents.

This shared authority, as understood in Nosso Sagrado, grants agency not only to terreiro leaders but also to the enchanted objects themselves. It reflects a musealization process rooted in the intersection of diverse epistemologies - a creation that is both poetic and political. These museological crossroads are not a rigid set of practices but rather a collaborative creation that enables constructive and non-violent combinations of social meanings. By combining the expertise of museologists with the traditional philosophies of *mães* and *pais de santo*, the process decentralises the specialist's role, fostering structural changes in the museum's relationship with society.

The enchantment, central to this process, signifies a paradigm shift, challenging the modern and rational legacy of museums. Nosso Sagrado reimagines the possibilities of what a museum can be and how historical violences can be addressed and re-signified. The Western institution is fundamentally transformed by the presence and agency of previously marginalised actors. The collective actions of Nosso Sagrado subvert the colonial and museological separation between subject and object. The objects' vitality is acknowledged and respected by the institution. As previously noted, the then-director Mario Chagas was instructed to care for them as if they were in a terreiro.

The creative passage of musealization is also positioned at a crossroad. The collection stands out not only because it has been musealized by the Museu da República but also because it was co-musealized with terreiro leaders. The creative passage is enriched by the sophisticated perspectives of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. Their enchanted worldviews provide the tools to confront new challenges and bring about meaningful change, as a new social heritage is collectively being created.

The journey of the Nosso Sagrado collection illustrates how the values assigned to museum collections can change over time. Initially seized as evidence of a crime, the collection of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* artefacts was later reclassified as ethnological objects of supposed significance and now as an ongoing process of care, respect and healing. This evolving categorization reflects the dynamic nature of museological value as mediated by the institutions that preserve these collections.

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Conclusion

Musealization is not a straightforward or absolute process. The museological practice can simultaneously address both the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of an object. The transition from the Museum of Black Magic to Collection Nosso Sagrado - from a musealization marked by violence and prejudice to one characterised by shared authority - signals a transformation in the status of these sacred objects. This shift enables the collection to exist beyond the confines of modern objectification.

Shared curatorship redefines traditional museological authority, opening up new possibilities for agency. The collaboration between museum staff and the leaders of Candomblé and Umbanda has expanded the epistemological framework of the museum, resulting in a new, co-created praxis. The complexity of Collection Nosso Sagrado is acknowledged by the museum, creating a need to reconfigure its musealization in alignment with the sacred worldview of *terreiros*.

The "re-musealization" of Nosso Sagrado invites us to reconsider the various social relationships that surround museological objects and to transform the contexts in which they are situated. The agencies involved in this process are not merely representing *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* cultural heritage but are actively reshaping the social realities of Afro-Brazilian communities. This creative transformation reverses the traditional museological approach; instead of the objects being adapted to fit the museum's framework, the museum adapts its practices to accommodate Nosso Sagrado.

The experimental nature of this process is crucial, as highlighted by Maria Helena Versiani's concepts of the "democratic usage of the museum" and "museology as an inclusive and socially-based practice".[40] The Museu da República plays a key role in mediating these ideas, particularly by engaging with the traditional knowledge of various *terreiros*. This practice of involving non-academic and non-governmental agents in museum processes creates an opportunity to challenge the established structures and methodologies of modern scientific judgement.

The musealization process of Nosso Sagrado is, here, understood as a "re-musealization" precisely due to the presence of the agents around the process of researching, documenting, preserving and communicating. In her Master Dissertation, the museologist Silvia Patoja elaborates on the concept of musealization not as a chain or line, but rather as a confluence. Based on the concept of "confluence" by Quilombola leader Nego Bispo, Silvia Patoja proposes that the museological scientific processes be understood as a non-linear circular continuum.[41]

The museological practice in relation with the *terreiros* leaders can be also understood as a Rhizome. The multiplicity of agencies around the Collection is an ecosystem of social meanings. Nosso Sagrado is not only between institutions but also with the entities present within the sacred objects. The multiplicity such as in the concept of the Rhizomes can be understood, as Deleuze and Guatarri write, as roots which grow in a lateral, circular, non dichotomous and non-binary movement.

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The rhizomorphic form is structured around the connections made with different semiotic universes without the aim of reaching universal form, thus decentralising the principle of unity. The multiplicity of the Rhizome doesn't have a subject or object, but different fibres that hold together a system of variable dimensions.[42]

The musealization and creative process in Nosso Sagrado reconfigures traditional museum practices through dialogue and collective action. The distinction between subject and object fades, as the sacred nature of the objects is honoured through shared authority. The rhizomatic experience of Nosso Sagrado enables both poetic and political engagement, relying on active community participation. This exemplifies Social Museology, which highlights how museums can function as tools for democratic action in contemporary society.

The connection between Social Museology and the remusealization of Nosso Sagrado is evident during Mario Chagas's directorship of the institution.[43] In Brazil, Social Museology stands as a social movement beyond academics and universities standpoints. Social Museology is a museology with a strong social and ethical purpose, focused on fighting social injustices and inequalities through museum practices. Social museology is consciously opposed to the western and normative museology. It is a practice and theory working memory as a tool for liberation and in service of life.[44] Social Museology opens new pathways for understanding the museum as a space open for cultural diversitiy, which creates new relations through our material culture.

Social Museology works by recognizing the value in the memory of subaltern communities and how it can be used as a form for political resistance. The museological representation of oppressed communities and the collaboration with these communities allows new radical museum practices. The experience of Nosso Sagrado also points to a Social Museology practice made possible within a traditional museum, such as Museu da República.

Nosso Sagrado, as a flow of intention and perception, challenges the hegemonic museum paradigm. The profound transformation it brings establishes a new framework around shared curating and healing processes for sensitive museological collections, while promoting shared authority within museums.

Nosso Sagrado represents a historical turning point in museology. It cultivates an alternative universe of museum practices, emphasising curating as a healing process. It invites us to rethink what museums can become and how they can facilitate negotiation. It envisions a museum that embraces responsible and attentive citizenship while fulfilling a vital social function.

Axé!

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Endnotes

1 *Candomblé* is a religion structured in the African Diaspora in Brazil. Candomblé Ketu, Jêje and Angola are recreated expressions of traditional African religions brought to Brazilian territory during the transatlantic slave-trade. The temples of *Candomblé* are conducted by the priestess or priest, referred to as *Iyalorixá* or *Babalorixá,* existing in an autonomous and independent hierarchy. The *Candomblés* in Brazil could also be understood in the context of other African Diasporic religions in the Americas due to slavery, such as the Cuban Santeria and the Haitian Voodoo.

2 *Umbanda* is a Brazilian religion expressed largely in the syncretism of Spiritism, Candomblé, Catholicism and Indigenous traditions. Umbanda temples are autonomous and independent, having their own leaders referred to as *mãe de santo* or *pai de santo*. Different from *Candomblé*, in most *Umbanda* practises, *Exús*, *Pombagiras, Pombogiras,* the Christian God, catholic saints, angels and caboclos are worshipped, as well as *orixás*.

3 Lody 2005. About museological collections with stolen objects from *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* see "Coleção Afro do Xangô de Pernambuco", Museu do Estado de Pernambuco; "Coleção Perseverança", Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Alagoas; "Coleção Estácio Lima", Museu Afro-Brasileiro-UFBA; and the "Acervo Afro-Pernambucano", Centro Cultural São Paulo.

4 A direct reference to the 2017 Declaration of Córdoba (MINOM, ICOM): "A museology that doesn't serve life, is worthless"; see Declaración de Córdoba 2017.

5 Fisher, Grinberg, Mattos 2018.

6 The Brazilian Slavery period lasted from 1500 up to 1888, being the last country in the Americas to abolish it.

7 Braga 1995, pp. 19-20.

8 About *calundu* see Reis 1988: Marcussi 2015; Ferreira 2016.

9 Gama 2018.

10 "Terreiro" is a broad term to refer to Candomblé and Umbanda temples.

11 Cabral 2017; Soares, Lima 2013. The Kumbukumbu Collection and Nosso Sagrado are distinct collections, but they share similar historical aspects in how they were formed.

12 Alves 2023. SPHAN - Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, now IPHAN - Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional.

13 Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum *et al.* 2021.

14 Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum *et al.* 2021.

15 Pereira 2017, p. 100-101.

16 Pereira 2017, p. 54.

17 Pereira 2023, p. 69.

18 Versiani, Chagas 2024.

19 In 1831, the first law against transatlantic slavery was published, Lei Feijó. However transatlantic slave trade continued up to 1850, when it was repressed by Lei Eusébio de Queiroz, leading to a higher internal slave trade concentrated around the coffee plantations in Vale do Paraíba, being abolished in the whole country in 1888.

20 Marretto 2020.

21 Nora 1997.

22 About the online exhibition of Nosso Sagrado see https://artsandculture.google.com/story/nosso-sagrado-museudarepublica/mwWx9m6ZCuqk5A?hl=en.

23 Pereira 2023, pp. 92-98.

24 "Exu Ijelú - Exu, Legbara and Nzila are the messengers between the human and

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the divine, respectively of the Ketu, Jeje and Angola nations. Vital Force that streamlines movement, path and communication"; Google Arts & Culture, n.d.

25 Versiani, Chagas 2024.

26 Divine Yorubá entities present in Candomblé and Umbanda.

27 Pereira 2023, p. 95.

28 Versiani, Chagas 2024 (Translated by the authors).

29 Brulon 2022, pp. 46-47.

30 Poulot 2013, pp. 62-63.

31 Brulon 2023, p. 105.

32 Sauvage 2010, p. 205.

33 Spivak 1988.

34 Brulon 2018, p. 201.

35 Karp, Lavine 1991, p. 15.

36 Preziosi 1998, p. 61.

37 Stocking 1985, p. 4.

38 Duncan, Wallach 1978.

39 Simas, Rufino 2020.

40 Versiani 2018.

41 Pantoja 2022, p. 37.

42 Deleuze, Guattari 1987.

43 In July 2024, Mario Chagas was dismissed as director of the Museu da República by IBRAM, citing misalignment with the institute's direction. The dismissal sparked strong reactions from academics and the press.While the link between his dismissal and the museum's receipt of a collection remains unclear, Chagas's leadership was instrumental in acquiring and collaboratively curating it with religious communities. Appointed via IBRAM's 2017 national selection, Chagas proposed implementing Social Museology to transform the museum, acknowledging its hegemonic and historical significance.

44 Chagas, Gouveia 2014.

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Tirer les ficelles
Usage et réparation de collections en tension

Noémie Etienne

Keywords:
Museums, Conservation, Puppets, Fluidity, Activation, Circulation, Solution, France, Cameroon.

ABSTRACT:

The restitution of colonial collections is often hampered by a recurring argument: that of conservation. According to this rhetoric, only Western museums have the necessary expertise to conserve material heritage, thereby imposing the idea that museums elsewhere should adapt and conform to international standards. In recent years, however, this perspective has been challenged by a growing recognition of the diversity of conservation traditions and practices. In this article I would like to highlight an additional dimension: the appropriate flexibility of European museums in managing and loaning cultural heritage. The case of the puppets in the North of France will serve as an illustration of this dynamic. I will stress the importance of understanding the fluidity of museum practices worldwide and of moving beyond the often assumed epistemological opposition between, for example, 'African museums' and 'European museums'. Rather than reinforcing this divide, I will highlight the diversity and adaptability of different museum models, drawing on examples from France and Cameroon. For example, I will highlight cases where museums have found innovative solutions to allow different users to access their collections. In this context, repair emerges as both a material and immaterial practice, involving the physical transformation, activation, and circulation of collections.

La restitution des collections coloniales est souvent entravée par un argument récurrent : celui de la conservation. Selon cette rhétorique, seuls les musées occidentaux auraient l'expertise nécessaire à la conservation du patrimoine matériel, imposant ainsi l'idée que les musées d'ailleurs devraient s'adapter et se conformer aux normes internationales. Ces dernières années, cependant, cette perspective a été remise en question par la reconnaissance croissante de la diversité des traditions et des pratiques de conservation. Dans cet article, j'aimerais mettre en lumière une perspective supplémentaire : la flexibilité des musées européens dans la gestion et le prêt du patrimoine culturel. Le cas des marionnettes du Nord de la France servira d'illustration à cette dynamique. Je soulignerai l'importance de comprendre la fluidité des pratiques muséales dans le monde et de dépasser l'opposition épistémologique souvent supposée entre, par exemple, les « musées africains » et les « musées européens ». Au lieu de renforcer ce clivage, je mettrai en évidence la diversité et l'adaptabilité des différents modèles de musées, en m'appuyant sur des exemples en France et au Cameroun. Je soulignerai les cas où les musées ont trouvé des solutions innovantes pour permettre à différents utilisateurs d'accéder à leurs collections. Dans ce contexte, la réparation apparaît comme une pratique à la fois matérielle et immatérielle, impliquant la transformation physique, l'activation et la circulation des collections.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 10: Fabrication des marionnettes Ché Cabotans d'Amiens, atelier Michel Petit.

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“Tout a commencé avec une image”, me dit au téléphone la metteuse en scène Sylvie Baillon, durant l’été 2024. “Celle de marionnettes suspendues dans les réserves, emballées dans du plastique. Je me suis dit : il faut faire quelque chose”.[1] Cette vision a débouché sur une collaboration réalisée dix ans plus tôt (2014) entre le Musée de Picardie à Amiens, au Nord de la France, et l’ancienne directrice de la Compagnie de marionnettes *Le Tas de Sable – Chés Panses Vertes*. Il s’agissait de mettre en relation des marionnettes conservées dans les dépôts du musée avec des artistes d’aujourd’hui (fig. 1). La préparation de ce projet a duré deux ans et a donné lieu à de nombreuses négociations. Il a fallu déterminer quelles étaient les marionnettes anciennes destinées à être réutilisées. En retour, les artistes ont fait connaître leurs préférences, qui ne s’alignaient pas toujours avec celles de leurs collègues des musées.

Dans cet article, je pose les questions suivantes : comment concilier conservation et usage des collections? Le musée peut-il permettre de nouvelles pratiques de réparation, en dehors du paradigme classique de la conservation muséale occidentale? Je montre que la conservation des collections et le rétablissement des liens entre les personnes et les objets passent notamment par des pratiques de soin partagées.

Depuis plusieurs dizaines d’années, les artistes, activistes et universitaires mettent en crise le modèle du musée présenté comme encyclopédique et universel.[2] Ce modèle de musée serait garant de la conservation des œuvres d’art. Cet argument est lié à l’histoire des Lumières et au projet du Louvre, destiné à accueillir et préserver les œuvres de l’Europe, quoique celles-ci aient été en partie spoliées durant la Révolution française et l’époque napoléonienne. Aujourd’hui, ce discours est largement dénoncé comme visant à s’approprier le patrimoine international et à délégitimer les demandes de restitution. L’universel dont il est question serait une fiction, utilisée pour exporter un modèle eurocentré (et non véritablement international). [3] En partant de ces discussions, qui datent déjà des années 1990, je souligne la pluralité des modèles de musées existants. En prenant le cas des marionnettes, je montre que des solutions multiples ont été trouvées depuis des décennies dans les musées pour permettre une conservation active et polyphonique.

En effet, il existe de nombreuses formes de musées, en Europe comme ailleurs. Dans ce contexte, la marionnette pose des questions spécifiques.[4] Sa situation à la croisée de plusieurs typologies (beaux-arts, art décoratif, jouets, ethnographie) a favorisé l’invention de solutions innovantes pour sa conservation.[5] Dans les réserves des musées de marionnettes, on trouve des objets très divers, qui pourraient être conservés ailleurs, comme dans les musées ethnographiques (voir fig. 6). Ainsi, j’émets l’hypothèse que la marionnette peut servir de point de départ à une réflexion plus générale sur la fonction des musées, permettant de fracturer l’apparente cohésion du modèle patrimonial occidental. Il existe une pluralité de projets et de perspectives, déterminés par les collections mais aussi par les relations entretenues entre les acteurs et actrices. Des “musées - bibliothèques” existent déjà, notamment au Ca-

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Fig.01: Guillaume Lecamus performant avec les marionnettes du Musée de Picardie à Amiens. © Véronique Lesperat Hecquet, 2014. Je remercie Guillaume Lecamus pour la mise à disposition des images.

meroun, dans le projet des musées communautaires. Comme dans les bibliothèques, les œuvres peuvent être sorties du musée et empruntées sous certaines conditions, pour y être retournées par la suite. Je suggère que ce modèle vient offrir des perspectives concrètes pour une conservation encore plus dynamique des collections.

Cette recherche est basée sur une série d'entretiens menés avec différents marionnettistes, artistes, conservateurs et conservatrices de musée en Europe (France et Suisse) et en Afrique (Cameroun). J'ai aussi échangé avec des conservateurs-restaurateurs et conservatrices-restauratrices de ces pays. Dans certains cas, comme à Lyon, j'ai pu mener l'enquête sur place. Dans d'autres, comme au Cameroun, ma collègue Maeva Pimo a recueilli les informations. Les personnes interrogées ont été identifiées dans la mesure où elles sont engagées dans une réflexion sur la conservation.[6]

Les exemples choisis ne prétendent pas être exhaustifs. La vision des interlocuteurs et interlocutrices leur est évidemment propre. Cet article rappelle qu'il n'y pas d'uniformité institutionnelle ou épistémologique et pas de "musée européen" opposé au "musée africain", dans la gestion du patrimoine. Des modèles alternatifs sont déjà en place. Ils sont formalisés par des documents juridiques et des protocoles. Il importe de ne pas les invisibiliser pour continuer à penser le futur des institutions.

Tête d'oiseau et œil crevé : les marionnettes au centre des négociations

01

En 2014, la compagnie *Le tas-de-sable. Chez Panses Vertes* a invité une série de marionnettistes, d'auteurs et d'autrices à réactiver des marionnettes qui se trouvaient alors au musée de Picardie à Amiens. La conservatrice des collections à l'époque a opéré une sélection en fonction de l'état des collections.[7] Les objets proposés aux artistes ont été classés par catégories. Le marionnettiste Guillaume Lecamus se rappelle qu'ils étaient entourés de petits fils colorés lors de leur présentation. Ces fils étaient porteurs d'un code couleur : le fil vert signifiait que les objets pouvaient être utilisés, le fil orange qu'ils étaient fragiles, et le fil rouge qu'ils n'étaient pas destinés à être manipulés. Ce classement témoigne d'une évaluation des collections en fonction des critères du musée. Il s'agissait de présenter les artefacts mais aussi d'orienter les marionnettistes.

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02-03

Mais tout n'a pas fonctionné comme prévu. Immédiatement, Lecamus est interpellé par un objet. Malheureusement, celui-ci est entouré du fil rouge. En théorie, l'objet est donc hors de sa portée. La poupée avait perdu un œil. Il lui manquait des éléments, et notamment des vêtements (figg. 2-3). Elle était patinée et portait des traces de manipulation. Comme il l'indique, c'était précisément cet état de conservation altéré qui l'avait attiré vers cette marionnette, baptisée *Tête d'oiseau* en raison de ses caractéristiques matérielles.[8] Pour les collègues du musée, toutes ces traces interdisaient son usage. Néanmoins, cette logique a opéré à l'inverse et attiré l'artiste. S'ensuivirent alors des discussions sur la possibilité et la légitimité de manipuler quand même cet artefact. Finalement, Lecamus a pu utiliser la marionnette qu'il souhaitait. Du point de vue du performeur, c'était un succès : "Nous avons tout obtenu", déclare l'artiste (fig. 4).

D'autres négociations ont eu lieu dans différents théâtres et musées de France. Le Théâtre Le Guignol de Lyon conserve près de 260 marionnettes anciennes (fig. 5). Emma Utges, qui dirige La Compagnie M.A. en charge du théâtre, m'explique qu'elles peuvent être manipulées, mais aussi transformées, repeintes, re-sculptées ou ré-habillées (sauf les très anciennes). Elle effectue aussi elle-même les réparations, recolle les nez fracturés, etc. La marionnette n'est pas perçue comme un artefact figé, authentique et intact, mais comme une matière en évolution. Pour elle, la possibilité de modifier les collections fait partie du sens de l'objet et a été prévue dès sa conception. Les guignols sont souvent construits en bois de tilleul, un bois souple qui résiste peu aux chocs. Le guignol est fait pour cette capacité à se détruire, à se casser, à se remodeler.

Fig. 02:
Artistes non-identifiés, marionnette rebaptisée *Tête d'oiseau*, conservée au Musée de Picardie à Amiens. Technique mixte. © Véronique Lesperat Hecquet, 2014.

Fig. 03:
Marionnettes proposées à la sélection pour le projet.
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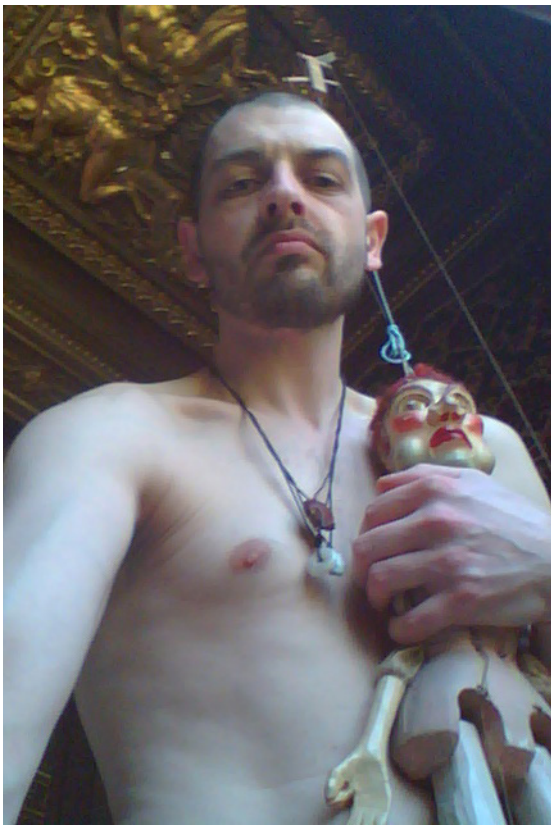

04-05

Fig. 04:
Guillaume Lecamus avec l'une des marionnettes du Musée de Picardie à Amiens.
© Guillaume Lecamus, 2014.

Fig. 05:
Entrée du théâtre Le Guignol à Lyon, 2024.
© Noémie Etienne, 2024.

En revanche, les entretiens ont révélé certaines tensions avec l'institution muséale de référence à Lyon pour la conservation des marionnettes, à savoir le Musée des Arts de la Marionnette (MAM) au sein du Musée Gadagne (fig. 6). Ce dernier est en échange constant avec Le Théâtre Le Guignol de Lyon et avec d'autres marionnettistes. Le musée soutient la compagnie M.A., qui lui prête régulièrement des pièces pour ses propres expositions temporaires, renouvelées tous les quatre ans. Néanmoins, une discussion est en cours autour des textes anciens, souvent imprimés et annotés. Le musée souhaiterait les exposer et les conserver, tandis que les marionnettistes sont réticents à s'en détacher. La proximité et la facilité d'accès des livres émeut et inspire Emma Utges et ses collègues. Pour elle, déposer ces documents graphiques au musée est une perte d'autonomie et de créativité potentielle. C'est aussi une rupture avec l'histoire, car les marionnettistes ont longtemps eu un accès direct et privilégié aux collections et aux livrets.

Au début du 20e siècle, l'historien d'art viennois Alois Riegl mettait déjà en évidence l'existence de différentes valeurs qui devaient être négociées.[9] Par exemple, la "valeur d'usage" de la marionnette opposée à sa "valeur d'ancienneté". Selon ce modèle, les valeurs seraient en conflit dans le monde de la conservation-restauration. Effectivement, les attentes peuvent être diverses. Néanmoins, dans les exemples proposés, des solutions sont trouvées. Les différents usagers — marionnettiste, conservateur et conservatrice — ne se limitent pas à une seule conception de ce qui fait patrimoine, ni à un seul régime de valeurs. Ils et elles négocient et trouvent des compromis pour satisfaire leurs attentes communes, en fonction de leurs op-

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portunités et intérêts.[10] Les cas présentés soulignent la possibilité de négocier face aux œuvres, avec des valeurs qui se discutent et se transforment au cours des interactions.

Réactiver pour réparer

La remise en usage des collections, que ce soit dans les réserves des musées ou lors de performances publiques, est l'une des solutions proposées pour résoudre les conflits. Dans cette seconde partie, je rappelle l'existence en France d'un exemple ancien de conservation partagée qui a été formalisé juridiquement. Ensuite, je montre que ces remises en jeu peuvent également avoir une dimension éthique. Elles fonctionnent comme des formes de réparation réelle car les personnes concernées ont le droit de réparer les collections mais aussi symbolique puisque la remise en activité permet de rétablir une forme partielle de justice quant à l'accès aux collections.

Depuis les années 1960, le musée de Picardie à Amiens conserve les marionnettes de la troupe Chè Cabotans, constituée en association loi de 1901, et nommée Théâtre d'Animation Picard.[11] Dans une convention qui date de 1966, le musée permet la circulation et l'usage des collections, bien que celles-ci soient enregistrées à l'inventaire du patrimoine national.[12] La convention formalise la mise à disposition du théâtre de marionnettes (poupées, décor), officiellement propriété de l'État français mais prêtées aux marionnettistes.[13] Cet accord a été rendu possible notamment par les liens entre René Lamps, le maire d'Amiens entre 1971 et 1989 (Parti Communiste) et Maurice Domont, le principal meneur de la troupe, lui-même un militant communiste. En fait, les deux hommes ont créé ensemble la compagnie de marionnettes en 1933. René Lamps était également sculpteur, décorateur et marionnettiste jusqu'en 1942. Ce contexte a permis une formulation nouvelle du rapport entre le musée et les collections. Il s'est ensuite perpétué et formalisé durant les différents mandats du maire.

La conservation des marionnettes est très présente dans les annexes de la convention de 1982. Elle est évoquée dans dix articles sur les vingt-cinq que comptent la deuxième annexe du cahier des charges. Dans ce document, la ville d'Amiens "met à disposition l'outil culturel" que représente le théâtre de marionnettes. Pour encourager la pratique du répertoire, le cahier des charges prévoit aussi la réalisation de copies. Des fac-similés des marionnettes originales ont depuis été réalisés par un facteur de marionnette réputé qui travaille aussi pour Ché Cabo-

Fig. 06: Réserves des marionnettes au Musée Gadagne, Lyon, 2024. L'image montre la diversité des objets conservés dans ces contextes, incluant notamment une figure du théâtre indonésien (wayang golek). © Noémie Etienne, 2024.

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tans, Michel Petit (fig. 7-9). L'article 11 (Annexe 2) stipule bien que les marionnettes originales pourront être utilisées par la compagnie. L'article 6 délègue la responsabilité de la conservation à l'Association fondée dans ce contexte : "l'Association Théâtre d'Animation Picard sera tenue de procéder à la restauration, à la réparation et à la conservation dudit patrimoine. Ces travaux, effectués sous le contrôle du conservateur des musées d'Amiens, seront à la charge de la ville d'Amiens" (fig. 10).

Dans la pratique, les interventions sont généralement réalisées par des conservateurs-restaurateurs et conservatrices-restauratrices formés et engagés par le musée. Néanmoins, les marionnettistes ont largement la main sur les collections. Ils et elles ne sont pas perçus comme des dangers, qu'il faudrait tenir à l'écart des espaces muséaux. Lors de notre entretien téléphonique, le conservateur actuel du musée de Picardie me dit que les marionnettistes ont la légitimité d'utiliser et de conserver les objets. Pour lui, il s'agit des usagers originaux, dont les savoir-faire sont reconnus et valorisés. Malgré le principe d'inaliénabilité des collections nationales françaises, les objets circulent entre les lieux, le musée et le théâtre.[14]

En outre, la conservation de certains patrimoines est liée à leur mise en activité. Lors de notre entretien, Guillaume Lecamus décrit les réserves du musée de Picardie à Amiens comme des "forêts". Dans ces espaces, l'artiste trouve que "les marionnettes font quand même très objets" (fig. 11). Selon lui, les marionnettes ne sont pas des artefacts inanimés mais plutôt des "instruments". Elles sont au service d'un récit, d'une narration et d'une performance. La marionnette n'est pas vivante mais peut et doit être activée. Les œuvres collectées gardent leur sens premier si elles sont remises en jeu. Dans cette perspective, la conservation des marionnettes doit passer son animation, au moins partiellement, sous peine de dénaturer la fonction de l'artefact et de ne pas en transmettre l'essentiel.

Depuis les années 1990, en particulier en Amérique du Nord, différents projets permettant l'usage des collections saisies en contexte colonial, un état de fait toujours à l'œuvre, sont au centre de nouvelles pratiques.[15] Il ne s'agit pas forcément de restituer les biens, mais de permettre aux communautés concernées d'accéder aux réserves. Les potentiels risques, du point de vue des conservateurs-restaurateurs occidentaux, sont mis en balance avec l'idée que les communautés concernées ont un droit d'accès aux collections. L'usage vient partiellement réparer la violence originelle du musée qui les avait déconnectées de leur contexte premier. En effet, à partir des années 1990, la notion de réactivation a permis de renforcer les négociations autour des œuvres, amenant à une utilisation ponctuelle du patrimoine.[16]

Une approche visant la remise en jeu est également proposée en Europe pour les instruments de musique[17]. Par exemple, une sélection d'instruments du Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève (MEG) a été jouée en 2019 par Midori Takada,[18] une percussionniste et compositrice contemporaine. Dans ce contexte, Takada a composé de la musique à partir des collections mises à sa disposi-

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07

tion. Une pré-sélection a été réalisée par la conservatrice-restauratrice Isabel Garcia Gomez et la conservatrice du département d'ethnomusicologie Madeleine Leclair. Le bon état de conservation a été l'un des arguments présidant à cette sélection car "la mise en vibration de peaux ou de caisse de résonnance comporte un risque structurel pour un instrument de musique".[19] La musicienne Midori Takada[20] voit ce projet tel une forme de réveil : "Les instruments étaient dans leur boîte, et chacun rêvassait sur son étagère, rangé dans leurs réserves. Par mon travail je leur dis : venez, sortez, faites entendre votre voix ! (...) Car les instruments veulent crier, ils veulent chanter, ils veulent se manifester parmi nous".[21] Les instruments sont des personnages auxquels elle souhaite redonner la parole. Malgré ses réserves sur les dommages potentiels, Isabel Garcia Gomez conclut que l'expertise et le soin sont du côté de la musicienne : "Il m'est rapidement apparu que la vraie garante du bien-être de ces instruments, c'était Midori Takada elle-même. En tant que percussionniste expérimentée, elle savait comment les manipuler".[22]

Lors d'échanges informels menés en août 2024, Isabel Garcia Gomez a mentionné que certaines questions éthiques avaient été discutées lors d'une rencontre ultérieure à la Philharmonie de Paris (mais non publiées), comme le fait de ne pas prendre une artiste africaine pour jouer ces objets, par exemple. En effet, le fait de prendre une artiste japonaise et non une artiste africaine, par exemple, pose des questions sur l'appropriation culturelle

Fig. 07: Fabrication des marionnettes Ché Cabotans d'Amiens, atelier Michel Petit. © Céline Brégand, 2022.

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Fig. 08: Fabrication des marionnettes Ché Cabotans d'Amiens, atelier Michel Petit. © Céline Brégand, 2022.

qui entourent ces manifestations. Qui peut réellement jouer les instruments ? À qui profitent ces performances ? Pourquoi ne pas choisir une personne issue des communautés concernées ? Ces questions pointent les possibles glissements quant à la finalité de ces remises en jeu. Les instruments sont réactivés surtout aux bénéfices du musée et de la performeuse choisie, qui peuvent en tirer profit. Ces gestes n'apportent pas forcément quelque chose aux personnes de la diaspora, par exemple.

Dans tous ces exemples, néanmoins, le musée permet l'usage des objets. Cet usage comporte un risque mais il est modéré et équilibré par une plus-value artistique et éthique. Remettre en action les objets peut les fragiliser. Mais la création de nouveaux spectacles a été jugée plus intéressante que le risque encouru, notamment dans un contexte très encadré comme c'était le cas au musée de Picardie à Amiens. De plus, ces solutions s'intègrent à une réflexion plus large sur le rôle des musées. Depuis les années 1960 au moins, par exemple, le modèle des artothèques s'est développé en France. Il s'agit d'emprunter des œuvres d'art, souvent très récemment réalisées par des artistes locaux, pour les exposer chez soi.[23] Elles doivent ensuite être retournées, après une période de quelques mois.

Ainsi, la conservation ne passe pas forcément par la préservation matérielle des collections. L'enjeu est aussi la préservation des gestes et des traditions qui s'y rapportent. L'artefact, qu'il s'agisse de la marionnette ou du marimba, attire les artistes, qui s'intéressent à la fois à son ap-

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Fig. 09:
Fabrication des marionnettes Ché Cabotans d'Amiens, atelier Michel Petit.
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Fig. 11:
Marionnettes suspendues, atelier Michel Petit, Amiens.
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parence et aux sons ou aux images qu'il peut exprimer. L'instrument n'est pas seulement au service du passé mais permet l'éclosion d'un nouveau répertoire. Cette logique se base sur la reconnaissance de la compétence et de l'expertise des artistes, qui sont également à même de préserver les collections. Elle articule l'idée de conservation du patrimoine à celle de son activation. Ces gestes forment un ensemble de pratiques qui tendent à réparer, symboliquement et matériellement, les collections entendues aussi dans leur dimension immatérielle et rétablies dans leur fonction. Parallèlement, ces actions visent à restaurer les liens entre les personnes et les objets, souvent détruits lors de la saisie des collections.

Sortie et retour des collections dans les musées au Cameroun

Les questions spécifiques et les solutions trouvées pour les marionnettes peuvent-elles être appliquées à d'autres cas ? Ce modèle de musée, développé dans un contexte précis et autour d'objets singuliers, peut-il être étendu ? Peut-on envisager le développement d'un musée-bibliothèque, dans lequel les personnes concernées peuvent sortir des objets, et même réaliser leurs propres interventions de conservation-restauration ? Plus précisément, pourrait-on étendre ce modèle, par exemple, aux collections d'art africain conservées en France ? Depuis une dizaine d'années, les collections dites ethnographiques sont au centre de discussions portant sur la décolonisation des musées. Le sujet des restitutions, très important, a dominé les débats publics.[24] Mais il n'est pas possible de restituer la très grande majorité des œuvres. Logiquement, les demandes de restitution se concentrent souvent sur des pièces emblématiques. Les exemples cités précédemment montrent que des solutions existent dans les musées en Europe. Elles prennent en compte la spécificité des collections, les exigences déontologiques du musée et les attentes des usagers. Le musée devient un lieu de réparation symbolique et pragmatique, où la circulation et la mise à disposition des objets est une forme de soin pour les patrimoines et pour les humains. Réactiver les collections permet de rejouer un patrimoine qui risque de tomber dans l'oubli et d'en inventer un nouveau.

La majorité des objets conservés dans les musées ethnographiques ont été créés pour être utilisés. Ils sont souvent nécessaires à des pratiques qui permettent une connexion aux ancêtres, mais aussi soignent les maladies, ou protègent les écosystèmes. Dans les premières pages de sa thèse de doctorat, le conservateur camerounais Honoré Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou cite Achille Mbembé: "les objets africains ont toujours été la manifestation de ce qui se situe par-delà la matière. Faits de matière, ils sont en réalité un appel strident à son dépassement et à sa transfiguration".[25]

Dans cette troisième partie, je présente un modèle de musée spécifique: les cases patrimoniales. Je souligne que différentes traditions de conservation co-existent dans ces institutions. En effet, des musées ont été créées à partir des années 1970 au Cameroun.[26] Ils regroupent les patrimoines matériels des chefferies, qu'il s'agisse des biens coutumiers ou du trésor royal. Les chefferies

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sont le siège des gouvernements et des royaumes locaux.[27] À partir des années 2000, et plus encore après 2012, le programme dit de la "route des Chefferies" formalise, bureaucratise et rigidifie la conservation dans ces lieux culturels. Lorsqu'ils sont évalués conformes aux "bonnes pratiques", selon les normes professionnelles d'une institution comme l'ICOM, les musées des chefferies sont labellisés sous le nom de "case patrimoniale".[28] Par là, ils confirment leur volonté de se conformer à un règlement intérieur.[29] Ce modèle muséal est développé en collaboration avec des personnes extérieures aux chefferies qui, dans une certaine mesure, implantent de la sorte un modèle international. Mais il prend aussi en compte des stratégies de préservation du patrimoine qui sont anciennes et éminemment politiques dans les chefferies, et ceci bien avant l'époque coloniale.

Aujourd'hui, les musées des chefferies mélangent ou alternent des méthodes de conservation locales et les apports occidentaux en la matière. L'utilisation de produits chimiques, par exemple, a trouvé sa place pour supprimer la menace des insectes, à côté d'autres savoirs locaux, telle la fumigation des artefacts. Comme le rappelle Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou, une longue tradition de conservation du patrimoine matériel et immatériel existe au Cameroun. Elle a toujours été perméable à d'autres traditions.

La circulation des objets est possible à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des musées des chefferies. Un entretien mené par Maeva Pimo, doctorante dans le projet GloCo en août 2024 avec Yollande Tsuangyo Soh, responsable de la case patrimoniale de Bafou, permet de souligner ce fonctionnement.[30] La chefferie de Bafou est l'une des plus grandes à l'Ouest du Cameroun. Elle est signataires de la charte déontologique sur laquelle se base aussi l'association "La Route des Chefferies".[31] Le musée de Bafou a été réhabilité en 2015 (fig. 12-13). Les normes de conservation internationales ont été adoptées, au moins dans le discours. Par exemple, la sortie des objets est encadrée par un protocole, incluant notamment un relevé de l'état de conservation. Yollande

Fig. 12:
Entrée de la chefferie de Bafou. Photo : Seriemi-nou, 2021. © CC.

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Soh décrit ainsi le procédé : “une demande adressée au directeur du musée/case patrimoniale ; le remplissage d’une fiche d’inventaire et d’une fiche de constat d’état de l’objet ; les dates fixes pour rendre l’objet.” Le prêt des objets est limité aux membres de la chefferie. La sortie des objets ne change pas leur statut. “Il faut que les conditions de conservation préventive soient respectées pour éviter d’éventuelles destructions de l’objet. À ce moment l’objet appartient toujours au musée sauf que l’utilisateur n’est pas le même.” Lorsqu’une dégradation intervient, Soh appelle un conservateur-restaurateur. Cette profession, dans son acception européenne est toutefois peu développée au Cameroun, faute de formation et de moyens. Les codes déontologiques appliqués sont donc très proches de ceux des musées occidentaux, dont les cases patrimoniales sont une traduction adaptée et située en contexte camerounais.

Un second entretien, mené au musée d’art local de Maroua, dans le Nord du Cameroun, donne des résultats similaires. Le gestionnaire en charge du musée, Aboubakar Amada suit actuellement un Master en “Recherche, Gestion et Conservation du patrimoine culturel et des musées” à l’université de Maroua. Il décrit des normes très strictes en ce qui concerne les prêts, réservés aux institutions patrimoniales ou aux familles. La conservation est également très encadrée. Ces déclarations répondent aux attentes du programme “Route des Chefferies”, et probablement aux enseignements de la formation universitaire suivie. Néanmoins, une exception importante tient aux collections appartenant aux sociétés secrètes. Au Cameroun, une société secrète est une organisation indépendante créée à l’initiative du roi, dont les membres, le fonctionnement et les règles restent dissimulés aux autres membres de la société. À l’origine, chaque société secrète possédait une case pour conserver son patrimoine, avec notamment des trophées de chasse.[32] Aujourd’hui, les sociétés secrètes ont toujours des artefacts qui peuvent être présentés dans les musées des chefferies. Le chef peut être lui-même issu de l’une de ces sociétés.

Dans ce contexte, le discours du gestionnaire du musée d’art local de Maroua change radicalement. Lorsque les collections appartiennent aux sociétés secrètes, il préconise les actions suivantes :

> *“Consultation des experts culturels : La réparation de tels objets nécessite souvent l’implication de personnes appartenant à la société d’origine ou d’experts culturels reconnus. - Respect des rites et traditions : Le processus de restauration peut devoir respecter des rites ou des traditions spécifiques. Dans certains cas, l’objet doit être réparé par un membre de la société d’origine, selon des protocoles bien définis. - Confidentialité : En raison de la nature secrète de ces objets, le processus de restauration est souvent tenu confidentiel et encadré par des traditions orales.”*

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L'expertise d'un conservateur-restaurateur professionnel n'est plus nécessaire, de même que le recours aux protocoles scientifiques occidentaux, aux savoirs codifiés par écrits ou aux rapports de restauration. La transparence des procédés n'est pas de mise, bien au contraire. La nature des objets et l'identité de leurs propriétaires invitent à laisser de côté les protocoles prônés par les institutions européennes et états-uniennes. Yollande Soh explique également qu'il s'agit de circonstances dans lesquels les normes européennes de conservation peuvent être renégociées : "En cas de dégradations, un restaurateur peut assurer la restauration avec l'accord de la structure et de la société secrète." Les attentes spécifiques des sociétés secrètes prévalent sur d'autres normes importées. Ces sociétés jouent des rôles politiques et religieux majeurs. Une partie des collections a été créée à leur initiative. Dans ce contexte, leurs demandes sont plus importantes que les autres normes muséales, également en place dans les institutions.

Les collections des musées communautaires sont aussi prêtées et utilisées par les familles concernées. Le modèle du musée des chefferies est assez souple pour superposer différentes attentes. En marge d'un projet visant à garantir la mise en place des normes internationales au Cameroun, l'identité spécifique des usagers (les membres des communautés en général, les familles, ou en particulier, le membres des sociétés secrètes) ouvre une grande marge de négociation. Ces modèles font penser aux exemples évoqués précédemment autour des musées de marionnettes ou du MEG. Comme dans les bibliothèques ou les artothèques, les œuvres peuvent sortir sous certaines conditions bien définies et revenir ensuite dans l'institution qui les héberge. Cette flexibilité permet de partager les responsabilités en matière de conservation. Les collections restent souvent la propriété des institutions. Néanmoins, le musée n'est pas une forteresse qui exclut les différentes actrices et acteurs du patrimoine.

Conclusion

La restitution des objets africains est souvent freinée par un argument récurrent, celui de la "conservation". Selon ce discours, seuls les musées occidentaux possèderaient les compétences nécessaires pour préserver les patrimoines matériels, imposant ainsi l'idée que les musées africains devraient, au minimum, s'adapter et se conformer à ces normes prétendument universelles. Cependant, depuis plusieurs années, cette rhétorique est contestée par la reconnaissance croissante de la diversité des traditions et des pratiques dans le domaine de la conservation-restauration.

Dans cet article, je souhaite mettre en évidence une dimension supplémentaire, rarement abordée : la flexibilité des musées européens en matière de gestion et de prêt de collections patrimoniales. Les musées européens, à l'instar de celui d'Amiens, permettent des arrangements et des prêts adaptés aux besoins des usagers. Le cas des marionnettes illustre cette souplesse, même si elle est moins fréquente dans d'autres domaines. Cet usage n'est cependant pas unique: en France, le Mobilier National repose également sur un système de prêts d'objets inscrits à l'Inventaire natio-

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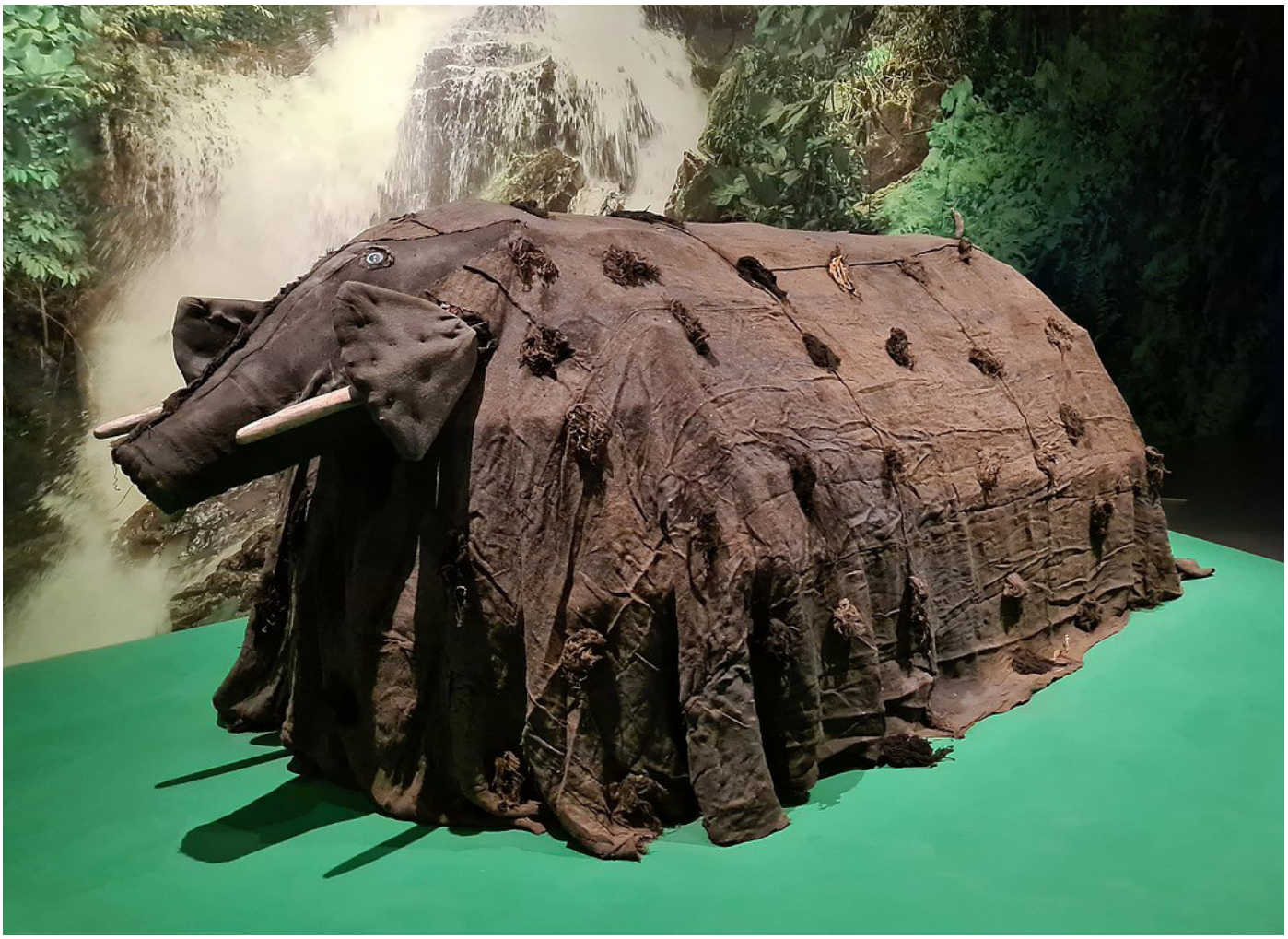

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Fig. 13: Totem éléphant géant, Département de la Menoua, Région de l'Ouest du Cameroun. Depuis la fondation de la chefferie Bafou au 16e siècle. Toile, rotin, bois. Bafou, musée de la chefferie de Bafou, 2022. © CC.

nal, lesquels sont utilisés dans divers lieux et entretenus par des conservateurs-restaurateurs contractuels. Parallèlement, les musées des chefferies au Cameroun proposent des arrangements comparables. Dans ces contextes, la légitimité et l'expertise des acteurs locaux, comme les artistes ou les membres des sociétés secrètes, ne sont pas remises en cause. Par exemple, les familles liées aux collections peuvent emprunter certains objets pour réaliser des rituels.

Ces exemples révèlent, d'une part, la similarité des structures muséales à grande échelle entre différents pays. D'autre part, elles ouvrent des pistes de transformation pour les musées européens. Ces derniers s'engagent actuellement dans un processus de décolonisation visant à guérir les blessures historiques laissées par l'héritage colonial. La question ne se limite pas à la conservation des patrimoines matériels, mais inclut également les patrimoines immatériels, ainsi que le rétablissement des liens entre les personnes et les collections. Plus encore, les musées peuvent devenir des lieux d'expérimentation sociale et éthique, s'inspirant des principes de la justice réparatrice. Cette dernière ne se caractérise pas par une approche punitive mais s'intéresse prioritairement aux victimes, en mettant l'accent sur les réparations - qu'elles soient matérielles, immatérielles ou financières. Le mot "réparation" peut ainsi désigner à la fois une intervention matérielle sur l'objet,

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une remise en usage pour lui redonner sa fonctionnalité, et un rétablissement des droits des victimes. Cela peut inclure, par exemple, des compensations économiques, comme celles demandées dans le cadre des réparations liées à la traite transatlantique.

Dans cette perspective, les musées d'ethnographie pourraient-ils envisager de prêter des objets aux membres des diasporas africaines ? Les populations africaines et afro-européennes pourraient-elles obtenir un accès privilégié à ces collections ? Pourrait-on imaginer des réparations menées sous leur supervision ? Le cas des marionnettes d'Amiens montre que ce partage des collections, sous forme de dépôts ou de prêts, est non seulement possible mais qu'il existe déjà depuis longtemps. Il repose sur une organisation claire et sur une conception renouvelée des collections, qui peuvent circuler dans un cadre précis et rigoureux. Ce cadre doit être fondé sur la reconnaissance de la compétence et de la légitimité de multiples usagers, y compris en dehors des musées.

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Endnotes

1 Entretien téléphonique avec Sylvie Baillon, jeudi 4 juillet 2024. Toutes les citations dans le texte qui va suivre sont issues de cette discussion.

2 Cuno 2008. Parmi les très nombreux auteurs critiques, on peut citer Mbembe 2013.

3 Pour une critique constructive de la notion d'universalisme, voir Bachir Diagne 2013.

4 Voir le colloque *La Marionnette, objet de musée et patrimoine vivant*, qui s'est tenu les 8 et 9 novembre 2018 au musée de la vie Wallonne à Liège ; Nsunda 2019.

5 Fleury, Sermon 2019.

6 Les interviews ont été réalisés sur place, par téléphone ou par questionnaire, entre mai et septembre 2024. Les personnes interviewées sont François Seguin (28 mai 2024), Guillaume Lecamus, (1er juillet 2024), Sylvie Baillon (5 juillet 2024), Paul Ripoche (9 juillet 2024), Aboubakar Amada (13 août 2024), Yollande Tsuangyo Soh (14 août 2024), Céline Brégand (21 août 2024), Abdoulaye Sy (26 août 2024), Isabel Garcia Gomez (28 août 2024), Manon Léchenne (2 septembre 2024), Emma Utges (2 septembre 2024), Claire Lefort (3 septembre 2024). Cette enquête est liée au projet collectif que je dirige actuellement, intitulé *Global Conservation: Histories and Theories*, et financé par le Conseil Européen de la Recherche.

7 Malgré nos tentatives, nous n'avons pas pu réaliser d'entretien avec elle dans le cadre de cet article.

8 *Le Courrier Picard*. Voir sur l'artiste https://morbustheatre.wixsite.com/morbustheatre.

9 Riegl [1903] 2013. Cette théorie a inspiré de nombreux auteurs et autrices, comme Avrami *et al.* 2019.

10 Voir Hénaut 2011.

11 https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/hauts-de-france/somme/amiens/l-histoire-du-dimanche-ches-cabotans-d-amiens-gardiens-de-la-tradition-de-la-marionnette-a-tringle-et-a-fil-et-de-la-de-la-langue-picarde-depuis-90-ans-2676868.html. Entretien téléphonique avec François Séguin, conservateur au musée de Picardie à Amiens, le 28 mai 2024. Voir aussi : https://www.amiens.fr/Liens-utiles/JDA/Les-plus-du-JDA/articles/Les-polichinelles-sortent-du-placard.

12 Mouton-Rezzouk 2021.

13 Ville d'Amiens, Conseil Municipal, Séance du 19 février 1982. La convention, datée du 25 février 1982, est établie entre le Maire de la Ville d'Amiens et le Président de l'Association "Théâtre d'Animation Picard."

14 Cornu, Fromageau, Orsi 2013.

15 Moses 2023. Voir *Guide à l'usage…* 2021.

16 Nuala Morse 2021.

17 Girard-Muscagorry, Nur Goni 2022. Voir https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/expositions-evenements/au-musee/rendez-vous-du-salon-de-lecture-jacques-kerchache/details-de-levenement/e/patrimoines-africains-la-performance-politique-des-objets.

18 https://www.rts.ch/info/culture/arts-visuels/2024/article/a-geneve-la-musicienne-japonaise-midori-takada-reveille-les-instruments-du-meg-28503438.html.

19 Gajo *et al.* 2019, en ligne : https://www.meg.ch/fr/recherche-collections/reveil-instruments-musique-du-meg. Le projet a donné lieu à un enregistrement : Midori Takada, *Cutting Branches for a Temporary Shelter*, 2022, WEWTFWW Records, disponible sur Youtube.

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20 https://www.meg.ch/fr/recherche-collections/reveil-instruments-musique-du-meg.

21 Entretien réalisé par Madeleine Leclair, avec la participation d'Isabel Garcia Gomez, musée d'ethnographie de Genève, le 26 novembre 2019. Les textes de ces entretiens sont publiés dans la pochette du vinyle réalisé dans ce cadre et intitulé *Cutting Branches for a Temporary Shelter*. Ce projet est également présenté dans l'exposition "Mémoires" au musée d'ethnographique, du 3 mai 2024 au 5 janvier 2025.

22 "Le réveil des instruments de musique", par Isabel Garcia Gomez, texte publié dans la pochette du vinyle.

23 Voir le projet en cours sur les artothèques: https://arp.hypotheses.org/.

24 Malgré son importance le Rapport Sarr/Savoy n'inclut pas le point de vue des conservateur-restaurateurs ou conservatrices-restauratrices : Sarr, Savoy 2018.

25 Mbembé 2019.

26 Voir le travail de référence d'Honoré Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou dans sa thèse de doctorat inédite : Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022. Ces informations lui reviennent.

27 Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022, p. 15, 28.

28 Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022, p. 159.

29 Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022, p. 160.

30 Interview de Yollande Tsuangyo Soh, musée de Bafou, Maeva Pimo, 2024.

31 Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022, p. 145.

32 Tchatchouang Ngoupeyou 2022, p. 69-70. Voir aussi O'Hern, Pearlstein, Gagliardi 2016.

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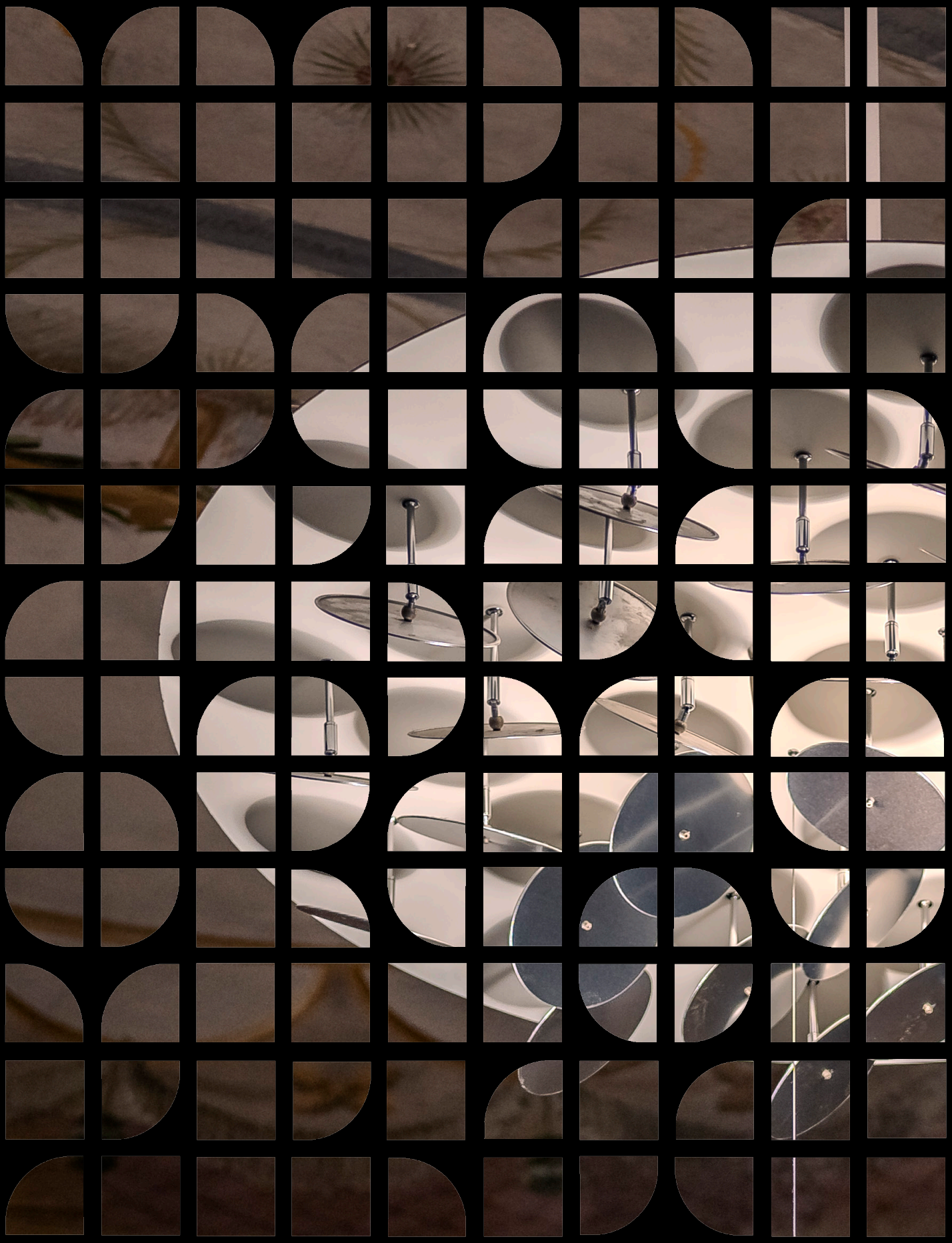

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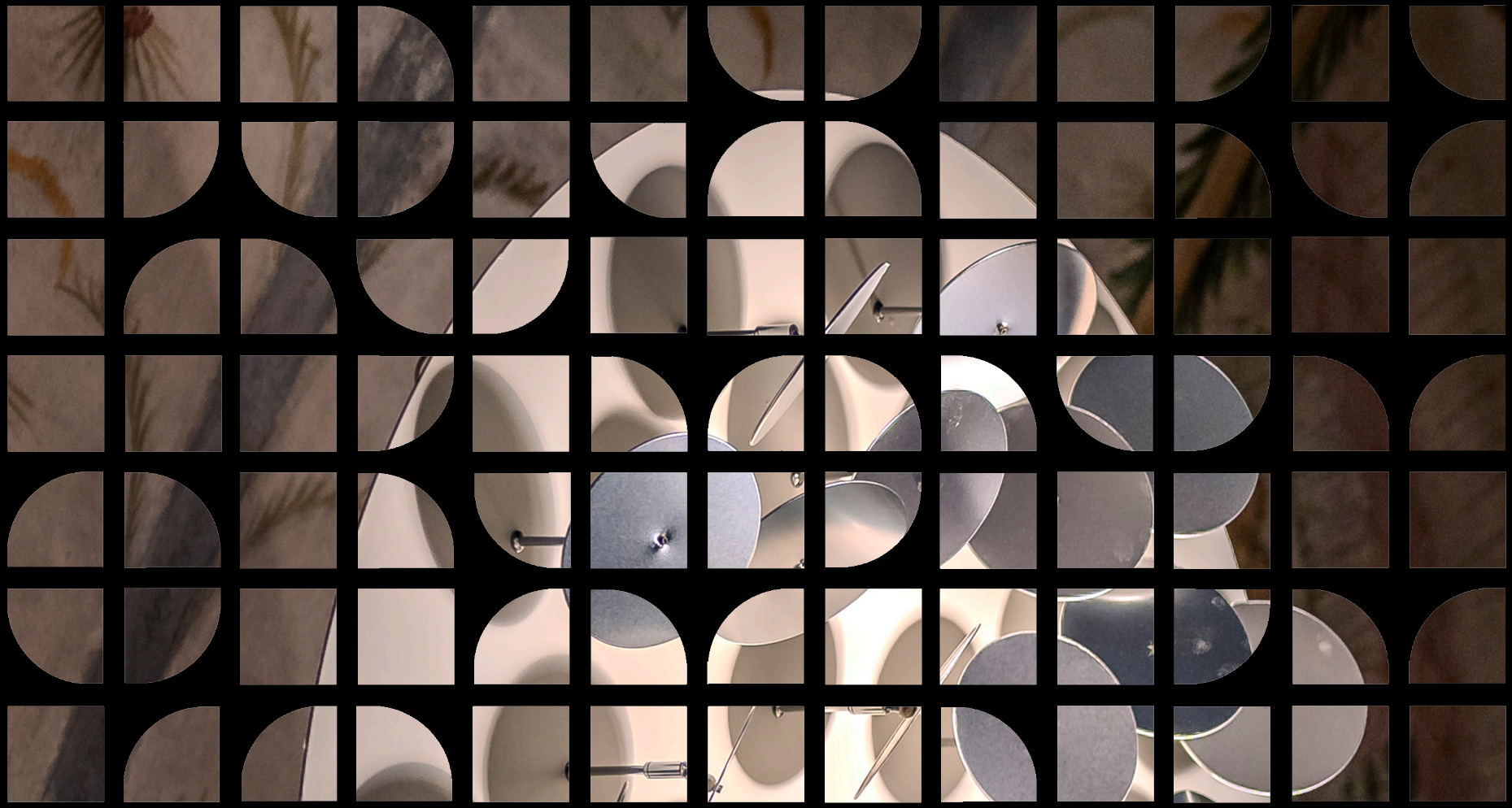

Exploring the Boundaries of Perception: Interview with Valeria Bottalico

Alessandro Paolo Lena

Keywords:
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Doppio Senso, Accessibility, Perception, Multisensoriality.

ABSTRACT:

In this conversation, Valeria Bottalico explores the intersection of art, perception, and accessibility through the Doppio Senso program at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, a project designed to make modern and contemporary art accessible to individuals with visual impairments. Doppio Senso challenges traditional museum experiences by integrating tactile exploration and multisensory engagement, allowing both blind and sighted visitors to interact with art in new ways. Bottalico highlights how Doppio Senso redefines accessibility—not as a separate initiative, but as a core element of the museum experience for everyone, as the project fosters participation, challenges perceptions, and broadens the very definition of seeing.

In questa conversazione, Valeria Bottalico esplora l'intersezione tra arte, percezione e accessibilità attraverso il programma Doppio Senso presso la Collezione Peggy Guggenheim di Venezia, un progetto pensato per rendere l'arte moderna e contemporanea accessibile alle persone con disabilità visive. Doppio Senso sfida le esperienze museali tradizionali integrando l'esplorazione tattile e il coinvolgimento multisensoriale, permettendo sia ai visitatori ciechi che a quelli vedenti di interagire con l'arte in modi nuovi. Bottalico sottolinea come Doppio Senso ridefinisca l'accessibilità, non come un'iniziativa separata, ma come un elemento centrale dell'esperienza museale per tutti, promuovendo la partecipazione, mettendo in discussione le percezioni e ampliando la stessa definizione di vedere.

Opening Picture:

Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim. Photo © Fei Xu.

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Valeria Bottalico

Valeria Bottalico is an Italian educator and art historian specializing in museum accessibility. She has been instrumental in developing and leading *Doppio Senso* at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, a program that offers tactile experiences and educational activities for individuals with visual impairments. In addition to her work at the Guggenheim, she has contributed to various cultural accessibility projects, including the Abecedarium project at Ocean Space in Venice, which promotes environmental awareness through an eco-glossary in Italian Sign Language.

In light of the thematic dossier presented in the third issue of *MMD*, this section dedicated to experience and audiences features an interview with Valeria Bottalico. An Italian educator and art historian, Bottalico has been instrumental in developing and leading the *Doppio Senso* program at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which offers tactile experiences and educational activities for individuals with visual impairments.

In addition to her work at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Bottalico has contributed to various projects aimed at increasing accessibility in cultural institutions. Notably, she has been involved in the *Abecedarium* project at Ocean Space in Venice, collaborating with researchers and artists to create an eco-glossary in Italian Sign Language, thereby promoting environmental awareness through art. Bottalico's dedication to inclusive education and her innovative approaches have established her as a leading figure in the field of museum accessibility in Italy.

In this conversation, Bottalico explores the intersection of art, perception, and accessibility through *Doppio Senso*, a project designed to make modern and contemporary art accessible to individuals with visual impairments. *Doppio Senso* challenges traditional museum experiences by integrating tactile exploration and multisensory engagement, allowing both blind and sighted visitors to interact with art in new ways.

Discussing the theoretical foundations and practical methodologies behind the project, and drawing from philosophy, neuroscience, education, and art history, Bottalico highlights how *Doppio Senso* redefines accessibility—not as a separate initiative, but as a core element of the museum experience for everyone. The project fosters participation, challenges perceptions, and broadens the very definition of seeing.

As *Doppio Senso* approaches its tenth anniversary and has become a permanent service at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Bottalico reflects on its evolution, the challenges it has faced, and the impact it has had on museum accessibility in Italy. She also shares insights into other projects that build on its successes, contributing to an ongoing dialogue about how museums can engage diverse audiences in meaningful ways.

The interview was held on 10th January 2025.

1. Can you describe the genesis of Doppio Senso? How does the project contribute to the broader discourse on accessibility in museums and what theoretical and practical insights does it offer for enhancing participation across different visitor groups?

The choice of the name *Doppio Senso*[1] for the museum's tactile mediation project, launched in 2015, stems from a multilayered reflection. On the one hand, the program initiated a gradual yet progressive process of accessibility to artworks for blind individuals at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. On the other, its goal goes beyond mere accessibility: it aims to foster active and conscious engagement with art, in line

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with Peggy Guggenheim's vision. This fits within the broader framework of democratizing cultural heritage, ensuring it is accessible to all audiences—not by categorizing people, but by designing mediation tools that are useful for everyone.

This is why the project is not called *Doppio Senso: Accessible Tours for Blind and Visually Impaired Visitors*, but *Doppio Senso: Tactile Tours at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection*, referencing the possibility of experiencing artworks through touch—a service offered to all visitors of the Venetian museum.

From the outset, the choice of the name *Doppio Senso* was a clear statement of intent, reflecting Peggy Guggenheim's attitude toward art, the mission of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, and the avant-garde spirit of the 20th-century pieces displayed in the museum. These works break with tradition to open up new forms of relationship between art and audience. The goal was to move beyond vision alone, using tactile language—an essential way of understanding the world for blind individuals—to make art accessible to all. Thus, the project was not just about adapting abstract art for blind audiences but about using tactile language as a universal tool, enriching the experience for every visitor.

Conceptually, the project title *Doppio Senso* is in fact based on the physiological principle that the act of seeing involves the use of two senses: sight and touch. The core idea is that touch is a concrete and analytical sense, while sight is a synthetic one. In the blink of an eye, vision allows us to grasp the overall image but often overlooks details, which are rarely retained in memory. Touch, on the other hand, is a sense that explores step by step, detail by detail, and is inherently analytical. It does not immediately capture the whole but enables the recognition of individual elements, gradually constructing a mental image through a psychological and mnemonic process. This reinforces the idea that, physiologically, the act of seeing is completed through the integration of both touch and vision. Hearing, too, plays a role in reinforcing this perception—not necessarily of seeing itself, but of observing and perceiving through the integration of these two senses. The goal of the project is to ensure that, for both sighted and blind individuals, the fusion of these senses triggers a psychological process that leads to the creation of a mental image. Each of us, thanks to mirror neurons and the information passing through our retinas, generates mental images.

The *Doppio Senso* concept is also embedded in the structure of the program, which involves two key figures: a sighted person (that is me, as I have personally guided the experimentation over the years), who assists visitors in transitioning from visual to tactile interpretation, helping them construct a mental image of the artwork; and a blind person, sculptor Felice Tagliaferri, who shares his sensory and methodological experience in tactile interpretation.

Through this dual approach, the tactile tour becomes a dialogue between two modes of perception, offering insights into experiencing 20th-century artworks not only through sight but also through

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touch and tactile language. Abstract art, when it shows a geometric and structural nature, lends itself particularly well to this experience, as it encourages a process of abstraction that is shared by all visitors, regardless of their visual ability. In this way, the project not only makes art accessible but transforms it into a shared and democratic experience, staying true to Peggy Guggenheim's vision of a museum as a "laboratory of new ideas." Thus, the project was not conceived as a separate initiative but is fully integrated into the museum's mission.

Doppio Senso also draws from philosophical and scientific influences. In this context, we can refer to a concept introduced by neurologist Oliver Sacks: *The Mind's Eye*, which is also the title of an audio description project adopted by the Guggenheim Museum in New York, inspired by Sacks' text. It suggests that our mind, by generating mental images, creates an "inner eye" that allows even those who cannot see to "see." My interest in English empiricism, particularly the essays published in *The Spectator* by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele highlight the Enlightenment concept of imagination as an association of ideas—a notion that ties back to the *Mind's Eye* and the representation of images. A central question in this discourse comes from the Irish philosopher William Molyneux: *cube or sphere?* That is, if a person born blind (congenitally blind) were to regain sight, having learned to distinguish between a cube and a sphere only through touch, would they be able to visually differentiate them without touching them? This question, referred to in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, remains open. Despite scientific advancements, including stem cell research, there are still no documented cases of congenitally blind individuals regaining their sight.

Doppio Senso develops from these questions—some of which are quite challenging—that have accompa-

Fig. 01:
Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim.
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nied me throughout my practice. By engaging with 20th-century artworks and philosophical and scientific reflections, the project seeks to explore the boundaries between perception, imagination, and representation, fostering a dialogue between art, science, and cultural mediation.

2. What specific methodologies did "Doppio Senso" implement to foster an inclusive museum experience for blind, visually impaired, and sighted visitors? How do tactile explorations and sculpture workshops function within this framework to enhance multisensory engagement?

From its inception, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection recognized the significance and innovative nature of this initiative, as it was the first time in Italy that abstract art was being discussed in terms of tactile accessibility. Even for the Fondazione Istituto dei Ciechi (Institute for the Blind People Foundation) in Milan, that provides technical support to the program, this was the first experience in translating abstract works into tactile form. This project has since become a reference point, as other Italian museums later approached the same center in Milan, requesting the model developed by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

In Italy, two museums have played a pioneering role in the field of accessibility and tactile engagement with art. The first is the Museo Tattile Omero in Ancona, named after the great poet Homer, who is traditionally depicted as blind. Founded by two blind individuals, Aldo Grassini and his wife Daniela Bottegoni, this museum houses a collection of replicas of some of the most significant architectural and sculptural masterpieces in art history. Among the architectural models, visitors can explore 3D dismantlable reproductions of the Pantheon, the Parthenon, and other iconic works,

Fig. 01: Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim. Photo © Fei Xu.

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designed to be experienced through touch. Additionally, the museum features replicas of famous sculptures, such as Donatello's *David* and Michelangelo's *Moses*. These reproductions were primarily created to allow blind individuals to learn about and appreciate these masterpieces through tactile exploration.

The second museum is the Museo Tattile Anteros, located in Bologna within the Istituto dei Ciechi Francesco Cavazza (Institute for the Blind People Francesco Cavazza). This museum focuses primarily on paintings, with a collection based on the concept of perspective bas-relief. Through this technique, major pictorial masterpieces have been translated into bas-reliefs, making them accessible to blind individuals. However, the Anteros Museum mainly concentrates on figurative artworks.

This raises an important question: how can 20th-century art be made accessible, in line with Peggy Guggenheim's vision? During this period, art underwent a radical transformation: it was no longer necessarily figurative but became increasingly abstract. This shift presents a particular challenge for individuals born blind (*congenitally blind*), who have learned to understand the world through four senses without ever having experienced sight. For them, touch and hearing become compensatory senses, replacing vision. In contrast, individuals who *acquired* blindness after having experienced sight retain a sensory archive based on visual memories, which makes it easier for them to grasp abstract concepts as well.

The situation is even more complex for children who lose sight at an early age—around seven years old, for instance—during what Jean Piaget defines as the *concrete operational stage*. At this stage, children are still learning about the world through direct experience, and the loss of sight makes it more difficult for them to develop abstract thinking processes. This raises further questions about how to make abstract 20th-century art accessible, especially for those who have never had visual experience.

As it was the first time, the project began as an experiment, made possible by an initial grant. Right from the start, we debunked a common misconception: that it is easier for a blind person to appreciate figurative works of art rather than abstract ones. It is true that when translating a figurative painting, such as a portrait of a man or woman, a blind person can recognize human figures because they are familiar with their own body or the body of someone close to them. However, the tactile translation of a figurative painting or photograph is complex because everything is concentrated in the unique representation created by the artist. Moreover, it is more difficult to appreciate a landscape, as its spatial and geographical aspects require an understanding that goes beyond tactile, olfactory, or auditory elements. A blind person can distinguish a marine environment from a mountain one through smells, sounds, or tactile sensations like humidity, but the overall representation of a landscape remains a challenge.

Paradoxically, it may be easier to experience a 20th-century abstract work. The pieces selected for tactile translation in the *Doppio Sen-*

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so program are often composed of geometric shapes, which make the experience less prone to interpretation and more accessible. Furthermore, the process of engagement levels all visitors. For this reason, the program is not aimed exclusively at blind people but at everyone. It invites participants to enter the artist's creative process, as the act of experiencing the work itself requires a mental shift toward abstraction. This process is similar to what a blind person does when exploring an artwork through touch: they build a mental image, detail by detail, creating a mnemonic archive that allows them to form an overall vision of the piece. On the other hand, a sighted person might initially feel disoriented in front of an abstract work, as they need to make an effort to abandon their dependence on sight and approach the artwork through a process of abstraction.

For example, the average visitor experiencing 20th-century art often struggles to mentally reconstruct a drawing like Picasso's *Bust of a Man in a Striped Jersey*. After just a few seconds of viewing the piece, unless they have a particular interest, they tend to move on. However, if we expose a sighted visitor to a tactile exploration using a tactile board, we force them to engage more deeply with the artist's creative process. In the case of a two-dimensional work like the one by Picasso, the tactile board extrapolates the volumes suggested by the brushstrokes, transforming the work into a bas-relief. This approach reinforces the geometric deconstruction of the bust and the figure, prompting the viewer to mentally reassemble the entire portrait.

Therefore, *Doppio Senso* is not just an accessibility project, but a true tool for realizing that participatory vision that defines contemporary museums. By integrating senses like touch and sight, the project aims to create an experience that actively involves the public, overcoming physical and cultural barriers and promoting an art that is truly for everyone.

Fig. 03: Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim. Photo © Fei Xu.

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3. Over the nearly ten years since its inception, what have been the primary challenges encountered in the implementation of Doppio Senso, and how were these addressed?

The *Doppio Senso* project began in 2015, thanks to a small grant and, particularly, following a visit by an American sculptor who had lost his sight. This visitor contacted the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in advance, asking to touch a sculpture by Constantin Brancusi. At that time, the museum did not yet have a system in place for visually impaired visitors, but his request led to a unique experience: together with the then-director, Philip Rylands, we allowed him to touch not only the Brancusi sculpture but all the sculptures in the museum.

After this visit, that American sculptor made a $20,000 donation, which enabled the project's launch with an experimental phase lasting four months, scheduling monthly appointments: Saturdays for adults and Sundays for children, from October 2015 to January 2016. *Doppio Senso*, in fact, was included in the museum's programming during a temporary exhibition dedicated to Indian artist Vasudeo Santu Gaitonde (1924-2001), who had been inspired by the works of Vasily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. Thus, in collaboration with the Fondazione Istituto dei Ciechi in Milan, two works from the permanent collection were selected to be translated into tactile form: *Upward* by Kandinsky and *Portrait of Frau P.* by Klee. The tactile translations were made in epoxy resin and thermoformed, and two booklets were created for the occasion: one in Braille and one in large print, both in Italian and English, to guide tactile exploration. The third accessible work was the bronze sculpture *Young Woman in the Shape of a Flower* by Max Ernst, chosen in collaboration with the conservator, the museum's director, and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, which handled the conservation and diagnostic aspects.

The interest in *Doppio Senso* was immediate: blind people and sighted visitors from all over Italy participated, demonstrating the need for an innovative approach. In March 2016, a symposium presented the case study of the project, attracting a new three-year grant that allowed the expansion of activities. During this period, more works from the permanent collection were translated into tactile form, using techniques like thermoforming and resining to reproduce paintings. At the same time, the sculpture section was enhanced by introducing original works by Alberto Giacometti, Marino Marini, and Jean Arp, after evaluating their conservation status and tactile readability.

In 2020, additional funding from the Veneto-based company Florim helped solidify the program, transforming it into a permanent service of the museum: it was decided, in fact, to show the tactile translations next to the original works in the galleries, integrating them permanently into the exhibition path. Until then, in fact, these tools had been movable and primarily used during guided activities. Since 2020, a complete kit has also been introduced—a tactile catalog that includes reproductions of 11 works from the Permanent Collection, in

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addition to the displayed tactile tablets. The catalog is available in Braille, in both Italian and English, and in large print, making it accessible to a broad audience.

The service offered to visitors is flexible and free. It is possible to book a guided tactile visit or use the tablets independently, even for those passing through Venice. In the past two years, the program has been further enriched by another appointment, called "masterclass" and part of the museum's public programs, consisting in a two days' workshop centered on the themes explored in the temporary exhibitions.

The masterclass represents an additional service within the *Doppio Senso* initiative, which, in 2025, will celebrate its first 10 years. One of the program's goals is to create an ever-growing community of an audience more aware of 20th-century art, with the intention of engaging the "non-public," including blind people, and making art accessible to everyone. This aligns with the museum definition proposed by ICOM, which views museums as places of enjoyment, accessibility, aggregation, and participation. Every museum is responsible for making its heritage accessible, activating processes of audience engagement and audience development to find strategies and tools that allow all citizens to access culture.

In this sense, a key element of *Doppio Senso* is the application of the principle of "Design for All," as defined by the Stockholm Declaration in 2004,[2] which calls for the active participation of end users in the design process. This approach was realized with the involvement of the aforementioned blind sculptor Felice Tagliaferri, who was chosen not only as a user but as a co-creator of the program. Tagliaferri, in addition to being a talented sculptor, learned to navigate the museum spaces independently, becoming a key figure in conducting workshops and activities. His presence was essential in ensuring that the program addressed the real needs of blind people, demonstrating how co-participation of end users is an indispensable pillar for an inclusive project.

Fig. 04: Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim. Photo © Fei Xu.

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4. As "Doppio Senso" nears its tenth year, can you discuss the subsequent projects or initiatives that have emerged from it? How do these ventures build on the project's initial achievements and contribute to scholarly discourse on engaging diverse audiences in museum contexts?

Doppio Senso has been an opportunity for experimentation, study, and research, pursued with a rigorous and replicable approach. Thanks to this work, *Doppio Senso* has become a trailblazer for other initiatives related to the accessibility of cultural heritage in other museum contexts.

A significant example of this is the *Valori Tattili* project, created in 2018 at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo. The occasion was the cataloging of the sculptures donated to the Fondazione Accademia Carrara by Federico Zeri. Unlike *Doppio Senso*, tactile reproductions were not used in that context, as the focus was on highlighting the original works, starting from the idea that sculpture inherently involves tactility and that one of its values can be found in the ability to be explored also through touch.

The project was carried out in an interdepartmental manner, involving the educational department of the foundation and the conservation department, in collaboration with the restoration center at Venaria Reale. After an assessment based on criteria such as the state of conservation, tactile legibility, and narrative potential, six marble sculptures from the Federico Zeri collection were selected, while a group of blind individuals was trained for one year as cultural mediators, learning to understand the works from multiple perspectives, from art history to materiality.

These blind mediators first learned to understand the sculptures for themselves and later, through a series of exercises, were trained to mediate these works to a broader audience. During the training, they deepened their knowledge of the artists' creative and production processes: they studied how ears, nostrils, and other details were sculpted, discovering which chisel tips were used and how the artist shaped the material. This journey transformed blind people into storytellers of cultural heritage, capable of guiding other visitors through a deep and meaningful tactile experience.

The project further developed by including the collection of medals and plaques, donated to Accademia Carrara by Mario Scaglia. The blind mediators are now learning about these works, and tactile boards illustrating the process of creating a minted medal have been displayed in the museums halls, showing the tools and materials used in the production of these items. Regarding the medals and plaques, the tactile experience has been sometimes integrated with sound elements, making art accessible through multiple sensory channels. The future goal is to also train individuals who are deaf or have cognitive disabilities, following the Design for All approach: the idea is to use the languages and mediation methods developed for some audiences and make them available to others, exploring new forms of accessibility that go beyond the visual experience.

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Like *Doppio Senso, Valori Tattili*—which started as an experimental project—has become a permanent program and a service for visitors. Today, it includes symposia and conferences, specific workshops related to the museum's programming, and a monthly appointment where visitors can experience the artworks with the guidance of blind mediators. This evolution highlights how the program has expanded its scope, providing deeper, more comprehensive access to art through sensory exploration and continued community engagement.

Thanks to the PNRR funding, several new projects have emerged across various cultural contexts. One of them is an initiative designed for Ocean Space in Venice, a research center and exhibition space managed by the foundation TBA21—Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. Located inside a deconsecrated church, Ocean Space hosts a rich program of site-specific works, created specifically for the center in collaboration with contemporary artists. Here, the *Ocean for All* program has been developed, offering monthly visits where works can be experienced tactilely or accompanied by sign language interpreters, making them accessible to all audiences, both adults and children.

As an extension of the project *Ocean for All*, a long-term research initiative called *Abecedarium* was created, in collaboration with research institutes such as the ISMAR (National Institute of Marine Sciences) and the LACAM laboratory of the Department of Cognitive Sciences at CNR (National Research Council). This project involves deaf people from across Italy in the creation of an eco-glossary in sign language, the visual-gestural language used by the deaf community. The goal is to leverage the performative nature of sign language—already an artistic language—to disseminate scientific and environmental themes through contemporary art.

Fig. 05: Doppio Senso. Percorsi Tattili alla Collezione Peggy Guggenheim. Photo © Fei Xu.

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The project aligns with the mission of the TBA21 foundation and its patron, Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, which aims to explore significant environmental and social issues through the lens of art. In this case, deaf people have become protagonists, demonstrating how sign language can be a powerful tool to communicate complex issues in an accessible and engaging way.

Work is also underway to implement a simplified writing method known as “easy-to-read,” which is used by people with cognitive disabilities but can also benefit individuals with a migratory background and a basic level of language proficiency (A1 or A2). These texts, facilitated and validated directly by end-users—people with cognitive disabilities—serve as tools that can help children, migrants, and anyone in need of more accessible language when engaging with cultural heritage.

I believe the most interesting aspect of these initiatives is that they are co-designed with the end-users, ensuring that they address their real needs. This approach, grounded in the Design for All concept, transforms museums into truly accessible spaces where the experience of cultural heritage becomes a shared and democratic practice.

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Endnotes

1 *Doppio Senso* can be translated both as “Double Meaning” and “Double Sense,” reflecting the project’s dual focus on the intellectual and sensory dimensions of art engagement. The term plays on the idea of a deeper, multifaceted interaction with artworks, accessible through both visual and tactile experiences.

2 Bottalico refers to the EIDD Stockholm Declaration, adopted on 9 May 2004, at the Annual General Meeting of the European Institute for Design and Disability (EIDD) in Stockholm. See https://dfaeurope.eu/what-is-dfa/dfa-documents/the-eidd-stockholm-declaration-2004/.

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House of Memories di National Museums Liverpool: un approccio integrato alle collezioni digitali per persone malate di Alzheimer

Irene Di Pietro

Keywords:
Digital, Digital for Museums, Liverpool, Dementia, Information technology.

ABSTRACT:

The essay aims to give an overview of the idea of “care” in museums through digital tools by presenting the case of the NML (National Museums of Liverpool) projects for people with dementia.

Il saggio intende offrire una panoramica sul tema della cura nei musei attraverso gli strumenti offerti dal digitale presentando il caso dei progetti di NML (National Museums of Liverpool) per le persone affette da demenza.

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Tra i programmi museali[1] che coniugano il tema della cura delle persone colpite da Alzheimer[2] e l'utilizzo delle tecnologie digitali, *House of Memories*, promosso nel Regno Unito dalla rete National Museums Liverpool,[3] rappresenta un progetto significativo, capace di promuovere i musei come istituzioni culturali di riferimento per una comunità, di offrire un sostegno efficace ai malati di demenza, ma anche di individuare come priorità gli strumenti utili per i caregiver. La strategia è stata elaborata anche tenendo conto delle esigenze legate all'invecchiamento della popolazione del Regno Unito, il cui numero di persone con più di 60 anni è destinato a crescere in maniera significativa nei prossimi decenni.[4]

Il progetto nasce nel 2012 nell'ambito del *Department of Health* con l'idea di supportare in maniera organica i professionisti dell'assistenza sanitaria e sociale, dando accesso alle collezioni tramite l'utilizzo di oggetti musealizzati, in particolare le risorse afferenti alla sezione di storia sociale, considerate punti di partenza per creare connessioni e occasioni di dialogo e conversazione tra persone affette da demenza. Riconoscendo, così, che le storie individuali, i ricordi, i gusti e le antipatie di una persona possono essere preziosi per creare connessioni e migliorare la comunicazione attraverso attività coinvolgenti.[5]

La rete istituzionale museale, nell'ambito di un vasto panorama scientifico sull'argomento,[6] ha infatti individuato la mancanza di un'offerta, nella formazione alla cura della demenza, centrata particolarmente sulla persona. Solo la NML (National Museums Liverpool) aveva già sviluppato in precedenza programmi inclusivi,[7] in particolare, per il coinvolgimento dei membri anziani delle comunità locali:[8] queste iniziative hanno costituito, così, una prima esperienza da cui creare le offerte di *House of Memories*.

Il progetto si propone come obiettivo il miglioramento e l'incentivo dell'assistenza sociale attraverso la promozione, la collaborazione e l'innovazione, anche creando partenariati tra arte, salute, tempo libero, sport e attività outdoor. Tramite il percorso creato, NML ha scelto di sensibilizzare i propri pubblici sul tema dell'Alzheimer e ha supportato i caregiver nella condivisione creativa dei ricordi delle persone assistite. Gli studi di valutazione su *House of Memories*, condotti a partire dal lancio nel 2012, mostrano risultati costantemente positivi per le organizzazioni e i settori dell'assistenza sanitaria che hanno partecipato, soprattutto in termini di sviluppo professionale e di rafforzamento delle capacità individuali. Il progetto ha messo in luce il potenziale dei musei nel contribuire allo sviluppo di competenze fondamentali per le persone anziane e una maggiore comprensione empatica della malattia da parte dei caregiver.[9] I partecipanti hanno dimostrato un cambiamento nella comprensione cognitiva ed emotiva della demenza e delle sue implicazioni sia per le persone direttamente colpite sia per chi se ne prende cura, così da riconsiderare e valutare i propri atteggiamenti e comportamenti.[10]

L'idea di cambiare il concetto di cura attraverso la cultura ha orientato le iniziative di National Museums Liverpool attraverso una strategia

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museale che ha saputo coniugare, nel corso degli anni, una mediazione realizzata tramite risorse reali e analogiche con un approccio, più recente, attraverso strumenti digitali e la creazione di luoghi virtuali. Oltre agli eventi creati all'interno dei musei e che hanno riguardato le collezioni, gli allestimenti, ma anche le testimonianze e i documenti, sono state pensate risorse supplementari che potessero essere impiegate anche in spazi *altri*.

Il progetto *Memory Box*, tra i primi del museo, aveva come obiettivo il coinvolgimento e la condivisione della memoria ed è stato realizzato attraverso l'utilizzo di oggetti, contenuti all'interno di piccole valigie, che potessero far *risuonare* la storia e la vita delle persone e far scaturire conversazioni sui ricordi.

A seguito di questo percorso *on site*, nel 2014 è stata poi lanciata l'app *My House of Memories*,[11] frutto di una co-progettazione con le persone affette da demenza e i loro caregiver[12] e con la collaborazione di altre organizzazioni artistiche, culturali e che si occupano di medialità.[13] Nello sviluppo dell'applicazione è stata infatti coinvolta una compagnia teatrale e sono stati utilizzati documentari basati su vari personaggi, realizzati durante gli eventi di formazione; queste collaborazioni professionali hanno permesso di produrre e fornire contenuti ed esperienze creative di alta qualità. Nello sviluppo della App, primo progetto digitale, sono stati coinvolti ricercatori accademici provenienti da discipline quali la psicologia della salute, la gerontologia, l'infermieristica e la sanità applicata.

My House of Memories si presenta come una collezione digitale di oggetti museali e di uso quotidiano provenienti da diversi decenni e accompagnati da suoni, musica e descrizioni; attraverso il suo utilizzo prendono vita i ricordi delle persone, e vengono stimolate conversazioni e discussioni. Per gli utenti malati di Alzheimer osservare le immagini può, infatti, riportare alla mente ricordi passati legati ai loro passatempi e alle loro abitudini. Inoltre, ogni immagine può essere spiegata dall'applicazione, in modo da essere ben compresa dagli utenti. I temi proposti da *My House of Memories* sono la scuola, il lavoro, il tempo libero e la storia marittima, con un ricco patrimonio di fotografie, oggetti e di contenuti da esplorare.[14]

Il progetto riesce a mettere in evidenza il contributo unico che i musei e il patrimonio possono dare in questo contesto, valorizzando la conoscenza della persona dietro la diagnosi di demenza.

L'interfaccia si presenta con caratteristiche di usabilità e può essere facilmente compresa e utilizzata: anche chi non ha competenze digitali può apprenderne l'utilizzo progressivamente. *My House of Memories* può essere utilizzata anche all'interno di piccoli gruppi di persone con demenza e offrire, così, spunti per trattare temi e innescare conversazioni richiamando, di volta in volta, argomenti diversi. È possibile salvare i propri oggetti preferiti in un "albero dei ricordi" digitale, in una "scatola dei ricordi" (che richiama la *Memory Box*) virtuale o in una linea del tempo. L'App può essere utilizzata anche nel contesto familiare, cosicché i caregiver e i familiari possano supportare il recupero delle memorie, grazie all'implemen-

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to della sezione *My Memories*, nella quale è possibile aggiungere fotografie e ricordi propri creando una galleria personale.[15]

Nel 2021 NML ha lanciato un nuovo progetto digitale, dimostrando la continua capacità del programma *My House of Memories* di rispondere alle esigenze delle comunità locali e intercettando la difficoltà delle persone con demenza che non fossero in grado di accedere con facilità ai programmi sviluppati fino a quel momento. Per questo motivo, è stato elaborato *House of Memories on The Road*,[16] un'esperienza museale mobile immersiva capace di promuovere lo sviluppo digitale nel settore museale, sanitario e sociale nel panorama post Covid-19, come si vedrà in seguito. L'utilizzo della tecnologia informatica si è rivelata indispensabile nel processo di *rimmaginazione* del museo, superando i confini, in questo caso, di una tematica connessa alla salute.[17]

On The Road è, infatti, un'esperienza 3D fruibile all'interno di un autobus di 30 metri quadrati all'interno del quale sono stati realizzati un'installazione e uno spazio per le attività. Il progetto, che rappresenta la prima esperienza di museo immersivo mobile nel Regno Unito,[18] è stato portato nei quartieri di Liverpool, nei centri delle comunità, nei parcheggi delle varie attività locali e nelle vicinanze delle case di cura per raggiungere più facilmente le persone con Alzheimer. Gruppi di sei persone possono esplorare contemporaneamente l'ambiente trovando uno spazio intimo e sicuro in cui poter fruire esperienze dal passato: lo spazio cinematografico interattivo si ricollega alle attività quotidiane degli anni Cinquanta per poter stimolare, anche grazie a suoni e odori,[19] i ricordi e le memorie. Tutte le immagini provengono dalle collezioni di NML.[20] Gli utenti possono rivivere virtualmente un giro sulla ferrovia *Liverpool's Overhead*, una gita al mare, ma anche entrare in una drogheria o in una vecchia scuola; lo schermo permette l'utilizzo di bottoni che possono riportare alla mente altri ricordi e i fruitori sono, infatti, liberi di scegliere il percorso da seguire.

Con l'utilizzo di un veicolo riconvertito come *On The Road*, le esperienze memorabili vengono così *avvicinate* alle categorie più vulnerabili, spesso isolate dalla società a causa della malattia. Il museo mobile apre le sue porte e invita a salire a bordo condividendo ricordi legati alla storia sociale della città di Liverpool; l'idea di un museo alla portata di tutti comporta sicuramente numerosi benefit: anzitutto contrasta l'esclusione delle comunità più fragili dai mezzi informatici e intende colmare la loro difficoltà ad accedere al mondo digitale.[21] *On The Road* è stato pensato, quindi, come una possibilità offerta a coloro che convivono con la demenza, perché possano riconoscere il loro contributo alla società, ma anche ai giovani per creare un'esperienza digitale il più condivisa possibile.[22] *On The Road* può essere prenotato e raggiungere diverse sedi e luoghi, oltre alle case di cura e centri di aggregazione, e può essere utilizzato anche durante eventi all'aperto. Il progetto, come nel caso di *My House of Memories*, è stato creato adattando una rivisitazione innovativa dell'offerta digitale di NML, che già comprendeva l'erogazione online di programmi di formazione per professionisti, ma anche, come già evidenziato, nume-

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rose iniziative all'interno delle collezioni.[23]

Nel 2021 è stato lanciato anche il servizio di prestito di tablet, *Connect My Memories*, in collaborazione con reti di comunità locali: attraverso un kit, per il personale specializzato e i volontari, e un programma di formazione, le risorse per il patrimonio digitale possono aiutare, anche in questo caso, gli anziani isolati a sviluppare nuove competenze, connessioni e interessi.

I progetti *On The Road* e *Connect My Memories* sono stati evidentemente elaborati per mitigare gli effetti della solitudine e dell'isolamento, in particolare sulla popolazione anziana e l'impatto della pandemia Covid-19:[24] problematiche presenti nelle aree prioritarie della sanità pubblica britannica. I ricercatori di NML hanno infatti approfondito quanto emerso dalla ricerca della Croce Rossa Britannica del 2020[25] che ha riportato come fenomeni emergenti: la mancanza di contatti significativi, la riduzione del sostegno informale e formale in termini di cura e assistenza e l'aumento dell'ansia, soprattutto nelle comunità a maggior rischio di solitudine e di isolamento (comprese le persone appartenenti a comunità di minoranza: nere, asiatiche, con malattie fisiche e mentali di lungo corso, ma anche persone a basso reddito e quelle con un accesso limitato alle tecnologie digitale e a Internet). I programmi costituiscono, così, una risorsa sociale preziosa che incoraggia la creazione di storie condivise e nuove comprensioni della diversità culturale.[26]

I progetti più recenti dimostrano, dunque, la capacità di risposta di NML alle esigenze delle comunità locali: ne sono esempi anche le nuove versioni multiculturali dell'app *My House of Memories*.[27] Ma il progetto continua a espandersi digitalmente e rappresenta uno degli sviluppi digitali più avanzati in ambito museale, sanitario e dell'assistenza sociale nel panorama postpandemico in termini di ampliamento e diversificazione dell'accesso ai servizi e alle collezioni.[28]

Gli obiettivi di crescita di NML individuati a medio termine (2025-27) e a lungo termine (2028-30) comprendono progetti che prevedono la creazione di contenuti digitali differenziati e la realizzazione di reti con le comunità locali; oltre all'ampliamento di *House of Memories* attraverso nuove partnership globali negli Stati Uniti, in Sud America, nel Sud-Est asiatico ed Europa per rispondere a tendenze simili al Regno Unito, considerando che i malati di Alzheimer dovrebbero quasi triplicare a livello mondiale, raggiungendo 153 milioni di persone entro il 2050.[29]

House of Memories rappresenta, in conclusione, un intervento culturale di altissima qualità nella politica e nella pratica dell'assistenza alle persone con demenza, grazie alla creazione di esperienze memorabili per tutti.[30] I musei, intesi spesso come luoghi "distanti" dalla vita della comunità, hanno dato vita a una strategia integrata con altri partner, configurandosi come luoghi in cui è possibile esplorare nuovi modi di lavorare, sviluppare competenze relazionali e interpersonali, facendo così progredire il settore della cultura, della salute e del benessere a livello locale e internazionale.

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Endnotes

1 Per inquadrare meglio il progetto *House of Memories* è sicuramente importante tracciare il quadro di riferimento sulle iniziative di cura dirette alle persone malate di Alzheimer nel Regno Unito. Gli Standard di qualità sulla cura di persone affette da demenza pubblicati dal National Institute for Health and Care Excellence nel 2019 hanno evidenziato come obiettivo strategico il coinvolgimento in attività che possano in cui possa migliorare il loro benessere, ma anche l'offerta di formazione a tutti i caregiver (si veda *Dementia: Quality Standard*...2019). Per ciò che riguarda, invece, le politiche sui benefici per la salute e il benessere derivanti dalla partecipazione alle arti e alla cultura, nel Regno Unito è stato creato nel 2021 il National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH), a seguito dell'ampia indagine biennale dell'*All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Wellbeing*. Il rapporto, *Creative Health* 2017, viene considerata l'analisi più completa sul ruolo delle arti e della creatività nel sostenere la salute fisica e mentale lungo tutto l'arco della vita. L'NCCH è stato quindi istituito con l'obiettivo principale di rendere la salute creativa una componente strategica dei sistemi di assistenza sanitaria e sociale (si veda anche Wilson 2022a, p. 6). Un'analisi della letteratura sulle politiche sanitarie, condotta nel dicembre 2021 dal team *Innovate Dementia* della Liverpool John Mores University ha identificato cinque temi determinanti per la salute e l'assistenza, tra questi, è interessante notare l'importanza crescente dell'assistenza sociale, in base alla quale i pazienti o gli utenti dei servizi che presentano problemi di salute mentale vengono indirizzati a un'attività all'interno della comunità come alternativa al trattamento clinico (Cfr. Wilson 2022a, p. 15). Altri studi condotti dalla Liverpool John Mores University hanno invece identificato le priorità della strategia e degli orientamenti del Regno Unito in materia di demenza nel documento *Dementia 2020 Challenge* 2019 che richiama i punti di forza del progetto *House of Memories* e propone anche nuove azioni da svolgere per continuare a produrre cambiamenti positivi nel campo della demenza. In particolare: il coinvolgimento di un sempre maggior numero di persone affette da demenza nella ricerca e nello sviluppo e nell'individuazione di modalità per coinvolgere i gruppi "non ancora raggiunti", tra cui le comunità BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) e non anglofone. Dal punto di vista delle arti e della salute, è sicuramente interessante citare l'agenda *Creative Health and Wellbeing* dell'Arts Council England che ha portato, nel 2022, alla progettazione della strategia *Let's Create 2020-30*: il documento stabilisce come il lavoro del Council affronta le disuguaglianze in materia di salute collegando le persone con le loro comunità attraverso la creatività. La ricerca accademica sul valore delle arti e della cultura per le persone affette da Alzheimer è poi sostenuta da una sempre maggiore rappresentazione dei media, ne è un esempio la serie della BBC, *Our Dementia Choir* (si veda a questo proposito Mangan 2019).

2 Per contributi di riferimento sulle esperienze museali per le persone affette da demenza si veda Rosenberg, Parsa, Humble, McGee 2009; Benham 2015; Johnson, Culverwell, *et al.* 2017; Fancourt, Steptoe, Cadar 2018; Coles, Jury 2020; Marchionni 2021. Il valore specifico dei musei nell' assistenza sociale per le persone anziane è evidenziato dalla ricerca di Thomson, Lockyer, Camic, Chatterjee 2018, i benefici indicati sono anzitutto l'opportunità di acquisire nuove conoscenze e competenze e il miglioramento, nel tempo, del benessere psicologico.

Sul riconoscimento del valore delle arti e della creatività per le persone affette da demenza, si vedano le ricerche sulle arti visive partecipative (Barroso, Rai, *et al.* 2022).

Per una trattazione del museo come spazio di assistenza sociale e come nodo di rete capace di soddisfare i bisogni della comunità, si veda Morse 2021.

3 Nel 2013 il progetto è stato distribuito in tutto il nord dell'Inghilterra, in collaborazione con il Salford Museum and Art Gallery, il Bury Art Museum e il Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. Nel 2015, è stato sviluppato *Train the Trainer* da Health Education England. Il programma prevedeva che gli operatori museali del team di *House of Memories* formassero i professionisti nei centri ospedalieri nel Nord-Ovest del Regno Unito, in modo da potere poi formare a cascata altri colleghi. Nel 2016 è stato realizzato

anche un programma pilota nazionale in collaborazione con il New Walk Museum and Art Gallery di Leicester, il Salford Museum and Art Gallery e il British Museum di Londra. Nel 2017 è stato lanciato il programma *House of Memories* per assistenti familiari.

4 Il numero di persone con più di 60 anni è destinato a raggiungere i 22 milioni nel 2039 e il numero di persone di età superiore a 85 anni i 3,6 milioni. Entro il 2025, si stima che 1 milione di persone nel Regno Unito saranno affette da demenza. Inoltre, si stima che ci siano circa 700.000 fornitori di assistenza familiare non retribuita. Per approfondire i risultati inerenti al tema, si vedano UK Public General Acts, 2022 c.31, *UK Health and Social Care act* (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/31/contents).

5 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

6 Per un approfondimento sui programmi di cura delle persone malate di Alzheimer, si veda in particolare Wilson 2022a, pp. 5-6 e i relativi riferimenti bibliografici. *House of Memories* è stato citato come un esempio sistematico di assistenza nell'ambito di una revisione degli standard di assistenza per le persone affette da demenza (*Cracks in the Pathway*... 2014). Il progetto si è sviluppato in sinergia con i più importanti programmi di salute pubblica nel Regno Unito, che mettono in campo strategie preventive progettate per affrontare i fattori sociali e le disuguaglianze sanitarie, e che si occupano della creazione di sistemi sanitari e sociali integrati più sensibili e basati maggiormente sull'idea di comunità. Per gli altri riconoscimenti del progetto, si veda Wilson 2022a, p. 6. Durante un dibattito parlamentare dedicato, nel giugno 2013 il progetto è stato citato come un esempio di utilizzo efficace dei beni culturali nella campagna per la cura della demenza. Inoltre, è stata sottolineata l'efficacia sociale ed economica di *House of Memories*, in seguito agli investimenti del Dipartimento della Salute e al riconoscimento da parte del Consiglio comunale di Liverpool che indica il progetto come motore principale della sua politica di città a misura di anziano. Cfr. Wilson 2022a, p. 11.

7 Sui progetti creati da NML si veda Chatterjee, Noble 2013; Wilson 2015.

8 In particolare, la rete Happy Older People (HOP) nata nel 2014 per promuove la partecipazione artistica a misura di anziano nella regione di Liverpool. Per un inquadramento del progetto, si veda Wilson 2022a, p. 7.

9 Si vedano Wilson, Grindrod 2013; Wilson, Whelan 2014; Wilson, Whelan 2016.

10 Wilson, Whelan 2014; Wilson, Whelan, 2016; Ganga, Wilson, 2020 e *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

11 https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/my-house-of-memories-app.

12 L'App è stata sviluppata attraverso partnership con organizzazioni che continuano a collaborare con il team di *House of Memories* per nuovi sviluppi e iniziative. Tra queste, la Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, la Liverpool Dementia Action Alliance, l'Everton Football Club e la LJMU, che si occupa del programma internazionale *Innovate Dementia*, finanziato dalla Commissione europea. Si veda Wilson 2022a, p. 12.

13 Il progetto è stato lanciato ufficialmente durante un evento speciale alla Camera dei Comuni, nel giugno 2014. L'evento ha riunito tutti coloro che hanno partecipato al programma, comprese le persone affette da demenza e i caregiver, con i parlamentari dei principali partiti politici per celebrare i risultati ottenuti dal programma e lanciare l'applicazione. Il contributo del programma e l'esperienza dei membri del team sono stati riconosciuti grazie alla loro capacità di inclusione attiva e alla creazione di iniziative e gruppi strategici. Si veda Wilson 2022a, p. 11.

14 Sono disponibili anche contenuti sviluppati in collaborazione con musei e organizzazioni partner, come la sezione LGBTQIA+, pensata per persone appartenenti alla comunità e creata con l'associazione Switchboard che raccoglie storie di protesta, famiglie arcobaleno e ricordi di momenti chiave della comunità LGBTQIA+; la collezione *Memories of Yemen*, curata dalla comunità yemenita di Liverpool; *Liverpool FC Memories* per i tifosi di calcio che possono ripercorrere i loro legami e ricordi con il Liverpool Football Club; nel 2025 verrà lanciato dalla città di St Helens, l'omonimo progetto. Si veda

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https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/my-house-of-memories-app.

15 Il funzionamento dell'App è presentato nel video https://youtu.be/eQMc2ziW3kk?si=DdAHOmWl8YZYhThg.

16 https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/on-the-road. La presentazione del progetto è visibile su https://youtu.be/TAnp4wxkiPQ?si=fMFbi8GEc_Y6Xb5g.

17 Whitehouse 2015.

18 Sull'importanza di *On The Road* come esempio di museo che esce dai vincoli spaziali si veda Cane 2022.

19 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

20 Cfr. l'intervista a Carol Rogers, Director of the House of Memories, in *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

21 L'inchiesta lanciata nel 2020 sul tema della solitudine dal All-Party Parliamentary Group ha individuato nelle persone affette da demenza e in chi le assiste un gruppo specifico a rischio solitudine; inoltre nel rapporto che costituisce il risultato dell'inchiesta si definisce la necessità come intervento critico la necessità di colmare il divario digitale tra i gruppi a rischio solitudine e gli altri gruppi, per cui l'investimento in infrastrutture digitali e l'aumento delle competenze e della fiducia nel digitale sono indicate come azioni necessarie da perseguire. Cfr. *Fuelling the Moonshot*...2021 citata in Wilson 2022a, p. 14.

22 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

23 Wilson 2022a, p. 14, si veda anche nota n. 3.

24 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

25 *Life After Lockdown*...2020 è infatti citata in forse Wilson 2022a, p. 14.

26 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

27 Tra il 2021 e il 2022 la Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund ha finanziato il progetto *Memories of Yemen* per la co-creazione di una collezione digitale del patrimonio yemenita di Liverpool. Il progetto intergenerazionale ha coinvolto giovani e i membri più anziani della comunità e organizzazioni come il Liverpool Arabic Centre, la Moschea Al-Taiseer e il Centro Al-Ghazali, oltre che essere stato sviluppato con il supporto del Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre per creare una versione in doppia lingua (arabo e inglese) dell'app *My House of Memories*, utilizzando le collezioni museali dei partner del progetto: il British Museum e il Fashion Museum di Bath, e gli oggetti raccolti e fotografati dai membri della comunità su temi quali la cucina, l'intrattenimento, la vita nelle campagne, l'abbigliamento e i gioielli. Cfr. https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/connecting-yemeni-elders-heritage e Wilson 2022b.

House of Memories Cymru è un'altra versione in doppia lingua del programma. Nel 2022 il governo gallese ha finanziato un programma che offre formazione, App e attività in gallese e inglese, co-prodotto con un consorzio di 14 musei e reti di assistenza che supportano gli anziani e le persone affette da demenza in tutto il Galles, comprese le comunità più isolate. Il progetto si concentra soprattutto sull'idea di far rivivere la tradizione gallese, per avvicinare gli anziani alle abitudini e agli eventi che possono far rivivere i ricordi del passato. Cfr. https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/cymru/house-of-memories-cymru.

28 Wilson 2022a, p. 14.

29 Wilson 2022a, p. 19.

30 *House of Memories Hits the Road*...2022.

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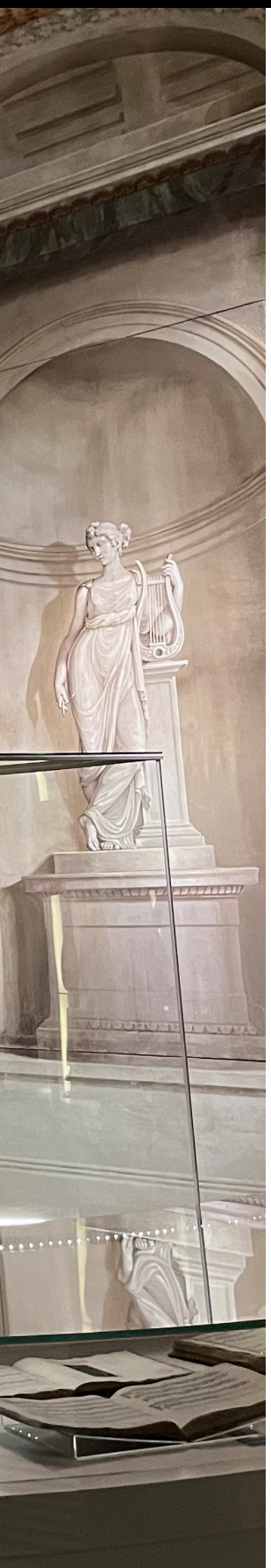
Exhibition design and lighting: notes on the genesis of the debate between conservation, public emotion, and care

Federico Maria Giorgi

Keywords:
Light design, Care, Museum displays, Architecture, Public perception.



ABSTRACT:

In 1969, a group of museum professionals from the United States decided to found the International Association of Lighting Designer (IALD), marking both the emergence of a new profession and the rising importance given to the topic of light inside exhibition spaces. If the complex relationship between the preventive conservation of exhibited artworks and the visual comfort of the public is at the origin of the first considerations of light as an essential tool for museums, today's light designers' projects shed new light on the topic by offering new horizons - such as the importance of environmental care- and by improving the design, technologies, and knowledge behind the art of illuminating museums. As such, this article tries to retrace the evolution of the reflection toward museum illumination by highlighting its constant relationship with our different perspectives of "care".

Nel 1969, un gruppo di professionisti museali statunitensi decise di fondare l'International Association of Lighting Designer (IALD), segnando sia la nascita di una nuova professione sia la crescente importanza attribuita al tema della luce all'interno degli spazi espositivi. Se la complessa relazione tra la conservazione preventiva delle opere d'arte esposte e il comfort visivo del pubblico è all'origine delle prime considerazioni sulla luce come strumento essenziale per i musei, oggi i progetti dei light designer forniscono una prospettiva rinnovata sull'argomento, offrendo nuovi orizzonti - come l'importanza della cura dell'ambiente - e migliorando il design, le tecnologie e le conoscenze alla base dell'arte di illuminare i musei. Questo articolo cerca quindi di ripercorrere l'evoluzione della riflessione sull'illuminazione museale, evidenziando il suo costante rapporto con le diverse prospettive del "care".

Opening Picture:

Fig. 6: Detail of the Multireflex light system installed inside the Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica di Bologna, November 2024. In Italian museums, light often plays a double role, highlighting the exhibited works and enhancing the historical container that displays them.

Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

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The 4th dimension of architecture: how light entered the design of museum spaces

The importance of the light offered to collections has been a topic of artistic historiography ever since the 17th-century indications of Giulio Mancini and Vincenzo Scamozzi and the 18th-century debate on the lighting of the first exhibitions - temporary, laic and open to all - at the Salon Carré in the Louvre. Exhibitions that would, in those years, make zenithal lighting a fashionable subject among Parisian artists[1] and architects.[2] In the 19th century, the emotional possibilities offered by light variations inside an identical space would be explored in Art: we only need to recall Claude Monet's thirty-one canvases of Rouen Cathedral painted in different light conditions. Light, which contemporary debate has sometimes interpreted as the 'fourth dimension' of architecture, has since offered visual consistency to the spaces of collections, revealing their volumes and matter.[3] However, in time, it also started to create moods and atmospheres by conveying emotions to the spectator,[4] permanently balancing the needs of the spaces, the artworks and the public.

The following reflections do not intend to propose a technical analysis of the evolution of lighting systems used over time for exhibitions and museums[5] but rather to point out how the question of 'care', which is as topical as ever today, has been at the basis of some exhibition projects and of various theoretical reflections in the field of museology since the 1940s. At that time, curators' practice was confronted with two different and sometimes conflicting requirements: on the one hand, the essential need for adequate preservation of collections over time;[6] on the other hand, the increasingly important focus on public perception.[7] This priority toward the visitor - by now essential for the life of many museums – was emphasised, perhaps for the first time so clearly, in the Madrid conference of 1934. On this occasion, what can be considered the first handbook of museography[8] was produced under the coordination of Euripides Foundoukidis, Secretary General of the IOM (International Office of Museums).[9]

Internationally, Kruithof's now famous studies of 1941 aimed to scientifically identify 'pleasant' light and visual comfort by studying the relationship between the luminance and the colour temperature of the light source. It should be noted that the visual "satisfaction" identified by Kruithof was still partially validated by visual tests with LED illuminants published by Viénot, Durand and Mahler in 2009.[10] Still, at the beginning of the 21st century, James Druzik and Bent Eshøj[11] went over the main historical stages of the relationship between conservation and lighting to emphasise the opportunity to find standard reference models and more stringent regulatory guidelines to more safely process lighting in museums.[12]

Designing the lighting of a museum requires the search for harmony between different elements: perceptive, physiological and psychological factors of vision, but also "chromatic memories that have been sedimented in western culture".[13] In Italy, it also implies, es-

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Fig. 01: Detail of the Multireflex light system installed inside the Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica di Bologna, November 2024. The lighting system takes full advantage of the physical characteristics of the rooms, in particular their height, so that they can be illuminated at 360 degrees without the risk of blinding visitors through glare. Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

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pecially if the museum is housed in a historic building, dealing with the problems of integrating lighting fixtures and illumination systems in monumental and often protected spaces of our past. This attention to the preservation of monuments shows how the reflection on the role of light inside museum spaces locally developed itself by following various national cultures and customs toward the topic of "care". Through the prism of the attention given to light inside exhibition designs, it is, after all, possible to read much of the critical evolution that has characterised the social objectives and design priorities of Italian and, more generally, European museums: the relationship between collections and space - basically between container and content; the role offered to masterpieces concerning public enjoyment in a kind of perceptive hierarchy; the double scale of environment and detail in the lighting of exhibition spaces; the difficult dialogue between aesthetics and didactics.

Exhibitions and museums have been an emerging topic in the Italian critical and architectural debate since the years of the Second World War: for example, in 1941, the magazine Costruzioni Casabella published a monographic issue examining installations created between 1925 and 1940, considering them as a testimony of the contemporary architectural reflection.[14] During the post-war years, museology and museography not only took note of the fundamental importance of light

Fig. 2: Illumination of the Musée d'histoire de Nantes, in june 2024. In this one example, we can observe different functions of light care: facilitating the reading of printed elements, facilitating the reading of a three-dimensional element through grazing light, and highlighting architectural elements made less visible by the building's restoration work. Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

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but also explored it through the now-famous installations of great masters of architecture such as the BBPR, Carlo Scarpa, Franco Albini and many others. In Italy, more than 150 museums were reopened to the public between 1945 and 1953, and about as many in the following decade. Those were times of significant architectural commitment towards the reconstruction of buildings and museums damaged by bombings: the museum and its lighting became important case studies for contemporary architecture as a whole. This "conquest" of the museum by architects and its consideration as a space for high-design experimentation was one of the great novelties of those years, in which Italy was trying to catch up with the backwardness it had developed to the rest of Europe over more than twenty years.[15]

Between 1946 and 1950, for example, the Pinacoteca di Brera was rebuilt after being heavily damaged during the bombardments: the collaboration between the complementary competencies of the famous directors Ettore Modigliani and Fernanda Wittgens, of architecture masters Piero Portaluppi and Franco Albini, but also of illumination specialist[16] allowed the realisation of spaces in which the dimension of the "suggestion", as Fernanda Wittgens defined it, began to assume a central role in introducing the importance of the emotional participation of the publics. 1953 was undoubtedly a particularly rich year for Italian museums: in the Antonello da Messina exhibition realised by Carlo Scarpa, the architect's search for the most appropriate light for Antonello's paintings led him to the very famous solution of vertiginous pleated fabrics that covered the rooms and reconfigured their spatial character. A design proposal that constituted an unprecedented way to screen the natural light entering the rooms but also realised an impressive poetic element in the installation.

In the meantime, Palazzo Bianco had been reopened in Genoa (in 1950); Franco Albini had illuminated its rooms, which had been heavily damaged during the war, with a mix of natural light and artificial lighting: the arrangement of the lamps in the rooms, created employing suspended tracks, was considered an "almost metaphysical element, in which the visitors were invited to enter into a direct relationship with the work of art".[17] Albini's design practice was also reflected in his university teaching; in his lecture for the opening of the IUAV academic year 1954,[18] the master argued that air and light were in their own rights materials for the construction of space and that the technical dimension of lighting had to be considered as a priority in architectural design, especially in that 'exhibition design' which had yet to be defined.[19] The synthesis of its various design components, from display cases to communication and lighting, made exhibition design a field in which Italian architecture has particularly distinguished itself thanks to historical installations, with exemplary exhibitions created by masters such as Carlo Scarpa, Franco Albini, Franco Minissi, but also Pier Giacomo Castiglioni or Marcello Nizzoli, right up to contemporary installations such as those made by the Migliore-Servetto studio.

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From conservation to communication: artifical lights at the origins of the debate on "care"

The post-war years were also the time when great attention began to be given to the overall lighting of spaces and the light inside individual showcases. As such, lighting would take part in the more general debate on the relationship between the public's experience and the masterpieces: for example, from the Central Institute for Restoration came the proposal to direct and concentrate light, and thus the public's interest, on the highest quality works, leaving the rest of the collections in diffuse light.[20] Theoretical elaborations on the incidence, colour and intensity of light and new exhibition practice also began to move museums away from the undifferentiated penumbra in which many collections had been previously confined. They followed, on the one hand, the public's need for a perfect view of the work and, on the other, the new awareness of the value of atmosphere and emotion for the experience of art.

From this perspective, the post-war democratic focus on the educational role of cultural institutions in advancing civil progress also corresponded to an extension of museums' opening hours late into the evening[21] to allow workers to access exhibition halls. Analysing the role and importance of artificial light became mandatory for controlling the harmony between artificial and natural light while facilitating the comprehension of the collections for an ever-larger audience of non-specialists.

A handful of articles in the *Bollettino d'arte*, *a* magazine published by the Ministero della Educazione Nazionale - direzione delle Antichità e Belle Arti, are still an essential testimony to the contemporary genesis of a conscious consideration of the use of light for the physical and psychological well-being of visitors and the proper conservation of exhibits' objects.[22] Piero Sanpaolesi (1904-1980), both an architect and an architecture historian, was one of the protagonists of the culture of restoration in the second half of the 20th century, Soprintendente ai Monumenti e alle Gallerie in the cities of Pisa, Livorno, Lucca and Massa Carrara from 1943.[23] In 1949, he published '*Tipi di lucernari per illuminazione*', which was inspired by solutions he had previously realised in the Museo della Collegiata in Empoli and during the restoration and reconstruction of the former San Matteo Prison in Pisa. In some respects, his reflections on museum lighting can be considered one of the cornerstones of a new museography in Italy. [24] Sanpaolesi Writes:

> *"Too much light offends the visitor and the exhibited object by encouraging reflections from the walls, and especially from the floors. Too little light (the most frequent problem in museums) does not allow everything in the paintings to be seen. However, determining the amount of light required is difficult in theory...It is therefore necessary to use suitably prepared experimentations for each case."*[25]

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The 'light that offends the visitor', whether by its strong presence or absence, is connected to the difficulties of applying theoretical indications within the concrete experience on the field. However, for the author, some general considerations could still be applied:

> *"Traditional window lighting can be effective in small rooms, while overhead lighting is preferred in medium and large rooms."*[26]

These observations are still strongly linked with the architecture's structure and characteristics; space remains the primary constraint that needs to be considered to define the emotions of visitors. It is from these technical expedients that, according to Sampaolesi, a feeling of well-being arises for the visitors, a sensation for which they very rarely identify the cause, i.e. the light, which architects and curators instead consider to be a tool, as fundamental as it is refined, for elaborating the 'narrative' and presentation of the collections:

> *"The result of these expedients may go unnoticed by most, and visitors are often justified in attributing their well-being to a happy coincidence of favourable conditions. But this is not the case for architects and directors of galleries and museums, who cannot ignore these delicate devices of the institutions entrusted to their care and strive to raise their quality by every means possible."*[27]

Here, we are faced with one of the first citations identifying the correct lighting of exhibition halls as a source of spectator well-being; Sanpaolesi's theoretical guidelines would later be taken up in the third edition of the *Manuale dell'Architetto*[28] *in 1962* and would become one of the best-accepted design models[29] in several post-war museums.[30]

Meanwhile, in 1953, Roberto Carità (1913-2008), who had been working at the Soprintendenza Torinese as Ispettore Storico dell'Arte since 1950, was involved by Cesare Brandi in the new venture of the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro. That very year, Carità also wrote a *Nota sull'illuminazione artificiale delle opere d'arte*[31] in the "Bollettino d'Arte". The profile of the author, a humanist and "idealist", was profoundly different from that of Sanpaolesi. Yet, the importance they both claimed for experimentation in the field of optics and their shared interest in museum lighting demonstrate the topicality of these themes. However, Carità's work at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro and his commitment to the conservation and restoration of works of art is undoubtedly a vital key in understanding his focus on lighting solutions that couldn't pose a danger to some particularly delicate categories of objects, such as antique textiles and drawings. In the pages of the *Bollettino d'Arte*, Carità disapproved of the habitual dependence of museum lighting on architectural structures and asserted the necessity of appropriate artificial lighting for drawings:

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> *"Looking at the artificial light installations in some museums, one doubts that the most important laws of optics regarding illumination have been taken into account. In some cases, the designs appear to have been drawn up in absolute subordination to the architectural forms, for which the light - to achieve the right combination – should not be in servitude but rather in harmony... I do not consider the absence of daylight a disadvantage... not only to gain space but also to eliminate the possibility of prolonged exposure to light, which is very damaging for drawings, while the lamps can be switched off when they are not needed."*[32]

According to Carità, adequate artificial lighting was particularly suitable for exhibition halls set up in historic buildings - a widespread characteristic in the Italian development of museums - for which the windows openings were often more adapted to housing people rather than housing artworks : "... especially in museums housed in older buildings, where good artificial lighting is undoubtedly preferable to bad natural lighting."[33] One of the cases he presented in the Bollettino d'arte is that of the Albertina museum, where the lighting is considered too intense and therefore not adequate for a good conservation of fragile materials:

> *"Intense light is detrimental to conservation: thinking that the intensity is, for our eye, measured in relation to the environment (and this can be clearly seen by projecting slides in a dark room or only in half-light or full light) I thought it appropriate to keep the diffuse lighting in the rooms as low as possible, to make the lighting concentrated on the works more evident."*[34]

Again, on the topic of collections' conservation, Carità observe how even the design of individual display elements could prove harmful to artworks and pose some critical problems:

> *"I have observed that, for the illumination of single works, outdoors or inside a display case, the light source is almost always placed too close and with direct incidence on the object, forgetting that, among the many possibilities of damage to paintings, not the least is discolouration."*[35]

Seventy years later, many of Roberto Carità's technical indications are now obsolete, overtaken by the extraordinary evolution of lighting technology. However, the most interesting and perhaps still influential part of his text remains the one in which the author introduces the theme of the visual 'fatigue' and

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'rest' of the spectator in relation to lighting. Stressing not only the importance of light for the well-being of the audience, Carità explains the importance of an appropriate use of materials and opaque surfaces in exhibition halls by using musical analogies:

> *"The appropriate use of such surfaces is not dictated by reasons of taste, nor by 'feeling' of rest that arises from viewing them. This can be explained by acoustic analogies, as light and sound radiations often follow similar laws. Just as fabrics, by extinguishing echoes, give a 'plush' sensation, so opaque surfaces act towards light. And, again, just as resonances and echoes cause annoyance to a listener of music, so do scattered and unnecessary reflections that reach the eye of the beholder of a work of art: with the difference that a sound disturbance is immediately perceived, while an optical disturbance, within the field of vision but not in the focus of the pupil, is a disturbance that is felt but not immediately explained. The result is fatigue."*[36]

According to Carità, therefore, part of the typical fatigue we feel during museum visits is caused by optical disturbances, perceived but undetected, due to reflections produced by bad lighting and wrong surface materials. Indeed, one of the most modern elements of this discourse, which, let us remember, dates back to the 1950s, lies in the search for the physical and psychological well-being of the spectator and the experimental use of new lighting techniques to achieve an objective which, until recently, was essential-

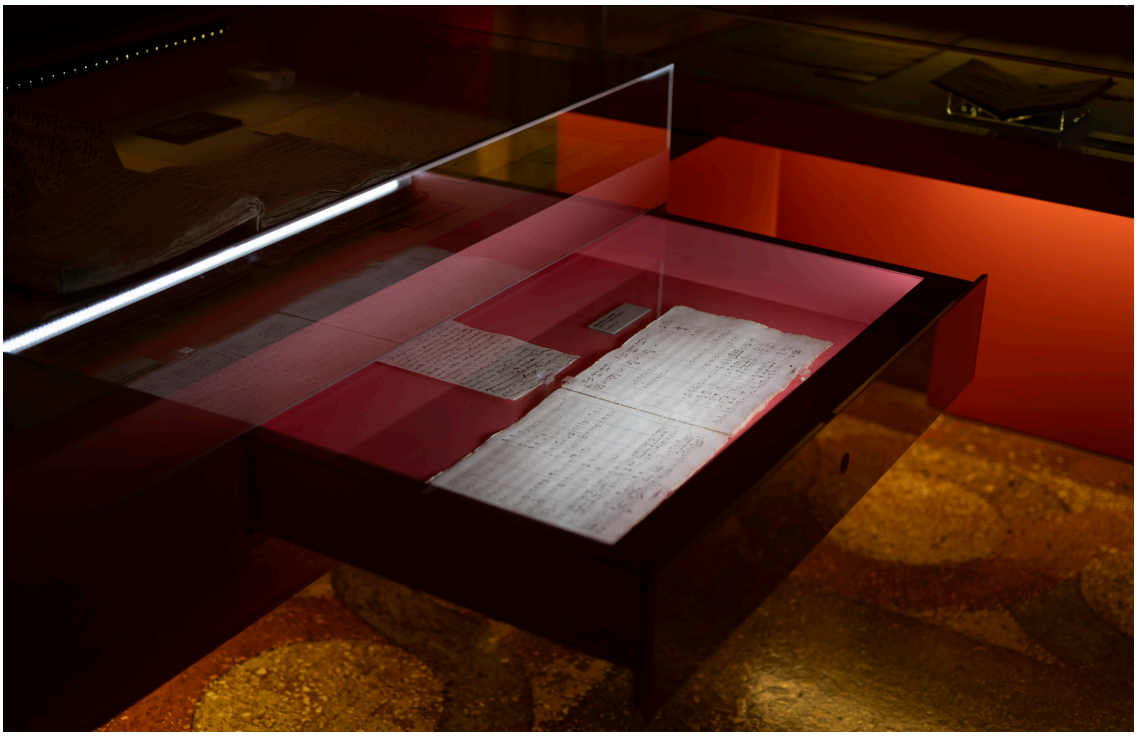

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Fig. 3: Dynamic light system made of movable drawers installed inside the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna, November 2024. Despite the great technical care that characterises the construction of these display cabinets, the visitor's experience is challenging when this type of protective mechanism is repeated too often, as the action of opening and closing the drawers entails, not only physically but also symbolically, a fragmentation of the visitor's attention. Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

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ly foreign to both museum practice and museology. Its great actuality can be seen in some recent reflections on the risk of creating homogeneous and contrasting lighting scenarios inside exposition, as they could, similarly to sudden and irregular changes in music rhythm, cause distress and anxiety in people affected not only by visual handicaps but also by psychic disabilities.[37]

Ambiance and the birth of a new profession: how light-designer changed the horizons of care.

On the 17th of May 1947, ICOM was born, which, although in different ways, throughout its various definitions, would indicate that the objective of museums was "to conserve and exhibit": to follow an oxymoron that wasn't always easy to realise. Franco Albini, for example, was responsible for the realisation of the Treasure Room of San Lorenzo in Genova in 1956, an early and exciting case study for the controversial relationship between lighting and conservation, between the spectator's emotions and the good preservation of works. Here the cases of the precious copes of the Cathedral were initially closed by "luminous hairs" that were later removed because Caterina Mercenaro didn't like them and were never restored because they contained neon tubes that would prove contrary to the good preservation of ancient fabrics[38] in the years following Albini's realisation. The fundamental debate between conservation and atmosphere that was to characterise the whole of the second half of the 20th century on the correct use of light in museums and exhibitions is already evident here.

The Castelvecchio museum in Verona, which was opened in 1964, is further proof of this: Carlo Scarpa's installation is considered as a whole to be one of the great masterpieces of second-century museography. However, the lighting system, although particularly elegant and attentive to the building's historical pre-existences, is today - at least according to Paola Marini, former director of the museum - the aspect that has become most obsolete over the years.[39] Perhaps because it cannot create the intensely emotional atmospheres that the general public now demands for exhibitions and museums.[40] In May 2024, during a short presentation for the conference "*Architettura disciplina eteronoma*", James Bradburne highlighted how, during his time at the Pinacoteca di Brera as a director, the decision to change the light-design of the entire museum radically from its previous homogenous illumination was due to the necessity to engage more effectively the public with stronger contrast between light and shadow.[41]

It seems clear that the recent rise of both temporary exhibitions and new artificial lighting technologies has led to the emergence of a new profession of "artisans" who are making collections increasingly spectacular, perhaps for some overly so, and whose expertise combines both theatrical and scenographic knowledge to enhance the experience of visitors and spectators: light designers. The foundation of the International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD)[42] in 1969 can be considered as the birth of this new

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specialised branch of professionals that were coming from a broad range of studies and experiences[43] but was also a great occasion for the circulation and dissemination of knowledge on the topic of illumination.[44] Since then, a semiotic of illumination has developed between these experts, a grammar of light's parameters and variables that can give new meaning to an exposition through common historically superposed assonances.

Recent examples of effective use of the "grammar of light" have tried to create or even recreate an ambience. One example is the light design project for the exposition *Hogarth, Reynolds, Turner. Pittura inglese verso la modernità* that was opened at the Museo Fondazione Roma from the 15th of april to the 20th of july 2014. The light designer recreated the impression of a space illuminated with candlelight[45] using modern technologies while at the same time guaranteeing the visual comfort of the visitors. Giuseppe Mestrangelo gives us the following insight on this project:

> *"The exhibition path was to be characterised by imitating the light, just right for the most likely setting of the period presented in the project's stage setting. It was not necessary to have chandeliers or appliqués, just the artificial luminous flow of light "managed knowledgeably" in composition, giving visitors the real sensation that they were in a place lit up by candles."*[46]

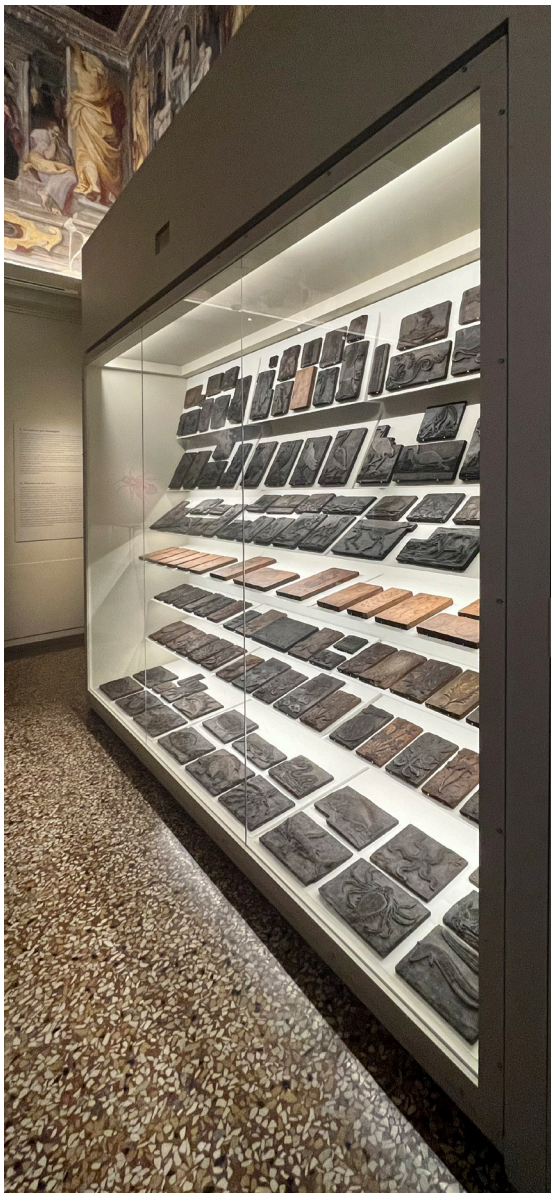

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Fig. 4: Illumination of the exposition *Ulisse Aldrovandi, l'Altro Rinascimento* in Palazzo Poggi, Bologna. This example clearly shows how the objective of facilitating the visual experience of visitors with light can also be achieved through inexpensive technical solutions that do not necessarily require special or expensive lighting equipment. In this case, simple LED strips and slanted wooden panels allow a good view of embossed objects. Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

Recently, Andrea Graser also highlighted the possibilities that modern lighting offers to museums as a way to transport visitors to the original context of the artwork:

> *"Just as it is possible to digitally scan an object, a room or a building and then plot it in a three-dimensional model, it is also possible to measure the light at a specific location using a digital spectrometer, store the data and*

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> *reproduce it in a new environment using state of the art lighting technology. Taking this concept further, one might use a digitally controlled dynamic lighting system to travel in time – for example, from the light of the present day to that of the Baroque – or to transport the light of Central Europe to the light of the North or South."*[47]

Since the late 20th century and with the emergence of these new tools, lighting designers have been asked to create immersive experiences for visitors in environments that should encourage discovery, curiosity and learning by orienting and guiding audiences while at the same time helping to preserve the works and objects on display. In 2004, the Commission Internationale de l'Éclairage (CIE) fixed a series of thresholds for the preservation of museum objects[48] that, despite not being radically different from previous research, were calculated on an annual basis, allowing curators to modify the amount of light in the function of the various needs of the moment. For example, works could be exposed for the duration of an exposition to a more impactful source of light and then put to "rest" for the rest of the year, or light sources could be automated to dim in relationship with the movement of visitors or with the change of natural light. Dynamic lighting offers more room for the creativity of light designers to shine and more opportunities to integrate the care of the artworks with the care of the visitors; stronger illumination settings could, for example, be prepared for the guided visits of people with visual impairments. Another possibility offered by dynamic artificial light is to simulate the natural daylight and its evolution throughout the day-cycle. For example, since 2019, Veronika Mayerböck has replaced the fluorescent tubes of the Kunsthistoriches Museum's glass ceilings with LED in her design in order to simulate the daylight that once entered the museum through the now veilled skylights.[49] This solution could prove particularly interesting for the topic of care as various scientific studies have shown the lasting effects that artificially simulated daylight systems can have on people's health and well-being.[50] The emergence of LED technologies is also at the centre of significant advances in the scientific field of psychology and perception. The fully customisable nature of LED sources, in colour and intensity, allowed researchers to engage in new studies aimed toward analysing our psychological reaction to different lightning situations.[51] The international lighting magazine *Luminous* produced a special 'Light Health and Wellbeing' issue in 2010 where French light designer and specialist of 'éclairages durables'[52] Vincent Laganier wrote: "By asking who the users are, what they do, and how they will use the buildings, lighting designers can contribute to their happiness and health".[53]

This indication seems even more relevant for museums that are called upon to increasingly assume a repairing function in which the "care" of the public has become an essential element of any up-to-date

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Fig. 5: Illumination of the exposition *Ulisse Aldrovandi, l'Altro Rinascimento* in Palazzo Poggi, Bologna. The light of the immersive video projected on the ceiling of this room completely changes the perception of the room. Although viewing some works from the museum's permanent exhibition is more complex, the experience and atmosphere of the visit are completely changed for the duration of a temporary exhibition simply through light. Photo by Federico Maria Giorgi.

museographic discourse. In certain peculiar occasions, this sense of care can be extended not only to the visitors but also to the artists themselves and their vision. Often, a dialogue between living artists and light designers is necessary to better integrate their artwork inside the exhibition spaces and as a way to improve their trust.[54] This attention to the artwork's characteristics can also give voice to new interpretations and discoveries by highlighting small details that would otherwise remain unseen. This is why Vivianna Gobbato observes how light could if used correctly, become a temporary and reversible tool of restoration:

> *"By a gesture that can be erased, illumination contributes to a form of aesthetic renovation of the works. This gesture admits a dimension of perceptible and formal transformation of the work in the*

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> *museum. The light reveals a completely different facet of the object previously known from one angle. Such a dimension makes lighting a tool capable of orienting and modifying the perception of an institutionalised object, but also able of establishing it as part of our heritage."*[55]

In recent years, the technical achievements, the evolution and specialisation of lightning solutions for museum displays have also taken a new importance of their own, often inspired by the equipment of theatrical and film sets they have, however, to answer the challenge of a moving public. As such, light emitters cannot always be hidden, and therefore, their design is the object of careful studies that have even been awarded important titles like the Compasso d'Oro: the "Shuttle" projector series designed by Bruno Gecchelin and produced by iGuzzini Illuminazione was awarded in 1989, while the "Mondial F1" modular system designed by Paolo Targetti and produced by Targetti Sankey received the prestigious award in 1998. In the jury motivation for both prices, we can underline the importance for illuminotechnic devices to easily "integrate into different spaces" and "to answer to multiple requisites";[56] in short it must be flexible and beautiful.

Today, lighting designers are called upon to compose and coordinate different technical requirements that are no longer just architectural but concern both the priorities of conservation of the works and the well-being of the spectators as well as short and long-term economic, organisational and sustainability needs linked to the exhibition design. From a technical point of view, new importance is, of course, given to the energetical efficiency of light fixtures inside museum spaces, mainly with the help of LED technologies and automation strategies. However, even simple tools such as mirrors have been reinterpreted to answer the new challenges of "energetical care". In the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica of Bologna, Light Design Studio installed a complex chandelier,[57] which reflects the light coming from a single light source in different directions, thus cutting down on the energy and materials necessary to illuminate the numerous objects present in the room.

The strategic pursuit of EVC (efficient visual comfort) - in which conservation, enjoyment, and sustainability come together for the benefit of collections, viewers, and now the planet- incorporates a new design horizon destined to become increasingly important. As such, the illumination of the museum seems to be destined to remain at the centre of the complex overlap that characterises our newfound vision of sustainable care: one that balances the conservation of artworks and spaces, the economic attractiveness of the museum and its sustainability, and the well being of the publics.

Conclusion

The use of light as a vector for care has been for a long time at the centre of a complex balancing act between different objectives: protecting artwork, providing good visibility, ensuring the comfort of visitors, val-

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orising exposition space, creating atmospheres and the reducing museums' energy consumption. Nowadays, the technological progress linked with both the physical light sources and their digital controls allows us to easily find this difficult balance and allows us to focus our attention on innovative solutions that give voice to the technical and artistic capabilities of a new type of professionals.

However, the career and life path that leed to this kind of expertise are still very diversified inside the European context, and it's difficult to define a common base of knowledge for this kind of profession that keeps, to this day, an artisanal and hand-made approach. At the same time, other museum professionals still lack the technical knowledge necessary to effectively communicate on the critical challenges surrounding the topic of light management.

In this perspective, future generations of architects, light designers, and curators should strive not only for the dissemination of knowledge between different fields of studies but also for the sensitisation of the museums' public to these topics. Highlighting the technical aspects that influence the decisions made "behind the scene" to a broader audience could prove beneficial in giving "new light" to the topic of museums' light design, by making what's often invisible to the audience visible again.

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Endnotes

1 See, for example, the following: "… this roof-lit room, which puts the paintings in their most advantageous light, has been gratefully accepted.", Jean Baptiste Pierre Lebrun, *Avertissement*, Paris, 1789, cited in : Lemaire 2004, p. 63. Translation by the author, original text : "… cette salle éclairée par le comble, et qui met les tableaux dans leur jour le plus avantageux, a été acceptée avec reconnaissance."

2 By the end of the century Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand was advocating for this kind of natural lighting solution in an architectural manual: *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique, par J.-N.-L. Durand*. See Durand 1802 p.112.

3 We can highlight the reflections made by Julien Guadet at the turn of the century, where he expressed how lightning solutions should be chosen in function of the museum typology: high windows to protect against the reflected glare of glass displays and to underline the forms of sculptures; roof windows for paintings. See Guadet 1901, p. 613.

4 See also Gobbato 2021, pp. 24-36.

5 On this topic see for example: Bianchi, Pulcini 1995; Forcolini, 2012; Vivioli, Galati 2014.

6 Before the second world war, Jean Fernand Cellerier, director of the Laboratoire d'essais du Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, already defined the maximum quantities of light that could be applied to different materials and works of arts. See Cellerier 1931, p. 69.

7 While strongly criticised for over-dramatising artworks, Ned Burns was at the time inspired by the illumination practices of cinema and theatre to propose the installation of coloured gelatine strips onto small light spots to accentuate certain areas of an artwork, for exemple, amber colours for shadows, green for foliage during the day, blue for foliage during the night and pale shades of blue for snowy landscape. See Burns 1933, p.126.

8 Sociètè des Nations, Office International des Musées, Istitut Internazional de Coopération Intellectuelle 1934.

9 In between the two world wars, what can be considered the press organ of the International Office of Museums, *Mouseion*, had been, as we highlighted before, an essential place for the birth of an early debate on the complex and often contrasting roles of light inside museums.

10 Vienot, Durand, Mahler 2009.

11 James Druzik is a senior scientist at the Getty Conservation Institute. Bent Eshøj is the director of the School of Conservation at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.

12 Druzik, Eshøj 2007, pp. 51-56. See also: https://www.academia.edu/8308202/La_luce_nello_spazio_del_museo_significati_e_prospettive_per_una_valorizzazione_del_patrimonio.

13 See: https://www.academia.edu/8308202/La_luce_nello_spazio_del_museo_significati_e_prospettive_per_una_valorizzazione_del_patrimonio.

14 See Curzi 2022, p. 16.

15 See Morello 1997, p. 392.

16 In this regard, Marco Semenza and G.A. Rigatti should be mentioned, see De Simone, Modesti 2022, p. 210.

17 Curzi 2022, p. 22.

18 The lesson was later published in Casabella, n. 230, February 2005, p. 9-12,

19 Curzi 2022, p. 19. See also Bucci 2016.

20 Carità 1953, pp. 357-364. See also De Simone, Modesti 2022, p. 218.

21 The Paestum Museum designed by architect Marcello De Vita was inaugurated in 1952. See Sestrieri 1953, p. 182. Cited by De Simone, Modesti 2022, p. 219.

22 Sanpaolesi 1949; Carità 1953. See also De Simone, Modesti 2022, p. 218.

23 During his work, Sanpaolesi also dealt with the reorganisation of local and peripheral museums, leading to the best-known experiences of the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa, the Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi in Lucca and the reorganisation project of the Galleria Sabauda in Turin. See Spinosa 2007.

24 In the article, the graphs are complemented by a precise technical explanation and a study of daylight incidence and diffusion. See Sanpaolesi 1949, pp. 280-283. See also Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche 1962, p. 360; Spinosa 2007.

25 Sanpaolesi 1949, p. 280. Translation by the author: “Troppa luce offende il visitatore e gli oggetti esposti favorendo i riflessi dalle pareti e soprattutto dai pavimenti. Poca luce (è il più frequente difetto dei musei) non consente di vedere tutto nei dipinti. Però una determinazione della quantità di luce necessaria è difficile in via teorica…È necessario quindi valersi, caso per caso, di esperienze opportunamente predisposte.”

26 Sanpaolesi 1949, p. 280. Translation by the author: “Per le piccole sale quindi si può con ottimo risultato mantenere la tradizionale illuminazione con finestre, mentre per le sale medie e grandi si adotta preferibilmente l'illuminazione dall'alto.”

27 Sanpaolesi 1949, p. 282. Translation by the author: “Il risultato di questi accorgimenti può passare forse inosservato ai più, e i visitatori sono anche autorizzati ad attribuire il benessere che ad essi ne viene ad un felice casuale combinarsi di favorevoli concomitanze; ma così non è per gli architetti e i direttori di pinacoteche o musei, che non possono ignorare questi delicati congegni dell'organismo loro affidato, e con ogni mezzo cercare di elevarne la qualità.”

28 Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche 1962.

29 The skylight solution was also adopted in those years in the *Sala dei primitivi* of the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, set up by Scarpa, Gardella and Michelucci between 1953 and 1955. See Curzi 2022, p. 21.

30 Take, for example, the Museo di Capodimonte finished between 1952 and 1957, thanks to Bruno Molajoli and Ezio Bruno De Felice. See De Felice 1979, p. 45.

31 Carità would later become Soprintendente of Sassari and Nuoro from 1960 to 1973.

32 Carità 1953, p. 357, 359. Translation by the author: “Osservando gli impianti di luce artificiale di qualche museo, vien fatto di dubitare che si siano tenute presenti le più importanti leggi che l'ottica ha enunciato nei riguardi dell'illuminazione. In alcuni casi, i progetti appaiono elaborati in dipendenza assoluta delle forme architettoniche, rispetto alle quali la luce - per attuare un giusto connubio - deve essere non in schiavitù, ma in armonia… Non considero uno svantaggio l'assenza di illuminazione diurna… non solo per guadagnare spazio ma anche per eliminare la possibilità di una prolungata esposizione alla luce, che è molto dannosa ai disegni, mentre le lampade possono essere spente quando non servono”.

33 Carità 1953, p. 359. Translation by the author: “…specie nei musei sistemati in palazzi antichi, ove una buona illuminazione artificiale è da preferire, senza dubbio alcuno, ad una cattiva illuminazione naturale”.

34 Carità 1953, p. 359. Translation by the author: “l'intensa luce è dannosa alla conservazione: così, pensando che l'intensità è, per il nostro occhio, una misura anche in relazione all'ambiente (e ben lo si nota proiettando diapositive in una camera buia o soltanto in penombra o in piena luce) ho ritenuto opportuno tenere al grado più basso possibile l'illuminazione diffusa nelle salette, per rendere più evidente l'illuminazione concentrata sulle opere.”

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35 Carità 1953, p. 363. Translation by the author: “Ho osservato che, per l'illuminazione di opere singole, all'aperto o in vetrina, la sorgente di luce è collocata, quasi sempre, troppo vicina e con diretta incidenza sull'oggetto, dimenticando che, fra le tante possibilità di danno che incombono sui dipinti, non ultima è la decolorazione.”

36 Carità 1953, p. 359. Translation by the author: “L'opportunità di tali superfici non è dettata da motivi di gusto, ne ‘sentimento’ il senso di riposo che nasce dalla visione di esse. Se ne possono spiegare le cause ricorrendo ad analogie acustiche, poiché le radiazioni luminose e quelle sonore seguono spesso leggi simili. Come le stoffe, spegnendo gli echi, danno una sensazione ‘felpata’, così le superfici opache agiscono nei riguardi della luce. E, ancora, come generano fastidio le risonanze e gli echi a chi ascolti una musica, così recano disturbo i riflessi dispersi ed inutili che giungono all'occhio di chi osserva un'opera d'arte: con la differenza che un disturbo sonoro è immediatamente avvertito, mentre un disturbo ottico, compreso nel campo visivo ma non nel fuoco della pupilla, è un disturbo sentito ma non immediatamente spiegato. Risultato è la stanchezza.”

37 This peculiar point was highlighted by Catherine André, deputy to the head of the education and culture department for mediation projects of the Petit Palais, during the Séance 7 of the Diplôme d'université Delphine Lévy. Pour l'accès à l'art et au patrimoine : outils et recherches, “*Accessibilité universelle et musée inclusive*”, that was hosted by the Petit Palais in Paris on the 1st of December 2023.

38 Musso 2022, p. 58.

39 Marini 2022, p. 88.

40 Today’s museums, and especially their temporary expositions, are in concurrence with other industries for culture and entertainment; they need to be more exciting and dramatic, which is often possible with light.

41 On this occasion, Bradburn Cited the text “In Praise of Shadows” by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki to underline how without shadows we forget the importance of light, and that good lighting cannot be made visible without good shadows.

42 The association is still active today: www.iald.org.

43 A divergence in experiences, often made more apparent by different national educational systems, is leading to the quick formation of various local traditions and habits that come from the sensibilities learned from a multitude of career paths. A diversity in perspective that as strongly expanded the horizons of the relationship between light and ‘care’. This difference in study paths between nations is also probably one of the many reasons for today’s broad cultural landscape on the topic of light and for the drastically different usage and habits worldwide.

44 See also: Illuminating Engeneering Society of North America 1996.

45 Andrea Graser observes on this topic how: “Light has the potential to be sensed as a space. A streetlight, for example, is perceived as a cone of light in the darkness”; Graser 2023, p.29.

46 Mestrangelo 2017, p. 81.

47 Graser 2023, p.11.

48 See also CIE 2004.

49 Graser 2023, p. 45.

50 Many researchers demonstrated that the Human Centric Light system can positively impact the well-being of employees and reduce the number of sick days inside offices or improve the buying habits of customers inside retail structures. See for example: Kyle Konis, 2019.

51 See for example: Veitch 2001.

52 Laganier, Van Der Pol 2011.

53 Laganier 2010. Translation by the author: “Chiedendosi chi siano gli utenti, che cosa fanno e come utilizzeranno gli edifici, i progettisti dell'illuminazione possono contribuire alla loro felicità e alla loro salute”.

54 Gobbato 2024, pp. 71-73.

55 Gobbato 2024, pp. 135-136. Translation by the author, original text: “Par un geste effaçable, l’éclairage participe d’une forme de restauration ésthétique des œuvres. Ce geste admet une dimension de transformation perceptible et formelle de l’œuvre au musée. L’objet auparavant connu sous une facette dévoile sous la lumière un tout autre visage. Une telle dimension assimile l’éclairage à un outil capable d’orienter et de modifier la perception, mais aussi à la patrimonialisation de l’objet institutionalisé”.

56 Informations regarding the design awarded with the Compasso d’Oro can be found on the site of the ADI Design Museum - Compasso d’Oro: https://www.adidesignmuseum.org/schede/shuttle/; https://www.adidesignmuseum.org/schede/mondial-f1/.

57 The Multireflex light system, developed by Anniluce, can illuminate a space by exploiting just two high-yield, low-consumption light sources that are reflected downward by 31 mirrors divided in two rows. See: https://www.annilucebylightstudio.it/multireflex-detail.

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Federico Maria Giorgi
Exhibition design and lighting: notes on the genesis of the debate between conservation, public emotion, and care
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Interview with Clémentine Deliss

Clémentine Deliss

Keywords:
Art school, museology, ethnology, museography, learning, contemporary art, architecture, design.

ABSTRACT:

The author presents a series of case studies detailing her initiatives within educational institutions, namely art schools and museums of ethnology and contemporary art. The objective of these initiatives is to affect a renewal of contemporary museology. The author then provides a concise overview of the options defined for a museum that encourages critical interventions by both guest researchers and artists, and by visitors. These options include furnishings, tables and chairs that have been specially designed by architects.

L'autrice illustra le sue diverse esperienze nelle scuole d'arte e nei musei di etnologia e arte contemporanea per rinnovare la museologia contemporanea. Riassume le opzioni definite per un museo che favorisca interventi critici, sia da parte dei ricercatori e degli artisti invitati, sia da parte dei visitatori, attraverso arredi specifici, come tavoli e sedie appositamente progettati da architetti.

L'auteure rend compte de ses différentes interventions dans des écoles d'art et dans des musées d'ethnologie et d'art contemporain pour renouveler la muséologie contemporaine. Elle résume les options définies à propos d'un musée favorisant les interventions critiques à la fois chez les chercheurs et artistes invités et chez les visiteurs, grâce à des mobiliers spécifiques, tables et chaises spécialement dessinées par des architectes.

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Clémentine Deliss is a curator, publisher and cultural historian. She studied contemporary art and semantic anthropology in Vienna, Paris, and London and holds a PhD from SOAS, University of London. Between 2010-2015, she directed the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, instituting a new research laboratory to remediate collections within a post-ethnological context. Exhibitions she curated at the Weltkulturen Museum include Object Atlas - Fieldwork in the Museum (2011), Trading Style (2013), Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger) (2014), and El Hadji Sy - Painting, Politics, Performance (2015). From 2002-2009, she ran the transdisciplinary collective Future Academy with student research cells in London, Edinburgh, Dakar, Mumbai, Bangalore, Melbourne, and Tokyo. Since 1996, she has published the itinerant and independent artists' and writers' organ, "Metronome" that was twice part of documenta in Kassel (1997, dX and 2007, d12). She has held guest professorships at the Städelschule Frankfurt, the University of the Arts in Kassel, and was Reader at the Edinburgh College of Art between 2003-2009. She has acted as an expert consultant for the European Union and was on the Scientific Council of the Musée du quai Branly in Paris between 2011-2019. In 2017-18, she curated four international roundtables on "Transitioning Museums" in South East Asia for the Goethe-Institut. The Dilijan Arts Observatory, which she curated in 2016, was a gathering of artists, historians, and scientists in a former electronics factory in Armenia. The results were exhibited in Portable Homelands. From Field to Factory as part of Hello World. Revising a Collection (National Galerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, April-August 2018). In 2017-2018 she was Visiting Professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Arts Paris-Cergy. During this time, she held an International Chair at the Laboratoire d'Excellence des Arts et Médiations Humaines, Université, Paris 8 and Centre Georges Pompidou. Between 2020-2023, she was Associate Curator at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin where she ran her Metabolic Museum-University (mm-u.online) and curated the exhibition Skin in the Game. She is currently Curator at Large at KANAL-Centre Pompidou, and Guest Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Brussels. She is Honorary Professor of Global Humanities in History of Art at the University of Cambridge. She lives in Berlin.

In your book, The Metabolic Museum, first elaborated at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt am Main, you wrote that "the new model for the museum would be the house itself, a renewal of a domestic environment of repose and reflection, of living, dialoguing, researching, and production in contrast to a corporate site of consumerist culture".[1] So you intimately link the ethos of care with domestic design. How can we think about the intimacy of care within public space, and in the framework of the welfare state over the last decades of liberal democracies, where anonymous functionalism seems to characterize all effective care structures?

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When I deploy the term "domestic", I am pointing to the effects that space has on behavior and on the performance of research. I pay attention to the architectonic agency of museums because I regard the institution like a body, built from a constellation of interdependent organs that come together to produce a venue, a metabolism.

This notion of "metabolism" is absolutely fascinating, but it has been worked on in a different way before, in literature in particular. Without multiplying parallel or opposite evocations, the comparison between the museum and the brothel became a classic in the literature of the interwar period and beyond, best represented by the ethnologist writer Michel Leiris. A chapter of *L'âge d'homme*[2] is entitled "Lupanars and Museums", in which the author writes that "nothing seems to me to resemble a brothel as much as a museum. There's the same shady side and the same petrified side". Indeed, Michel Leiris goes on to develop his observations, and writes that in museums "certain lost corners must be the scene of hidden lubricity". In contrast, the photographs of the Museum-University you are working on and designing suggest a sanitized white cube, nothing "louche" at all. How do you see this?

I am glad you mention Michel Leiris. I wrote my PhD on his contribution to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in the 1930s while he was alive, and more specifically on the journal "Documents" (1929-31). Since that time, I have been obsessed with the notion of the publishing organ – as a vital vehicle for the expression of artists and writers. In one issue of "Documents", Georges Bataille illustrated the entry on "Dust" (Poussière) with a photograph of two mannikins leaning against a wall in a storage room of the ethnographic museum. In oth-

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er texts, he spoke of the museum as the lungs of the city.[3] A further reference for me is Olympia Press, the notorious publishing house of Maurice Girodias that produced both seminal books such as *Lolita* as well as a quantity of pornographic texts. His hybrid jazz cellar and hotel in 1950s Paris was notorious. I too launched my publishing organ, *Metronome* No. 9 and Metronome Press in a hotel near l'Opéra in Paris. In 2005, I hired all the rooms for one night for the sum of 1500 Euro. For 24 hours, the contributing writers, artists and guests filled the rooms with activities that were private. I had forgotten to remove the keys from the locks, with results that you can only imagine.

However today, museums are formatted to provide a maximum of publicly accessible areas that correspond to an increasingly consumerist imperative. Only very rarely do we find a private apartment for artists-in-residency within the parameters of a museum building. Likewise, rooms in which collections can be brought into contact with one another, placed in assemblages and reflected upon prior to an exhibition are kept to a minimum. The digitalization of holdings and the use of databanks as the foundation for curatorial elaboration works to minimize the backstage of the museum. In Frankfurt at the Weltkulturen Museum, domestic research was facilitated by the simple fact that the buildings were 19th century villas. In other words, they had been constructed with the intention to provide shelter for people to live together. Until I arrived there in 2010, this aspect had been denied. The rooms of the three villas had suffered a form of scenographic camouflage, an attempt to hide from sight the original functions of the houses. During my time there – which ended in 2015 – guest researchers and artists could move freely between their apartment on the top floor, the studio spaces right below, the laboratory on the ground floor with its specially designed furniture by Mathis Esterhazy, and the

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photographic archive in the basement. There was a daily cyclical experience of sleeping, working, reading, and observing the assemblages of artefacts, all on site in the museum. The moment I left, the structure was closed down by the city and I was accused of running a hotel! This may seem an extreme judgement, yet I recognize models for this type of work in the "halfway house", and even the "maison de passe". The villa-museum was intended as a site for the activation of desire and remediation that would be collection-centric, recursive, and domestic in scale.

The need for museums to develop infrastructure to enable "multidisciplinary inquiry" poses an architectural and design challenge that you feel is essential. How would you characterize it?

It is a challenge to rework the spatial parameters of museums in terms of design and inquiry. I've never understood why patterns of use remain so entrenched. In the past there were more chairs and sofas strategically placed for people to relax on while looking at an artwork. Today we are asked to follow a plan of consumption, to walk through exhibitions, stand upright and still for the time it takes to read a panel, and then are made to move on through the café and bookshop. This phenomenon is closely related to the ergonomy of the department store where consumerism requires moving through rather than spending hours at one counter or sitting down. Airports, department stores and museums are growing in similarity. The public is browbeaten to follow the route with its overbearing explanatory devices.

As an antidote to this state of play, I work on the concept of a Museum-University. The image it conjures up in my mind is of a wave of inquiry that gently floods the everyday practice of the museum-goer. No one needs proof of education to enter a museum, unlike its sister civic institutions such as the university or the art college. In the Muse-

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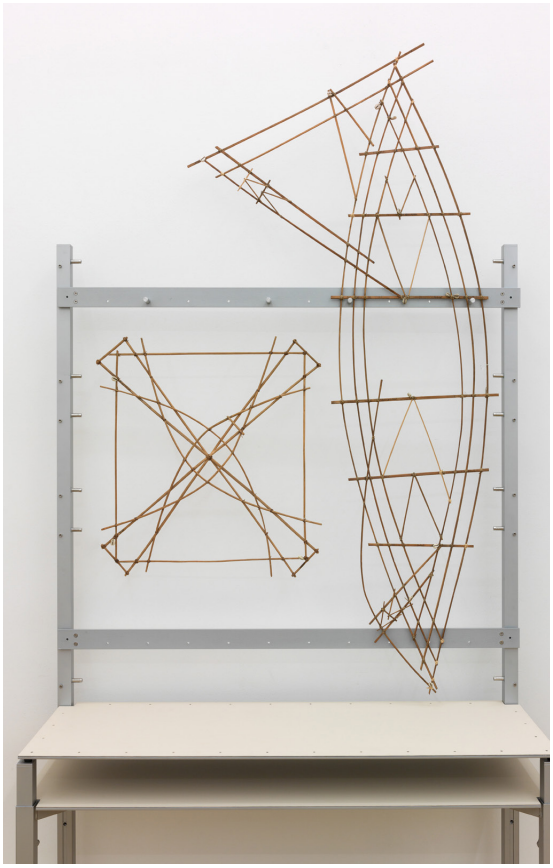
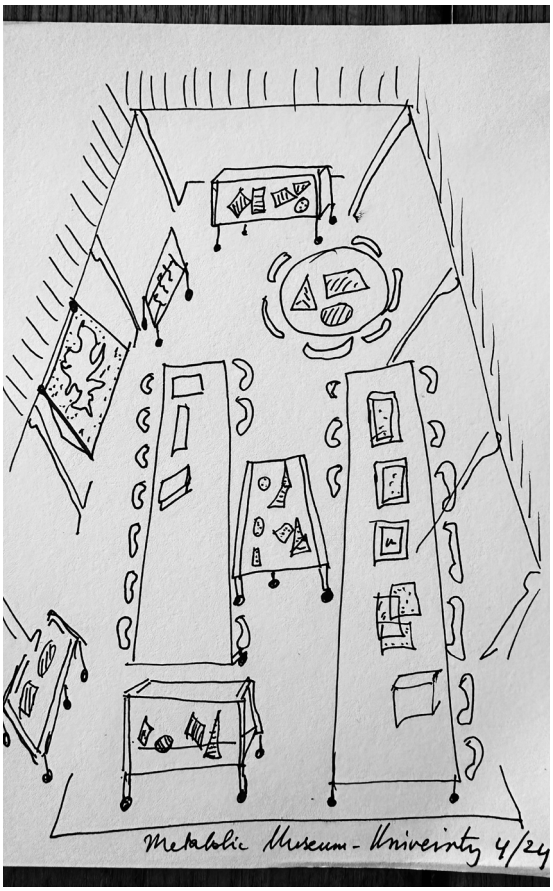
um-University, visitors are encouraged to stop, sit down, spend time and study in the society of artworks and collections. Multidisciplinarity describes the visitors' heterogeneous backgrounds, the diversity of collections brought into the museum-university, and the forms of interpretation and future meanings that can emerge out of this exercise.



Efficient furniture, lighting are actors of all the liturgies, manifestations of reverence, attention, ceremonies – to which the museum is often referred. How do you imagine an alternative to these devices?

I often speak about scenography as a drug for curators and museums. I mention addiction because the industry is so compelling and seductive that the curator of a Kunsthalle, not to mention a museum, will prefer to spend a considerable portion of their budget on building and painting temporary walls rather than allocating expenditure to artistic production or artists' fees. Institutions rely on scenography believing that artworks are simply not enough, or that they are, by nature, inaccessible. Lighting and temporary wall structures are part of this process of psychological compensation. The artwork overwhelmed by textual explanations recedes into the background or has to fight against scenography. The artist's intentions and the artwork's semantic power are diminished to little more than the illustration of a theme.



Furniture however is something different. It has a function that may contradict the draw of consumer-

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ism. Tables and chairs are rarely introduced into exhibitions unless as a cosmetic gesture. I'm interested in how we can change the parameters of human experience within museum spaces. For that we need to think about what can be achieved in a museum and how artworks can form the basis for a flourishing of the democratic intellect. Every visitor has the right to form their own opinion and should be encouraged to engage in a form of poaching between disciplines and cultures to quote Michel de Certeau.[4] The visitor can be a "braconnier" of visual representation rather than a flâneur of exhibitions.

In some cases, the artist wants to hide his work inside a museum, forbidding access or at least reproduction, making it an inaccessible object. Christian Boltanski, for example, has buried some of his installations or concealed them in various hiding places in some museums.

This is a specific work that problematizes the archival. However today access to storage areas in museums is kept to a minimum implying that any visit must operate through a go-between in the shape of a curator or keeper who has the authority to guide and control knowledge. I'm concerned with the sequestration of collections, the categories used to classify them, and the value they may have for the education of future generations. I have written a manifesto on this question.[5] I don't believe that the fashion for open storage design is an option here. Open storage – which you can find in neo-universalist museums such as the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, or the soon to open V&A East in London's Docklands, actually entrenches taxonomies from earlier times. It allows for superficial observation and gloating but prevents any mobility within collections in favor of a static display.

You created a Laboratory in the museum, a workshop space, studios and apartments. Is that reminiscent of the Alexandria Mouseion? Did the workshops held in Dahlem prior to the opening of the Humboldt Forum relate to your project? Likewise, are there models in curatorial studies programs that work on similar lines as yours?

The model I developed has not been explored in other contexts. Nothing that was organized by the Humboldt Lab ahead of the Forum's opening can be compared to the activities and research models that I enabled in Frankfurt. It also differs from the University Museum in the US that is increasingly made to cater to large audiences rather than internal teaching and research. But take the Schaulager in Basel as a further model. It is an extraordinary project constructed around rooms for individual artist's collections ranging from Christian Boltanski to Andrea Zittel or Matthew Barney. This is definitely a research-based museum. However, when I visited the place, eager to see how research was undertaken, I was told that 90 minutes was the average time spent in the room of a specific artist. There would be a curator watching over you, and no table. The idea was to observe, take notes standing up,

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and then move to the library next door and write. What I did in Frankfurt was much more extreme. There was no curator watching the artists and we trusted them. We gave them 24 hours access over four weeks. No one in the laboratory broke or sabotaged anything from the museum's collection. We trusted our guests and they were respectful of the situation.

You explain the power of a collection in terms of mobility: multiple reconfigurations and new and varied meanings. What are the main challenges in this respect in terms of caring for the public, their comfort and their expectations?

I like to believe that imagination is a faculty of care and well-being. The Museum-University is about empowering the imaginary of the individual visitor through visual thinking. Constellations of artefacts from different collections are created in order to encourage a cross-fertilization of meanings across disciplinary boundaries. This can be liberating for the public. The dogma of explanation so well described by Jacques Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is suspended.[6] Instead, there is a sense of emancipation in the minds of visitors, of heightened curiosity. It's another form of fieldwork in the museum in which chance and desire are kindled.

Beyond practical necessities and the need for depots and storage, the issue of museum logistics is becoming a political one. It accompanies a turning point in art history with regard to the transportation of works of art and of course with respect to museums of migration, museums of ethnology and so on. What does this situation inspire in you?

I would like to see greater circulation between and within museum collections. I'm not interested in col-

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lection vanitas! In Brussels where I have been researching dormant, secondary collections, I encounter the presence of vanitas in each museum I visit. It's about cultivating exception and masterpiece value. In the minds of politicians and funding agencies, the character of a museum and its collections has to be preserved. But I would like to see more host-guest situations, where museums within a city exchange materials, are gracious in their lending of holdings that may not be top quality but can, once placed in another museum context, contribute to public education and empowerment. Today I walk out of rooms in museums in which a masterpiece is displayed like a pornographic carcass. It feels necrophiliac to revel in the consumption of one work pumped up to a value of millions. This same masterpiece will succumb to an appalling dissection of fragments and details reproduced on a gigantic marketing scale but also commercialized as fridge magnets, mugs, and silk scarves. That's exactly what I mean about scenography – a veiling of historical detail and an obfuscation of the violence that accompanies this museum.

The opportunity to sit down for several hours and study seems to be one of the aims of your design of museum-universities. Are you betting on slowness rather than speed, which Paul Virilio described as one of the perils of the contemporary, in all the movements required of us today? And how can the simultaneous insistence on slowness and mobility be understood?

That's an interesting tension. I would like to see people sitting down to look at artworks for longer than is usual, getting out their laptops, making their own cross connections. In 2019, my students at the University of Art and Design in Karlsruhe, Germany, produced what we called "Metabolic Chairs".[7] Members of the public could sit down in one and use a mini-projector to beam their own images onto the blank wall between paintings. We called this "spamming the hang". It was a form of auto-curatorial intervention that actually supported the appreciation of art through adjacency. The eye would take in the paintings either side of the projection. Perhaps we can think of spending less on the shifting of major masterpieces for blockbuster exhibitions with their exorbitant insurance costs and consider another form of mobility, a local exchange of less recognized collections, an upscaling of secondary materials?

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Museum care can be seen from a number of different points of view, and applied in a number of ways. If we start with ethnological collections, part of the notion of care is to be taken seriously in the first degree, i.e. the challenges of protecting objects from the toxic treatments to which they have been or may have been subjected. Is this a real concern?

The argument of toxicity is a decoy to prevent access. Yes, it is true that curators at ethnographic museums used to spray arsenic and DDT onto the objects they brought back from expeditions. It is likely that traces of these poisons can be found on certain pieces more than on others. It is the duty of the former colonial museum to do all it can to remove these traces. The argument of toxicity is an attempt to shift attention from the analogue artefact to its digital representation. Another contemporary chimera is the claim that the microbiome found in animal and human particles located in masks or ritual paraphernalia can unleash latent diseases from the past and trigger future pandemics. This is part of the obfuscation produced by ethnographic museums in order to keep people out of the reserves! If toxicity is present, it is up to the museum to find a quick and efficient way to deal with it to avoid delays in repatriation.[8]

You seem very concerned about ensuring face-to-face meetings in museum-style negotiations. Could the museum be, and at what cost, an agency for this kind of dialogue?

We've all become accustomed to working with emails and Zoom, and I actually appreciate this move. However, I've always been interested in the transmission of initiate knowledge, in those moments when artists wish to mediate ideas to each other or to trusted interlocutors and not to a broad public. For this reason, I produce a publishing organ called "Metronome" that is not online but simply passed from hand to hand.[9] It vehicles the early stages of research, the foreplay of production, and is like a code between artists. Your question also references the condition *after* an exhibition is produced or a meeting has taken place. This is what Paul Rabinow once called "exiting the field".[10] It refers to the value placed on withdrawal, on diffusion after the act. Sometimes you'll find that a show has a *finissage*, but generally, little attention is paid to the aftermath of an exhibition and what it implies for the artist or the visitor. That is why I critique the timing of curatorial structures such as exhibitions. They don't make sense today and are barely sustainable. Why stick to a 3-month rote when other temporal models can work too? What alternative timings might be considered that could dislodge the stagnancy and unsustainability of this treadmill of exhibition-making and prove equally productive for audiences?

According to you, "Today, expeditions take place in the (museum) where the aim is to understand what has been collected and why, and to discover the different paradigms that signified the research of the museum's former directors

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and curators".[11] How can we imagine staging or exhibiting the museum's explorations in these terms?

In his recent book on Sigmund Freud's "figurative psychoanalysis", German historian Horst Bredekamp describes the Musée Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital as a "Bild- und Objektlabor der Psychologie" (an image and object laboratory of psychology).[12] Like Charcot, Freud also had trinkets in his library, 2-3000 pieces in total made up of Etruscan figurines, African art, and various paintings, which he began collecting during his first travels to Italy in September 1896. In Vienna, Freud knew all the antiquarians and in 1917, he writes of his "Abenteuerlust" when he visits them searching for something new. Freud gathers so many trinkets, that when he moves to a new apartment, he needs three furniture carts to transport his familiar items, or as he called them, his "Dinge der Vertrautheit". Bredekamp claims that Freud's collection was integral to his practice, like a medium of communication between the doctor and patient. The statuettes represented an intermediate space for the gaze of both parties, a divergent ground where their eyes could settle but never meet.

My model also requires artefacts and artworks. It is conceptual and empirical rather than academic. Imagine the wing of a museum in which the exhibition space is filled with long tables and chairs for visitors to gather, sit down, and study at their pace. Surrounding this furniture are racks with historical paintings, mobile media stations, and artefacts in vitrines that can be moved into different configurations. All artworks and objects are pulled from the oblivion of secondary museum collections. With no masterpiece value, they are revitalised into hybrid configurations, intentionally crossing cultures, disciplines, and time frames. A baroque painting, riddled with holes and cavities, too damaged to exhibit, is positioned next to an 18th century condom made from sheep's gut, embellished with an erotic drawing. Adjacent is a set of slave shackles, some elaborately engineered fish traps from Africa and Oceania, and an artwork by Andreas Slominski, which like a seductive decoy lies somewhere between a sculpture and a functional object.[13] Such assemblages confuse the borders between art history and other disciplines, fueling new imaginative conversations based on visual relationships. The public encounters an ecology of art and ideas based on the afterlives of marginal collections and duplicate items that fill the reservoirs of every museum in Europe. The effects, both beautiful and enigmatic, offer the foundation for critical fabulations, designs, and inventions for future generations.

This interview was made in December 2024 by Dominique Poulot, guest editor. Many thanks to Clémentine Deliss for her time and energy. The photos of the Weltkulturen Museum are the work of Wolfgang Günzel.

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Endnotes

1 Deliss 2020, p. 17.

2 Leiris 1939.

3 “Documents” 1930, p. 300.

4 Certeau 1924.

5 See *The Metabolic Museum* for the English version of “Manifesto for the rights of access to colonial collections sequestered in Western Europe”, and on the website of the journal “Multitudes” 2018.

6 Rancière 1987.

7 https://mm-u.online/project/university-of-design-hfg-karlsruhe/

8 https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/456_occupy_collections_clementine_deliss_in_conversation_with_frederic_keck_on_access_circulation_and_interdisciplinary_experimentation_or_the_urgency_of_remediating_ethnographic_collections_before_it_is_really_too_late

9 “Metronome” is an artists’ and writers’ organ that is both a collective artwork and a research methodology. It was conceived in 1996 by Clémentine Deliss and has been researched and published for over ten years in a number of cities and locations in the world including Dakar, London, Berlin, Basel, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Malmö, Bergen, Frankfurt, Vienna, Biella, Edinburgh, Paris, Oregon, Tokyo and Stavanger. Acting as a critical alternative to conventional art publishing, “Metronome” operates like a prologue or creative tangent to an exhibition, generating new work and debates between artists and thereby triggering short circuits between art scenes in different locations. See the interview of Clementine Deliss in Paris INHA : https://www.canal-u.tv/chaines/inha/la-revue-critique-et-culturelle-dans-le-monde-revolution-subversion-et-emancipation-8

10 Rabinow, Stavrianakis 2019.

11 Deliss 2011, p. 201.

12 Bredekamp 2023.

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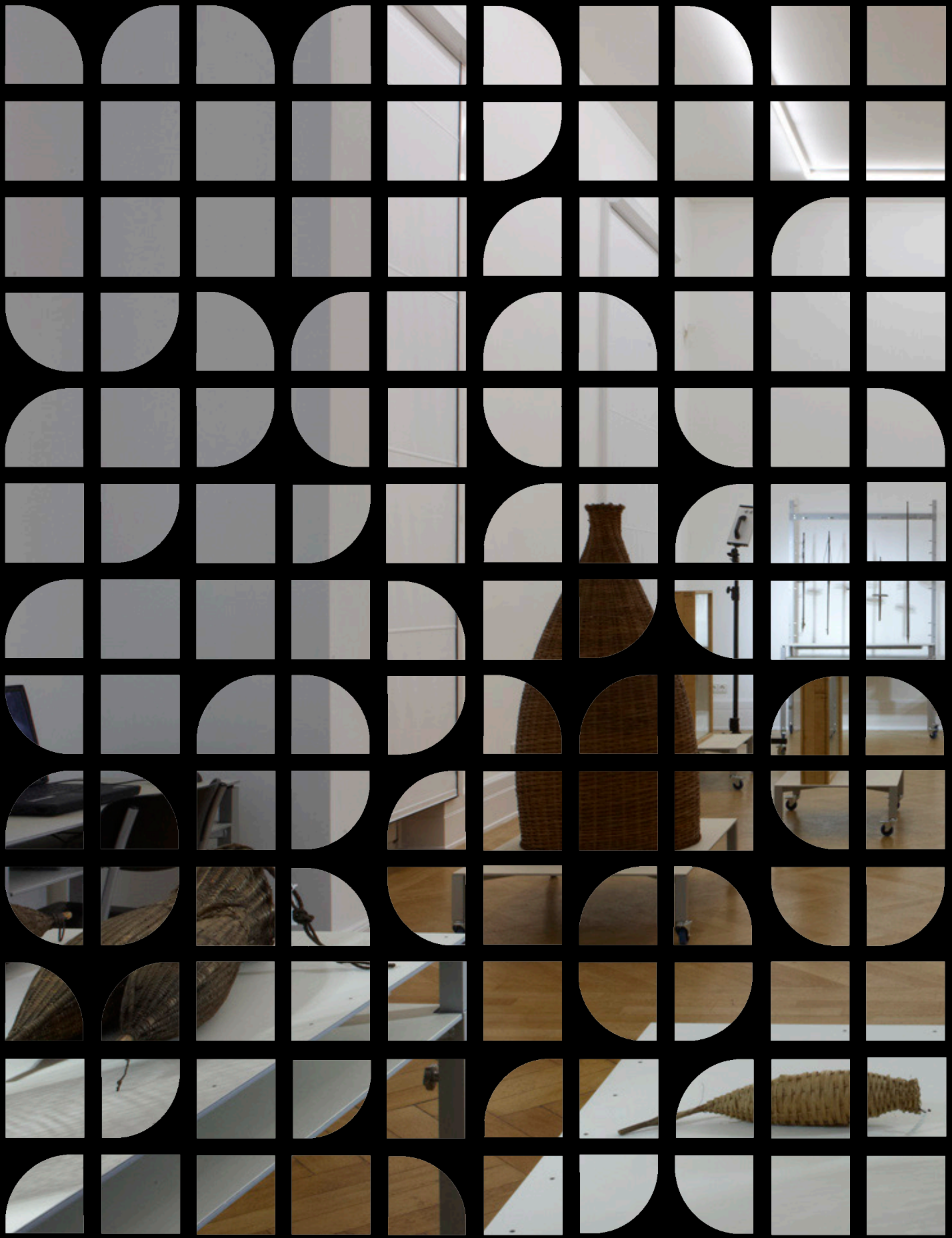

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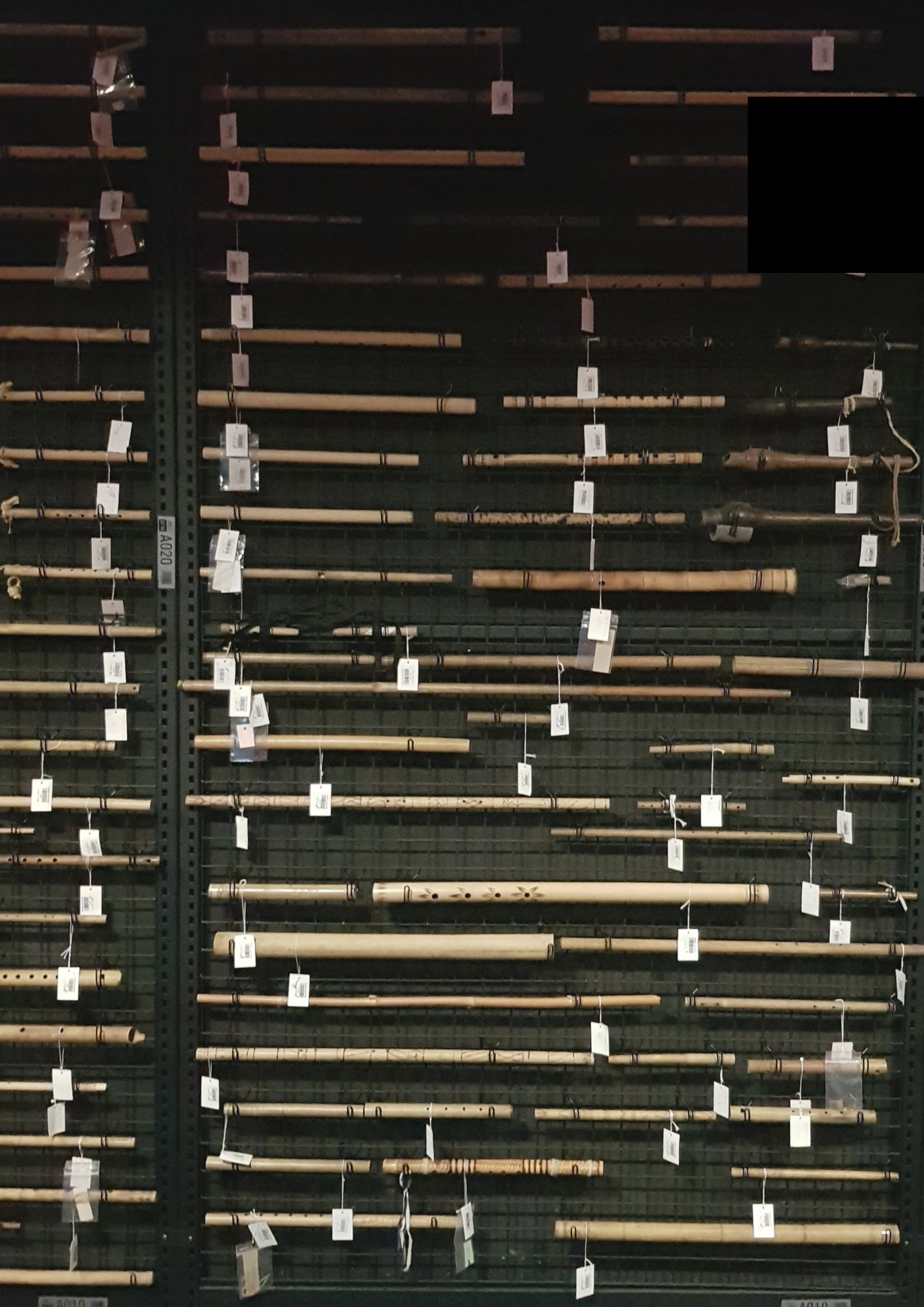
A020

Unmuting musical instruments held in ethnographic collections: towards a sound remediation?

Louis Petitjean

Keywords:
Sound, Ethnographic Museums, Decolonisation, Multisensory Experience, Dissonant Heritage.

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the integration of sound in ethnographic museums displays as a possible way to deal with the mediation of musical instruments taken from colonised cultures. It examines museums' evolving approaches to decolonisation, particularly the incorporation of multi-sensory experiences that allow audiences to connect with heritage beyond visual displays. Museums like the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, the case study of the article, attempt to address historical erasures by working with artists to create installations that let musical instruments resonate differently. By shifting the focus from preservation alone to collaborative, sensory engagements, these museums aim to repair dissonant heritages, fostering inclusivity and rethinking representation within modern museology.

Questo articolo esplora l'integrazione del suono nei musei etnografici come strategia per ridare voce agli strumenti musicali delle culture colonizzate. L'articolo esamina l'evoluzione degli approcci dei musei alla decolonizzazione, con un'attenzione particolare all'integrazione di esperienze multisensoriali che permettono al pubblico di entrare in contatto con il patrimonio culturale, al di là delle esposizioni visive. Musei come il Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, preso in esame nell'articolo, cercano di affrontare le cancellazioni storiche collaborando con gli artisti per creare installazioni che fanno risuonare gli strumenti musicali in modo diverso. Spostando l'attenzione dalla sola conservazione all'impegno collaborativo e sensoriale, questi musei mirano a riparare patrimoni dissonanti, promuovendo l'inclusività e ripensando la rappresentazione all'interno della museologia moderna.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 02: The flutes and pipes reserve. Photo by Louis Petitjean.

Louis Petitjean

Louis Petitjean is a PhD student at Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne in cotutelle with Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, part of the UnaHerDoc programme of Una Europa, under the supervision of Dominique Poulot and Sandra Costa. His work focuses on the circulation of organological knowledge in museums at the end of the 19th century in Europe, with particular reference to Asian instruments from Indochina and Japan.

Ethnographic museums are undoubtedly going through a period of crisis. From the presentation of the ethnographic object,[1] to the discourse produced on the former acquisition methods,[2] as well as on practices of repatriation,[3] these museums face multiple challenges. To cope up with these academic and social critiques, some of them have undertaken renovations, in response to "a need to create and disseminate a multicultural and postcolonial image of Europe, fully integrated into globalisation and interpreted as a symbol of modernity, particularly in the former colonial metropolises".[4] Often moved by the need of pluralisation of voices in the museum, the ethnographic museum moves towards James Clifford's definition of the "contact zone",[5] i.e. an inclusive space for the co-construction of knowledge between the museum and the populations about which it produces a discourse. Thought to be in opposition to a museology inherited from colonialism and experienced as overwhelming for the populations it deals with, these museums now wish to respond to the imperatives of a decolonial museology[6] as means of repairing the past of European empires.

The new definition of the museum, proposed in 2019 at ICOM Kyoto and voted on in 2022 at ICOM Prague, attests of this large-scale paradigm shift. A museum is, or must be, "open to the public, accessible and inclusive" and "promotes diversity and sustainability"; in addition, "museums operate and communicate ethically and professionally, with the participation of diverse communities".[7] Anthropologists Joachim Classen and David Howes have described European ethnographic museums as *sensescapes*,[8] that can be defined as places of ongoing emotional renegotiation between the institution and its public. In those museums, erected in the second half of the 19th century, the only mode of access to the objects has been the sight, at the expense of other senses, and "within the museum's empire of sight, objects are colonized by the gaze".[9] These museums are experimenting with new ways of providing access to the collections, integrating the "new body of the visitor"[10] in a multi-sensory way, in which sound and hearing seem to have become more and more important.

One may speak of renovation when referring to a new architectural and scenography redesign, or of a redesign when referring to a new museography. However, this concept fails to include the question of the public, even though these redesigns or renovations are often thought of as responses to the social issues that museums are engaged in tackling. An extended renovation would therefore include a renewal of the intermediary practices between the institution and its public, in other words would redefine mediation. Some of those museums are therefore engaged in what can be called *remediation*, a concept developed by the American anthropologist Paul Rabinow and defined, in the museum case, as a collaborative and dialogical process through which certain practices within the museum are "reconfigured, modified, rectified and adjusted".[11] Inspired by Judith Butler's "politics of radical resignification"[12] and Michel Foucault's politics of discomfort, this method involves introducing alternative modes of representation into

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the museum space, which can also sometimes make visitors feel uncomfortable.[13]

If we take the example of sound in exhibition spaces, the first observation is that sonic practices within museums have become commonplace, from audio guides to sound showers and listening rooms. Interest in the use of sound in exhibition spaces appeared recently in scientific literature with the emphasis on the fact that sound develops a sense of immediacy and participation for the public.[14] The work of museologist Julia T.S. Binter links this to the relationship of the public with ethnographic objects and focuses on sound agency in the context of the decolonisation of the museum, investigating how sound archives help to resist the "colonial aphasia" from which European museums suffer.[15] Music, for its part, is an art form that largely resists the traditional modes of access offered by the museum. According to its definition, it is brought into the world through bodily techniques, involving the voice or body percussions, or techniques requiring objects and knowledge about them. Yet *music* as a vast and moving social and anthropological concept has often been cut down, within museums, to the gathering and presentation of collections of musical instruments, often putting aside the theme of music practices.

This type of collection is particularly interesting in our case, because the process of remediation takes place in an original way. Often criticised for their silence, these collections and particularly those from non-European cultures, tend to be re-examined and to break new grounds. They are now being rethought around a programme aiming at restoring their agentivity and their capacity to generate sound, which their existence in the museum has made difficult or even denied. In other words, *unmute* the instruments that the museum has forced into silence.[16] This can be done in different ways. It is often pushed by the institution itself, by collaborating with artists from source-communities negotiating an access to the music instruments. From then, and regarding specific conservation needs for each type of instrument, these artists either play them to symbolically re-sound them, either produce new form of discourses on them, notably through the use of contemporary art approaches.

Nonetheless, the process of re-sounding instruments often comes up against the demands of preventive conservation, which has been progressively institutionalised by ICOM through the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music (CIMCIM) since the early 1960s. Even though music instruments museums were born in the second half of the 19th century, the recognition of musical instruments as proper *heritage objects*, and not as pedagogical tools for the music academies, has been a long process.

The CIMCIM was founded in Paris on 1st July 1960, at the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, under the leadership of Georges Henri Rivière (1897-1985). He defended the idea that musical instruments were an integral part of humanity's

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material culture and that museums should start treating them as such. Indeed, as the official history of the CIMCIM states, "musical instruments have not always been respected as part of our cultural heritage, but rather as a tool in the service of music",[17] often leading to deterioration or renovations that altered the instruments. The committee set up a think-tank on instrument conservation and restoration which led to the publication in 1985 of the *Recommendations for regulating access to musical instruments in public collections*.[18] The researcher Judith Dehail has shown how, in this process, the musical instrument has gone from being an "intermediary or tool for producing the authentic music of the past, to becoming an end in itself, whose materiality crystallises, and therefore documents, the authenticity of the past".[19] This also implies a broader distance with the instrument: according to the ideals of conservation, it must be touched the least possible, paradoxically reinforcing its muteness within collection storages.

What is at stake here is therefore the tension between, on the one hand, the need and the institutional organisation to protect musical instruments from time and destruction, so to speak preserving their "still life",[20] and on the other hand the wish to repair them symbolically by proposing a new way of mediating them. Without opposing the two binarily, we want to address how museum practices are entangled with social agendas as well as with its own functioning as an institution. By giving examples of *sound remediation practices* currently held in Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac (MQB) and in different European museums during the recent years, this article will attempt to address this duality of sound remediation. It will touch on the different ways in which collections of non-European musical instruments can be repaired and investigate to what extent sound is a powerful tool for repairing ethnographic museums themselves, notably by putting their relationship with their own pasts and collection histories on the table. The exploration of the interactions between institutions and artists shall shed light on the complex ecologies of the museum and the effects they have on repairing processes. How can the museum provide access to musical instruments that have been uprooted nay imprisoned in analytical categories inherited from nineteenth-century colonial anthropology? How can it meet the demands of modern, critical museology in the case of musical instruments that have been silenced by history? Can sound be used to write new narratives in museums?

The study is based on ethnographic methods, relying on multi-sited observation within the walls of the museum and a total of six interviews. The first section of the interviews has been made with the museum staff, conducted between December 2023 and March 2024. The three profiles are quite different. Our first contact with the museum was made through an interview with a production manager, in the exhibition service department. The second interviewee is responsible for the sound collection of the museum and was thus a very important informer for the project. The third interview was made with the former director of the MQB auditorium, who worked within the cultural programme de-

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partment (live arts, cinema, conferences). She had worked a lot on the *Musée Résonnant* project which we will discuss later. The position of the researcher involved a regular presence in the museum. As being external to the workings of the museum itself, it rendered possible a comparison between observations made in the exhibition spaces with the internal discourse produced on them. The second section of the interviews, conducted from March to September 2024, was made with artists involved in "sound remediation" within ethnographic museums. An interview with the artist who created our case study, Youmna Saba, was compulsory. Yet in order to understand the larger scale of the phenomenon, two other interviews were conducted with artists working in different countries than France, with different institutional contexts, like Adilia Ying Dip in Brussels and Sacht Hoyt in Berlin. Acknowledging the fact that art works are not the creation of isolated individuals but result from cooperation between different artists, institutions, critics and audiences, who together make up the "art world",[21] it was necessary to multiply the points of views and complete them with observations, in order to grasp the complexity of an artistic project taking place in a major Parisian museum, involving various actors, intermediaries and interests.

After rapidly telling the place of musical instruments within ethnographic collections, we shall look at the new role given to sound in the MQB. The third part will focus on the artistic installation *La réserve des non-dits* by the Franco-Lebanese artist Youmna Saba, winner of the first sound residency of the museum.

Music instruments in ethnographic museums

1) Organology, museums and music instrument collections in contemporary history

The last quarter of the 19th century in Western Europe saw a great interest in non-European musical instruments, manifested in the building of collections and the opening of museums. For example, the Musée des Instruments de Musique du Conservatoire Royal in Brussels opened in 1877, following the donation of a large Indian collection to King Leopold II. In Paris, the Musée des Instruments de musique du Conservatoire had already existed since 1861, and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro opened in 1878, initially comprising 150 instruments from Africa and Oceania[22]. At the same time, organology, the science of musical instruments, began to develop. This interrelated discipline of musicology enjoys a symbiotic relationship with museums,[23] which functioned as laboratories. These musical artifacts, preserved and exhibited, were mobilized by contemporaries as levers enabling them to build classification systems marked by the evolutionary paradigm, categorizing "specimens", "families" and "branches", largely marked by the epistemology of natural sciences. In 1878, Victor-Charles Mahillon (1841-1924), the first curator of the museum in Brussels, drew up the first major classification into four families of instruments, divided according to the way they set the air

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into vibration: aerophones, cordophones, idiophones, membranophones.[24] This fourfold classification became the basis for the one still in use today after its systematisation in 1914 by two German scholars.[25] Recent work has shown that organology, along with ethnomusicology afterwards, have played a large part in the process of "primitivization" of non-European music, defined as the assignment of "certain musical repertoires, carried by living populations, to an anhistoricity, a place below history. These are distinguished from a 'modern' repertoire, whose progress the comparative history of music, and later musicology, endeavours to describe".[26] Born in the heart of imperialist Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century, this science relied heavily on colonial and diplomatic networks to transfer instruments to the metropolises, where it was written.

In 1929, at the request of Georges Henri Rivière, André Schaeffner founded what will become the department of Ethnomusicology within the ethnographic museum, which became in 1937 the Musée de l'Homme. The Hornbostel and Sachs typological classification was applied to the instrument collection of this museum.

In 2006, the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac was created by the merger of the collections of the Musée de l'Homme with Rivière's Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires. The museum's collection of musical instruments now totals 10,000 pieces, most of which come from the Musée de l'Homme's ethnomusicological laboratory.[27] This brief detour into the history of organological classification is necessary to understand the current arrangements for the mediation of these instruments at the Musée du Quai Branly. In fact, the presentation still uses the "organological mode",[28] using a label for each display case and explaining which object class the instrument belongs to (Fig. 1). Even if this mode of presentation is not properly a colonial reenactment, the profusion of objects in the museum was made possible by the very colonial context of imperial France, and the pregnancy of organological settings within the museum dispositive seems to be currently discussed, modified and remediated.

Fig. 01: An organological cartel on the glass tower. Photo Louis Petitjean.

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As a good witness of the contemporaneity of this process, the Musée de la Musique in Paris is planning to renovate its permanent exhibition space which until now has been called "*Les musiques du monde*" (World music) due to open in May 2025. In its *Projet Scientifique et Culturel* (2020-2025), in a section entitled "A museum in the present", the museum declares its desire to "think about Western music in a globalised world"; the three aspects of this renovation include a reorganisation of the display, an easier access to the collections which until now have been at the end of the museum's route and an emphasis on "the experience of the intangible within the museum and a more sensitive approach to the collections".[29]

2) Mute instruments in silent storages

Museums seem to have been a powerful tool to mute musical instruments. Scholars have even provocatively described them as "mausoleums, places for the display of the musically dead, with organologists acting as morticians, preparing dead instrument bodies for preservation and display".[30] If we take the example of MQB, these thousands of musical instruments collected since the 19th century are in full view for the museum visitors to the museum, housed in a huge glass tower that acts as the backbone of the museum. One of the few articles on the subject, written by Madeleine Leclerc, ethnomusicologist and director of MQB's musical instrument collections from the museum's opening until 2012, reveals a great deal about the initial ambitions for this glass tower. According to her report, there were originally ten screens inside, connected to the outside by transducers that broadcasted musical extracts. The aim was "to create a link between the formal aesthetics of musical instruments [...] and the musical aesthetics sought by instrument makers".[31] Today, this original ambition is not there, and the instruments are only accessible via organological labels such as the one shown above. On the top of that, Jean Nouvel's architectural project comprised this glass tower in the concrete structure itself and therefore it cannot be modulated. The tower seems to resist to a radical change of its display, utility and accessibility.

In contrast to the exhibition platform, this tower takes on a special museological form as it displays a part of the museum's reserves. The display of backstages, the *behind the scenes* of museums is a relatively recent phenomenon. It calls to another type of museological discourse: the revealing of what is not visible, what is hidden, what refers to the inner workings of the museum. However, we should not "take the media productions of institutions as descriptions of the work of collections management but treat them for what they are: selective and partial representations of the museum's activities".[32] The display of these musical instruments is inseparable from the institution that has given them heritage status and is part of the range of discourses it produces about its collections. Given that the museum does not have any ethnomusicologist in its staff since 2016, this staging of conservation no longer coincides with the reality of curatorial work.

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Yet, there has also been a shift in the way museum staff perceive this space, as evidenced by the way they talk about it. During fieldwork, a museum employee explained that they were told not to use the originating term "silo" anymore, but rather "instrument tower", before using the term again later in the interview, by mistake, indicating that a lexicon linked to representations of this facility within the museum had become imbued and thus resistant to change.

As Youmna Saba puts it, "it was very beautiful to see all these instruments, but at the same time, it was very shocking to see them placed like that in this tower. There's something borderline violent about it".[33] As a whole, the public seems to be calling for more direct access to these collections and are expressing a form of frustration at the glass tower housing objects whose potential for sound they are aware of, but which are confined to being merely looked at. Eric de Visscher,[34] who has played a major role in the project we will discuss afterwards, states this:

> *"This inaudible of a collection of instruments is always there, we're always fighting against it and the public also asks: 'we want to hear the instruments, why don't we play them?' Or 'these are dead instruments!'"*[35]

Of course, forms of sound mediation for musical instrument exist in the museum, but that follow a direct illustrative approach. If a flute is shown in a display case, then the sound shower next to it will broadcast a recording of the flute in question, or of a similar flute. So, what can be done to give access in a different way to musical instruments that are fixed and rendered mute in their display case? Although there is no public survey as such on this question, the museum has been reacting for some years now by proposing an overall overhaul of the way sound is perceived and lived within the museum's walls. In short, MQB is trying to make a sound remediation.

Towards "resonating" museums?

1) New echoes within the walls

In 2020, the former Director of the Heritage and Collections Department, Yves Le Fur, launched an audit for a major project, the *Musée Résonnant* (resonating museum).[36] It has been led by Eric de Visscher, whose expertise today coincides with the up-to-date sensory and sound approaches in museums. Starting from the observation that the museum is a multi-sensory space and that its architecture is designed "more like a territory where the visitor wanders through spaces of very different sizes and volumes, and therefore with different acoustics",[37] Eric de Visscher has proposed solutions to redefine the place of sound in the exhibition area and to enhance the value of intangible heritage. In an approach rooted in critical museology, he has developed the idea that sound design can be a highly effective tool for developing new narratives in museums:

Fig. 03:
The virtual "manza balanga" to be found on RMCA's ReSoXY website.

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> *"As something that is fleeting but that also is physical and spatial, felt in the body, and connected to concepts and politics of the voice, vocality, and memory, sound is suited for prompting questions, for destabilizing that which is thought to be stable, and for re-examining what we think we know."*[38]

The project is therefore to some extent a practical application of this theorisation of the power of sound within the exhibition spaces of the MQB.

This ambitious project is cross-disciplinary and wishes to include the museum's various departments: public relations, cultural development, heritage and collections, technical resources and security... It therefore needs a reconfiguration of museum practices and greater cooperation. Nevertheless, the lack of clear steering of the project between the departments leaves a wide degree of freedom and interpretation adapted to the human and financial potential of each. The departments that are already closely involved in the issue of sound, such as the media library, are very committed to the programme. This project is not without confronting the reality of differing budgets allocated to the departments, depending on their size and importance within the museum. As one member of staff explains:

> *"The most frustrating thing, the most complicated thing to manage, is that we have a lot of departments, and each of the departments is involved with a totally different budget and human resources, or even very, very, very different budgets. [...] No one has ever complained about it, as it's not visible [to the public], everyone, with their own resources, programmes very different things."*[39]

In fact, the aim of the project is to extend into many areas of the museum. It also takes the form of a particular focus on the issue of sound for the public, which has taken the form of "experiments on the perception of sounds in the museum by and with the public", as well as an acoustic study "to find out how this building reacts to the issue of sound, as well as to noise pollution".[40] And finally, the most visible form of this new resonance of the museum is the setting up of a sound residency consisting of a series of *cartes blanches* given to contemporary sound artists. The *Musée Résonnant* is therefore a wide-ranging, shape-shifting project and refers as much to sound understood as a material reality and an aspect of human culture as to a lived experience in a museum.

The sound residencies consist of inviting sound artists and musicians to create a work with and for the museum. These *cartes blanches* are also part of a recent museum dynamic that outsources mediation through contemporary creation, calling on intermediaries to take another look at the collections. Faced with demands for restitution and the proliferation of critical studies

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on the museum, the aim is to give back symbolic power to artists from non-European cultures, by letting them *take over* the museum and its collections:

> *"Because we are not able to return the objects, which are moreover most of the time not requested, the idea is rather to give a free rein to an artist [...], to make the objects or collections available for artists who come from those cultures."*[41]

The idea of a carte blanche given to a single artist also fits in with the museum's consideration of artists' self-representation in the museum, in a model that encourages them to invest the museum and integrate its various components into their artistic approach. It also brings into play the question of contemporary art at the MQB. Given the relative slowness with which major Parisian contemporary art institutions, such as the Palais de Tokyo and the Fondation Cartier, begin to integrate sound art into their collections, this program is also a way of positioning the museum in the context of the growing interest for sound art in the artistic field:

> *"Quite quickly, we decided that a residency program, in other words, a commission for works of art, but conceived from and for the museum, was a good way to build up a collection of contemporary works of sound art on the same model as photographic residencies."*[42]

2) Sound exits the museum

Resonating museums seem to be a broader phenomenon than what is happening in MQB. Other forms of remediation of musical instruments collected during the colonial periods and rendered mute by their existence within the museum are sprouting.

Launched by the percussionist and researcher Dr. Adilia Dip, the project entitled "Re-Sounding the xylophone collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA)"[43] (ReSoXy) is being developed in the walls of the RMCA in Tervuren, Belgium. It focuses on unmuting its xylophone collection, comprising 159 instruments, mainly collected between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century. Deeply rooted in Belgium colonial history in Congo, as it was created in 1897 following the colonial part of the Universal Exhibition taking place in Tervuren, the museum increased its collections through great collectors such as Armand Hutereau, who picked up more than 600 instruments alongside with sound recordings and photographs during his 1911-1913 expedition.

Just like Quai Branly, RMCA seems to lack of "experts in-house that can repair the physical objects".[44] Therefore, the repairing process cannot be focused on the materiality of the musical instrument, but rather on the sound and the intangible musical practices. The process is the following: after having sound sampled the xylophones, they are

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synthetised and could be replayed during live performances. This symbolically means that the sound is being freed up while the objects are still being captive within museum reserves.

For this project, the sound remediation does not only include the recording of the sounds of the instruments: it also encompasses a digitalised manza playable directly on the website (Fig. 3), a demonstration of a musical pattern extracted from RMCA's archive, various photos, a data record with precise information on the origins of the object (culture of origin, acquisition date and collecting method, collector and acquisition location), audio-samples downloadable freely of various audio formats, and extracts of the museum archive recordings. Digitalisation is therefore one way of dealing with the issue of the repairing museum by making accessible to visitors in and outside the museum: this digitalised manza is currently inside the exposition area of the RMCA.

At the very core of the ReSoXy project is the idea that by digitalising the xylophone collection, the museum could be a good purveyor of cultural information that colonial collects have sometimes deleted:

"Because we want to reach out to the communities, we want them to know these instruments again, because some of these instruments are not in use anymore. Especially the communities in Congo. But of course, it's difficult when the instruments are not in use, and it's already for decades in this circle of disappearance."[45]

Accueil › Collection de xylophones

Manza MO.0.0.14308

Jouer de l'instrument virtuel

Cliquez ici pour jouer en pleine fenêtre

Cliquez sur les touches pour entendre le son du xylophone. Il fonctionne à la fois sur les ordinateurs de bureau et sur les appareils à écran tactile.

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As part of the project was the trips of the "re-sounder" artist and researcher to meet the source-communities whose ancestors were dispossessed of these objects. Dr. Adilia Dip explains that, when in Congo, all her work was what could be given back to the communities. This new accessibility of sound recordings, instruments and archives could therefore produce new music:

> *"When I was in Congo and I needed something to show them. I could not just show them some old recordings made hundred years ago. So now I have an object to do knowledge exchange and then they might start to remember more, or they can create new music together."*[46]

Therefore, musical co-creation is one of the tools museums deploy to

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repair their difficult histories. It can also take other forms.

Youmna Saba's La reserve des non-dits or sound remediation for MQB's tower

1) Making the unheard listened

The first winner of MQB's sound residency program was Youmna Saba, a contemporary Lebanese artist. Youmna Saba is a composer, virtuoso oud player and musicologist and her albums explore the relationship between electroacoustic music and the sung Arabic language. Her project *La Réserve des non-dits* (the Reserve of the Unsaid) won the selection competition for the first sound residency in the Quai Branly's carte blanche program. Her installation was on view from March to December 2023. The selection encompassed artists "from one of the four continents represented in the Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac collections: Africa, Asia, America, Oceania"[47] that had to propose a project interacting with the museum and its collections. Whether "the museum as a place, the museum as a presentation centre or the museum as a centre for the conservation of archives and works",[48] priority was given to projects that made organic use of the museum, including a mediation and installation proposal. Artists could choose to base their work on the sound and audiovisual collection, the musical instrument collection, or both. Successful artists are given around six months to work and receive technical support from Le Fresnoy, a Tourcoing-based national studio for contemporary arts. Winners also receive financial support to develop the project, to the tune of €8,000, which "covers the copyright remunerating the winner's work, the entry of the work into the museum's collections and the delivery of the final work (digital file or any other format)"[49]. In addition, the various expenses associated with the production are covered by the museum (material costs, travel expenses, costs of using non-free sources, etc.).

Youmna Saba's project was based on the intuition that the instruments in the tower, despite their apparent silence behind the glass, nevertheless produced almost inaudible sounds generated by the circulation of air on the membranes. This is part of her artistic quest to question the audible and the inaudible. For example, as part of the Taïma project at the CNCM Césaré in Reims, she gave a concert in which she placed an oud on a chair in the middle of the stage and connected microphones to pick up the resonance of the strings and the cabinet, subverting resonance as a traditional problem in live mixing by transforming it into a musical element that forms an integral part of the work. With the same ambition, her project in the museum aimed to capture hidden resonances using small microphones placed at different points on the instrument. She created a bank of 139 sounds from recordings made in the glass tower's storeroom. These recordings are divided into three categories: "ambient" sounds, captured in the resonance boxes of certain instruments; "instrumental" sounds, captured by microphones placed inside the instruments; "optimised" sounds, reworked in the studio in post-production. The title of the work is a challenge to this glass tower, which

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struggles to make its presence felt and refers to the silence emanating from the reserve compared with their dense and very diverse cultural histories.

2) Issues of accessibility

The sound project and its implementation for the visitor were conceived synchronously. The device was distributed over three areas of the museum. Mounted on the windows of the instrument tower and on three floors of the museum, three listening points could be activated by the visitor. As the tower is at the heart of Jean Nouvel's architecture, the listening points brightened up the exhibition route. A further five listening points were installed in the collections area to punctuate the tour with sound pieces. To make the artistic process more accessible, MQB's "boîte à musique" brought together personal notes from the artist and questions about the day-to-day realisation of her project. In the form of a diagram, visitors were provided with explanations of the artist's work that were not easily understood by simply encountering the sound works, which at first sight are rather unsettling because they are taking the form of rhythmless ambient music, unveiling sometimes dark and gloomy atmospheres. This contradicts what the visitor might expect from a sound mediation of musical instruments, namely an extract of their sound in a playing context.

Enhancing the value of the tower was a major challenge. Faced with the dual question of "how do we [...] make it understandable that we are giving something to hear and leave it to the public to activate what they

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hear?",[50] the museum proposed a signage system in the form of a hand, suggesting a new way of "touching" the instruments on the other side of the glass, through listening. Visitors had to activate the device themselves by pressing a hand-shaped sticker on the glass wall of the storage room (Fig. 4). It was also necessary to highlight the tower within the museum route, which seems to hide its contents from view: of the three listening points attached to the tower, two are outside the collections area, one in the entrance hall, the other in the basement, in the educational and theatre areas. In other words, these are areas where the public does not linger. However, the absence of a tool to evaluate public use of the installation meant that it was impossible to know to what extent it really worked.

The superimposition of Youmna Saba's installation and the traditional mediation devices of organological cartels, as well as their upholding in contrast to the artist's ephemer-

Fig. 04: Front installation in the main hall. Photo Louis Petitjean

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al installation, invites to question the persistence of the organological mode within the museum's presentation of musical instruments. Regarding that, while she was working on the micro-sounds of the instrument inside the tower, she declares she had "forget" about organology:

> *"Is there a way to organize them differently? Or should we? Should we organize them or not? Because I perceived them completely... I completely forgot about organology when I was working in [the glass tower]. [...] I just looked at where I could place the microphone and listened, and that was that. Outside of all the projections, all the organizations and all the notions that we can place on these objects."*[51]

One way to cure instruments seems therefore to make them thinkable outside the classification paradigm.

3) Sound ecology of the museum

The conservation constraints at Quai Branly are quite strict, and the curators themselves no longer have direct access to the storerooms, having to go through the collections management to do so. Although recently, Pakistani and Cameroonian artists Ashraf Sharif Khan and Blick Bassy were able to play on some of the instruments in the collection, the access to the instrument tower is fairly restricted. To ensure that the artist respected this rule, Youmna Saba was always accompanied by someone when she was in the musical instrument storeroom:

> *"Sometimes it was the assistant director of the collections department. Youmna often talks about it. They really had an almost friendly relationship. It worked very well between them, even though you could imagine they had slightly different interests. [...] Sometimes it was one of the security staff who accompanied her. In particular, she describes the behaviour of one of them, who was a bit... You know, when you're nervous and you move your leg... he did this, and it created a sort of vibration. She picked up the vibration."*[52]

Initially intended as a means of ensuring that the artist creative process was in line with curatorial requirements, this "dispositive of control" has been distorted and is now part of the sound work itself. To create her work, the artist drew on the museum's complex *ecology*, ie. the network of links produced by the iterative interactions between humans and non-humans within it. In this respect, the collection of musical instruments is a boundary-work,[53] as it brings together actors from different social worlds and interests and calls, through its very materiality, for cooperation and interaction. This ecology is also revealed by this anecdote:

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> *"The first thing the curatorial team told me was that sometimes in the silo, as the carts pass by, the gongs start to move. In fact, there's a lot of movement due to the metal planks, which sometimes create an orchestra of gongs. I recreated this phenomenon without touching the gongs. We just touched the shelf, applied a little pressure and the gongs began to move and bang against each other. I captured that and kept it as a composition."*[54]

To finish with, the technical means of developing this project were also framed by the museum. The artist had to draw a list of her technical needs prior to her first enter in the glass tower. As she explains, the "gear has dictated the frequences I picked up. Therefore, if there had been other equipment, that picked up other frequences, the project would have been different".[55] The remediation is therefore unthinkable outside the museum socio-technical scope and framework.

4) Twisting patrimonialisation

To finish with, we mentioned above that the residency programme was part of the objective of bringing sound works into the museum's sound library. Again, the idea of the museum's patrimonialisation of the works can be traced back to the dynamics of assimilation that haunt ethnographic museums: "[Quai Branly Museum] wanted the sound bank to be in the museum, to belong to the museum. And that, I think, is... No, at some point you have to stop".[56] To get around this, the artist insisted on registering the 139 recordings under the Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 4.0 DEED licence, which allows the work to be shared, remixed, transformed, used or copied in any format or medium, for any purpose, including commercial. This was for her, "the most important thing, for the future developments of the project".[57] It was negotiated with the museum's legal department, who initially objected on two grounds. One declared reason was the "desire to protect Youmna's and the museum's credit on the finished product, on the files"[58], and the other was that this form of licensing would allow the work to be reused for commercial purposes, thus indirectly allowing public money to fund music production that would enrich private interests. Yet, as one member of the museum commented, "given the nature of the sounds, I don't think we're going to make a commercial hit [...]. I don't think Beyoncé or Rihanna would take all this and make money out of it".[59] To conclude with the artist own words, she "did not repair anything, unfortunately" but managed to "put the sound bank in the Creative Commons. And this is a victory for me, to give access to something, something so ephemeral and so free".[60] On the museum's website, the artist justifies her approach by explaining what this free access to the sound art collection would be used for:

> *"A renewable and ever-expanding resource; an invitation to musicians and composers to explore this*

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> *resource as a raw material for creation, and also to researchers to rethink these instruments in terms of their current state and behaviour, and to re-examine conservation practices and the criteria underlying research in musicology, organology and lute-making."*[61]

Conclusion. Sonic discourse, heritage discourse

In this article, we exemplified one of the many responses of ethnographic museums to the question of their relationship with their objects and histories. Faced with institutional demands for restitution and writing of new narratives, these museums are developing alternatives, taking the form of new mediations. Sound is being increasingly considered as a means of providing access to visitors. Maybe because it doesn't *say* anything, sound infiltrates more easily the space of exhibition halls, allows a freer interpretation, and resonates with individual sensibilities.

In this respect, the example of the remediation of collections of musical instruments "silenced" by their conservation speaks for itself. The museum wants to give a free hand to another voice, perhaps switching legitimacy, to produce an artistic-cum-scientific discourse, one that moves away from the organological considerations that stored the instruments, symbolically and physically, in categories. These new voices aim at capturing their intimate life in a museum ecology that posits itself as a constant dialogue between humans and non-humans, between security guards and drums, between carts and curators, between publics and storage. Therefore, the development of sound practices seems to be a plausible way of dealing with the challenges posed by the decolonial agenda.

To go further, we can also say that *remediation* is a concept borrowed to the ecological and biological concept of *phytoremediation*, defined as "the use of green plants and their associated microbiota, soil amendments and use of agronomic techniques to remove, contain or render harmless environmental contaminants".[62] The parallel with the ecology of the museum mentioned before is relevant as sound remediation also uses the multilayered dynamics of an ecological environment, here the museum, to give an answer to the broad treatment of difficult heritage.[63]

However, we can see that the new way of accessing these instruments is also a new form of museum discourse, adapted to the current reflections of museums interrogating their relationships with the visitor senses, which does not resolve certain aporias inherent to the history of the institutions. The cross-century ghost of museum colonial assimilations, here for example in the case of the sound works, remains. Furthermore, with the relative absence of qualified scientific staff for these instruments, the collection could only be interpreted by artists proposing an aesthetic discourse, re-activating the longstanding critic on the aestheticization of collections of non-European objects. Conversely, some radical positions towards ethnographic museums, so to speak critical practices of unmuting, fol-

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lowing the approach of the artist Sacht Hoyt, are not interested in collaborating with museums, but rather using the museum as a means of producing engaged art. To conclude with Hoyt's own words:

> *"The thing is, [unmuting] is like going and having a drink with somebody who's in jail and making them feel like you've got some kind of a solution to take them back out into freedom. But you don't. [...] The only thing I can set free is the sound."*[64]

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Endnotes

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11 Rabinow 2007, cited in Deliss 2020, p. 31.

12 Olson, Worsham 2007.

13 See for example the project “Curating discomfort” developed by the Hunterian Museum and the University of Glasgow, https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/about/changing-museum/curating-discomfort/.

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23 Dehail 2019, p. 783.

24 Mahillon 1878.

25 Hornbostel, Sachs 1914.

26 Mayaud 2018, p. 126.

27 Currently, the database mentions 9117 entries in the inventory with the mention « instruments de musique »,https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/explorer-les-collections/base/Work/action/list?tx_mqbcollection_explorer%5Bclose%5D=1&cHash=177e964e8a5be6c85c9fb2f5cf80bbd2.

28 Gérard 2014.

29 *Projet scientifique et culturel du musée de la Musique de Paris* (2020-2025), Paris, Cité de la musique – Philharmonie de Paris, 2019, p. 38.

30 Bates 2012, p. 365.

31 Leclair 2007, pp. 30-39.

32 Kreplak 2021, p. 205.

Https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.3034-9699/21600

33 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

34 Eric de Visscher is a trained musicologist and exhibition curator, former director of Paris' Musée de la Musique (2006-2017) and currently working at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, as part of the research project entitled "Sound in Museums: New Engagements, New Tools, New Audiences". See https://www.vam.ac.uk/research/projects/sound-in-museums-new-engagements-new-tool-new-audiences.

35 Remark of Eric de Visscher in the interview for the website *Hémisphère son, Youmna Saba dans la tour des instruments du monde* – https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde.

36 The project is still underway at the time of writing.

37 Remark of Eric de Visscher in the interview for the website *Hémisphère son, Youmna Saba dans la tour des instruments du monde* – https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde/.

38 Candela, de Visscher 2023, p. 57.

39 Interview with the responsible of the museum's sound collection, 13/02/2024.

40 Remark of Christine Drouin, director of Cultural Development, in the interview for the website *Hémisphère son, Youmna Saba dans la tour des instruments du monde* – https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde/.

41 Interview with the former director of the MQB auditorium, 05/03/2024.

42 Interview with the former director of the MQB auditorium, 05/03/2024.

43 See https://resoxy.africamuseum.be/.

44 Interview with Adilia Ying Dip, 17/09/2024.

45 Interview with Adilia Ying Dip, 17/09/2024.

46 Interview with Adilia Ying Dip, 17/09/2024.

47 MQB, 2024-2025 call for the sound residency, p. 7., https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/collections/toutes-les-collections/residences-sonores/appel-a-projets-residence-sonore.

48 Interview with an exhibition production manager, 02/02/2024.

49 MQB, 2024-2025 call for the sound residency, p. 7.

50 Interview with an exhibition production manager, 02/02/2024.

51 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

52 Interview with the responsible of the museum's sound collection, 13/02/2024.

53 Star, Griesmer 1989.

54 Remark of Youmna Saba in the interview for the website *Hémisphère son, Youmna Saba dans la tour des instruments du monde* – https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde/.

55 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

56 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

57 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

58 Interview with the responsible of the museum's sound collection, 13/02/2024.

59 Interview with the responsible of the museum's sound collection, 13/02/2024.

60 Interview with Youmna Saba, 23/05/2024.

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61 Extract from MQB's website, « La réserve comme ressource(s) »,
https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/collections/vie-des-collections/actualites/residence-sonore/residence-sonore-2022-youmna-saba.

62 Das 2018, p. 192.

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64 Interview with Sacht Hoyt, 14/06/2024.

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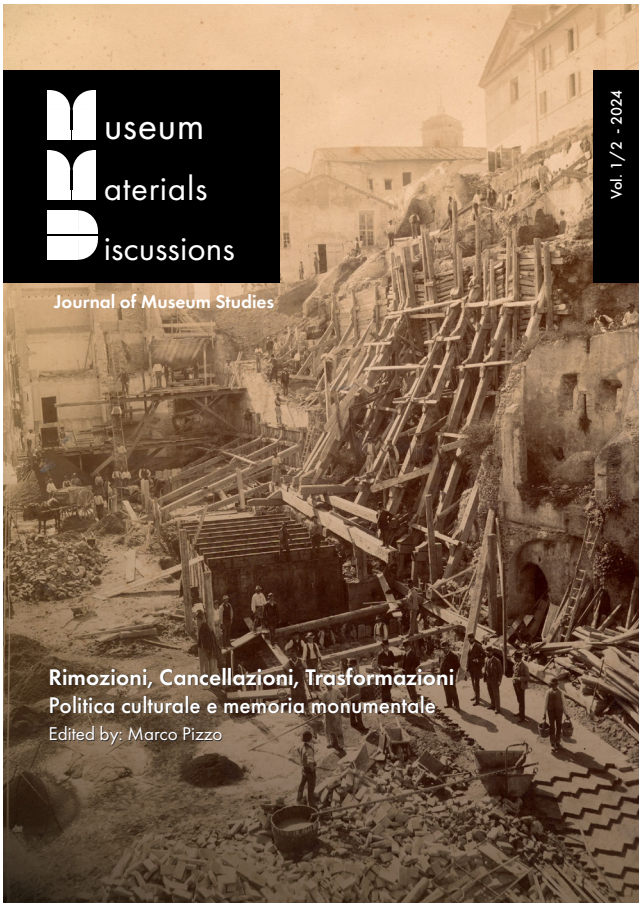

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