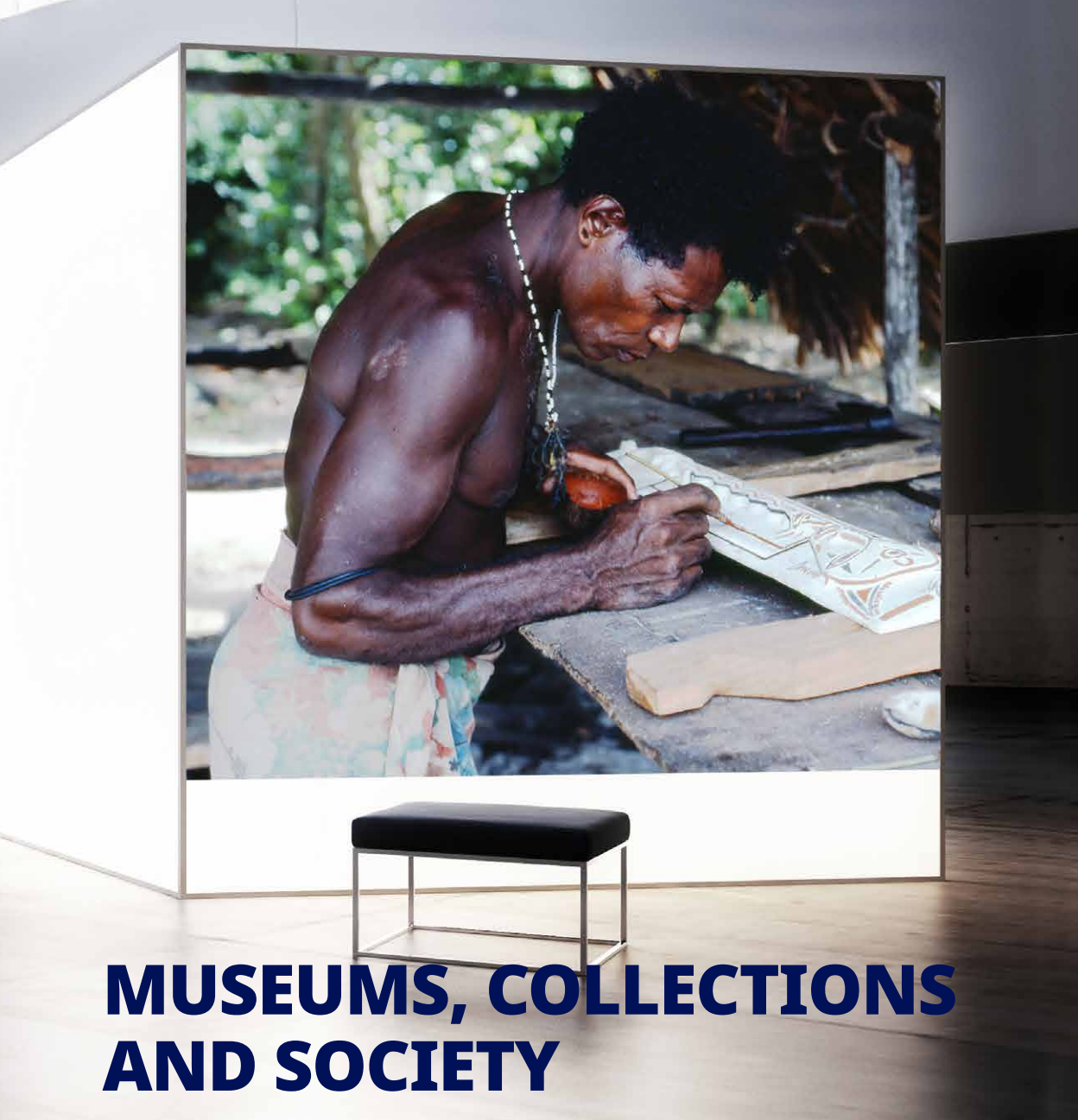

MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS AND SOCIETY

YEARBOOK 2020

Holly O'Farrell and Pieter ter Keurs (eds)

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

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Photograph cover: Kataka, one of the woodcarvers of Mandok Island (Siassi, Papua New Guinea), is working on a ceremonial dance shield for the museum in Leiden (November 1983). The objects of series RV 5307 of the National Museum of World Cultures, including this shield, were collected in 1983/84 on the Siassi-Islands (Photograph: Pieter ter Keurs).

Contents

Introduction

In 2019 the College van Bestuur (Executive Board) of Leiden University decided to invest in a four-year program on Museums, Collection and Society (MCS). The MCS program aims at stimulating collection-based research, in an interdisciplinary way.

In the city of Leiden extensive and sometimes extremely rare collections are being kept, in the museums as well as at the University. This unique situation justifies special attention for research, use and outreach related to collections. Combined with the museums in The Hague the region offers an enormous richness of fascinating cultural expressions, including complicated ethical dimensions.

Museums and collections are often frontpage news nowadays. The collections stored and curated in museums, universities and private institutions are no longer seen as 'neutral' entities to be enjoyed without political connotations. There are now intensive discussions in the press, on social media, with various stakeholders about who owns the collections, where should they be stored or exhibited, how should they be stored or exhibited, who can claim an emotional relationship with the collections and who can claim an exclusive role in appropriating collections thus excluding others.

These issues are central to museum-related discussions and they show that there is an intensive relationship between objects and people, not only in terms of contestation, but also in regular daily life, in the construction of identities and in terms of agency. What happens when you enjoy seeing an object, or when you are impressed by it? These types of questions demand the involvement of various disciplines: archaeology, anthropology, art history, history, sociology, psychology and of course a science-based approach.

The entanglement of objects and subjects is the central theme in the MCS program and museums and collections are the laboratories and the sources we work with.

In this first Yearbook of Museums, Collections and Society we present our newly formed team and some of the themes the team members are interested in. Despite a complicated year with two lockdowns because of the Covid pandemic, we could build a solid basis for the next three years.

You will hear more about our research and our outreach, in close cooperation with the museums in Leiden and The Hague.

Pieter ter Keurs

London goes Persian

The International Exhibition of Persian Art, 1931 and the British response

Holly O'Farrell

During the early twentieth century in Britain, numerous exhibitions took place, manifesting the shifting landscape between the Middle East and Western imperial world. The 1920s and 30s brought major changes to the state of European empires. The fallout from World War One had led to many countries losing hold of their colonial regions while the mandate system set up in the wake of the war encouraged a new type of imperial rule. Domestically, need for revitalisation meant that overseas territories were less and less a focus and the drive for expansion in Britain softened in the years up to the Second World War. While exhibitions of previous decades displayed confidence in the supremacy of the British imperial project, response to the 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art reflects the less steady position of the British Empire in the Middle East; mirroring the anxieties of other Western nations.

The International Exhibition was one in a string of events held annually at the Burlington House in London in order to 'display masterpieces of the genius of foreign nations'.[1] The previous years had seen large scale exhibitions of Flemish, Dutch and Italian art which welcomed the general public through their doors. The Persian Exhibition was to be the most ambitious of such events to date. The exhibition had been the initiative of the scholar and Persian art expert Arthur Upham Pope who had

1 A.T. Wilson, 'Introductory note', *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Persian Art, 7th January to 7th March, 1931, Royal Academy of Arts, London* (1931), xi.

been working alongside the new Iranian government to uncover Persian art history and give the nation a sense of shared history and cultural unity.[2]

The exhibition was to have a considerable amount of coverage in the news media of the day, with many journalists being concerned with how the Persian contents would influence trends in architecture, design and fashion. This paper will argue that the coverage of the exhibition tells much more about the social and political self-perception of Britain in 1931 rather than truly saying anything about the contemporary position of the newly Pahlavi controlled Iran. An analysis of gender, race and class constructs helps to reveal British establishment and public concerns in the face of newly empowered nations, once seen as inherently below a supposedly impenetrable British civilisation.

While it would seem that Iran was pushing away from Western control and sway, British influence remained extremely strong in the region and their power over the new Iranian government cannot be overlooked. Mohammad Gholi Majd, in his book *Britain and Reza Shah*, contends that Iran continued to be largely controlled by Britain after the overthrow of the Qajar's, with Britain having a hand in deciding who takes the reigns. Oil was a major incentive for interaction in Iran but its strategic placement in Asia also meant that influence should be maintained. Ervand Abrahamian mirrors this understanding of the situation by pointing to Reza Shah's eventual removal by the British in 1941. Evidently Britain continued to hold sway, although in a more clandestine manner. [3] The modernization of Iran could be seen as a 'Westernisation' from some angles while from others it simply meant the growing power of the nation. British influence was, nevertheless, unsteady and needed to be nurtured, and for Iranian powers to be indulged. This fact is important in understanding and explaining the reasoning behind holding a Persian art exhibition at this time and demonstrates the various anxieties over Iran as a growing power.

I

The International Exhibition of Persian Art, hosted by the Royal Academy of Arts, was the largest of its kind, celebrating thousands of years of Persian art and culture. Objects and art pieces were sent from all over the globe, loaned by museums, libraries and private collections.[4] Over two thousand pieces were loaned from collections

2 K. Rizvi, 'Art history and the nation: Arthur Upham Pope and the discourse on "Persian Art" in the early twentieth century', *Muqarnas*, 24 (2007), 47.

3 Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65.

4 Wilson, 'Introductory note', xv.

around the world valued at an estimated $10 million.[5] The *New York Times* reported the exhibition itself cost $50,000 to assemble.[6]

In the exhibition catalogue Arthur Upham Pope's profound interest in the art and architecture of the region was given as the drive behind the exhibit. It was Pope who convinced many of the patrons to lend pieces to the exhibit which he hoped would enlighten the British public on the splendours of Persian art. Various other experts took part in the organising of the exhibition including Orientalists Laurence Binyon and Chester Beatty. The two chief patrons of the exhibition were King George of England and Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran who are thanked for their involvement and in loaning pieces for display.[7]

Each room in the Burlington House was filled with an astonishing array of objects from Persian history; jewellery, weaponry, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, carpets, miniature paintings and illuminated manuscripts. According to the catalogue, to walk through the rooms was to travel through Persian history, moving from prehistoric times to the present day.[8] The collection was immense and it is at times hard to understand the motives for the arrangement of pieces as little information is given in the description of objects. Barry Wood remarks that 'the wealth of artistic treasures on display was conceived as a decorative extravaganza that would bowl viewers over from the moment they set foot in the building'.[9] There is more than a sense of the aim to bring to life the classic stories of Arabian Nights before the British public's eyes. Both organisers and the news media mentioned these tales in their descriptions of the exhibition contents.[10] This method of framing is predictable when it comes to the Middle East with Orientalist scholars, writers and artists preferring to hark back to a bygone age when the splendours of the East were supposedly in full flower. In creating this image of a 'golden age' of the Orient, Western writers and artists were, as a result, commenting on the contemporary state of the region. The literature tended to describe Iran as lagging behind Britain and in decline from periods of past glory.[11] One would argue that both the location of the exhibition, along with the choice of objects and their placement in such a historical British building,

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5 B. Wood, '"A great symphony of pure form": The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and its influence', *Ars Orientalis,* 30 (2000), 115.

6 Wireless to The New York Times. "Persian Art Exhibition Interests Londoners: Sponsored by the Royal Academy, It Will be Opened to the Public on Wednesday." *New York Times (*04 Jan. 1931), https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/persian-art-exhibition-interests-londoners/docview/99536684/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 26 Apr. 2021.

7 Wilson, 'Introductory note', xii.

8 *Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Persian Art, 7th January to 7th March, 1931, Royal Academy of Arts, London* (1931), xvi-xix.

9 Wood, '"A great symphony of pure form"', 116.

10 Lawrence Binyon, *The Observer,* 21 Sept. 1930;

11 G. Curzon MP, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 10.

Figure 1.1: The Central Hall, The International Exhibition of Persian Art, at the Royal Academy of Arts, 1931., 1931.

Figure 1.2: Gallery III, the International Exhibition of Persian Art, at the Royal Academy of Arts, 1931., 1931.

helped to position Iran as somewhere below Britain. This paper maintains that the Persian Art Exhibition was wrapped up in politics and nation building which can be perceived through newspaper and public responses to the event. The very staging of exhibits; the political current surrounding them, the choice of venue, along with the choice of objects contributed to how cultures were viewed and viewed themselves. The tone of the exhibition was celebratory, yet there was an undercurrent of British superiority over Iran. Although less overt than older Orientalist practices, the International Exhibition of Persian Art continued this trend in representation, with the media promoting the same ideas in newspaper articles. The current state of Iran as lagging behind and the importance of their cooperation with Britain if they are to move forward civilizationally, is coded into both the curator's comments and the national media's responses.

While there was a clear and genuine interest in the gathering and display of Persian art by those responsible for putting the exhibition together, it can also be maintained that politics had a part in the timing and promotion of the exhibit. Pope described the reasoning behind the exhibition in an article for the *Times*, fawning over the great riches of Persian art and insisting that the Shah had acquiesced to sending his treasures as a 'member of the cultivated world society' and described the Shah and 'more modern Persians' as seeing their participation as a 'demonstration of the cultural resources of their country, a proof of its eminence in art and its hope for the future'.[12] This can be read as both genuine appreciation on the part of Pope and a wider process of political pandering. The processes of cultural imperialism evidently play a part in the motives and methods for the display. Sir Arnold Wilson, as exhibition organiser is quoted as saying 'we have a genuine desire to introduce to a larger public the beauties and mysteries of Persian art at its very best… Politics change, but the art of a nation is immortal, and if we make the art of Persian better known in this country we shall be amply rewarded.'[13]

As Iran came more into focus on the world stage, it was no longer as easy to ignore the realities of the nation and maintain the old Orientalist imagery. While there continued to be a fondness for the exotic *Arabian Nights* fantasy, this was largely seen in responses to the exhibit.This exhibition is much more a presentation of Iran's cultural history than an overt attempt to promote long held impressions of the Orient. The exhibition organisers were evidently less confident in their ability to bully Iran and so a celebration of the culture was the technique used to preserve good relations. As will be discussed further on, this less fantastical representation of the Middle East was not upheld in British media and cultural responses to the exhibit.

It may be asserted, then, that rather than subjugating Persian culture, a reason behind the exhibition was to encourage the new Persia, under Reza Shah Pahlavi, to

12 Arthur Upham Pope, 'Persian Art', *Times London* (5 Jan. 1931).

13 'Exhibition of Persian Art, Luncheon to the Guarantors', *The Times* (9 Dec. 1930).

interact and ally with Britain.[14] In the past Britain often used its strength in order to exert control over regions in the Middle East either through army presence or placing British administrators in positions of power.[15] Under Pahlavi, Persia (or Iran) was becoming stronger as a nation. Pahlavi managed to bring together various different ethnic groups in the region under a shared national culture which sprung from the narrative of an ancient Iranian empire.[16] That an exhibition was set up at this time to celebrate Persian culture speaks to this national unity. Reza Shah had begun a process in which Iran was modernising and growing industrially. As mentioned earlier, Britain continued to pull strings in Iran and Reza Shah can be seen to have been under great influence, yet this was a more nuanced agreement than earlier British imperialism.[17] Power and influence in the region needed to be maintained without overt military might. Rather than using force to attempt to control Iran, it may be suggested that Britain used the exhibition to demonstrate respect for the Iranian nation and its history. It was to their advantage to maintain close and friendly ties with the Iranian nation. The Persian Exhibition manoeuvre could be seen as a method of retaining some control over the region through the celebration of their heritage. Iran's indication of its independence from European powers and its efforts at modernisation developed anxieties in European nations attempting to maintain control of the region and its oil fields.[18] While the Ottoman Empire had collapsed in the first years of the twentieth century, Iran was consolidating its power and unity as a nation. Britain hoped to continue to influence Iranian politics and it did so through its connections with Reza Shah yet this relationship was unstable and needed maintenance. As a growing power in the Middle East, Iran needed to be looked after in order to keep peace throughout the region and in British and French mandated lands.

The move away from explicit imperialism in the Middle East was accompanied by an anxiety over the dominant position of Britain in world affairs. The founding of the League of Nations under US president Woodrow Wilson had instigated a change in international politics which focused on preventing wars, international security

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14 Many Middle Eastern regimes were attracted to the Nazi party and Fascism in Germany which led to further anxieties around allegiances. It was important for Britain to keep a good relationship with the strengthening Iranian nation.

15 Britain had been sending troops and politicians to Iran for decades, vying for power against Russia and consolidating control of the oil fields. See: N. Keddi, *Modern Iran: roots and results of revolution* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006),76; S. Brysac, 'A very British coup: how Reza Shah won and lost his throne', *World Policy Journal*, 24:2 (2007).

16 K. Abdi, 'Nationalism, politics, and the development of archaeology in Iran', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 105, 1 (2001), 58.

17 M. G. Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah: the plunder of Iran, 1921-1941* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 1.

18 J. L. Gelvin, *The modern Middle East, a History* (3rd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203.

and negotiation.[19] Amongst the new policies brought about by the League was the mandate system, which although supposedly favouring independence in the Middle East, did little to change the power structures. Though in actuality, Britain and France became colonial powers in the Middle East, the image, internationally, changed from that of outright imperialism to one of assistance. The maintenance of British supremacy in the face of such change was important. Gender and class distinctions were also being destabilised, bringing even more anxiety to the British and colonial establishment.[20] As described later in this research, the English gentleman was an important symbol for Britain and its values. Should he be undermined, the Empire both at home and across the world would be weakened. The Persian Exhibition was to celebrate Iranian culture while also hinting at the overall supremacy of the European powers. The housing of the exhibition in Britain, along with the many donations from Western collections, made evident who was in charge.

It would seem that the exhibition, on the surface, demonstrated Britain's supremacy over Middle Eastern cultures yet, as will be described further on, a reading of the exhibition catalogues along with the public reactions to Persian culture revealed a more anxious side to the British. This side is evident in the importance placed on the idea of the British gentleman as icon of British society and imperialism.

II

A.T. Wilson, chairman of the exhibition, describes the richness and beauty of Persian art in his Introductory Note, asserting that 'such a representation of the genius of the oldest and most stable of Eastern nations was long overdue'.[21] By proclaiming the stability of Persia, Wilson implies the general unrest in the region, the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the Allies during the Great War and the need for Western intervention and administration of Middle Eastern regions under the Mandate system. Wilson himself had served as a colonial administrator to Mesopotamia and served during the Iraqi revolt against the British in 1920.[22] As a colonial officer Wilson had aided in the development of the country's administration and tried to bring stability to the nation. After World War I Wilson was one of those in authority who spoke out in favour of the mandate scheme and against the independence of

19 For a detailed description of the foundation of the League of Nations, see: A. Ginneken, *Historical dictionary of the League of Nations* (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 1-23.

20 The First World War brought massive changes to British society. Class systems had been eroded after WWI, with the working classes gaining a presence in politics with enfranchisement. Likewise, women's involvement in labour during the War, and the suffragist movement had brought important changes to the rights of women and their involvement in the public sphere. See: A. Simmonds, Britain and World War One (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 285-287.

21 A.T. Wilson, 'Introductory note', xi.

22 'Obituary: Lieut.-Colonel Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson, K. C. I. E., C. S. I., C. M. G., D. S. O., M. P.', *The Geographical Journal*, 97:1 (1941), 72.

Iraq. Wilson's loyalties clearly lay with British imperialism and their presence in the region.[23]

His statement also serves to compliment the Persian nation under their new ruler Reza Shah Pahlavi. Earlier in the introduction Wilson praises Pahlavi's influence on the region declaring that 'at no time in the last three centuries has Persia been so strong, so prosperous, so secure and so tranquil as she has become during the last few years under the compelling genius of Rīza Shāh Pahlavi'.[24] This sentence can be read as an allusion to the supposedly indigenously generated years of unrest in the area and the need for British intervention which had only become less essential in the years preceding the exhibition. In reality Britain had lost much control of the region through the establishment of a government in Iran that relied less and less on Western influence and refusal of the government to allow Western powers to assert control. Wilson's interests in the region go beyond a sympathy and understanding. At the time of the exhibition he was serving as resident director in Persia of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company[25].

Wilson goes on to declare:

> Great efforts are being made in Persia to enable the younger generation to get in touch with Western scientific method and thought. There is corresponding obligation on our part to gain some insight into the main springs of Persian character and to appreciate the Persian outlook on affairs. The amusement, contempt, or even repulsion which human observers, wedded in their own ways, are apt to feel for a different mode of life, changes on deeper acquaintance to a measure of sympathetic understanding. It is hoped that the present Exhibition and the handbooks issued in connection with it, may help towards this end.[26]

Within this judgement the classic convictions of colonial and imperial thought are evident. The understanding of the civilising of a nation as evolving alongside Westernization can be seen through the claim that Western scientific thought is being taken up by younger generations. It will be through Westernization that a nation gains recognition by the European and American powers.

Wilson continues in the imperial vein by describing the horror which may befall 'human observers' as they look upon the work produced by 'different modes of life' but promises that through getting to know the work the viewer (in this case the British public) will eventually look compassionately upon the Persian people.[27]

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23 J. Marlowe, *Late Victorian, the life of Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson* (London, Cresset P., 1967).

24 Wilson, 'Introductory note', xi.

25 R. Pearce, *Oxford dictionary of national biography (Oxford, 2004), Online*, 'Wilson, Sir Arnold Talbot (1884-1940)', http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36944, accessed 3 Aug. 2017.

26 Wilson, 'Introductory note', xi.

27 Wilson, 'Introductory note', xi.

Though Wilson commends the Iranian nation he does so while simultaneously stressing the dominance of Western culture over Persian civilization. The modernisation efforts undertaken by Reza Shah were decidedly 'Western' in their focus; a fact which must not have been lost on the organisers.[28] It can be argued that Britain was demonstrating hegemony (to both Iran and the British public) over the Persian nation through the language used in the catalogue. In order to sustain dominance Britain must do so in such a way as to demonstrate respect and understanding of Persian culture. Wilson both compliments the Persian nation while simultaneously patronising them. Wilson's narrative in the catalogue encapsulates the need to frame Iran in such a way so as to ensure that although their art is greatly appreciated, there is no question of which society is the more civilised and advanced.

The events surrounding the Persian Exhibition allow for an understanding of why the art of the Iranian people may have been chosen at this time and as the first nation outside of Europe to be represented at these Burlington House exhibitions. It can be speculated that at least part of the reasoning behind the display may have come from the fact that Iran had declared itself a modern nation and was moving forward without as much outside help as it had needed in previous years. While Britain continued to hold much sway over Iran, this was a less obvious type of power which seemed more precarious as Iran grew in strength.

Britain was celebrating Iran while also pointing to its own part in the success. Iran was seen to be Westernising and, should other Middle Eastern nations move forward under the mandate system they may also be celebrated. Edward Said explains the success of Orientalism as stemming from this type of cultural hegemony. Said writes, 'In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand'. [29]

The dominant nation of Britain could reasonably be seen to be aiming to gain consent for their involvement in the Middle East through the mandate system by praising and supporting the Iranian nation. Britain is showing itself as the benevolent father figure, nurturing and encouraging the nations of the world towards civility. On a wider scale it made sense for Britain to be supportive of Iran if it was to maintain influence, not only in Iran, but in the Middle East more generally. The 1930s was a less stable time for imperialism and this type of cultural event can be seen as shrewd political manoeuvring. Whether or not this may have been wholly intentional, the Persian Exhibition clearly allowed for a political current to run through it with various countries loaning objects for display. In many cases these objects had been taken from the Persian region and were part of collections, both private and public,

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28 For a detailed description of the reforms introduced by Reza Shah see: A. Amanat, *Iran, a modern history* (London: Yale University Press, 2017), 446-501.

29 E. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003), 7.

in the West. The objects chosen for the exhibit also told a particular story about the people of the region, a narrative which had been popular for centuries and which points to the supremacy of the West over the East.

III

The International Exhibition of Persian Art was a large-scale event which drew thousands of visitors. The organisers aimed to display the many wonders of Persian art to British audiences for the first time at this scale. However, if the intention of Pope and his contemporaries was to give the British public a realistic sense of Persian culture, the media certainly were not motivated by the same drive to depict the genuine Orient. The many articles written on the subject of the Persian Exhibition in Britain and the United States are littered with references to *Arabian Nights* and classic Orientalist imagery.

One of the major impacts of the exhibition on British society was, the newspapers described, to be on fashion, especially women's fashion. Of course, the idea of dressing in Oriental costumes for fun was one which had been popular with both Western men and women for centuries, especially visible in the Oriental style portraits fashionable in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[30] Here however, it was expected for everyday wear and seemingly more suitable for women's fashion. An article in the *New York Times* reported from London that 'the biggest boom (…) is expected to be in women's fashions, not only here, but in Paris and New York'.[31] Marni Reva Kesler suggests that 'like the universal exhibitions, the department store could be constituted as a space of difference and accessible exoticism for the (…) consumer, and that fantasy is achieved mainly through the borrowing of fabrics'.[32]

The influence of the Middle East on fashion had been evident during the late nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth century, especially in Britain and the United States, influencing, among other things, architectural, graphic and clothing designs. Orientalist themes during this interwar period were rare both in casual and occasional wear so that when the International Exhibition of Persian Art commenced there was an excitement in the press about the possible effects on fashion. The newspapers reporting on the Persian Exhibition evidently expected a sort of 'Persomania' to spread throughout Western fashion and culture. The *Guardian* described the opening of the exhibition as having more women visitors, writing that

30 G. Lemaires, *The Orient in Western art* (Cologne: Koneman, 2001), 220.

31 'Persian Exhibition Attracts London: Jewelry Design, Women's Dress and Even Eyebrows Likely to be Influenced', *New York Times (*11 Jan. 1931), 56. *ProQuest*, https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/persian-exhibition-attracts-london/docview/99144764/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 26 Apr. 2021.

32 M. Kessler, *Sheer presence: the veil in Manet's Paris* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 127.

LONDON GOES PERSIAN—BUT NOT TOO FAR

Exotic Color and Pattern, Though Astonishing The Briton, Has Not Yet Submerged Him

Left—Al Rushid Hour in the West End.

From London Punch.

Right—Inaugural Dinner of the Worshipful Company of Hubble-Bubble-Makers.

From London Punch.

By CLAIR PRICE

LONDON.

RUMORS that the bulbul had been heard in Kensington Gardens prompted a reporter to reach for his hat a few days ago. Rumor also said that the hubble-bubble was hubble-bubbling in Hampstead; that the plaintive call of the yashmak was sounding through the Strand; that the Hajji Babas of Hammersmith were sipping sherbet in the bazaars along the Broadway; in fact, that all of London, having streamed through the blue gate of Isfahan at Burlington House, was emerging into Piccadilly with a tall cap of Persian lamb cocked on the back of its head and the tassel of a string of amber beads dangling from a trousers pocket. To such lengths—so the reports had it—London had gone Persian during the six weeks that the exhibition of Persian art has been open at Burlington House.

And so to Kensington Gardens in search of the bulbul, after a momentary pause which Abu Bekr of Shiraz, had he been lurking about, would have immortalized in a many-colored miniature, and connoisseurs, thronging about it at some future exhibition of Persian art, would have found catalogued as "Reporter Hailing Taxi." But Abu Bekr would have made it very different from the sad reporter who hailed a melancholy taxi to take him through the fog to Kensington Gardens the other day. Persian eyes would have clothed in poppy colors all the actors in this trifling pause at the curb. The reporter would have become not a mere reporter but an excellency luminous in a short black coat, green knee-breeches, orange stockings and crimson slippers, carrying a brown mantle and wearing a conical hat with eyes of peacock's tail in it. The taxi driver would have become not a mere cockney crasher of gears, but a radiant figure of rose, ivory and blue, the turbaned shah of all the taxi drivers. And the taxicab would have been transfigured into a vision of arabesque gazelles pursuing each other round and round in a never-ending frieze.

From this it might perhaps be assumed that the Persian touch is a mere fancy-dress touch, but such an assumption would be grossly unjust. The fact is that Persian art is unlike anything that London has ever seen before. The differences are many, but the most memorable is the color. What a Persian can do with color is a complete revelation. Until now, in fact, London has known but little about the use of color. What it has now discovered at Burlington House is that you can take two shades of rose, three shades of orange, four shades of green and five shades of blue, and use them all side by side in one intricate pattern and not go whizzing off into space as a result.

* * *

THIS is a new idea. It is an attractive idea. It is so obviously attractive that it may be assumed at once that many individual Londoners are for it. Many Londoners are always for a brighter London—or, for that matter, a brighter anything. But the thing has its difficulties. Amid the somber realities of London, color suggests levity; and, where life is real and life is earnest, levity is not only in rather questionable taste but may even be downright indecent.

It is possible to think of the present Persian contagion as ultimately causing the whole of London to break out into a fine rash of cats and carpets. It is possible to imagine a London suffused with the odors of nard and lotus and jasmine, and generally with that atmosphere of wine and roses in which no man of wit need starve. It is possible to imagine Britannia exchanging her trident for a quince; to imagine Nelson growing a square Assyrian beard on his column in Trafalgar Square and all the lions at the foot of his column growing formal Assyrian wings; to imagine buses bound from the Bank to Samarkand, with their drivers growing in blunt cockney to the camel-men along the golden road, "Look to thyself, oh, son of liver and lentils!"

It is possible that these exotic Eastern oaths would eventually fill a long-felt want in London, for there are many Londoners, particularly among those who invested in French war bonds, who have felt for some time that Western oaths have become inadequate and effete. Indeed, it is even possible, provided the Persian cult continues to extend its suzerainty, that London in time will learn how to make a really good cup of coffee; and in that case it is possible that peals of mocking laughter will burst forth when the muezzin summons the faithful to tea.

These things may perhaps place a certain strain on the imagination, but they do not necessarily strain it to the breaking point. It might, however, impose a really dangerous strain on the most elastic imagination to saddle it with the further possibility of a London addicted to the poppy and pomegranate colors of the Persians.

Certainly, if London has really gone Persian, or even semi-Persian, it can only be because the impact of the Persian exhibition has been a shattering one. And so, in fact, it seems to have been. Of that there can be no doubt at all; no probable, possible shadow of doubt; no possible doubt whatever. Nothing like this present furor over Persian carpets, Persian plate and Persian painting has been seen since Chinese art was discovered in the 1700s or the Elgin marbles were first unveiled in the early 1800s.

Not only has the exhibition itself been crowded daily, but also The London Times has issued a special Persian supplement, the publishers have covered the bookstalls with Persian handbooks, and lecturers on Persian subjects have radiated out into the suburbs and beyond into the towns and villages of the country. The result is that people who have found the exhibition too marvelous for words now know what the right words are.

* * *

FURTHERMORE, the lecturers have not confined themselves to Mogul and Arab influences and Manichean motifs and the Safavid manner. They have gone on to the subject of Persia in general, to Cyrus and Darius and Xerxes, to Hafis and Omar Khayyam; and hard-headed business men, listening to that line in Omar about taking the cash and letting the credit go, have concluded that there is a lot more in this Persian business than they had supposed.

As for the wireless, it has been virtually abandoned to the lion and the lizard, who keep the courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep. You try perhaps to escape them by twiddling the thingummy in search of the daily Irish lesson from Dublin or the fish market prices from Copenhagen or the Alpine weather report from Vienna, but it appears to be a fact that as soon as the lion and the lizard of Persia become really housed they chase the fish, the Alps and the Irish clean off the ether. Once they are roused, this business of Persian art begins to warm up in earnest, and after that you could toast a Welsh rabbit on your loud-speaker.

But to return and resume * * *

And so to Kensington Gardens in search of the bulbul. There did not seem to be any bulbuls or any other nightingales, either Persian or native, in Kensington Gardens that morning; but there was a man there who knew a man who had a brother who worked for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company—and that was even better. Such a man in London today is practically the owner and proprietor of Persia, occupying for the time being practically the peacock throne itself. The following conversation ensued:

"Have you been to the Persian exhibition?"

"Oh, yes. I know a man who works in Persia."

"Has it struck you that the exhibition has had much effect on London generally?"

"Oh, lots of effect. Plenty of it. He writes that the oil business is booming in Persia."

"In what way especially has it had an effect? For example, has it struck you that the manners and customs of London have been profoundly modified by this contact with Persian life and thought?"

"Oh, yes; certainly. All the time. He writes that his football team expects to win the cup in the Masjidi-Sulaiman league this year."

(Continued on Page 19)

Figure 1.3: C. Price, London Goes Persian-But Not Too Far: Exotic Color and Pattern, Though Astonishing the Briton, Has Not Yet Submerged Him, *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (22 Feb. 1931), 68. ISSN 03624331.

'they formed the majority of the crowd of several hundreds gathered before ten o'clock to await the opening of the doors, and they far outnumbered the men'.[33]

The Persian penchant for colour and pattern in their clothing and creative products was acceptable for women, but British gentlemen, it seems, were too respectable and too masculine, to be found dressing in the clothes traditionally worn in Persia. This idea coincides with the notion of a feminine Orient. Women became the symbol for the Orient and the social and cultural traits found there. Femininity, sensuality and violence created a highly sexualised image of the East in British minds. Anna Secor, in her essay on Lady Mary Montegu's letters, states that 'the lust and sensuality of the East were further linked to cruelty, violence and despotism, and this edifice became a metaphor for the Orient as a whole'.[34] Zachary Lockman writes 'the Orient and Orientals were often not only eroticized but also depicted as effeminate, weak and passive, in contrast to a West portrayed as active, powerful and male'.[35] By the time of the Persian Exhibition the idea of a feminine, sexualised orient had been present in the British psyche for hundreds of years. One argues that the pattern of dividing and cataloguing for the purpose of control, (noted to be present in Western society since the Enlightenment) can be observed in the manner in which the Orient is portrayed. The dividing practices of Western powers are not confined to the idea of West and East, but to all areas of society and culture. Women and men become opposites, the healthy and ill, the sane and insane. Society, as Michel Foucault argues, is divided up so as to better control it and encourage participation within it.[36]

The feminising of the Orient, both through museum representation and fashion during the exhibition partly stems from the traditional gender and class positions of the period. The Middle East; depicted as the feminine, needs protection and the authority of the male, in this case Britain. As the ultimate gentleman, Britain will guide and protect those regions which are perceived to be in need of their assistance. This idea fits nicely into the imperial ideas of the time and the need for Britain to maintain its hold on the Middle East region. The flirting and foreplay concealed the true intent of the British Empire; their licentious imperialist designs and vigorous political manoeuvring in the region. Anne McClintock writes that 'sexuality as a trope for other power relations was certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power'.[37] For British women to dress in styles reminiscent of Oriental garb was neither new or of

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33 'THE PERSIAN ART EXHIBITION', *The Manchester Guardian (*8 Jan. 1931), 5, *ProQuest*, https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/persian-art-exhibition/docview/478201719/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 26 Apr. 2021.

34 Anna Secor, 'Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters: to Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters &C.', *Ecumene, 6.4* (1999), 383.

35 Z. Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

36 See: Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Enquiry*,8, 4 (1982), 777-795.

37 A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14.

great concern, but the media sentiment was rather different when it came to British gentlemen. As symbols of imperial rule they were expected to remain indifferent and superior to foreign influences. Similarly, the concern with 'gentlemen' indicates the association between this class and the image of Britain, their moral superiority and civility. This is illustrated in the examples of newspaper responses to the Persian Exhibition analysed below.

Reporter Clair Price wrote for the *New York Times* during the 1931 exhibition, that London had gone Persian, 'but not too far'.[38] In this satirical piece (Fig. 1.3) it is suggested that the people of London had taken to living in a manner imitating those from the Middle East. The article describes the influence the International Exhibition of Persian Art had on London; pointing to the various industries which had supposedly been influenced by Persian culture and design. In an imagined dialogue with a fictional character, the author brings attention to the 'world of dress', asking 'have you been able to recognise Persian influences in the new season's fashions for women? And in men's fashions?'[39] The answer given by the author is yes, Persian style can be seen throughout various different fashions. Price goes on, however, to describe a fictional visit to Saville Row, the famous gentleman's clothing street in London. Here, again the question is asked, 'what effect has the Persian Exhibition had on men's fashions?'.[40] The answer is that although Persian styles may have influenced some of the other industries and popular fashions at the time, the respectable Saville Row establishments had not succumbed to such flights of fancy. Price ends the article by stating that 'the Persianization of London, if any such thing exists, has only to encounter the lifted eyebrows of Saville Row in order to shrink and vanish as completely as if it had never existed'.[41] This commentary on the influence of Persian styles or lack thereof on London fashion is telling in its treatment of the fad. It is acceptable for interior design, craft and even women's fashions to be seduced by the Persian arts but the real gentlemen of London and their tailors will not be found to be concerned with such passing trends. The article could be seen to convey the idea that these men are symbols of the Great British Empire and their clothing will not be dictated by those other cultures which, in the past were, or continue to be, controlled or colonised by the British crown. The three-piece suit was the ideal in men's fashion; the drape suit style becoming popular during this period, along with the fedora hat, and 'among the well-to-do, the English tailor retained his reputation as the best in

38 C. Price, 'London Goes Persian-But Not Too Far: Exotic Color and Pattern, Though Astonishing the Briton, has not yet Submerged Him', *New York Times* (22 Feb. 1931), 68. *ProQuest*, https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/london-goes-persian-not-too-far/docview/99484604/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 20 Apr. 2021.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

the world'.[42] The position of the British gentleman as a pinnacle of morality has long been a feature of British self-perception. To be inspired by the Persian 'other' could be seen as a dangerous step away from British cultural identity.

The idea of the 'British gentleman' had long been associated with colonial administration and it was precisely this supposed gentlemanliness which made men of certain backgrounds suitable for such a task. Maria Misra points out that 'owing to remarkably circumscribed social origins, recruitment networks, and training' the colonial officers were largely conservative in their views and not overly interested in a progressive imperialist project.[43] Misra notes that 'many officials had a self-consciously 'gentlemanly' identity' stemming from both their background and education.[44] As a result of their gentlemanly self-image, many administrators cast themselves in a paternal role over the people they were sent abroad to govern. Like their expected protection of women, British gentlemen should civilise and govern over the less advanced nations, always aware of their superiority. One argues that this ideal of gentlemen ruling over colonised peoples without becoming too involved or influenced by the culture was the urging behind Price's 'London Goes Persian' article. Gentlemen were not to be swayed by other cultures; they remained the backbone of British society and their empire abroad. To be influenced by the Persian Exhibition, whether it was through fashion or other means, was to loosen the grip on the British Empire overseas and this was not to be tolerated.

News articles used the phrase 'going Persian' to describe this new partiality towards Persian styles and patterns. This was not to be avoided by designers, the *Guardian* noted, 'dress designers in America and Europe are coming with the idea that fashion is "going Persian"'.[45] The connotations surrounding such a phrase say a lot about the way in which the media, and by extension the public thought of the Persian people and culture.

To 'go native' is a phrase used in a derogatory or humorous manner to describe someone who has left the Western way of life and gone to live with and like the natives of a particular, often less industrially developed region.[46] The phrase has links to colonial Britain and those who have 'gone native' are often depicted

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42 P. Tortora, S. Marcketti, *Survey of historic costume*, (6th edn, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2015), 490.

43 M. Misra, 'Colonial Officers and Gentlemen: The British Empire and the Globalization of 'Tradition'' in *Journal of Global History* (2008), 150.

44 Misra, 'Colonial Officers and Gentlemen', 150.

45 'Our London Correspondence: Persia in Piccadilly', *The Manchester Guardian* (06 Jan. 1931), 8, *ProQuest*, https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/our-london-correspondence/docview/478202571/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 20 Apr. 2021.

46 See: *Oxford Dictionaries*, 'Go Native', https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/go_native, accessed 3 Sept. 2017.

as having lost their senses to some degree.[47] Again, the idea of the sensible Briton, removed from, and superior to others both within their own society and the societies they come in contact with can be seen in these articles. Although the contents of the Persian Exhibition may be admired, they are to be admired from a distance, under the masculine control of Britain, and with a continuing sense of the superiority of the British people and the gentleman class.

The women of Britain could be influenced in their fashions by Persian culture, they were perhaps thought of as equally silly and frivolous as the Persians, their interests not greatly changing British society. Women were traditionally, if implicitly, linked with 'natives' or 'savages' as foreign 'others' to the men of society. Similar to the 'savages', women were in need of educating and civilising. Given that women had not been seen as having a large presence in the public sphere (although this was changing with feminist and suffragette movements) their actions were considered within the domestic sphere and as such, of less importance publicly. The case for gentlemen, however, was different. British gentlemen needed to hold up all of society and the empire. Here there was no room for dress up. The title of the article by Clair Price reads 'London goes Persian – But not too far'.[48] The idea that something could go 'too far' hints at a need for restraint and examples the pillars of British society, the gentlemen who buy their suits, traditionally, on Saville Row. If these men were to 'go Persian', like the rest of London, Price hints that there may be some unforeseen trouble; Great Britain might lose its grip, the Persians may take control.

The subtitle of Price's article reads 'Exotic Color and Pattern, Though Astonishing the Briton, Has Not Yet Submerged Him'.[49] This sentence suggests an obscured struggle, one fought between Persia and the British. The author, although clearly concerned for the British public, evidently feels that Persian culture has not won out and taken over. The sentence speaks of the flash and fancy of the Persian styles but warns that if the British are not careful there is a possibility of being 'submerged' by it all. The guardians of London, we find out later in the article, are the British gentlemen who are impervious to the influence of the 'astonishing' displays seen at the Burlington House.[50]

It can be maintained that the fear expressed by the media when describing a takeover by Persians may have in some part been enhanced by the gender politics over the previous years in Britain. Suffragettes had successfully petitioned for the right for women to vote, giving more power than ever before to this group in

47 For a description of 'going native', see: P. Brantlinger, *Taming cannibals: race and the Victorians* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011).

48 C. Price, 'London Goes Persian'.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

society.[51] The supposed link between women and the Orient as groups within society may have encouraged a fear that if women were gaining power in the public sphere, it would be no time before colonised nations would do the same. The fear of a 'gender take-over' could be extended to include the perceived feminine Orient. In noting that 'He' has not been submerged, the article places the British male on an island amidst the ocean of 'others'. Both women and Middle Eastern society are seen as outsiders who must be kept at a distance should societal norms be maintained. Politics both gender and racial, affected ethics in Britain and the understanding of how different members of society were to be treated. During the 1930s this was changing rapidly as, internationally, more and more colonised nations moved towards independence, and domestically, there was a break with Victorian and Edwardian moral and cultural norms.

In contrast to the gentlemen's supposed imperviousness to Persian fashions, women in Britain and further afield were expected to adopt Persian trends as they were produced by designers influenced by the exhibition. Various newspapers reported on the upcoming trends in women's fashions influenced by Persian designs. The *Belfast Newsletter* pointed out that 'many of the exquisite blues which made the recent Persian exhibition at the Royal Academy such a joy influenced also the choice of women's dance frocks this winter'.[52] The article goes on to describe its popularity among debutants, even going so far as to say that it is expected that the greens and blues found in Persian art will be used to decorate the royal throne rooms and drawing-rooms of the royal palaces. The *Dundee Courier* also mentions the Royal family, reporting that the Queen remarked that "I am sure that we shall see some Persian effects soon"'.[53]

Writing from London, Helen McCloy of the *New York Times* cynically addresses the Persia craze, teasing 'every one knows that Persian art is more "modern" than tomorrow'.[54] McCloy goes on to question the effects the exhibition might have on the English artist and designer.

The *Derby Daily Telegraph*, writing on that seasons fashions, suggests that 'perhaps the colour experts remembered the influence that the Persian Art Exhibition at Burlington House is likely to exercise on fashion'.[55] The overall impression in the media was that the Persia exhibition would have been an influence on fashion and design in the months following the exhibition opening.

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51 Women over 30 won the right to vote in 1918, with all women over 21 winning the right in 1928. See: https://www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/womens-suffrage-timeline, accessed 4 Nov. 2020.

52 *Belfast Newsletter* (10 Mar. 1931).

53 *Dundee Courier (*20 Feb. 1931).

54 C. Price, 'London goes Persian'.

55 *Derby Daily Telegraph* (28 Jan. 1931).

Figure 1.4: 'The Persian Cult: Inaugural Dinner Of The Worshipful Company Of Hubble-Bubble Makers', Printed in *New York Times from Punch London* (22 Feb. 1931).

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* remarked, as late as 1934 that 'Persian influence is noted in styles at Paris exhibitions'.[56] The paper highlighted the frocks and costumes influenced by Persian shahs or the region of Turkestan which are in vogue in Paris. It is notable here that the journalist describes dresses as being designed to emulate the clothing of the Persian shahs, the male rulers of Iran. Women's fashions again were noted as being influenced by Persian styles, with Persian men's fashion treated as costume for women. This trend was a continuation of the tendency to see the Orient and its people as effeminate in essence.

An important measure on the impact of the exhibition (perceived or real) is the cartoons produced within the satirical *Punch* magazine. The artists at *Punch* produced images which might suggest that both men and women were as taken by the Persia craze, drawing Englishmen wearing turbans and women in belly dance attire.[57] The cartoons are clearly mocking the trend yet there may be present an underlying fear that the Persian culture will take over. The conservative magazine had long been affiliated with the British establishment since its foundation in 1841.[58] The cartoons produced on the subject of the Persian Exhibition confirm a fear that British society and gentlemen may be brought down by the power and popularity of the Exhibition of Persian Art along with the new nation behind it. There is a visible anxiety within the images as English gentlemen are illustrated as 'going Persian'. Interaction with the Persian Exhibition, even in a manner detached from the actual event, is associated with collusion with Oriental culture. As the Orient is linked with the feminine, such interaction emasculates the British gentleman, resulting in a loss of power whether actual or symbolic.

Women also feature in these satirical cartoons. However, there seems less focus on their indiscretions involving Persian culture and fashion. The women entertaining men in 'The Persian Cult: Inaugural Dinner of the Worshipful Company of Hubble-Bubble-Makers' (Fig. 1.4) are depicted as dancing in the centre of seated men.[59] These women may be Persian; there is no clear depiction of their being English. The men, however, are certainly English gentlemen engaging in activities associated with Oriental culture. The title of the cartoon adds ridicule to the image, accusing those involved of the exhibition of being part of a 'cult'. Their obsession with Persian art and culture is something to mock. Both the image and the title

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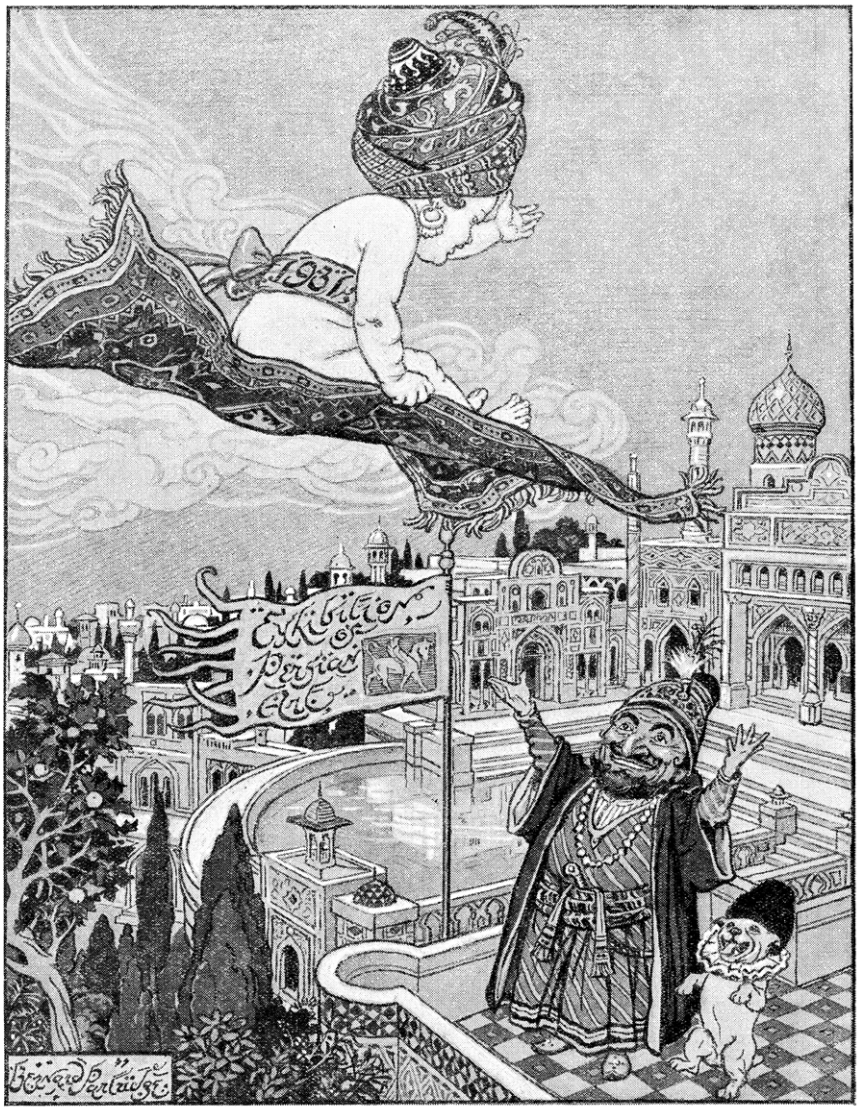
56 'Persian Influence is Noted in Styles at Paris Exhibitions', *Chicago Daily Tribune (*01 Aug. 1934), 23, *ProQuest*, https://login.proxy.lib.ul.ie/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ul.ie/historical-newspapers/persian-influence-is-noted-styles-at-paris/docview/181608616/se-2?accountid=14564, accessed 20 Apr. 2021.

57 'The Persian Cult: Inaugural Dinner Of The Worshipful Company Of Hubble-Bubble Makers', Printed in: *New York Times from Punch London* (22 Feb. 1931), accessed 25 Apr. 2021.

58 *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 'Punch' https://www.britannica.com/topic/Punch-British-periodical, accessed *3 Aug. 2017*.

59 'The Persian Cult', *New York Times.*



MAGIC ENTRY OF THE NEW YEAR.

MR. PUNCH (*improving on his* HORACE). "'PERSICOS LAUDO, PUER, APPARATUS;' IN OTHER WORDS, I WELCOME YOUR PERSIAN SHOW, MY BOY, WITH THE GREATEST ENTHUSIASM."

[Mr. Punch's first issue of the New Year coincides with the opening of the Exhibition of Persian Art at Burlington House.]

Figure 1.5: 'Magic Entry of the New Year. Mr. Punch (improving on his Horace). "'Persicos laudo puer apparatus;'" in other words, I welcome your Persian show, my boy, with the greatest enthusiasm.'", *Punch* (7 Jan. 1931).

point to these men partaking in Persian culture rather than viewing it from an outside perspective. The term 'hubble-bubble' is used to describe the Persian water pipes used for smoking tobacco but also hints to the commotion and turmoil which has been created through the exhibition and those gentlemen involving themselves in Oriental culture.[60]

Another image (Fig. 1.5) from 1931 shows a man flying in on a magic carpet with Mr. Punch, the magazines mascot waving him down, calling out 'I welcome your Persian show, my boy, with the greatest of enthusiasm'.[61] Mr.Punch is dressed in Persian costume with his dog by his side dressed in a similar fashion. The use of Mr. Punch here, as the Persianised Englishman, points to the silliness of the 'Persomania' in London, and Punch magazines dismissal of it. Mr. Punch originated from the Punch and Judy character of popular puppet shows at fairs and parties.[62] As the person ushering in the Persian man on the carpet, he is the epitome of boorishness and stupidity. Typically portrayed in puppet shows as wearing a jester's cap and violently beating his wife, Mr. Punch is the very opposite of the gentlemen of London. In dressing Mr. Punch in Persian attire and having him usher in Persians to Britain, Punch magazine is both making a mockery of the Persian fad and warning readers not to become like the cartoon character.

The distinction between what is expected of men and women in response to the Persian exhibit can be seen as representative of the kind of relationship between what is on exhibit and the museum itself. Through the fetishisation of exhibitions, there was a production of a gendered relationship between the exhibiting body – in this case the British Empire – and the culture on exhibit. This in turn allows for the acceptance and maintenance of patriarchal ideas within the dominant society, giving sanction to imperial objectives. Moral norms too, gave legitimacy to imperialist or patriarchal actions, along with supporting collecting and display in museums in Britain. The view that British society must be correctly educated morally in response to their interaction with 'other' cultures on display is evident here as the exhibition is praised but only so long as there is a detached interest on the part of British audiences. Any deeper engagement may be dangerous to British identity, especially in the case of the upper-class male. These ideas, in the case of the Burlington exhibit as with most other exhibitions, were largely expressed through the media at the time. While women were not of the greatest concern, the idea that Middle Eastern culture could creep into British life through the

60 'Hubble Bubble', *Collins Ductionary,* https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/hubble-bubble, accessed 18 Jun. 2019.

61 'Magic Entry of the New Year. Mr. Punch (improving on his Horace). '"Persicos laudo puer apparatus;"' in other words, I welcome your Persian show, my boy, with the greatest enthusiasm."', *Punch* (7 Jan. 1931).

62 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Punch' https://www.britannica.com/topic/Punch-puppet-character, accessed 3 Aug. 2017.

engagement of British men in fads such as Persian fashions was of real concern. The moral high ground had to be maintained and this was the important duty of the British gentleman.

Conclusion

In many ways, morality is linked to fear. Fear of the unknown, of the 'other' and of change. The Persian Art Exhibition reveals the specific fears that arose from the display of Iranian art during the early twentieth century. This paper demonstrates how the exhibition facilitated the development British public's own self-image and understanding of themselves as a nation. While exhibitions in museums, galleries and fairs were only one of many tools used to disseminate national and imperialist ideas, their ability to reach large numbers of the public, along with the media interest surrounding them, made these displays useful in informing public opinion and promoting political and ideological positions.

Private Museums in Twenty-First Century Europe

Laurie Kalb Cosmo

Introduction

Asked to leave our cell phones and cameras behind as we descended a dark staircase into a pitch-black entryway, where the only sound was avant-garde music by John Cage, my students and I were intrigued. On excursion from Rome, we travelled to Berlin to see how 1930s-era sites were either remembered historically or reconfigured. The Feuerle Collection of ancient Chinese and Southeast Asian and contemporary art, opened to the public in 2016, was housed in a former Nazi-era telecommunications bunker for the German National Railway system, located in the Kreuzberg section of Berlin. The most recent of nearly 2000 bunkers the German government began to sell privately in 2007, this was the second in Berlin that had been repurposed as an art museum.[1] Today, the Feuerle Collection offers a highly refined, eerily seductive, and spectacularly lit presentation of Khmer divinity statues and Han and Ming Dynasty stone and lacquered-wood furniture in the restored bunker, sometimes in juxtaposition with erotic photographs by Nobuyoshi Araki or other contemporary works by internationally recognized artists, among them Anish Kapoor, Adam Fuss, and Cristina Iglesias. The buildup to this new museum was intense. Pre-booked entry tickets were required and when we visited in 2019, they were still difficult to come by.

Class visits to private foundations and museums in Europe, such as The Feuerle Collection, had become increasingly frequent over twelve years that I taught Museum History and Theory at Temple University Rome. Numerous, powerful, and often

1 The first was Sammlung Boros (2008), more about which will be discussed later in this essay.

idiosyncratic in their exhibiting practices, architecture, and even visitation rules, new private museums were exerting a growing influence on the cultural landscape. Of more than 300 private museums founded globally since 2000, seventy percent are in Europe,[2] with Germany and then Italy having the largest number.[3] Students of museum history needed to understand how these new institutions fit within the twenty-first-century museum context.

At first, as an American, I found private museums in Europe surprising. In the United States, nineteenth- and twentieth-century collectors and the extraordinary buildings they created provided a rich legacy for some of the country's most important public museums. But in Europe, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century national museums that emerged from the Enlightenment spawned a vast network of state-supported, often encyclopedic public institutions that from the beginning were government creations.[4] In Europe, private philanthropy of public institutions is more limited than in the United States, and private museums associated more with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocratic palaces.

Against such a background, many questions arise regarding the proliferation of private museums in twenty-first century Europe. From what tradition do they emanate? How do they differ from state institutions? Why, like the Feuerle Collection, are they so popular? What are the goals of private museums? Who are their audiences? What role does architecture play? What is exhibited and how? How is the term museum employed in the context of a private setting? Do private museum founders collaborate with public institutions? Do their museums perform a civic role? What is the future of private museums? Such questions and others inform this article. At this point, my study is introductory, based on visits I made over the past five years, mostly with students, to private exhibition spaces in Rome, Milan, Venice, Berlin, and Stockholm. I offer brief case studies as examples to explore how private museums function and may fit into a larger continuum of European and North American museum history.

Although some private collectors refer to their exhibition spaces as "museums," many prefer to use the terms "Collection" or "Foundation." This is because their

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2 G. Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum, Public Good vs. Private Gain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 10-11. The data from Walker comes from the Hong-Kong based *Larry's List* (2016), a leading art market knowledge company providing data, research and access to contemporary art collectors and a service provider for collectors and private museums.

3 Larry's List, '*Private Art Museums Report*' (Hong Kong, 2016), 11, 18. South Korea and the United States led as countries with the largest number of private museums overall, with Germany and Italy following. Seoul, Beijing and Berlin were the top three cities of private art museums globally.

4 In Europe, it was at the juncture of princely and public that the art museum emerged, however in most parts of Europe the museum building era did not materialize until the beginning of the revolutionary period of the 19th century (Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 14).

spaces do not necessarily provide the full range of museum services.[5] In the interests of clarity and efficiency, I call them private museums, with a caveat that private exhibition spaces have their own parameters and exist separate from but alongside public museums.

Literature

Amidst the rising popularity of private museums, little targeted research has yet been done. However, the most respected visual arts and architecture journals and magazines, such as *The Art Newspaper*, *Apollo,* and *Architectural Review*, feature articles on the topic, especially as new private museums open.[6] One significant scholarly contribution is Australian art historian Georgina Walker's recent book *The Private Collector's Museum. Public Good vs. Private Gain* (2019). Recognizing a global emergence of private museums in the twenty-first century, Walker underscores a difference between Western and Asian collecting traditions, suggesting that those in the West are based largely on conventional models of philanthropy while those in the East are more entrepreneurial and worthy of separate study.[7] In her book, Walker focuses on private museums that follow Western collecting traditions -- in Germany, Switzerland, the United States, England and Australia. Based on a decade-long study, she attributes the boom in private museum building to numerous factors, including changes in wealth distribution around the globe, a competitive and dynamic nature of art collecting and philanthropy, and collectors' interests in asserting cultural prestige during their lifetimes.[8] As new private museums and galleries are conceived, Walker explains how they are often done so through the vehicle of a philanthropic trust or foundation, in which tax breaks are traded for ceding formal legal ownership, but not necessarily control.[9] Within this philanthropic context, Walker provides case studies and addresses the choices collectors make. They either donate their collections to public museums, which often means losing control though gaining prestige, or create private spaces of their own, where they can realize their individual cultural ambitions more quickly and keep their collections on permanent display. Walker also examines private museum building strategies, such as new commissions for architects and designers to foster

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5 Such services might include restaurants, bookshops, auditoriums, or conservation labs. See: Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 1.

6 A. Ellis, "Privately Funded Museums," *The Art Newspaper*, February 2008, 24, https://aeaconsulting.com/insights/the_problem_with_privately_funded_museums,_accessed 1 Nov. 2020; S. Moore, "Why Désiré Feuerle Displays His Art in a Berlin Bunker," *Apollo Magazine,* 22 February 2017, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/feuerle-collection-berlin/; T. Abrahams, "Fondazione Prada in Milan," *The Architectural Review*, 21 Sept 2015, https://www.architectural-review.com/today/fondazione-prada-in-milan-by-oma.

7 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum,* 14-15.

8 Ibid,, 235-236.

9 Ibid., 235.

unique and alternative engagements with art. She suggests that the twenty-first century private museum model allows influential wealthy collectors to present themselves in a manner seen as cutting edge, culturally accomplished, and public-spirited, though she ultimately questions the long-term viability and contribution that these private museums can make.[10]

European sociologists of art have also taken up the subject of private art museums. French critic and professor Alain Quemin has recently written about how in the past twenty years, the art market has strengthened its role in the creation of artistic value to the point that it can sometimes control and influence choices made by public institutions. He focuses on the leading French contemporary art collectors Bernard Arnault, CEO of the luxury group LVMH, and François Pinault, CEO of the Kering group and owner of the auction house Christie's, and the agency and power of their private museums in Paris and Venice.[11] Dutch sociologist Olav Velthuis has begun a research project with graduate students at the University of Amsterdam that he calls 'The Return of the Medici? The Global Rise of Private Museums for Contemporary Art', whereby he examines how private museums position themselves in local and global cultural fields and questions whether they contribute to a rise in cultural inequality or democratize and support art, especially when government support is absent or declining.[12] Sociological questions surrounding diversity and inclusion in private museums are especially pressing as state museums concurrently undergo their own dramatic paradigm shifts from collections-based, object-displaying, elite institutions to a wide range of visitor-centered museums, intended to be 'more socially responsive…[and] in service to the public'.[13] When private museums profess that they are created with the public in mind, what does this actually mean? To which public are they referring? British art and architectural historian Nicky Ryan, in her recently-published book *The Price of Patronage: Commerce, Culture and Exchange*,[14] about relationships between museums, patronage and the market, also contributes significantly to this topic.

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10 Ibid., 229-230.

11 A. Quemin, 'The Market and Museums: The Increasing Power of Collectors and Private Galleries in the Contemporary Art World', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 19/3 (2020), 211-224.

12 O. Velthius, "Return of the Medici: The Global Rise of Private Museums for Contemporary Art.", presented at conference More than Money, An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Art in Organizations, *University of Amsterdam Online*, https://corporatecollecting2020.wordpress.com/, accessed 14 Nov. 2020.

13 G. Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (California: Altamira, 2004), 1.

14 N. Ryan, *The Price of Patronage: Commerce, Culture and Exchange*. (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2021).

Precursors: The United States Gilded Age and Its Legacy

The relationship between private collecting and museum formation is not new. It is part of a system of cultural benefaction that has a long trajectory in the United States, going back to the nineteenth century when industrial and banking titans gifted their private collections and thereby contributed to the founding of leading city, state and national cultural institutions. Like their nineteenth- and twentieth-century precursors, including the collections of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, Alfred C. Barnes, and Peggy Guggenheim, twenty-first century collections reflect the acquisitive interests of a single wealthy individual or couple and the small coterie of advisers they surround themselves with. In the past and present, these collections represent a passionate and single-minded interest – the antithesis of the universalist impulses of the encyclopaedic museum.[15]

Still, although the private impulse to collect and the desire to establish public museums with private collections links the American past with the European present, this millennium has seen a paradigm shift in cultural benefaction. In the United States, most of the private collections of last century were not opened as museums until after the collectors' deaths. The collectors lived with their artwork and entertained privately in their homes; they created trusts to open their personal spaces as museums only after their passing, when their personal collections would move into the public sphere to benefit future generations.[16] The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, The Frick Collection, the Barnes Foundation, and The Peggy Guggenheim Collection were not established as museums until after their founders died.

In twenty-first-century Europe, individual collectors create their museums and manage their holdings and public personae in their lifetimes. Unlike the intimate domestic settings of the early twentieth-century American collectors that have since become extraordinary house museums, twenty-first century European private collections are housed in a variety of unique and purpose-built alternative spaces spectacularly designed for engagement with art.[17] In Europe, different taxation laws and limited benefits to making museum donations have meant that private collectors have never had the power to shape the collecting, exhibiting and building programs of state-run museums the way North American collectors did. Instead, European collectors have found it more beneficial to establish private museums in their lifetimes but this does not necessarily mean they have clear plans for their museums' longevity.

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15 Ellis, "The Problem with Privately Funded Museums," 24.

16 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 1.

17 Ibid., 7.

Germany/Berlin

The Feuerle Collection

Over the past two decades, forty-two private museums have opened throughout Germany, including nine in Berlin.[18] Like most private museums internationally, the German collections comprise contemporary art. However, their preponderance in Germany has particular ties to the country's twentieth-century past. During Reunification, the repositioning of many museums highlighted significant gaps in public holdings of modern and contemporary art, particularly twentieth-century European and German avant-garde and American postwar art. In the case of Modernist art, this was due in large part to its removal or ban by the Nazi Socialist party, who labelled it "degenerate," and the ensuing Cold War. It also had to do with financial constraints caused by a struggling economy. Since Reunification, a number of significant private bequests have encouraged some museums to develop their collections of contemporary art. However, in Germany as elsewhere in Europe the tax incentives for donating artworks to public museums are few and less enticing to collectors than creating private foundations. Collectors' motivations for managing

18 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum,* 11; Larry's List, *Private Art Museums Report*, 25.

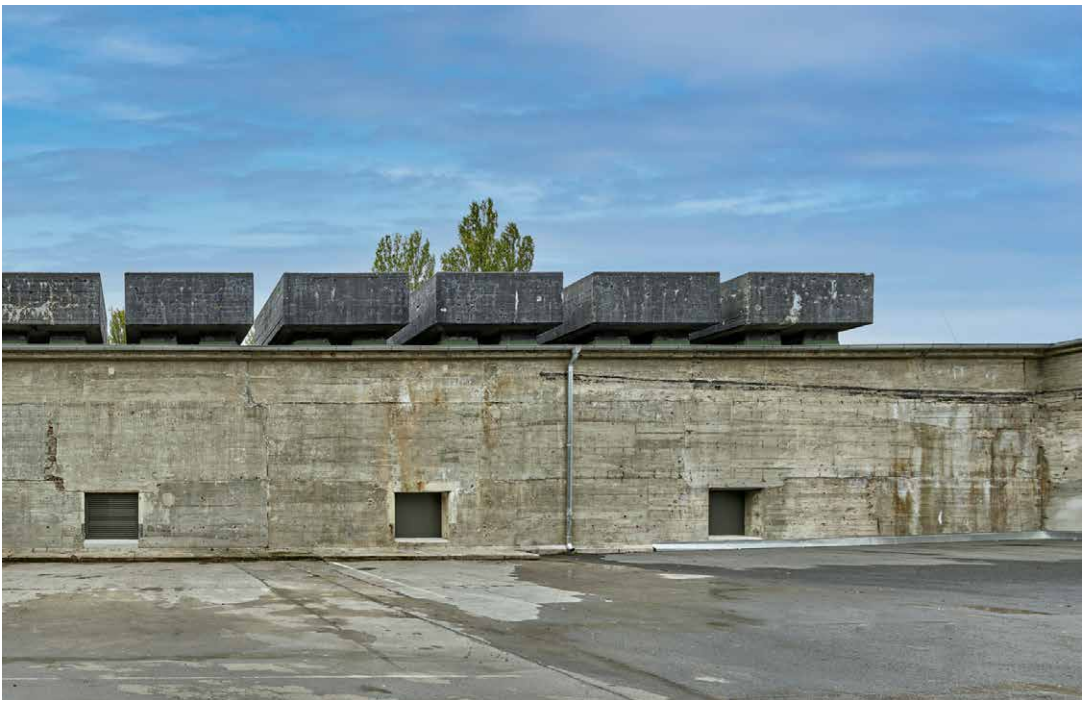

Figure 2.1: The Feuerle Collection in the former telecommunications Bunker with "Bahnselbstanschlussanlage" (telephone network) for the National Railway System, Berlin. Photo: def image. Courtesy The Feuerle Collection.

their own collections are far more personal and complex than can be accommodated by state-run institutions.[19]

Two cases in Berlin, the Feuerle Collection and Sammlung Boros, demonstrate both the geographic particularity of private museums in Germany and the diversity of approaches to private museum display. Both the Feuerle Collection and Sammlung Boros are housed in World War II bunkers the collectors purchased from the German government for purposes of adaptive reuse. For Desire' Feuerle, whose display of ancient and contemporary art I spoke about above, the bunker as a building fascinated him. A former gallerist in Cologne and connoisseur and collector of antique Asian art, Feuerle closed his commercial gallery and began a search throughout Europe for a private museum space. For Feuerle, whose display choices are based on a personal spirituality and refined aesthetic, the lack of beauty in Berlin and the concrete materiality of the telecommunications bunkers, which were never used, appealed to him. He likened the bunkers to a minimalist sculpture by the late American

19 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 143-144.

Figure 2.2: Permanent Installation, The Feuerle Collection. Photo: def image. Courtesy The Feuerle Collection.

artist Donald Judd (1928-1994) and felt they would form a suitable backdrop for the alternative exhibition space he sought. Feuerle acknowledged the charged tension inherent in using a Nazi bunker and insisted that his purpose was to aesthetically transform it.[20]

Desire Feuerle had a specific vision in mind for his museum, and he intended to realize it uncompromised. He wished to create what he called "a third piece",[21] consisting of rich historical layerings and aesthetic juxtapositions of art and their aesthetic connection to the space in which they are housed, along the lines of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[22] Although the bunker and Asian art in Feuerle's collection have intrinsic historic significance, Feuerle wanted to build neither a museum of Asian art nor one of architecture. Rather, he worked with British architect John Pawson to renovate the bunker, respecting its form and age, to transform it into what he calls "a different world," a space that visitors can now enter for a specified amount of time – forty-five minutes, by reservation.

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20 D. Feuerle, Founder, The Feuerle Collection, telephone conversation with author, 20 Nov. 2020.

21 Ibid.

22 Moore, "Why Désiré Feuerle Displays His Art in a Berlin Bunker."

With carefully lit installations in a building without natural light and the sensitive placement of an idiosyncratic art collection in an evocative atmosphere, Feuerle claims to give new life to art, even if, he explains, the pieces themselves have little commercial value to public audiences.[23] Feuerle's particular approach to art appreciation has to do with feeling and experience rather than didactics. In fact, no labels appear next to works at the Feuerle Collection; instead "art mediators" accompany visitors through the spaces and discreetly answer questions, though they are instructed not to talk if not asked.[24] In Feurle's words, "I want… the visitor to be seduced by an experience, something very different to what you'll get in a conventional [museum] gallery space."[25]

The Feuerle Collection is administered by the Sara Puig Institute for the Arts, whose goal as stated on the website, is to display a permanent exhibition of The Feuerle Collection and promote discussion around The Feuerle Concept. Sara Puig, whose family founded the successful Spanish fashion and perfume company Puig, is the current president of Fundació Joan Miró and married to Desire Feuerle. She and her husband self-finance The Feuerle Collection.

Asked what he felt was his greatest achievement with the Feuerle Collection, Desire Feuerle said it was having young visitors (who must be sixteen years of age to enter) come into the museum and say, "Look how cool this is…" Perhaps, he mused, "it is a 'sexy' attraction to these works that [make this display appealing and] may be missing from other displays." According to Feuerle, "They (the youngsters) make the pieces young" and therefore relevant. The Feuerle Collection is on permanent display. Feuerle would like to advance his exhibition concept with state museums and universities to, in his words, "update museums into the twenty-first century."[26]

Sammlung Boros

Other art collectors M. Christian Boros, a Berlin-based advertising agency founder, and his wife Karen bought the former Reichsbahnbunker in Berlin-Mitte in 2003. Originally built in 1943 as an air raid shelter for German National Railway passengers, the bunker subsequently served as a prisoner-of-war camp under Soviet rule, a storage depot for bananas and tropical fruit, a hardcore techno club in the

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23 Feuerle criticized the "flashy value" of contemporary art and sought a different experience for his visitors (D. Feuerle, telephone conversation with the author, 20 November 2020). However, it should be noted that his collection of antique Asian and contemporary art also have high market value.

24 D. Feuerle, telephone conversation with the author, 20 Nov. 2020.

25 M. Byng, 'The Feuerle Collection: A Berlin Bunker Becomes a Beguiling Museum,' *The Spaces*, https://thespaces.com/the-feuerle-collection-a-berlin-bunker-becomes-a-beguiling-museum/, accessed 12 Dec. 2020.

26 D. Feuerle, telephone conversation with author, 20 Nov. 2020.

Figure 2.3: Sammlung Boros in the former Reichsbahnbunker, Berlin. Photo: Boros Collection, Berlin © NOSHE.

mid-1990s, and after purchase and use by a number of investors, the residence of the Boros family and exhibition space of their foundation.

Originally designed under the direction of Hitler's architect Albert Speer (1905-1981) as an above-ground bunker and intended to last, the building has Renaissance-style flourishes, including symmetrical facades, a cornice, arched doorways and a pair of double opposing staircases in the style of those at the Chateau de Chambord attributed to Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Deemed a historic monument, the bunker's exterior cannot be altered, although the inside can. The Boroses hired the Berlin firm Realarchitektur to core out the building's interior to create dynamic vertical spaces, windows, balconies, and roomy galleries for a display space that

Figure 2.4: He Xiangyu, Untitled (2017), Bronze, 18K Gold, 24 pieces, overall dimensions variable. Photo: Boros Collection, Berlin © NOSHE.

opened to the public in 2008. The architects also designed an elaborate 500 square meter penthouse for the family residence.[27]

All of the bunker's former uses – military stronghold, prison, storage facility, nightclub – remain visible in traces, such as leftover neon graffiti on the walls and original air ventilation boxes. Unlike Desire Feuerle, who chose to neutralize the charged history of his bunker, the Boroses display site-specific and political works that tend to accentuate the past of theirs. For example, the artist duo Awst & Walther discovered a hole in a bunker wall that leads directly outside. It had been chiseled out by geologists wanting a sample of the building material. For *Line of Fire* (2012), the artists created a golden arrow that appears to have been shot through the hole, into the gallery wall opposite.[28] A recent installation of Chinese conceptual artist He Xiangyu's egg-cartons made out of 18K gold (2017), randomly strewn across a gallery floor with gritty, unpainted walls in the background, alludes to the increasing materialism and obsolescence of our society.[29] An art mediator once told me that the

27 S. Truax, "Carving a Space: The Boros Collection Bunker in Berlin," *Apollo Magazine*, 29 May 2014, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/carving-space-boros-collection-bunker-berlin.

28 Ibid.

29 E. David, 'Boros Collection: Bunker Berlin #3: A Private Tour Inside a Dystopian Treasure Trove of Art', *Yatzer Newsletter* (2018), https://www.yatzer.com/boros-collection-bunker-berlin-3, accessed 1 Dec. 2020.

presence of the Boros Collection in the former Reichsbahnbunker was the ultimate "f-you" to Hitler. According to Juliet Kothe, Director of the Boros Foundation, "You can't separate the art from the space in which it is shown. We always give an introduction into the history of the house before we start mediating and explaining the exhibited works since we see this as an educational responsibility."[30]

Christian and Karen Boros' art collection dates from 1990 to the present. It includes work by international and up-and-coming Berlin-based artists. Due to safety regulations, the Bunker can only be visited in small groups accompanied by guides, called art mediators. Different from those at the Feuerle Collection, Sammlung Boros art mediators are talkative and trained to offer engaging, conversational visits. Tours last ninety minutes; routinely, they book up weeks in advance. Says M. Christian Boros, "We run a collection, which is neither a [state] museum nor a private museum. I see us as a private space that can be visited by appointment, showing fragments of our collection, which is solely contemporary."[31] Exhibitions change every four years, often reflecting new acquisitions and site-specific commissions. The works always represent the Boros private collection. The space offers neither a cafe nor a bookshop. The only product for sale is an expensive catalogue of the Boros collection. Art storage is offsite and there are no conservation facilities. The foundation does loan artworks to other institutions.

Italy/Milan and Rome

Fondazione Prada, Milan

On 9 May 2015, Fondazione Prada, headed by fashion designer Miuccia Prada, granddaughter of the luxury fashion brand founder, and her husband Patrizio Bertelli, the company's chief executive, opened a dazzling private museum on the site of a former gin distillery in the Largo Isarco industrial complex of Milan. Even larger than the sprawling Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, which opened six months earlier in a Frank Gehry-designed building, the Fondazione Prada museum comprises a vast campus of new and regenerated buildings conceived by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and his firm OMA. It opened at a time when private money from luxury goods brands like LVMH, Fendi, Prada and others began to fill a void left by European government cutbacks in the arts.[32]

Fondazione Prada's new home is the product of a long gestation period. Established in 1995, the foundation had already invested heavily in support of the

30 G. Bria, "Sammlung Boros: The Berlin Bunker Converted into an Art Gallery Gets Updated." *Domus*, (2019), https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2019/05/21/sammlung-boros-a-bunker-collection.html

31 Ibid.

32 Carol Vogel, 'The Prada Foundation's New Arts Complex in Milan', *The New York Times*, 22 Apr. 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/26/arts/design/the-prada-foundations-new-arts-complex-in-milan.html.

Figure 2.5: Fondazione Prada, Milan Architectural project by OMA. Photo: Bas Princen 2018. Courtesy Fondazione Prada.

Figure 2.6: "Edward Kienholz: Five Car Stud, 1969 – 1972." View of the exhibition curated by Germano Celant, 2016, Fondazione Prada, Milan. Photo: Delfino Sisto Legnani Studio. Courtesy Fondazione Prada.

arts before building its new venue. It mounted solo exhibitions of works by Italian and international artists in cities around the world, sponsored film festivals, and organized exhibitions in honor of two Venice Biennale fairs (2005, 2009). Since 2011, Fondazione Prada has also managed an art space at its Venice headquarters in Palazzo Ca' Corner della Regina, and from 2016, the photography gallery Osservatorio in Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II.[33]

The new Milan headquarters were financed privately, however the couple did not personally provide the funds. Rather, the corporation Prada S.p.A., a sponsor of Fondazione Prada, underwrote the entire complex.[34] Since its opening, Fondazione Prada Museum has been hailed as a welcome addition to the art and cultural scene in Milan, filling a void in the representation of contemporary art at a time when the city could not afford to build its own contemporary art museum, and considered de facto an equivalent institution to Milan's civic museums.[35]

Programming

In its programming, Fondazione Prada has an international, creative and intellectually energetic reach. Among the many opening exhibitions in 2015 was one that offered a particularly striking departure from inaugural shows of founders' art collections. The exhibition "Serial Classic," curated by esteemed Italian archaeologist and art historian Salvatore Settis, focused on classical sculpture and the relationship between originality and imitation in Roman culture and the circulation of multiples as an homage to Greek art.[36] It included major international loans, including works from the Louvre, British Museum and Vatican Museums.[37] Settis praised Fondazione Prada for its conceptual and financial support of this program, calling it 'courageous'. For him, it affirmed that the classic must have a place in the contemporary world, that classical art, like contemporary art, responded to events happening in the world, and that classical and contemporary art can and should be presented as mirrors of each other. While contemporary art is welcomed in archaeology museums, Settis argued, it is much rarer for classical art to appear in contemporary museums.[38] For this Settis called the project "unprecedented….There is nothing comparable in Italy…. This is something really avant-garde."[39]

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33 Fondazione Prada, http://www.fondazioneprada.org/, accessed 10 Nov. 2020

34 Vogel, "Prada Foundation's New Art Complex."

35 Abrahams, "Fondazione Prada in Milan."

36 Fondazione Prada, http://www.fondazioneprada.org/.

37 A companion exhibition, titled 'Portable Classic', which explored the origins and functions of miniature reproductions of classical sculpture in the ancient and Renaissance periods, opened contemporaneously at the Venice headquarters of Fondazione Prada, on the eve of the opening of the 2015 Venice Biennale.

38 Fondazione Prada, http://www.fondazioneprada.org/.

39 Vogel, "Prada Foundation's New Art Complex."

Architecture

Architecture critics also praised the new Fondazione Prada museum as a triumph. According to London-based writer Tim Abrahams, "Here [with Fondazione Prada] architecture has been used to articulate a new relationship between private collection, patronage and the public as well as the relationship between the past and the present."[40] The original distillery, built in 1910, consisted of a group of industrial buildings arranged around a courtyard, similar to an Italian palazzo. Koolhaas and OMA transformed the space by stabilizing pre-existing buildings and adding three new structures. Named "Podium", "Cinema" and "Torre," these additions were designed to offer a large, flexible display area, auditorium, and tall, nine-story space for showing the Prada permanent collection and furnishing a restaurant and rooftop bar. The OMA website describes Fondazione Prada museum as "a genuine collection of architectural spaces in addition to its holdings in art."[41]

As with most private museums, the architecture of Fondazione Prada asserts its presence and demands attention. One of the extant buildings from the original complex – a three-story high block dubbed the "Haunted House" – was clad entirely in twenty-four carat gold leaf.[42] This was done to turn what many considered a drab and slightly off-putting building into what has since become a visual hallmark of the campus.

"Haunted House" along with other buildings on Fondazione Prada's campus are self-referential. In describing the golden "Haunted House," Abrahams recalls the first Metaphysical town square painting of Giorgio de Chirico, made in1910, the same year the distillery was built. Titled "The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon," this painting includes a golden house in its civic compound. Abrahams likens the new Podium, designed for temporary exhibitions, to the ground floor of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin – the archetype of a public and state-run art institution.[43]

Bar Luce, a caffe designed in a quasi 1950s Milanese-style by American filmmaker Wes Anderson, is located at the entrance to Fondazione Prada. Its visual references include Italian Neorealist films of the 1950s, Milan's iconic shopping arcade Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, and Anderson' own short film *Castello Cavalcanti* (2013), about an American race car driver that crashes in an Italian village of the 1950s, that was financed by Fondazione Prada. The caffe's filmic references, the Haunted House's resemblance to De Chirico's work, and the Podium's likeness to an iconic museum are fascinating. But they are insider jokes, intelligible only to a few, and lend a quality of hyperreality to the place. Why, for example, if the Fondazione is located in the elegant city of Milan, is a filmmaker needed to recreate a Milanese cafe?

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40 Abrahams, "Fondazione Prada in Milan."

41 OMA. 'Fondazione Prada', https://oma.eu/projects/fondazione-prada, accessed 5 December 2020.

42 Four kilograms of gold foil, costing approximately £75,000, were hammered painstakingly onto all parts of the building, including drainpipes and windowsills, over three months (Abrahams, "Fondazione Prada in Milan").

43 Abrahams, "Fondazione Prada in Milan."

Commerce and Art

Despite Miuccia Prada's determination to keep her art and business separate, the Fondazione Prada seems to float amidst many overlapping worlds. Rem Koolhaas, the architect for the museum, has worked with Prada for twenty years, designing a number of Prada stores, including flagships in New York and Los Angeles. His exhibition style for the inaugural exhibition "Serial Classic" as well as conception for the Largo Isarco complex would be familiar to upscale Prada consumers who may have confronted Koolhaas' complex codings in his commercial designs for Prada shops. These consumers would have what art and architectural historian Nicky Ryan considers the "cultural capital" necessary to understand the Prada "aura," where shopping is redefined as cultural entertainment.[44] They may also be the audience most attuned to the stream of fascinating simulations and facsimiles that make up the Fondazione Prada complex.[45]

What then does this Prada "aura" do for the meaningful display of art? Since its opening, Fondazione Prada has exhibited important and sometimes edgy, political and disturbing artworks, such as installations by American artist Ed Kienholz (1927-1994), whose *Five Car Stud* is a gruesome depiction of racial violence in the United States, and the exhibition 'Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943' (2018), that recreated rhetorical exhibitions held during the rise and fall of Fascist Italy. Somehow, in the coolness of the Prada complex and the wink and the nod of the architectural references, a sense of safety and serenity prevails, lessening the dangerous messages of such powerful artworks.

Palazzo Merulana, Rome

The Project

Opened in May 2018 on Rome's Esquiline Hill, Palazzo Merulana is among the city's newest cultural institutions. A private, non-profit museum that does not benefit from government subsidies,[46] Palazzo Merulana offers an unusual combination of a distinctive private collection of early twentieth-century Roman art and a metropolitan cultural hub for its local community, a neighborhood rich in cultural and ethnic diversity but in physical decline. Palazzo Merulana's edifice, a prestigious 19th-century Renaissance-Revival style palace originally built by the Vatican and then used as offices for Rome's department of health and hygiene, had suffered a long period of neglect and decay. It was meticulously restored by S.A.C. S.p.A., the

44 Ryan, "Prada," 8-17.

45 Ibid., 18.

46 Letitzia Casuccio, et al. "Giving Value to Community Mission and Artistic Brand: A New Museum Tale from the Hill of Esquilino," Conference Proceedings from 10th Annual ENCATC Education and Research Session. *Diversity and Sustainability at Work. Policies and Practices from Culture and Education*, Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, Dijon, France (4 October 2019), 104.

construction company owned by the late Claudio Cerasi (1933-2020), who with his wife Elena established the Claudio and Elena Cerasi Foundation for their well-honed Roman art collection and founded Palazzo Merulana Museum.[47]

In planning Palazzo Merulana, the couple expressed a desire for "un museo vivo," a living museum, in contrast to what they called a "salotto," or a staid, collection-driven living room environment.[48] In their role as directors of The Cerasi Foundation, Claudia and Elena Cerasi not only envisioned a restored landmark building to display their important art collection, but a dynamic institution that would engage local communities in cultural practices and achieve a sustainable financial equilibrium. To develop this model, the couple entered a partnership with CoopCulture, the largest company specialized in supporting culture and heritage activities in Italy.[49] Studies were undertaken of similar arts and community centers throughout Europe and the United States, and a particular institutional model for Palazzo Merulana was created,

Figure 2.7: Claudio Cerasi and I Piccoli Saltimbanchi (The Young Acrobats), 1938, by Antonio Donghi. Photo: CoopCulture for Palazzo Merulana.

47 G. Tucci, "Faro and Practices. How Can Palazzo Merulana Involve Esquilino Local Community Into Cultural Initiatives. A Case Study," Tesi di Laurea Magistrale in Economics and Management in Arts, Culture, Media and Entertainment. Universita' Commerciale "Luigi Bocconi" Scuola Superiore Universitaria, 2018, 30; Casuccio, "Giving Value,", 107.

48 G. Tucci and P. Centanni, telephone conversation with the author, 30 Oct. 2020.

49 Casuccio, "Giving Value,", 119.

Figure 2.8: Summer Camp for Children at Palazzo Merulana. Autoritratto con violino (Self-Portrait with Violin), 1928, by Antoinetta Raphael. Photo: CoopCulture for Palazzo Merulana.

Figure 2.9: Opening "SlideDoor," 2019. Palazzo Merulana – Fondazione Cerasi. Photo: CoopCulture for Palazzo Merulana.

based on its singular edifice and local demographics.[50] The Cerasis' community participation objective was very much in keeping with the 2005 Council of Europe Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, which emphasizes the important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy and which Italy has ratified. Principals of CoopCulture viewed Palazzo Merulana as an institution that could realize some of the convention's goals.[51]

Management as well as vision played an important role in the development of Palazzo Merulana. Recent official statistics count 124 museums and cultural sites in Rome, with twenty-seven million visitors in 2017.[52] With so many cultural attractions, competition for visitors is quite high. CoopCulture grouped Palazzo Merulana in the category of modern and contemporary museums, of which there are only three or four in Rome, and where visitors are fewest. Palazzo Merulana's distinction in promoting artistic productions and activities with roots in the city of Rome as well as exhibiting modern and contemporary art were considered fiscally as well as programmatically advantageous.[53]

The Cerasi Foundation invested five million euros in the renovation of Palazzo Merulana, but the foundation does not own it.[54] Rather, they engaged in what is termed a *progetto di finanza*, an economic opportunity in Italy for investors to restore a public building with an option to use it for their own purposes for a period of ninety years. Although the Cerasi investment may not have been motivated by issues of financial return, the program offers a way to recoup on expenditures. One can offer part of the building as rental property, which the Cerasi did with Palazzo Merulana. Other corporate art foundations have also followed this model in Italy, including the Punta della Dogana project in Venice by the Pinault Foundation (although they have property rights for only thirty years). Still, the social experiment of the Palazzo Merulana shows a difference in the behavioral and organizational models of the larger global brands.[55]

Claudio Cerasi's company S.A.C. S.p.A. had already been involved eight years earlier in another cultural revitalization project in the Flaminio neighborhood of Rome, in this case a state-run museum. S.A.C. S.p.A. was principal contractor for the construction of MAXXI, a national museum for arts of the twenty-first century,

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50 Among those researched were La Gaîte Lyrique and Le Centquatre, both in Paris, the Matadero Complex in Madrid, Theaster Gates' Rebuild Project in Chicago, Marle Culturale Urbano in Milan, and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Piedmont. Tucci, "Faro and Practices", 31-37.

51 Casuccio, 'Giving Value', 109, Tucci, "Faro and Practices", 2.

52 L. Casuccio, et al. "Giving Value to Community Mission and Artistic Brand: A New Museum Tale from the Hill of Esquilino", Conference Proceedings from 10th Annual ENCATC Education and Research Session, *Diversity and Sustainability at Work. Policies and Practices from Culture and Education*, Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, Dijon, France (4 Oct. 2019), 104-120 (106).

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 116.

55 Ibid.

designed by the late Zaha Hadid (1950-2016) and opened in 2010. Located on the grounds of a former military barracks, the MAXXI was conceived in a similar way to Fondazione Prada, as a museum campus consisting of the stabilization of old buildings and creation of a new one. Its purpose however was to be more socially and locally engaged. The MAXXI would introduce a star architect-designed building for the display of contemporary art to a section of the city designated for cultural revitalization. A piazza created between the new exhibition space and renovated barracks was made accessible to city residents and the general public, free of charge.[56] In Hadid's words, the museum was intended as a "field of buildings…[that would offer]…an immersive urban environment for the exchange of ideas, feeding the cultural vitality of the city."[57]

The construction of Palazzo Merulana had similar civic goals, to jumpstart a Roman neighborhood rich in historic and cultural capital but in need of economic and municipal attention. Instead of an archistar building, however, the Palazzo Merulana involved the much-publicized renovation of an historic municipal building. The architect was lesser known, but the building restoration was a significant component of the project.

The Collection

The private collection of Claudio and Elena Cerasi is permanently displayed on Palazzo Merulana's second floor. It numbers ninety artworks by some of the most important Italian artists working between the nineteen-twenties and forties of the past century, including Giorgio De Chirico, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini, Mario Sironi, Antonio Donghi, Antoinetta Raphaël and Mario Mafai, to name a few. Many, though not all, of these artists were part of the Scuola Romana Movement, a group of painters and sculptors that worked loosely within the Expressionist style. They often coalesced around the artist couple Antoinetta Raphael and Mario Mafai, gathering at the couple's home and studio on Via Cavour, a road near the ancient Roman Forum that was partially demolished under Fascism. Although Scuola Romana artists produced work under the Fascist regime, they were politically opposed to it; the tonalist hues or colorful Expressionist palettes, figurative style, and non-rhetorical content of their work reflected an anti-governmental stance.

When asked whether politics may have informed the collecting choices of the couple, Museum Site Manager Poala Centanni explained that the Cerasis' acquisitions were dictated solely by taste and a preference for figurative art. She suggested

56 Over the past two years, the museum cafe, originally accessible only once inside the building, has been combined with the book shop and moved to a location with an on-street entrance, further inviting public participation without the need to buy museum entry tickets.

57 "Contemporary Arts Centre 'MAXXI' Rome by Zaha Hadid Architects | Museums", Accessed 20 November 2020. https://www.maxxi.art/en/progetto-architettonico/.

instead a geographic connection between the permanent collection and Palazzo Merulana, namely that the museum's location, on the Esquiline Hill, is precisely the neighborhood where the studio and home of the Scuola Romana founders stood. She explained that in this way the Museum's location served an added purpose of bringing the collection back to its roots.[58] Statistics show that in its first year, ninety-four percent of visitors to Palazzo Merulana were Italian, and of these only eighteen percent came to see the permanent collection.[59]

Curiously, another museum devoted solely to Scuola Romana artists already exists in Rome. Housed within the complex of the Villa Torlonia Museum and managed by the Rome municipality, The Scuola Romana Museum displays art from its own collection and long-term private loans. No association exists between it and Palazzo Merulana or the Cerasi Foundation. One can find the Scuola Romana Museum in the former servants' quarters of the villa's otherwise grand *casino nobile* (noble house), where it receives few visitors.

Northern Europe/Stockholm, Sweden

Unlike the private museums described thus far, Artipelag, a purpose-built exhibition hall nestled among pine trees on Värmdö Island in the Stockholm archipelago, has no private collection. Rather, it organizes cultural events and hosts world-class temporary exhibitions with artworks borrowed from elsewhere. The inspiration of Bjorn and Lillemore Jacobsson, whose parent company Lillebor Design AB built the successful infant-care products company Baby Bjorn, Artipelag opened in June 2012 as a private art space reflecting the couple's passions--a love for the archipelago and its nature, a desire to give back, and a chance for Lillemore, who trained as an artist but spent her career working in the family business, to devote herself to art.[60] The name Artipelag comes from a play on words combining art, activities and archipelago.

Although privately conceived and financed by the Jacobssons, at an estimated sixty-nine million dollars as quoted by *The New York Times*,[61] the founders, who began planning for their museum in 2000, enlisted museum professionals early in its development. Before becoming Artistic Director of Artipelag, Bo Nilsson, an art historian whose background includes senior curatorships at Moderna Museet and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and an academic post at Stockholm University, consulted on the museological requirements of Artipelag's new building. Making sketches of the museum for eighteen months before its opening, Nilsson helped the founders realize their vision.

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58 G. Tucci and P. Centanni, telephone conversation with the author, 30 Oct. 2020.

59 Casuccio, "Giving Value," 111.

60 B. Nilsson, telephone interview with author, 18 Nov. 2020.

61 F. Rose, The Swedish Museum That BabyBjörn Built, *The New York Times* (3 Sept. 2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/06/arts/design/art-with-stunning-water-views-in-sweden.html.

According to Nilsson, the goal for Artipelag was "to combine art and nature, not art and gardens." Hoping to find a "more rough" or untamed environment than Värmdö, where they ultimately settled, the Jacobssons first tried a more northern location in the Swedish archipelago but were rejected. Nilsson explained how municipal seats are hesitant to accept private museum projects, because in the long run, the cities assume that they will have to support them. The current location of Artipelag was initially earmarked for a municipal recreation center, but in the end was not viable. This was how Jacobsson could finally purchase the land to build Artipelag.[62]

With a particular vision in mind, Bjorn Jacobsson interviewed seven architects for his building. He chose the seventh, Johan Nyrén, even though he was sick at the time, and did not live to see the building realized. Jacobsson liked that Nyrén was nationally known, coming from Nyréns Arkitektkontor, one of Sweden's leading architecture firms, and he favored the architect's idea. According to Nilsson, "[the design] was simple, modern, but not too perpendicular, "not a 'spaceship,' [like Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao or LVMH Foundation in Paris] but relating to boats."[63] The design had a relationship to water and you wouldn't see the building until you got close to it. Bjorn Jakobson was very present in the building process, on site every day. He changed the building company if something went wrong. The architect had already died by the building phase, and so the founder felt even more compelled to stay involved.

In an interview with me, Bo Nilsson emphasized the professional backgrounds of the Artipelag staff, many who, like him, had worked in Swedish and Danish state museums. He offered examples of how the staff has the capacity to make choices according to the specific needs of the founding family and professional museum requirements. For example, Bjorn Jacobsson is almost deaf. He wears a hearing aid. For Nilsson, this condition accentuated how important it is to make a museum building with good sound. This was addressed when planning for the big black box that is a multipurpose space for performances and concerts. According to Nilsson, "you never get good buildings if you don't consider how they will function."[64]

Other family preferences were also considered in planning the design. The Jacobssons wanted lots of light and to avoid a white cube environment in favor of a museum that had a strong connection to the landscape. These priorities were professionally addressed in terms of lighting with protective screens and climate control throughout the building's public spaces. Though private, Artipelag was built on the same professional standards as state museums. In fact, Artipelag receives insurance support from the Swedish state through an indemnity just as state museums do. This is especially important, as most of the exhibitions mounted

62 Bo Nilsson, Artistic Director, Artipelag, telephone conversation with author, 18 Nov. 2020.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.

Figure 2.10: Artipelag, Värmdö, Sweden, designed by Johan Nyrén. Photo: Björn Lofterud. Courtesy Artipelag.

Figure 2.11: Ainsa IV, 2012, by Jaume Plensa. Photo: Samuel Lind. Courtesy Artipelag.

at Artipelag are created from loaned artworks, which can be fragile to handle and expensive to borrow.

The actual decision over whether or not to build a private art collection was addressed during the planning of Artipelag. Bjorn Jacobsson discussed the possibilities with Nilsson, who urged against it, arguing that a new private collection would have to be international in scope in order to stand out from other private collections in Sweden. Such an undertaking would require an enormous additional financial investment. Besides, Nilsson explained that the Jacobssons were not interested in making Artipelag a monument to themselves or their art.[65]

From the very first exhibition at Artipelag, titled "What Does it Mean to Do a Show in an Archipelago," an abiding ethos has prevailed in the programming and ambience, informed by an emphasis on art that has a relationship to nature and climate. At Artipelag, the earth matters. While it has no private collection per se, Artipelag does invest in sculpture, often by young artists; the works are installed directly in nature, along the twenty-two acres of grounds and boardwalks that surround the museum. Referring to the outside sculpture, Nilsson distinguishes between Artipelag and state museums, arguing that with these works, it is "about finding the right spot [for the sculpture], the right location. [Here] you are more relaxed than being in a museum."[66]

Nature is built right into the fabric of the Artipelag building, where a 2000-year-old rock juts out of the floor of one of the two restaurants and a cliff forms the wall of an underground level. A harmony exists at Artipelag between land, building and art. The same fluidity endures for art, where crossovers of genres are celebrated. In the exhibition "Giorgio Morandi and Edmund de Waal" (2017), ceramic artist de Waal's vessels and Morandi's paintings, many depicting jars and pottery, were exhibited together, not necessarily for their similar subject matter but for the artists' shared interest in how these objects are presented. In "Fornasetti Inside Out Outside In" (2019-2020), the museum displayed the technical versatility of Piero Fornasetti, among the twentieth century's most renowned designers, whose skills spanned the genres of painting, drawing, graphic design, furniture, design objects and installations. This approach reflects both the sensibilities of the curator Nilsson and founder Bjorn Jacobsson, who has an interest in function and objects. It is also a practical as well as philosophical reality of Artipelag, where the museum must strive to create programs and exhibitions that differ from those of Stockholm's other twenty-odd museums.[67] Although the art-nature-architecture continuum is not unique to Artipelag and is reflected in other recent European private museums, such as the Voorlinden Museum and Gardens in Wassenaar,

65 Ibid.
66 Nilsson, phone conversation, 18 Nov. 2020.
67 Ibid.

the Netherlands, Artipelag's particular manifestation as a non-collecting private cultural center with an overriding curatorial theme distinguishes it from others of its type.

Conclusions

In her book *The Private Collector's Museum. Public Good vs. Private Gain*, Georgina Walker suggests that many influential wealthy collectors – past and present – recognize that it is through their cultural, not business initiatives, that they establish lasting legacies to honor their individual achievements. The private museum model provides them an opportunity to achieve cultural and social prestige and present themselves in a manner seen as public-spirited, with public acknowledgment and validation bestowed upon them in their lifetimes.[68]

In the five examples of private museums surveyed in this article, we have seen how collectors claim their cultural and social prestige in varied ways. Some collaborate with public museums as more or less equal partners, as in the case of Fondazione Prada and Artipelag. Others, such as the Feuerle Collection and Sammlung Boros, exist separately though alongside public institutions, with a focused concentration on their own collections and alternative art spaces, and in the case of Palazzo Merulana, an additional dedication to creating community venues for them. For Fondazione Prada, the prestige of its new museum may actually add cultural capital to the Prada Company's elite brand.

As for the public-spirited manner in which collectors present themselves through their private museums, many questions must be asked. The first concerns the public. What type of visitor do private museums target? As twenty-first century public museums challenge themselves to diversify their audiences, do private museum founders take interest in such issues? Most private museums show contemporary art, often including conceptual works that address politically charged topics. Does the embrace of such work in private museums bring a demographically more diverse audience, or, as in the case of Fondazione Prada, possibly lessen the work's impact because of the hyperreality on display? The location of Artipelag, a vacation destination twenty-two kilometers from central Stockholm, self-determines its visitor population. It costs time and money to arrive there. Palazzo Merulana, on the other hand, sits amidst the diverse local community it aims to reach. But most Palazzo Merulana visitors do not come to see the permanent art collection; they arrive instead for cultural events and locally curated programs.

The alternative art spaces of most private museums, along with the high quality of displays, draw large crowds, some admittedly less diverse than others. The collections on view reflect the individual collectors' taste and that of their advisors. Directors of private museums necessarily promote the inspiration of their founders.

68 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 160, 230.

In this context, one might ask, as does Walker, whether the discerning approach used for institutional collecting is perhaps compromised by private collections not necessarily formed with the same connoisseurship in mind[69] or, as Alain Quemin suggests for private art galleries,[70] do the new dazzling displays in private museums compete with public institutions, forcing them to make choices based on individual collectors' taste?

Ancient art found a home in two of the private museums surveyed in this article. Desire Feuerle created a contemporary installation, or as he calls it a "third piece," by juxtaposing Khmer sculpture, Han and Ming Dynasty furniture and contemporary art inside a restored Nazi-era bunker that he used as a canvas for his creation. Muccia Prada launched the new headquarters of Fondazione Prada with a world-class exhibition devoted to Roman copies of Greek art, curated by a renowned Classical art scholar who argued for the sculpture's relevance in today's world. These two examples demonstrate provocative and creative ways that conceptual and artistic thresholds may be crossed in private museums. But again, these departures from traditional exhibiting practices leave many questions unanswered. For example, as my students and I exited the spectacularly lit galleries of the Feuerle Collection bunker, we asked ourselves what we had just visited. A museum? A theater? A kind of three-dimensional painting? A sacred space? If this was indeed a museum, was knowledge conveyed? Or was knowledge even the point of our visit? What about the bunker? Did its own difficult history require separate attention? Did The Feuerle Collection reflect innovative museum practice? If so, how and for whom?

Private museums allow founders to take charge of their artworks and exhibition goals in ways that satisfy them and expand museumgoers' experiences. Walker argues that the alternative quality of these spaces is what keeps them viable.[71] But where does this leave public museums? One could argue that the proliferation of private museums could negatively impact the already challenged public museum sector, by denying them access to significant donations.[72] But that stance offers only one dismissive side to this phenomenon. What about the successful display methods employed by private museums that attract large crowds? Do private museums offer a constructive new model for the European public museum? Are they more than idiosyncratic presentations that cater to well-heeled visitors? To further explore questions such as these, future research must include comparisons of new exhibiting practices at private and public museums, and more dialogue about private museum practices between public museum professionals and collectors.

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69 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum,* 232.

70 Quemin, *The Market and Museums,* 220-222.

71 Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum*, 230-231, 235.

72 Ibid., 230-231.

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Contested cultural objects: property or heritage?

Evelien Campfens

'It is no longer acceptable that most of Africa's cultural heritage is in Europe'.[1] With these words by French President Emmanuel Macron, Europe seems to have entered a new phase in the discussion on colonial collections in Western museum collections.[2] Whilst in France a return policy was announced for African objects held in French museums, in Germany the idea was launched to draft rules for colonial takings similar to the "Washington Principles" for Nazi-looted art.[3] Interestingly, this proposal was voiced by the German director of one of the main 'universal' museums and signatories to the *Declaration on the Value and Importance of Universal Museums*.[4] In 2002, in reaction to claims by source communities to colonial takings, the main Western encyclopaedic museums had argued in this Declaration that treasures from around the world – no matter their provenance – are shown to their best advantage and can be best kept in the care of 'universal' museums. This follows the school of thought that argues that preservation and wide public access are *the* public interests at stake.

1 Emmanuel Macron discusses the restitution of African art in French collections [video], YouTube, November 2017: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I3exI4f9BY&feature=youtu.be, accessed 15 Jan. 2021.

2 The term 'looting' is used for pillage in times of conflict, for takings the unlawful export of cultural objects or losses as a result of racist policies, e.g. during the Nazi-era.

3 E.g. Oped by Herrmann Parzinger, President of the *Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz* in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 January 2018.

4 Undersigned by 18 major Western museums. See 'Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museum', *The State Hermitage Museum*, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/news/news-item/news/1999_2013/hm11_1_93/?lng, accessed 10 Jan. 2021.

In the meantime, however, the door had been opened to claims to Nazi-looted art. After settlement of such claims, artefacts may also disappear from public view – as happened, for example, with Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II,* after its restitution to the heirs of the pre-war Jewish owner.[5] This, notwithstanding its status as Austrian national patrimony. Also requests for the repatriation of human remains by so-called 'settler states' were honoured – such claims by the New Zealand government for Mokomokai on behalf of its indigenous peoples.[6]

In other words, a new vision of cultural objects gains traction whereby the intangible 'heritage' value of cultural objects to individuals or communities, is key. This shift in thinking was voiced by president Macron when he argued that no justification exists for a situation where Africans have to travel to Europe to get an impression of their own cultural heritage. In a similar way, the 2019 German government policy for colonial takings in German museums, provides as rationale that 'all people should have the possibility to access their rich material culture [...] to connect with it and to pass it on to future generations'.[7]

Both Nazi and colonial looting are beyond the scope of present-day treaties that arrange for the return of looted cultural objects. Moreover, such claims often are 'stale' under national ownership laws. For both categories, however, "soft law" instruments (non-binding declarations or ethical guidelines) have been adopted that support claims. In the case of Nazi-looted art the so-called 1998 Washington Principles proposes in that regard 'fair and just' solutions for claims by victims of looting or their heirs. [8] Also in the field of colonial takings such soft law is in place: since the 1970s the United Nations General Assembly adopted, for example, more than twenty declarations on the importance of return of looted cultural objects to source communities. Similarly, the Council of Museums (ICOM) ethical code supports claims by source communities since 1986. [9] Although the political will to follow-up on these calls in Western Europe did exist in the field of Nazi looted art, this was generally lacking for colonial takings. That *status quo* seems to be changing since 2017.

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5 As result of its sale (see image 3.2). For an overview, e.g. Renold C, Chechi A, Bandle AL, Renold MA (2012) Case six Klimt paintings – Maria Altmann and Austria. Platform ArThemis, Art-Law Centre, University of Geneva, https://plone.unige.ch/art-adr/cases -afaires/6-klimt-paintings-2013-maria-altmann-and-austria, accessed 10 Jan. 2020.

6 See: 'The repatriation of Maori and Moriori Remains', *Museum of New Zealand*, https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/repatriation/repatriation-maori-and-moriori-remains, accessed 10 Jan. 2021.

7 *'Erste Eckpunkte Zum Umgang Mit Sammlungsgut Aus Kolonialen Kontexten'*, Kultusminister Konferenz (2019) https://www.kmk.org/aktuelles/artikelansicht/eckpunkte-zum-umgang-mit-sammlungsgut-aus-kolonialen-kontexten.html, accessed 15 Jan. 2021.

8 'Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art' (1998), On 3 December 1998 the 44 governments participating in the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets endorsed a set of 11 principles for dealing with Nazi-looted art. See https://www.lootedartcommission.com/Washington-principles. Acc. 15 Jan 2021.

9 Adopted by the 15th General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (4 November 1986, renamed and revised in 2001 and 2004).

Figure 3.1: The Banjarmasin Diamond in the Rijksmuseum. It was war booty and once owned by Panembahan Adam, the sultan of Banjarmasin (Kalimantan). After his death, the Netherlands intervened in the battle of succession. In 1859 Dutch troops violently seized control of Banjarmasin and abolished the sultanate. The rough diamond was sent to the Netherlands, where it was cut into a rectangle of 36 carats. (text and image: courtesy Rijksmuseum)

In this debate some crucial matters remain unclear. First, what is decisive for return requests, the unlawfulness of the loss at the time or the significance of an object to people today? In the second place, who are the beneficiaries of return? Consider the case of the diamond of Banjarmasin now in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum and seized in 1859 by the Dutch Army from the sultanate of Banjarmasin, presently part of the Indonesian state. Which party should be entitled to restitution: the heirs of the sultan (*i.e.* private families as is the case with Nazi-looted art), the people of Banjarmasin (following the example of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)[10], or the Indonesian State (in accordance with the interstate model of UNESCO)? And, as a necessary third point: what organisation could monitor the implementation of non-binding rules? In this regard, lessons can be drawn from experiences in the field of Nazi-looted art: clear standards and neutral, transparent, claims procedures are needed for justice to have its way.[11] This paper proposes that a human rights law approach to the issue of contested culural objects could help develop this field further.

1. Stolen possession or lost heritage?

Cultural objects have a dual nature. They can be seen as possessions, and as such they can be owned and traded and are subject to property law regimes. Yet, it is their intangible (cultural or heritage) value that sets them apart from other goods. That intangible value is an all but static notion: an artefact may be valued by the general

10 Zie, Advies over the omgang met koloniale collecties, *Raad voor Cultuur*, 7 Oct. 2020, p. 10.

11 E. Campfens, 'Restitution of Looted Art: What About Access to Justice?', *Santander Art Cult Law Rev,* 2/4 (2019), 185-220.

public because of its scientific or aesthetic value, but at the same time be of spiritual importance to a community, it may be symbolic of the cultural identity of a people, or it may be a special family heirloom. Whereas, in broad terms, national private law addresses cultural object as possessions, international public law addresses the intangible cultural and heritage interests at stake.

Cultural objects as possessions

Private law is the field that traditionally arranges legal claims over lost cultural objects. Laws on ownership and property, however, differ widely per country, with many variations on the theme of how title over a (stolen) good can be transferred to a new possessor. Common law jurisdictions (*e.g.* the US and the UK) accord relatively strong rights to the dispossessed former owner on the basis of the principle that a thief cannot convey good title, whereas in civil law countries (most European countries) the position of the new possessor is stronger. Here, title over stolen goods may pass to a new possessor after an acquisiton in good faith or just after the passage of time.

Depending on the adoption by a specific country of international treaties that arrange for the restitution of looted cultural objects, this domestic private law will have been adapted to international standards. The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, in that regard introduced a system that relies on the following pillars:[12] (i) national states are 'right holders' of the cultural property on their territory; (ii) the unauthorized export of such objects is unlawful; and (iii) such objects should be returned. Since its adoption, these principles have gained universal recognition. Nevertheless, these rules only apply directly to claims based on a loss after both states adopted the convention, and only in as far the country where the object is located implemented these standards in national law. This obviously does not cover historical cases such as Nazi looted art or colonial takings. Beyond these, however, many more such 'grey categories' of unlawfully looted but lawfully possessed cultural objects exist. This is why Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) generally is the preferred – and often the only – way to solve claims in this field.

Cultural objects as heritage

From a heritage point of view, cultural objects are valued because of their intangible value to people. Throughout history and in most cultures, objects that are symbolic of an identity enjoy protection under the law. Illustrative in this respect is a 1925 Indian court ruling holding that a contested Hindu family idol "could not be

12 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (signed 14 November 1970), 823 UNTS 231 (1970 UNESCO Convention).

Figure 3.2: *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II* by Gustav Klimt (1912). After restitution it was auctioned and, in 2016, reportedly resold for 150 million dollars. (See <https://news.artnet.com/market/oprah-sells-famed-gustav-klimt-portrait-150-million-851537>). (image: Wikimedia)

seen as a mere chattel which was owned".[13] The intangible heritage value of cultural objects, being symbolic of a spiritual, historical or ethnic identity, or of family life, arguably has been the rationale underlying the protected status of cultural objects in international law since its foundation.[14] In that sense Hugo Grotius, one of the founders of international law, in 1625 already highlights the protected status of cultural objects – in his turn referring to the writings of Polybius and Cicero – where he argues these are exempt from the righ to pillage in times of war:[15]

"There are some things of that nature, [...] which even common reason will have spared during war. [...] Such are temples, porticos, statues, and the like. Cicero much commends Marcellus, because he took such a particular care to preserve all the buildings of Syracuse both public and private, sacred and prohpane, as he had been

13 *Mullick v Mullick* (1925) LR LII Indian Appeals 245, cited in LV. Prott, PV. O'Keefe, 'Cultural Heritage or Cultural Property?' *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 1 (1992), 307. However, when it comes to the protection of *foreign* heritage interests such special treatment is not a given.

14 On the historical development, see: E. Campfens, 'The Bangwa Queen: Artifact or Heritage?' *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 26 (2019), 75-110.

15 Hugo Grotius, *De Jure Belli Ac Pacis (On the Law of War and Peace)* (1625) bk III ch 12.:V. For this translation see https://oll.libertyfund.org/page/grotius-war-peace#lf1032-03_label_1362.

sent with an army, rather to defend than take the city. [..]. Our ancestors used to leave to the conquered, what things were grateful to them, but to us of no great importance."

With regard to wartime looting, the legal obligation to return cultural objects is well established in international law. The peace treaties after the Napoleonic Wars at the outset of the 19th century are generally considered the turning point in the development of the law in this respect: restitution of dispersed heritage on the basis of territoriality (instead of 'winners takers') was at the time considered a principle of justice 'amongst civilised nations'.[16] Eventually, the legal obligation to return cultural objects looted in times of war was codified in 1954, in the First Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict Hague Convention.[17] Beyond situations of armed conflict, as mentioned above, today the 1970 UNESCO Convention provides for the rule that unlawfully exported cultural objects should be returned. In spite of the fact that rules with regard to the return of

Figure 3.3: The Horses of San Marco (Quadriga) in Venice. The Quadriga probably originates from the island of Chios and was taken by the Venetions from Constantinople in 1204 during the sack of the capital of the Byzantine Empire as part of the Fourth Crusade. Napoleon took it to Paris, to be returned to Venice after his defeat. (image: Wikimedia)

16 Problematic is that international law for long was biased in this respect. A discussion in Campfens (2019a).

17 The 1954 Hague Convention, adopted 14 May 1954. 249 UNTS 358.

war booty are very old, former imperial powers generally did not acknowledge any legal obligations to return cultural objects taken from their colonies.

Leaving a discussion on the lawfulness of looting practices at the time for what they are, what about other approaches?

2. Human Rights Law notions

While the UNESCO Conventions approach cultural objects as national 'property', more recent regulations take another approach. They tend to focus on the social significance of cultural objects and their identity value for communities and this brings with it the relevance of international human rights law. Disputes relating to contested cultural objects, from that perspective, also do not necessarily have to be approached as issues of property or ownership (as stolen possessions), but may also be approached as cases that, in their essence, are about identity values (lost *heritage).*

The 2005 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention), for example, very well illustrates that shift in approach. It defines cultural heritage as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, *independently of ownership*, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions".[18] Although the Faro Convention does not aim to create rights but rather voices policy aims for governments, it opened the door to a new understanding of cultural objects: away from a focus on property and state sovereignty, and towards the recognition of heritage interests of individuals and communities.

Heritage community

The Faro Convention introduced the concept of 'heritage communities': "A heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations".[19] This idea of heritage communites as "right holders" underscores that, apart from owners, more parties may have legitimate interests in the same heritage. In relation to contested cultural objects these may be creators, former and present owners, but also the general public – which reflects the importance of wide public access to "universal heritage". Such an approach contrasts with the "all-or-nothing" outcome in an ownership approach: under applicaton of ownership law only one party would be seen as the legitimate 'right holder', namely the owner. The notion of heritage communities allowes for more flexibility. It also better suits a reality where spiritually important objects or archaeological finds, in their original setting, were inalienable and could not be privately owned. Nevertheless, after such

18 Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (adopted 27 October 2005), CETS No. 199 (Faro Convention) (emphasis added), Art. 6.

19 Faro Convention, Art. 2(b).

objects entered another jurisdiction they may well be owned and traded, and seen as any other commodity. This clahs of national laws underlines a need for universally applicable rules in this field.

Equitable solutions to competing claims

In as far as it concerns competing claims, the Faro Convention provides for the rule that states should 'encourage reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of the cultural heritage, as well as respect for diversity of interpretations'; and 'establish processes for conciliation to deal equitably with situations where contradictory values are placed on the same cultural heritage by different communities'.[20]

This preference for cooperative solutions reflects soft law and (best) practice in the field of contested cultural objects. The 2015 Operational Guidelines to the 1970 UNESCO Convention, for example, suggest in the event of competing claims to national cultural property, 'to realize […] interests in a compatible way through, inter alia, loans, temporary exchange of objects […], temporary exhibitions, joint activities of research and restoration'.[21] Such creative solutions are not uncommon in practice as it is. For example, when France in 2011 returned looted scriptures to (South) Korea on a renewable long-term loan – to circumvent laws prohibiting French museums to deaccession public collections –, it separated ownership rights from rights to access, use and control.[22] A solution mirrored by the Korean example is the transfer of title of (presumably looted) Nok and Sokoto statuettes by France to Nigeria, whereas they physically remained in France under the terms of a 25-year loan.[23]

In the Korean example physical possession, whereas in the Nigerian example rehabilitation and a formal recognition, may have been key. Also in the field of Nazi looted art, the 1998 Washington Principles prescribe 'fair and just solutions, depending on the circumstances of the case', not an absolute right to full ownership. Solutions in that field often involve a financial settlement, where recognition by addressing the ownership history (*e.g.* in a plaque in a museum) also features as (part of) solutions found.

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20 Faro Convention, Article 7 (b).

21 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted at the UNESCO Meeting of States Parties, 18-20 May 2015 (C70/15/3.MSP/11), para. 19.

22 *Décret No.2011-527 Portant publication de l'accord entre le Gouvernement de la République Française et le Gouvernement de la République de Corée relatif aux manuscrits royaux de la Dynastie Joseon (ensemble une annexe)* (adopted 7 February 2011) <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000024022738?r=g7YcXLuG3d>

23 M. Cornu, MA. Renold, New Developments in the Restitution of Cultural Property: Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution, *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 17/ 1-31 (2010), 20-21.

Figure 3.4: The Bull by Paulus Potter (1647), Mauritshuis, The Hague. The painting returned from Paris to the Netherlands after Napoleon's final defeat. (image courtesy Mauritshuis)

A human right to access to (one's) culture

As mentioned, the Faro Convention does not create binding rights. Nevertheless, binding international human rights instruments provide for a number of rights that may be relevant in this field. Of key importance in that respect is the evolution of the right of 'access to culture', as it developed from the right to culture in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).[24] According to the 2009 General Comment on the right to culture this has come to include "access to cultural goods", and this implicates that states should adopt "specific measures aimed at achieving respect for the right of everyone … to have access to their own cultural… heritage and to that of others."[25] The 2011 Report of the independent expert in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, is instructive where she concludes that:

24 Article 15(1)(a) of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966), 993 UNTS 3 (ICESCR). See also Art. 27 of the UDHR.

25 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 21 (2009), UN Doc E/C.12/GC/21.

> The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage forms part of international human rights law, finding its legal basis, in particular, in the right to take part in cultural life, the right of members of minorities to enjoy their own culture, and the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and to maintain, control, protect and develop cultural heritage.[26]

Shaheed also observes that 'varying degrees of access and enjoyment may be recognized, taking into consideration the diverse interests of individuals and groups according to their relationship with specific cultural heritages'. As mentioned in the introduction, this right of access to one's cultural heritage resonates in recent declarations and soft law instruments.[27]

Similar to the Faro Convention, according to Shaheed distinctions should be made between:

a. originators or 'source communities', communities which consider themselves as the custodians/owners of a specific cultural heritage, people who are keeping cultural heritage alive and/or have taken responsibility for it;
b. individuals and communities, including local communities, who consider the cultural heritage in question an integral part of the life of the community, but may not be actively involved in its maintenance;
c. scientists and artists; and
d. general public accessing the cultural heritage of others.[28]

Although this list is of a general nature and not per se aimed at lost cultural objects, it underscores that the specific social function of cultural objects defines entitlement. Moreover, it signals a trend away from national interests and towards community interests.

UNDRIP

While the right of 'access to culture' in the binding ICESCR may seem vague and unspecified, the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is clear and specific in its obligations. The UNDRIP entitles indigenous peoples to rights with regard to their cultural heritage, including their lost cultural property.[29] In Article 11(2), this is defined as a right of 'redress through

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26 Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent Expert in the Field of Cultural Rights (Farida Shaheed)' submitted pursuant to resolution 10/23 of the Human Rights Council, 22 March 2010 [Doc A/HRC/14/36

27 Supra, n. 7.

28 Ibid., (62) under 'Right Holders', p. 16

29 See also International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention no. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (adopted 27 June 1989) 28 ILM 1382. It requests States to take special measures to 'safeguard' the cultures of indigenous peoples (Art. 4). UNDRIP is more specific.

effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs'.[30] Article 12 deals with rights to objects of special importance – providing for a right to 'use and control' where lost ceremonial objects are concerned and a straightforward right to repatriation for objects containing human remains.[31]

Since these provisions are acknowledged as part of the (binding) right of access to culture insofar as the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples is concerned, this is an important instrument in the field of colonial takings.[32] That it is more than 'just' a declaration is illustrated by the fact that the UNDRIP was adopted after 20 years of negotiations and by now is supported almost universally.[33] States, in other words, are under the obligation to assist indigenous peoples in providing 'redress through effective mechanisms' and to 'enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned'.[34]

As to the question of what exactly constitutes an indigenous people, the UNDRIP deliberately abstained from a definition to allow for the flexible evolution of the concept.[35] In general terms the link between people, their land and culture, and self-identification as a distinct community, are decisive factors.[36]

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30 UNDRIP, Art. 11(2).

31 UNDRIP, Art. 12(1): 'Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; […] the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. (2) States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned'.

32 According to General Comment No. 21 the right of 'access to culture' includes the rights as listed in the UNDRIP.

33 It was adopted by a majority of 144 States in favour, 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine) and four votes against. These objectors all reversed their vote: on 3 April 2009, Australia's government endorsed it; on 19 April 2010, New Zealand's support became official; on 16 December 2010, the United States declared it would 'lend its support', and in 2016, Canada officially adopted the declaration.

34 UNDRIP, Art. 12(2).

35 Following the advice of Special Rapporteur Daes, Commission on Human Rights, Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 'Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples: Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People', Final Report (1995), Doc. E/Cn.4/Sub.2/1995/26.

36 See *Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International (on Behalf of Endorois Welfare Council) v. Kenya* (2010) ACHPR, Communication No. 276/2003, discussed in Vrdoljak AF (2016) Standing and collective cultural rights. In: Jakubowski A (ed) Cultural rights as collective rights, an international law perspective. Brill, Leiden, pp 272-287, p. 281.

3. Heritage title

The approach taken in the UNDRIP is useful in a more general sense because it relies on rights implicated by a continuing situation. Remaining separated from cultural objects that are particularly meaningful to specific people could add up to a violation of human rights. This, as opposed to a focus on the illegality of the acquisition in the past in a property approach. A shift in focus, in other words, from events in the *past* towards the interests of people *today*.

A second point is that this approach enables the classification of objects, depending on their social function and identity value for the people involved. UNDRIP differentiates for example between ceremonial objects, objects containing human remains and a general category of cultural objects 'taken without free, prior and informed consent'.[37] In that sense, differences in entitlement follow from the type of object and identity values concerned.

A third element is that the rights involved are defined in terms of access, return or equitable solutions, not in terms of (the restitution of) exclusive ownership rights. Rights, in other words, tailored to the interests involved, enabling remedies that also take account of the interests of other right holders, such as new possessors who gained ownership title under a specific national regime.

As mentioned above, this reflects soft law that promotes creative and more flexible solutions. On the level of human rights law the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is noteworthy in this regard. In the 2015 *Kaliña and Lokono Peoples v. Suriname* case the Court acknowledged, first of all, pre-existing rights of the indigenous peoples with respect to their ancestral lands. The court futhermore held that the right of access can be compatible with rights of other title holders.[38] It ruled that "the State must establish, by mutual agreement with the Kaliña and Lokono peoples and the third parties, rules for peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the lands in questions, which respect the uses and customs of these peoples and ensure their access to the Marowijne River".

The notion that thus emerges can be denoted as "heritage title".[39] Entitlement in this respect depends on a continuing cultural link between people and cultural objects, and the rights involved are defined in terms of access and control, not in terms of absolute and exclusive ownership. Although we are accustomed to defining

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37 UNDRIP articles 11 and 12, see n. 31.

38 The Court ruled with respect to ancestral land that was now owned by third parties that 'the State must establish, by mutual agreement with the Kaliña and Lokono peoples and the third parties, rules for peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the lands in questions, which respect the uses and customs of these peoples and ensure their access to the Marowijne River'. *Kaliña and Lokono Peoples v Suriname*, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct HR, Series C, No. 309, 25 November 2015, para. 159.

39 See E. Campfens 'Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims', NILR 67, 257-295 (2020).

Figure 3.5: The mummified body of 11th century monk Zhanggong Zushi, encased in a Buddha statue that was looted in 1995. The Dutch court did not honour the ownership claim by the Chinese villages, illustrating the wider usefulness of a human rights approach. (image courtesy Elsevier Stokmans Fotografie)

relations between objects and people by way of exclusive ownership, this exclusivity does not always fit cultural *property*. The reason for that is that the intangible heritage values – especially those of earlier foreign owners – are not sufficiently covered by regular ownership laws. Dependant on the type of object and the values it represents, heritage title gives rise to equitable. The specific circumstances and interests involved should determine what is 'equitable'.

Obviously, the intangible heritage value of an object is not the sole point of reference in disputes regarding contested cultural objects. It is important, however, to acknowledge this as a legitimate interest. The UNESCO Conventional framework appoints national states as right holder to heritage title with regard to their "national cultural property". Nevertheless, that model does not provide an answer for earlier losses and has other blind spots, meaning that additional legal tools seem needed.

Figure 3.6: One of the 122 pieces of the Quimbaya collection in Madrid (image courtesy Museo de America)

Access to justice

A last question that needs to be addressed is how to make heritage title operational. Alternative dispute resolution and cultural diplomacy on the interstate level are often promoted as being best equipped to solve disputes in this field.[40] However valid this may be in specific cases, access to justice eventually is key, not only in the recognition of unequal power relations, but also for the development of norms in a field that is hindered by legal insecurity. The question of whether norms can be made operational obviously depends on their binding force. Here, hurdles still exist as

40 E.g. the International Law Association's Principles for Co-operation in the Mutual Protection and Transfer of Cultural Material: 'If the [… parties, EC] are unable to reach a mutually satisfactory settlement […] both parties shall submit the dispute to good offices, consultation, mediation, conciliation, ad hoc arbitration or institutional arbitration'. International Law Association, Report of the Seventy-second Conference (2006), Principle 9. Annex to Nafziger JAR (2007) The principles for cooperation in the mutual protection and transfer of cultural material. Chic J Int Law 8:147-167.

Figure 3.7: The Quimbaya Treasure as shown in Madrid in the beginning of the 20th century (image courtesy Museo de America)

the law is evolving. Nevertheless, heritage title may operate as a 'narrative norm'.[41] Heritage title should thus instruct judges on the interpretation of open norms that exist in all jurisdictions, for example concepts such as 'morality', 'general principles of (international) law' or 'reasonableness and fairness'.[42]

In terms of a straightforward human rights claim, the question is whether a forum could evaluate a claim based on the argument that the continued deprivation of a specific cultural object is an infringement of the right to 'access to culture'. The Optional Protocol to the ICESCR offers a complaints procedure. This procedure, however, is limited to nationals or groups in the State responsible for the alleged violation, whereas claimants are not usually nationals of a holding State, and is

41 E. Jayme, 'Narrative Norms in Private International Law, The Example of Art law', in *The Hague Academy of International Law, Recueil des cours, Collected Courses*, 375 (2015), 41: 'These norms speak, but they are flexible and not very precise. They describe certain policies without giving answers in a single case'. As an example, he refers to the 1998 Washington Principles that judges should take into account.

42 In fact, courts in various countries already prevent unjust outcomes to cultural property disputes in a strict private law approach in that way, see E. Campfens 'Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims', *Netherlands International Law Review*, 67 (2020), 257-295, section 3.

subject to ratification of the Protocol by that State.[43] Within the European human rights system, while a stumbling block is that the European Convention on Human Rights does not include a right to culture, claims may be addressed through the human right to property and a number of other rights.[44]

An interesting roadmap on how to proceed is given by the Colombian Constitutional Court in a 2017 case concerning the 'Quimbaya Treasure'.[45] In its ruling, the Court ordered the Colombian government to pursue – on behalf of the indigenous Quimbaya people – the return from Spain of a treasure of 122 golden objects lost at the close of the nineteenth century. The Court argued that under today's standards of international law – referring to human rights law but interestingly also to the 1970 UNESCO Convention -, indigenous peoples are entitled to their lost cultural objects. *How* such a claim is pursued is left to the discretion of the government, but according to the Court *the fact that* governments should work towards this goal is clear.[46] In a first reaction to the subsequent request by the Colombian authorities for the return of the Quimbaya Treasure, the Spanish authorities, however, declined on the grounds that today the Quimbaya Treasure has become Spanish patrimony.

This, of course, has long been a common European reaction to restitution requests by former colonized people. It is also reminiscent of the (initial) position that the Austrian government took in the *Altmann* case mentioned in the introduction: due to national patrimony laws the Klimt paintings that were lost during the Nazi era were inalienable Austrian national cultural heritage. In that case, however, after US Supreme Court established a violation of international law, the Austrian government accepted to abide by an arbitral award and the rights of Altmann prevailed.[47] It illustrates the difficulties in this field, but also highlights the potential of the human rights framework as a universal language to further develop this field.

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43 Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 10 December 2008, entered into force 5 May 2013) UN Doc A/RES/63/117, Art. 2: 'Communications may be submitted by or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals, under the jurisdiction of a State Party, claiming to be victims of a violation of any of the economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant *by that State Party*'. Emphasis added.

44 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (adopted 4 November 1950, entered into force 3 September 1953) 213 UNTS 221 (ECHR). In the case law, rights that may fall under the notion of 'cultural rights' have been recognized. See Jakubowski A (2016) Cultural heritage and the collective dimension of cultural rights in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. In: A. Jakubowski (ed) *Cultural rights as Collective Rights, an International Law Perspective* (The Hague, Brill, 2016), 155-179, 158 and 178-179.

45 Judgment SU-649/17 (2017) (Republic of Colombia, Constitutional Court).

46 For a discussion, see D. Mejia-Lemos, 'The 'Quimbaya Treasure' Judgment SU-649/17', *American Journal of International Law*, 113 (2019), 122-130.

47 Above n. 5.

Conclusion

Although the rationale underlying the protected status of cultural objects in international law is their intangible 'heritage' value, the legal framework for contested cultural objects takes an ownership approach. By doing that, it fails to address the intangible heritage interests of people who identify with specific objects, adequately. Soft law instruments increasingly *do* acknowledge the interests of former owners in "their" lost cultural objects. An ethical approach and alternative dispute resolution for settling these types of cases that follows from such a soft law approach, may at times be the best way forward. From a legal perspective however this raises a fundamental question. If we believe this is a matter of (delayed) justice, the role of law is to provide for a framework where similar cases can be dealt with similarly.

This paper suggests that a human rights law approach could help structure this field. Human rights law is particularly equipped to address heritage and identity values; human rights are of a universal nature, and penetrate and shape how private law is being interpreted and adjudicated. The right of 'access to culture' as developed in the realm of the right to culture in Article 15 (1) ICESCR can be a point of reference in such an approach. Besides, other human rights could be invoked. More specifically such an approach may offer tools to address: (i) the recognition of the immaterial value of cultural objects for certain people, as opposed to a sole focus on ownership and legality of events in the past in the traditional approach of restitution issues; (ii) the interests of non-state parties like individuals, communities or indigenous people; and (iii) prioritization and conciliation of competing interests parties may have in the same cultural object by aiming at creative and participatory solutions.

From the Leiden Collections: Part 1

Figure 1: PhD procession leaving the Academy Building, painting by Hendrik van de Burgh, circa 1650-1660 (on loan from Rijksmuseum). Museum De Lakenhal.

Figure 2: The teacher of Europe. Portrait of Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), cameo, Wedgwood, 1782. Boerhaave was an all-rounder: physician, anatomist, botanist, chemist, humanist and researcher. His contemporaries called him the teacher of Europe. Rijksmuseum Boerhaave.

Figure 3: The oldest gown. Silk velvet gown, 1775. Academisch Historisch Museum.

Figure 4: Ginkgo. The Ginkgo tree is considered to be a living fossil. It was planted in the Hortus Botanicus in 1785. The Ginkgo was the favourite tree of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who honoured it with a poem. Hortus Botanicus.

Figure 5: Rice from Suriname. Rice plant, cultivated from black rice seeds from Paramaribo. Etnobotanist Professor Tine van Andel researched this particular plant. Genetic analysis showed that the seeds of this plant came from West-Africa. Probably taken by an enslaved African. Naturalis.

Figure 6: Etruscan urn. An Etruscan urn from Volterra, Italy, 200-250 BCE. Bought in 1826 by Jean-Emile Humbert, who was an agent for the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities) in Leiden. The urn is on display in Leiden and registered under number H III C. National Museum of Antiquities.

Between policy and practice

The impact of global decolonization on the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, 1960-1970

Martin E. Berger

Introduction

This article examines the impact of global decolonization in the 1960s on the National Museum of Ethnology (NME) in Leiden, The Netherlands. It focusses especially on how the newly found independence of many countries around the world influenced the mission that the museum set for itself, and how decolonization impacted exhibition-making and acquisition policies. The goal of the article is to better understand how the museum saw its own role and its praxis in a period of significant global political changes that deeply affected the way ethnographic museums functioned. The choice for the 1960s as the decade of focus is based on several arguments. As Claire Wintle has argued, 'in general surveys of museums displaying world cultures the period between 1945 and 1970 is generally marked by extreme inertia [...] the frantic political shifts which dominated the world map in the 1950s and 1960s are rarely seen to have affected museum practice'.[1] Nevertheless, as Wintle has suggested, decolonization had a strong influence on the way ethnographic museum functioned and, vice versa, museums themselves contributed to processes of decolonization.

1 C. Wintle, Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes, *Museum and Society,* 11/2 (2013), 185-201 (185).

A particular focus of the article will be acquisition practices. Previously, studies of ethnographic collecting have focused on the period before World War Two, especially in colonial contexts.[2] Comparatively little attention has been paid to collecting processes in the period after 1950. Research into the history of ethnographic museum collections has often focused on identifying and understanding the work of field collectors, in order to better understand the context in which these pieces were originally collected. However, as Wingfield has argued, 'while identifying field collectors accords with the twentieth-century focus of the disciplines with which [ethnographic museums are] associated, it also has the tendency of marginalizing the museum and locating it away from the action'.[3] Therefore, in this article I will focus on the acquisition policies of the museum itself and try to assess to what extent the museum had control over what was acquired and to what extent museum acquisitions were determined by outside partners such as dealers, donors and private collectors.

Another reason this article considers the 1960s is the introduction of UNESCO's Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in 1970. This convention grew out of a global concern with the large-scale looting and illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. As Prott has argued, the adoption of the UNESCO 1970 treaty was directly linked to UN Resolution 1514 (the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples), as newly independent states wished to put a stop to the looting and illicit traffic of their cultural heritage and strove for the return of important items of national cultural heritage which resided in former colonial museums.[4] While the return of items was a bridge too far for many former colonial powers, they were prepared to aid in curtailing the illicit trade in cultural heritage, resulting in the UNESCO 1970 convention.[5] At the same time, this decade saw the widespread popularization of the market for 'primitive' or 'tribal' art. The marketing by European and North American art dealers of ethnographic and archaeological pieces as art led to an ever-increasing demand (and financial value) for these artefacts, which had until then primarily be seen as scientific specimens and objects of study. As a result, the 1960s were a moment of global political and cultural transition in which archaeological and ethnographic pieces were still legally available on the market in large numbers, but the values attached to them were changing.

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2 See: M. O'Hanlon & R. Welsch, eds., *Hunting The Gatherers Ethnographic Collectors, Agents, and Agency in Melanesia 1870s-1930s* (Berghahn: Oxford, 2000).

3 C. Wingfield, 'Donors, Loaners, Dealers and Swappers: The Relationships behind the English Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum', in S. Byrne, A. Clarke, R. Harrison & R. Torrence, eds., *Unpacking the Collection: Museums, Identity and Agency*, (New York: Springer, 2011), 119-140 (121).

4 L.V. Prott, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the 1970 Convention: An Evaluation 40 years after its adoption', *Second Meeting of States Parties to the 1970 Convention* (2012), https://www.obs-traffic.museum/sites/default/files/ressources/files/Prott_strengths_and_weaknesses_2012.pdf, accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

5 Ibid.

Figure 4.1: This Classic Maya lintel is a fitting example of the 'aesthetic masterpieces' that Director P.H. Pott aimed to acquire. La Pasadita Lintel 2, RV-3939-1, Maya, ca. 766. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/783727

The NME and the annual reports

Founded in 1837, the NME is one of the oldest ethnographic museums in the world. The museum has a collection of around 240,000 objects, in addition to hundreds of thousands of photographs, as well as a large collection of ethnographic films and sound recordings. In April 2014 the museum merged with the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Africa Museum in Berg en Dal (both in The Netherlands) to form the National Museum of World Cultures. In 2017, the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam was added to this new institution. As a result, while all the individual museums remain open, all Dutch ethnographic museums now fall under the institutional umbrella of the National Museum of World Cultures.

The 1960s were a period of active collecting at the NME. Around 20,000 objects were collected from around the globe during this decade. Additionally, the 1960s were a pivotal moment in the development of a collections policy that would influence the NME until well into the twenty-first century. In 1955, Dr. Pieter H. Pott, Indologist by training, took over the directorship of the museum, a position he would fulfill until 1981. Pott's vision of ethnography and of the role of ethnographic museums in mid-twentieth century society profoundly influenced the direction of the NME in terms of collecting, display and educational work. Many of these changes were implemented and started to take effect in the 1960s, the period of main concern in this article.

Since official acquisition policies were uncommon in ethnographic museums in the period under discussion, the primary source for reconstructing acquisitions and collections policies at the NME are the museum's annual reports submitted to the Ministry of Culture. Policies were dictated by the director and many acquisitions were made by the director without consulting the curators of the museum. According to one employee of the museum active at the time, during Pott's tenure as director the acquisitions policy of the museum was never discussed during staff meetings.[6] All annual reports were based on Pott's own observations and the quarterly reports submitted by the museum's curators. In the reports Pott not only wrote about the museums' new acquisitions, exhibitions and educational work, but also reflected on current events and the influence that broader socio-political events had on the activities and mission of the museum.

Three major interconnected themes emerge from the reports that are relevant to the questions discussed in this article. These are: 1. decolonization and the mission of ethnographic museums; 2. the ethics of collecting; and 3. the changing interest in and increasing market values of 'primitive art'.

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6 G.D. van Wengen, *'Wat is er te doen in Volkenkunde?' : de bewogen geschiedenis van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden* (Leiden: Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, 2002), 178.

Decolonization, display and the mission of ethnographic museums

Processes of decolonization heavily affected ethnographic museums in Europe, not only in the manners in which they collected their objects, but also in the way they positioned themselves in society. Pott's reflections in the annual report of 1960 on this process are worth quoting at length, as they succinctly summarize his ideas on the mission of ethnographic museums:

> [in 1960] the contrast between the changing circumstances in the world and the basis on which the majority of ethnological museums have directed their policies has been particularly salient. It is clear that most of the ethnological museums originated as colonial museums […] As a result, these museums were in fact based on the idea of a community of interests; they demanded attention in their own society for the richness and diversity in these colonial regions and showed how technical progress was stimulated there. All this could give the visitor a sense of pride or satisfaction in his own society; after all, he belonged to the group [of people] that had 'achieved something great' elsewhere. Because of the changes in the global situation, suddenly there is no longer any significance attached to that great thing that has been done […]
>
> This means that most older ethnographic museums have to change their policies. Two possibilities are then available, the first: turning an ethnographic museum into an art museum that showcases so-called exotic art, which can be approached and appreciated without any knowledge of the culture from which it originated. The second would be to establish a truly ethnographic museum, one which calls attention to the cultures of other peoples without assuming a community of interests but for which the interest can be expected on the basis of the positive values of the cultures themselves, which can be appreciated by [Western] society without violating their own norms. […]
>
> The National Museum of Ethnology is certainly privileged in this respect. Not only can it have a decent number of staff, specialized in almost all areas of the world, it has never been a colonial museum. It has developed from the outset as an ethnological museum, where the interest for foreign peoples was prominent and not the community of interests of its own people with certain overseas territories.[7]

Pott sketches two pathways that (former colonial) ethnographic museums can follow when attempting to come to grips with their new roles in a decolonizing world. One is to become a museum of non-Western art that focuses on the aesthetic experience,

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7 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1961* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1961), 1.

the other is to become a 'true ethnographic museum' that draws the attention of the visitor to the 'positive values' of other cultures. From the annual reports it is clear that Pott aims to follow this second course for the NME. He envisions a museum that attempts to further understanding of other cultures, presenting them in ways that are not dictated by colonial interests and enterprises. Pott highlights the fact that, according to him, the NME 'has never been a colonial museum'. By doing so he contrasts the NME with the Tropenmuseum, The Netherlands' other major ethnographic museum which was formed as the Colonial Museum and was part of the Ministry of Colonies. While the main role of the Colonial Museum was to aid in the instruction and education of future civil servants in the Dutch colonies, the NME was primarily an academic institution, with strong ties to Leiden University, aimed at the study of comparative ethnology on a global scale.

Pott aims to use the museum to 'make that which was seen at first as strange and incomprehensible, into something trusted and understandable'.[8] According to Pott, in a decolonizing world, the mission of the museum should be to instill in the museum visitor 'an open and honest interest for the lives and cultures of humans in foreign lands'.[9] No longer should objects be valued as the spoils of empire and proof of colonial power. Rather, they should serve as entryways to understand the life-worlds of Others. As a result, Pott was most interested in acquiring 'ordinary' items of everyday use, which he thought best represented the daily life of people in other cultures. Through these displays, Pott also aimed to make the Dutch museum visitor more aware of the way their own preconceptions, thoughts, feelings and judgements towards non-Dutch Others were formed. This way, Pott hoped to facilitate 'honest engagement with these unknown cultures'.[10]

Of course, one could argue that Pott was relatively late to the game in his ambition to create contextual collections and displays of the material culture of other peoples in which other cultures were displayed on their own terms. This viewpoint had already been argued by anthropologists like Franz Boas at the turn of the twentieth century. [11] Still, as Pott sketches in the annual reports, it is global decolonization that forces ethnographic museums the world over to rethink their mission and role in a world after Empire, urging them to be more critical of earlier colonial ways of engaging the Other.

The exhibitions program that developed under Pott's directorship reflects this concern with context-driven presentations. Exhibitions aimed to create an

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8 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1968* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1968), 4.

9 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1962* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1962), 1.

10 Ibid.

11 D. Jenkins, Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology, Comparative Studies, *Society and History,* 36/1 (1994), 242-270 (266).

understanding of how other peoples and cultures carve out a life for themselves in other locations, while also instructing visitors on how cultural stereotypes were formed and how they continue to have an impact. For instance, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the NME, Pott curated an exhibition entitled 'Naar Wijder Horizon' ('Towards a Broader Horizon') which analyzed the origins and development of cultural stereotypes about non-Western peoples. This exhibition was accompanied by a smaller display of children's drawings from The Netherlands ('Zo zien zij hen'/'This is how they see them'), in which children from around the country had drawn images of how they saw people from other cultures.

In foregrounding the importance of cultural understanding and context-driven presentations, Pott took an active stance against the creation of museums of non-Western/tribal/primitive art, as well as the non-contextualized display of ethnographic objects in art museums. In the annual report of 1962, Pott contrasts the exhibition 'Wow-ipitsj – Twaalf houtsnijders van Amanamkai' ('Wow ipitsj – Twelve wood carvers of Amanamkai'), curated on the basis of extensive fieldwork by the NME's Dr. A. A. Gerbrands, with an exhibition of Papuan art that was shown at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. In 'Wow-ipitsj' the curator aimed to demonstrate that no objective, culturally-independent aesthetic criteria exist and that, therefore, the arts of non-Western peoples can never be judged by Western standards. Meanwhile, according to Pott, the Rijksmuseum show only sought to 'evoke a vague sense of admiration for the so-called '"power of primitive art"'.[12] In Pott's words, this aesthetic approach 'testifies of a, possibly subconscious, sense of superiority, with which the foreign object is appropriated and subsumed into a system of value and classification, that only accentuates its foreignness, because of which it is impossible to come to a better understanding of our fellow man, who shaped this object according to their own values and purposes'.[13]

Naturally, this preoccupation with understanding the context of a particular object had repercussions for the way that Pott envisioned collecting practices. First of all, one could only collect objects of which the original cultural context was known. Second, this meant that, since art dealers generally were unable to supply much information regarding provenance and context, objects should ideally be acquired by specialists in the field who had direct access to the 'source' of the objects. In the annual reports, Pott repeatedly stressed the need for more funds to be able to finance collecting trips by museum staff. However, since these funds were not made available until well into the 1970s, Pott envisioned a practice in which the museum would work with a network of trusted local collaborators, who were familiar with the local situation and could acquire objects for the museum. This collaboration with locals would ensure that the context of objects was

12 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde*, 4.

13 Ibid.

Figure 4.2: Pieter H. Pott around 1970. NMvW collection: RV-111899.

documented and thus enabled a presentation that would stimulate understanding and empathy in visitors.

While stimulating understanding and empathy for other cultures were among Pott's main goals, it should be noted that he was simultaneously convinced that there was no place for anti-colonial politics in an ethnographic museum. According to Ger van Wengen, a former curator of the museum who headed the Education Department between 1956 and 1991, Pott repeatedly complained about the political engagement of the education staff. According to Pott, ethnographic museums should focus on the cultures and arts of non-Western peoples and refrain from engaging in political debates.[14]

In sum, Pott saw the impact of decolonization on ethnographic museums primarily in terms of display (*i.e.* creating displays that promoted understanding and empathy, rather than feelings of colonial superiority). However, his insistence on understanding and empathy meant that collecting and acquisition practices needed to change as well. No longer could the museum haphazardly accept anything that was offered to it, regardless of the way it was acquired and the contextual information that was available. In his approach, Pott distances himself from acquisition policies of the past – or criticizes the lack thereof. Pott's predecessor G.W. Locher was mostly

14 van Wengen, *'Wat is er te doen in Volkenkunde?'*, 124.

interested in diversifying the museum's collections through the acquisition of aesthetic masterpieces. At the time the museum's collections consisted primarily of material from the Dutch colonies of Surinam and Indonesia, as well as important older collections from Japan and China. Earlier, pre-World War II, directors and curators seemed to have set hardly any limitations on what should enter the national collections and collected in a rather indiscriminate way. In Pott's view, however, limits to collecting were necessary to create a collection of sufficient quality.

Pott's views on collecting

In the report for 1964, Pott summarizes his views on collecting quite clearly: 'In terms of the creation of new collections, the museum strives to acquire striking elements, these can be individual objects with a high aesthetic or scientific value, or they can be collections that are well-documented and represent a complete sample [of a certain culture]'.[15] Pott's acquisition policy was oriented along two axes – collecting masterpieces of ethnographic art, on the one hand, and acquiring supposedly complete overviews of the material culture of a particular people or culture, on the other. At first sight, these two approaches might seem contradictory, as the latter is mainly concerned with contextualization while the former focuses on aesthetic qualities without contextual information. In the late nineteenth century, Adolf Bastian had suggested that ethnographic collectors focus on everyday items, rather than singular pieces of high aesthetic quality. Tools and artefacts that reflected the 'normal and average character' of communities were to be preferred over 'dazzling items' (Young 2000: 184)[16]. Everyday items were seen to be more representative and more fitting to elucidate foreign cultures. While Pott adhered strongly to this view, his acquisition ambitions also included 'aesthetic masterpieces'. Here, the influence of the market for 'primitive art', which was booming in the 1960s, undoubtedly played a role, as it was a primary marketing and branding mechanism which valued non-Western artefacts primarily for aesthetic (and financial) reasons.

While Pott's dual approach might seem contradictory at first, at the basis of it is the concept of 'completeness'. This idea of 'completeness' (possibly better translated as 'comprehensiveness') is present in many of Pott's reports. On the one hand Pott aims to 'fill in the gaps', that is acquire pieces from cultures that are not yet represented in the NME collections. On the other, he aims to acquire 'complete samples' of cultures, based on the idea that one can only truly understand a different culture through a

15 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1964* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1964), 13.

16 M. Young, 'The Careless Collector: Malinowski and the Antiquarians', in M. O'Hanlon and R. Welsch, eds., *Hunting The Gatherers – Ethnographic Collectors, Agents, and Agency in Melanesia 1870s-1930s* (Berghahn: Oxford, 2000), 184.

range of its material culture. A good example of this kind of 'complete' collecting are series numbers 4016 and 4171, which were sold to the museum by Polish anthropologist Borys Malkin (1917-2009). Between 1964 and 1966 Malkin supplied a total of 370 objects of the Ka'apor and Tapirapé peoples to the NME.[17] According to the seller, these items were 98% representative of Tapirapé material culture and 95% representative of the material culture of the Ka'apor.[18] How Malkin defined these rather peculiar percentages is not quite made clear in the correspondence, but what these numbers do show is that completeness – understood as the extent to which a collection is representative of the full range of material culture of a certain community – was a mark of quality for both Pott and Malkin.

While for the ethnographic collections, completeness was measured in percentages of artefact types represented, for the aesthetic masterpieces the acquisition policy attempted to 'fill out the canon of non-western art' that was being formed at the time. This canon has never really been defined and would merit more research into what it entails and how it was formed in the interplay between academic, commercial and museum actors. Still, it is clear that some cultures and object types were much sought-after, while others were not. For example, for pre-Columbian art, my own primary field of expertise, even a cursory glance at museum exhibitions the world over will show that certain cultures and objects types are considered to be essential. Simply put, every self-respecting display of pre-Columbian art will include at least some Classic Maya material (preferably with hieroglyphs), pieces from Formative era Western Mexico, and Moche and Chimu ceramics from the Andean region. Since many collections of pre-Columbian art were contemporaneously formed in the 1950s and 60s, there was undoubtedly some form of self-enforcing effect in which museums looked to and followed each other in building up collections of pre-Columbian art.[19]

Limits to collecting

For Pott, the best way to achieve completeness, at least for ethnographic material, was to send out small teams consisting of museum staff, trained ethnologists and photographers/filmmakers who could sketch an overall picture of a culture. Pott repeatedly attempted to attain permission to use parts of the acquisitions funds

17 M. Françozo, 'O colecionismo etnográfico no Brasil (1955-1975): entrevista com René Fuerst' Bol. Mus. Para. Emílio Goeldi. Ciênc. hum. [online], 12/3 (2017), 789-800. ISSN 2178-2547. https://doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000300007; Françozo and Caromano *in prep.*

18 A. Timmers, 'To collect or not to collect, that is the question: a story about the collections policy at Leiden's Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in the sixties', Unpublished MA Thesis, Leiden University, 2015, 50.

19 E.H. Boone, ed. *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1993); C.G. Tremain & D. Yates, eds., *The Market for Mesoamerica: Reflections on the Sale of Pre-Columbian Antiquities* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2019).

to send out these teams, but did not succeed in doing this during the first fifteen years of his tenure as director. As a result, the museum remained dependent on the aforementioned local collaborators, as well as art dealers and the generosity of donors. Pott also flagged this problem himself, arguing that the museum was dependent on 'relatively accidental offers that cross our path [...] because of which the focus lies on those pieces that have primarily aesthetic value, rather than ethnographic worth'.[20] Because of this, it was difficult for the museum to achieve Pott's main goal: to acquire those pieces of everyday use that most aptly sketch the lives of people across the globe. Pott bemoaned the fact that art dealers did not realize that pieces with solid contextual documentation are worth far more to ethnographic museums than pieces that are considered 'art'. At the same time, he complained that first-grade 'primitive art' pieces had become prohibitively expensive and that art dealers took to calling second-grade art 'typical museum pieces'.[21]

The steep increase in prices on the art market for ethnographic and archaeological pieces was a perennial concern to Pott. In the annual reports, which were written primarily for the Dutch Ministry of Culture, which funded the museum, Pott requested more money for acquisitions almost every year. For example in the report for 1963, Pott writes, 'Sadly, we have to conclude that the prices for very good ethnographic pieces are rising enormously, while the acquisition budget does not grow correspondingly'.[22] Because of this price increase, the museum could not afford to acquire all the pieces that it was interested in. According to Pott, 'in general, one sees that the prices of ethnographic objects increase more strongly than those of other pieces in the art trade. In many respects, these prices are prohibitive and acquisitions can no longer be considered; prices in the range of tens of thousands of guilders are no longer the exception'.[23]

Apart from the financial concerns, Pott also took ethical issue with some of the acquisition practices of previous generations. He particularly cautioned against the acquisition of objects which played an ongoing active role in the religious and spiritual life of local communities and which would be difficult for those communities to replace. According to Pott, 'the times have passed in which we could collect through a 'buyout policy' without any regard for the sentiments of others; such an action would only elicit strong reproach, if not aggressive opposition, in the current climate'.[24] A few years later, Pott phrases this sentiment more strongly when he says 'it is no longer ethically and morally acceptable to more or less randomly extract

20 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1968), 3.
21 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1961), 4.
22 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1963), 9.
23 Ibid., 13.
24 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1960), 16-7.

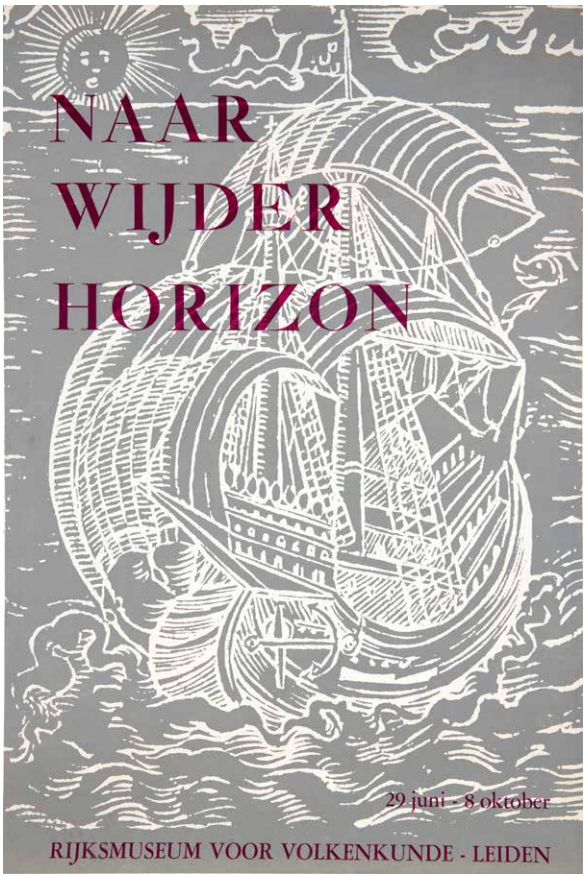

Figure 4.3: Poster for the 'Naar Wijder Horizon' exhibition, curated by Pott in 1962. RV-6235-63

objects from living cultures, if these are irreplaceable and still fulfill an essential function in these cultures'.[25]

Another obstacle to unbridled collecting was the legislation that many countries put in place – or started to enforce – on the export of cultural goods. International lobbies lead to the drafting of the UNESCO 1970 Convention, which, it should be noted, was only accepted in 2009 by The Netherlands. Because of this more stringent control on the trade in material heritage, Pott's ambition to collect 'outstanding masterpieces' was made more difficult.

While the first issue – that of extracting objects with an active 'essential function' – was given ample attention by the director and care seems to have been taken to collect ethnographic objects in an ethical manner, the UNESCO 1970 issue – related primarily to archaeological pieces – seems to have been considered of minor

25 Ibid., 9.

importance, at least not in regards to Latin American countries. The NME continued collecting pre-Columbian pieces without a secure provenance until the late 1980s. In the 1960s, correspondence concerning possible acquisitions even openly makes mention of circumventing legislation by smuggling pieces out of the country.[26] Naturally, both these ethical considerations result from processes of decolonization that gradually lead to a shift in the balance of power, as well as more awareness of problematic collecting practices.

Discussion

The research in this article represents a small and limited case study into the impact of decolonization on European ethnographic museums in the mid-twentieth century. This work forms part of a larger research project that will be developed as part of the Museums, Collections and Society research group. This larger project should answer important questions that could not be addressed within the scope of this article. Primary among these is the question of how the NME relates to other ethnographic museums around the world in the same time period. Are the developments sketched here unique for the NME, or do they represent a larger pattern? How did the global developments of the 1960s impact other ethnographic museums in Europe and North America in terms of collection formation and acquisition policies? And how do these developments map onto institutional trajectories of ethnographic museums in formerly colonized countries?

Some tentative answers to these questions can already be given, when looking at other studies of ethnographic museums in the same time period. For example, Claire Wintle has analyzed the collecting program of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. in the mid-twentieth century.[27] Wintle shows that the ambitions of Eugene Knez, the museum's curator for Far Eastern ethnology, were virtually the same as those of Pott. Knez sought to acquire comprehensive sets of objects that would depict particular patterns of behavior, rather than "luxury items for the well-to-do"'.[28] Whether Knez and Pott were in direct contact and to what extent these coinciding views were the result of larger global developments or of personal contacts is a topic for future research.

Wintle has also studied the impact of decolonization on the Imperial/Commonwealth institute in the 1960s. She argues that 'museums and other exhibition spaces not only responded to or 'mirrored' the politics of decolonisation across the middle years of the twentieth century, but were active agents in this process'.[29] In

26 N. van de Walle, Letter from N. van de Walle to P.H. Pott, 1 june 1960 Correspondence Archive, Museum Volkenkunde, 1960.

27 C. Wintle, Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter, *The American Historical Review* 121/5 (2016), 1492-1520.

28 Ibid., 1497.

29 Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Museum', 186.

terms of cultural politics, this is arguably the case for the NME, where Pott attempted, through the introduction of less colonial (one can hardly speak of post-colonial) exhibition and education programs, to contribute to a museum practice that attempted not to exoticize the cultures and peoples on display. While it is hard to measure the actual impact of exhibitions like 'Naar Wijder Horizon' among Dutch publics, it is clear that Pott's attention to the creation of stereotypes aimed to adjust images of the Other rooted in colonial politics and presentations. Even though Pott seems to not have seen this new agenda as political himself, his focus on cultural understanding and empathy was clearly in contrast with earlier endeavors in ethnographic museums, which were primarily inspired by colonial politics.

On a more local comparative scale, Christina Kreps has argued that, in the 1960s, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam was forced to reassess its audience because new media and travel made museum visitors more aware of the cultures and lived realities of people in formerly colonized countries.[30] In addition, Kreps notes that 'people who were represented in the museum as colonial subjects in the past were now members of Dutch society'.[31] As a consequence, exhibitions were changed so as to sketch a more socially relevant image of non-Western people's lives. Since the Tropenmuseum was funded primarily by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and Development Cooperation), exhibitions tended until well into the 1990s to focus on societal issues of international cooperation, poverty/social inequality, human rights, and climate change, among others. This more politically engaged approach to exhibition-making was eschewed by Pott, who saw the NME as a place of culture, not politics (assuming that these could be neatly separated). Thus, decolonization in the 1960s seems to have had a different kind of impact in The Netherlands' two major ethnographic museums. While in both institutions the approach to foreign cultures changed into an arguably more decolonial praxis, the NME, because of its director, chose to focus on culture, while the Tropenmuseum focused more on socio-political engagement.

Lastly, this article set out to better understand the extent to which museum staff, as opposed to other actors like field collectors or art dealers, had control over what was collected and acquired. As we have seen, the museum, or rather its director Dr. P.H. Pott, set itself a relatively clear acquisition agenda, focusing on 'aesthetic masterpieces' and 'well-documented complete samples of specific cultures'. Ultimately, however, this agenda could hardly be fulfilled due to financial, ethical and practical constraints. The lack of funds to finance collecting expeditions was primary among these, as it meant that museum staff was not able to go out into 'the

30 C. Kreps, 'Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology', in Janet Marstine, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twentieth-Century Museum,* (Routledge: London, 2011), 73.

31 Ibid.

field' and collect for the museum themselves. While Pott attempted to remedy this issue by working with 'trusted local collaborators' it should be noted that these were more often than not Dutch citizens living abroad, rather than actual locals who were intimately familiar with the cultures to be collected. An exception to this list would be the aforementioned Polish anthropologists Borys Malkin. However, while Malkin was a trained anthropologist, he was clearly also a European outsider, rather than a member of the communities whose material he collected. In this sense, one could argue that, while there may have been more consideration for the ethical aspects of collection formation, decolonization significantly impacted acquisition policy, rather than acquisition practice at the NME.

From the Leiden Collections: Part 2

Figure 1: The Brugmans Nautilus. Preserved specimen of a squid, collected by Professor Sebald Brugmans (1763-1819). (Photo: Esther Dondorp). Naturalis.

Figure 2: Praying for success. Woodblock print by Kobayashi Kiyochika, 1885. This print depicts the medieval scholar and poet Sugawana no Michizane. In Japan, he is the patron saint of scholarship. Temples dedicated to him are popular places for students to pray for good grades. Japanmuseum SieboldHuis, Coll. no. SH2018-DM-451.

Figure 3: "Thunder church". Wooden model made by John Cuthbertson, 1780. Used to demonstrate the effect of lightning and the usefulness of a lightning rod. Rijksmuseum Boerhaave.

Figure 4: Territory Dress. Susan Stockwell, 2018. National Museum of World Cultures, Coll. no. 7175-1ab.

Figure 5: Headdress from Enggano island. Worn by women during the *eakalea* (large feast). National Museum of World Cultures, Coll.no. RV-712-1.

Figure 6: Performance of a nakamutmut. Masked dancers, representing mythical ancestors, appear during an initiation ceremony on Mandok Island, Siassi, Papua New Guinea, December 1983. The objects of series 5307 of the National Museum of World Cultures were collected in 1983/84 on the Siassi-Islands. (Photo: Pieter ter Keurs).

Portland Plasters and Interiors for Display

Alexander Dencher

My academic and curatorial research focuses on the decorative arts and architecture in the 'long eighteenth century' from an art historical as well as museological point of view. Thanks to the support of the research group *Museums, Collections and Society,* I am able to pursue two projects in this field of research: 1. *Portland Plasters,* about a collection of seventeenth-century plasters casts in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden; 2. *Interiors for display*, about the eighteenth-century domestic interior in the Dutch Republic. Both projects highlight the changing perceptions of objects that entered into the collections of the modernist museum after being removed from their original, historical settings. This displacement entails a fragmentation of knowledge, particularly in the case of architectural decoration, which is intended to function as a fixed part of a larger setting. Displays of historical objects in art and archeological museums often focus on the perceived aesthetic value of objects but infrequently account for the intentions of their creators, who may have been motivated by social and political reasons rather than purely artistic ones. Michael Baxandall addressed similar issues in his thought-provoking article 'Exhibiting Intentions' and the anthropological approach taken by Baxandall in his discussion of the presentation of objects from other cultures may also be applied to historical objects that remain at a significant temporal distance from the curator or 'exhibitor'.[1] The past is a foreign land, as the author L.P. Hartley expressed in the famous and often-quoted opening his

1 M. Baxandall, 'Exhibiting Intention: Some preconditions of the visual display of culturally purposeful objects', S.D Lavine, ed., Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display (London/Washington: 1991), 33-41.

Figure 5.1: A seventeenth-century plaster fragment from the orangery of the Earl of Portland displayed upside down by museum handlers. Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden.

novel *The Go-Between*. In order to bridge this gap, scholars must mine the available visual, archival and contextual evidence to arrive at a more complete picture of the historical significance of objects and collections of cultural value.

Portland Plasters

The project *Portland Plasters* focuses on a collection of plaster casts of Trajan's Column in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (RMO) in Leiden (fig.1). Since their discovery by the museum's first director Caspar Reuvens (1793-1835) in an abandoned barn these plaster casts have received little attention from scholars and much remains unclear about their creation, provenance and historical significance. I argue that this collection of plaster fragments of approximately the same size (about 110 x 60 cm) actually constitutes a highly significant record of the reception of classical antiquity in seventeenth-century Dutch art and architecture. The RMO collection was almost certainly created using the moulds made for Louis XIV of France, which makes it possible to connect the plasters with Hans Willem Bentinck (1682-1726), 1st Earl of Portland. Visitors to Portland's estate Sorghvliet describe seeing the plaster reliefs of

Trajan's Column in the orangery (fig.2). These plaster casts, which must be the same ones now in the collection of the RMO, are therefore related to the archeological and artistic ambitions of their patrons and collectors.

The contextualisation of the plasters casts within the well-known gardens of one Europe's leading politicians and diplomats also links the collection of the RMO with the animated and often volatile debates about the cultural representation of politics in early modern Europe. The decoration of Portland's gardens with classical statuary has been understood by scholars as a sign of his interest in the classics but its iconography has not been considered in relation to other, similar artistic campaigns orchestrated by members of the court. The representation of Trajan's military successes in the Dacian Wars (101-102 and 150-106 CE), and the depiction on the RMO casts of the emperor's duties of *adlocutio* (public address) and *lustratio* (religious sacrifice) recall not only the decoration of garden vases at Sorghvliet but also the triumphal entry of Portland's patron, William III of Orange (1650-1702) into The Hague in 1691, as well as the restoration of Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar* ordered by William III at this time.

The case of the Portland Plasters at the RMO also raises questions about the function of gardens as a kind of proto-museum for displaying fragments and copies of classical art. Vanessa Bezemer Sellers surmised that the orangery at Sorghvliet may have functioned as a kind of 'naturalia cabinet' and this description of gardens as cabinets recurs in horticultural literature from the period. Gardens have been used as sites for displaying ancient sculpture since Pope Julius II laid out the courtyard of the Belvedere at the Vatican but their museological function can be further examined. In the gardens at Sorghvliet, as at Versailles, casts of antique sculpture were shown alongside modern interpretations of Greco-Roman art and architecture, which conveyed an ancient appearance through the imitation or appropriation of well-known examples from antiquity. Therefore, it may be argued that as an integral part of the architecture of Portland's gardens the plaster casts of Trajan's Column already functioned within a system of display before entering the collection of the RMO. But how did the transfer of these fragments from their original setting in the early modern formal garden to the galleries of a modernist archeological museum impact their perceived meaning (in particular the ideological and political associations of monumental classical art) and how can we account for this historical development?

These are some of the questions that have been raised in my research thus far. Because archives and museums are currently closed I have focused on studying the available literature, which covers several fields of research, including classical archeology as well as the history of collections, gardens and museums. Mari Lending's discussion of the role of plaster casts of historical architecture in the development of the nineteenth-century museum has been particularly illuminating in this

Figure 5.2: The interior of the orangery of the Earl of Portland at Sorghvliet near The Hague. Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed.

regard.[2] Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 it has nonetheless been possible to undertake parts of my research thanks in part to the cooperative kindness of institutions and colleagues. I am particularly grateful to Professor Ruurd Halbertsma, curator at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, for his interest and enthusiasm, which has made it possible to add a collaborative component to this project.

I am currently working on the organisation of an international symposium in collaboration with the RMO that will unite the curators of the seventeenth-century plasters casts of Trajan's Column (Leiden, Paris, Rome, Stockholm and Milan) with scholars of art history and museum studies. By taking the sets of plasters made with the moulds fashioned for Louis XIV as a point of departure it will be possible for the first time to trace the biographies of an exemplary case of early modern plasters from an archeological, art historical and museological point of view. Although the last two decades have witnessed a reappraisal of the historical importance of early modern plaster casts these studies have not always addressed the epistemological transformation these fragments underwent in their appropriation by the nascent

2 Mari Lending, *Plaster Monuments: Architecture and the Power of Reproduction,* Princeton, 2017, especially Chapter 3.

Figure 5.3: Adriaan de Lelie, *The merchant Jan Gildemeester Jansz. in his cabinet of paintings in his townhouse at Herengracht 475*, 1794-1795. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

archeological museum in the nineteenth century. This not only changed the perceived meaning of such fragments, but curators and conservators frequently eradicated any traces of their intended architectural setting in order to restore the plaster to its pristine, "original" state. Comparisons between the different sets of Trajan plasters in their current state of conservation may also clarify aesthetic debates about patina and authenticity.

The outcome of this symposium will be an edited volume, perhaps in the RMO series *PALMA* (Papers on Archeology Leiden Museum of Antiquities), that will offer an interdisciplinary and comparative study at the creation, dissemination and reception of the seventeenth-century casts of Trajan Column. One of the aspects of this project that I am eager to develop is a comparative technical and material study of the plaster casts in collaboration with NICAS (Netherlands Institute for Conservation, Art and Science) or RCE (Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed), which would shed more light on the provenance of the plaster casts as well as their original appearance. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will lead to an exhibition in the RMO that will recontextualise the 'Portland Plasters' for a much wider audience.

Interiors for display

My second research project studies the eighteenth-century domestic interior in the Netherlands and focuses especially on the 'salon' as a physical and social space rather than a merely notional or literary one (fig.3). The most significant feature of a fashionable townhouse was the addition of a large reception room at the back of the house, sometimes referred to as a *pronkzaal* in Dutch, which became a defining feature of sophisticated city life. Considered by visitors to the Republic as the *state room* of the urban townhouse, these quintessentially eighteenth-century spaces are usually studied with a particular focus on painting or architecture. Although there have been several exhibitions in the last few decades that have studied various aspects of the eighteenth-century interior, there is no cultural history that brings together the artistic, archival and circumstantial evidence.

At this stage my research is focused primarily on the material evidence in museum collections, which is substantial but has been neglected for various reasons. Some of these reasons are discussed in an article I wrote for the research blog of the Leiden University Centre for Arts in Society.[3] As with the Portland Plasters, a loss of meaning occurs when decorative arts and architectural fragments of interiors are removed from their original setting and enter the collection of the museum. But in the case of furniture and furnishings it has often proved more difficult to trace their provenance, which would make it possible to recontextualise these objects within the domestic lives of their original owners. By focusing on the collections of municipal museums, which are often focused on local history, it may be possible to connect objects with their original setting.

The research undertaken in this project will provide sufficient information to write a larger research grant that will make it possible to pursue these ideas on a much larger scale. I will be able to translate some of the results of this research into a 'hands-on' workshop to be given at the Conference of Historians of Netherlandish Art, which was originally planned for June 2021 is now scheduled to be held in 2022. The focus will be on the patrons, designers and craftsmen involved in the interiors of three eighteenth-century townhouses owned by the Association Hendrik de Keyser.

3 A. Dencher, 'Enlightened Spaces: The eighteenth-century interior and the study of decorative arts at Leiden University', LeidenArtsInSociety [blog post], (26 Jan. 2021) https://www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl/articles/enlightened-spaces, accessed 10 May 2021.

Openly Linking Qing Things: the hair-hat-head-case

Fresco Sam-Sin

Case and goals

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an increasing number of Qing subjects (Qing Empire 1636-1912) moving and traveling to Europe and the United States. Abroad, many Qing men cut off the queues they had to wear domestically.[1] To blend in and avoid racial violence many also hid their Qing dress and their hats as well as other markers of Qing identity. At the same time, people from the West traveled to Qing China, engaging in travel, politics, consultancy and war and collecting Qing things (art, militaria, memorabilia etc.) along the way. Some of them worked in the Qing court's service in positions that came with custom-made Qing dress and attire (Hanmeng Li, researcher at the museum, is currently engaged in this topic). The increased mobility resulted in a wealth of Qing objects in both European and American collections, including Qing hats and hair, but also mannequins showcasing Qing hairdos and hats (Fig. 1). Of all the heritage institutes in the world, those in the Netherlands store the most Qing queues and hats. The *Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen* (Location Leiden and Amsterdam), for example, already holds 14 queues in its collection, while all other collections (that is, the ones we are able to consult online) in Europe taken together, hold less

1 A queue is a style of hairstyle worn by men during the Qing Empire. All subjects of the Manchu Qing court had to wear a queue. The hairstyle was originally a Manchu custom but by having Chinese men wear the hairstyle after the Manchu conquer of China in 1644, the Manchu wanted to make it clear that the Chinese had to conform to their customs and not the other way round.

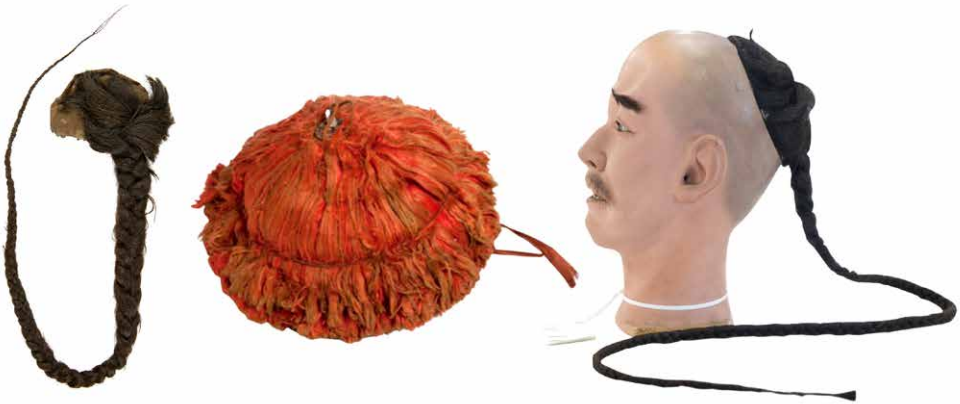

Figure 6.1: hair, hat and head from National Museum of World Cultures.

than 10. The focus of our project is to closely map the materiality, the provenance and the storage of these objects in the Netherlands and compare them to collection items elsewhere.

Our test case, focusing on this specific set of objects, has two overarching goals. First, we want to visualize, map, group and connect these objects and compare them with related objects in other collections outside of the Netherlands. The second goal is to validate why object-based studies, however small in scope, should commit to open data processing (no drop, no sea). Results of our project will include the presentation of case studies on thingsthattalk.net. Things That Talk, while presenting the life of objects in a way that speaks to a wide audience, has built- in Linked Open Data input methods. On that same platform, we will include our first prototyping of how to present linked open data in conjunction with the above object narratives. This will include a visible first step in the front end, but more importantly will build an improved linked open data interaction in the CMS (Content Management System, *i.e.* back end of the platform)

Steps so far

While Covid did prevent us from researching the objects in museums, we have already made two important steps.

1.

Our first step was to single out a few collection items within our object-group and use them to formulate questions. We use the visual storytelling technology of Things That Talk (working on Micr.io software). It helps us to engage with the object without having to hold it in one's hand, and it provides us with a public way to get in touch with peers. The example in Fig. 2 was carried out by ResMA Asian Studies

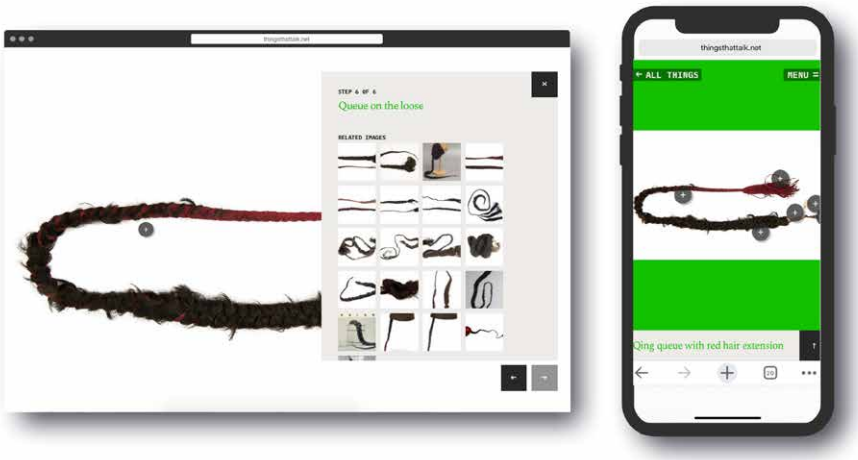

Figure 6.2: Case study by Koen van der Lijn.

student Koen van der Lijn. Van der Lijn followed the life of one of the queues in the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen collection. We then connected the queues of the museum with other collections in and outside of the Netherlands. This already gave us a lot of ideas about the kind of information we should be processing. For example, we started to register the colors of the hair extensions (Van der Lijn found out that they may represent certain meanings). Research into this queue also raised the question about the DNA of the queue (Van der Lijn found that Qing subjects purchased queues when returning home to avoid trouble domestically): how many humans were involved in making this queue, one or more? And, can we find horse hair in these queues or other fabrics that are not really human hair? Another issue that needs to be stored in our linked data is whether this queue is indeed directly connected to Qing China, or whether it came to the collections via the Peranakan population of Indonesia, which might explain the large number of queues in our Dutch collections.

Translating this to linked open data means that we can start to ask interesting questions that look beyond the boundaries of one catalogue. Individual museum collections enable the use of tags for catalogue queries, like “red”, “queue”, “Qing”, “cotton”. This would result in Qing queues with red elements in it and cotton elements in it. But the system would not know if the red elements are made of cotton or that the black queue is enriched with cotton. Linked open data input would, when thought through, not only trace these same tags in other collections as well, but would also enable us to perform more specific and relational queries, such as: “show me Qing queues made from human black hair with interwoven black cotton, and red cotton extensions. In this case the results will exclude those queues that have no cotton

woven into the black hair. In other words, linked data does not only help us to look beyond the individual collections, it also helps to build in more relational links in our queries.

2.

We hold regular meetings with our tech partner Q42 and our design partner Fabrique. Together we are trying to get our existing linked data infrastructure at Things That Talk to a stage where we can use it as a true innovative and user-friendly example to be a real tangible example to address the scepsis around linked open data.

The scepsis is understandable. While the concept of linked open data excels in linking everything with everything, there is a scarcity in implementations and interfaces that are able to translate the data model to intuitive, easy to understand and useable visual front ends, back end input methods, and query methods that encourages researchers and curators to add linked open data to the objects of their research (even if their own focus might not (yet) be to answer questions beyond the scope of one set of objects of one collection). It is the cumulative input of linked open data that we need to obtain a deeper understanding about our objects and our collections. This is not only a task for museums, but also for other heritage collections such as libraries, but also private collections (the latter being a whole parallel reality that we need to start to map if we want to take the next step in understanding the circulation of objects in history, therewith entering yet another layer of humanities research).

Together with our tech and design partners and in liaison with the heritage institutes and individual traders and collectors, we are working on a road map that

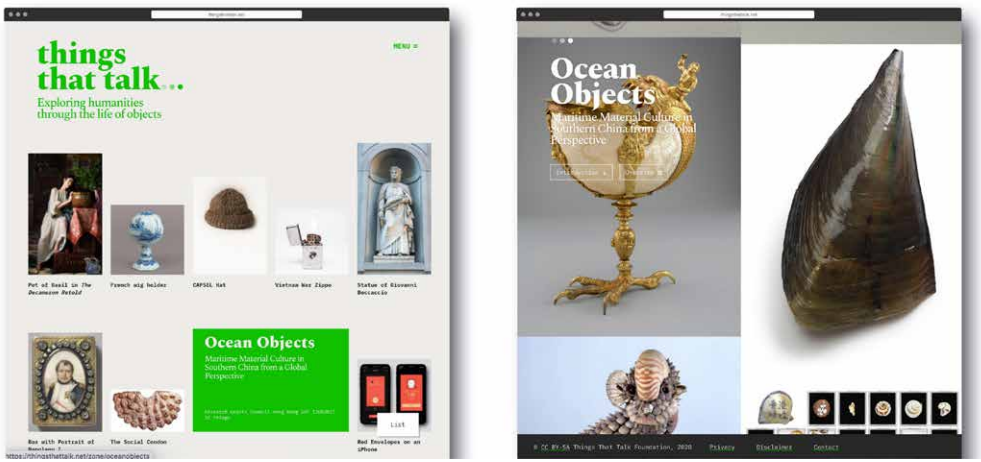

Figure 6.3: Zone 'Ocean Objects'.

will not only lead to a new step in our development of Things That Talk, but will also help us formulate our ambitions for the future that lead to entry points in new discussions with scholars and curators in the heritage world.

Conclusion

We are working on two levels: on the object-per-object level, and on the conceptual design and data level. In the coming months we will accelerate the object studies, after which we will engage in new dedicated sessions with our design and development partners. Parallel to our project, we are also trying to locate other projects that we can use as other voices in the discussion with our partners (see for example *Ocean Objects* in Fig 3.). We implemented a way to group them in our platform (in a 'zone'), and will do the same for the hair-hat-head-case. Again, this provides new and visible ways to view group collections from different locations.

Collecting: A multi-layered phenomenon

Pieter ter Keurs

Lecture to mark the start of the Museums, Collections and Society (MCS) programme

December 2, 2019

Nine years ago, I gave a lecture, on this very spot, on the subject 'Material Culture and Transience'.[1] On that occasion I argued that objects, our material environment, are a kind of antidote for the given fact that life is transient. Since we often have the impression that material culture is eternal (which is of course not true), it give us something to hold on to. It creates a secure environment. And in a fundamentally insecure world people desperately need this.

Today I would like to talk about a one aspect of the search for the eternal: the phenomenon of collecting. Why do we collect? I will discuss four aspects of collecting, the psychological, the social, the political and the ethical aspect, but first I give a short introduction on 'the entanglement of object and subject'. This entanglement of people and objects is of course crucial for our attempts to comprehend collecting.

In the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s new theoretical insights developed, particularly in anthropology and archaeology. Let me concentrate on anthropology here, the discipline in which I was originally trained at Leiden University.

1 The Academy Building of Leiden University is traditionally the place where inaugural lectures are given.

Thanks to authors such as Daniel Miller (*Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 1987, and many other books published afterwards) and Marilyn Strathern (particularly *Gender of the Gift*, 1988) many anthropologists changed their approach in their attempts to understand cultural expressions, thereby not only focusing on non-European societies but also on Europe.[2]

The main change, however, was the insight that understanding societies (Western and Non-Western) and societal processes is not possible with a strict Cartesian separation of object and subject, as anthropologists had learned to do in the typically European rationalist, enlightened, intellectual framework of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Although Descartes himself already had doubts about this strict separation towards the end of his life, the idea that objects and subjects – dead matter and living and interpreting human beings – are always two separate entities has been very dominant in the cultural and scholarly history of Europe.

Until the mid-twentieth century, it seems as if the outside world was patiently waiting for scientists, who were supposed to be objective and apolitical, to map and attempt to understand the world. The same was the case for anthropologists and certainly many anthropologists who worked in ethnological museums. Although the existence of animism and fetishism was of course long known, anthropologists in the Western world went out of their way to neutralize things (objects, but also socio-cosmic structures and ideas) once they were studied in Europe. In practice, this often meant that cultural phenomena were devalued by placing them lower on the evolutionary ladder, that many were classified and objects were stripped of their context. This, of course, always led to a simplification of reality.

Storing objects in depots or display cases is also a form of neutralisation. Stripped of its powerful active role, the object takes on a new meaning in a museum context.

Many researchers assumed an objective reality that patiently waits for the researcher to be interpreted and this is exactly what changed in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. I'm not talking about a postmodern deconstructivism. This is about the recognition that object and subject interact and construct each other. This awareness has proved to be of great importance for the development of our fields of expertise. Later this idea has also been further developed in art history. I only have to mention the work of former Leiden (now Cambridge) Professor Caroline van Eck and her successor Professor Stijn Bussels.

'The material turn' (more attention to materiality), in our disciplines, which the Leiden Material Agency Forum calls attention to, stems partly from the development

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2 D. Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1987); M. Strathern, *Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

outlined above. After all, if object and subject interact intensively, it is not enough to see only the subject as an active partner in the system. The material and physical properties of the object also elicit reactions and should therefore be the subject of research, more than before. The effect of the physical presence of the object should be taken seriously. Museums know that, in their way, all too well. Museums are struggling to prevent the visitor from touching the objects on display. Sometimes it is apparently very difficult for people not to touch an object.

In order to understand the phenomenon of collecting, it is very important to keep in mind the introductory remarks I have made above.

In collecting, we have to realize that the attraction between what is collected and the collector is central, and that is to a large extent what the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer would call an irrational force. Indeed, many collectors cannot verbalize why they collect, often very fanatically. People often can't reason why they want certain objects in their vicinity and why they want to touch them.

Let me give an example of what I have just mentioned. Around the year 1800 the German towns of Weimar and Jena were places where a lot was happening in the cultural field. Especially Jena became the centre of early Romanticism. Around the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel a group of intellectuals gathered who made a name for themselves. The most important members of the Jena group, apart from the Schlegel brothers, were Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, the poet Novalis and the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In neighbouring Weimar (now only 15 minutes by train) the situation was different. The Dukes of Weimar have supported important intellectuals and artists for generations. Johann Sebastian Bach had once lived and worked in Weimar and later Franz Liszt would leave his musical traces there.

Around 1800, the writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was the intellectual master of the small but bustling town. Goethe also arranged for Friedrich Schiller to come to live in Weimar. Both celebrities (even then) kept the Jena romantics at an appropriate distance.[3] The houses of Goethe and Schiller are still there and can be visited nowadays. For my example, I'll take you to Schiller's house.

The contemporary visitor enters through the back, where in the new building the ticket sales and the shop are located. This new building is hardly visible from the street and therefore does not disturb. From there one walks into the actual house. On the first floor is Schiller's study, a room that assumes mythical and magical proportions for Schiller adepts. In a corner stands, quite carelessly, Schiller's desk.

I visited Schiller's house in 2019 and when I entered the study I was somewhat off balance. Is that just standing here, unguarded? Isn't it a copy? And I was tempted to take a seat at the desk, but I was holding back. It was the same sensation I had had

3 R. Safranski, *Goethe und Schiller, Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009).

Figure 7.1: Friedrich Schiller's house in Weimar.

a day earlier in Franz Liszt's house. The tendency to sit at his piano, or at least touch the piano, was very strong. I didn't do it there either.

I walked back to Schiller's desk three times. Every now and then a guard came along and a single visitor. Everyone I saw there kept appropriate distance from this sacred place. Apparently, there was no need for tighter surveillance. When I walked out of the room for the last time, a young man came into the room. He looked around skittishly and then bent over Schiller's desk. I kept walking, but in the hallway I looked back. The young man had apparently seen that there was no guard in the room and touched Schiller's desk for a moment, with due respect. He was shocked when he saw me looking and witnessing his daring act.

Museums often have to deal with this phenomenon. Very often, museum employees have to warn visitors not to touch the objects, or that they get too close. And more than once, a visitor reacts irritated in such a case. Some think they're going to get away with an excuse, "I thought it was a copy," and others react indignantly with the comment, "Who cares that I touch it for a while," followed by, "There's no sign that I can't touch it."

What exactly is going on here? Why do people want to be so close to certain objects? That desire for physical proximity can be so strong that it becomes an obsession. This urge to 'touch' and even 'have' things is of course crucial in collecting.

Collecting is the gathering of a group of related objects. The relationship may lie with the objects, but also with the subject, the collector. In this lecture, I would like to dwell on 'the gathering' and not on the 'related objects', the collections themselves. Here, I am concerned with the activity 'collecting', the 'doing' of 'gathering'. What exactly happens and why, when one collects?

Psychology

First of all, the psychological aspects of collecting. I am not a psychologist, but some comments on the psychology of collecting are necessary here. In the psychological literature it is noticeable that the phenomenon of collecting is extremely complex, but some constants can be indicated. For example, the psychoanalyst Peter Subkowski[4] wrote that there is always a close and often unconscious relationship between what is collected and the personal life history of the collector.[5]

The French scholar Jean Baudrillard described collecting as an ultimate neurotic defense against the reality of the fear-inducing persistence of time, ending in one's inevitable death.[6] By collecting large quantities of objects, the collector tries to slow down the passage of time and make it controllable. In doing so, the collector aims to create a perfect world, as a counterbalance to the not-perfect, chaotic and uncertain outside world. We also come across such views from other authors, such as with Walter Benjamin and the aforementioned Peter Subkowski.[7]

> … collecting offers a way to console oneself for being left, [to] give narcissistic validation and [to] calm tempestuous emotions. It expresses a yearning for completeness and for a world which is to become perfectly shaped by way of the collection.

However, this pursuit of perfection in an imperfect world can also be a form of pathology. Collectors can use collections as a means to compensate for a loss, trauma or unconscious desire. There may also be a perverse desire.

Sigmund Freud, who in his analyses attached great importance to sexuality, was himself a fanatical collector of 'antiquities'. It is a pity that he never subjected his

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4 P. Subkowksi, 'On the psychodynamics of collecting', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87 (2006), 383-401 (386).

5 Thanks to Professor Philip Spinhoven who helped me on my way with suggestions on relevant literature.

6 J. Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

7 Subkowksi, 'On the psychodynamics of collecting', 387.

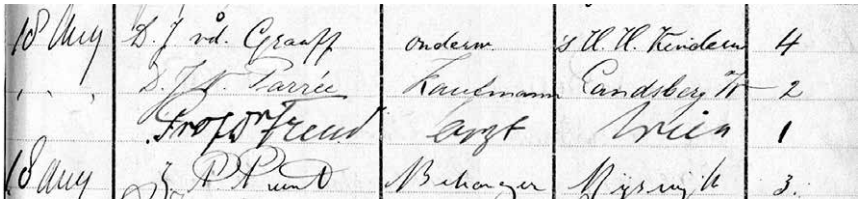

Figure 7.2: Signature of Sigmund Freud in the visitors book of the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden. August 18, 1910. Freud was on holiday in Noordwijk and visited Leiden twice in that period, including for a meeting with the composer Gustav Mahler.

own collecting drive to a comprehensive analysis, because in some cases collecting can also be interpreted as a defense mechanism against sexual fears.

The case studies on collectors with mental health problems are fascinating to read, because they are largely about the relationship between human objects. I am not going to tire you out with this, because I want to prevent the collectors among you from leaving the room in disappointment and with psychological problems.

To reassure you, not all collectors have a psychological problem. There is of course also a large number of collectors with a stable personality. But also among these collectors, the urge to own objects, surround themselves with them and create a pleasant, familiar world with them, is great. When Johann Wolfgang von Goethe learned of the death of his friend Friedrich Schiller, he locked himself in his house for a long time, surrounded by his vast collection, with which he tried to understand the creation in all its facets.[8]

The social

Collecting is also a social event. Although collecting is foremost an individual activity, the collector cannot do without a social network. Otherwise, you can never know where the desired objects are and how to acquire them. Collectors, however, are also remarkably often *einzelgängers*,[9] people who stand somewhat out of the everyday world and are sometimes even downright hostile to the outside world. This is partly because of the fanaticism with which they collect. Let's discuss an example, in which both elements can be recognized, a little more extensively.

8 Ibid., 389.

9 Jasanoff's analysis of English and French 18th century collectors in India stresses the marginal position of many collectors, particularly in their European countries of origin. M. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire. Conquest and Collecting in the East, 1750-1850* (London, New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006).

Figure 7.3: Hans Sloane (1660-1753), after a portrait of T. Murray. Collection British Museum.

I take you to the last decades of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century, to the world of Hans Sloane whose collections are seen as the basis of the British Museum.

Sloane was born on April 6, 1660, and died at the age of 92 on January 11, 1753, in Chelsea, now part of London. Immediately after his death, the myth-making began. Although he was already a very well-known collector, also internationally, at the end of his life (and certainly after his death) the relationship between Sloane's collections and the interests of the emerging British empire became increasingly important. Sloane was soon seen as a hero and that has placed the raw reality of imperialism and western domination, also in the various biographies, in the background. James Delbourgo presents a more nuanced view in a recent biography (2017).[10]

The family in which Sloane was born was not unmediated. His father had made good money, but they were not part of the nobility. In fact, the Sloanes were a family of servants, people who were employed by important noble families and thus serving

10 J. Delbourgo, *Collecting the World, The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 217.

the elite. They were not the least 'servants', but in the British empire of the period (and still) social mobility was very difficult. Fortunately for Hans there was money to give him a good education. He was trained as a doctor and later earned a lot with this profession.

Sloane was confronted with a colonial situation early in his life. As a young man he lived in Northern Ireland and although in later notes he mainly talks about the overwhelming nature, he must have been well embedded in a situation of power inequality. He may even have taken that for granted. However, not much is known about his childhood. When he later set up a practice as a doctor, he worked mainly for the elite. That was also where most money could be earned. However, the story of Hans Sloane is not just about the money. He also invested very clearly in social relationships and, partly because of his family background, quickly built up an impressive network.

In 1687 came his great opportunity. Sloane was asked to accompany the Duke of Albemarle as a family doctor to Jamaica, where the Duke had been appointed governor. Nature in Jamaica overwhelmed him. He collected many specimens and eventually this work would lead to the publication of the extensive *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica.* Vol. 1. 1707, vol. 2 1725.

The Duke died a year after arriving, Sloane apparently could not keep him alive, but this year was enough for the young doctor to create a solid foundation in the social network of the white elite in Jamaica. He knew many wealthy plantation owners, because he was asked for medical advice everywhere. Apart from payment in money, this often also led to donations of specimens from nature and objects. There was also a lasting thanks and dependence. For Sloane, this period resulted in a great expansion of his social possibilities and ultimately also a rich bride, the widow of a wealthy plantation owner.[11]

How aware was Sloane of the dubious practices on which the wealth of his circle of friends was based: the slave trade? Very conscious and I suspect that it was seen as an obvious reality that was not fundamentally challenged. Public criticism of the slave trade and the exploitation of enslaved people of African origin were still in their infancy in those years.

Sloane's network was not limited to the elite. Among other things, he was interested in the objects used by slaves. However, his interest in musical instruments of slaves was not completely harmless. The plantation owners viewed this with suspicion, because music was seen as a bonding element and too much solidarity among slaves was potentially dangerous.

In March 1689, Hans Sloane returned to London. It was an uncertain time. The month before his arrival, the Dutch Stadholder William III was crowned King of

11 'Sloane's match with Elizabeth Langley Rose on 11 May 1695 linked him permanently to Jamaica and slavery' (Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 149).

England and the country was torn apart by conflict. Fortunately for Sloane, he had already been in contact with the Protestant Stadholder and he was able to adapt quickly to the uncertain situation. His medical practice flourished and because of his social skills his network expanded steadily. And with Hans Sloane, the network of people was always strongly connected to networks of objects or specimens from nature.

Sloane's collections expanded, he was well off financially (because of his marriage he acquired large interests in plantations in Jamaica) and he became well-known as a collector. However, that did not mean that he was now accepted by the elite as a part of them. He remained an outsider in a sense, because he was not of noble descent and he made his money by working and making convenient deals with relationships and trading partners. And those were things that weren't highly regarded.

Scientists also questioned the importance of Sloane's work. As secretary of the Royal Society, he was heavily criticized for his editorial work for the *Philosophical Transactions.* Towards the end of his life, it got a little easier for Sloane. He was elevated to the nobility and succeeded Isaac Newton as President of the Royal Society, but even then the attitude remained critical. The criticism from a scientific angle is easy to understand when looking at the inventory that was made just after Sloane's death in 1753. Based on Sloane's own notes, the following classification of his collection was created:[12]

When we see this list, we think above all of an inventory of a Cabinet of Rarities from the Renaissance and much less of the classifications used by many museums in the nineteenth century. The great discussions about how collections – and implicitly the world – should be classified seem to have largely passed Sloane.

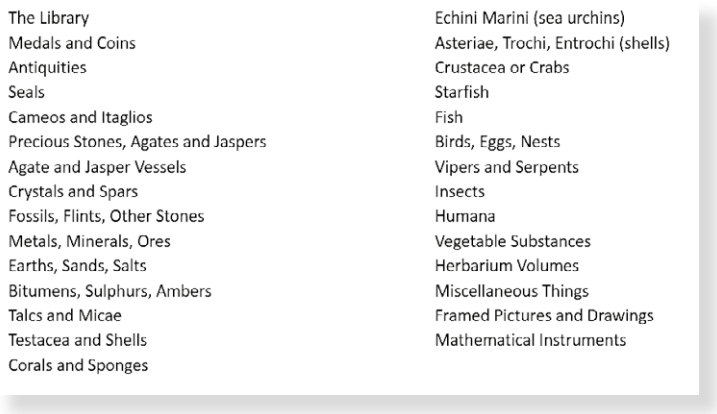
The Library
Medals and Coins
Antiquities
Seals
Cameos and Itaglios
Precious Stones, Agates and Jaspers
Agate and Jasper Vessels
Crystals and Spars
Fossils, Flints, Other Stones
Metals, Minerals, Ores
Earths, Sands, Salts
Bitumens, Sulphurs, Ambers
Talcs and Micae
Testacea and Shells
Corals and Sponges
Echini Marini (sea urchins)
Asteriae, Trochi, Entrochi (shells)
Crustacea or Crabs
Starfish
Fish
Birds, Eggs, Nests
Vipers and Serpents
Insects
Humana
Vegetable Substances
Herbarium Volumes
Miscellaneous Things
Framed Pictures and Drawings
Mathematical Instruments

Figure 7.4: Sloane's Classification of his own collection.

12 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 259-261

In the case of not taking Hans Sloane seriously as a scholar, we must also realize that he was actually crushed in time between Linnaeus and Newton. The classifications developed by Linnaeus to map the plant and animal world have become much more influential than what Sloane has put together. The most influential version of *Systema naturae* by Linnaeus is the one of 1758 (this was the tenth edition), five years after Sloane's death. This effectively confirms his status as a benevolent amateur. Contemporary Isaac Newton would also become much more influential than Sloane. I don't think there is any need to describe this in more detail.

Hans Sloane died on January 11, 1753, at the age of 92. A short time later, the British Museum opened its collections. By maneuvering cleverly, Sloane had made sure that his estate became public property. The entry was, and the British Museum still is, free. The State paid £20,000 for the collection, significantly less than the market value. This was a demand Sloane had made in his will, because he wanted to leave his two daughters in a financially comfortable situation. The collection became publicly accessible (although there were still some restrictions in the beginning, because it was not easy to get tickets) and the collection became a definitive part of Empire thinking of the British Empire.

Sloane's life as a collector is a fine example of the 'entanglement object-subject'. As a doctor he had a large social network, which yielded many objects and specimens from nature. Unfortunately, very little is known about how donors, sellers and collectors felt about these objects.

Apart from Sloane's closeness to slave labour on plantations, he and his collection are also more broadly connected to the political and military aspirations of the British Empire. This brings me to the political aspect of collecting.

Politics

Objects and collections play a significant role in increasing the status and prestige of the collector. That already has strong political connotations. However, the relationship between collecting and political reality is more complicated.

The period around 1800 can be seen as a tipping point in the history of collecting. I cannot go into detail about this now, but one of the most important changes is the increasing influence of the nation state. The beginning of the nineteenth century shows that nation states are increasingly involved in controlling collecting activities of private individuals. This state interference with collecting would only increase in the nineteenth century and with it the relationship with colonialism. Nineteenth-century colonial officials often understood very well that understanding the entanglement between object and subject was crucial to controlling an area. Local rulers often derive their power from the possession of certain objects with a powerful 'agency', so if the colonial government confiscated those objects, the power struggle was decided in its favor.

There are numerous examples of conscious actions to obtain objects in order to control people. Let us look at the subjugation of South Sumatra to colonial power, in the early twentieth century, and in particular to the person of Oscar Louis Helfrich (1860-1958). Helfrich arrived in the Dutch East Indies in 1886 as a young colonial officer and was placed in the region of Kerinci in South Sumatra. He developed into a very experienced official of the Interior Administration and an extraordinary collector, both for the Museum of the Bataviaasch Genootschap (Batavian Society, now the National Museum of Indonesia) and for the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden.[13]

Shortly after his appointment, he wrote:

> In the belief, that it is for an administrative officer of the highest weight, to know the customs, mores, customs and language of the region, over which he conducts the administration, I rushed … to put that thesis into practice . . .[14]

Helfrich became a member of the Batavian Society and clearly wanted to put himself on the map as a connoisseur of local cultures. He was very pleased with the compliments he received later, around 1890, from the great Sumatra specialists Snouck Hurgronje and Van der Tuuk. Helfrich's drive to document well knew no boundaries. In a house model he sent to the Leiden museum, he distinguished no less than 119 parts, all with a local name.[15]

Figure 7.5: A house model collected by Helfrich. Collection NMVW 886-1.

13 For more information, see P. ter Keurs, 'Verzamelen in Centraal en Zuid-Sumatra' in, Endang Sri Hardiati & Pieter ter Keurs, eds., *Indonesia. De ontdekking van het verleden* (Amsterdam, KIT Publishers, 2005), 85-89, and Brinkgreve 2009.

14 Quoted in Ter Keurs, 'Verzamelen in Centraal en Zuid-Sumatra', 88.

15 H. Fischer, *Catalogus van 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum*, vol. 12 (Zuid-Sumatra. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1912), 76-80.

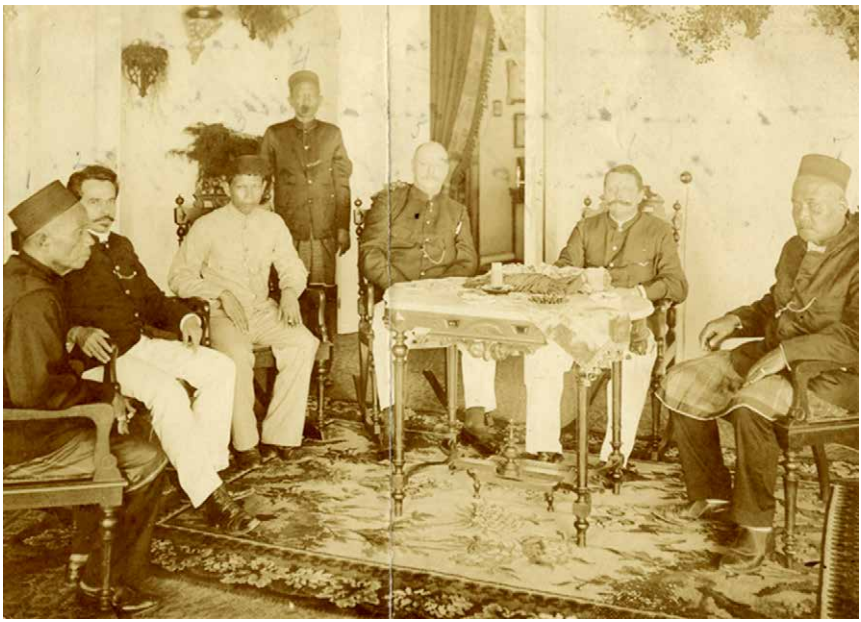

Figure 7.6: The transfer of the regalia of the ruler of Jambi to the Dutch authorities, 26 March 1904. O.L. Helfrich sits at the center of the table. Collection KITLV 27644.

Helfrich's hunger for knowledge about local cultures certainly seems driven by a curiosity for local customs. He was known to the local people as a civil servant who was strict but just. He spent most of his career in South Sumatra and spoke local languages. With Helfrich, however, the raw reality of colonial oppression was not far away. He was honored many times with awards for courage and colonial policy in Aceh (1898), Jambi and Kerinci (1906) and central Sumatra (1908). In 1903 he had already been appointed an officer of the Order of Orange-Nassau.

Oscar Helfrich was regularly brought in when difficult issues were involved. Illustrative is his performance in Jambi, an area that was difficult to control. Eventually the Sultan was defeated, but the important heirlooms (*pusaka*) were still in the possession of the Sultan's family. As long as that was the case, the danger of rebellion remained. Helfrich was sent to Jambi and managed to persuade the Sultan's family to hand over the regalia to the colonial government.[16]

The main kris of the Sultanate, a kris with a mythical past, thus became property the state and placed in the Museum of the Batavian Society. The kris was stored in a museum and thereby defused.

16 Budiarti, H. and F. Brinkgreve, F, 'Court Arts of the Sumatran Sultanates', in F. Brinkgreve and R. Sulistianingsih, eds, *Sumatra, Crossroads of Cultures*. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009)121-151 (144-145).

Figure 7.7: Kris Si Ginjai, National Museum of Indonesia. MNI 10921/E.263.

There are two things that we can learn from this example. On the one hand, it is clear that certain objects, in this case a kris, can be considered as 'living' things that can affect human action, which can make or break the power of an authority (Sultan or colonial government). On the other hand, we point out that museums can be used to neutralize the influence of an object, in a highly charged political context. In particular, if the object in question is stored in a depot and is not publicly accessible, its influence diminishes. It is not seen again and the documentation is forgotten.

Therefore, a lot of in-depth research is often needed to give the object its meaning, its power and influence back. With our collecting practices, we not only deprive a previous owner of the physical object, but we also dispose the object of its power, as it were, its function in life.

This brings us to the last substantive part of this lecture. The ethical aspects of collecting.

Ethics

What gives a collector the right to acquire objects for his own honor and glory? In order to find a sensible answer to this, we first need to distinguish two types of systems within which objects change hands. Furthermore, we must recognize that there are different forms of ownership.

Broadly speaking, there are situations in which objects change hands, 1) in trading systems or exchange systems, within which agreements are made on the conditions under which the objects are exchanged and 2) in networks where there is an asymmetrical balance of power.

With regard to the first category, we can look at cultural anthropology for more detail. The many trading systems described in anthropological literature provide ample information about how objects are exchanged and which mechanisms ensure a balanced discussion about price and/or other considerations.[17] I already gave an example of the second category of exchange with Helfrich's actions on Sumatra, but more extreme are outright colonial wars such as the ones in Aceh, on Bali and on

17 The main founders of this discourse are B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific. An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1922), and of course M. Mauss, 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *L'Année sociologique* (1923/24).

Figure 7.8: Negotiations on the price of wooden bowls of the Siassi Islands, Aisega, New Britain, December 1983.

Lombok. The British punitive expedition to Benin of 1897, much debated in recent repatriation discussions, is also an example of the violent way objects were obtained.

The more regular exchange networks offer us another collecting context and, in a way, a much more complex context. In 1983/84 I was able to do research in the Siassi trade network, in North-East New Guinea. Political machinations also play a role in these types of exchanges. In the negotiations, for example (see the photograph above), the fact that I was present as 'guest member"of the trade delegation was useful. As the sellers stressed in their conversations with the buyers:

> If someone comes all the way from Europe to buy our bowls, they have to be of high quality.

I will not go into the details of these talks, as interesting as that might be. What concerns me now is that, through difficult but respectful negotiations a price was set for the transaction, with mutual agreement. Thus the wooden bowls were exchanged. I don't think any of the Siassi producers of these scales has thought of reclaiming the bowls since 1983. After all, they had voluntarily changed hands. Mutual agreement had been reached.

Visitors, administrative officials, colonial administrators have also often functioned in such trade networks. Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles have shown

in the book *Collecting Colonialism* (2001) that European, American and Australian anthropologists and government officials were often seen by locals in southern New Britain (not far from the Siassi Islands) as regular, more or less ordinary, trading partners.

The ethical problems, of course, are particularly important in collecting activities where there is an imbalance of power, such as colonial situations and art theft by the Nazis. It is precisely these two situations that have played a major role in the public discussions in recent years about how ethical it is that we, our ancestors, have brought together and continue to manage all these collections. Because to whom do they actually belong? Let me limit myself here to colonialism. That's complicated enough.

'Collections assembled in a colonial context' are not necessarily the same as Looted Art, a term often used nowadays. There are many different ways in which things were collected, even within a colonial situation. I already mentioned collecting as part of local or regional trade, but if we look closely at the collections themselves, we find even more interesting nuances. For example, the large collections specially assembled for colonial exhibitions contain a remarkable number of newly made objects. Not only in late nineteenth-century collections we encounter this phenomenon, also in early nineteenth-century collections, such as those of the Natural Science Committee traveling through the Lesser Sunda Islands (Nusa Tenggara), there are many objects that show no signs of use. This suggests that the local people made objects especially for sale and that the people largely determined for themselves what they wanted to sell and what not. Given the excellent communication between the villages, it is plausible that it was known long in advance that a European expedition was coming.

In the expeditions of the Leiden physician and later professor Anton Nieuwenhuis, in the last years of the nineteenth century, we can also see that many newly made objects were collected.

Then there were of course the diplomatic gifts and the many situations in which there was indeed a good relationship between collector and original owner.

I do not want to downplay the negative aspects, the violence and the oppression of colonialism. We should not deny that objects were brutally looted in Bali and Lombok (and unfortunately there are many other examples). On the contrary, I want this to be discussed with an open mind, but I would like to add more nuance to the discussions about Looted collections. Also because a lot of people who have an opinion about Looted art, including politicians, often don't even know exactly how the collections we're talking about were collected. Even specialists, historians and anthropologists, often do not have information about how exactly objects were obtained. If there is any information at all, it is usually still stored deep in our archives, or in the objects themselves. After all, also by looking more closely at the things themselves, we can still figure out a lot.

Figure 7.9: Nakamumut Worsaina during an initiation ritual in December 1983, Siassi, Papua New Guinea.

Fortunately, the realization that more research into the history of collecting needs to be done is gradually beginning to permeate. And we should not do that in order to sit down navel-gazing, but above all to be able to have a better, more useful discussion with source communities and ultimately to be able to better maintain international cultural contacts.

I therefore welcome the initiative of the Rijksmuseum, NIOD and the National Museum of World Cultures to jointly tackle this problem.

Let's go back to the question to whom the collections actually belong. Apart from the collecting context, the answer to that question also depends on what we mean by ownership. Here too, cultural anthropology can help us, because our European understanding of ownership may differ considerably from what other people of other cultures think and practice. For Europeans, there is a legal framework based on Enlightenment thought. In case of disagreement, we can start a legal procedure

that usually resolves the matter. In the case of requests for repatriation, the return of objects to the place origin also seems to be a way of finding a solution. However, it is not that simple for objects from New Guinea, for example. When I wanted to collect a mask of an important mythical ancestor (*nakamutmut* Worsaina) on the Siassi Islands in 1983, I was surprised to agree on a price pretty quickly. The mask and its attributes were cleaned, refurbished and handed over to me. The only condition was that I was not allowed to show it to the uninitiated of the village (and the surrounding villages).

However, it is important to see that the *nakamutmut* masks of Siassi are destroyed after the great rituals in which they occur, which last up to two weeks, by placing them in the swamp, the actual residence of the *nakamutmut*, and leaving them to rot. The masks are nothing more than a material shell, a material manifestation, of something that is much more important and much more durable, but not material: the *nakamutmut* itself.

That's why, when I bought the mask, people said to me very clearly:

> 'It's nice that you're taking this mask now to introduce people in the Netherlands to our culture, but the real Worsaina will always be here. And so you will always have to maintain a relationship with us by honoring Worsaina's place of residence.'

So, we have not *nakamutmut* Worsaina himself here at the National Museum of World Cultures. We do not own it, because Worsaina himself never left his actual residence. In the next ritual, one simply makes a new mask and 'loads' it, as it were, with the power of Worsaina, so that the mask can perform its function again.[18]

This example fits in well with classical anthropological examples, such as those presented by the aforementioned Marcel Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowksi, among others. For example, Mauss cites examples from New Zealand and other parts of Polynesia, where it is said that certain types of objects always remain connected to the place of origin. The large amount of literature that followed these examples can help us to better understand the complex issue of restitution. Showing respect for the place of origin may be more important than returning the object itself.

Museums, Collections and Society

There is now the new Research Group 'Museums, Collections and Society'. The group will be active in four areas: research, education, organization and communication.

The research will take place along four lines: 1. History of collections and collection formation, 2. classifications and representations in collection management and museum presentations, 3. the agency of collections and 4. the ethics of collecting. We are going to do this with a research group of, apart from my position, two university

18 National Museum of World Cultures, RV 5703-72a.

lecturers and two postdoctoral researchers, in close cooperation with the relevant collaborators in art history and archaeology, and the curators and researchers at the Leiden and The Hague museums.

In education we will create a core course 'Museums, Collections and Society', which will be a mandatory introduction to the MA phase for both art history and archaeology students.

In the coming years we also look at how we can structurally and university-wide embed Museums, Collections and Society and relate strongly to the activities of the Leiden and Hague museums. The relationship with heritage studies, such as the Heritage and Society group of the Faculty of Archaeology, the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and of course the LDE Centre for Global Heritage and Development, will be further expanded.

To clarify what we want to communicate, I go back to my remarks about Hans Sloane. James Delbourgo's book about Hans Sloane ends with a knife that cuts both ways, a conclusion that allows you to go both ways. I quote:

> … Sloane's museum embodied a fusion of empire and information in which the lofty dream of surveying the creation rested on the cunning mundanities of colonial and commercial ambition.[19]

> … The civic promise of Sloane's legacy … endures: the use of free public institutions to better understand the interplay of species and cultures that make up our world.[20]

The Leiden collections, in the museums and at the university, are also a kind of universal museum as the British Museum was originally intended. In Leiden, however, it is all split into several different organizations. Nevertheless, the problems and opportunities we have are the same as what I signaled in this lecture: on the one hand, a problematic past and, on the other hand, the ideal of enlightenment and humanism, or a curiosity about natural and human diversity. This tension is inherent in the work we do.

We need to keep both aspects of collection-oriented research and museum presentations in mind with everything we do. Only then can we do justice to the enormous wealth that the collections offer us, a wealth that expresses itself in knowledge and wonder, and (I say this emphatically) that we can further develop in our complex, fascinating and stimulating contacts with people and cultures around the world.

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19 Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, 341.

20 Ibid., 342.

Museums, Collections and Society 2020

An exceptional year

Preface

The planned start of the Museums, Collections and Society (MCS) program (including PR and guests from abroad) in May 2020 did not take place due to the corona crisis. All activities in this context had to be cancelled. Conferences in, and visits to, London, Bristol, Paris and Rabat were also cancelled.

Fortunately, the application procedures for new employees could be completed in spring. The MCS group was complete as of August 1, 2020.

Staff

Apart from the Full Professor appointed at the end of 2019, the MCS group consists of 2 assistant professors and 2 postdoc. researchers: Dr. Laurie Cosmo (UD), Dr. Martin Berger (UD), Holly O'Farrell (researcher) and Evelien Campfens (researcher).

Laurie Cosmo and Martin Berger both have a great deal of experience in the (inter)national museum world and were also directly available for teaching in the Humanities and Archaeology faculties of Leiden University.

Holly O'Farrell has successfully defended her thesis on museum presentations of the Middle East at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

Evelien Campfens has submitted her thesis to the supervisor. It concerns a dissertation based on already published or accepted articles in renowned journals. Campfens' research focuses on legal regulations around restitution issues.

Research

- Laurie Cosmo focuses her research on the role of private museums in the cultural field and on the relationship between museum architecture and collecting politicies in the 1920s and 1930s, applied to the Kunstmuseum (formerly Gemeente Museum) in The Hague. The first topic is an addition to an ongoing research by Laurie, the second topic is in line with her previous research on museum architecture in fascist Italy. However, the building of the Kunstmuseum came about from a socialist framework. Cosmo will also involve the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo in her research;
- Martin Berger is developing a research plan on the relations between European ethnographic collections, in particular collections from Central and South America. This will shed more light on the role of producers, middlemen and trade in forming ethnographic collections. There is a methodical focus on exploring the use of big data;
- Holly O'Farrell is developing a research plan on female collectors, focused on the Middle East during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is potential for collaboration in this area with the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh;
- Evelien Campfens will focus her research on legal issues related to restitution matters, the concept of "heritage value" and the documentation of other (than Western) interpretations of property;
- In the coming years, Pieter ter Keurs' research will mainly focus on collecting and agency (with the intention of publishing a book in 2023), the role of private museums (a project with the University of Bristol, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council) and 'contested heritage' (with museums and the LDE Centre for Global Heritage and Development, CGHD).

The above mentioned focus points of the individual researchers all fit into the research strategy of MCS, summarized in the topics: Collection History, Agency, Classification and Representation, Ethics.

In addition to the regular research of employees appointed at the MCS group, MCS also stimulates research of other employees of the University and the Leiden and The Hague museums by making grants and replacement opportunities available.

- Alexander Dencher has been awarded a grant of € 4000 for, among other things, European travels in the context of his research into copies of reliefs of the Trajan's column (one set of which is present in the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden) in Rome. He will also receive teaching replacement for this work (0.2 of the appointment);
- Fresco Sam-Sin will use an MCS grant of € 4000 to research Chinese collections for the Things That Talk project;

- Arthur Crucq receives teaching replacement (0.2) to prepare an application, or to write a peer-reviewed article, about the role of the Antiquities Service of the Dutch East Indies in the restoration of Hindu-Javanese temples;
- Karin de Wild will also receive teaching replacement for preparing an application about the use of the Internet by museums.

In 2021, the options for grants and replacement will be broadened, with a more intensive follow-up. Several seminars will also be organized from this support of the regular academic staff.

Education

Both MCS-assistant professors are intensively involved in education in two faculties (Humanities and Archaeology).

- Laurie Cosmo taught the MA course Early Modern Cultures of Collecting in 2020 and assisted with BA courses;
- Martin Berger coordinated and taught the MA (core) course "Museums, Collections and Society" (with Pieter ter Keurs). The intention is that this course will be rolled out in 2021/22 for both archaeology and art history.
- Holly O'Farrell and Evelien Campfens gave guest lectures.

Applications

- An EU-ITN (International Training Network) application was submitted in January 2020, with Leiden University as the main applicant. Other partners are universities and research institutes in Nijmegen, Gothenburg, Barcelona, Munich, Paris and Bolzano. In June it was announced that the application had been rejected. A second attempt is currently underway, with a new deadline in May 2021. Unfortunately, it will very likely be decided soon that not 15 but 10 Early Stage Researchers may be applied for. This requires the entire program to be rewritten.
- Ter Keurs is co-investigator in a University of Bristol project on the role of "Private Museums" in Asia. The application was submitted to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in June 2020, by Lead researcher Prof. dr. Graeme Were. In October it was announced that the project had been approved. Duration: 18 months. Apart from Bristol and Leiden, scholars from Hong Kong and Vietnam are involved in the project.

Long-term

It is worth mentioning that MCS is the initiator of a plan to improve cooperation between the University, the museums and the municipality of Leiden in the field of heritage and museums. This allows Leiden to develop a better profile as City of

Knowledge, Heritage and Museums (in line with construction plans, such as the Humanities Campus, Central Storage for some Leiden Museums, but also the Law Park), at local, national and international levels. For a further development of the triangle University – Museums – Municipality it is the intention to develop a "program line" that will last at least ten years. All parties can benefit from this. Several discussions have already taken place about this program with museum directors and with the municipality of Leiden. In November last year, Pieter ter Keurs and Martin Berger presented its general outline during a joint meeting of the Executive Board of the University and the Municipal Executive.

Decisions with regard to who will participate and how this will be organized are expected in May 2021.

Prof. dr. Pieter ter Keurs
Head of the program Museums, Collections and Society
Academic Director
LDE Centre for Global Heritage and Development
December 6, 2020

MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS AND SOCIETY

Museums and collections are often frontpage news nowadays. The collections stored and curated in museums, universities and private institutions are no longer seen as 'neutral' entities to be enjoyed without political connotations. There are now intensive discussions in the press, on social media, with various stakeholders about who owns the collections, where should they be stored or exhibited, how should they be stored or exhibited, who can claim a relationship with the collections and who can claim an exclusive role in appropriating collections thus excluding others.

These issues are central to museum-related discussions and they show that there is an intensive relationship between objects and people. What happens when you enjoy seeing an object, or when you are impressed by it, or when you feel emotionally attached to it? These types of questions demand the involvement of various disciplines: archaeology, anthropology, art history, history, sociology, psychology and of course a science-based approach.

The entanglement of objects and subjects is the central theme in the MCS program of Leiden University. Museums and collections are the laboratories and the sources we work with.

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