

Global Provenance

Revisiting Appropriated
Heritage in the Light
of Inclusive
Partnerships



Palais
de Rumine
Lausanne,
Switzerland

28-29 January 2021

Conference within
the Scientific Program of the Exhibition
“Exotic? Switzerland Looking
Outward in the Age of Enlightenment”
Call for Papers

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The exhibition *Exotic? Switzerland Looking Outward in the Age of Enlightenment*, which will run from 24 September 2020 to 28 February 2021 at the Palais de Rumine, will present a variety of collections from different museums (art, ethnography, history, natural history and history of sciences), as well as from archive centres and libraries¹. The selection of these items (objects, iconography and nature specimens) was based on two, specific criteria: they had to have been collected in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania and/or have been transformed in Europe. There also needed to be evidence of their presence within the Confederation or its allied Republics in the 18th century. Historical contextualisation work was undertaken to respect these criteria. In particular, it raised the question of the provenance of the items studied.

Provenance research has become more important in Switzerland over the last 30 years at least. While institutional funding is largely devoted to research into works of art looted during the period of National Socialism (1933-1945), the context of colonialism is also addressed as a priority by those museums concerned. And this often occurs before the problems raised make headlines. Swiss museums have been questioning the biographies of non-European cultural items since the first half of the 20th century, sometimes resulting in sacred objects² and human remains³ being repatriated to their communities of origin. This heritage issue is supported by research centred around colonial violence and a critique of the asymmetrical relationships - in political, economic or religious terms - Swiss citizens maintained on all

continents. From now on, the principles of relational ethics and decolonial practices must be applied more widely to the conservation of source communities' cultural heritage.

On an international level, former imperialistic nations have long faced requests from source countries and communities for the return of their confiscated heritage; we need look no further than the appeal launched in 1978 by the director of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow⁴. After decades of difficult dialogue around their claims⁵, in 2007 the cultural leaders were finally able to join their forces through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to demand transparency in the inventories of museum collections, access to their sacred objects, their cultural reappropriation, and even their restitution⁶. Such issues, while long studied by heritage institutions, lack visibility however. And visibility is all the more necessary given that the items, the archives and the documentation of a single original collection are often scattered among several institutions that conserve them on a national, and even international scale. Only a collaborative structure, involving all these institutions, would enable us to create a global analysis of the question of provenance. It is within this context that we would like to expand the critical vision that heritage institutions have of collections and their history, while examining their links to the political and ideological questions in which they are inevitably caught.

This call to participation thus sees itself as a starting point for the case in Switzerland, inviting international scholars in natural

sciences and humanities, as well as museum professionals (in zoology, geology, botany, archaeology, history, history of art and ethnology) to suggest contributions. These should be as much to do with contemporary as historical aspects – both theory and practices – of the general matter of provenance research, restitution and setting up exchange links as well as partnerships with the countries, communities or individuals from the regions from which the collections originate. The aim is to approach the matter in a multi-disciplinary and critical way. This is a non-exhaustive list of the kind of issues we would like the participants to address:

- Discussing contemporary practices in provenance research: their structure, funding and sharing. Who currently benefits from provenance research? Does talking about transparency really serve the interests of source communities and the collections, or is it part of an initiative to advertise and promote heritage institutions?
- Questioning the visibility of the projects that examine the heritage dimension of colonial violence. What “reparations” are being offered to source communities, in particular in terms of new, equitable exchanges with the institutions? What inclusive and decolonizing transformations are taking place within institutions?
- Providing specific examples involving objects held in museums and their connection to the places from which they originated, reflecting critically on this subject and analysing both the benefits and the insoluble limitations or contradictions raised by these processes. On the other hand, could provenance issues provide fertile (albeit somewhat limited) ground for contemporary and activist creativity among artists asserting their affiliation to a source community?

- Examining current and future acquisition policies. For example, how does the Nagoya Protocol, on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation (APA), affect acquisition practices? In what ways do source communities really benefit from such policies?

1. This exhibition is the result of a research programme «The Exotic?», financed by the Swiss National Science Federation (2016–2022), and it is curated by Noémie Etienne, Chonja Lee and Claire Brizon.

2. Sometimes dating back to the 1920s. See for example: <https://plone.unige.ch/art-adr/cases-affaires/chasuble-2013-paraguay-et-musee-d2019-ethnographie-de-neuchatel-et-francois-machon>.

3. In 1992, the City of Geneva returned a Maori head from its Ethnography Museum to New Zealand in the form of a loan. In 2011, this loan was converted into full restitution. Another example is the restitution to Bolivia, in 2014, of a statuette of Ekeko, the god of abundance, that had been housed in the History Museum in Bern.

4. Available on the UNESCO website: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000034683?posInSet=3&queryId=N-EXPLORE-09af0445-ad3c-4d81-a3f0-b3ff64d55b72>.

5. As an example, in the United States, the Federal «Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act» (NAGPRA) came into force in 1990. The «Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies» (AIATSIS) has been working since 1989 to defend the cultural heritage of the communities involved.

6. Here is the declaration, updated in 2018: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenous_peoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.

Proposals for a presentation of up to 20 minutes should not exceed **250-300 words** and should include **a short biography** highlighting selected publications (10 lines maximum).

Please submit your proposals by e-mail to Claire Brizon : claire.brizon@ikg.unibe.ch, Floriane Morin : Floriane.Morin@ville-ge.ch et Olivier Schinz : Olivier.Schinz@ne.ch, no later than **31 May 2020**.

The organisation will cover the travel, accommodation and dining expenses of all selected speakers.

The Scientific Committee

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(Bern University),

Dr. Carine Ayélé Durand
(Ethnography Museum of Geneva),

Prof Noémie Etienne
(Bern University),

Dr Kane Mamadou Hadiya
(National Museum of Mauritania),

MA Floriane Morin
(Ethnography Museum of Geneva),

Dr Lionel Pernet
(Cantonal Museum of Archaeology and History, Lausanne),

Dr Michel Sartori
(Cantonal Museum of Zoology, Lausanne),

Dr Olivier Schinz
(Ethnography Museum of Neuchâtel),

Lic. Phil. Esther Tisa Francini
(Rietberg Museum, Zurich).

References

Thomas David, Bouda Etemad and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, *La Suisse et l'esclavage des Noirs*, Lausanne, Antipodes (History Collection), 2005.

Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser, Sarah Fründt, et al. *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte*, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2018.

Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle*, November 2018.

Bénédicte Savoy, *Objets du désir, désir d'objets* : Inaugural lesson given on Thursday 30 March 2017, Paris, Collège de France, 2017.

Béatrice Veyrassat, *Histoire de la Suisse et des Suisses dans la marche du monde (xvii^e siècle – Première Guerre mondiale) : espaces, circulations, échanges*, Neuchâtel, Livreo-Alphil (Les routes de l'histoire Collection), 2018.

Partners

