

## Moral Issues of Acquisition

### Anti-ethicalness of collecting

- scientific nature of ethnographic collections;
- destroying of natural environment and violence;
- balance of research and education/publicity

### Focus of museum activities

- the public dimension of acquisition activity;
- preserving and developing the humanistic value of a researcher's activity;
- prospective approach to the collecting.



# Letter From the Chair

*Danielle Kuijten*

As I am writing this introduction, I cannot stop thinking of all the things we missed this year and the uncertainty that is still surrounding our daily realities. It is, thus, with a slightly heavy heart, but also with gratitude for all the things that we have achieved this year, against all odds, that I present you our final newsletter of 2020/ first of 2021. This is a special edition as it includes papers from our 2020 annual conference **Collecting Diversity: Divergence as Dialogue**.

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Our 2020 annual conference was planned to take place at the **National Museum of the Tatarstan Republic in Kazan** in collaboration with our host, ICOM Russia. Although we were very much looking forward to meeting our colleagues in person and getting to know more about the diverse heritage of Kazan, the pandemic did not allow for the conference to take place in the physical space of the National Museum of the Tatarstan Republic. However, we were still happy to be able to join forces with our colleagues and offer the programme we had jointly prepared in a different format, that of an online conference. For COMCOL, ICOM Russia and the National Museum it remained an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas, inspiration and perspectives.

The theme of this year, **Collecting Diversity: Divergence as Dialogue**, allowed us to take a closer look at concepts of diversity and inclusion in relation to collections and collecting. At a time when pressure from society on museums and heritage institutions is growing, demanding more meaningful and inclusive places, we museum professionals often find ourselves challenged when thinking about how we can actually transform our ways of working: how we can move beyond talk to action and indeed achieve increasing diversity, inclusion and equity for all; how we might start making real and lasting change in the museum sector.

Despite the fact that museums should be places to teach us about diversity, they still remain places where diversity is often missing, or is not present enough. The quest for equality, diversity and inclusion is not limited to how we present our exhibitions or to the audiences that we aim to address. It is a quest that goes inside the structure of the institution, to each organisation as a whole.

From the perspective of collections and collecting, diversity and inclusion invites us to think about both the past and the future of our museums. It invites us to reflect on the history of our collections and the practices of collecting in order to consider the power relations, the exclusions and the omissions that we have to deal with. It invites us to change the processes of meaning-making through our collections, to become more aware of our actions and make visible what is significant for the community or society at large. But it also pushes us to consider how we are going to keep collecting, plan our future acquisitions and try to fill

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gaps in our collections, or create collections without gaps and omissions for future generations. Ideas and notions like decolonization, relevancy, empathy, complexity, but also subjectivity and activism need to be at the heart of how we think about our existing collections and how we plan for future ones.

By revisiting historical narratives and collections, but also by developing new means of contemporary collecting or of documenting the present, we should seek new meanings, demystify or legitimize social memories, try to present the 'unpresented', 'write in' what has been left out.

Museums have the capacity to reformulate social, cultural and environmental values and can function as mirrors or sounding boards for their societies. They have the ability to echo the problems of the contexts in which they are immersed and to focus on fostering diverse values for a better social co-existence.

With these ideas in mind, we created a program to investigate together a broad variety of approaches developed by contemporary institutions as well as questions they have to deal with. Our program kicked off with two keynote presentations that introduced two different strands of issues: Dr. Julia Kupina, director of the Russian Museum of Ethnography, took us through the current issues on collecting her museum is facing, introducing the challenges museums need to overcome every day. Armando Perla, on the other hand, focused on recent debates on institutional racism, representation and in/exclusion in museums, using examples from institutions in Canada and South America.

You can read his inspirational paper in this issue, on page 4.

The conference programme included 15 papers presented by colleagues from 10 different countries: they addressed the themes of Contemporary Ways of Collecting, Using Collections to make New Connections, the Histories of Collections, Ethics of Collecting and Digital Collection Mobility. Nine of these papers are presented in this special issue, and I am sure that you will find them as intriguing and inspiring as we all did during the event.

For the final part of our conference a special workshop was co-organised with the Jewish Museum in Berlin, in order to explore the heritage of religion in contemporary migration societies.

We hope you enjoy reading the selection of papers and are inspired by the examples they bring to the forefront.

In addition to this publication, all presentations and discussions are also available on COMCOL's YouTube channel. Please, share this with colleagues and friends and follow us on all our social media.

On behalf of all COMCOL Board Members, I wish you all a happy and healthy 2021!

*Danielle Kuijten*

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## ***Introduction: Remaining Relevant Beyond 2020 Through Museum Collections and Practice***

In recent decades we have been discussing the topic of the accessibility of culture for everyone, for all categories of visitors. Many events have been devoted to the topic of inclusion and best practices of working with people with disabilities or socially-excluded groups. Specialists have been talking about the pluralistic world and our efforts to preserve cultural diversity and foster the freedom of creative expression. Museums have always been at the forefront of this process, and have been quick to respond to the changing demands of society. That is why museum professionals initiated the debate about the necessity to modify the museum definition to better represent the social role of museums and their importance for the public.

At the same time, our society has been faced with huge challenges caused by globalization. Globalization has had a lot of positive consequences such as the simplification of logistics; easier transfer of knowledge, competences, and quality standards; and ultimately the faster development of states. Even so, there is a dark side to this process - the risk of extinction of local cultures and traditions. In being global, some organizations forget about local communities and the interests of ordinary people. Our society becomes more diverse which can cause fear and rejection: on the one hand, society is fighting for rights and the freedom of expression, but at the same time, it is also fighting for traditions and routine ways of life. In this situation, museums play a crucial role: they can help to construct the future on a stronger basis of unity.

Today, museums are not only custodians of cultural and natural heritage, but also realize an important social role. They have always been important for society because they form meanings and values, and serve as a source of dialogue and development. The activities of modern museums and other cultural institutions reinforce their successful educational

function and emphasize their role in promoting socio-cultural inclusion and smoothing out historical, social, and political conflicts. Society takes this for granted. However, times of crisis force us to rethink the meaning of culture and its contribution to social well-being.

This year has changed a lot in our lives. We have been faced with the biggest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War - the COVID-19 Pandemic. We have lost the ability to travel around the world. In spring, a lot of countries had enforced lockdowns. Individuals had to stay at home, and almost all organizations and institutions were closed. This situation clearly demonstrated how museums were able to quickly adapt and respond, while remaining committed to the actual needs of the individual. Their digital programs were focused on promoting culture, education, creativity, and participatory practices, allowing people to feel the social and emotional support they needed in an environment of uncertainty and risk.

This crisis has shown us a lot. We have seen how fragile our society is. At the same time, we have realized how museums can help overcome a crisis situation, influence society, and solve the problems we face. We have also seen how vulnerable our museums are, and how they need the support of governments, society, and business. To ensure such support, museums need to be closer to people and their problems. They should work within the requirements of today's society, to preserve contemporary heritage and create the museums of tomorrow. At the same time, museums should be conservative enough to preserve their essence, their scientific attitude to heritage, and the public's trust. Museum experts should always remember that collections, objects, or other elements which have been/could be added to institutional collections should be at the center of museum activities. Thus, museums must find a balance between an openness to society, a willingness to work with visitors on an equal basis, and reasonable conservatism. That is the key to success. The papers presented in this year's COMCOL Annual Conference, held in collaboration with ICOM Russia, responded to this ever-present challenge in varied ways.

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Fig. 1.  
Museum of Antioquia  
Courtesy Julieta Duque/  
Museum of Antioquia

# Centering the Human in Human Rights Museology

Armando Perla

## Abstract

*This paper explains how an expanded understanding of human rights museology can help museums become more attuned with the needs of the communities they intend to serve, and to decolonize their practices. Developed in the early 2010s, the current definition of human rights museology remains mostly a theoretical exercise. Thus, this paper proposes using a Human Rights-Based Approach to museum work as a starting point to shifting the definition from theory to practice. Museo 360, a project developed by the Museum of Antioquia in Colombia, illustrates what this expanded and human-centred definition of human rights museology can look like in practice. By focusing on a peripheral approach based on strong objectivity, this paper demonstrates that the definition of human rights museology can be more productively informed through the analyses of alternative practices developed by the marginalised groups which have been historically excluded from such conversations.*

*Keywords: human rights; human rights museology; coloniality; LGBTTQI+; diversity, equity and inclusion*

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### Human rights museology and the decolonization of museums

Museums are intimately tied to the colonial project (Lonetree 2012). Colonization is the process of European invasion that created a social classification based on a false idea of race, imposed an oppressive



**Fig. 3.**  
**Juli Zapata Rincón performing at La Esquina on 30 June 2017**  
 Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia



**Fig. 2.**  
**Patrons at La Esquina on June 9, 2017**  
 Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

system of white supremacy, dispossession of land and wealth, and established policies of genocide and enslavement (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Maori lawyer and Indigenous rights expert Moana Jackson (2019) argues that white supremacy, that is the idea that white people are inherently superior to everyone else, is the founding presumption of colonialism. He posits:

Some of Europe's greatest thinkers contributed to the development of this presumption, and it eventually encompassed everything from the superiority of their form of government to the greater reason of their minds and even the beauty of their bodies. They were merely warped fantasies posing as fact, but they were eventually learned as the 'truths' that enabled Europeans to assert that they had the right to take over the lands, lives, and power of those they had decided were the 'lesser breeds'. The consequent dispossession of indigenous peoples was a race-based process that led to the genocide and deaths of millions of innocent men, women and children around the world (Jackson 2019).

Maori professor of Indigenous education Linda Tuhiwani Smith (1999, p. 1) directly links these colonial ways of doing and thinking to museums: "[t]his collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized." However, the United Nations' Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP 2020) has affirmed that advancing a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in museum practice can play an essential role in decolonizing



Fig. 4.  
**Passersby on Cundinamarca Street look at Sara Lamar during a performance of Lesbian Flamenco at La Esquina on 14 July 2017**  
 Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

museums. A HRBA is a conceptual framework, based on international human rights standards, directed to advance human rights (UNSDG 2003). A HRBA promotes empowering people — especially the most marginalized — to participate in all processes and phases of a project and to hold accountable those who have a duty to act (UNSDG 2003). Under this framework, human rights are not considered to be just one element or dimension in mainstream processes, they constitute the foundational framework and basis for the entire process of socio-political organisation and development (Balam and Packer 2020).

But how does a HRBA approach relate to human rights museology? At the beginning of the 2010s, professor of new museology Jennifer Carter and lawyer Jennifer Orange (2012, p. 112) defined human rights museology as:

...an evolving body of theory and professional practices underlying the global phenomenon of museums dedicated to the subject of social injustices, one that is fundamentally changing the form, and nature, of museum work. Human rights museology acknowledges the potential for museums to engage in campaigns against human rights violations, at the local, national and international levels. This work means that museums are required to take a public stand on political issues, which may situate museums in conflict with their funders.

They affirmed that human rights museology is a form of practice that proclaims the social vocation of museums and incorporates practices other than those traditionally identified with such institutions (Carter

and Orange 2011). However, this definition, mostly drawn from studying human rights museums' mission statements and programs at the time (Carter 2013), needs to be updated. Human rights museology must reflect current museum practice, be more attuned to the current needs and realities of our societies and be closer and more useful to historically marginalized groups. Developed a decade ago, Carter's and Orange's definition remains a theoretical exercise that fails to consider how practitioners and historically marginalized groups in all types of museums have used human rights as a method of work. Thus, instead of analyzing what institutions say they do, I want to focus on how practitioners,<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with historically excluded communities, are advancing human rights in all phases of their work and in all types of museums. Rather than centering institutional discourses, I intend to centre the human in human rights museology.

Because I want to consider human rights not merely as one element of museum work but as the foundation of all its processes, I propose to move the current definition of human rights museology from theory to practice. In doing so, I want to reaffirm the idea that theory is derived from practice and that practice can only be improved through theoretical reflection (Brulon Soares 2019). Thus, I intend to analyze how museum practitioners have, intentionally or not, used a HRBA to help them prioritize the meaningful participation and empowerment of historically marginalized voices in all processes of museum work. Therefore, I will study how practitioners are shaping a still-evolving field of human rights museology. For this, I am using a HRBA as one tool to frame several methods of practice, to help me expand the definition of human rights museology. The use of a HRBA in museum practice requires that we move away from colonial ways of doing and thinking that are upheld by many museums. This is the type of museum work that I am interested in practicing and analyzing. EMRIP (2020, p. 61) explains:

Historically, museums were geared to house and showcase items of 'exotic' cultures for the viewing pleasure of dominant societies, and the concept of indigenous peoples as visitors or partners was unfamiliar. Moving

<sup>1</sup> *By practitioners I understand museum and cultural workers, those who engage with any type of organizations that carry out cultural work, and community members and other stakeholders involved in this type of work with different types of organizations and institutions.*

towards a human rights-based approach may therefore require a dramatic shift. In many instances, this transition begins with museums exploring cooperation with indigenous peoples as constituents, employees and stakeholders. As museums increasingly embrace indigenous peoples' cultural rights, along with repatriation, they are also able to develop more extensive relationships, better information about collections, and collaborative programming consistent with museums' current goals to be inclusive, diverse and relevant to today's societies.

### Strong objectivity as a tool to expand human rights museology

Thus, to disrupt Western/modern colonial frames of theory, knowledge, research, and academic thought, I want to challenge scientific principles of distance, neutrality, and objectivity. In doing so I must pause here to make myself visible and to identify how my



**Fig. 5.**  
Natalia Arango dances during a Lesbian Flamenco performance while Sara Lamar sings and plays in the background at la Esquina



**Fig. 6.**  
From left to right: Bárbara Queen, Dalila Velvet, Assistant Curator Juli Zapata Rincón (Santa Putricia), Daph D'Bones, Curator Carolina Chacón, Jano Von Skorpio, Megan Wat and Phiore del Rio. During the performances of Medellín Cultura Drag on 30 June 2017 at La Esquina  
Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

own positionality influences the perspectives from which I practice and then theorize. This decolonial shift in the way in which I understand theory and practice requires that I make myself visible and recognize how my own positionality influences the way I practice and then theorize. I identify as a cisgender queer man of colour who is living with an invisible disability. I arrived in Canada as an asylum seeker fleeing homophobia in El Salvador, my country of birth. Before working in the museum sector, I gathered significant experience in the field of human rights. Having been trained as a human rights lawyer, I initially framed my museum practice through a HRBA. In doing so, I have sought to prioritize the meaningful participation and empowerment of the communities I work with.

In challenging academic principles of distance, neutrality and objectivity, a peripheral approach rooted in 'strong objectivity' is an excellent base for a more sustainable way of working. Strong objectivity, a term coined by the feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1995), describes an alternative method of analysis that emphasises the subjective realities of the members of a group. The integration of these subjective realities results in a more accurate and nuanced representation of that group. I have chosen this way of working to redress discriminatory practices and the unequal distribution of power historically embedded in many museums. Yet,



**Fig. 7.**  
Members of the House of Tupamara Laika Tamara and Pvsy Diva voguing during the Ballroom held at La Esquina

community work in the museum sector has made me realize the limitations of a HRBA and of understanding human rights exclusively as a construct of positive/codified law. And thus, in an effort to move beyond the Eurocentrism and positivism embedded in modern understandings of human rights, I have expanded my use of this concept to include other frameworks such as anti-oppression, anti-racism, liberation, indigenization and decoloniality.

It is influenced by these experiences and different types of knowledge that I have come to understand human rights museology as a set of museum practices and a corresponding body of theory that aim to further human rights through the prioritization and participation of historically excluded voices in all museum processes that directly affect them. Human rights museology goes beyond using codified articulations of human rights to include anti-oppression, anti-racism, decolonization, and indigenization as the tenets of museum work. Under a human rights museology, participation means ensuring that historically excluded voices are empowered to have genuine ownership and control over all phases of a project: assessment, analysis, planning, design, setting of goals, objectives and strategies, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This promotes the development and cultivation of long-standing relationships while also ensuring the sustainability of projects.

Human rights museology sees communities as legitimate rights holders and institutions as duty bearers. It works towards strengthening the capacity of all parties to make their claims, and to meet their responsibilities. At times this may challenge the status quo and force institutions to acknowledge, repair and redress the damages of unjust and unequal

distributions of power historically embedded in their structures. Human rights museology not only understands the potential for museums to engage in campaigns against human rights violations at the local, national and international levels, but it also recognizes the right of museum communities and museum practitioners to mobilize against oppressive systems, even if that means going against their own institutions. This focus on practice is essential because it responds to a conscious desire to break away from “the reign of theory over practice” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, p. 28).

### **What does a human-centred human rights museology look like?**

Going beyond the limits imposed by Western ideas and models of academic research, I intend to focus mainly



**Fig. 8.**  
From left to right: Laika Tamara, Pvsy Diva and Lajona Tamara perform at La Esquina on 18 October 2018



**Fig. 9.**  
Eunuca members Val and Analy Laferal during the performance Perra Eres Mía (Bitch you're mine) at la Esquina  
Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia



**Fig. 10.**  
**Perra eres mía (Bitch you're mine) is a performance that was performed at MOA with the intention of challenging Amatonormativity**

on storywork as action, as process and as a vehicle to find meaning in community (Archibald et al. 2019). And thus I want to prioritize the historically excluded voices developing these museological practices to use their own words “to counter the violence of colonial storytelling” (Archibald et al. 2019, p. 11) that has framed their narratives in the past.

The Museum of Antioquia (MOA) was founded in 1881 as a provincial art museum located in Medellín, the second largest city in Colombia (Fig. 1). MOA was established to help the provincial government to cement the identity of a young and emerging province (Agudelo Restrepo 2020). Today, the museum continues to explore the idea of identity, but does it from a critical perspective that challenges official narratives. Located in downtown Medellín, a complex area with many social issues: violence, drug trade, sex work, poverty, and homelessness, the museum is surrounded by and serves many historically marginalized communities. Museo 360 is a macro-project established by MOA in 2016 that generates diverse and collaborative museological practices with these communities (EMP, MOA: both undated). Even if MOA does not specifically use the term human rights museology to describe its work, the workers behind Museo 360 prioritize the meaningful participation of historically marginalized communities in all its programs. Museum Director María del Rosario Escobar affirms that Museo 360's goal is to position MOA as an agent of social change in downtown Medellín (Agudelo Restrepo 2020). To do so, the project aims to provide historically excluded

groups – who inhabit, use, or transit through the area – with the tools needed to choose and lead the strategies to overcome the social challenges they face. Jessica Rucinque (2020), Director of Education at MOA, further explains:

There are many injustices in our society, so most people think that they don't really have the right to access or to enjoy cultural institutions. So we have been working very hard through Museo 360 to open the museum to everyone. We go out and we work with people in our neighbourhood. We have been focused on developing collaborative methodologies to work with our communities.

A remarkable number of LGBTTTQI+ museum workers allows this community to be involved in all decision-making processes inside MOA. This has contributed to the museum establishing strong collaborative relationships with different groups within the LGBTTTQI+ community in downtown Medellín. In turn, this has pushed the museum to actively engage with sexuality, sex, and gender, and thus contributing to the institution queering its museological practices, breaking away from privileging and upholding heteronormative power relations (Middleton and Sullivan 2019). Queering is a form of critical thought that challenges the foundations of the nation-state by deconstructing the gender system (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2019). In the Latin American context, queering (*cuirización*) is intimately tied to human rights and decolonization. While human rights discourse opens the door to



**Fig. 11.**  
**Performance of Nadie Sabe Quien Soy Yo by Las Guerreras del Centro at Museum of Antioquia**  
 Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

*cuirización* as a form of resistance and recognition of LGBTTTQI+ rights, *cuirización* breaks away from the heteronormativity imposed by colonization and its ways of excluding all types of difference (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2019). In the context of the MOA, this has meant constantly challenging the status quo in Medellín's still religious and conservative society.

La Esquina (the Corner) is a space that opens to the public every Friday night, located on the corner of Cundinamarca and Calibío. It acts as a hybrid between a performance bar and a discussion forum. La Esquina works as a place that breaks away from the idea of conventional exhibition and programming venues (Comuna 10 2017). It is decorated like the cantinas in the area and hosts live performances every week (Fig. 2). It is a spot in downtown Medellín where artists, museum employees, and neighbours can dance, socialize, and critically engage in conversations around various social issues (Comuna 10 2017). Assistant curator, drag performer, and performance artist Juli Zapata Rincón, who self-identifies as a non-binary marica<sup>2</sup> trans, has led most of the programming in this space. They elaborate:

This used to be one of the most dangerous corners in the city of Medellín, so we asked ourselves how we could use this corner to work collaboratively with the different groups that are present in this area. The idea was to explore different topics like sexuality, gender, racism, anti-blackness, etc. We wanted a space to meet every Friday night, like a bar for performances, where we could have 'dancing conferences' [Fig. 3] We wanted a space for storytelling where we could weave different narratives. I wanted to make sure that we were not prioritizing only cisgender gay men. So, it was important to include women's stories. We also wanted people to see different representations of the body, including those outside the male/female binary. One of the

<sup>2</sup> *Marica* is a derogatory term that has traditionally been used to describe an effeminate gay man. More recently, some members of the LGBTTTQI+ community in Latin America have reappropriated the word and turned the insult into political empowerment (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Muxe* is an identity ingrained in the Zapoteca culture of Mexico, which corresponds to a third gender. The Muxe identity finds its legitimization in its Indigeneity. Some express the desire to be treated as traditional women and dress in a mixture of traditional Zapoteca costumes and television divas. Muxes are custodians of tradition in their community and lead community celebrations related to saints and candles. The Muxe identity opens a space of relative acceptance in the dominant Catholic idiosyncrasy, which treats sexualities outside of the heteronormativity as anathema and as sinful acts (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2019, pp. 53-59).

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Spanish sources are the author's own.



Fig. 11. Tomás Ochoa Riquetti (2013). Danny [Gunpowder on canvas]. Museum of Antioquia Collection

One of the pieces displayed in Hell in the permanent decolonial gallery

first artists to perform in this space was Lukas Avendaño who is a Muxe<sup>3</sup> dancer. We also had dancers Sara Lamar with her lesbian Flamenco [Fig. 4, 5] and Norma Leal with her cabaret of Lesbian tango. We invited people from Cultura Drag Medellín [Fig. 6] to do drag and we also brought the House of Tupamara to host a ballroom [Fig. 7, 8]. We held an event to retell the stories of trans women and 'transvestites' of the 40s and 50s. The problem is that in the past only journalists got to tell those stories and they only did it in a violent way. They were always framed as the 'violence of the night'. We wanted a space to tell those stories in a different way, such as the stories of the red-light district of Medellín. We also wanted artists who enjoy 'non-traditional' sexual practices to be part of La Esquina. So, we brought artists from the BDSM community and they questioned the idea of romantic love and analyzed how violent it can be [Fig. 9, 10] (Zapata Rincón 2020).<sup>4</sup>

Something that MOA's workers have understood is the need to adapt their practices to the needs of the communities they intend to serve. For instance, La



**Fig. 13.**  
Assistant curator Juli Zapata Rincón as Santa Putricia during a tour of Hell in the Decolonial Gallery

Photo credit: Juan Estebán

Esquina is a space where the museum minimizes its voice and prioritizes connecting with its neighbours without imposing its own agenda:

The museum understands that it cannot be disconnected from all these dynamics that take place downtown, from its neighbours. All the work carried out in La Esquina must allow for connections with the neighbourhood to emerge, with the ‘people of the night.’ We didn’t want to be an interruption to their ways of acting. Instead, we wanted to be part of their processes. We wanted to incorporate ourselves to what was happening outside our doors. For instance, in La Esquina, sex workers come and go and participate in whatever is taking place that night. One time, one came over and she was really sad because she had forgotten her heels at home, so she could not work that night. After she arrived, she had a couple of drinks, met some friends, danced a little and started to feel better. She really enjoyed the space, which helped her not to be sad anymore. After a while, she left with a cousin who would lend her some heels so she could go work that night. How many museums have spaces like this? The museum has allowed for this space to exist here. It is part of our story. It is part of our DNA (Zapata Rincón 2020).<sup>4</sup>

MOA’s workers’ flexibility to adapt their practices, their emphasis on communities’ empowerment, and on providing them with the tools to be self-sufficient have allowed projects to be sustainable even after the museum’s involvement has ended. This fluid model with a more decentralised distribution of power – where the brunt of the power is not only held by the museum, curators, workers and board members but

is also shared with communities – represents a more sustainable way to change a system. *Residencias Cundinamarca* (Cundinamarca Residencies) is an artistic and educational project in which local, national and international artists or groups of artists come to MOA to do an artistic residency. The goal is for the artists to create, together with the communities that live around the museum, a project that is connected to the realities and the needs of these communities. Using art as a tool, this program aims to create collaborative processes that strengthen the coexistence of the different communities around the museum, their empowerment as active citizens, the use of public space, and knowledge exchange. For instance, during performance artist Nadia Granados’ residency, she worked with museum curator Carolina Chacón to develop a collaborative performance with older and retired sex workers from downtown Medellín. Chacón (El Pauer 2018) explains that during the development process and the performance, the women took full control of how they wanted to tell their own stories. After having been on stage for several months performing *Nadie Sabe Quien Soy Yo* (Nobody knows who I am) (Fig. 11), the women felt the need to continue their work outside of the museum. As a result, they formed the collective *Las Guerreras del Centro* (Downtown Women Warriors). Director Melissa Toro (El Pauer 2018) explains:

Las Guerreras del Centro is a corporation that aims to dignify sex work through art, we want to break away from the idea that prostitutes are separate from the rest of society. Because they



**Fig. 14.**  
Jorge Alonso Zapata (2006). *Maja desnudo* [Acrylic paint on paper]. Museum of Antioquia Collection. Other forms outside the male/female binary are also included in Hell in the Decolonial gallery at MOA

can be mothers, they can be aunts, they can be sisters, they can even be our grandmothers. I feel that the power of Las Guerreras lies in the social transformation that we have been able to achieve through this project. It lies in being able to recognize that agency in ourselves. That is the power that we have. What we got from coming together was the fact that we were able to realize that we are capable of accomplishing things.

Through the collective, the women get together to perform, dance, sew, and carry out other artistic activities (Collazons Pinto 2019). Today, after four years working together, the Guerreras have found popularity and a means for their survival through art. Over the years, they have included other women, giving them the space to tell their stories and the opportunity to access additional sources of income (Collazos Pinto 2019). Revisiting the purpose of museums within a human rights agenda means constantly working to remove barriers so everyone can feel like they belong. As African American poet and professor Camille



**Fig. 15.**  
Assistant curator Juli Zapata Rincón dressed as a priest in Hell in the Decolonial Gallery of MOA

Photo credit: Juan Estebán



**Fig. 16.**  
Assistant curator Camilo Castaño during the opening of La Consentida Gallery at Museum of Antioquia 6 April 2016  
Courtesy Museum of Antioquia

Dungy (2017, p. 5) reminds us, “when you belong, you can overlook the totality of otherness, the way that being other pervades every aspect of a person’s life.”

The practices and the relations built through Museo 360 have pushed MOA to question the way in which the stories of the historically marginalized are told in all its spaces and through all its processes. As such, this has impacted interpretive plans and curatorial approaches in the museum’s temporary and permanent galleries. Zapata (2020) explains:

This work has forced the museum to rethink the narrative of art in Medellín, which has always been written by white men. White heterosexual men trying to whiten art history in this city. Now we ask ourselves how has art history been written in the past? In one of the temporary galleries, we showed the work of Benjamin de la Calle, who was a gay photographer at the end of the XIX century. He took photos of gay men who at the time were considered depraved and deviant. Everyone knew he was gay, he lived with his partner, but no one ever talked about it. In previous exhibitions this context wasn’t shown, it was not how he had been described. The museum also redid a permanent gallery, the decolonial gallery. For it, we used a critical review of art history outside the colonial paradigm. The exhibit is divided into three areas: Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. All the queer people are in hell, not because it is a bad thing but because that is where society pushed them [Fig. 12-15]. And this is a permanent gallery so everyone can see the queer. We want to spark conversations about different ways of existing in one’s body. It is also a way to resist and to affirm that we will not be erased!



**Fig. 17.**  
**Floor-to-ceiling windows at the back of the museum facing Cundinamarca Street**  
**The windows also serve as a programming space known as Vitrinas Cundinamarca (Cundinamarca Windows)**  
 Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

Sala Cundinamarca: *La Consentida* (The Cundinamarca Room: The Pampered Girl) was the first exhibition space opened in MOA under Museo 360. Located in the back of the museum, facing Cundinamarca Street, this exhibition room aims to bring together diverse groups around a theme or a work of art to generate critical reflection and interpretation around the museum's collection (Fig. 16). By opening floor-to-ceiling windows that connect the gallery to the street (Fig. 17-19), the museum aims to create links between the two, and to include in its work the communities who live, use or transit through Cundinamarca Street.

One such collaborative exhibition was developed around the painting *La Procesi3n* by artist D3bora Arango. It was chosen by a group of trans women from the LGBTQI+ organization Casa de la Diversidad. Arango was a Colombian artist, born in Medell3n in 1907, who used her artwork to explore many political and controversial issues. She was the first Colombian woman to paint female nudes in the country from the 1930s. The representation of the female body in the nudes of Arango was perceived as a transgression of both the social mores of a conservative society at the time and the traditional canon of representation of women in Colombian art (Aguilar and Mahecha 2011). This led to Arango's exclusion and self-imposed isolation from the artistic community in the country (Aguilar and Mahecha). It was Arango's transgressive nature that attracted the group of women from Casa de la Diversidad to her work and which made them choose *La Procesi3n* as the starting point of an exhibition. Zapata (2020) explains:

The women from Casa de la Diversidad have built their bodies to break with the canons of morality that society has tried to impose on them, like the woman in *La Procesi3n*, who has painted her nails in red and is wearing lipstick. This is a woman who is showing her arms when kissing the hand of the archbishop, instead of covering herself with a shawl and trying to look pure, as she was expected to do. She is breaking with all moral norms that society is telling her she needs to follow [Fig. 20, 21]. This is also what trans bodies do.

They (2020) further elaborate:

The exhibition was done together with the women. We were trying to make sure that the work in the exhibition would not be completed only by museum staff. The intention was to allow the women to use all the museum's resources, like other pieces in the collection, so that they could tell the stories they wanted to tell. We didn't want an academic gaze on the way the exhibition was being developed. We wanted to stay away from it because we didn't want to impose or juxtapose academic theories over their stories or for them to feel studied. We wanted to avoid using formal academic texts and theories that are usually enforced by researchers and academics when carrying out this type of work. We wanted the voices of the women to be central, we wanted them to be the ones leading the narrative. We didn't want to minimize their presence. You know, some were sex workers, and some were university students. It was important that they would be the storytellers, so that they could show the diversity of their experiences.



**Fig. 18.**  
**Passersby watching from the street the live performance Pan de Oro by the Collective El Cuerpo Habla inside the Cundinamarca windows**

Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia



**Fig. 19.**  
**Passersby watch the live performances**  
**inside the museum's windows under the**  
**rain on Cundinamarca Street**

Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

Zapata served as the liaison between the women and the museum. Their lived experience as a member of the trans community and their professional experience as assistant curator were instrumental in ensuring the success of the exhibition. The associated programming was also led by the community and included initiatives such as make-up and storytelling workshops and guided tours led by the women. During the tours, the women interpreted the pieces exhibited: they told the public why they had chosen them and what they meant to them. Recognizing the need for communities to determine their own forms of identification and self-representation through museum programs manifests itself as an assertion of human rights and the challenging of the status quo. As Smith (1999, p. 35) explains: “The need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.”

### Conclusion

The biggest challenge faced by human rights museology lies in the use of the term ‘human rights’ as suggested by its Western construct. Criticism of the universality of the UN discourse on human rights is a valid one. The perspectives of indigenous peoples and other historically marginalized communities have often been excluded from the discourses that have formed the international legal order of human rights. Their focus on individual rights finds itself in opposition with the need to prioritize community ones. The use of a HRBA can pose a hindrance when working with many historically marginalized communities outside of the Western paradigm. The practices nurtured by the MOA do not always perfectly fit the academic definition of human rights museology. Rather, they

suggest a ‘museology from below,’ an extension or even a subversion of a heavily theoretical approach that leaves out the practices developed and led by historically excluded communities. The differences between both definitions are not only that one is emerging from concrete practice while the other remains largely on paper. They have a fundamental difference in origin, as they both arise from different contexts. One is institution-based while the other is human-centred. MOA’s museological practices suggest a parallel method that is rooted in the same essence but that has in mind an expanded understanding of human rights as well as the ways in which these rights are determined, protected, and enforced by virtue of the subject(s) it centres. MOA’s practice provides some solutions for the elements which are lacking in the more theoretical conceptualizations of human rights museology and a HRBA.

Other challenges to human rights museology include the need to reconcile the political nature of the work with the interests of donors such as governments or private sponsors. Often institutions will self-censor activities because of a fear of upsetting possible donors, or they might discontinue a successful program due to a lack of funds. When it comes to publicly funded institutions, changes of government can easily affect not only the direction and mandate of a museum but also its relationship with its collaborating communities. Political interference might also



**Fig. 20.**  
**Débora Arango (1941)**  
**La procesión [Watercolour on paper]**  
 Museum of Antioquia Collection

hinder a human rights museology that intends to hold governments accountable as being ultimately responsible for respecting, promoting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights. As we have seen, human rights museology has the potential to assist museums in their decolonization efforts. However, the type of community work it requires is not easy; it is demanding and emotionally taxing. It cannot be hasty. It requires mending, cultivating, nurturing, and maintaining relations as well as building trust and focusing on sustainability. For this to be effective, museums must devote time, effort, and resources; they must commit to structural change. Yet, a lack of centralized policies that can legitimize these types of museological practices often makes the implementation of human rights museology fragile and dependent on the actions of individual museum workers rather than



**Fig. 21.**  
Curator Carolina Chacón and Assistant Curator Juli Zapata Rincón during the opening of *La Procesión* at *la Consentida* 5 May 2018

Courtesy Julieta Duque/Museum of Antioquia

on institutional support. Ultimately, human rights museology, which by nature intends to challenge the status quo, is bound to face resistance in a museum sector that continues to be overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, cisgender and reflective of other forms of privilege. All of which favours the upholding of 'traditional' ways of doing and thinking about any type of radical change.

Yet human rights museology is still evolving and there is much potential for its use. The current crises facing the world today are a clear indication that a human rights museology is needed now more than ever. The

arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic not only forced us to rethink our daily lives and the way in which we work, but also the way in which our institutions maintain and perpetuate inequality and oppression. This has exposed the shocking impoverishment existing in all sectors of our societies: civil, political, economic, social, and cultural. Under this new reality, those who were already vulnerable must now fight to simply stay alive. Human rights defenders have repeatedly pointed out how vulnerable groups such as the elderly, asylum seekers, refugees, racialized people, members from the LGBTTQI+ community, undocumented workers, those with low incomes and people experiencing homelessness have been disproportionately affected. We must favour the social role of museums and position them not as elite institutions but as community spaces capable of being something more than a white box. In a time when museums are finding it hard to justify their existence, human rights museology offers a more just, more human, and more equitable alternative to a museum sector that has already been exposed for its decline (Halperin and Pes 2020; Dapena and Perla 2020; Ulaby 2020). As Brazilian professor of social museology Mario Chagas (Fulchieri 2017) reminds us: "A museology which does not serve people's lives, does not serve anything."

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# Nordiska museet's Agents: collecting at the turn of the century

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## Abstract

*The focus of this paper is a network of unpaid volunteers collecting, promoting, and fundraising for the Nordiska museet in the late 19th century. They were a heterogeneous group who came from all levels of society. Some were sent on collecting expeditions funded by the museum. Others were farmers collecting in their local communities. They collected both objects and information.*

In this paper I discuss collecting at the Nordiska museet in Stockholm at the end of the 19th century. I provide some context, highlight four of the agents collecting, and look at how they were managed. I also briefly comment on the legacy of the collections.

In this period, the Nordic countries experienced many of the same developments as the rest of Europe. Industrialisation, for example, was important, although the growth was slow compared to some other countries. Regardless of the extent, and the resulting social impact, the changes were of great concern to some. These concerns were essential to the founding of the Nordiska museet.

Reflections concerning national identities were also important elements in the general social debate at this time. This included efforts to appreciate the Nordic nations' position in the world, as well as in history. The relationships between the countries were also being negotiated. These reflections and negotiations had some significant outcomes. The most acute of these outcomes was the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905. War was avoided, but there was posturing and sabre-rattling



Fig. 1.  
**Arthur Hazelius, painted by Julius  
 Kronberg 1910 (NMA.0031979)**  
 Courtesy Mats Landin, Nordiska museet

on both sides. This also represented the last in a long line of reductions of the geographical area under Swedish control. Another related outcome was Pan-Scandinavianism. The followers of this movement preferred close collaboration — or even a union — between the Scandinavian countries. The latter thinking also influenced the founding of the Nordiska museet.

Artur Hazelius (Fig. 1), the founder of the museum, was influenced by Pan-Scandinavianism. He fittingly had a doctorate in Nordic languages. Before he established the museum, he was primarily known as an advocate for educational and grammatical reform. He promoted a harmonisation of the spelling for the three Scandinavian languages (Hillström 2010, p. 589). This did not make him universally popular (Berg

1901, p. 397).

Hazelius was born in Stockholm in 1833 into a middle-class family. Some of his core values were instilled in him since childhood. These included a fondness for the countryside and its people.

*Tidigt lärde han att älska svensk natur och svenskt folkliif. | From an early age he learnt to love Swedish nature and folklife.*<sup>1</sup> (Hazelius et al. 1903, p. 4)

In adulthood this developed into a great concern for what he saw as the developing loss of such culture, something he shared with his wife Sofi Hazelius. They traveled the countryside, made observations, and made friends. Eventually, they had a network of contacts, who would later prove useful in establishing the museum. Over time Artur and Sofi started collecting. Their first museum objects were eight items of folk-costumes collected during their travel in 1872 (Bergman 1998, p. 10). Regardless of the slight infamy caused by his ideas about grammatical reform, by the time the museum was founded Hazelius was well-connected. Among his friends and supporters there were both influential people in the capital and common farmers in the countryside. The former group helped the founding of the museum, the latter helped populate its collections. All this was made possible thanks to Hazelius' affable, and concomitantly focused and persuasive nature. He constantly forged new and productive friendships, whilst also maintaining old and equally beneficial ones.

Nordiska museet was established in 1873, when Hazelius was 40 years old. Initially it was named *Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen* (Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection). The museum's current purpose-built and very grand home started construction in 1888 and opened to the public in 1907. Artur Hazelius tragically never saw his life's work completed as he died in 1901.

The museum, the collections, and the exhibitions were a product of Hazelius' unique ambition (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004, p. 13). Beyond ideas such as those mentioned above, Hazelius' approach to collecting was much influenced by Romantic thought, and perhaps more importantly, sociocultural evolutionism (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004). It was an

<sup>1</sup> *Translations from Swedish are the author's own*

innovative and remarkably contemporary museum. It also incorporated a Scandinavian museum invention. "Skansen" is an open-air museum filled with buildings transported from representative parts of the Nordic region. Nordiska museet was also from its start an important and visible element in Sweden's cultural life. Almost 150 years later it still is.

With a nod to Pan-Scandinavianism, the collection from the outset included objects from throughout the Nordic region, as well as from other areas formerly under Swedish control. Hazelius' ambition was also from the start to integrate the object collection with archives, and a public library. While each of these collections are impressive on their own, their intertwined nature makes the whole something beside the parts. There is for example furniture in the object collection, with design and development drawings in the archives, and sales catalogues in the library.

To populate all these collections, Hazelius relied on a network of agents. They were commonly referred to as *'skaffarna'*. This term can perhaps best be translated as 'the providers'. They contributed to all the collections by sourcing objects, observations and information. They also acted as promoters and fundraisers. It was a diverse group of people. They came from different walks of life, with different ambitions for, and relations to the museum. They were volunteers rather than paid staff (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004, p. 16), although some did at least get their expenses covered. I will attempt to illustrate this diversity by introducing four of the museum's early *'skaffarne'*.

The first two were a married couple: Bud Erik and Anna Olsson. They lived in the region of Dalarna in Sweden. This is also where they met Hazelius during his travels before the founding of the museum (Pers 1931, p. 12). They became life-long friends. As Hazelius became increasingly focused on the museum in Stockholm, they primarily kept in contact through letters. Hazelius would still travel to Dalarna for occasional visits, such as after the Olssons' home burned down (Pers 1931, p. 24). Olsson would also travel to Stockholm to reassemble entire buildings he had bought and disassembled for the museum (Pers 1931, pp. 21-22).

The Olssons collected for the museum in their local community, and in their region. Beyond entire buildings, they collected a wide variety of objects, including clothes, paintings (Svärdström 1937), and

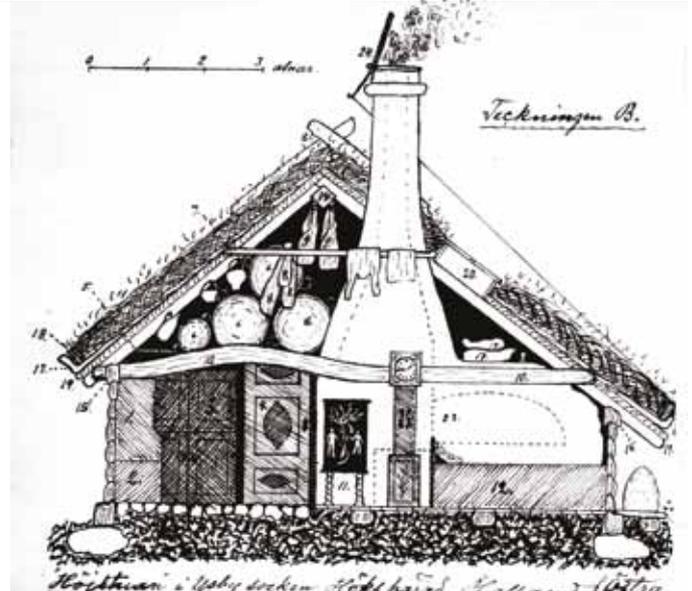


Fig.2.

**Drawing made by Alexis Engdahl  
(NMA.0064650)**

Courtesy Nordiska museets topografiska arkiv

furniture (Stridsberg 1915, p. 9). They were also active in fundraising activities for the museum such as lotteries and bazaars (Pers 1931, p. 21). They remained dedicated to the museum and to Hazelius throughout their lives. In a letter, Olsson even broached the possibility of becoming an employee at the museum in Stockholm (Pers 1931, p. 22).

The third agent to be discussed here is Alexis Engdahl, a theology student. He started collecting in 1884 when he was 35 years old, and did his last work for the museum in 1887 (Arnö-Berg 1983). Eventually, he resumed his studies and became a priest. Unlike the Olssons discussed above, Engdahl travelled all over Sweden to collect. During his travels he experienced much hardship (Arnö-Berg 1983). He seems constantly to have been low on cash and clothes, as well as spirits. He had to improvise, borrow, and generally persevere to fulfil Hazelius' objectives. Regardless of this, he seems to have held an ambition of becoming a paid member of staff at the museum (Arnö-Berg 1983, p. 53). He never did. It is not clear why he failed. What is clear, however, is that Hazelius expected much from his agents.

Engdahl not only collected objects, he also wrote down information, observations, and made illustrations (Fig. 2). Similarly to the Olssons, he sold lottery tickets to raise funds for the museum (Arnö-Berg 1983, p. 46). There are more than 1,200 objects attributed to him in the museum, several hundred

pages with annotations and illustrations, as well as over 300 pages of letters (Arnö-Berg 1983, p. 45). This combined effort highlights not only Engdahl's industriousness, but also Hazelius' excellent museological instincts. He instituted a well-rounded focus on knowledge gathering from the start.

Hazelius met the fourth agent in Norway in 1874. His name was Torjus Leifsson Jore (Fig. 3). When they first met, Jore, a farmer's son, was only 15-16 year old (Hals 1945, p. 105). They met at Jore's family's farm, when Hazelius arrived looking for objects to collect. Among other things, he wanted to acquire a chair owned by Jore's father. When the latter proved hard to convince, Hazelius enlisted the son (Hals 1945, pp. 105-106), although it is unclear whether this particular chair ever made it into the collection. The teenager, however, was captivated by Hazelius' ideas, and fascinated by the museum in faraway Stockholm (Hals 1945). He quickly became another friend that Hazelius enlisted in the service of the museum. Jore's fascination and dedication endured beyond his teens. He ended up traveling extensively in Norway

to collect. Similar to Engdahl's experiences discussed above, the work proved challenging.

*Et helseslit var det som oftest. Knapt med penger fikk han og vondord og hugg måtte han døy. Men det lot til som tålte han allting for "saken". Most often it [the collecting] was extremely hard work. He received little money, and had to endure insults and violence. But it seems as if he could survive anything for "the cause". (Hals 1945, p. 106)*

Perhaps due to his young age, Jore frequently needed detailed instructions. Hazelius provided him with these in several letters, and would also remind him to add various items to his list of things to ask for (Hals 1945, p. 107). Like Engdahl and Olsson, Jore never became a member of staff at the museum. Instead, he ended up as the owner of a hotel (Hals 1945, p. 106).

To recap, the agents (*skaffarna*) were unpaid volunteers. Whilst some, like the Olssons, were active primarily in their local region, others, like Engdahl and Jore, travelled extensively. The work provided few luxuries, and was instead rich in challenges. The agents came from different walks of life, and had different levels of education. Their relationships with the museum and its founder also differed. They were not limited to collecting artefacts, but also collected information. They made written records, as well as illustrations. Olsson even acquired, dismantled and rebuilt entire buildings. They were also involved in generating interest for the museum as well as in fundraising.

At the start the agents all seem to have received instructions directly from Hazelius. There must have been obstacles to providing these, as well as in managing such a heterogeneous group, particularly considering the geographical spread and the limited range of available communication technologies. Hazelius solved this using different strategies. He provided the agents with both an overall picture of what he wanted to achieve, and detailed instructions. Before the museum was even founded he had written and published an acquisition policy booklet. The first edition was printed in Stockholm in 1872 (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004, p. 16). This booklet was given in addition to the specific and individual instructions provided in the letters mentioned above.

He also equipped new agents with general ideas, and some context for their work. Together with the acquisition policy booklet he gave them copies of a book by Carl Jonas Love Almqvists called *Kapellet*



Gåva av Politikkvilmektig Kåre Rasmussen, Oslo

Fig. 3.  
Torjus Leifsson Jore (NMA.0096065)  
Unknown Photographer, courtesy Nordiska  
museets arkiv

(‘The Chapel’) (Hammarlund-Larsson 2004, p. 16). This gift served as a token of gratitude and encouragement, as well as inspiration. The book is a *folklivsberättelse*, describing a small town on Sweden's east coast populated by poor fishermen. The simple people living there are nonetheless described as reflective and self-aware. This was a new manner in which to describe this type of demographic (Hammarlund-Larsson 2020).

One of Hazelius' major strengths was his personality. He invested heavily in personal relationships, and kept them alive. He was affable and enthusiastic; concomitantly, he could be persuasive and demanding as seen above. His agents volunteered to face significant challenges and perform repeated tests of endurance. As the work at the museum prevented him from travelling, and as the museum's area of interest spanned a large geographical area, he directed the work primarily by writing letters.

The Nordiska museet collections today hold about 1.5 million objects, 5,500 meters of archives, 6 million photos, and 3,800 meters of books and magazines. There are objects from all over Scandinavia, from areas formerly part of Sweden, and from the entire Nordic region.

The collection clearly is the outcome of Hazelius' and the museum-agents' (*skaffarnas*) combined efforts. The breadth of information that such a heterogeneous group provided was a major advantage. Concomitantly, the collecting process was well-directed. The agents had opportunities to glimpse both Hazelius' vision, and to understand what the detailed focus of their activities should be. This enriched the museum not only with objects, archives and books, but also with information. It proved to be an excellent starting point, and equipped the museum with diverse, relevant, contextualised, and interconnected collections.

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# *Interdisciplinary Innovation for Contemporary Collecting: the Practice of Constructing Diversified Dialogues in Taiwanese Museums*

**Ya-Hsuan (Chelsea) WANG**

## **Abstract**

*The museum community has constantly reflected on the social influence of museums, and the functions of museum collections. We try to create interdisciplinary and innovative collection plans, by creating new modes of dialogue with the public. This case study is about a creative development of the National History Museum (NMH). In 2018, the museum was closed for renovation, and it became hard for the NMH to exhibit its collection. The museum then proposed a "Pattern Licensing Project" in 2019, which involved transforming the collection into new pattern designs interpreted by the museum, guided by the core concept of exploring the "fascinating details" in the collection. The museum created 60 patterns and provided a style guide for public use. Moreover, the museum created an imaginative exhibition of these patterns in 2020. In addition to in-depth research into the original meanings of the collection, new interpretation has become the seed to start the imagination, further extending the existing interpretation and generating new content.*

## **Introduction**

Museums provide people with access to the intellectual and cultural heritage of humanity and are often the public's first point of contact with cultural institutions. As such, they have become a source of inspiration for people in different eras with different attitudes. The creativity within museums as institutions is also one of the sources of motivation for their continuous progress. With the progression of new understandings and ideas about their role in the world, museums have

tried to establish more approaches to communication with the public, accumulating more and more connections with the soul of society (Scott 2007). This article introduces the Pattern Licensing Project, which has been promoted by the National Museum of History (NMH) of Taiwan since 2019 and is one such project which aims to bring museum collections to a wider public.

This article discusses the origin of that project: firstly the stage of content creation, and secondly the stage of promotion outside the museum. The goal of this project is to break through certain frameworks and assumptions commonly adopted in the field of museum studies while still upholding the professional standards of the museum industry. For example, a museum as a licensor is usually licensing a collection of images, the licensee is usually creating products which are replicas of the originals in the collection. But in this Pattern Licensing Project, the subject of licensing target is not a replica object but an abstracted image from the collection, which the licensee can use in diverse ways to suit their needs. As such, it has become an innovative strategy that has broken new ground in the field of licensing for museums in Taiwan.

## **The Starting Point: Inspiration for the project sprouts from international exchanges**

The starting point of new ideas often germinates in unexpected places, and the Pattern Licensing Project — which drew inspiration from the experience of international exchange outside the museum — is no exception. The NMH is a pioneer in the promotion of the international image licensing of domestic museums in Taiwan (Wang, 2015). The Ministry of Culture in Taiwan was established on May 20, 2001. In the same year, the Cultural Creative Marketing Division was established within the National Museum of History, to focus on image licensing (NMH 2013, p. 158). Examining the history of museum legislation in Taiwan, the National Museum of History was one of the first museums to set up a museum image licensing practice based on cultural and creative law (Wang 2016, p.146-147).

Over the years, it has participated in licensing exhibitions in different countries to strive for brand marketing opportunities. From 2015 to 2019, it participated annually in the Hong Kong International Licensing Show, hosted by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council. In 2018, the NMH participated



Fig. 1.  
National Museum of History Pattern  
Licensing Style Guide  
Courtesy the author

for the first time in Licensing Expo Japan.<sup>1</sup> During the exhibition in Japan, representatives of the NMH gave a lecture on licensing (Ministry of Culture 2018). This attracted many attendees to visit the NMH booth after the seminar to find out how this museum from Taiwan promotes its content.

Among them, representatives of the centuries-old paper art brand *Haibara* located in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan, met with the NMH. Through exchanges and sharing, the NMH learned that *Haibara*, which has been in business since 1806, has also begun to make breakthroughs in their industry. The traditional patterns in their paper art were at risk of becoming lost due to the decline in the number of skilled craftsmen. Therefore, they began to consider finding ways to preserve traditional patterns in digital form. This would enable the brand's large number of traditional Japanese patterns to be reproduced with modern technical tools (Haibara, undated). It would also free

traditional patterns from the physical restrictions of the objects on which they were created. For example, the patterns on traditional water printing can now be rearranged through digital technologies, such as old 'UKIYO-E', making way for the development of new products and product lines (Haibara, undated). *Haibara* has become a contemporary paper art brand that spans different fields. In recent years, it has cooperated with the Japanese fashion brand UNIQLO in a trendy cross-border cooperation, presenting paper patterns on T-shirts (UNIQLO, undated).

At the same time, the NMH's accumulated achievements in licensing cooperation offered precious experiences that the Japanese artists hoped to learn from. Such licensing cooperation examples include the Licensing Project which is based on the spirit of social enterprise (Huang 2020). And the NMH announced a fashion licensing project, Meet Sanyu, in 2017 (Wang 2020). The representatives from *Haibara* were eager to consult with the representative from the NMH, and both sides have continued to discuss practical operational issues and challenges regarding licensing promotion in the creative industries. This exchange of experience has benefited both the Taiwanese and Japanese organizations greatly. As a result of their discussions, both sides have more inspiration for the possibility of reinterpreting traditional culture in the contemporary era. This important exchange at the Licensing Expo Japan has also become the one of the sources of inspiration for ongoing development within the NMH.

### **The Vitality of Museums: Digital preservation from form to cultural significance**

Through observation of the local regulations on licensing cooperation, it was discovered that there may be several barriers to licensing promotion by the museum, including copyright status, the unitary type images in the collections, and the difficulty of cross-domain application of the collection (Chao 2018). Furthermore, the NMH was closed for renovation from 2018 to 2019, and most of the collections were transported to different warehouses following restoration work on various items. The above-mentioned factors are also a core part of the context in which museum staff developed the Pattern Licensing Project. The question of how to display the collections and create more cultural resources and creative practices for objects stored away in warehouses became a key concern of this project.

<sup>1</sup> The large-scale licensing exhibitions are both officially certified by the Licensing International, and they are important international licensing exhibitions in Asia which attract hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world every year.

After further development, the Pattern Licensing Project was expanded to three key ideas based on the stages of the project: conceptual innovation, target creation, and universal application. For this project, the term ‘conceptual innovation’ means that the museum prioritizes innovation and progress towards its own perspectives on transformation, while upholding professional standards for the industry. The NMH chose classic ornamental designs from historical collections and elements of artworks to undergo a process of design transformation, which is underpinned by principles of regular, re-creative and revolutionary design (Wang 2019). The aim was for the museum to work in line with the vision of this plan to create more licensed subjects, using the logic of contemporary design to provide the public with more choice. According to *The Style Guide of Collection Pattern* published in 2019, this project is designed with the primary principle of "excavating unexpected details in the collection that are dazzling to viewers." (Chang 2019, p. 65) This is also the primary positioning of the project that is used in communication with the public.

The next step in the process follows the principle of promotion through popularization and application. Anyone can apply these unique pattern images through NMH licensing regulation, including manufactures or companies applying for brand licensing operation. In this way, the licensed subjects will be treated as a sort of ‘cultural transmitter’; the goal of the project’s creative practice will be achieved through interdisciplinary innovation and re-creation within the collection.

The Pattern Licensing Project not only helps to preserve the collection, but also activates the cultural meaning of the preserved materials. Combining these two functions, the Pattern Licensing Project expands the goal of merely preserving the *form* of the collection, to simultaneously activating new *meaning* in the collection in this interactive museum context. In the first stage, the members of the Pattern Licensing Project team considered the breadth and convenience of future licensing use as well as previous research conducted by the licensing team. All of this was done in an attempt to eliminate the original limitations of image licensing. Steps taken included the establishment of a clear and complete set of intellectual property rights for the chosen objects, including a diverse range of items from the breadth of the collection, and the creation of shortcuts to simplify use of these images such as clear taxonomy by design



Fig. 2.  
A corner of exhibition The Grand NMH Hotel: Pattern Licensing Project  
Courtesy the author

theme instead of difficult chronology. Through these measures, the team is committed to promoting the sustainability of the project toward ‘one source multi use’ in the future.<sup>2</sup>

### **Content Creation: The extension of sixty patterns at the National Museum of History**

In the first phase of the project in 2019, it took the project team a whole year to create the target content. According to the statistics of the ‘National Museum of History Pattern Licensing Style Guide’ (Wang 2019) (Fig. 1) the Pattern Licensing Project created a total of sixty images of pattern designs based on different themes. The categories were divided into four major groupings: romantic flowers and birds, the beauty of humanity, hand-painted, and lucky blessings. At the beginning of the Pattern Licensing Project, the first task was to select the collection items to be the source of the sixty pattern designs. However, it was no easy feat to choose only sixty patterns from a large-scale collection.

Therefore, the first step was for the project leader to narrow down the collection. This entailed preliminary research and sorting of ornamental designs in the collections, from which the applicable academic

<sup>2</sup> “One source multi use” is a viewpoint originating in South Korea, which refers to the concept of a single material for multiple applications and is often used in the application range of film and television entertainment.



Fig. 3.  
Audiences flip through the fabric exhibits  
Courtesy the author

information was collated. The first task in the initial stage of the project was to select the collection as the design source of the NMH pattern images. The museum staff leading the project had to first conduct preliminary research to sort the historical decoration and ornamentation in the collection. The project manager studied and sorted out the knowledge resources that could be used for licensing, and explored their social context and techniques to gain a deeper understanding. In order to speed up the process of narrowing down the collections, the committee

members devised certain selection principles. The following is a set of principles that guided collection decisions (among other conditions):

- Copyright is licensable
- Ornaments of cultural significance
- Exclusive image characteristics
- Stories and symbols of meaning
- Flexibility of elements

In addition to these criteria, there were also additional considerations for narrowing down the selection process. For example, the museum staff first discarded nearly 30,000 coins and numismatic collections because of the repetitive nature of the designs, the readability of calligraphic text on objects, as well as other factors that caused design problems.

Through the process of repeated selection and elimination, nine categories were finally selected from nineteen types of cultural relics of the NMH. A total of thirty-seven collection items were used as sources for transformational design, including two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. In the end, “exploring the fascinating details in the collection” was the main position for external communication. From the museum’s perspective, the collection’s unique historical ornaments and artworks were re-interpreted in a contemporary context, and the sixty patterns were designed based on principles of international pattern design technology (Chang 2019, p. 66).

The core of the museum’s creative thinking process is to use unique historical designs from the collection and transform portions of the patterns into new designs. The museum’s design patterns are similar to what are known as ‘pattern images’ in the world of image licensing. Therefore, the technical principle of the design used by the museum is the same as that used by designers using international patterns in common use. By weaving together the cultural memory of the past with new designs, this heritage can be preserved and passed on in a way that also incorporates popular, contemporary style.

#### **Experimental creative exhibition at the museum: The Grand NMH Hotel special exhibition**

At the beginning of the second phase of the Pattern Licensing Project, the museum was faced with the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent economic stagnation. Art and cultural events in Taiwan only opened up after June of 2020. The situation of forced isolation due to COVID-19 prompted the Pattern Licensing Project team members to reflect on

new and creative ways of displaying works. Therefore, an experimental museum display experience was proposed; to create a special exhibition allowing the audience to have close contact with the collection in a real, operating hotel. The NMH chose an area with a backpackers' hotel located in an important district for subculture in Taipei city. The surreal space uses low-chroma and high-saturation color to recreate the gorgeous style of past eras, allowing the audience to experience time and space as if they were in the 'The Grand NMH Hotel: Pattern Licensing Project' where classic and contemporary are fused (Fig. 2).

After entering the 'The Grand NMH Hotel' setting, the NMH invites audiences to join in and experience the fantasy space. Audiences can experience the various images and patterns and discover the history hidden within them (Fig. 3, 4). This special exhibition is full of experimental designs, paying tribute to the international trend towards playfulness in contemporary installations, and creating a new visual style for the NMH. The design inspiration begins with the romantic style of the 1920s (Xie 2020, pp. 50-52).

The route of the exhibition leads all the way from the hotel lobby to unique pattern-themed rooms (Fig. 5), comprehensively transforming the hotel's operating area through details such as furniture, decorations and hotel uniforms. The experience of these patterns, one after another, inspires visitors' imagination with the possibilities for these historical designs and patterns in a variety of settings. In this way, the NMH connects daily life and imaginary space through creative design. Historic patterns are imbued with a magical charm, just as the collections of the museum are brought closer to life.

### Conclusion

The Pattern Licensing Project introduced in this case study is an innovative strategy in the field of licensing spearheaded by the National Museum of History in Taiwan. Through observation of the current situation and critical thinking, the museum curators developed a new strategy with potential for development. Following this, the museum curators advocated for this plan and finally came to an internal consensus on moving forward. After receiving internal approval, the project was carried out in alignment with a series of articulated values and stances.

Cultural relics are places where the traces of human activity are inscribed. Use of licensed images in design bolsters creativity and aesthetic attractiveness,

evoking the resonance of the viewer's visual and cultural memory and becoming a 'superimposed interpretation.' Compared with the licensing categories in other commercial markets, revenue from this area is relatively small and fragmentary for the museum sector. However, it has the unique advantage of growing a market within specific populations, creating the largest synergy of cooperation among all participants, including the museum as a licensor, licensees from cultural industries, and audiences or consumers. It allows all participants to achieve their own goals: for example, museums promote their images and knowledge in new ways, cultural



Fig. 4.  
The design and arts department of a university visit and have a discussion in the exhibition

Courtesy the author

industries get unique resources from museums, and creative products enter the life of the public to create new aesthetic trends.

The core spirit behind the museum's licensing efforts, beyond securing basic legal protection for copyrighted images, is cooperation and co-creation. Drawing on the practical experience of creative personnel within the organization, the team has been able to establish partnerships with licensing experts in different fields



Fig. 5.  
NMH Pattern Deco Room in exhibition  
Courtesy the author

and integrate resources outside the museum such as manufacturing partnerships, marketing resources and creative designers. By combining its values and goals with the tangible results of image licensing, the museum hopes to respond to the needs and desires of contemporary audiences. In the contemporary era of two-way collaboration rather than one-way export, the innovative strategy of the Pattern Licensing Project has the potential to become a new strength for the National Museum of History, pushing the museum to be further in sync with society at different levels.

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# Unlocated: Brook Andrew—Evidence

Dolla S. Merrillees

## Abstract

Museums play a key role in the preservation and protection of cultural material and while we think of museum collections as time capsules for posterity, few beyond those on the inside realise that countless objects have been lost, stolen, misplaced, discarded or transferred, or were officially classified as 'unlocated'. Steven Lubar describes the study of this phenomenon as museum taphonomy: the process by which collections disappear. Using one case study, this paper explores the life of one 'missing' object and asks what it means when objects are separated from the information about them, their stories, their metadata. Do they lose much of their value, connection and legacy? My research approaches these questions through the concepts of time, space and memory and helps us to understand that loss is intrinsic in the formation and processing of collections, reminding us not only of the fragility and ephemeral nature of things but challenging assumptions about permanence.



Fig. 1.  
Walter, T. Brook Andrew [Photograph]  
Courtesy the artist

In Australia, at the beginning of a public event or meeting it is customary to offer a Welcome to Country delivered by an Elder or Traditional Custodian, or an Acknowledgement of Country which can be given by any person. It's an opportunity to show our respect for Australia's First Nations and acknowledge their custodianship and continuing connection to country. It is a statement that speaks of respect and dignity and as a non-Indigenous person it asks me to pause, to consider the colonial heritage of my country and the legislation and events which have shaped the lives of Indigenous peoples since colonisation. It promotes an awareness of the past, the present and connection to the future but it also reminds us of the fluidity of memory and that the capacity to forget is perhaps the most haunting trait of our species (Wade 2020).

Museums, in this regard, play a key role in the preservation and protection of our cultural heritage and identity but while we think of museum collections as time capsules for posterity – as our external memory banks – few beyond those of us on the inside realise that hundreds of thousands of objects worth millions of dollars have been lost, stolen, misplaced, damaged, accidentally discarded or transferred, or officially classified as 'unlocated'. The real scale of these missing items is unknown, yet if a key function of the museum is to guard against anticipated loss it creates a paradoxical situation where museums nervous about reputational damage and reluctant to publicise their own failures rarely speak about the disappearance or misplacement of priceless objects,



Fig. 2.  
Capurro, C. (2016). Evidence [Installation view], Sydney: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences  
Courtesy the artist

artefacts and artworks integral to their collections. Museums have a responsibility to consider the ethical dimensions of their collecting methods, but they also have a responsibility to acknowledge and account for loss, not simply within the institution but the loss to community and cultures, particularly when it pertains to objects that are sensitive in nature, including human remains and sacred and non-sacred objects from across the world. Steven Lubar (2017, p. 2) describes the study of this phenomenon as *museum taphonomy*: the process by which collections disappear. With many cultural institutions burdened by a profusion of artefacts many of which will never be displayed, how do museums deal with loss? Should we continue to accumulate when we can't account for what we have? And with the very real possibility that many museums may not survive the seismic impact of COVID-19 it will not simply be a matter of switching off the lights and locking the doors; disposal or the dissolution of collections implies a loss of context, of history and of our collective cultural heritage.

In this paper I will explore the life of one 'missing' item and ask what it means when objects are separated from the information about them, their stories, their metadata. Do they lose much of their value, connection and legacy and what is the museum's responsibility in acknowledging such loss? Museums hold both objects and stories, and stories are even more easily displaced than artefacts (Lubar et al., 2017). Objects are witnesses to both the past and present and my research approaches these questions through the concepts of time, space and memory. In doing so I address questions about the wider role of collecting institutions in preserving and storing the tens of millions of items held in their trust, as well as reminding us that cultural artefacts are never static either physically or conceptually. In their introduction 'Biographies, Travels and Itineraries of Things', Hans Hahn and Hadas Weiss (2013, p.3) note that "... things appear, then they disappear or are forgotten — sometimes for centuries — and then, in new horizons of time, or in different environments, they reappear to play an entirely new and different role." It is important to understand that loss is intrinsic in the formation and processing of collections (Lubar et al. 2017), reminding us not only of the fragility and ephemeral nature of things but challenging assumptions and notions about permanence.

I would also like to note that the material presented in this case study is of a culturally sensitive nature. I provide it in an historical context, and it has been

published (Dyer 2015, p. 15), but it may cause sadness or distress, particularly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2015, as the Director of Curatorial, Collections and Exhibitions at Sydney's Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences I invited artist Brook Andrew (Fig. 1) to develop a major immersive installation that incorporated our collection and archives, as a response to the exhibition *Disobedient Objects* organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon, the co-curators of the exhibition, noted (Flood et al. 2015) that while disobedient objects have a history as long as social struggle itself, the role of material culture in social movements is a mostly untold story. The exhibition and the installation were to be shown simultaneously, and while different, both of these projects sought to uncover hidden histories by reinterpreting and shedding light on objects that embodied the struggle for rights and liberties.

Andrew is a multidisciplinary artist, descended from the Wiradjuri people of south-eastern Australia as well as being of Scottish descent. His practice and artistic process incorporates photography, installation, museum interventions and public and interactive artworks. As described by curator Katie Dyer (2015, p. 5), "Andrew creates meanings through harnessing artefacts and often uses contemporary interpretations of the traditional Wirajuri language and motifs of his mother's ancestors as an implicit critique of dominant power structures."

Titling his installation *Evidence* (Fig. 2), Andrew wove together unexpected and often overlooked objects and materials from the Museum's collections with specially commissioned artworks to tell a story of social change and frontier resistance as well as to interrogate the dominant historical narrative in Australia (Merrillees 2015). For Andrew, the collections and archives are evidence of both conflict and creativity (Ibid.). His investigations and repurposing of material is a form of subversion from the inside (Dyer 2015), imbuing the objects with an idiosyncratic personal vision and ignoring the myth of neutrality or long-held traditions that for so long have formed the backbone of museum practice. In Andrew's words: "My approach to *Evidence* was experimental, a question of how far does the artist push and pull against the might of the museum to provide different access to objects while still maintaining an artistic sensibility...



Fig. 2.  
Capurro, C. (2016). *Evidence*, [Installation view], Sydney: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences  
Courtesy the artist

it means that risks needed to be taken with the display and interpretation" (Merrillees 2015, p. 25).

The potency of his installation (Fig. 3) lay in its juxtaposition and collating of seemingly disconnected objects such as a syringe container (Fitpack), provision opium and an Australian army service revolver with a Rakali (water rat) fur coat, convict love tokens and engraved Aboriginal breastplates symbolising, respectively, substance abuse, conflict, cruelty to animals and colonialism. These items were positioned alongside poignant documents such as the Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report 1887, and glass plate negatives of Aboriginal people from the 19th century who, as Katie Dyer (2015, p. 9) writes in her catalogue essay, were unlikely to have granted permission to be photographed.

Over a period of about a year, Andrew met and worked with museum staff to research the collection and delve into the collection stores (Fig. 3), peeling back layers, uncovering stories and long dormant objects. Connections were made, interactions and relationships researched, and new possibilities were opened up, as yet others petered out. One of those was an entry in an 1898 collection inventory of animal products. Handwritten in ink and sandwiched between a listing for turtle eggs and a perch is "E2286: Tanned skin of Aboriginal female —Tasmania."<sup>1</sup> While it appears that the remains were transferred to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences from the Australian Museum in January of 1898 it should be noted that further research on this work needs to be undertaken.



Fig. 4.  
Andrew, B. (2016). *Lately?* From the Nation's party series [Photo-lithograph with collaged elements and hand-colouring]

Courtesy the artist

The starkness of the entry belies its shocking, distressing and deeply disturbing nature. The disrespect to the individual, to the dead, to the cultural sensitivities of the originating community, and the inherent racism are indisputable. Research undertaken by the museum at the behest of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc. in 2006-7 reveals that a 1939 stocktake failed to account for her remains and they have been missing ever since (Dyer 2015). All that is left is the collection record.

Andrew's decision to exhibit the inventory as a form of memorial was also a sharp reminder that the Museum needed to acknowledge and confront its past and that we were not simply dealing with the loss of 'property'. Discussions with colleagues, community members, and staff about appropriate methods for display led to the stock book being placed in an early 20th-century museum vitrine covered by a form of shroud. The shroud was made of linen speckled with coloured foils and digitally printed with Australian historical photographs chosen by Andrew from the collection. Visitors were invited through labelling

to lift the cover to reveal the inventory but given the sensitive nature of the content, warnings were also put in place to enable the audience to choose whether or not to access the material.

The very physical act of lifting the shroud and pushing it to one side (Fig. 4) required, as curator Katie Dyer (2015, p. 14) noted, "...a concerted decision to look deeper and unearth the 'evidence' Andrew had chosen for our consideration, in fact, our reconsideration." The use of the showcase, reminiscent of the traditional *Wunderkammer*, was also a deliberate form of protest by Andrew reinforcing how museum collections both conceal and reveal historical narratives that shape our understanding of the world (Merrillees 2015).

For Andrew, covering objects is one way of dealing with the politics of representation, of complex ways of viewing and of how we unpack and interpret stories, traumatic histories and the rules of engagement (Merrillees 2015). Should they be seen, or shouldn't they? While some members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community felt understandably that it was a very sensitive matter, that should not be referenced in the context of an exhibition, others such as Andrew and Professor Ian Anderson AO, a Palawa man from the North West coast of Tasmania (quoted in Dyer 2015, p. 15), believe that history shouldn't be deleted: "A stock-book entry of this nature is not an unemotive, passive fading record. It is traumatising – a hurtful reminder of a time when colonists considered Aboriginal Tasmanians as 'stock' - possessions and curiosity. It is witness of an inhumane disregard and cruelty. One, perhaps understandable response is to bury the evidence in the back of the archives. Leave the pain in the past. But that risks the truth telling that is so necessary if we are to confront the history of Australia with authenticity and honesty. Revealing the evidence of colonial violence is never pain free and never free of the risk that comes with such honesty."

For the Museum it was an acknowledgement that we had to become more responsive to changing socio-political agendas and to adopt a greater degree of social responsibility, empowering individuals and communities as well as making new meanings for our collections in a contemporary context. We understood that, while for some displaying this record would be perceived as distressing, for others it was liberating. In this sense the dichotomy for museums and their collections is that we are forgetting in order to remember.

<sup>1</sup> *Museum of Applied Arts and Science E Stock book, volume 1.*

Ultimately, in inviting Andrew to work with the collection we understood that his relative independence as an artist empowered him to probe and challenge convention as well as to experiment, and our stated position was to support his curatorial voice as well as his contribution to the artistic dialogue. His installation in this context represented a way to exhibit and contextualise the Museum's collection that made it relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences as well as speaking to contemporary issues. We also understood that his research might raise challenging issues about the collection that included the reporting or depiction of violence, loss and trauma.

Loss is intrinsic in the formation and development of museum collections. As museum professionals we are imbued with the notion that there is no level at which loss is acceptable, that our collections are immutable and unchanging leading to what Rodney Harrison (2013, p. 580) describes as a 'crisis of accumulation'. The loss however of some 20 million artefacts in a devastating fire that ravaged the National Museum of Brazil in 2018 reminds us that everything in our world is ephemeral and arbitrary.

Loss can be painful and profound. We imbue objects with meaning, with love, with our hopes, fears, aspirations and ambitions—a sentimental gift, a souvenir reminder of a memorable experience, a love token, memento mori or talisman designed to protect the bearer and ward off evil. Objects are bridges to other people, places, and times, creating meaningful connections for their owners. Museums and their staff as custodians and caretakers of our heritage are not immune to imbuing their collections with value beyond their monetary worth.

But with the privilege and access that comes as a result of being custodians of these great collections comes great responsibility. There are other voices silenced, overlooked, and ignored, different perspectives to consider and different ways of seeing. While as curators we may weave together the narrative, it is the artists, the donors, the communities, the experts, the makers and custodians who interrogate and offer different ways of interpreting objects and their history beyond the institutional. For Andrew, *Evidence* and subsequent installations and exhibitions would give

rise to what he coins 'Powerful Objects', collections of archival and historical material that "...provide webs of meaning to consider possible closure, healing, and rejoicing."<sup>2</sup>

Our collections are evidence of our interconnectedness. While their relevance is now all too often eclipsed in an era where our interactions are dominated by social media, personalised marketing, virtual reality, cancel culture and vicarious experiences, we are also seeing a renewed sense of cultural awareness, of kinship and connection, and relationship to the environment. But the threats are multiple and growing — identity politics, populist governments, climate change, pandemics, overpopulation, food security, gender equality, habitat destruction, and accelerated urbanisation. These are not isolated issues and are debated and questioned on a global scale.

As Richard Sandell (2017, p. 7) observes, "...museums have increasingly sought to take on contemporary, social justice-related issues – and to (explicitly and implicitly) take up particular moral standpoints in place of seemingly neutral and objective commentary." And in Robert Janes' (2009, p. 13) words, "[m]useums, as public institutions, are morally and intellectually obliged to question, challenge or ignore the status quo and officialdom, whenever necessary. With the exception of museums, there are few, if any, social institutions with the trust and credibility to fulfil this role."

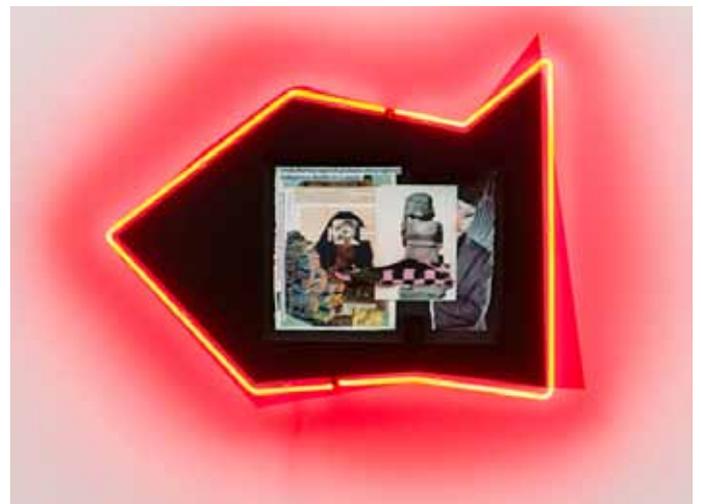


Fig. 5.  
Andrew, B. (2016). *Lately?*  
From the Nation's party series  
[Photo-lithograph with collaged elements and  
hand-colouring], Courtesy the artist

<sup>2</sup> Object label for Andrew, B 2020, *Powerful Objects*, *Nirin*, 22nd Biennale of Sydney.

Museums are not neutral spaces; they carry their own biases and prejudices. If museum professionals want to genuinely ‘decolonise’ the museum to represent the experience of empire, and its legacies, from multiple perspectives, they must be prepared to engage in a meaningful and genuine dialogue about repatriation, restitution and sovereignty. As Andrew noted in a conversation, I had with him, “the issue with decolonisation is that it is danger of being led by the colonisers.”<sup>3</sup>

Museums must also take risks and be brave as institutional independence is increasingly eroded by populist and nationalistic political agendas. “Our collective concern,” writes Dan Hicks (2020), “must be with politicians who seek, at whim, by ministerial pronouncement, through what Umberto Eco once called “the cult of tradition”, to freeze the progress of history, to strong-arm, to smother creativity, to demonise those who want to tell new stories about our shared past.” In inviting Andrew to work with the museum we understood that while not everyone would be comfortable with his approach, as an institution we were an accomplice, explicitly and implicitly supporting his right to tell the story in the way he saw fit while also understanding that his investigations into our archives offered evidence about our museum’s culpability in the very system that collected, preserved and lost them.

What are the legacies of all these lost objects? Why are they relevant to museum audiences? Like Franz Kafka I am drawn to the idea of absence, to explorations of ‘invisible curiosities’ (Gekoski, 2013, p. x). Absence implies a monochromatic meditation on grief, alienation and loss but for a curator absence is also a ‘lost’ opportunity to fill and identify the gaps. The clues may be insubstantial and fragmented, threads that knot, loop and unravel but ultimately stitch together memories, fears and aspirations, and our collections a hope and a gateway into individual and communal stories.

I leave the last words to Brook Andrew: “Who,” he asks, “is telling the right story?”<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 4 & 5).

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew, B, personal communication, 16 August 2020.

# Digital Unity in Physical Reality

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## Abstract

*This paper presents an overview of the different opportunities offered by media art for increasing collaboration and communication between museums and individuals, as well as between institutions. One of the key aspects is implementing a concept of sharing into museum practices of acquisition: media art, due to its intangible nature, presents various possibilities of realizing this approach. This paper gives several examples of successful practices in the field of sharing that are being implemented in the art sphere now, for instance, Eve Sussman's project 89 Seconds Atomized (2018) made in collaboration with Snark.Art, and certain acquisition initiatives of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.*

## Introduction

Nowadays, we see the world without any limitations, with physical and geographical boundaries becoming blurred, and humanity becoming a globalized community. At the same time, we explore new types of differences and diversities that sometimes divide us. So it is a task for art and art institutions to overcome barriers and create unity, understanding and cooperation. One of the most promising types of art to accomplish this is media art – which I am using here as an umbrella term for artworks that depend on video, audio, or computer technologies (Wahl 2013). If we are speaking about building cooperation between communities and institutions, it should become one of the main focuses for museum collections.

Besides being a significant part of the heritage of tomorrow, media art allows different forms of communication between individuals, institutions and communities. Due to its ephemeral and intangible nature, media art can create connections and penetrate even closed borders. Media can democratize art as it speaks the language of the digital era that is shared by communities all over the world. It also offers different opportunities for cooperation and accessibility (Poole 2011; Davies, Dyer 2019).

Media art, by its nature, postulates the concept of sharing — between individuals, communities and institutions. Being distributed as digital files and instructions, works of media art contain the idea that they can be shared between different owners without physical risks that could damage the integrity of the artworks themselves. The ability to be shared is a topical issue now for over a decade. We have been experiencing a boom in the 'sharing economy' that allows more democratic forms of collaboration (Barbu, Bratu & Sîrbu 2018). The economic model of such companies as Uber, Airbnb, Kickstarter is no longer news in the world of finance (Zavelev 2019). Media art can become a tool for bringing those concepts into the museum world. What opportunities does media art provide us to build stronger connections between communities and institutions? To get closer to understanding these opportunities, I would like to provide an overview of the ways that new possibilities of media art in the museum field are being explored.

From the outset, I would like to distinguish two general directions that can be used to differentiate trends within this developing field. These are the inclusion of communities into museum practices – where I see communities as equal stakeholders to museums – and collaboration between different institutions built on equal input from two or more institutional participants. The first focus of this paper is the practices that media art can offer for including communities in museum activities.

## Community inclusion in museums through Media Art

Collecting can be seen as one of the most conservative aspects of museum activities since it forms the core of the museum's role as an institution for memory, research and education: selecting and preserving cultural heritage, including the cultural heritage of tomorrow. For centuries museums have been deciding what is considered worth saving and what is not (Mattos et al. 2017). General practice in this field historically did not allow communities to influence this process. Today this notion is changing: the newest proposed definition of the museum (although not currently adopted) puts the focus on society and the public (ICOM 2020). So the next step that museums should take here is to include the public in acquisition policies. Media art can become an integral part of this inclusion since it allows different methods of acquisition and distribution including the model of collective ownership, that is to say, sharing. Sharing

through collective ownership is a way to create more inclusive and horizontal relationships with the museum audience: not merely to postulate inclusiveness, but to really make it happen.

One example which allows us to further explore and learn from community participation is a project by American artist Eve Sussman (*89 Seconds Atomized* (2018)) that she made together with Snark.Art, a New York-based digital lab (Snark.Art, Undated). Sussman took the last remaining artist's copy of her highly-acclaimed piece *89 Seconds at Alcazar* (2004) and disintegrated it into 2,304 digital units or 'atoms', as she calls them (Snark.Art, Undated). Each atom is a 20 x 20 pixel section of the entire visual frame of 9'44" (the total running time of the video work) with the complete soundtrack. The atoms were sold using blockchain technology. Thus, once all the atoms are sold, the piece is owned by several hundred individuals and, in some cases, organizations. So, the work as a whole can be exhibited only on the basis of collaboration, with each participant willing to exhibit his or her 'atom(s)'. To make that happen, an owner of an individual atom (or other exhibitors) would borrow remaining ones from the rest of the community so as to 're-assemble' the work. So, the higher the level of community participation, the higher the level of 're-assembly' which can be achieved. Blockchain technology enables such mechanics. The platform devised by Snark.Art offers an interface for each owner of individual atoms to request a loan from the other owners for a screening. Each screening is available for a unit of one day with the booking on the platform costing less than 1 USD. The process is simple: the owner chooses a date, sets the privacy settings and follows up with the transaction through the crypto wallet that sets out in motion the system of requests and responses. And on a set date and time the piece is shown and it exists as the number of atoms that have actually been loaned by its owners (Snark.Art, Undated). I believe that this is a beautiful example of a shared economy that embodies as its highest priority the ability to come to a consensus at a community level. Suppose museums explored such a way of acquiring artworks, including their audiences in all of the stages of acquisition – from selecting the piece to actually owning it. In that scenario, implementing a concept of sharing could help museums to enrich their collections with items that represent the issues and concerns that really matter to their audiences.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize the difference between sharing in this way and crowdfunding, which

is another excellent opportunity for museums to enrich their collections and further include audiences in the internal processes of museums. Indeed, crowdfunding does create connections, but shared ownership allows an opportunity to make it much more meaningful as it brings a sense of responsibility into the equation. When audiences become co-owners of a piece that they have chosen themselves, it has the potential to create a deeper connection between an institution and an individual. It may bring a feeling of interconnectedness. In this way, it helps to create a more loyal and understanding audience (which is essential for an institution), whilst the audience can get better representation and more influence over the activities of the museum. Moreover, unlike crowdfunding, acquisition through blockchain technology or any other form of shared ownership creates a horizontal system where each participant is treated equally.

### **Collaboration between institutions through Media Art**

Another way in which media art can help to enhance connections is sharing between institutions. Media art allows museums to build cooperation between one another in the field of collecting – creating shared collections through joint acquisition of art pieces. Shared collections and joint acquisitions are not an entirely new phenomenon, but it is definitely a practice that has not been as widely adopted as it should be.

Back in 2015, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) – one of the most active players in the field of sharing in museums, in conjunction with the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), acquired a highly acclaimed video piece by Canadian artist Stan Douglas: a six-hour-long single-channel video installation titled *Luanda-Kinshasa* (2013) (Halperin 2015). Even earlier, in 2011, LACMA acquired, together with the J. Paul Getty Museum, a collection of over 2,000 works from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation (Finckel 2011), demonstrating the highest level of openness and communication between institutions. Since physical artworks are not the main subject of this paper, I will not share here the details of how this particular acquisition was undertaken. Still, in terms of collection management, these examples share the same challenges that any joint ownership initiative would face – an interweaving of acquisition and loan policies with a focus on legal procedures, numbering, cataloguing and access. One can find a

more detailed account of the latter example on the webpage of “Gallery Systems Inc.” (Undated).

Another interesting aspect of establishing communication between institutions involves working with the interests of their local and national communities. In 2015, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) together with Tate started a collaboration on an International Joint Acquisition Program that aims to promote Australian art on an international level and bring it to new audiences (MCA, Undated 2). Among the very first pool of acquisitions, there were two large-scale video installations. One of those works – *tall man* (2010) by Vernon Ah Kee, who is a member of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples – focuses on the issues that Aboriginal communities face in Australia (MCA 2016). These issues are also reflected both in physical works of art by prominent Aboriginal artists Richard Bell, Gordon Bennett and Judy Watson as well as a second media work by Peter Kennedy & John Hughes, all of which were shared between MCA and Tate through the program. Bringing this agenda which is highly topical to Australian society to a broader audience helps to raise awareness and gather communities around institutions (Bullock, N. & Lee, S.-K. 2019; MCA, Undated). Furthermore, using media art can help to achieve those aims in a flexible way since media art faces no borders and is freed from problems of transportation and shipment.

### Conclusion

In summary, I would like to repeat that sharing is a concept which is integral to the nature of media art itself. Due to its non-physical nature, media art offers a possibility to create bridges between communities despite physical borders or barriers which neither painting nor sculpture may be able to overcome. It becomes an incredibly valuable quality in the world that we find ourselves in today, defined by COVID-19 repercussions with traditional connections disrupted and conventional methods of cultural production questioned (De Dreuzy 2020; Farago 2020).

Moreover, a piece in a joint collection offers more opportunities for new narratives. Becoming a part of not one but two or more collections, a jointly-owned work of media art can acquire new meanings in the context of the collection of each respective institution. It can allow different possibilities for exhibiting the artworks, as well as studying and researching them.

Besides these scholarly advantages, implementing a sharing approach can have a very practical aspect, as it can help to deal with the financial burden of new acquisitions. When a digital artwork is acquired jointly by two or more institutions, it is still one edition of the artwork that is being shared. So the bearing of acquisition costs is distributed between two or more institutions, allowing them to acquire more artworks for the same budget.

Unquestionably, I should not forget that there are challenges in implementing such programs. First of all, it requires the respective museum staff to have proper training in the field of ownership rights, especially of copyright laws: this is the central tool for preserving the integrity of the artwork, as well as protecting the interests of all of the parties involved. If questions arise in this domain, a solution may be to turn for expertise to legal professionals in fields like television or film. Another big concern is legislation, which can include norms counterintuitive to the presuppositions of a sharing economy. For example, in Russian legislation, Federal Law №54-FZ from 26 May 1996 (On the Museum Fund of the Russian Federation and Museums in the Russian Federation) states that museum objects and museum collections included in the governmental part of Russian Federation museum funding are government property.<sup>1</sup> In its turn, government property belongs to the Russian Federation based on the right of ownership – not commonly or jointly owned (Civil Code of the Russian Federation, article 214). However, I hope that the benefits of implementing such an approach can help to bring about changes in legislation, allowing museums to explore these new and exciting opportunities.

In a world where resources are limited sharing is a key to sustainability. Shared collections are a source for finding understanding and balancing interests, as shared ownership implies collective choice. Sharing even in such a conservative field as collecting is an inevitable feature of tomorrow. All in all, the concept of sharing allows boundless possibilities for creating much more stable communities of and around museums and offering different opportunities for dialogue between individuals and institutions. It is definitely an option provided by media art that museums should consider.

<sup>1</sup> Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation Regulation No. 3020-1, Appendix 1

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# ***Transforming a Folk Tradition into a Museum Object: A Night of a Divine Procession (Anfang) in Lukang from the National Museum of History (Taiwan)***

***Chen-hsiao Chai***

## ***Abstract***

*The representation of different cultures and re-contextualization of material cultures in museums has long been central to museum studies. In this paper, the author will present a new project; to translate and reinterpret the substance of a work of art, and to underline the significance of research and interpretation of museum collections.*

*The main storyline of the project is Huang Kuo-su, a veteran artisan, and his woodcarving masterpiece, A*



**Fig. 1.**  
The National Museum of History was the first public museum to be established following the retreat of the nationalist government to Taiwan in 1955  
Photo courtesy of the NMH

Night of a Divine Procession (Anfang) in Lukang. Through this lovingly created artwork, viewers are given a glimpse into the development history of the woodcarving industry, and a traditional religious custom, the Night of a Divine Procession, that has existed in Lukang for more than 150 years, and plays an integral role connecting temples and the community. We believe the goal of museum collections is to preserve not only artifacts but also the intangible cultural heritage behind them. The collecting of cultural artifacts helps us to better understand the meaning of the cultural context and the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization, thereby obtaining a clearer understanding of the real facets of those cultures.

### Foreword: The Representation of an Iconic Museum Collection

The National Museum of History was the first public museum to be established following the retreat of the nationalist government to Taiwan from China. Inaugurated in 1955 and originally called the National Museum of Historical Artifacts and Fine Arts, the establishment underwent a rechristening to become the National Museum of History (NMH) in 1956. The National Gallery was established in 1961. In 1970, the NMH was given a facelift and rebuilt into a traditional palace-style building, featuring a vibrant red wall and teal-green roof tiles. In addition to being a window on national culture and a platform for new artistic creation in the 30-year postwar period, the NMH also played a vital role in the construction of national history and culture, having a far-reaching impact on social education and art and culture in Taiwan (National Museum of History 2020a, p.12) (Fig. 1).

The cultural relics in the NMH's earliest collection were either shipped from Henan Province in China, or were antiquities returned by the Japanese colonists; the collection was later enriched with contemporary and modern paintings, calligraphic works and folk cultural relics from China, Taiwan and around the world. The collection includes Chinese paintings, calligraphy, western paintings, prints, photography, seal cutting, bronze ware, pottery, porcelain, lacquerware, jade and stone, metals, enamel, bamboo and wood, bone, textile, currency, literature, and other miscellaneous material, making up 57,380 pieces in total, which are divided into 19 categories. Five items have been designated as national treasures and 46 sets of items as significant antiquities.



Fig. 2.  
One of the most iconic works in the NMH collection is the woodcarving *A Night of a Divine Procession Anfang in Lukang* (Photo courtesy of the NMH)

One of the most iconic works in the NMH collection is the woodcarving *A Night of a Divine Procession (Anfang) in Lukang* (Registration number: 90-00252) (Fig. 2). The collection records state that this beautiful piece of woodcarving - 108 cm in length, 58 cm in width and 28 cm in height - was created by master woodcarver Huang Kuo-su, who won First Prize in the Carving Category in the 4th Folk Crafts Awards in 1995 (National Museum of History 2020b). It was later procured by a collector, Ms. Chen, who then donated it to the NMH. The questions posed here are: Why Lukang as the theme? What is a Night Divine Procession (*Anfang*)? What inspired the artist to create the work? What value and cultural significance does an artwork represent when it becomes part of a national collection? These questions had yet to be adequately answered by the limited collection data currently available.

In 2019 the NMH launched a project with *A Night of a Divine Procession (Anfang) in Lukang* as its creative focal point, (the output of this project was four video records which are publicly available), to revisit the history of the development of wood carving and traditional folk beliefs in a small town. The artist's creative process was recorded in audio and video to chronicle the spiritual and cultural import of the work. The woodcarvers in Lukang also recalled the history and shifts of the craft in their hometown. The story concludes with a clip on the centurial *Wang Yeh* belief ("*Wang Yeh*" is known as the divine emissary who tours the world of the living on behalf of the celestial realm), and the Night of Divine Procession ceremony that continues to strengthen the bond between the people, the temple and the community (National Museum of History 2019a).



Fig. 3.  
The artist of *Anfang*, Huang Kuo-su, was mentored by master Lee Sung-lin in 1991  
Photo courtesy of the NMH

### A Study of Museum Collection and Material Culture

Academic study has often focused on “material objects” as one of the most important research topics since the second half of the 19th century. Scholars were heavily involved in the study of the material aspects of culture, in particular, the study of material culture within museum collections. Research was carried out under the framework of the theory of evolution, with museums attempting to show that material in their collections proved the progress of human civilization. A great majority of the research efforts leaned heavily on material objects themselves, strongly characterized by an artistic perspective and clear aesthetics (Nason 1987, p. 31; Reynolds 1987, p. 155).

Nonetheless, as the structural-functional theory has become more important, finding increasing predominance in the academic community, its criticism of the excessively linear, evolutionary thinking forced the organization of material culture that leaned towards static typological analysis to fade from the spotlight in anthropological studies. After an extended period of silence, research on material culture made a comeback in the 1970s. Scholars advocated that the description and analysis of material culture should include the objects themselves as well as the social and cultural context in which they were found. Material objects were treated as the foundation, with their symbolic and explicit characteristics as the medium of visual communication. Objects were treated as codes to interpret the contextualization of cultural concepts and behavioral patterns in nonverbal forms (Stott & Reynolds 1987, pp. 1-4; McCracken 1987 p. 114). Moreover, in the past three decades, scholars

have extensively discussed several core topics, ranging from cultural research, process, or cultural cognitive systems to the socio-cultural identity of material, breaking through the previous concept of cultural classification that was limited to the material itself with no connection with social culture as a whole; scholars have attempted to regard objects as the entry point for understanding a culture before exploring the basic concept of cultural classification, opening up possibilities for new research and development for material culture (Huang 2004, p. 2).

Museums have long been the venue for realizing cultural ideas and knowledge for mankind, and above all they are places for the shaping of knowledge and the creation of our own identity (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Kaplan 1994). Most of the material found in museums is detached from its original context, with more than 80% of collections suffering from seriously insufficient records. Therefore, a common focus for scholars who conduct research on decontextualized objects removed from their temporal and spatial context is to recontextualize them with interpretation and presentation (Stott & Reynolds 1987, p. 8). For example, Margaret A. Stott believed that the study of material culture should involve three main aspects: the object itself, the relationship between the object and its context, and the process from its production to use. She pointed out that, in order to explore the cultural meaning of behavior, objects must be integrated with social history to present their context as well as the meaning produced by the process of shaping and using them. Stott highlighted the fact that studying the objects’ development is the only way to place material research in the organic process of interaction, development and creation, and the key to understanding the point of view of the originating cultural group, the representation of objects, and the phenomenon of objects and experience that is constantly being reconstructed (Stott 1987, pp. 13-19).

The collection and research of material objects has always been a vital project for anthropologists and their work in museums. Most pieces in museum collections are objects that have been removed from the original social system and cultural context, or lack detailed records of relevant background information. The process of conducting research on collections places objects in the cultural context through metadata. What will be preserved in this process of removal and placement? What will be lost? This article



Fig. 4.  
Huang Kuo-su revisited his childhood memories and accumulated a large number of sketches and photographs as inspiration for this work

Photo courtesy of the NMH

reflects on how museum collections can be embodied with functions that are meaningful to contemporary life by increasing the amount of information available and reproducing knowledge structures.

### The story behind the *Anfang* in Lukang

The videos created as a result of this project, tell us that the creator of the piece, Huang Kuo-su, was born in Lukang Township in Changhua, Taiwan. He played in temples as a child, where he was immersed in the exquisiteness of the art of woodcarving. He later apprenticed at a woodcarving factory after graduating from junior high school, after which he began carving statues of deities. Huang was awarded the Traditional Folk Art Heritage Award by the Ministry of Education in 1991 (Changhua County Cultural Affairs Bureau 2020) and was later mentored by master artist Lee Sung-lin (Fig. 3). During his apprenticeship with Lee, he revisited his childhood memories and lasting impressions of the Night Divine Procession that he had taken part in back in his hometown and accumulated a large number of sketches and photographs as the inspirational sustenance for this *pièce de résistance* (Fig. 4). Using a large block of beech, he arranged the layout of the piece by following the natural contours of the wood to vividly recreate the Lukang Longshan Temple, ancient adobes, parade formations, and the onlookers; displaying temple scenes and investing them with a feeling of movement and sound (Fig.5). The figures in the work interact throughout the whole scene; the parade formations and onlookers total around 70 people of all ages, and each person has his or her own gestures, different personality and role, expressing the nuances of folk life to the fullest.

At one point, Huang actually had to abandon the semi-finished work due to a large hole, caused by erosion, in the wood; however he was able to find a new piece of Taiwan Zelkova wood to remedy the situation and adapted his design accordingly, showing the old houses of Lukang, old temple doors, and the winding mottled ballast of stone alleys, creating an extended spatial impression. He persevered and completed the work after three years. This extraordinary display of the microcosm of the life of ordinary Taiwanese people won him a Folk Crafts Award; this is the little known but heartwarming narrative behind this masterpiece (National Museum of History 2019b).

From the perspective of historical development, Lukang was an important trade port in central Taiwan during the Qing dynasty. The town was established by settlers from Fujian in China; it also attracted a large number of well-to-do families of gentry, who engaged in business and trade activities (Lukang Township Office 2020). Cultural events thrived, and as a result traditional folk culture and crafts are preserved to this day. Wood carving is the central focus of Lukang's heritage, and closely related to the community's religious life. As Lukang has many temples, a sophisticated level of skill was required to create and decorate them and there was high demand: the craft of woodworking became a family enterprise in Lukang, giving rise to a booming wood carving community there. Therefore, many outstanding craftsmen appeared. The good times did not last, as the Chinese market began to open up and prices dropped as a result. Woodcarving in Lukang transitioned from use for religious and utilitarian purposes to an artistic



Fig. 5.  
Using a large block of beech, Huang Kuo-su followed the natural contours of the wood to depict vivid temple scenes

Photo courtesy of the NMH



Fig. 6.  
A Night Divine Procession (Anfang) is  
also called Night Patrol

Photo courtesy of the NMH

métier. Huang's cultural masterpiece draws on a traditional craft, but then it extends beyond the craft's traditional confines and techniques. The creator chose his hometown, Lukang, as his subject, and with unique artistic skill, used advanced engraving craftsmanship to mould a three-dimensional scene that bursts with authentic folk culture and religious significance to transcend tradition, becoming a microcosm of the response of woodcarving in Taiwan to changing times (National Museum of History 2019c).

The Night Divine Procession (*Anfang*) is also known as Night Patrol. Lukang was established by a community of settlers who brought their god from

home in Quanzhou to Taiwan, where the statues (*Wang Yeh emissaries*) became enshrined as protectors of ancestral homes (Fig. 6). *Wang Yeh* was enshrined in many temples; today, Lukang has 25 temples per square kilometer. In early times, when there was plague or misfortune, it was believed that the gods gave instruction on an irregular basis to drive away evil at night. The "straw figures sendoff" ritual is held to symbolically banish evil and bad luck on behalf of residents, the ritual having a purifying effect and helping to maintain peace in the community (Fig. 7). This is arguably the most mystical of all the traditional religious rituals of Lukang (Hsieh and Wu 2020). The distinctiveness of the "Night Divine Procession is characterized by the partnership between temples; the organizing temple is the driver, the co-organizing temple the co-driver and the other participating temples assistant drivers, together forming a mutually-cooperating whole (Fig. 8). In early times, the Night Divine Procession was a solemn religious ceremony but in recent years it has become a bustling temple fair event. The scenes of the procession presented in Huang's work fix dynamic folk activities in a certain time and space. It is a compelling portrayal of the merging of religious and folk activities (National Museum of History 2019d).

### Old Collections, New Connections

Museum collections have always provided convenient yet fascinating access to researchers for understanding the social culture of a community (Crooke 2011).

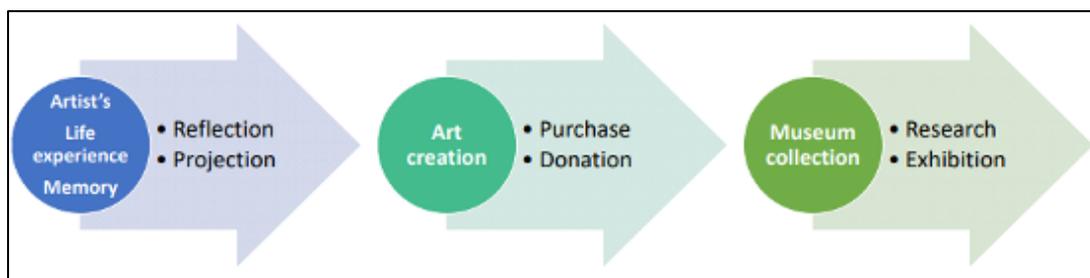


Fig. 9. The processes of decontextualization of museum collections.

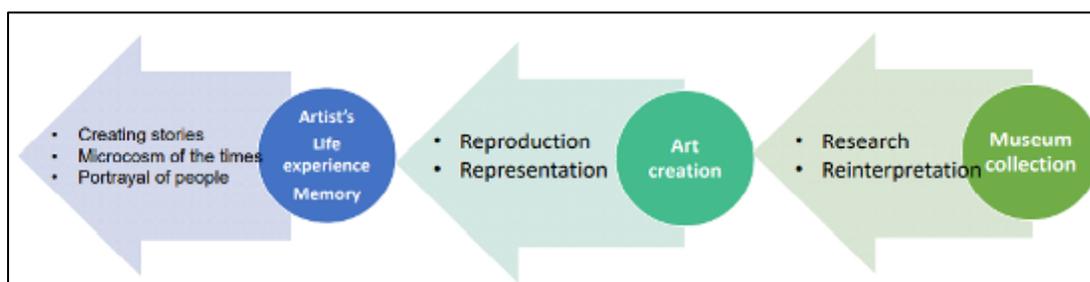


Fig. 10. The processes of recontextualization of museum collections.

They reveal the ways humans produce, manufacture and use different objects (and these objects' aesthetic forms); they also explore the socio-cultural context of the objects. These socio-cultural experiences are not limited to tangible objects: instead, they have gradually expanded beyond the physical environment and landscape of the objects to include their material and cultural import (Stott and Reynolds 1987, pp. 1-4).

Scholars advocate that material culture is the externally expressed symbol of human consciousness (Reynolds 1987, pp. 155-156; Kaplan 1996, p. 813). The information it contains is not just the physical properties of the objects themselves: on a deep level, material culture reflects the abstract cultural concepts and thinking models of a specific group of people and encapsulates their human knowledge, experience systems and paths of cultural development.

As well as being the basis for studies into material culture, researchers believe that these tangible cultural objects in museum collections can reflect the abstract concepts and behavioral values within a culture and can provide material evidence to understand cultural behavior and its defining characteristics. Generally speaking, the sources of objects in a museum collection encompass the following: field collection, purchases, donations and custody. This means an object for everyday use employed in an ancient human community is no longer part of its original context but becomes part of the NMH (or other museum)'s display space (Fig. 9). Ideally, when these objects leave their original socio-cultural context to be included in a museum showroom, they would be documented, analyzed, researched and reinterpreted by scholars; their socio-cultural background would be reconstructed and reproduced (Fig. 10), building knowledge systems under such headings as object and person, object and society, and object and nature, allowing these cultural artifacts to take on the function of cultural preservation.

Nevertheless, most museums for various reasons fail to preserve the background information and records of their exhibits; studies suggest that more than 80% of the original records of museum collection objects are lacking, and no more than 10% of pieces have been previously studied (Stott & Reynolds 1987, p. 5). Consequently, the original documentation data of many collection pieces are missing, either completely or in part, causing problems for follow-up research. This means there is no way for one to adequately



Fig. 7.  
The Night Divine Procession (Anfang) ritual has a purifying effect and helps to maintain peace in the community  
Photo courtesy of the NMH

reproduce their cultural context through research, and the museums thus fail to fully fulfill the ultimate vision of cultural relic collection. The de-contextualization and re-contextualization of collections is clearly a challenge and a concern that confronts museum collection researchers.

In addressing the predicament of collection-based research, we can curate and reference literature related to material objects with the aim of obtaining information on their socio-cultural background; the survey and study of collection pieces in similar museums can also serve as an analogous information-gathering process for the subject of study. Also, analysis of image data or field survey information can also be used to mend or reconstruct the cultural context.

### **Conclusion: From the Collection of Artifacts to Collection Complexes**

In recent years, the aim of museum-based material culture research has evolved from more than just the analysis and research of an object's physical properties, or setting out from the angle of traditional craft research stressing cultural relic-making skills and aesthetics. Rather, it has taken material objects as the central point, seeking to break down the operation of the complexities of material systems and exploring the interconnected networks that developed around cultural relics. This can include their background precepts, behavior and knowledge, beliefs, values, meaning, communicated information and changes sparked by their interaction with immigrant culture.

For example, one must understand the dynamic between individual cultural relics and groups (makers,

users, distributors), and the dynamics between cultural relics and overall activities. This could mean borrowing tangible cultural relics to build group cultural identity or using ritual symbolic objects as the key medium for creating collective memory. The approach emphasizes the achievement of a dynamic balance between cultural relics, researchers and native inhabitants with regards to academic research, interpretation, and the viewpoints of different ethnic groups.

It can be said that these themes of material research cannot be adequately reached by external-oriented research alone: what is needed is long-term, in-depth field observation and research. We must realize that objects in museum collections aren't the only locations of research for material culture. Material systems are operating around us organically in life and at field research locations and continue to coexist with communities; this means that field research is another path for material research. This internal research orientation that emphasizes practice approaches material culture in an organic and changing way, clearly different from descriptions that are static and based on cultural characteristics. It is, compared to the rational and objective research method, better able to display the interactive relationship of objects and people to give an understanding of the dynamic process of the material life of an ethnic group.

The ideal objective of museum collection research is a process of knowledge construction that includes field survey, object collection, data documentation and display. The project undertaken by NMH in this vein features *A Night of a Divine Procession (Anfang) in Lukang* by master Huang Kuo-su as its point of departure. It begins with the artist's creative



Fig. 8. The centurial Wang Yeh belief and the Night of Divine Procession continue to strengthen the bond between the people, the temple and the community

Photo courtesy of the NMH

beginnings, the traditional woodcarving culture in small town Lukang, and the night patrol ritual – a centurial custom that's still in practice. We believe that an ideal museum collection isn't just one piece: it should be the whole interconnected network around an object and the shared history and culture, knowledge, belief, value and meaning within (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. The ideal museum collection network around an object.

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# The Collection of the National Writer Sharif Kamal as a Form of Preserving the Unique Culture of a People

*Gulnaz Zigangirova*

## Abstract

*In 1944, the first literary museum to a Tatar writer was established in Kazan. The museum was created in the apartment of Tatar writer, playwright, and translator Sharif Kamal. He was the first in Tatar literature to write works about a working man, using a peculiar, unique style and the specificity of the Tatar language. The museum also houses the writer's personal archive. The collection of Sharif Kamal, stored by the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, is a part of the national heritage, presenting to the whole world the unique, inimitable originality of the culture of the Tatar people. It is also used to preserve and form humanistic universal values in the minds of future generations.*

A memorial collection, as a collection of objects associated with a particular person, is one of the most widespread forms of collection amongst historical and literary museums. The main principles of interpretation of memorial collections can be distinguished as follows:

- Authenticity of museum items
- Demonstration of the uniqueness/importance of various representatives of society
- Promotion of the self-determination of the individual
- Fostering of positive values

The Sharif Kamal collection consists of authentic personal items; documents, books, and photographs that have been holistically preserved. This collection shows the lifestyle, stages of development, and thoughts of a representative of Tatar society. It is a model for studying and analyzing the main features



Fig. 1.  
H. Yakupov (1949). Portrait of the Tatar writer Sharif Kamal [Oil on canvas]  
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of the national identity of the Tatar people and as such fits firmly into the category of memorial collections as described above.

In 1944, the first literary museum dedicated to Sharif Kamal was established in Kazan. As a writer, playwright, and translator, he is particularly important for having written in his native language and is a classic figure in the national literature (Fig. 1). Kamal's archive includes about 2,000 "storage units". Among the documents, photos, and manuscripts there are many historical, literary, and artistic materials reflecting the way in which Tatar culture developed in the early twentieth century.

The main part of the archive was transferred to the museum from the owner's family and is constantly updated as museum staff continue to carry out research work to collect materials relating to Kamal (Fig. 2). Sharif Kamal was born in 1884 in the village of Tatart Peshlya, to a moderately prosperous Tatar family. His father was an educated man, and a religious leader of the community. The writer's archive contains a photo of the village where he was born. In 1944, a museum employee made a special expedition to the writer's



Fig. 2.  
Materials from the archive of Sharif Kamal:  
books, letters, photos, a towel preserved in  
the family. Early 20th century  
Copyright National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan

hometown and the city of Orenburg, where he lived for over fifteen years. During this expedition, memories of people who knew or who met with Kamal were documented. Photographs were also taken of places and buildings associated with the life and work of the writer.

The village of Tatart Peshlya is located in the republic of Mordovia where the Tatar population lived. In accordance with national tradition, getting an education was the purpose of Kamal's youth. After graduating from a basic Muslim school in his hometown, Kamal studied at university in Istanbul and, for one year, in Cairo. He wrote his first literary work in 1906. The collection of poems *Sade* ('The Voice') was published in St. Petersburg. Kamal's elder brother Gimatdin then lived in St. Petersburg. In accordance with national tradition, Gimatdin helped his brother in his life and in the implementation of his creative plans. The newspaper *Nur* ('Light') where Kamal's poems were published was the first newspaper in the Tatar language and the first Muslim newspaper in Russia. This newspaper was founded in 1905 in St. Petersburg.

Afterwards Kamal lived and worked in the city of Orenburg for more than fifteen years, and it was here that he wrote his most famous work «Акчарлаклар»

(‘Seagulls’). This book, which became a best-seller at the beginning of the twentieth century, describes the life of Tatars labouring as hired workers and like Kamal's other works is largely autobiographical, telling us about the life of the Tatars at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1925 he was invited to Kazan to work in the public education system. But Kamal's main field of activity was writing. In Kazan, he wrote another of his famous works – «Матур туганда» ('When the beautiful is born'). In that novel the author showed the complex processes of revolutionary events among the Tatars. Manuscripts of various versions of Kamal's works are kept in his archive. By studying these materials, you can trace the creative process of the writer.

After the death of the writer in 1942, a memorial museum was created in his apartment. It completely preserves the setting and atmosphere of the writer's residence. The museum's permanent exhibition displays a memorial collection of things linked to Kamal (Fig. 3). The museum has fully preserved the atmosphere of the writer's residence. In the 1930s-1940s, this living room was the center of meetings of Tatar intellectuals. Musicians, writers, and actors would gather here. They went to Kamal as a respected writer, mentor and teacher. And today the museum space is more than just an exhibition. Various meetings and events are held here with the participation of scientists, writers, artists and a large public.



Fig. 3.  
Sh. Kamal Memorial Flat (2019)  
Museum Memorial Room [Photograph]  
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Tatarstan

The Sharif Kamal collection is the only complete archive of a Tatar creative intellectual of the early twentieth century preserved in a museum collection. The archival materials contain the particular philosophical and social views of the progressive representatives of the Tatar people, who sought to develop their culture in the new conditions of the Russian state (Fig. 4). The uniqueness of the materials is in the fact that this collection is complex and includes different types of objects. The collection includes both written, artistic, historical and household items. The materials reflect the cultural and aesthetic changes in everyday life in the early twentieth century and are a typical and rare example of the lifestyle of the Tatar intelligentsia of that time.

The collection of the writer Sharif Kamal, safeguarded by the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, is a part of the Republic's national heritage, which presents to the whole world the unique, inimitable originality of the culture of the Tatar people and is used to preserve and form humanistic universal values in the minds of future generations.

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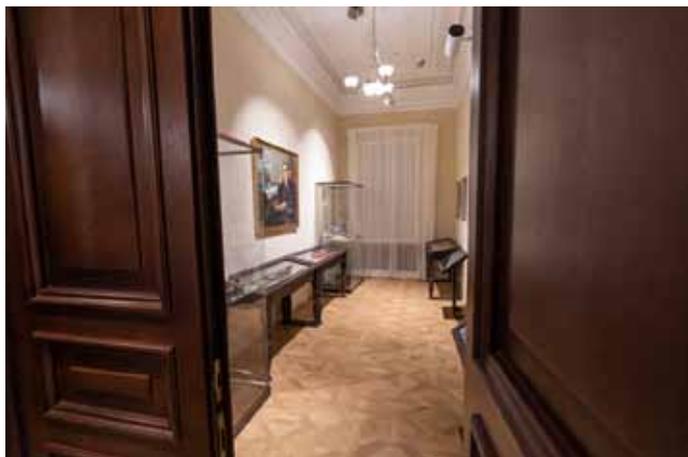


Fig. 4.  
 Museum exhibition (2019) [Photograph]

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## *Cabinet of Collected Rituals, Customs and Traditions of Daily Life: collection policy at the House of Alijn*

*Els Veraverbeke*

### **Abstract**

*The Huis van Alijn (Fig. 1) is the museum of everyday life in Belgium. Curator Els Veraverbeke was a speaker at the COMCOL conference 2020 with the theme Collecting Diversity: Divergence as Dialogue. She describes how she helped the museum to evolve from a classical folklore approach to one that was more museologically professionalised with a focus on changes in everyday life. It is a challenge to enrich a collection that has grown systematically since 1926 to ensure it reflects with today's diverse society. Central to this point of view is how public activities, exhibition policy and display techniques play a crucial role in a collection policy which is rooted in public participation and contribution.*

### **Introduction**

The tagline of the House of Alijn since 2017 is "the museum of daily life". We will soon celebrate the centennial of the museum collection: the first item was registered in 1926 in what was then the collection of the *Folkloremuseum*. Since then, there has been one major constant: collecting items of our ever-changing everyday life. What has changed over time are the approach and the focus. The early collection was



Fig. 1.  
House of Alijn  
Copyright Michiel Devijver

the basis for the foundation of the *Folkloremuseum* in 1932. The name was changed to *Museum voor Volkskunde* (Museum of Folklore) in 1962 and again to *Huis van Alijn* (House of Alijn) in 2000 and now the tagline “museum of daily life” has been added. This history of the museum is also reflected in its evolving collection policy. The items collected and the manner in which the museum collects them not only mirror the evolutions in everyday life over the period since the museum’s establishment, but also tell the story of the conversion from ‘folklore’ to ‘cultural heritage’. Furthermore, they illustrate the House of Alijn’s approach to specific themes, new materials and media, tangible and intangible heritage and increasing digitisation.

Today, the House of Alijn is still building a “reference collection of everyday life in Flanders from the 20th century onward”. Below we will provide some information about the evolution of our collection policy.

### Collection as the foundation

*The House of Alijn collects, studies and shares memories relating to everyday life, foreign and familiar, from days gone by and of the present day. We are a museum for all people and as such, we want to give meaning to the things people can connect with and that bind them.*

This mission statement determines the entire operation of the museum: public activities, organisation, research and collection policy. Today, the House of Alijn manages a rich collection of objects, images,

sounds, stories, traditions, rituals and customs. The collection contains memories of everyday life. We interpret the term ‘memories’ in the broadest sense of the word: both tangible and intangible, personal emotions or objective artefacts that give us an insight into a material and immaterial past, present and future. Nothing is as recognisable as everyday life and yet this heritage collection is as foreign as it is familiar. Everyone’s experience of daily life is unique, and our collection gives an idea of how diverse it is. A lot of factors play a role in the make-up of the collection: location, ideology, relationships, migration, socio-economic and professional situation etc. From the 20th century onward, the cultural heritage of everyday life in Flanders has been influenced by change and diversity, a relationship between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’. A focus on different generations both then and now transcends and stimulates dialogue. This has inspired the museum to focus its public activities on the perception of rituals, traditions and customs, with the key aim of fostering inclusion. The House of Alijn not only enables visitors to participate, but also to share. In the House of Alijn, participation is not an end in itself but a means to an end: working together to give meaning to things that affect and bind us, and in the process to create a reference collection.

Our mission statement and vision determine both future collection policy and the extension of the collection for the future. Updating and diversification are very important within that context.

Fig. 2.  
(Un)Happy  
Copyright Patrick Henry





Fig. 3.  
A New Year  
Copyright Patrick Henry

### A constantly evolving collection

The collection finds its origins in the 1920s and was first started by the *Koninklijke Bond der Oost-Vlaamse Volkskundigen* (Royal Federation of East-Flemish Folklorists, KBOV), who founded the museum in 1932. Between 1927 and 1997, it gradually built a rich collection of folk objects and documents, as did analogous museums in Antwerp and Bruges. The main focus was on collecting and conserving material relics relating to the everyday life of the citizens of Ghent as the city evolved from a provincial town into an industrial city. In line with the spirit of the time, the *Folkloremuseum* and later the *Volkskundemuseum* displayed reconstructions of forgotten crafts and interiors, extensively documenting life in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in a Flemish urban context. In 1958 the open-air museum Bokrijk was inaugurated, focusing on rural culture. In addition to the folklore museums in Ghent, Bruges and Antwerp, a network of regional and local folklore museums and museums of local history was developed.

In the early 21st century, popular culture was more dynamically perceived as the culture of everyday life, and the paradigm of cultural heritage became

more important. The House of Alijn was the first folklore museum to actually implement this new way of thinking in the context of the Flemish museum network. Under the new approach the traditional emphasis on folklore or local history gave way to more reflection and contemporary experience. Consequently, the need arose to adapt the House of Alijn's collection policy to the culture of contemporary daily life and to extend the collection's profile in time and space. The geographic focus was expanded from Ghent and the province of East Flanders to the whole of Flanders, and the timeline was lengthened to include the entire 20th century. In 2000, the change of the name from "Museum voor Volkskunde" to "Het Huis van Alijn" emphasised this new approach.

This also led to new approaches to documenting and displaying cultural heritage which had a major impact on the museum's collection policy. In 2005, after 75 years of having centred the collection around the period from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, the decision was taken to also include the post-war period. Since then, the museum's collection has been extended with objects and documents from the 1950s to the 1990s. At the same time, digital and audio-visual collections have made an appearance. With the help of the public, the House of Alijn has been building extensive digital collections relating to everyday life in the 20th century. These collections do not contain unique pieces, but the whole as an ensemble is unique because of its size and scale and is therefore a rich historical source.



Fig. 4.  
Love  
Copyright Patrick Henry

Within this context, two large-scale projects, *Everyday life in moving images* and the series of photo exhibitions called *From the photo album*, were a major turning point and gave rise to a structured development of the digital collection. Since 2017 the collection policy has been working to further update the collection to reflect everyday life in Flanders from the 20th century onward.

### Intangible Culture Heritage in the collection policy

Everyday life in Flanders from the 20th century onward is a wide concept. The focus of the House of Alijn is more specifically on recording and collecting changing rituals, traditions and customs. Evolution is central to this. These themes are at the core of the UNESCO definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (UNESCO 2018).

Fig. 5.  
Mourning

Copyright Michiel Devijver



The House of Alijn highlights rituals, traditions and customs from a dynamic perspective, with change and innovation as the leitmotiv. Creating a link between the overall operation of the museum and a continuously changing society is the first priority. This vision is the basis for the main exhibition, and its complete renovation in 2017 was a key moment in bringing the overall operation of the museum into line with new ideas on cultural heritage.

The narrative of this exhibition is the calendar. The rituals and traditions linked to the calendar illustrate how we organise daily life. It concerns rituals, traditions and customs such as New Year celebrations, the annual first day of school or the weekly rest day, but also evening and morning rituals, celebrating a birth, falling in love or mourning. In short, it's about lavish parties, intimate events and emotions that colour life (Fig. 2-6). Although these rituals and traditions change constantly, they become part of our collective memory. This approach provides a lot of opportunities to integrate new and changing rituals and traditions into research, our collection and our public activities. As a result, rituals, traditions and customs linked to the calendar, the different stages of life, and daily routine, are the main focus of the current collection policy. Foreign or familiar, it concerns themes everyone feels connected with. Because of that focus, tangible and intangible heritage are closely interwoven, and a collection policy centred around objects or a focus on audio-visual sources is no longer predominant. Stories, meanings and usage have become more important than the tangible objects themselves or their medium. Linguistic heritage like folk songs or dialects is also gaining in importance.

At the House of Alijn we don't collect Intangible Cultural Heritage as such, but we document and collect memories of this type of heritage, in an approach called documentary and biographic collecting. This type of collecting enhances the possibilities of putting Intangible Cultural Heritage at the heart of a collection policy in which diversification and constant updating are a priority. Our calls are usually connected with public campaigns: targeted calls to the public not only enable us to build a thematic collection but also enhance awareness of its intangible aspect. A thematic approach also enables us to cooperate with different heritage communities. This participation is important to secure intangible heritage.



Fig. 6.  
Moving

Copyright Patrick Henry

### Let's get digital

Building a digital collection has been an integral part of our collection policy for the past few years. Today it mainly concerns digitised versions of physical media: photographs, moving images and audio material. Sometimes the original physical version is part of the museum collection but often the museum only has a digital copy. The digital collection has become quite extensive and is still growing, making careful selection and quality standards necessary.

Today we are thinking ahead to the heritage of everyday life in the future and expect increasing digitisation and digital applications to be ubiquitous in this context. What we mean by this is that museum staff have to prepare for future heritage collections: for example; yesterday's photo album will become an Instagram account, or a shopping list will be a Collect & Go list or a Hello Fresh box. The challenges accompanying the collection of this contemporary heritage of everyday life compel the museum to get out of its comfort zone of traditional collections. Updating the collection is therefore of major importance and there is an urgent need for a new digital strategy.

Since 2016 the House of Alijn has been developing a sustainable digital collection policy and service that is solid, durable and flexible, in order to be able to respond to this continuously changing context. In this respect we have also set up an online service: in November 2019 the new website [www.huisvanalijn.be](http://www.huisvanalijn.be) went online to make our resources available for reuse whenever possible. The House of Alijn and its predecessors, the *Folkloremuseum* and the *Museum voor Volkskunde* have always succeeded in anticipating changes in everyday life. Today we are facing particularly difficult challenges, including responding to the digitisation of contemporary everyday life, but the combination of the high-quality core functions of a museum and a large dose of creativity and cooperation offers a multitude of chances and opportunities.

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# Ethical and Practical Issues Found in Collection-Based Museum Research

Jung-Ok Ha

## Abstract

*Museum research ethics is a declarative term that has not yet been defined in as much detail as other moral principles such as codes of ethics and codes of conduct in museums. Museum research by curators has also gone through decades of great change on the international stage in terms of priorities and directions.*

*This study aims to explore the ethical issues and practical dilemmas confronted by a department in the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History during a period of time when collection-based research is ongoing. Should museum curators focus on disclosing their museum's collections – a museum's most valuable assets – and sharing them with society along with research by outside experts, or prioritize their own research on those collections? What values (e.g., social inclusion, shared expertise, and public interest) must a museum pursue in its collection-based research? Should curators promote the process of research despite their other daily duties? As is the case in much of the existing literature, this study too shall conclude with an argument that for a museum's code of ethics and code of conduct to be applied to museum research, that museum will need its own principles that embody its specific context and conditions.*

## Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the importance of collection-based research conducted by museum curators and to review the ethical and practical issues that can emerge during the process. It will particularly address dilemmas faced by curators of a history museum that opened less than a decade ago during research, as they broke from the convention of being dependent upon external experts. Such issues may be universal and found in museum research worldwide,

Fig. 1.  
National Museum of Korean Contemporary History  
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but they particularly reflect characteristics of Korean society and museum culture. The characteristics of Korean society here refers to two problems. The first is the relationship between *woncheong* 원청 原請 (main contractor) and its dependent *hacheong* 하청 下請 (subcontractor), which Joo (2008) pointed out as an endemic problem in Korean society, with the key point connecting the two entities being labor service.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, a national museum in South Korea is a branch of a national agency (a representative example of *woncheong*), and even in research departments of national museums, there is a practice of hiring subcontractors rather than conducting research themselves.<sup>2</sup> Such issues may not be confined to museums (i.e. including memorial halls and libraries etc.), but they have been selected based on the judgment that they are specifically associated with history museums.

### 1) What is museum research?

Museum research as discussed in this paper refers to studies related to the museum's collections rather than research with a more general focus. It can be defined as an activity performed by curators. Museum research generally can be subdivided into a few different types. Alexandra Bounia (2014, p.3), citing J. Davallon (1995), has introduced four:

The first is the one based on the museum's collections and relies heavily on the disciplines connected to the content of the museum. The second involves sciences and disciplines (such as physics, chemistry, communication, and media studies) pursued in order to develop tools for museum practice. The third type of research aims to stimulate thought about the museum as an institution and takes place at a more theoretical and philosophical, or museological

level. The fourth type is also museological, in the sense that it addresses the analysis of the institution through communication and heritage studies; in this sense, visitor studies and evaluation are included in this category.

This paper will focus on the first type – research based on the museum’s collections – and discuss the recent attempts at museum research conducted by the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History (NMKCH) in South Korea.

## 2. Museum research by the NMKCH

The NMKCH, which opened in December 2012, is the first national contemporary history museum in Korea (Fig. 1). Just like any of its counterparts overseas (Benedik 2019; Hiura 2019; Mork 2019; Röther 2019; Schmidt 2019), the NMKCH was also established amidst a variety of controversies and has seen a number of disputes revolving around its exhibits throughout the years (Kim, A. 2013; Kim, S. B. 2013; Lee 2011; Lee 2013; Lee & Hong 2012; Yang 2013).

<sup>1</sup> “Woncheong” (main contractor) and “hacheong” (subcontractor) are rooted in the historical context of Korean society (“The result of a complex mixture of the code of a hierarchical society in the Joseon Dynasty, the state management system during the Japanese colonial period, and the post-war American system” Joo 2008, p. 7), and they are difficult to translate into English. The relationship between woncheong and hacheong is most similar to the dual labor market in labor market theory, and in fact carries into the whole of Korean society. The representative examples of woncheong are national agencies, conglomerates, and public enterprises, who monopolize power and economic resources, and hacheong, who survive only by providing services to woncheong.

<sup>2</sup> This problem is related to the first and is a system where a national agency (more precisely, a civil servant working at the agency) orders subcontractors to carry out research with national funds. Therefore, even in the research department of a national agency, research is outsourced rather than conducted by the relevant civil servants, and most of the work that these civil servants do is focused around managing the outsourced research services (rather than conducting research themselves). This tendency is common not only in national agencies, but also in other bodies (organizations) of woncheong, or institutions with equivalent power to that of woncheong. For example, even political parties outsource some fundraising activities. Directly related to our topic here is that a museum, which uses national funds to operate (that is, a national museum), outsources its research tasks rather than have its own museum curators do them.

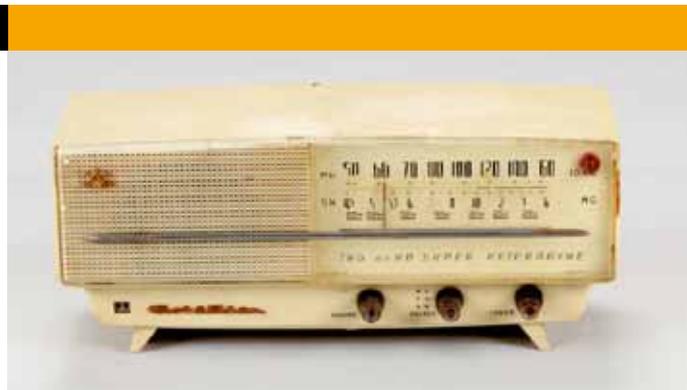


Fig. 2.  
Korea’s first domestically-manufactured radio from 1959

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Most of the research results produced by the NMKCH since its opening have concerned general issues of contemporary history, which is relevant to the third type of museum research mentioned above. These studies were all conducted by experts from other institutions (mainly associated with universities) instead of museum curators. In other words, they were far from being research directly related to exhibits or collections, but rather tended to take a much more theoretical and academic view toward issues of contemporary history.

It was only in 2019 that the NMKCH’s research division commenced its first internal, curator-led research project on its own collections. This project includes Korea’s first *gooksan*<sup>3</sup> 국산 國産 (meaning domestically-manufactured) radio dating from 1959

<sup>3</sup> The term “the first *gooksan*” is a modifier for this particular radio, which is registered as a cultural property for its significance. However, the term *gooksan* needs further elaboration. Modern industrialization began in the 1950s for Korean society. As a word that means something that is not imported but made “at home,” *gooksan* is a term that embodies both pride and aspiration in industrialization. Radios commonly seen at the time were mostly imported from Japan and the USA. A radio kit, with each part imported from Japan, was also sold on the market, although it had a smaller market share than imported models. The “first *gooksan*” radio has value in the fact that it was the very first radio produced by a domestic electronics company using domestic parts. There is dispute over the meaning of *gooksan* because not all the parts were made in Korea – only about 60%. However, the percentage of domestic parts rose quickly, which led to increased domestic production of home appliances, starting with radios and including electric fans and televisions. In this sense, the phrase “the first *gooksan*” is thought to be more than just a modifier even to this day.

(Fig. 2), a thank-you letter (to a sponsor) written by a child orphaned during the Korean War (1950-53) (Fig. 3), a tour map of Mt. Geumgang during the Japanese colonial period (Fig. 4), and paperwork on economic development plans in 1960 (Fig. 5). The 2019 study was published in four volumes in December 2020 (Fig. 6). This project is ongoing in 2020 with a new collection of artifacts.

The idea behind adopting, for the first time in 2019, a research approach based on museum collections studied by curators came from the NMKCH questioning its previous approach to museum research, i.e. theoretical, and academic, and conducted by experts outside the museum. The following chapters will address the motives (formed through self-analysis) for this collection-based museum research led by curators as well as some ethical and practical issues faced during the process.

### Significance of Museum Research

Museum research has become more than a 'requirement' in a rhetorical and normative sense: its value has recently become greatly magnified, being considered as the most important task among museum-related activities or as an 'obligation' of curators in terms of museum codes of ethics. In particular, research and interpretation of museum collections has been indicated as an important capability for professional curators to have (Kim, 2014). The following list is of codes of ethics that require these skills: Code of Professional Ethics by the International Council of Museums (International Council of Museums 1987), Code of Ethics for Curators by the American Association of Museums (American Association of Museums 2009), Code of Ethics for Museums by the UK Museums Association ([UK] Museums Association 2016), Code of Ethics by the Australian Association of Museums (Australian Association of Museums 1999), Ethics Guidelines by the Canadian Museums Association (Canadian Museums Association 2006). After comparing the codes of ethics for museums to those for libraries or archives, Kim (2014) stressed that "museums are relatively more strictly defined as serving as research institutes, so the ability to analyze and study collected artifacts needs to be the vital capability of a museum curator."

This paper previously mentioned that the new research project initiated by the NMKCH in 2019 was triggered by the museum questioning their existing research on theoretical issues of contemporary history, which had been dependent on external researchers (Lee, 2017).

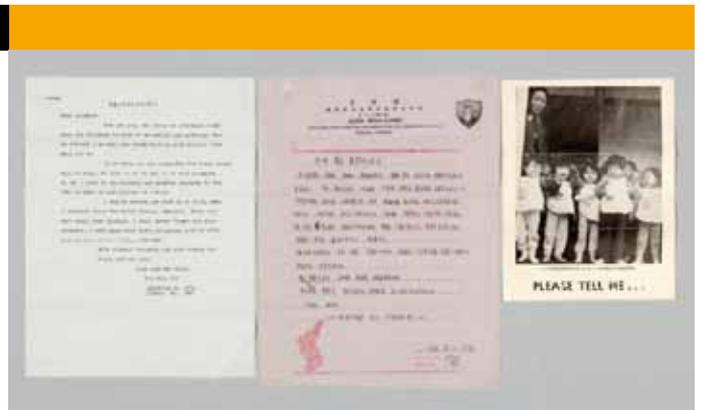


Fig. 3.  
Thank-you letter by an orphaned child during the Korean War

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The most critical error was that the vast amount of research accumulated so far had not been useful in enhancing the level of curatorial expertise because that research was not performed by curators. The translation of such research into exhibitions, which are the key projects in museums, was not effective either. Since exhibitions are based on collections, it has been a challenge to organize them when only theories surrounding issues in contemporary history can be referenced, and collection-based research data is lacking. Furthermore, the previous research method was neither helpful in monitoring the current status of collections nor provided any guidance on the steps necessary for follow-up collection management.

This reflection and the start of a new research project are in line with the international codes of ethics and codes of conduct, which stress the importance of museum research, emphasizing that collections should be the center of attention when a project is carried out by curators and not university or institute experts. The codes also outline that research for general museum-related business should be led by curators instead of leaving it in the hands of others; and that research itself is the duty of a curator as well as a vital element in curatorial professionalism.

### Research Ethics for Museum Research

The next topic in our discussion of museum research concerns research ethics – specifically regarding the conflicts of interest that curators may face. "Research ethics" is a term that has become familiar to people after scandals have been reported over a few decades, mainly in the field of science, regarding plagiarism or data manipulation. As an idea which can be captured in a simple phrase, research ethics position research integrity, honesty and meticulousness as absolutely



Fig. 4.  
Tourist map of Mt. Geumgang during the  
Japanese colonial period  
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History

essential when dealing with research methods and data and the presentation of outcomes. Such a principle of honesty and integrity is applied to authorship and can also take the form of specific guidelines for research such as keeping research notes.

In this context, conflicts of interest can occur during the research process. For example, doctors should not ask their patients to participate in their research or to donate parts of their bodies (blood, cells, tissues).<sup>4</sup> There should not be a situation where the interests of a medical attendant whose priority must be to provide the best treatment, and the interests of a researcher whose priority is to find good subjects and materials for study, collide and create conflict. When it comes to conflicts of interest as they relate to museum codes of ethics or codes of conduct, priorities should be set so that the public interest always comes before personal interest. Take the Code of Ethics for Curators (2009) provided by the American Association of Museums for instance (emphasis mine):

#### V. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Curators respect the *public purpose* of museums and conduct themselves in a manner intended to protect both their institution and profession *by putting the public interest first.* [...]

<sup>4</sup> If a question is asked, it seems that a patient has the right to say "No," but in reality, just asking the question can pressure the patient. This is because that patient understands their health (the safety of his or her body) is in the hands of the doctor, and therefore cannot help wondering if there will be a negative impact on his or her treatment if they answer "No."

#### A. General Statements

Curators often benefit personally and professionally from their association with a museum, enriching or advancing their careers through good work and through associations and contacts that are the normal result of curatorial activities. However, if curators use or appear to use their position with a museum purely for *personal advantage or profit rather than in service of their institution and the public good*, that behavior constitutes a conflict of interest.

In museums, conflicts of interest usually involve curators exploiting their position of in-depth access to the museum for personal gain. The most typical example would be problems resulting from the purchase and disposal of collections. Can conflicts of interest be found during museum research as well? This paper aims to suggest that they can, meaning that curators can find themselves torn between maintaining transparency by disclosing collections to the public and enhancing accessibility and engaging in research on those collections first.

In principle museum collections – whether donated or purchased – have to be classified and the related information organized before official registration. Collections possessed by the national museums in Korea (including the NMKCH) underwent this procedure before their photos and information were standardized for posting online ([www.emuseum.go.kr](http://www.emuseum.go.kr)), where they are accessible to anyone who visits the website and searches for that collection. However, there is a considerable amount of the NMKCH's collections that have yet to be registered, meaning they are not yet open to the public. In fact, the number of artifacts registered by the NMKCH amounted to 100,267 items of the 146,610 items it possessed as of December 2019 – a 68.4% registration rate. Of the registered items, 64,606, or 44.1% of the total collection, have been posted online. If the public does not have access to these collections and is thus unaware of their existence, is it ethical for curators to conduct research on them and even publish academic papers in their names before those collections are presented to the public? Should such publications include rare historical materials that have not yet been revealed to the world? Asking this question would be a very sensitive issue.

It may seem shocking (although, in actuality, many other organizations in Korea can be said to be guilty every now and then), but there have been a number of times when employees of public organizations (institutions such as museums and archives that collect and own the materials via public funds) carry out their research and present a thesis before revealing the artifacts to the public. The reason this is considered a potential conflict of interest is that those working in public organizations sometimes postpone the date of an open house on purpose so they can publish their research first. The worst-case scenario would be a researcher relocating him- or herself to a university first and taking their research with them for publication. In Korea, there are experts outside museums, such as university personnel, who say that museum curators should be restrained from conducting research on artifacts to which the public does not yet have access.<sup>5</sup> Even curators can see a conflict of interest arise, where they want to study artifacts at the same time as they are obliged to disclose collections for the public good.

This problem has never been a topic of discussion in relation to the codes of ethics and codes of conduct for museums. So far, only the importance of museum research and how that research must be conducted has been emphasized, since it is the key to curators being professional and responsible. No one has ever published an opinion on the question: What kind of research should not be performed? This not only concerns artifacts still off limits to the public but also those already registered and accessible to all. Indeed, some documents that are “accessible” to the public reveal only a title and cover, but no contents. Should curators prioritize the disclosure of document details for the sake of collections transparency, or engage in research first? This was the first question that came up when the NMKCH’s collection-based research project was initiated in 2019.

### Practical Issues in Museum Research

The final topic for discussion is about a few practical issues that have been encountered since the NMKCH began its collection-based research, and which currently remain unresolved.

<sup>5</sup> Private conversation. When it is said that the importance of rare materials determines the possibility of conducting research, especially in fields such as historical research, it is also understandable that researchers outside the museum require equal access to materials.

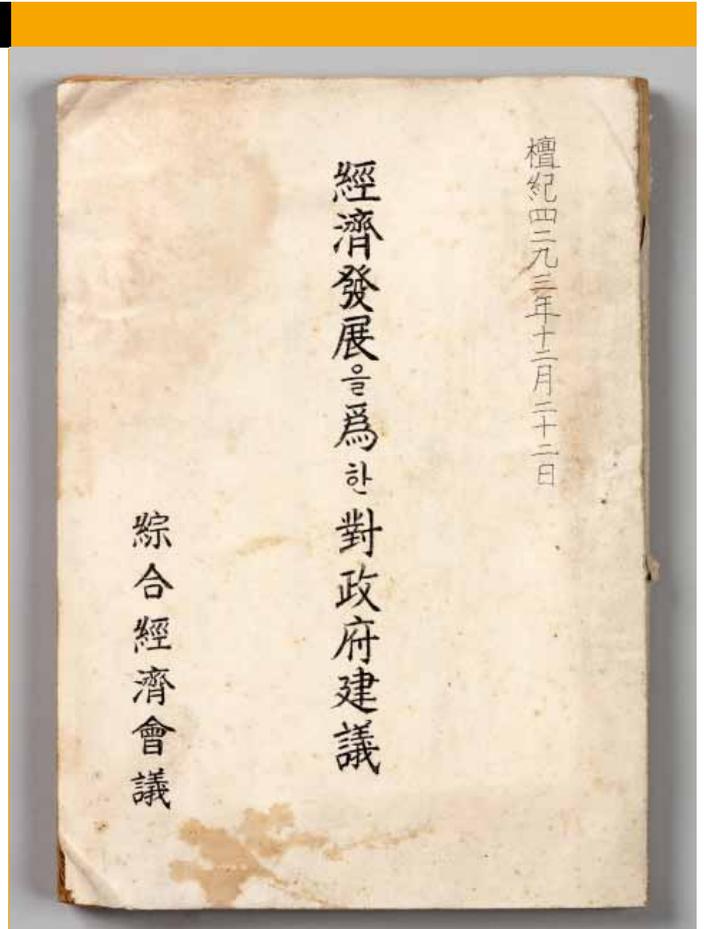


Fig. 5.  
Proposal for the government-led economic development plan from 1960  
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The first is the lack of criteria for establishing the order in which collections are to undergo research. For example, at the beginning of the project, curators selected materials most familiar to them or that matched their interests and expertise. It was impossible to ward off criticism of the arbitrary nature of these decisions. There were 146,610 items in the NMKCH collections as of December 2019. If research is to be continued, criteria are needed for determining which collections are to be researched.

Next is the lack of mid- to long-term plans for research, exhibition, and collection management, which make this issue relevant to the above need for research criteria. As it is only a decade old, the NMKCH has been engrossed in setting and implementing short-term plans that cover only a couple of years. However, plans for research, exhibition, and collection management are needed for spans of at least three to five years in order to organize an independent system for museum research while a relationship with other museum projects is closely maintained.



Fig. 6.  
Four volumes of the results of the 2019 NMKCH research based on collections. From left, Listen, Imagine: Research on Geumseong (LG's former name) Raio A-501; Chan Myon Administration's Economy-First Principle; Road to Mt. Geumgang; Stories of Children Left Behind

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The final issue concerns the priority that museum research holds in the list of duties assigned to curators. Even in museums built earlier than the NMKCH, curators have viewed collection-based research as a great burden. That is because most museums have a limited number of necessary personnel due to insufficient budgets. In this respect, it is certainly a challenge to put museum research before general administrative affairs and other tangible and concrete needs such as holding exhibitions, visitor programs, academic events, shows, and publication. Curators have to engage in museum research on their own time, which leads to overwork and a desire to avoid the research in the first place.

## Conclusion

This paper discussed the significance of museum research and reviewed the ethical and practical issues that can occur during the process. It can be concluded that such issues require adoption of the universal code of ethics released by the International Council of Museums, or other codes of ethics used by museum associations worldwide. However, it is more important to realize that more is needed than simply

perfunctory ethical guidelines. Such codes need to include aspects that are specific to the unique research needs of each museum, and that are drawn up to meet local conditions and requirements. Finally, they need to align with a museum's mid- and long-term plans for research.

The first research based on collections of the NMKCH in 2019 was completed with publication, and the research conducted in 2020 will be published in 2021. However, we face many tasks before conducting this research project in 2021. In 2019 and 2020, we engaged in the research as an exercise in trial and error, but in 2021, we need to carry out the project as part of a mid- to long-term plan. For the selection of materials to be studied, the research department will have to make decisions with the exhibition and data management departments, within the context of this longer planning horizon. External researchers have already begun to request the disclosure of and access to more collections of museum materials after coming across the books in the 2019 research results published in December 2020, and the photos of various collections (related to artifacts for research) in the books. In principle, collections that have not completed the registration process cannot be disclosed to people outside the museum. If so, should we focus more efforts on the registration and disclosure of collections than on research with the limited time available and limitations in personnel? This article, entitled, "Ethical and Practical Issues Found in Collection-Based Museum Research," is not merely theoretical, but characterizes the task that is now before us.

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We are looking for new volunteers to join our newsletter editorial team. Members assist as part of a small team with sourcing, proof-reading and editing submissions for our regular COMCOL newsletter.

Contact Erin  
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for further information.

## EDITORIAL

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