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The Future of Anthropological Representation: Contemporary Art and/in the Ethnographic Museum

Panel at 4th Major Conference ('Art, Materiality, and Representation') of the Royal Anthropological Institute, British Museum, 1-3 June 2018

Convenor

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Short abstract

Interactions between ethnographic museums and contemporary art have been contentious - appropriative and short-lived for some, a creative and necessary way forward for others. This panel investigates the manifold possibilities, histories, and possible futures of this relation.

Long abstract

Interactions between ethnographic museums and contemporary art have been contentious; while artists have become more sensitised to anthropological issues in recent years and many museums worldwide have invited artistic interventions in their collections, many see these exchanges as short-lived, superficial and appropriative responses to a deeper crisis of representation and legitimation. This panel investigates which possible other futures of this relation between ethnographic museums (and their collections) and contemporary art are imaginable, and which histories or traditions of this exchange have preceded the present situation.

Ethnographic museums are no longer mere repositories of anthropological knowledge and ethnographic items, but are opening up as relational research sites. Museums around the world open their stores for (artistic) research collaborations, working towards a relational museum that itself becomes a fieldsite. At the same time, the contemporary art world has appropriated and worked with theories, discourses, and methods formerly associated with anthropological research. Encapsulated in Hal Foster's seminal article on the artist as ethnographer, artistic interest in alterity, indigeneity, and decolonisation has taken centre stage at the biggest contemporary art exhibitions, from documenta to the Venice Biennale.

This panel welcomes papers, from artistic, anthropological, and/or curatorial perspectives, that may address the following themes: comparative and/or historical case studies of exemplary exhibitions, studies of collaborations between ethnographic museums and artists beyond exhibitions, critical examinations of the role of indigeneity, identity, and cultural appropriation in artistic engagement with ethnographic museums, the role(s) of the curator as mediator, analyses of prevalent theoretical concepts (alterity, 'the ethnographic', Global South, world cultures, decolonisation).

Panel conceived with Margareta von Oswald (Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Propose your paper until **8 January 2018** via the following link:

<http://nomadit.co.uk/rai/events/rai2018/conferencesuite.php/panels/6103>