Material Culture in Transit

The model was collected in the mid 1960s by the Swiss filmmaker and author René Gardi in Korhogo, Northern Côte d’Ivoire. It is now preserved in the ethnographic collection of the Bernisches Historisches Museum © Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern
Photo: Christine Moor
Wax model of a Senufo mask for a dead-mould brass casting.

Registration opens on January 15, 2020 on the conference website:
https://www.materialcultureintransit.com/
### THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2020
### BERNISCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM
Orientalischer-Saal, Bernisches Historisches Museum. 10:00 am-5:00 pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Speakers/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10:00 – 10:30 | Welcome Note          | Dr. Jakob Messerli Director Bernisches Historisches Museum  
                   | Prof. Thomas Späth Center for Global Studies, University of Bern.  
                   | Zainabu Jallo & Samuel Bachmann                          |
| 10:30 – 12:00 | Session One           | De-colonizing the Museum                           
                   | Key Note Boris Wastiau  
                   | Lionel Pernet & Grégoire Mayor  
                   | Sandra Ferracuti     |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Lunch Break           |                                                    |
| 13:00 – 14:30 | Session Two           | The Biography of Objects                           
                   | Key Note Nicholas Thomas  
                   | Beate Fricke  
                   | Alban von Stockhausen |
| 14:30 – 15:15 | Coffee Break & Guided Tours | Questions and Discussion                         |
| 15:15 – 16:45 | Session Three         | Transformation of Meaning                          
                   | Key Note Anna Schmid  
                   | Philipp Schorch  
                   | Michaela Schäuble   |
| 17:00 – 18:30 | Open Apéro            |                                                    |
| From 18:30    | Speaker’s Dinner      | Venue TBA                                          |
Session One: De-colonizing the Museum
Keynote: Dr. Boris Wastiau; Guest Speakers: Dr. Lionel Pernet, Grégoire Mayor, Dr. Sandra Ferracuti

The story of museums is also a story of dealing with legacies from complicated histories. Today, museums and academic disciplines run the risk of being an accomplice of “the colonial” by underplaying the role of colonial ideas and practices in their emergence. The museum world has been rife with discussions around the restitution of collections acquired in colonial contexts and only very recently has this rather sectoral debate on colonial heritage in European museums received the attention of a broader and global public. In this session, we discuss museum strategies, policies and exhibition management within a process of de-colonization (Wastiau).

One of the many responsibilities of Ethnographic museums is to challenge erroneous paradigms by producing self-critical, potentially remedial dialogues through exhibitions such as Linden-Museum’s Wo ist Afrika? (Ferracuti). Furthermore, Le Musée cantonal d'archéologie et d'histoire de Lausanne Derrière les cases de la mission takes a critical look at the activities of Swiss-French Missionaries in South Africa. (Pernet, Mayor).

Session Two: The Biography of Objects
Keynote: Prof. Nicholas Thomas; Guest Speakers: Prof. Beate Fricke; Dr. Alban von Stockhausen

On a rather theoretical level, this session discusses the idea of a biographical approach to the analysis of material culture: “how do we properly read the story of an object?”. Thus, the historicity of material culture is critical and, in line with this, opportunities and limitations of material culture as a historical source within museum and academic research alike will be a focal point of the discussions (Thomas). The biographies of things will be exemplified using specific objects from the Henry-Moser-collection, exhibited in the presentation hall of the Bernisches Historisches Museum and through a critical look at the said collection’s biographies and movements to the museum (Fricke). Ultimately, the first session tackles the challenge of reconstructing biographies of material objects, for which there is no written documentation (von Stockhausen).

Session Three: Transformation of Meaning
Keynote: Dr. Anna Schmid; Guest Speakers: Prof. Philipp Schorch; Prof. Michaela Schäuble.

In communities, objects are constituent parts or representatives of dynamic ideas and changing practices. This session draws from the remodelling of Museum der Kulturen Basel’s exhibition policies ten years ago. MKB continues to work towards disengaging objects from formerly dominant geographical classifications and reframe them within new thematic contexts (Schmid). These politics of display also raise questions regarding the museum’s responsibilities regarding the narratives concerned with the material culture they preserve. Contrarily, the idea of “Indigenizing the Museum”, for instance, is a recent example that aims at handing over the narrative responsibility and power over the meaning of an object back to those people who claim to have knowledge of its original meaning (Schorch). A further significant aspect of this session emphasises on the undercurrents of heritagization, which describes a transformation process of material culture in itself. (Schäuble).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Speaker(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 09:30 – 11:00| Session One:             | **Material Culture and Religion** | Urte Krass, Niklas Wolf, Roberto Costa, Susan Marti | Voodoo and the state of inter. Bildproduktion und Mitbenutzung westafrikanischer Vodun zwischen Identität und Alterität  
Polyptych and polytemporality: The Case of an Allegoric Asmat Altarpiece.  
Forgotten objects: Medieval memorial banners moving from the monastery to the museum |
|              |                          |                           | Julie Glauser, Carl Deussen, Etienne Wismer | “To give away my collection for free would be nonsense” - The Role of Decorations and Medals in 19th century Ethnographic Collecting.  
PLAY Bordeaux: Street skateboarding on works of art, a reflection on art, skateboarding and urban spaces.  
From Travelling to Representation to Expropriation: Considering a Scenic Wallpaper through time |
| 11:00 – 11:15| Coffee Break             |                           |                                            |                                                                                               |
| 11:15 – 12:45| Session Two:             | **Urban Transformation**  | Carine Ayele Durand, Carl Deussen, Etienne Wismer | “To give away my collection for free would be nonsense” - The Role of Decorations and Medals in 19th century Ethnographic Collecting.  
PLAY Bordeaux: Street skateboarding on works of art, a reflection on art, skateboarding and urban spaces.  
From Travelling to Representation to Expropriation: Considering a Scenic Wallpaper through time |
| 12:45 – 14:00| Lunch Break              |                           |                                            |                                                                                               |
| 14:00 – 15:30| Session Three            | **Museology and Representation** | Samuel Bachmann, Cécile Bründlmayer, Mary Mbewe, Zumrad Ilyasova, Floriane Morin | „Out of Context“- Translocation of West African Artefacts to European Museums: The Case of the Leo Frobenius Collection from Mali.  
From chisungu to the museum: Collecting, documenting, and representing the chisungu female initiation at the Moto Moto Museum in Zambia, 1950 to 2016.  
From a Dowry Chest to a Historical Museum Central Asian Textiles from the Henri Moser Collection.  
Heritage and political issues. The multiple identities of a Bamoun war calabash acquired by MEG during the collapse of the kingdom |
| 15:30 – 15:45| Coffee Break             |                           |                                            |                                                                                               |
| 15:45 – 17:15| Session Four             |                           | Samuel Bachmann & Zainabu Jallo | Round up - Discussion  
Venue TBA                                                                                             |
Material Culture and Religion

We focus on the materiality of religion and the modes in which religious objectives and beliefs have been communicated through, and sustained by, material practice. We pay attention to material culture as a crucial feature of religion following cross-cultural and parochial examples. These may signify physical structures, apparel, ritual artefacts drawing broadly from research topics from different disciplinary perspectives.

Urban Transformations

Urbanization is understood as an agent of transformation of inhabited spaces of culture and identity. When it comes to the investigation of the histories of material culture, urban spaces pose additional challenges and feature specific characteristics. How are the transformation processes invented and expressed through the lens of urban morphology? Furthermore, serial and mass products seem to rid themselves of singularity and uniqueness, while in heritage studies and practice, these qualities seemed to be essential for the definition of an object’s cultural, social, or historical significance. Material culture and heritage in urban spaces therefore require particular attention.

Museology and Representation

Museums have institutional power over transformations of meaning and memory, and play a critical role in the “politics of display”; this role calls for critical exploration of the responsibilities of the museum and the archive in creating narratives and establishing an object’s history. Here, the role of the curator seems to be critical, although the function of the curator might not only be limited to the museum curator but to all persons that fulfil the role of an artefact’s interpreter, be it on a subjective day-to-day basis or under scientific scrutiny.
Detailed information on how to get to the venues can be found on the conference website.