

43rd ANNUAL ICOFOM SYMPOSIUM
Montreal – Quebec, Canada, September 28 to October 2, 2020

**The decolonization of museology:
museums, mixing and myths of origin**

Call for Papers

ICOFOM is proposing a symposium around two themes inspired by the process of renewing the definition of the museum (ICOM – Kyoto 2019) and the major trends that contribute to transforming museums (Mairesse, 2015; 2016). These two central themes raise many questions about the primary mission of the museum. Decolonization is at the heart of the fundamental questioning of the social function of the museum. Consequently, these are the discourses, or even the myths of origin of the nations, that are contested.

Cultural Communities and "First Nations." More than ever, the question of the representation of cultural and indigenous communities in museums is a matter of debate. The same is true of the delicate issue of the restitution of works of art and of collections to communities of origin (Sarr & Savoy, 2018). What place do museums give to the culture of cultural communities and indigenous peoples in national collections and in the production of exhibitions dedicated to major national narratives? How far should museums go in decolonization? If "a museum [is] (...) open to the public of the social field, constantly reinventing itself, developing partnerships (...)" (Eidelman, 2017, p. 88) is this through consultation with partners from different cultural communities or First Nations? Through partnerships in decision-making regarding exhibits that concern them? Through representation on Museum Boards?

Decolonization. In light of the museum's new proposal for a museum definition presented in Kyoto, do museums engage in a critical dialogue about the past and future of nations and communities? Do museums envision the path of decolonization or do they still maintain the myths of homogeneous societies? Consequently, what are the museums' responsibilities regarding these major international trends?

Myths of Origin. In Canada, as in many countries, decolonization raises the question of the origin of a country and its own culture. This issue is fundamental in the creation of exhibitions of national museums that offer narratives giving meaning to the origin myths of nations (Bouchard, 2014; Lévi-Strauss, 2001), and that we also associate with the identification myths that participate in the construction of collective identities. Thus, until the beginning of the 21st century, Canadian museums proposed a national history that began with the discovery of America by Europeans in the sixteenth century. The period of contact between the Old and the New World then becomes the zero point of history and culture. However, can we ignore the fact that indigenous peoples, coming from Asia, have traveled, occupied and transformed North American territory for millennia before the arrival of Europeans? These diverse viewpoints are visible in Canadian national museums, but it has taken some strong action by First Nations peoples to make national museums aware of decolonization and to involve museum associations and governments (Phillips, 2011; Clifford, 2013; Sleeper-Smith, 2009). Is it still so in almost all dominant cultures?

Building Your Own Museum. In the past decade, major Canadian museums have chosen to revisit the history and place of Aboriginal people in permanent exhibitions devoted to Canadian history. The delicacy of this approach can be witnessed in teams from multiple museums (Kaine, 2016). In parallel with this movement, Aboriginal communities around the world have begun to build their own museums to deliver their version of history. Could cultural communities take this path? Is there not, in the end, a risk of segregating and isolating cultures? How to balance the return of objects held by national museums with their fiduciary duty to the civil society they serve? Does the biculturalism of the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum (McCarthy, 2007; Ross, 2013) in New Zealand constitute an exportable model? How far?

Intermixing and Hybridizations. In America, as elsewhere in the world, cultural history is made up of intermixing and hybridization (Turgeon, 2003), fundamentally opposed to the very idea of homogeneity of cultures. Do not museums tend to oppose the purity of origins with the concept of "allochthony," or what is not native to a country? But the reality of museums is more complex than this binary opposition; the objects, like the narratives, at the heart of these institutions testify to the intermixing of cultures. What are the museum's responsibilities with respect to these issues of interpretation of history? In short, the museums testify to which memories? Hybridization is an ethical as well as aesthetic choice (Morin, 2016), to privilege the meeting between peoples and between cultures. It opens the way to a creative

interculturality. Museums are places of cultural diplomacy. How can they participate in this hybridization?

Intangible Cultural Heritage. If the cultural, social and scientific project of museums is to testify to the “tangible and intangible history of humans and their environment,” then museums have for a long time ignored the history of First Nations peoples (Ames, 1992; Phillips, 2011). In addition, indigenous peoples have a different understanding of the cultural object than that traditionally held by the museum that owns the object (Clavir, 2002). One cannot say enough about the power of writing to assert authority and appropriation. For Aboriginal people, however, history has long remained oral and culture is expressed, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated, through mythical stories that are part of the intangible cultural heritage.

The recognition of cultural communities and indigenous cultures is highly relevant today. What place should these communities be given in national museums? Should museums respond to the demands of First Nations and cultural communities by transferring and restoring the objects that concern them? How should museums interpret the contribution of diverse cultural communities to national culture? In short, these issues that might seem unique to North American museums are universal in all countries. These are the questions we propose for the ICOFOM symposium in 2020.

Terms of Submission

The papers, presented in a short form, are expected before the conference. They will be collated, formatted and distributed before the conference, and discussed in workshops during the conference.

- Contributions should be concise (12,000 characters maximum, notes and references included, [as specified in our guidelines](#)) and must be sent by March 31, 2020 (at the latest) to the address: icofomsymposium@gmail.com. The proposals will have to integrate one of the proposed axes of analysis. They should follow the formatting rules of ICOFOM and be written in one of the three languages of ICOM (English, French, Spanish). Notice of acceptance of proposals will be given within two weeks.
- Collected and formatted texts will be sent to the authors and symposium participants, in electronic format, during the month of September 2020.
- The series editors and ICOFOM board will select, after the colloquium, those written contributions whose authors will be invited to develop their articles in a longer format for publication in the ICOFOM Study Series following peer review and revision.

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