Editorial

Sandra Dudley and Kylie Message

Museum Worlds: Advances in Research represents trends in museum-related research and practice. It builds a profile of various approaches to the expanding discipline of museum studies and to work in the growing number of museums throughout the world. It traces major regional, theoretical, methodological, and topical themes and debates, and encourages comparison of museum theories, practices, and developments in different global settings.

Museums, as well as the work within them and the studies that concern them, are neither self-contained nor static. Museums are not simply institutions, nor even are they merely institutional agglomerations of collections, people, and buildings. They are better envisaged as dynamic clusters of multiple relationships that connect present and past individuals, communities, and organizations at different levels within and beyond the museum, together with material and more ephemeral objects and the formal and informal networks that produce, use, and attribute meaning to collections and their related infrastructures. Contrary, perhaps, to the initial implications of the idea of the museum as a place for preserving things as they are in perpetuity, the character of some or all of those relationships change over time. Which relationships hold most power and influence and which ones are deemed to matter most, can demonstrate surprising fluidity. Museums engage with and are embedded within the societies and histories of which they are a part, and in doing so they are not only influenced by, but also impact upon, wider social and cultural patterns. Studies of museums, in their increasing range of disciplinary influences and subject focus, reflect this embeddedness and dynamism. Museums, and the ever developing field of museum studies, are variously concerned, on different levels and in a diversity of ways, with institutions, nations, people, communities, governments, exhibitions, displays, public programs, collections, material culture, audiences, public memory, and concepts and experiences of place, identity, and belonging. The articles in this inaugural issue of *Museum Worlds* touch in some way upon all of these.

Rather than working to consolidate a picture or singular overview of what the field of museum studies is, we have, as editors, sought articles, reports and reviews that analyze and engage critically, broadly, and dynamically with trends in museum-related research and practice. This editorial decision has formed a structure for our contributions, which have, in turn, encouraged us to consider that the most appropriate and relevant question is not one of definition but of purpose—about whom and what museums are for. As such, the research articles, reviews, and conversations contained within this volume contribute substantively to contemporary museum studies as a core scholarly field of research. The contributions also engage with investigations concerned with museums in other disciplines, and those conducted through interdisciplinary methods across a broad range of humanities and social sciences, as well as the natural sciences.

One purpose of *Museum Worlds* is to present an annual review or update of current work in the field, yet we certainly do not aim to provide a final word or neat summary on this continually evolving field of research. Rather, we intend the journal to contribute to the ongoing trajectory of the field by bringing together scholarly researchers, museum practitioners, and others to challenge, extend, and strengthen ways of understanding museums in a complex contemporary world. We aim to provide insight into cutting-edge research and into the principal concerns and practices pertinent to each year of publication, and to offer a vehicle for rigorous debate on current themes. To extend our current focus on museum dialogues and the networks of effect that radiate outward from them, a central element of the journal is the 'conversation,' or roundtable feature. In this issue, the roundtable took as its topic 'Museums and a Global World,' and generated a lively debate amongst participants at the inaugural international Association of Critical Heritage Studies conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 2012. We anticipate that the roundtable feature of future editions of *Museum Worlds* may also include responses to articles included in this and subsequent issues.

Editorial board members for the journal were sought for their potential to contribute to these conversations, and because they represent diversity in the field, geographically, institutionally, and also in terms of disciplinary affiliation. They were invited because of their individual contributions to scholarship and the profession, but also because if *Museum Worlds* is to act as a kind of discursive hub, the editorial board members provide the spokes and networks that can bring new voices into these discussions, thereby helping the debate resist becoming homogenous, insular, or singular in content or in the form or style in which it is recounted.

All of the contributions featured in this inaugural volume in some way ask questions about the public functions, obligations, debates around power and authority, and values of museums, with many exploring how museums in different countries are attempting to square the challenges of nation with ideas about local and community identity. They also and with equal rigor intersect productively and critically, directly or indirectly, with aspects of the field of museum studies. Each contributor has probed the current intellectual and practical landscape occupied by museum studies today and each represents particular views on directions in which the research field is heading. In addition, each article combines a range of insights and practices to actively engage with museums, collections, and the worlds within which these are located, in order to generate new understandings and innovations.

The journal

The research articles follow on from the editorial. The important scholarly dialogue they exhibit is also demonstrated in the interactions occurring more spontaneously in our roundtable conversation feature (we provide a transcript of a real time exchange of ideas). The research articles represent a range of views and case study sites and, taken together, they exemplify a diversity of literature, viewpoints, and stakeholders to be considered in studies of museums and society. This is a question not of combination but of negotiation across public and private spheres, and of communicating across borders, be they international, regional, or interpersonal. Rather than being used to demonstrate a singular point or homogenous ideal, when the ideas and arguments are taken together, the articles (and the dialogues they represent) in this volume also make the important point that museums are not just neutral reflections of the social politics and dynamics of the context in which they have been produced, but active contributors to debates on social order and justice, as well as governmentality.

Museums and museum studies scholarship are similarly affected by national, historical and topical trends of the moment, and anthologies and annual reviews such as *Museum Worlds* show the conversation that we see emerging in and across museums themselves at particular times. In this we agree with Preziosi and Farago's contention (from *Grasping the World: the Idea of the Museum*, Ashgate 2004) that a central element to consider in approaching any analysis of museums is the 'when' of the museum; and that by extension, understanding when a museum was produced, and its relationship to a given social and political era helps to unpack its meaning because the time of production provides crucial clues about power structures and priorities. This means, of course, that studies of museums are, or should be, also understood as studies of society, politics, economics, and other matters of structural, psychological, and emotional importance. Moreover, a collection of contemplations, interactions, and sound bites such as is provided by this volume of research articles, 'roundtables', and reviews, is itself an analogy of sorts with a museum of material cultural heritage: both at heart are collections of ideas and political agenda. While the research articles provide a formal and academic type of exchange, they are followed by the roundtable conversation, reports into current affairs or events in the museological sector, and then reviews of recent exhibitions and books.

Development and change, be it in disciplinary and museum studies forums, in the social contexts giving rise to (or levelling criticism at) museums, or in the particular museum forms or settings that aim to respond to and converse with each of these, are themes that all the research articles in this first issue could be said in some way to address, implicitly or explicitly. This begins with the changes in intellectual perspective, definition, and analytical approach suggested by two critical (re)positionings: the first article's stance on the scholarship of museums generally, and the second's on both 'the digital' in museums and the study of it. Anthony Shelton's article draws a distinction between what he identifies as three different museologies (critical, praxiological, and operational), and then focuses in on critical museology, and its development and precepts. Many readers will already identify with much of his manifesto, but they will bring to it distinct viewpoints and histories of their own and may find these valuably enriched through careful attention to the theoretical, historical, and practice-based genealogies and trajectories that Shelton traces. The article demonstrates the period- and culture-dependent specificities in these patterns that too often are overgeneralized, and ultimately raises some usefully provocative areas for inquiry and debate in future directions of both museum practice and museum studies. Ross Parry's piece on museums in the postdigital age also considers the trajectory of future work, focusing particularly on what Parry sees as a need to "reset our relationship" with digital media now that it is a normalized part of the museum (and other parts of the) world. In other words, it is time we ceased thinking of 'new' technology, digital revolutions, and the digital versus the nondigital worlds, and recognized instead the now normalized, mutual embeddedness of the digital and the nondigital. Parry does not reject change or represent the situation now as static; rather, he deals with it subtly and demonstrates that to continue treating digital technology as radically transformative and as 'other' is largely inappropriate in the contemporary setting.

A subtle and questioning approach to development and change continues in the next four articles, all of which, in diverse ways, address the relationships between museums, identities, and wider cultural dynamics—broadly defined, contexts of globalization, colonialism, heritage, and urban development, respectively. The first two articles in this group both deal with questions of museums and national identities, although in distinct settings and over rather different timescales. Rhiannon Mason explores whether or not Europe's national museums now essentially comprise something that properly belongs in an earlier era, given their associations with nationhood and place-bound identity on the one hand and the apparent rise of cosmo-

politanism and globalization on the other. Her conclusion is that, rather than globalization suggesting the demise of national museums, in fact such museums—and indeed other sorts of museums too—have an important role to play in articulating the tensions between globalization and national (and other) identities, precisely because in reality it is such tensions that appear to define contemporary cultural dynamics. She argues that museums should “cosmopolitanize from within” and that a “cosmopolitan museology” needs to be developed to guide future practice. Also looking at issues of national identity and political change, Christina Riggs takes a long view of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, taking as her starting point an analysis of interpretations of governmental claims regarding looting of the museum during mass protests in January 2011. She moves on from this to examine both the history of her case study museum and wider entanglements between museums, (ancient) historical representations, and European colonial endeavors in Egypt and beyond. Her article ends with a return to the contemporary postcolonial contexts in which the museum now finds itself, and a consideration of not only current dynamics but also future possibilities.

The second two articles in this cluster are concerned with relationships between museums, identities, and wider cultural dynamics, and focus on heritage, culture, and urban development. Mary Bouquet examines some major recent development and revitalization projects at Dutch museums. She situates them within a wider debate about the relationship between museums and “heritage,” and argues that they, and the increasing trend for their ilk, constitute a process she terms “reheritaging.” Effects of this include enhancing public sensibilities both locally and in communities far beyond where the museum is based, and reshaping of both the institution and its audiences. Through her case studies, she demonstrates how museums have become actively part of, and impacted by, these ongoing heritagizing processes with global reach and are, as a result, being turned “inside out.” Lisanne Gibson’s article also concentrates on museum developments, in her case particularly those that form a part of wider, culture-led urban regeneration projects. She situates her examination within a juxtaposition of two different literatures, bringing together an exploration of extant work on museums’ roles in urban development on the one hand with scrutiny of museum studies discussions of the ‘postmuseum’ on the other. Concluding that these approaches are dichotomous and do not allow full account to be taken of both the technical and symbolic aspects of new museum developments, Gibson proposes instead consideration of the phenomenotechnics of these projects.

The final three research articles in this issue of *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* take us inside the walls of the museum, focusing on questions pertaining to changing curatorial and exhibitionary practice, shifting relationships between museums and originating communities, and altered approaches to objects and interpretations. Anita Herle reflects, from the curatorial point of view, on the making of an exhibition. Most particularly, she asks if curatorial techniques can themselves comprise a form of anthropological research. This is especially pertinent given that the curatorial techniques in question center on sustained engagement with objects, and that the exhibition under discussion is the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology’s *Assembling Bodies: Art, Science and Imagination*, which explicitly “attempted to transcend” subject-object and person-thing dualisms. Herle’s discussion of the exhibitionary process is illuminating, and makes a powerful case for the significance of not only shifting considerations of exhibition making specifically but also of more general people-object relationships in and beyond the museum. A second anthropological article follows, this time focusing on changing relationships between museums and indigenous groups, through objects in the museum collections. In this article, Laura Peers explores the sensory and affective engagement of Blackfoot visitors with five historic Blackfoot shirts in the University of Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum. Ranging over issues of colonial trauma, heritage, memory, kin, and community, Peers

analyzes the role of objects and the senses, including touch, in healing “ceremonies of renewal,” and how such ceremonies can enable the strengthening of contemporary knowledge, identity, and well-being in the present. She examines the implications of such a project for museums’ shifting sense of their obligations to enable indigenous communities to gain culturally, sensorially appropriate access to the objects with which they identify. Finally, Janet Marstine’s article considers socially engaged artistic practice within the museum space. Focusing on a detailed case study of the work of artist Theaster Gates in the 2010 *To Speculate Darkly* project at the Milwaukee Art Museum, she explores how the mobilization of fluctuating postcolonial hybridities enables the museum to make symbolically reparative steps toward equality and inclusivity that might not otherwise have been feasible. Like Peers’s article, Marstine’s article is underpinned by an acute awareness of the fluidity of identity and the continually shifting relationships between museums, communities, and individuals, especially in postcolonial contexts; but where Peers provides us with a detailed case study of the importance, in such an atmosphere, of working with originating communities and utilizing the power of original objects and sensory experience, Marstine gives us a convincing example of the impact of bringing a socially and politically engaged artistic practice into the museum space. Both, like Herle’s article too, constitute instances of changing forms of practice and reflection by and within museums that augment and complement more established curatorial processes.

Change and development generally, in museum practices, representations, and scholarship, are, as we have already observed, themes running through all the research articles in this issue, touched on in various ways and at different museum levels. As an unsurprising corollary to this, also common to all the articles, though in varied ways, are questions about time, history, and changing perspectives. Such issues are raised explicitly by Shelton, Riggs, and Mason, for example, and they are also very clearly present not only in the thematic or institutional repositioning narratives by Parry, Bouquet, and Gibson, but also in the articles focused on newer forms of, and reflections on, practice by Herle, Peers, and Marstine.

These themes are also central to the two ‘reports’ included in this issue. The first of these gives an account of a workshop held at the Smithsonian Institution in 2012. Focused on issues of digital repatriation and the circulation of indigenous knowledge, the challenges and changing nature of the relationships between museums, communities, and individuals that are addressed in this report have synergy with many of the main themes of the research articles included within this volume. The second report describes a seminar held in Leh, Ladakh, India, also in 2012. Organized by the Department of Museology at the New Delhi National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museology, in collaboration with the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), this seminar brought together Ladakhi and international speakers. It aimed both to explore the museum’s potential as a vehicle for the documentation, representation, and communication of sociocultural change, and to help initiate the process of planning a museum for Ladakh.

In summary, each of the contributions to this inaugural issue of *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* stands independently, and it follows that the articles are quite distinct from one another. Furthermore, the issue does not claim to be a comprehensive review of current trends in museum studies research; indeed, to attempt to create such a review would be unfeasible. Nonetheless, this volume represents a wide number of current trends in museum-related research and practice, includes discussion of examples drawn from five different continents, and, importantly, because of the common threads of change, development, and time, gives an overall sense of dynamism in the field. Museum studies, as an academic and practical field of research that is rapidly expanding and alive with potential, presents an opportunity and challenge that parallels the explosive growth of museums throughout the world. We note that dynamism, development,

and diversity are crucial keywords that mark the trajectory of disciplinary innovation and transformation in our field globally. With a range of articles and reflections that capture breadth as well as depth in the compelling processes of change presently underway in different places and parts of the world, and that also offer the potential for comparison across case studies and contexts, *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* is critical and responsive, and important now.