Editorial

Sandra H. Dudley and Conal McCarthy

The 2017 volume of *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* is a particularly notable one for several reasons. It is the first without any editorial involvement from Kylie Message, one of the journal's two inaugural joint chief editors. She has played a major role in shaping *Museum Worlds* and its aspirations, and we are enormously grateful for all her work and insight. Conal McCarthy has also been a vital part of the journal's team from the beginning, as a reviews editor, and we are delighted that he has now taken on one of the chief editor roles. His vision and expertise will be excellently placed in this capacity. We are pleased too to welcome Sheila Hoffman to our team; she joins Masaaki Morishta as a reviews editor.

This volume also marks the halfway point through *Museum Worlds*' first decade. In those initial five years, this publication's pages have covered a wide array of issues—such as critical museology and cosmopolitan museology, heritage and repositioning museums, and the postdigital museum—through museums in cultural and urban development, new urban museums in Seoul and Hong Kong, museums in Dubai, Biennales, museums and mental health, and museums online, to exhibitions as research, encounters in Melbourne's Immigration Museum, contested histories in the Cairo Museum, object mobility as translation, and material proximities in exhibition design.

Beyond even these varied subjects, however, while *Museum Worlds* is not a specialist archaeology or world cultures/ethnography journal, it has contributed notably in its life so far to museum debates within and drawing upon these fields. Volume 3 (2015) included a special section on "Collections, Museums, Africa," and Volume 4 (2016) comprised a special issue on "Current Approaches to Museum Archaeology." Both of these had a particular focus on objects and practices in cultural contexts. Individual articles throughout the volumes to date have also explored this broad area, examining such topics as objects as contact zones, repatriation, socially engaged artistic practice and cultural collision, and the importance and potential of visits to museums by indigenous peoples.

This particular trajectory within *Museum Worlds*' growing work is, of course, by no means the only one of significance in leading edge museum theory and practice or the sole area in which we are interested. Our 2018 volume will once again be an open issue. This, 2017, volume, however, continues our progression of debates around objects, collections and cultural perspectives on ownership, access, knowledge, and dialogue. It incorporates two distinct, but implicitly connected, special sections, each of which is guest edited by internationally prominent scholars in the field.

The first special section, edited by Laura Peers, Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, and Jennifer Shannon, explores repatriation. At first sight, this is a well-visited theme in the existing literature,

but as the editors point out, it has thus far been both little theorized and largely located within binary and oppositional frames. Here, however, repatriation is examined in the context of (indigenous, museum, and other), and *as*, ritual. It is an advance of perspective that not only challenges conventional assumptions about epistemological and ontological dichotomies underpinning repatriation but also brings to the fore the multiple performative and symbolic aspects of the processes at work. It also enables a more complex and nuanced approach to coproduction, cultural hybridity, and, particularly interestingly, what the editors call “an emerging moral landscape” in which cultural memories and notions including responsibility and guilt are not only negotiated but also ritualized.

This special section is aptly followed by a second, edited by Sharon Macdonald, Henrietta Lidchi, and Margareta von Oswald, that explores how the colonial and anthropological legacies that underlie the formation of so-called ethnographic/ethnological museums and collections might now be positively redirected in the support and development of more convivial and cosmopolitan societies and futures. The editors are clear that this is an urgent issue for institutions that need to demonstrate they are neither extraneous to the contemporary world nor ongoing agents of colonial modes. The editors pay careful attention to ideas of the cosmopolitan and their notion of the “cosmo-optimistic,” and the case studies that follow exemplify strategically and practically different ways of addressing the challenges facing museums. This section thus emphasizes possible ways forward, rather than simply adding to already full library shelves on ethnographic museums’ apparent inadequacies. There is, as the editors point out, a growing body of research attempting to do just this, but this section represents a particular advance in the literature. It strikes a judicious balance between critique and doing justice to “the hopes and energy on the ground that we have witnessed as ethnographers and museum workers.” The particular backgrounds of the editors and authors (as, indeed, in the first section in this volume), as well as the care that has gone into giving proper attention and credit to the “actors [including objects] on the ground,” brings not only ethnographic and reflexive depths to the accounts but also a new analytical perspective. Moreover, while it is certainly not naïve or simplistic, it is ultimately optimistic.

Indeed, the volume overall is a positive one. The discussions in both special sections go well beyond ethnographic museums and collections in their relevance. They also speak directly to current and emergent wider debates on not only the social relevance but also the social purpose and socially transformative potentials, of museums (e.g., Sandell 2017). Such themes are not uncontentious; neither are they often easy to take forward in practice. Optimism, too, is neither uniform nor continuous—in theory or on the ground. Optimism, or particularly Macdonald, Lidchi, and von Oswald’s “cosmo-optimism,” also, perhaps, seems surprising or even out of place in current geopolitical contexts. On the other hand, maybe hope—and real, practical effort behind it—is precisely what we need in such moments. *Museum Worlds* welcomes submissions that reflect on this issue (as well, of course, as others) in relation to museums.

■ REFERENCE

Sandell, Richard. 2017. *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*. London: Routledge.