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## Editorial

*Conal McCarthy*

*Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* Volume 7 (2019) is an open issue, covering a rich variety of topics reflecting the range and diversity of today's museums around the globe. This year's volume has seven research articles, four of them dealing with very different but equally fascinating issues: contested African objects in UK museums, industrial heritage in Finland, manuscript collecting in Britain and North America, and Asian art exhibitions in New Zealand. But this issue also has a special section devoted to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, which contains three articles and an interview.

As well as this, we have the usual array of reviews of books and exhibitions, including some longer review essays, which are so necessary in an academic journal of this kind. It is very hard to keep up with the deluge of publishing in museum and heritage studies and related fields, let alone the countless new exhibitions around the globe jostling for our attention. These pages contain select examples of key books and exhibitions that captured the imagination of our reviewers and point to larger issues and debates not just in the academy but also in the professional museum, gallery, and heritage sectors. It is important to acknowledge here the work of our indefatigable reviews editors, who scout out possible topics for review, identify and line up reviewers, and edit and manage the resulting texts. We are very grateful for the hard work, acumen, and language skills of Dr. Sheila Hoffman, from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, who covers North America and Europe. We welcome our new reviews editor covering the Southern Hemisphere—Dr. Joanna Cobley from the University of Canterbury in Christchurch—who, in addition to editing several reviews, has contributed two interesting pieces of writing to this volume. Lastly, we would like to welcome the latest addition to the team, Dr. Linda Kong from Fudan University in Shanghai, who will be dealing with books, exhibitions, and conferences in Asia. This volume has several items dealing with museums in Asia, which is a vitally important but somewhat overlooked region of the museum world, at least in terms of Anglophone scholarship, so we look forward to many more contributions thanks to Dr. Kong's expert facilitation.

One section of *Museum Worlds* 7 is particularly prominent this year. Previously, we have had a section that brings together research in other forms, including reports on projects, conferences, and other events, and “conversations” in which scholars discuss particular issues of relevance to them. Over the years, we have seen this section become increasingly useful, a place where a range of different issues may be examined, issues which do not necessarily fit into the neat format of the research article or review and which take on a myriad of forms reflecting our interdisciplinary, transnational, and networked universities and museums. For example, in 2019, alongside reports on conferences in Japan, China, and Mexico, we find examples of long-form writing on three



significant research projects: Johan Hegardt's fascinating travelogue/essay ruminating on the ways in which the Cold War is represented in museums around the Baltic Sea, an innovative interpretation of a Melanesian Mask by Bruno Haas and Philipp Schorch (along with a response by a Melanesian museum professional), and finally a series of thought pieces on the theme of disasters. This latest contribution, developed and edited by Sheila Hoffman, has telling contributions from Bruno Brulon Soares on the tragic fire at the Brazilian National Museum, from Dominique Poulot on the high-profile fire at Notre Dame in Paris, and Joanna Copley on the lessons about resilience and disaster management from post-quake Christchurch, New Zealand. All of this work is unquestionably research in its own right, and, though outside the confines of a peer-reviewed article, is perhaps even more valuable, urgent, topical, and accessible for the audiences concerned, especially those working at the coalface in cultural institutions.

But whatever form research itself may take in future, *Museum Worlds* still focuses on "advances in research." The contents of the journal look forward to new ideas, theories, and methods in museums, but they also look back to reflect on those seminal scholars who have shaped the discipline and the industry to which it is closely affiliated. In recent years, we have reviewed the legacy of anthropologist James Clifford and cultural sociologist Tony Bennett through articles, review essays, and the like, charting the development of their thinking over many years through a series of key books and articles. In this volume, through a special section, we pay tribute to a universally admired writer, teacher, and curator who has made an enormous contribution to several fields: museum studies, heritage studies, tourism, world's fairs, and many others.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. With a diverse background in English literature and folklore studies, with a particular interest in Jewish and Hebrew culture and history, and experience curating exhibitions and festivals, she made crucial interventions into the burgeoning field of museum studies just as it was incorporating elements of social and cultural theory from related disciplines. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett spoke at the now famous conference at the Smithsonian in 1989, which led to the first Karp and Lavine edited volume *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991), making a persuasive argument for museums not just as visual spaces but as multisensory theatres in which culture, identity, and nation were performed. Employing insights from her groundbreaking work in performance studies and drawing on a diverse theoretical toolkit from anthropology, ethnographic fieldwork, and other sources, she revealed the ways in which exhibitions can be understood as active processes of meaning-making, which produce the things they display. This emphasis on movement, embodiment, process, and interaction was ahead of its time, and did much to push research in museum studies away from its reliance on representation and toward more performative modes of analysis. It also did much to reorient studies of museums and similar institutions away from the tendency to read off meanings like texts to a more contextualized and rounded critical investigation of the different elements that they are made up of. With heritage buildings and sites, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett had the simple but startlingly sharp insight that these places may look old but are actually something new that referred to the past, a form of contemporary cultural production in their own right. Clearly, her work was important in the early development of critical heritage studies, which has expanded enormously in recent years.

In the books, chapters, articles, and conference papers that followed, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett helped to deepen and refine the critical analysis of museums, galleries, heritage, and a broad range of popular sites where objects and display, collecting, exhibiting, events, and public programs took place, carving out in the process new territory in underexamined areas such as tourism and heritage in particular. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is the interdisciplinary scholar par excellence, working in and between several disciplines, dealing comfortably with different media, bringing all this together to focus in on the objects of her analysis. Her scholarship is

theoretically sophisticated but also steeped in historical context and grounded in real objects and concrete material culture, as witnessed by her love of “stuff” and her skill at making things as well as “thinking new thoughts” about them. Her writing is characterized by tremendous energy and verve, loaded up with empirical detail from close observation, but deftly theorized in words and phrases that captured in pithy, memorable terms the subjects of her investigation.

One of the original aims of this journal was to look at the teaching of museum studies, so it is a pleasure to have Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reflect, in the interview in this volume, on her approach to teaching. Her thoughts about how museum studies can be taught at university, and what should be in the ideal curriculum for training a museum professional, are essential reading for anyone engaged in postgraduate teaching today. What strikes the reader about her philosophy and practice as a teacher is the stress on fieldwork, on immersing students in case study research, and from there working up to the theory (rather than the other way around), as pointed out by Portuguese academic Nélia Dias in her invaluable recollection of sitting in on her classes in the 1990s. For Dias, who has worked on French ethnographic museums among many related topics, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was a gifted teacher and generous colleague, as she was for others writing in the special section honoring her work, for whom she was variously an associate, mentor, advisor, editor, supervisor, examiner, and friend. Many scholars of museum and heritage studies today cite Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as a key influence, guide, and inspiration for their work. Like Dias, American museum curator Ira Jacknis has had a long and close relationship with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett circling around common interests in the history of anthropology, folk culture, food, and other topics. For this special section, Jacknis has contributed an article on subjects close to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s heart: the changing understandings and shifting boundaries of anthropology, art, and folklore seen through the lens of the collecting activities of American museums in the early twentieth century, namely the tireless work of private collector Emily Johnston de Forest. Likewise, by way of an affectionate tribute to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s own academic and professional work on Jewish history museums and the Holocaust, academics Erica Lehrer and Monika Murzyn-Kupisz have written a major article on the “space of Jewish culture in Polish ethnographic museums,” in which a strikingly mono-ethnic postwar society strives to negotiate present-day social diversity.

This is a timely reminder that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s work has *always* been engaged in contemporary professional practice and its contested social context. Since she left the academy in 2006 and shifted to Warsaw to oversee the development of the core exhibition at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, discussed in the interview in this volume, she has been embroiled in the hard work of making a new museum in the challenging political environment of post-Soviet Eastern Europe. In this ongoing commitment to working through intellectual ideas and philosophical and ethical commitments amid the everyday operational realities of creating exhibitions, dealing with realpolitik, money, and media, and negotiating the complex politics of memory, reconciliation, and a dark history, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is an exemplar of a museum and heritage studies scholar and professional that integrates history, theory, and practice in the service of museums and their publics.