Editorial

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The world has changed. In early 2020, when COVID-19 spread around the globe, closing museums and universities and disrupting life as we know it, *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research*, like many academic and professional journals, was also affected. Of course, in a pandemic with so many lives lost, and many others exposed to illness, unemployment, and the disruption of the economy, travel, and trade, the tertiary and cultural sectors were bound to be adversely impacted as well. With the shutting of museums and galleries, university teaching going online—resulting in increased workloads for academics, the laying off or furloughing of staff, the delaying of the production of books and journals (with publishers unable to send books out), and the cancellation and/or delay of conferences and research projects—it was natural that we would also struggle to get together an issue for 2020. It was indeed a challenge compiling *Museum Worlds* 8 as the virus raged, but thanks to our hard-working team of editors, our generous and patient contributors, our tireless readers and peer reviewers, and the expert advice of Janine Latham and her colleagues at Berghahn, we got there. I want to thank everyone involved in this issue for their help in seeing it into print, and especially Dr. Susette Goldsmith, my editorial assistant, for being there in the final stages.

The journal you are now reading is a little on the light side, but it is a fine volume nonetheless, which maintains the high standards of research and academic debate, reviewing, and reporting that *Museum Worlds* has become recognized for. I am pleased to say that we have an excellent special section, assembled by guest editors Paula Mota Santos and Hugo DeBlock, which is made up of articles originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 2018. Though the issue was planned before the coronavirus broke out, much of it was written, peer-reviewed, revised, and edited during early and mid-2020, when many people were working within the extraordinary restrictions imposed by lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. As the introduction to this section by Santos and DeBlock describes, the articles explore “voices in the dark” through fascinating and diverse instances of what they call “museum-like practices and culturalized politics.” We would like to thank the authors for seeing this project through to completion, despite the peculiar challenges of the times we have been living through, and particularly the guest editors for their hard work and perseverance.

As with the last issue of *Museum Worlds*, we have a very rich cross-section of content in the next part of the journal, which we developed in 2019 in order to have a more flexible collection of commentary in/on/about museums, galleries, and heritage. This year, the “Research in Other Forms” section contains two reports from Japan: one on a panel on ethnographic museums and decolonization from last year’s ICOM General Conference in Kyoto; and one a long and detailed meditation on the papers presented at the second World Museologies Workshop, which took

place in Osaka. We also have a critical review of new exhibitions at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, which we were very pleased to receive, as it gives us unique insight into the current state of cultural politics and identity in this major Asian city, which has been embroiled in protest and unrest throughout the year. These pieces, along with other contributions from Asia elsewhere in the journal, show a very pleasing growth in our contributions from this region.

One highlight of this year's issue has to be the very topical survey of how museums responded to the pandemic, which was compiled and edited by our reviews editor, Joanna Copley. As Copley remarks in her introduction, the responses to the survey reflect the many different ways that museums reacted to the crisis. We have read in the media over the last few months about museums closing, about online exhibitions and digital access reaching audiences that could not attend exhibitions in person, and how museums might have to change to survive in the post-COVID world. There have been many pronouncements of doom and gloom, but also much revisioning and reflection, even promise, and glimpses of a new beginning, another reinvention of cultural institutions in the face of yet another crisis, but this time in the form of public health and attendant financial strictures. We received many good responses to our survey from different parts of the museum world, and could not publish them all here. We were lucky that our respondents did not leap to hasty conclusions, but gave us considered and thoughtful responses to what was happening. They looked back, they looked around, they cast their gaze into the future, considering how museums could learn from the situation they found themselves in. For some, like Brett Mason, Director of Museums Wellington in Aotearoa New Zealand, it was a very strange and unsettling time:

Probably like many museum workers, we have often thought, rumbled, considered, exclaimed in darkened hallways "if only we could," in small dark offices "we need more time," behind closed doors "if only we had some money, money, money."

Now, here we are COVID-19 swamped as a worker, a museum, a *whānau* ("family"), a business, a community, a city, a country—locked down and locked out, the language of prisons and control and containment.

But, as Mason goes on to explain, lockdown also proved to be a productive and fertile space in terms of giving staff the time to stop and think. In some cases, they emerged from the experience stronger and more focused—not just on what more they could do, but on what they have always done, were already doing, and what they could do better:

So, what does the future look like, and how do we reconnect into our communities, our local, moving between the authentic object experience or the social experience of a visit to a museum, to being part of a communal experience—more often than not experiences that are cross-generational, cross-cultural and multi-dimensional? How do we support our community to rebuild through economic times that are looking more and more tough? Well, we do what museums do best—we express how our forebears did it, we reflect on their lessons, and we support our locals to take those learnings and build a new and better place today.

This theme of the local also comes through in other contributions to the journal. One of the longer responses to the pandemic was the report on how art educators in New Zealand responded. Esther McNaughton describes how she and her fellow educators in art galleries across the country came together on the Internet, through the now ubiquitous Zoom meetings, to form a "community of practice." The last piece in this section of *Museum Worlds* also has a local slant: Michael Upchurch's report on the proposed return of a Māori meeting house *Hinemihī* from the National Trust in the United Kingdom to Aotearoa, which promises to be a game-changer in repatriation practice, as it involves the exchange of new carvings for old, and to be, through this

exchange, a continuation of the relationships among all involved: source communities, heritage agencies, conservators, artists, and museums. As editor of the journal, being stuck in the South Pacific and unable to travel, I found myself reaching out to locals to provide content, including students, graduates, and colleagues in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums—this explains in part the inevitably New-Zealand-centric nature of *Museum Worlds* 8.

Unfortunately, the review sections of the current issue have been most affected by the pandemic. Books were hard to get a hold of, reviewers were often too busy to meet deadlines, and there were hardly any exhibitions at all to review, except for those which were open pre-COVID. Nevertheless, Sara Selwood has contributed a comprehensive double review of an exhibition and catalogue about Hogarth in London, there is an interesting review of an exhibition at Yale, and Sheila K. Hoffman has written an in-depth review essay about online exhibitions around the world, a most welcome critical analysis of this topic given the somewhat naïve focus in the media this year on the apparently simple solution of providing digital access to displays and collections. The book reviews managed and edited by Joanna Cobley include books about a range of subjects, again with a noticeable Pacific bias. Paulette Wallace offers a review of several recent books on heritage and museums, including from Routledge's *Museums in Focus* series edited by Kylie Message that are pertinent for the current times, such as Message's own volume on collecting activism (2019). Wallace comments that the emphasis in these books on "the personal is political" got her thinking about "the role of individuals in museums and in politics—particularly in relation to the right to act on behalf of others." She concludes that

the *Museums in Focus* series is a rallying to action that places museum studies on the front-foot ready to engage, respond, and lead-out on discourses shaped by critical contemporary issues—the key for any future critical political writing will be the timeliness of the publication cycle of these short yet dynamic texts.

I want to pick out one book that I reviewed in this section in particular in order to reflect on this other theme, highlighted above, that comes through this year's writing in *Museum Worlds* that has taken place in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United States. Christina Kreps's inspiring new publication *Museums and Anthropology in the Age of Engagement* is a book for these times, even though it was not written for them. In tracing the history of museum-anthropology-community engagement, which is longer and more diverse than previously understood, Kreps provides revealing insights into what we can now see as vital models for "ethical and socially responsive practice" (2020: 227–228). Indeed, in the conclusion of the book readers are presented with one such model for "cosmopolitan museum anthropology" (255–257). This can be seen as a response to the questions asked by many in recent months: what are museums good for, what value do they add, and how do they contribute to social well-being? Kreps argues that museums are a forum to consider "what unites us as human beings without eliding our differences" (256).

We were honored to have Christina Kreps contribute also to the special section in this issue. Kreps is of course a renowned scholar and seasoned professional who works as professor, museum director, curator, and manager/facilitator of numerous international cross-cultural projects. She has written an expert and nuanced afterword commenting on and contextualizing the articles, but she also opens up broader questions relating to the current crises in which museums are immersed, not only the coronavirus but also the protests against the death of George Floyd that have sparked further protests, public debate, and soul-searching in the United States and around the world. "Writing at the midpoint of 2020, it has become cliché to say we are living in 'unprecedented times' as the world copes with a confluence of events and challenges near cataclysmic proportions—the COVID-19 pandemic, civic unrest, social and political upheavals,

and economies in nosedive,” she writes. “In these times,” Kreps adds, “what should be the work of culture, heritage, and musealized spaces and those that study them?” In the end, she argues:

Activism for social justice, human and civil rights, and the environment has been on the rise in the museum, arts, and cultural sectors . . . Increasingly we are recognizing that public and community engagement is not enough. We are now called upon to stand in *solidarity* with the historically oppressed and those fighting for their rights *on their own terms*.

Apart from our own direct individual support of such engagement, activism and direct action, how, we might ask, can we respond as a journal of museum studies and contemporary museum practice? Museums have taken many initiatives in this area that have been widely discussed and emulated (Janes and Sandell 2018). Our publisher, Berghahn, which sees itself as “a mission-driven publisher,” has contacted all their journal partners to “find ways in which equity can be encouraged, fostered, and nurtured.” “Internally as a company,” they go on to say, “we seek to be mindful of our role in amplifying marginalized voices, identifying unconscious bias, and being proactive about matters of racial and gender equality, as well as identity.” We endorse this commitment to change, equity, and diversity, which of course has long been an issue not only with museums but with academia as well. For our part, we undertake to participate in this process and to interrogate our “editorial practices and publication processes” to explore how we can respond internally to this call in the ways in which we do things. We also want to put out a call for proposals, inviting special issues, articles, reviews, and other contributions that address these urgent topics and, moreover, that suggest how this journal might do its part to advance them in terms of editing, peer review, and the style and presentation of text and images. As well as advances in research, *Museum Worlds* has to be about advances in human rights, social justice, and equality.

■ REFERENCES

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