

ICMEMOHRI 2024 CONFERENCE CALL FOR PAPERS

AFRICAN MEMORIAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS MUSEUMS BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR PEACE

Kigali, Rwanda 28th – 31 July 2024

The ICMEMOHRI 2024 conference in Kigali will address decolonization, the role of literature and graphic novels, and performance as a communication tool in museums and a catalyst for the traumatic experiences derived from armed conflict and genocide.

We hereby invite researchers, museum professionals and students to present papers on the topics outlined in this document.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All submissions must be original and not simultaneously submitted to another journal or conference. The application format should include:

- Name(s) of Author(s) - Affiliation(s), e-mail address(es), full address(es) and phone number(s);
- Conference session for your submittal;
- Title of your paper;
- Abstract (300 words maximum);
- Biography of the applicant(s) (100 words maximum).

Deadline for proposals: May 6th, 2024

Announcement of accepted proposals: May 20th, 2024

Deadline for Speaker confirmation of participation: June 3rd, 2024

Please email the submission to Massimiliano Azzolini, ICMEMOHRI Secretary, at:
secretary.icmemohri@icom.museum

The quality and relevance of the applications will be assessed by the Conference Program Committee.

GRANTS

Limited funds are available for partial grants towards accommodation and travel costs. Priority will be given to selected participants coming from countries in Categories 3 & 4.

SESSION 1 - DECOLONIZATION IN MUSEUMS

A process of decolonization is currently taking place on several levels worldwide. Within the museum sector, a growing movement is emerging that is reconsidering and rethinking the representation of colonial history and the display of cultural artifacts. The overarching aim is to foster a more inclusive, respectful, and accurate representation of history and cultural heritage. This often includes engaging communities originally affected by colonialism, returning stolen artifacts to their original owners, and reinterpreting artifacts to provide a more balanced and inclusive narrative of history and culture. Visitors to museums are thereby encouraged to look at the past in a more critical manner. From this perspective, museums play a vital role in facilitating new insights and understanding. Moreover, they serve as a platform for addressing trauma and fostering a sense of justice.

Memorial and human rights museums focus on specific events related to persecution, war, genocide and human rights violations. This session will be a podium for an exchange of views and discussions on the theme of decolonization. A process of rethinking colonialism and handing over the power of reinterpretation to its original owners can lead to fostering peace, to a more open society with greater social justice, and to reinforcing democratic processes through citizen engagement and an individual's responsibilities.

The interaction of museums regarding the process of decolonization stimulates understanding, cooperation, and solidarity. This can be achieved, for example, through exchanging knowledge, collaborating on exhibitions, joint research projects and expressing solidarity and support.

1. Return of cultural artifacts: A increasing number of African countries are demanding the return of their stolen cultural artifacts transferred to Western museums during the colonial period. This theme centers on the repatriation of these artifacts and restoring the direct link between the heritage and the communities of origin. Although some countries and communities demand that their stolen cultural artifacts be returned, many Western museums are hesitant about handing over these items.

2. Reinterpreting the museum narrative: Both Western and African museums are considering revising their interpretations of history in their presentations. The effort is toward a more balanced inclusive representation that does justice to different perspectives and experiences, including the impact of colonialism, slavery, and other forms of oppression. Reinterpreting the past to provide a more inclusive and diverse representation can lead to conflicts over how certain events are presented. Decolonization is often politically charged, particularly when addressing injustices committed during the colonial period. This can create tensions between governments, communities, and current power structures.

3. Involving communities: Decolonization includes engaging local communities that have been historically oppressed or marginalized in museum presentations. This involvement promotes greater inclusiveness and respect for the cultural traditions and knowledge of these communities. One prerequisite for this is the availability of financial resources and appropriate infrastructure.

4. Education and awareness: Museums play a vital role in educating the public about the legacy of colonialism and the need for decolonization.

SESSION 2 - PERFORMANCE

The 21st century museum is evolving beyond an object-driven setting to a people-centered mission. Memorial & Human Rights Museums have always strived to aid community healing from the trauma of genocide and other acts of injustices against humanity. Such crimes disrupt the fabric of communities, creating a loss of identity and a loss of loved ones, loss of security and the known.

This session intends to explore ways in which African museums are or can become safe spaces for healing. We will look at ways in which the arts, performance in particular, communicate difficult histories and express traumatic experiences as catalysts for deeper understanding, reconciliation, and the goals of non-repetition.

We invite presentations no more than 20 minutes long of case studies or abstracts around the following themes:

1. What can museums do, or have done, to help communities recover from traumas and genocides through the performing arts?
2. Music, dance, oral traditions, spoken words, art therapy and storytelling, and the visual arts provide a platform for healing. By incorporating the performing arts into their programming, can museums in Africa create spaces for communities to recover from traumas and genocides, fostering healing and resilience? Share or suggest examples.
3. How can museums play a more active role in conflict resolution, create spaces for open discussions on contested history and foster peace for a 21st Century Africa... and the world? Can the experiences in diverse African cultures and societies provide learning prototypes for other countries?
4. How can African museums provide a safe space encouraging people to come and discuss their experiences as a means of healing, incorporating a process for reconciliation that provides a balance on the spiritual, physical, and emotional levels?

SESSION 3 - LITERATURE

It was philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) who formulated the controversial statement: "To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric". The apodictically formulated verdict was the subject of debate for decades and motivated him to provide multiple explanations and modifications without retracting the central message about the shameful failure of culture in the face of Auschwitz: "Its disproportion to the horror that has happened and threatens to happen condemns it to cynicism."

Paul Celan's (1920-1970) poetic work is diametrically opposed to this. It is characterized by reflection on language and communication and their ability to preserve and bear witness to what has been experienced, as well as by the processing of borderline experiences, particularly the experience of the Holocaust.

The thinking of both men had a significant, if not always obvious, influence on European Jewish museums and memorials. The banality of the monstrously barbaric on the one side and the power of the word and the expressive possibilities of art on the other have served

and continue to serve as parameters of two possible human extremes, between which the possibilities and horizons presented by museums also operate, sometimes oscillate.

The question in our session is how literature, performance and narrative art forms also shape the content, presentation, and storytelling in African museums as they attempt to not only reflect but also process the various experiences of violence on the African continent. Are oral traditions, folk tales, slave narratives, poetry, novels, and other forms of African literatures integrated into museological forms of representation?

Do literary approaches to, or attempts to deal with, themes such as conflicts between past and present, tradition and modernity, self-determination and heteronomy, resistance, and self-assertion, the individual and the community, politics and development, but also continuities such as colonialism and imperialism, extremism, violence and overexploitation, also play a role in the museum? And if so, do they do so as a specific aesthetic factor that is integrated into the museum narrative? In other words, is such African literature made accessible within a museum space? And do (excerpts from) such African literatures enrich memorial exhibitions as quasi-word objects?

What examples and experiences exist? Which writers already play active roles in African museums or in African diaspora museums?

SESSION 4 - FROM GRAPHIC NOVELS TO NEW MEDIA

"Participation and (self)representation: From Graphic Novels to New Media"

Paul Ricœur's work on memory, history, and narrative, particularly in "Memory, History, Forgetting," emphasizes the significance of visual art in shaping collective memory.

Paul Ricœur's work on the relationship between memory, history and narrative emphasizes the importance of visual art in shaping an individual memory intervened with a collective memory through shared narratives in tension.

Similarly, Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" highlights the importance of expanding perspectives beyond Western boundaries, emphasizing memory as a contested terrain where battles for representation and recognition unfold.

In this sense, visual arts, - from autobiographical comics to new media storytelling are emerging in memorial and human rights museums, supported often by participatory methodologies. Their potential to tell complex stories and convey emotions in an accessible and visually striking way, are increasingly accompanying these spaces. Their capacity to incorporate the experiences and longings of victims as protagonists fuel reflection and debate in the museum sphere, enhancing both their commemorative objectives and their aim for reconciliation.

This session will be followed by a participatory WORKSHOP and an EXHIBIT.

We would like to invite researchers, museum professionals and artists to submit papers that explore, among other topics, the following areas of interest:

1. Visual narratives of trauma and resistance: How might these formats affect the ways in which experiences of violence, trauma and resistance are represented in the museum?

2. Community engagement and co-creation: How can memorial museums and collaborative arts projects engage affected communities in the production of knowledge and memory? What challenges and opportunities arise in the process of co-creation?

3. Emerging media and digital technologies: How are new technologies being used to narrate memory and human rights? What potential do these media have to reach new audiences and generate empathy?

4. Ethics and responsibility in visual representation: What are some of the ethical responsibilities of artists and curators in representing traumatic experiences? How do you address the possible tensions between authenticity and aesthetics in the visual representation of violence and human suffering?