

MATERIAL CULTURE IN TRANSIT

An International
Conference
March 19-20, 2020
University of Bern
Bernisches Historisches Museum



The model was collected in the mid 1960s
by the Swiss filmmaker and author René Gardi
in Korhogo, Northern Côte d'Ivoire.
It is now preserved in the ethnographic collection
of the Bernisches Historisches Museum
© Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern
Photo: Christine Moor

Wax model of a Senoufo mask for a dead-mould brass casting.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2020
BERNISCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM

Orientalischer-Saal, Bernisches Historisches Museum. 10:00 am- 5:00 pm

09:30 – 10:00	Registration	
10:00 – 10:30	Welcome Note	Dr. Jakob Messerli Director Bernisches Historisches Museum Prof. Thomas Späth Center for Global Studies, University of Bern. Zainabu Jallo & Samuel Bachmann
	Organizational Information	
10:30 – 12:00	Session One	Key Note Dr. Boris Wastiau Dr. Lionel Pernet & Dr. Grégoire Mayor Dr. Sandra Ferracuti Chair: Dr. Alexis Malefakis Questions & Discussion
	De-colonizing the Museum	
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch Break	
13:00 – 14:30	Session Two	Key Note Prof. Dr. Nicholas Thomas Prof. Dr. Beate Fricke Dr. Alban von Stockhausen Chair: Dr. Michael Toggweiler Questions and Discussion
	The Biography of Objects	
14:30 – 15:15	Coffee Break	
15:15 – 16:45	Session Three	Key Note Dr. Anna Schmid Prof. Dr. Philipp Schorch Prof. Dr. Michaela Schäuble Chair: Dr. Gudrun Föttinger Questions and Discussion
	Transformation of Meaning	
From 18:30	Speaker's Dinner	Venue TBA

Session One: De-colonizing the Museum

Keynote: Dr. Boris Wastiau; Guest Speakers: Dr. Lionel Pernet, Grégoire Mayor, Dr. Sandra Ferracuti

The story of museums is also a story of dealing with legacies from complicated histories. Today, museums and academic disciplines run the risk of being an accomplice of “the colonial” by underplaying the role of colonial ideas and practices in their emergence. The museum world has been rife with discussions around the restitution of collections acquired in colonial contexts and only very recently has this rather sectoral debate on colonial heritage in European museums received the attention of a broader and global public. In this session, we discuss museum strategies, policies and exhibition management within a process of de-colonization (Wastiau). One of the many responsibilities of Ethnographic museums is to challenge erroneous paradigms by producing self-critical, potentially remedial dialogues through exhibitions such as Linden-Museum’s *Wo ist Afrika?* (Ferracuti). Furthermore, Le Musée cantonal d’archéologie et d’histoire de Lausanne *Derrière les cases de la mission* takes a critical look at the activities of Swiss-French Missionaries in South Africa. (Pernet, Mayor).

Session Two: The Biography of Objects

Keynote: Prof. Nicholas Thomas; Guest Speakers: Prof. Beate Fricke; Dr. Alban von Stockhausen

On a rather theoretical level, this session discusses the idea of a biographical approach to the analysis of material culture: “how do we properly read the story of an object?”. Thus, the historicity of material culture is critical and, in line with this, opportunities and limitations of material culture as a historical source within museum and academic research alike will be a focal point of the discussions (Thomas). The biographies of objects will be exemplified using specific objects from the *Henry-Moser-collection*, exhibited in the presentation hall of the Bernisches Historisches Museum and through a critical look at the said collection’s biographies and movements to the museum (Fricke). Ultimately, this session tackles the challenge of reconstructing biographies of material objects, for which there is no written documentation (von Stockhausen).

Session Three: Transformation of Meaning

Keynote: Dr. Anna Schmid; Guest Speakers: Prof. Philipp Schorch; Prof. Michaela Schäuble.

In communities, objects are constituent parts or representatives of dynamic ideas and changing practices. This session draws from the remodelling of Museum der Kulturen Basel’s exhibition policies ten years ago. MKB continues to work towards disengaging objects from formerly dominant geographical classifications and reframe them within new thematic contexts (Schmid). These politics of display also raise questions regarding the museum’s responsibilities regarding the narratives concerned with the material culture they preserve. Contrarily, the idea of “Indigenizing the Museum”, for instance, is an approach that aims at handing over the narrative responsibility and power over the meaning of an object back to those people who claim to have knowledge of its original meaning (Schorch). A further significant aspect of this session emphasises on the undercurrents of heritagization, which describes a transformation process of material culture in itself. (Schäuble).

FRIDAY, MARCH 20TH, 2020
UNIVERSITY OF BERN

Kuppelraum, Main Building, University of Bern. 9:30 am- 17:15 pm

09:30 – 11:00	Session One: Material Culture and Religion	Chair: Urte Krass Niklas Wolf <i>Voodoo and the state of inter. Bildproduktion und Medien westafrikanischer Vodun zwischen Identität und Alterität</i> Roberto Costa <i>Polyptych and polytemporality: The Case of an Allegoric Asmat Altarpiece.</i> Susan Marti <i>Forgotten objects: Medieval memorial banners moving from the monastery to the museum</i> Discussion
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee Break	
11:15 – 12:45	Session Two: Urban Transformation	Chair: Carine Ayélé Durand Carl Deussen <i>“To give away my collection for free would be nonsense” - The Role of Decorations and Medals in 19th century Ethnographic Collecting.</i> Julien Glauser <i>PLAY Bordeaux: Street skateboarding on works of art, a reflection on art, skateboarding and urban spaces.</i> Etienne Wismer <i>From Travelling to Representation to Expropriation: Considering a Scenic Wallpaper through time</i> Discussion
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch Break	
14:00 – 15:30	Session Three Museology and Representation	Chair: Julien Glauser Cécile Bründlmayer <i>„Out of Context“- Translocation of West African Artefacts to European Museums: The Case of the Leo Frobenius Collection from Mali.</i> Mary Mbewe <i>From chisungu to the museum: Collecting, documenting, and representing the chisungu female initiation at the Moto Moto Museum in Zambia, 1950 to 2016.</i> Zumrad Ilyasova <i>From a Dowry Chest to a Historical Museum Central Asian Textiles from the Henri Moser Collection.</i> Floriane Morin <i>Heritage and political issues. The multiple identities of a Bamoun war calabash acquired by MEG during the collapse of the kingdom</i>
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45 – 17:15	Session Four	Samuel Bachmann & Zainabu Jallo Round up - Discussion
17:15 – 18:45	Open Apéro	

Material Culture and Religion

The session focuses on the materiality of religion and the modes in which religious objectives and beliefs have been communicated through, and sustained by, material practice. We pay attention to material culture as a crucial feature of religion following cross-cultural and parochial examples. These may signify physical structures, apparel, ritual artefacts drawing broadly from research topics from different disciplinary perspectives.

Urban Transformations

Urbanization is understood as an agent of transformation of inhabited spaces of culture and identity. When it comes to the investigation of the histories of material culture, urban spaces pose additional challenges and feature specific characteristics. How are the transformation processes invented and expressed through the lens of urban morphology? Furthermore, serial and mass products seem to rid themselves of singularity and uniqueness, while in heritage studies and practice, these qualities seemed to be essential for the definition of an object's cultural, social, or historical significance. Material culture and heritage in urban spaces therefore require particular attention.

Museology and Representation

Museums have institutional power over the transformation of meaning and memory, and play a critical role in the "politics of display"; this role calls for critical exploration of the responsibilities of the museum and the archive in creating narratives and establishing an object's history. Here, the role of the curator seems to be critical, although the function of the curator might not only be limited to the museum curator but to all persons that fulfil the role of an artefact's interpreter, be it on a subjective day-to-day basis or under scientific scrutiny.

Zainabu Jallo

Department of Social Anthropology
University of Bern,
Lerchenweg 36
Postfach 999
CH-3012

Department of Anthropology
USP – Universidade de São Paulo
Rua do Lago,
717 - CEP 05508-080
São Paulo SP, Brazil.
zainabu.jallo@cgs.unibe.ch

Samuel Bachmann

Bernisches Historisches Museum,
Collection Department
Scientific Assistant
Africa and Americas
Helvetiaplatz 5
Postfach 149
CH-3000 Bern 6

Telefon +41 31 350 77 46
Fax +41 31 350 77 99
Samuel.bachmann@bhm.ch

Detailed information on how to get to the venues can be found on the conference website.