



# National



# Museums

## Narrating the Nation



## Programme and abstracts

A two-day international conference organised by the National Museum of Ireland and the National College of Art and Design, Dublin on Friday 29 October and Friday 5 November 2021

Online with some panels and talks onsite at the National Museum of Ireland - Decorative Arts and History, Collins Barracks, Dublin 7

Free to attend. Open to all.  
Register at [www.museum.ie/](http://www.museum.ie/)



# National Museums - Narrating the Nation

The National Museum of Ireland originated in the collections of various institutions. When the museum opened as the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin, it was part of a network that included the South Kensington museums in London and its collections included Irish antiquities, decorative arts, ethnographical collections and natural history specimens. Following the foundation of the Irish state in 1922, its focus shifted to include Irish folklife material and artefacts connected with Irish archaeology.

The question of who or what is the nation has been asked repeatedly throughout the Museum's history, and always in response to the needs and concerns of the present.



View of the exhibition to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Easter Rising, central court, Kildare Street, 1941. (Image: National Museum of Ireland)

Ireland has also had the distinction of being a colony and engaged in colonial activities as part of the British Empire and through military, missionary and commercial activities. In our age – marked by identity conflicts, the politics of decolonisation, and populism in Europe and elsewhere – the ideology of the nation has become a matter of keen concern again.

This conference will provide a forum for discussion of current museum practices and debates in different national settings. Moreover, with plans in development for new 20th Century History of Ireland Galleries, it will support the task of helping the NMI to reflect on its current and future displays.



View of the *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibition tracing Ireland's military history from 1550 into the 21st Century at the Collins Barracks site of the National Museum of Ireland. (Image: National Museum of Ireland)

**Programme - Friday 29 October 2021**

To register go to [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_J0v3vcNgQWeM-E3oyZkGyw](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_J0v3vcNgQWeM-E3oyZkGyw)

**10.00 Welcome by Lynn Scarff, Director of the National Museum of Ireland and Professor Sarah Glennie, Director of the National College of Art and Design**

**10.15-12.30 Panel 1 – *The National Museum of Ireland: Past, Present and Future* chaired by Brenda Malone, NMI**

Battle Trophies, Personal Relics, and a Commissioned Canoe: Irish Colonial Collecting in the National Museum of Ireland

Rachel Hand, Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Folklore Collectors and Ethnologists: Material Culture and the Work of the Irish Folklore Commission  
Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, National Irish Folklore Archive

Inheriting the National Museum

Professor Elizabeth Crooke, University of Ulster

Past Actions, Present Opportunities: The Natural History Museum in the Nineteenth Century  
Dr Sherra Murphy, Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology

**12.30-14.00 Break**

**14.00-15.30 Panel 2 – *Museums and Politics Today* chaired by David Crowley, NCAD**

Crushing Culture, Dismantling Defiance: the Politics of Mesopotamian Museology  
Isra Samara Saymour, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto

Russia—My History: A Participatory Museum or a Disciplinary Institution?  
Alina Parker (Ryabovolova), University of Massachusetts Amherst

Holy Heritage, Secular Symbol: Hagia Sophia and Narratives of National Identity in the Republic of Turkey

Dr Gregory Goalwin, Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois, USA

**15.30-16.00 Break**

**16.00-17.30 Panel 3 – *Museums After Conflict* chaired by Dr Audrey Whitty, NMI**

For the Museum Yet-to-Come: Preserving Non-National Memory in Lebanon

Dr Renée Ragin Randall, Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

The (National) Key Problem of Sarajevo's Lock-Down of Cultural Institutions from 2011  
Sandra Bradvić, art historian, curator and art critic

Sites of Contested National Identity and History: Peace Museums

Dr. Joyce Apsel, Clinical Professor, Liberal Studies, College of Arts & Sciences, New York University

**17.30-18.00 Break**

**18.00-19.30 *A Nation's Story is Many Stories***

Keynote lecture from Dr Michèle Gates Moresi, Curator of Collections, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

## Programme - Friday 5 November 2021

To register go to [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_kj15aJuHTp6l4qO49jS2yA](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kj15aJuHTp6l4qO49jS2yA)

9.00-10.00 Arapata Hakiwai, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in conversation with Brian Crowley, Collections Curator, Kilmainham Gaol Museum, Dublin

10.00-12.00 Panel 4 - *Museums in Ireland – Communities and Difference* chaired by Gina O’Kelly, Irish Museums Association

On the Irish Traveller Community and Museums

Rosa Meehan, curator at the National Museum of Country Life, and Oein DeBhairduin, researcher and community activist

Making the Future: Creative Approaches to Dealing with the Legacy of the Past

William Blair, Director of Collections at National Museums NI, and Hannah Crowdy, Head of Curatorial at National Museums NI

A Subversive Shrine: Alternative histories in Kilmainham Gaol

Brian Crowley, Collections Curator, Kilmainham Gaol Museum, Dublin

12.00-12.30 Break

12.30-13.30 ***Rethinking Rural Life: Materiality and The Question of Racial Capitalism in the Museum***

Keynote lecture from Professor Wayne Modest, Director of Content National Museum of WorldCultures, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam and Head of the Research Center for Material Culture

13.30-14.30 Break

14.30-16.30 Panel 5 - *Museums in Post-Colonial Societies* chaired by Dr Lisa Godson, programme leader, MA Design History and Material Culture, NCAD

‘World Cultures’ in the North: Histories of Representation in National Museums NI

Dr Briony Widdis, ESRC-funded Postdoctoral Fellow, Queen’s University Belfast

Nation Building and Lahore Museum (1947-2000)

Komal Afzaal, History Department, Government College University Lahore

The National Gallery of Canada - Settler-Colonial Myth-making and Decolonization

Dr Anne Dymond, Associate Professor of Art History/Museum Studies, The University of Lethbridge, and Dr Devon Smither, Associate Professor of Art History/Museum Studies at The University of Lethbridge

Politics and Pride: The Historic Museum of Abomey (Benin)

Dr Lynne Ellsworth Larsen, Assistant Professor of Art History, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

16.30-17.00 Break

17.00-18.30 ***Counter-Conduct in The Museum or the Practice of Academic Iconoclasm***

Keynote lecture from Professor Clémentine Deliss, Global Humanities Professor of History of Art, University of Cambridge

# Keynote speakers

18.00-19.30 Friday 29 October 2021

## ***A Nation’s Story is Many Stories***

Dr Michèle Gates Moresi will reflect on the creation of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture which opened in Washington DC in 2016, as well as the Museum’s response to the changing politics of identity in the USA in recent years.

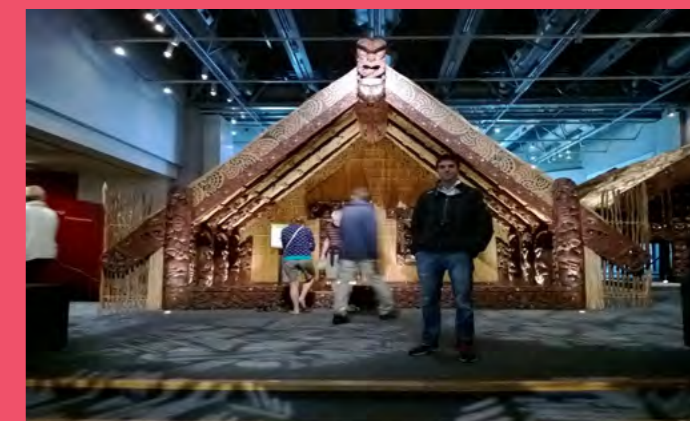
Dr Michèle Gates Moresi joined the Museum in 2006, ten years before its opening and was centrally involved in building its collection and planning its galleries. As Curator of Collections, she has been responsible for major acquisitions including the contents of Mae Reeves’ millinery store in Philadelphia, one of the first businesses to be owned by a black woman in the city, and Falls Church, Virginia campaign office for Barack Obama’s presidential election campaign. Working with colleagues at the museum she curated *More Than a Picture: Selections from the Photography Collection at the NMAAHC (2017)* and edited the book *Pictures With Purpose: Early Photographs from the National Museum of African American History and Culture (2019)*.



9.00-10.00 Friday 5 November 2021

## ***Arapata Hakiwai, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, in conversation with Brian Crowley, Collections Curator, Kilmainham Gaol Museum***

Arapata Hakiwai has tribal affiliations to Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Porou. Arapata Hakiwai has worked with collections, exhibition development, governance, professional development and senior management in a long career as a museum professional. Arapata Hakiwai is the Kaihautū, at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. He was previously the Head, Mātauranga Māori at Te Papa and he has undertaken many research projects over the last 15 years. Arapata Hakiwai helped lead the restoration of the Te Whānau-a-Ruata-upare carved meeting house ‘Ruatepupuke’ in the Field Museum, Chicago, in the early 1990s and is currently the principal investigator of a research project that investigates the creation of a digital database of Māori and Moriori taonga held in overseas museums.



Above: Te Hau ki Turanga, a Maori Meeting House, 1842, at Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand, photographed by Toni Almodóvar Escuder, 2014 (Flickr, reproduced under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 licence)

Left: School children watch the story of slavery at the time of the American Revolution at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington DC, 2017, GPA Photo Archive (Flickr, reproduced under a CC BY-NC 2.0 licence)

# Keynote speakers

12.30-13.30 Friday 5 November 2021

## ***Rethinking Rural Life: Materiality and The Question of Racial Capitalism in the Museum***

Professor Wayne Modest will explore the ways in which class and race overlap in the museum, focusing particularly on the interest of ethnographic museums in questions of the rural, and especially in the agricultural.

Wayne Modest is Head of the Research Center for Material Culture in Leiden and Professor of Material Culture and Critical Heritage Studies (by special appointment) in the faculty of humanities at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. Modest was previously Head of the curatorial department at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum in London, and Director of the Museums of History and Ethnography in Kingston, Jamaica. He has held visiting scholar positions at the Yale Centre for British Art, Yale University and the School for Museums Studies, New York University. Modest has (co)curated several exhibitions including, *What We Forget – Alana Jelinek, Rajkamal Kahlon, Servet Kocyigit, and Randa Maroufi*, which explored the art making and the memory of colonialism in current discussions about European citizenship, its pasts, present, and futures.

17.00-18.30 Friday 5 November 2021

## ***Counter-Conduct in The Museum or the Practice of Academic Iconoclasm***

Professor Clémentine Deliss will address what is required to decolonise the museum today, making the case for academic iconoclasm, ‘a form of counter-conduct that blankly refutes disciplinary divisions inherited from 19th century European scholasticism’.

Clémentine Deliss works across the borders of contemporary art, curatorial practice, and critical anthropology. She is Global Humanities Professor of History of Art, University of Cambridge and Associate Curator at KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin, where she is currently developing the ‘Metabolic Museum-University’ with a peer group. Between 2010–2015, she was Director of the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt/Main, where she instituted a transdisciplinary lab to remediate collections within a post-ethnological context. Selected exhibitions include ‘Portable Homelands. From Field to Factory’ for ‘Hello World. Revising a Collection’, National Galerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2018); and for the Weltkulturen Museum: ‘Object Atlas - Fieldwork in the Museum’ (2011); ‘Trading Style’ (2013), ‘Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger)’ (2014). Earlier exhibitions include ‘Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa’ Whitechapel Gallery (1995); and ‘Lotte or the transformation of the object’ Styrian Autumn (1990). Between 1996-2007, she produced the itinerant, independent artists’ and writers’ organ, Metronome, which was twice part of documenta (1997, dX and 2007, d12). Her most recent book is *The Metabolic Museum* (2020).

## Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Panel 1 – National Museum of Ireland: Past, Present and Future

### ***Battle Trophies, Personal Relics, and a Commissioned Canoe: Irish Colonial Collecting in the National Museum of Ireland***

Rachel Hand

From its opening in 1890 the Science and Art Museum, Dublin (later the National Museum of Ireland) exhibited indigenous material in an Ethnographic Gallery prominently situated in the Kildare Street site. These objects were collected from the late 18th century onwards by Irish explorers, military and naval officers, and later emigrants, missionaries, and colonial administrators across the British Empire. These included gifts of *taonga* (ancestral treasures) imbued with *mana* (prestige), commissioned artworks such as a model headhunting canoe, souvenirs from settler-colonists, as well as war trophies and material looted from the royal palaces of Kumase and Benin. Their deposit and display in the national institution made tangible the opportunities available in far-away lands, and legitimised and glorified corporate and militant colonialism.

However by the 1970s the beaded hide coat of executed Métis rebel and leader Louis Riel (1844-1885) confiscated by Irish Mountie Corporal Harry Green was deemed a ‘personal relic’ with the ‘remotest relevance’ to Irish history. It was subsequently sent to the Canadian Museum of History, Canada. The Gallery was dismantled and replaced with the Treasury, which focused on the development of Irish art. The ethnographic material was packed away emerging fleetingly for exhibitions in Ireland and abroad.

A biographical focus on the contexts of collecting and how these stories of gifts, loot, and commodities were made visible or effectively erased in the displays, reveals the changing focus of the Museum since Independence in 1922 and the contradictions of Ireland as both colonised and coloniser. As the Museum prepares to reconstitute looted Benin material it seems fitting to debate the values and futures of the Collection in the 21st century.

**Rachel Hand** has worked with the ethnographic collections at the National Museum of Ireland and from 2006 has been Collections Manager for Anthropology, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. Her current research interests include Irish collecting within the British Empire, early Pacific voyages and museum display histories.

### ***Folklore Collectors and Ethnologists: Material Culture and the Work of the Irish Folklore Commission***

Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh

From its inception in 1935, material culture, including the recording and study of vernacular artefacts and practices, comprised a key element of the Irish Folklore Commission’s programme of field work. Its field collectors also collaborated closely with colleagues in the National Museum to identify and acquire artefacts deemed worthy of preservation.

**Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh** is Director of the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin. The NFC curates the collections of the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-70), which are currently being digitized and published on its digital platform [www.duchas.ie](http://www.duchas.ie), and promotes new folklore and oral history collecting in Ireland. With a background in folklore and archaeology, he has written on different aspects of Irish oral literature, vernacular architecture, traditional boats and fishing. The cultural landscape of Atlantic island and coastal communities is of particular interest to him. His PhD dealt with the subject of story-telling in fishing communities in Corca Dhuibhne, west Kerry. He has edited a number of studies, including *New Survey of Clare Island, Volume 1: History and Cultural Landscape* (1999, co-edited with Kevin Whelan); *Border-Crossing: Mummification in Cross-Border and Cross-Community Contexts* (2007, co-edited with Séamas Ó Catháin, Séamus Mac Mathúna agus Anthony D. Buckley); *Traditional Boats of Ireland* (2008); and *Atlantic Currents, Essays on Lore, Literature and Language* (2012, co-edited with Bo Almqvist, Liam Mac Mathúna, Seosamh Watson and Séamus Mac Mathúna).

## ***Inheriting the National Museum*** Professor Elizabeth Crooke

This paper considers the connections between past, present, and future in the museum setting through the lens of inheritance. A museum, and its collections, is often referred to as ‘societal inheritance’: that great gift from the past and we are the custodians for future generations. With that comes assumptions and expectations of what a museum should be, how it should perform, and the duty of those working within museums to continue its legacy. By considering examples of how the National Museum of Ireland has been framed, this paper will explore how we might reshape our thinking about what duty means in relation to a national museum.

**Professor Elizabeth Crooke** is Principal Investigator of UK Research and Innovation funded-project *Museums, Crisis and Covid-19: Vitality and Vulnerabilities* (Dec 2020–May 2022), which is investigating how the museum sector will emerge and refocus in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis. The project is in collaboration with the Museums Association, NI Museums Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and regional museums in Northern Ireland. This new UKRI project builds on her position as a leading academic in museum and heritage studies and her close connection with the museum sector. Her co-edited collection *Heritage after Conflict: Northern Ireland* (Routledge 2018) brought together scholars with varying perspectives on the heritage landscape in Northern Ireland post-1998. Her peer reviewed journal articles can be found in *Memory Studies*; *Cultural Geographies*; *International Journal of Heritage Studies*; *Irish Political Studies*; *Liminalities: Journal of Performance Studies*; and *Journal of the History of Collections*.

## ***Past Actions, Present Opportunities: The Natural History Museum in the Nineteenth Century*** Dr Sherra Murphy

When the Natural History Museum was declared ‘the first national museum’ during the inauguration of its new building in 1857, it was the first permanent purpose-built public venue for collection and display in Ireland. That Ireland’s first national museum was devoted to science, rather than antiquities and art, has

been widely overlooked in disciplinary histories. It was instrumental in defining Ireland as a physical entity, examining geology, zoology, and natural resources. A significant proportion of the museum’s nineteenth century collections were donated by Irish people from various backgrounds who wanted to participate in natural history, the Victorian era’s great citizen science project. It was also the receptacle for materials collected by Irish men serving in the Crown’s military and colonial missions, complicating subsequent national narratives. The persistent foundational myth that Irish science and museums were engineered solely by the Anglo-Irish elite is flawed, and the contents of archives and period sources evidence a sense of complexity and nuance that invite rigorous interdisciplinary re-examination. This paper will use three examples from the pre-Twentieth Century history of the museum to show the necessity of its return to a more central position in conversations around museums as arbiters of Ireland’s national identity.

**Dr Sherra Murphy** is Senior Lecturer in Critical and Cultural Studies, teaching visual and material culture at the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design, and Technology. Her PhD at University College, Dublin (2015), examined the formation of the Natural History Museum Dublin as an interlocking set of historical, scientific, social, and visual frameworks. The monograph from this research, *The First National Museum’: Dublin’s Natural History Museum in the mid-nineteenth century*, will be published by Cork University Press in October 2021. Dr Murphy is the 2019 recipient of the Royal Dublin Society Library and Archives Bursary for conducting research in the Society’s equestrian archive, looking at the origins of the Dublin Horse Show in the mid-Victorian period through the lens of Irish cultural history, leisure, and social change. The first article from that research, ‘Many Attend Chiefly in Search of Pleasure’: The Great National Horse Show at the Royal Dublin Society, 1668–80’, is scheduled for publication in *Irish Historical Studies* in May 2023. She also currently represents IADT on the Academic Development Group of the Creative Futures Academy, an innovative collaborative venture between IADT, NCAD, and UCD’s College of Arts and Humanities.

## Panel 2 – Museums and Politics Today

### ***Crushing Culture, Dismantling Defiance: the Politics of Mesopotamian Museology*** Isra Samara Saymour

For the better part of two centuries, Iraq has served as the site of multiple volatile nation-building projects. While much research has illuminated the importance of natural resource conflict and imperial extraction in this region, less attention has been paid to the central role of Iraq’s material history in these struggles. Following the complex history of material culture and state-building in Iraq, beginning with the British establishment of a national museum and culminating in the Iraq War, this study explicates the symbolic power of cultural heritage and the ways in which this power is leveraged in nationalist state-building projects. Western and Iraqi groups have strategically ‘curated’ an Iraqi identity through the strategic inclusion (and exclusion) of certain types of material culture in museums and discourses. This strategy is effective because material culture drives group identity and social cohesion; hence, in the political sphere, it becomes malleable, and can be molded to drive different political agendas. In such a context, the widespread destruction and looting of Iraqi heritage, promoted by the calculated action (and inaction) of the United States and Allied forces, constitutes an imperial strategy of domination. By robbing the Iraqi people of their tangible past, they were also deprived of their ability to mobilize a coherent political resistance. Simultaneously, the stolen heritage was used by European and North American museums to craft discourses legitimating invasion and occupation. Treating the Iraqi case as symptomatic of the wider museum landscape, I hence position the cultural heritage trade as a colonial-imperial process of dispossession that facilitates the continued subordination of post-colonial peoples.

**Isra Samara Saymour** is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto. Isra’s research lies at the intersection of crime and culture. Her PhD project, ‘Stealing, Smuggling, and Selling: the Illicit Antiquities Trade, Cultural Loss, and Coloniality,’ investigates the overlaps of crime, law, and coloniality in the art world, through a multidisciplinary and

mixed-methods analysis of museums, antiquities dealing, and cultural heritage collection. This work also pays special attention to repatriation and reclamation of cultural heritage in a postcolonial age.

### ***Russia—My History: A Participatory Museum or a Disciplinary Institution?*** Alina Parker (Ryabovolova)

In 2014, the Russian state annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea—an event that forcibly changed national boundaries, transformed Russia’s relations with the international community, and divided its citizens into annexation supporters and opponents. The ensuing political controversy called for a new vision of Russia’s political community and a historical narrative that would support this vision. The multimedia historical exhibit *Russia—My History* answered that call. *My History* began in 2013 as a four-day exhibit created by religious-political activists (Orthodox monarchists) but, after the annexation, grew and transformed into a countrywide chain of 25 museums, approved by the Russian Ministry of Education as an ‘interactive supplement’ to the public-school curriculum.

Based on my long-term ethnographic observation and using a performance-studies approach (Schechner, 1985; McKenzie, 2001), this paper analyzes *My History*’s contradictory performances, which draw on both the disciplinary and participatory museum models. Created by multiple authors and continuously reiterated and revised, *My History*’s content is multivocal and eclectic; yet it has been recruited by the state to articulate an unambiguous historical narrative. *My History*’s adoption of the participatory museum format is also paradoxical. Whereas this format usually promotes personal engagement and reflexivity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2000), it conflicts with *My History*’s efforts of producing loyal subjects of the state.

This paper discusses the ways in which *My History* reconciles these contradictions and manages its multivocality and eclecticism, fitting its fragments into a coherent whole. It argues that the primary feature of *My History*’s performance is excess (McKenzie, 2001)—a combined effect of its massive scale and the abundance of multimedia, including collages, videos, touchscreens, and soundtracks. In its excessiveness, *My History* balances between

a disciplinary mode of museum performance and a participatory one, applying participatory technologies in pursuit of disciplinary ends.

**Alina Parker** is a Doctoral Candidate in Communication at UMass Amherst, currently completing her dissertation titled 'Russia—My History: The Amazing Transformations of a History Exhibit in Post-Crimean Russia.' Her research interests include nationalism, performance studies, discourse analysis, and Russian politics.

### ***Holy Heritage, Secular Symbol: Hagia Sophia and Narratives of National Identity in the Republic of Turkey***

Dr Gregory Goalwin

In 2020 President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey reinstated the Hagia Sophia as a working mosque. Built as a Christian church in 537 and converted to a mosque following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the edifice had been a secular museum since 1935.

Erdogan's decision to reclassify Hagia Sophia as a mosque was wildly divisive: it was met with passionate acclaim by religiously devout Turks but was immediately criticized by many Western cultural organizations, Christian groups, and even secular Turks. But how do ancient sacred spaces become so important to modern religious, political, and cultural concerns? Who has the right to claim such ancient legacies as elements of their own cultural heritage, and just as importantly to exclude others from doing the same? How does the heritagization of religious elements play into complicated relationships between religion and secular definitions of the nation?

This paper approaches these questions by examining the twin debates around the secularization and de-secularization of Hagia Sophia. Drawing on historical data from the founding of the Turkish Republic and contemporary governmental and media reports about the decision to reinstate Hagia Sophia as a mosque, I argue that such conversations about heritage have played a key role in the conceptualization of modern Turkish identity. I place the history of Hagia Sophia within larger debates about the relationship between religion and secularism in Turkey. I argue that the history of Hagia Sophia reveals a complicated balancing act between a Turkish na-

tionism that has used religion to marginalize non-Muslim populations as not truly 'Turkish' while struggling to define the extent to which Muslim identity would serve as a core element of Turkish identity. In this regard, debates over material heritage such as Hagia Sophia serve as a microcosm for larger conflicts over the role of religion, secularism, and national identity in Turkish public life, as well as its relationship with Europe and the larger world.

**Dr Gregory Goalwin** is Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois, USA. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. His work examines the role of religion and culture in the formation of national identity across a wide array of historical and geographical contexts. His monograph *Borders of Belief: Religious Nationalism and the Formation of Identity in Ireland and Turkey* is forthcoming from Rutgers University Press.

### Panel 3 – Museums After Conflict

#### ***For the Museum Yet-to-Come: Preserving Non-National Memory in Lebanon***

Dr Renée Ragin Randall

Lebanon has long frustrated those who try to discuss the country, its inhabitants and its institutions in terms of a 'national' anything. Since its birth as a modern nation-state in 1946, and certainly in the aftermath of its 1975-1990 civil war, the country has been governed by a sectarian political elite which has repeatedly collapsed the state and contributed to a fragmented populace.

As such, musealization projects in Lebanon in the last decades have been unconventional: the vast majority of those that exist (or once existed) are funded by specific sects or a local NGO with European funding and do not even attempt a national narrative. At least one sectarian museum (without European funding, it should be noted) is of such quality that it might be considered on par with world-class museums. Nonetheless, these archives have had a troubled history: they have been bombed out of existence, linked to terrorist or far-right nationalist movements, and the founder of another was the victim of political assassination a few months ago.

By contrast, government efforts to

create national museums and archives have been stymied by political infighting and a general lack of momentum. They often never quite get off the ground or close unexpectedly. Even here, the narrative is not quite 'national' but represents a particularly cosmopolitan view offered from the capital city, Beirut, and not largely representative of the rest of the nation.

In this paper, I explain the decentralization of institutionalized narratives and outline the pluralism in the visions of nation and nationhood articulated by multiple parties. Ultimately, I argue that such projects not only push against the nation-building ethos normally associated with a post-conflict and post-colonial model, but also against the globalizing standards for museums that have taken root elsewhere in the Middle East, including Gulf States.

**Dr Renée Ragin Randall** is an LSA Collegiate Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, and will be Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and Middle East Studies as of Fall 2022. She earned her PhD in Literature from Duke University in 2020 and her BA from Harvard University. Her research broadly attends to literary and artistic representation of the psychic aftermath of violence between civilians. She is currently at work on a monograph analyzing the concept and representation of 'madness' in literature, film and art about the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war. She has published in and served as the invited co-editor for a special edition of *Cultural Dynamics*. Her work has also appeared in *Mashriq and Mahjar* and *The Journal of Veterans Studies*. Prior to Duke, Dr. Randall was a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State.

#### ***The (National) Key Problem of Sarajevo's Lock-Down of Cultural Institutions from 2011***

Sandra Bradvić

On grounds of the Dayton Peace Agreement from 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH) should find itself divided into two ethnically different entities by its constitution. In 2011 seven museums in Sarajevo had to close their doors for the public. The reason: Disputes by the government about which 'nation' or 'ethnic group' these institutions should represent, 'whose' they are and 'who' should pay for them. Mean-

while, self-organized artistic and curatorial collectives have introduced new organizational forms which surpass the limits of the national question and have suggested new ways of how to use their own practice as a medium to create a common, participatory public sphere.

This contribution addresses the following questions: In how far should self-organized collectives be seen as an alternative current, since their counterparts, namely art institutions, have largely become dysfunctional and inefficient? In how far can examples from BIH be considered relevant contributions to the international discourse, critically negotiating traditional mandates and (national) representational models of public institutions? In how far can choosing to treat curatorial practice as the 'object' of art historical investigation be considered an adequate methodological shift to overcome narratives based on dualistic models such as self-organized/institutional, alternative/official, local/global, national/international or East/West?

**Sandra Bradvić** is an art historian, curator and art critic (based in Zurich). She has been engaged as both lecturer and curator at several educational and cultural institutions, including the Institute for Art History at the University of Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich), the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Kunsthalle Basel and most recently Muzeum Susch. As a result of the basic research of artistic and institutional archives for her PhD project *Institution and Self-Organization. Historiography of Curatorial Practice in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1982-2011*, she founded the Association for research, documentation and artist representation SKLOP in Sarajevo in 2017. Given the fact, that cultural and educational institutions in BIH today are rarely able to assume their public contract to invest in and investigate into art, especially contemporary artistic and curatorial practice with a critical distance towards institutional practice, the foundation of SKLOP has been driven by the attempt to identify and examine pivotal archival materials. The digitalization of the Zvono art group's archive (Sarajevo, 1982-1992) only marks the inception of a series of similar undertakings, concerning other artistic positions, projects and figures, which were key for the development of contemporary artistic and curatorial practice in BIH from the 1980s until today.

## **Sites of Contested National Identity and History: Peace Museums**

Dr. Joyce Apsel

This paper situates a series of peace museums world-wide within the broader category of museums for peace and examines how through exhibits, workshops and activism they engage audiences with reinterpretations of hegemonic national narratives and include silenced and ignored histories. Often, they promote elements of positive peace through activism and re-thinking meanings, memories and national identities. These sites include archives and exhibits on anti-war to anti-nuclear state policy and promote social justice themes at, for example, the Bradford Peace Museum in the UK to the Kyoto Museums for World Peace in Japan. They also include cultures of peace through peace art from quilts to protest posters and symbols. Also, there are a series of natural sites and traveling exhibits such as the African Peace Movement fostering indigenous practices and identity. And, still other peace museums emphasize recognition of long silenced, state inflicted harms from sexual slavery to massacres and targeting specific groups through direct and structural violence. While a few sites such as the Oslo Peace Centre are state supported, most peace museums are private and small, and dispute state myths and silences in official national narratives.

The final section of this paper looks at several self-described peace museums and museums for peace who, in fact, through their exhibits promote the national narrative, and serve as vehicles of propaganda for exclusive nationalism rooted in national victimization narratives.

**Dr Joyce Apsel** is Clinical Professor in Liberal Studies in the College of Arts & Sciences at New York University and President of the Institute for the Study of Genocide. She teaches courses in human rights, global violence and related subjects; and was a recipient of the NYU Distinguished Teaching Award (2009). Publications include *Introducing Peace Museums* (Routledge, 2016), nominated for the 2017 Dayton Literary Peace Prize in non-fiction; co-editor of *Museums and Sites of Persuasion: Politics, Memory and Human Rights* (Routledge 2019); *Genocide Matters: Ongoing Issues and Emerging Perspectives* (Routledge 2014), and *Museums for Peace: Transforming Cultures*

(INMP, 2012). and editor of *Darfur: Genocide before our Eyes* (3rd ed. 2007).

### Panel 4 - Museums in Ireland – Communities and Difference

#### **On the Irish Traveller Community and Museums**

Rosa Meehan and Oein DeBhairduin

National museums today regularly discuss openness to conflicted histories, engagement with communities and the presentation of ‘hidden histories’. But how are those traditionally marginalised represented or afforded space ‘at the table’? This talk will focus on nomadic people, and in particular the Irish Traveller/ Mincéir/ Lucht siúil in the Ireland in the twentieth century.

The main conduit of information, contextualization and input within the formal National Museum network in Ireland has been, in relation to native ethnic minority people (most often called ‘Travellers’), traditionally relayed via the ‘settled normative’ gaze, framing and interpretation. It has been void of solid specific inputs by Travellers, communal considerations and community-led narratives. The National Museum of Ireland’s ‘Minceir Misli’ programme prioritized community voices and also acknowledged lacks. Contested and hidden histories of the nation may be revealed when national museums work on a continuous engagement process that includes an authentic partnership, and learning environment that enables inclusive of diversity, assessment, transition of the programme, and enduring and new relationships.

The question we will discuss is how can the voice of Ireland’s native ethnic minority community be kept clear and aware – and avoid the risk of national museums presenting an alternative version the community.

**Rosa Meehan** is a curator at the National Museum of Country Life and **Oein DeBhairduin** is a Minceiri/Irish Traveller with a strong history in community activism and folklore.

#### **Making the Future: Creative Approaches to Dealing with the Legacy of the Past**

William Blair and Hannah Crowdy

As a national organisation, National Museums NI faces the challenge of more than one part

of our name and identity being highly contested. So how do we operate in a context where there is no consensus around the very idea of ‘the nation’? The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 may have brought a fragile peace, but the legacy of the past hangs heavy here. We are a society characterised by divided political allegiances, and there is an urgent need to address this through mutual respect and understanding, empathy and reconciliation. As a publicly funded body, we have an important role to play in place making and in supporting the government’s commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. The foundation of our work is ethical curatorship, and we extend an open invitation for dialogue and participation. We are active within the social peace process and we strive for inclusivity, ensuring we encompass multiple perspectives and diverse voices. This paper will explore how we continue to redefine National Museums NI as ‘Here for Good’; rooted in this place for the long term, for the benefit of all, and proactive in shaping a better future.

**William Blair** is the Director of Collections at National Museums NI, and **Hannah Crowdy** the Head of Curatorial. They are progressing a change agenda within National Museums NI, and are committed to unlocking the potential of collections and developing museums as dynamic, relevant and risk-taking places. Significant projects they have led on include the Titanic exhibition at the Ulster Transport Museum, and the Modern History and The Troubles and Beyond galleries at the Ulster Museum. William was recently Chair of the Irish Museums Association, and Hannah is a member of the ICOM UK Committee and the Ethics Committee for the UK Museums Association.

#### **A Subversive Shrine: Alternative histories in Kilmainham Gaol**

Brian Crowley

Few buildings have experienced a more dramatic transformation than Kilmainham Gaol, which went from being a building associated with shame and punishment to its current role as a national shrine and one of the principal memorials to the revolutionary struggle for Irish independence. In a tradition in which ‘A Felon’s cap is the noblest crown’, Irish republicans managed to subvert the original function of the prison to such an extent that in 1966 at

the official opening of the prison as a museum, President Eamon de Valera, a former inmate himself, declared that Kilmainham Gaol was now a ‘hallowed place’.

While Kilmainham may have experienced a form of apotheosis at the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, other histories which were more troubling to the new Irish State laid lurking, though unacknowledged, in this national ‘holy of holies’. Along with Emmet, Parnell and Pearse, there were also stories of the repression of queer lives and the unenviable fate of women deemed sexually transgressive by the wider Irish society. Kilmainham Gaol had also been at the centre of an international 19th century penal system in which a brutalised and colonised people became tools in the destruction of another colonised society half a world away.

For over fifty years, Kilmainham Gaol has been the embodiment of a particular kind of Irish identity, in which we see ourselves as an heroic people who resisted, and ultimately overthrew, our imperial masters. In this presentation I hope to look at ways in which Kilmainham Gaol might also be a space in which we can also look at some of the more unpalatable aspects of our past, such as the treatment of marginalised women and the LGBT community, as well as Ireland’s complex, and sometimes complicit, relationship with the wider European imperial project.

**Brian Crowley** is Curator of Collections for Kilmainham Gaol Museum and the Pearse Museum. Originally from Naas, Co. Kildare, he studied English and History in Trinity College and then completed a Masters in Museology in the University of East Anglia. He has served as a director of the Irish Museums Association and editor of its journal, *Museums Ireland*.

### Panel 5 - Museums in Post-Colonial Societies

#### **‘World Cultures’ in the North: Histories of Representation in National Museums NI**

Dr Briony Widdis

This paper examines imperial connections that led to what is now the World Cultures Collection in National Museums NI. It considers the impact of Partition on the collection; and the ensuing complexity of using ethnographic

collections to shape historical representation in Northern Ireland. The paper argues that, throughout the twentieth century, the potential of the topics of colonialism and Empire to become politically inflammatory was such that they were not explicitly tackled as interpretative themes. Instead, the Ulster Museum discussed these collections through biographical narratives relating to people from the north of Ireland; as generalised representations of cultural practices in distant places; and as a means of understanding the history of the world through a Northern Ireland lens. Reviewing the collection in the light of the decolonisation movement, the paper discusses recent National Museums NI initiatives to tackle prejudice, address exclusion and encourage diverse dialogue, including collaborative engagements with source and local communities. Finally, it considers the potential for new approaches to colonial collections within shared but non-neutral museums in Northern Ireland.

**Dr Briony Widdis** is an anthropologist and ethnography curator by background and has worked in museums and heritage in Northern Ireland since 1999. She is currently an ESRC-funded Postdoctoral Fellow at Queen's University Belfast and is delivering her research project, 'Museums, Empire and Northern Irish Identity' in partnership with National Museums NI, the Irish Museums Association, Northern Ireland Museums Council and Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at the University of Maynooth. She is Editor of *Museum Ireland*, the annual journal of the Irish Museums Association.

### ***Nation Building and Lahore Museum (1947-2000)***

Komal Afzaal

Lahore Museum was inherited to Pakistan from colonials (British), and even after independence, the Lahore Museum is disseminating the same colonial discourse which was inspired from religion mainly. The museum practices show that no rigorous efforts have been made to decolonize the museum, yet the Lahore Museum identifies itself as the space for the nation's story and cultural heritage site and its role in propagating nationalism is inevitable. More interestingly, the already exhibited pasts in the museum during the colonial era were reinterpreted to fit in the narrative of the

new state. This paper will compare the story of Pakistan as seen in the Lahore Museum with the major work on history or ideology of Pakistan published in the early decades (1947-1970). The history of Pakistan was levied from its Islamic ideology mainly; I argue that it was equally enthralled from the objects, artefacts, sculptures etc. available in the Lahore Museum. Museums as public spaces are ardent agencies in writing the history of nation and an official narrative, the material evidence showcased in colonial museums led to the contestation of identity between the states (India and Pakistan) divided on the basis of religion.

**Komal Afzaal** is an MPhil student in the History Department, Government College University Lahore, Pakistan. Her research interests broadly include culture and power politics. Currently, she is working on her thesis on 'The National History of Pakistan in Museums; a Case Study of Lahore Museum 1947-2000'. Her undergraduate thesis was titled *Impacts of Cultural Exchange Program on Students of Pakistan*.

### ***The National Gallery of Canada: Settler-Colonial Myth-making and Decolonization***

Dr Anne Dymond and Dr Devon Smither

Until 2003, the story of Canadian art told by the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) was almost exclusively settler-colonial, excluding First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. The Gallery first incorporated significant Indigenous materials into its permanent exhibition galleries in 2003 to redress this absence. However, some viewed this re-hang as merely additive, arguing that it did not fundamentally alter the institution's colonial-settler narrative. The NGC has continued to take important steps to decolonize. This on-going process has been complicated by the NGC's government-issued collecting mandate which prohibits its ability to acquire historic Indigenous material culture, and the conceptual challenge of fundamentally reinterpreting the history of our nations. In 2015, an official inquest into the impact of residential schools on indigenous peoples produced a report with 94 calls to action. Many of these calls confront the role that museums have played in supporting a racist culture, both institutionally and within Canadian culture more broadly. The NGC undertook its biggest transformation in the wake of that report with a new

rehang of the Canadian and Indigenous Galleries. This paper will consider how the gallery's actions have shifted the settler-colonial narrative that it promoted for so long.

**Dr Anne Dymond** is Associate Professor of Art History/Museum Studies and former Board of Governor's Teaching Chair at The University of Lethbridge, in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy, Treaty 7, and Métis Nation 3 territories. Her book, *Counting Diversity: Gender, Race and Representation in Canadian Art Galleries* (MQUP, 2019), examines issues of representation and diversity in contemporary art exhibitions, and has been called 'a path-breaking study and an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the contemporary art scene in Canada.' She has published in *The Art Bulletin*, *Nottingham French Studies*, *RIHA Journal*, and *RACAR* among others.

**Dr Devon Smither** is Associate Professor of Art History/Museum Studies at The University of Lethbridge, in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy, Treaty 7, and Métis Nation 3 territories. She is a founding member of Open Art Histories, a group of art historians in Canada devoted to advancing the conversation and scholarship on art, art history, and pedagogy. Her research and teaching interests include gender and modernity, modern colonial-settler art in Canada, and modern North American women artists. She is completing a book manuscript on the female nude in Canadian painting and photography from 1913 to 1980 (MQUP) and a manuscript on *Pegi Nicol MacLeod: Life & Work* (Art Canada Institute). She has published in *RACAR*, *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, and *The Literary Review of Canada*.

### ***Politics and Pride: The Historic Museum of Abomey***

Dr. Lynne Ellsworth Larsen

In the 1940s, the French administration of the colony of Dahomey transformed a portion of pre-colonial royal palace of Dahomey into the Historic Museum of Abomey, making it West Africa's first national museum. This decision had profound political, social, and aesthetic implications. The secularizing of a once exclusive, religious, royal space, and the colonial mode of display of the museum artifacts make apparent how the museum functioned to bolster the agenda of the French West African

administration. The palace architecture was modified to conform to the needs of the museum. Additional doors and windows were cut into the royal halls to improve the access and lighting of their displays, electricity was added and the roofs were changed. This paper examines colonial policies under which the Historic Museum of Abomey was formed, the display practices of museum objects during both its colonial and post-colonial periods, and its reception by foreign visitors and the Fon people indigenous to the area.

While the Historic Museum of Abomey arguably functioned as a colonial endeavor to exploit the local culture for political and economic gain, it has also remained an important historic, cultural, and religious center for the people of present-day Republic of Benin. In the postcolonial period, the museum has provided an avenue for increased foreign funds for the preservation of the architecture and artifacts. Its displays attest to a rich history, culture and religion that existed before and survived despite colonial rule. The physical and symbolic layers that the Historic Museum of Abomey accumulated throughout its pre-colonial and colonial history have made it a source of post-colonial national pride and international attention. As a result, the diverse parties invested in its continued existence and maintenance have added new layers of meaning to this ever-evolving structure.

**Dr Lynne Ellsworth Larsen** received her MA and PhD in Art History from the University of Iowa. Her dissertation, entitled 'The Royal Palace of Dahomey: Symbol of a Transforming Nation' examines how the pre-colonial Royal architecture located in Abomey, Benin has changed in form and function throughout its colonial and post-colonial periods. As a recipient of grants from the Project for the Advanced Study of Art and Life in Africa, the Marcus Bach Fellowship and the U.S. Student Fulbright Fellowship she was able to spend a total of 12 months in Benin carrying out this research. In addition, she was awarded a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Rochester's Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African-American Studies. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



This conference is one outcome of the strategic partnership between the National Museum of Ireland and the National College of Art and Design, a collaborative project that has enriched both institutions through student projects, research initiatives and joint public events.

The conference is convened by colleagues across both institutions: David Crowley, Head of Visual Culture (NCAD), Dr Lisa Godson, Programme Leader of MA Design History and Material Culture (NCAD), Brenda Malone, Curator of Military History, Arms and Armour, Flags, Banners and Transport (NMI) and Dr Audrey Whitty, Head of Collections and Learning (NMI).

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