

Call for papers

Ethics of contemporary collecting

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In early 2020, museums across the world were forced to close their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These closures then coincided with the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, with institutions having to engage with the public in new and remote ways. There have been growing calls both internal and external to the sector to decolonise museum collections, highlighting the need for museums to change their models and approaches to collecting now and in the future.

A public response to the role cultural organisations play in society and where objects on display come from has played out on social media and in popular culture. This public response has run in tandem with professional discourse and debate on ethical approaches to contemporary collecting.

A new edited publication aims to answer a sector need. Following the release of three of the editor's 2020 Arts Council funded 'Contemporary Collecting: An Ethical Toolkit for Museum Practitioners', as well as from discussions within the Contemporary Collecting Group, a collective of 300 people engaged with contemporary collecting in museums, a new book is proposed that delves deeper into the subject of ethical contemporary collecting.

This book seeks to:

- Address a pressing and pertinent issue with individual practitioners and institutions alike in this cultural moment
- Explore and critique the balance of power between museums and the people they work with, including audiences, project participants and donors
- Inform, train and educate the next generation of curators and collection professionals
- Reflect on how practices are evolving or in flux in the current moment through reflective, comprehensive, usefully critical text of theoretical, practical and historical relevance

SUBMISSIONS

We welcome international proposals for both chapters and case studies from museum and gallery professionals, academics and researchers. Proposals from those with practical experience of assessing and evaluating outcomes in this field are particularly welcome, as are contributions which detail practical experience of innovative programmes, or which present the results of the impact of new initiatives. Submissions should address the work of institutions which face the issues of scale associated with larger and national museums and galleries.

Aspects and questions of interest include – but are not limited to – one or more of the following:

- Experience of non-custodial collecting: Have you experience of working with models of collecting which are actively non-extractive? Do you care for objects that communities have access to for contemporary cultural use?
- Collecting of active, community-initiated memorials: Museums confer a set of meanings to an object and memorials have their own tradition of patterns of meaning. Have you experience of navigating those different meanings?

- Creating an absence by collecting: How have you considered the absence created by removing an object from its origin or place of context and adding it to a collection? Have you had experience of waiting for an appropriate moment to collect material?
- Deliberate collection gaps: Are there gaps in your collection created due to the challenging or ethical nature of the subject? Have you seen a gap as it's been formed, but felt it unwise to intervene? Was this perceived as a failure - either by yourself or as your institution?
- Environmentally conscious collecting: Have you had to consider the scale of a collecting project due to the environmental impact of its outcomes? What processes have you gone through to fix the scale of your collecting?
- Rapid collecting: When are we best placed for rapid collecting? Have you deliberately avoided rapid collecting and collected contemporary material at a slower pace for ethical reasons?
- Risk management: How is risk perceived and managed in contemporary collecting? Have you worked on collecting initiatives driven by the perceived risk of 'missing out'? Do you have examples of collecting an issue being seen as too risky?
- Obligation to collect: Do we feel obliged to collect histories less told within museums without authenticity and sensitivity? Who benefits, and what is the legacy of this? How are you ensuring sincere collaboration? How are they empowered in this process?
- Staff safeguarding: How are staff safeguarded in contemporary collecting? What ways do museums approach their duty of care and what support is available to staff? Is there pressure and responsibility to collect certain material without consideration for the impact on the individual doing the collecting?
- Role of 'niceness': What is the role of 'being nice/niceness' in contemporary collecting? What impact does this have on staff? How can relationships be created and also ended sensitively?
- Collecting hate: How do you manage collecting 'hate'? What is the risk of endorsing or validating hateful perspectives when collecting this material? What is the role of collecting extremism in museums? Conversely, have you ever collected something to endorse a point of view?

SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

If you are interested in being considered as a contributor, please submit a proposal and a short biography in Microsoft Word format. Proposals should be 300-500 words in length and biographies 100-200 words.

You can propose to submit either a chapter or a case study. Both would be 3000-4000 words in length. Images and photography are encouraged. Please prepare your proposal with these parameters in mind. The work should not have been published elsewhere. All contributions must be submitted in English – translation services will not be provided. Any images submitted need to have been cleared of copyright for use in the publication.

The deadline for proposals is **Monday 7th February 2022**. Please email your proposal to the editors at ethicsofcollecting@gmail.com. Any queries in advance of submission should be sent to the editors.