

Andrea Meyer, Bénédicte Savoy

Towards a Transnational History of Museums

An Introduction

The time has come to call into question a historiographic construct. According to a widely-held opinion, museums since the nineteenth century have been loci for the construction of identity, mirrors of competing national cultures, products of national affirmation – to name just a few of the recent museum-historical research themes. No one would deny that at least since the French Revolution the museum per se has been in the grips of a powerful tide of national pathos.¹

The future museum should contain the development of the whole wealth of drawings, paintings, sculptures, and other monuments of art. [...] This will be a national monument. [...] France will extend its glory over all times and all the peoples of the world; the national museum will comprise a total of the most wonderful knowledge and will command the admiration of the whole universe [...]. It will have such an influence on the mind, it will so elevate the soul, it will so excite the heart that it will be one of the most powerful ways of proclaiming the illustriousness of the French Republic,

wrote the French minister of the interior Jean-Marie Roland in his frequently cited, programmatic letter of 1792 to the painter Jacques-Louis David.² Museum rhetoric such as this was to have far-reaching consequences for the development of European museums in the nineteenth century.

But yet, thorough studies of correspondence, administrative records, travel activity, statements by museum experts and visitors, and even the architectonic and dramaturgical language of the museums all suggest that European museal reality includes the existence of another, more complex, multi-faceted level – one that is marked by transnational cross-fertilizations. If these sources are given credence, then

¹ Édouard Pommier (ed.), *Les musées en Europe à la veille de l'ouverture du Louvre*, Actes du colloque organisé par le Service Culturel de Musée du Louvre les 3, 4 et 5 juin 1993, Paris: Klincksieck, 1995; Pommier, *Le problème du musée à la veille de la révolution*, Montargis: Musée Girodet, 1989; Dominique Poulot, *Musée, nation, patrimoine, 1789–1815*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

² Roland to David: “Le Muséum doit être le développement des grandes richesses que possède la nation en dessin, peintures, sculptures et autres monuments de l’art [...] Ce monument sera national [...]. La France doit étendre sa gloire sur tous les temps et sur tous les peuples; le Museum national sera l’élément des plus belles connaissances, et fera l’admiration de l’univers. [...] Il élèvera tellement les âmes, il réchauffera tellement les cœurs, qu’il sera un des plus puissants moyens d’illustrer la République française,” cited in: Auguste-Théodore Girardot, *Les ministres de la République française*, Paris: Guillaumin, 1860, I, pièce N° 54, pp. 255–56. Roland’s letter was partly translated into English, see Carol Duncan, Alan Wallach, *The Universal Survey Museum*, in: Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies. An Anthology of Contexts*, Malden et al.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 51–70, p. 56.

the one-sidedness of the national perspective becomes obvious: complex connections come to light, interrelations that linked museums to one another for centuries, sparked museal trends, shaped the expectations of visitors, and so on. In the present volume, we do not mean to give national clamor and pathos a renewed hearing. On the contrary, we will listen carefully to the stillness, in which various forms of museum work and museum perception took shape in the European arena far removed from any national boundaries and free of functionalization.

The Current State of Research

In recent museum studies, hardly any function of the institution museum has been left untouched: protector of cultural heritage, temple of art, seat of learning and memory, storehouse of knowledge, shrine for the transmission of taste, showplace for imposing discipline and creating spectacle. But far beyond the limits of the traditional history of collection – primarily concerned with the path taken by objects on their way to the museum – and in the course of the continuous broadening of the fields of research, historians, social scientists, cultural and art historians have discovered a further object: the museum itself.³ This investigation of museums as central “staging grounds of culture,” – a phenomenon which can also be understood as a reaction to the tremendous expansion of the museum landscape after the Second World War and especially since the 1970s – was accompanied by the development of more differentiated theoretical underpinnings and by a geographical reorientation as well.⁴ Apart from the interest in the reciprocal effects of museum culture and colonialism, which brought the founding of museums in places like India or Algeria into focus, in recent years studies have been done of museums in countries like Turkey, Taiwan, or Korea – to mention just a few – which from the Eurocentric point-of-view are located on the periphery of the classical birthplace of the museum, the Italian, English, and German-speaking regions of the European world.⁵

³ See Joachim Baur, *Museumsanalyse: Zur Einführung*, in: Baur (ed.), *Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010, pp. 7–14.

⁴ See Daniel J. Sherman, Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London: Routledge, 1994; Sharon MacDonald, *Museen erforschen. Für eine Museumswissenschaft in der Erweiterung*, in: Baur 2010 (as fn. 3), pp. 49–69.

⁵ See e.g. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; Kavita Singh, *Material Fantasy. The Museum in Colonial India*, in: Gayatri Sinha (ed.), *Art and Visual Culture in India, 1857–2007*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009, pp. 40–57; Nabila Oulebsir, *Les usages du patrimoine. Monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830–1930)*, Paris: Ed. de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 2004; Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed. Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003; Chi-Jung Chu, *Political Change*

But whether the research is carried out within or beyond the usual geographic and disciplinary borders, one thing is noticeable: the opinion persists that the institutions – developed out of the erstwhile art and curiosity cabinets of the Renaissance and, since the eighteenth century, through the gradual opening of the princely picture galleries to the non-nobility – were a tool for nations to position and differentiate themselves in relation to others.⁶ The frame of reference for many museums-related investigations continues to be a more or less clearly delineated state entity or a community defined by a common language, culture, and value system, or better yet: an imagined community. Even in studies that forego the term “nation” or “nationality” in their title, the methodical approach – often just for pragmatic reasons – remains similar, as for example when the intent is to make a museum landscape accessible and to provide an overview of the German, French, English, or American museums.⁷ This is even true for studies that seem to emphasize a larger geographic context or take a comparative approach, since frequently here, too, the observations on the museum culture of individual countries will follow directly upon one another without any connection.⁸ And since the nineteenth century – the “century of museums” – is also the epoch in which the modern nation state developed, this approach seems quite justifiable. But, as Thomas W. Gaehtgens has ascertained, even for the cosmopolitical eighteenth century, for the European “*république des lettres et des arts*,” there has been no study carried out on the establishment of the museum per se that argues from a perspective transcending national or cultural borders.⁹

and the National Museum in Taiwan, in: Simon J. Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Amundsen et al. (eds.), *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 180–92.

⁶ See e.g. Poulot 1997 (as fn. 1); Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; McClellan, Nationalism and the Origins of the Museum in France, in: Gwendolyn Wright (ed.), *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996, pp. 28–39; Marlies Raffler, *Museum – Spiegel der Nation? Zugänge zur Historischen Museologie am Beispiel der Genese von Landes- und Nationalmuseen in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Vienna [et al.]: Böhlau, 2007.

⁷ James Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Dominique Poulot, *Une histoire des musées de France. XVIIIe–XXe siècle*, Paris: La Découverte; Chantal, Georgel (ed.), *La jeunesse des musées. Les musées de France aux XIXe siècle*, exh.cat., Paris: Editions de la réunion des musées nationaux, 1994; Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals & Radicals. 100 Years of Museums in America*, Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2006; Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain. The Development of the National Gallery*, Aldershot [et al.]: Ashgate, 2005.

⁸ See e.g. Dominique Poulot, Catherine Ballé (eds.), *Musées en Europe: une mutation inachevée*, Paris: La Documentation française, 2004; Knell/Aronsson/Amundsen et al. 2011 (as fn. 5).

⁹ See Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Das Museum um 1800. Bildungsideal und Bauaufgabe, in: Pascal Griener, Kornelia Imesch (eds.), *Klassizismen und Kosmopolitismus. Programm oder Problem? Austausch in Kunst und Kunsttheorie im 18. Jahrhundert*, Zürich: Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, 2004, pp. 137–62.

This lacuna in the research is especially surprising in view of the fact that the courtly and intellectual bourgeois elite of enlightened Europe around 1800 carried on a lively exchange, which was nurtured among other things by pronounced travel activity.¹⁰ However, Carole Paul recently took a step “Toward a Collective History” of the early public museums, as she tellingly has titled the introduction to her volume *The First Modern Museums of Art*.¹¹ In highlighting transregional parallels, for example in reference to the focuses of the princely collections and to their installation, architectural settings, or also educational function, Paul points to the “larger international development,” in which the emergence of public art museums was embedded in the transition between the early modern and the modern periods.¹² Similarly to Gaehtgens and to Krzysztof Pomian, who even construes the museum to be the “quintessence of Europe,” she emphasizes the pan-European roots of this institution.¹³ What these positions have in common is a methodical approach that extends beyond individual nations in its investigation of the museum as an object of research. They are an indication for the present tendency towards taking a transnational perspective in researching museum history. Such a perspective has so far been more characteristic of studies undertaken on contemporary art and the current art scene.¹⁴

10 See e.g. Carole Paul, Introduction: The Grand Tour and Princely Collections in Rome, in: Paul (ed.), *The First Modern Museums of Art. The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early 19th-Century Europe*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012, pp. 21–47, with further bibliographical references to the Grand Tour as travel practice.

11 Carole Paul, Preface. Toward a Collective History, in: Paul 2012 (as fn. 10), pp. vii–xxi. Further studies of aspects of early museum culture that are based on a comparative approach are e.g. Virginie Spenlé, *Die Dresdner Gemäldegalerie und Frankreich. Der „bon goût“ im Sachsen des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Beucha: Sax-Verlag, 2008; Christina Strunck, Elisabeth Kieven (eds.), *Europäische Galeriebauten. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, Rome, 23.–26. February 2005, Munich: Hirmer, 2010.

12 Paul 2012 (as fn. 11), pp. vii–viii.

13 Paul 2012 (as fn. 11); Krzysztof Pomian, Das Museum: die Quintessenz Europas, in: Annesofie Becker, Michael C. Jensen (eds.), *Wunderkammer des Abendlandes. Museum und Sammlung im Spiegel der Zeit*, exh.cat., Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994, pp. 112–18, p. 114. With regard to the internationality of museums in nineteenth century Europe, see also Hanno Möbius, Konturen des Museums im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Bernhard Graf, Hanno Möbius (eds.), *Zur Geschichte der Museen im 19. Jahrhundert 1789–1918*, Berlin: G + H Verlag, 2006, pp. 11–22. The re-ordering of the European museum landscape after the restitution of objects looted under the Directoire and Napoleon has been addressed more frequently as well, see e.g. Deborah Meijers, Ellinoor Bergvelt, Lieske Tibbe, Elsa van Wezel (eds.), *Napoleon's Legacy. The Rise of National Museums in Europe*, Berlin: G + H Verlag, 2009.

14 Roland Cvetkovski, Unabdingbare Transnationalität, Konferenzbericht zu: Transnationale Museumsgeschichte 1750–1940. Internationale Tagung der Technischen Universität Berlin, Institut für Kunstwissenschaft und Historische Urbanistik, Fachgebiet Kunstgeschichte. Februar 17/18, 2012, in: *Kunstchronik* 65 (2012), pp. 406–10, p. 406. For an example of a transnational approach to a certain museum type, see Glenn H. Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

History's Turn towards Transnationalism

In disciplines like anthropology, law, economics, and the political sciences, the term transnational has long been in use, for example to describe the cross-border activities of commercial enterprises or the formation of migrant networks of a specific culture.¹⁵ In the humanities, transnational historiography did not become prevalent until the end of the twentieth century, but it is counted among the most rapidly expanding domains, whereby it cannot always be unequivocally differentiated from related approaches like *connected history*, *entangled history*, *histoire croisée*, or *global history*.¹⁶ Decisive for this increasing turn toward research approaches that attempt to transcend national borders both empirically and methodically is on the one hand the idea in today's writing of history that nations are not naturally occurring givens, but rather results of social processes and practices, and hence projections.¹⁷ On the other hand, the experience of globalization has led to the realization that actions taken on the supposed other side of the world have an influence on our immediate surroundings. Important impulses have also come from the social and cultural sciences as well as from post-colonial studies, with the consequence that categories like the "foreign" (das Fremde), the "other," and the "self" (das Eigene) which scholars have for a long time attempted to neatly place in juxtaposition, have been recognized as constructs.¹⁸ Consequently, the younger generation of historians has dissociated itself from the idea that the nation or nation state is a kind of "container" without contacts or networks between nations or other social spaces.¹⁹ Transnational history pays attention to the dependencies and the transferrals that cross territorial and political boundaries – the reciprocal perceptions and transmissions.²⁰ It is interested in the "links and

15 Kiran Klaus Patel, Transnationale Geschichte, in: *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*, ed. by the Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), Mainz 2010-12-03, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/patelk-2010-de>, 1 (accessed January 31, 2012), 1; Matthias Middell, Review of: Budde, Gunilla; Conrad, Sebastian; Janz, Oliver (eds.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenz und Theorien*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 2006-10-10, http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id_8152 (accessed June 10, 2011).

16 Margrit Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte*, Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 2011, p. 7; Patel 2010 (as fn. 15), 4.

17 See e.g. Pernau 2012 (as fn. 17), pp. 9–10, who particularly refers to the following publications: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books, 1991; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; Erich Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

18 Patel, Überlegungen zu einer transnationalen Geschichte, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 52 (2004), pp. 626–45, p. 631.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 627.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 631, p. 635; Patel, Transnationale Geschichte. Ein neues Paradigma?, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 2005-02-02, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2005-02-001> (accessed April 17, 2013);

flows” – as formative factors – between “people, ideas, products, processes, and patterns,” while also acknowledging the continued relevance of the nation-state paradigms and the varying intensity of cross-boundary transfers over time.²¹

Along the lines of the transnational approach briefly outlined above, the present volume comprises lectures from an international conference which was held at the Technische Universität Berlin in February 2012,²² as well as further contributions, in which aspects and various events of museum history are taken out of their usual national framework and thus are shown in a new light. This publication is intended to sharpen the sensitivity for the potential in a discourse that goes beyond the national specifics of museums in critically reflecting upon customary patterns of perception and explanation. The contributions not only cover the European museum landscape but extend outwards over the Atlantic and parts of Northern Africa, and all the way to La Réunion. In the foreground are museums of art and the applied arts, and the so-called universal museums, as well as plaster cast and archaeological collections. Point of departure is the mid-eighteenth century, when the modern (art) museums’ decisive characteristics such as public accessibility, autonomous exhibition spaces, and the utilization of scientific principles of organization began to prevail. The volume ends with the outbreak of World War II, but gives a few glimpses of the revival of museum operation in the years shortly after the war and the new conceptions regarding colonial museum design.

The individual chapters are devoted to the various themes that together make up a museum: 1. the objects and collections, 2. the architectonic design of the museums along with the staging of the exhibits, 3. the actors – museum founders, heads of collections, curators or commissions – and their networks. Furthermore, attention is given to the international reform efforts, which attempted to change the above components. The last chapter focuses decidedly on the museum as a space in which national, imperialist interests and transnational entanglements compete or coexist. It thus signals that national boundaries – as implied in the term “transnational” – do continue to exist as points of reference for analysis, but likewise that such boundaries are also crossed.

Patel’s article is but one of a series of contributions published by the online forum *geschichte.transnational*, see <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/index.asp?id=584pn=texte> (accessed April 17, 2013)

²¹ Akira Iriye, Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, New York: Palgrave, 2009, pp. xvii–xx, cited in Patel 2010 (as fn. 15), 6.

²² Cvetkovski 2012 (as fn. 14). Regretfully the papers presented at the conference by Waltraud Bayer on the imperial Hermitage under revolutionary rule, Miklós Skelely on leitmotifs of European museum architecture, and Nikolaus Bernau on museum politics in the British-Indian Empire could not be included in this volume due to conflicting time schedules.

Museums and the Transnational Circuits of Artefacts

The focus of the first chapter, *Museums and the Transnational Circuits of Artefacts*, is the mobility and circulation of objects before, or even after, their arrival at the museums. The opening contributions by Mirjam Brusius, Charlotte Schreiter, and Dorothea Peters investigate individual original objects, unique specimens, which found their way into European museums as a result of their interest for scholars but which, because of their radical uniqueness, defied categorization within the conventional museum classification systems; another issue discussed is the reproduction of artworks in the form of plaster casts which repeatedly narrated one and the same story of classical antiquity in thousands of copies distributed throughout the capitals of Europe; furthermore, photography is focused upon as the privileged medium for the dissemination of museum pictures.

Using the example of Assyrian archaeological finds, Brusius sheds light on the gestures and reflexes of material and intellectual acquisition associated with objects discovered in the region of ancient Mesopotamia, their transport to London, and their arrival at the British Museum. The expansion of museum holdings to include antiquities from excavations in the Near East, from the 1840s onwards, was to a large degree serendipitous. And, as Brusius ascertains, the objects – within the museum itself, either as exhibits or in storage – were continually subjected to new assignments of origin and meaning that not only shook the canon of antiquities already integrated in the museum, but also the concept of the museum as a “disciplined” space.

In her investigation of the plaster cast collections popular in the mid-nineteenth century, Schreiter focuses not so much on the pathways the objects took as on the entanglements of the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum in London, the Louvre and the Musée de Sculpture Comparée in Paris, and the Neues Museum in Berlin. These institutions were all dependent on just a few, increasingly professional, plaster cast workshops like the Parisian Atelier de Moulage or the Berlin Royal Plaster Cast Manufactory for delivering an unbroken overview of the development of sculpture and architecture from antiquity to the Renaissance. But not only the ambition to provide encyclopedic completeness linked the competing museums. As Schreiter also explains, the chronological display of the casts that had prevailed since the end of the nineteenth century had common roots in the showplace of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crystal Palace – which had been relocated from Hyde Park to Sydenham – where this organizational principle had been realized for the first time and from where it spread out all over Europe.

The London World Fair also was the catalyst for photographic campaigns, which are the theme of Peters’ contribution. The world exhibition had increased the awareness of photography and had publicized important innovations, most notably the wet-plate process. This invention delighted Prince Albert, who is known to have had a key role in the planning and organization of the World Fair, and sparked his enthusiasm for the new medium. In an endeavor to create a visual history of painting

through photography, Albert first commissioned the photography of all the Raphael works in his collection, later those in museums, private collections, and churches all over Europe. From this initiative, Peters traces the expansion of the campaigns, which were sometimes repudiated sharply by art historians and museum personnel, sometimes greeted with enthusiasm, and which in final measure led to the Europe-wide reproduction and publication of a substantial number of museum holdings. The distribution of the reproduced works of art, which were included in catalogues or became part of picture archives, went hand in hand, according to Peters, with the increasing mobility of the photographers involved in the campaigns. In a time when cultural tourism in Europe was booming, the images generated certain expectations on the part of the public, which increasingly had already seen what was to be seen, albeit small and in black-and-white, before it even set foot in the museum – an effect not to be underestimated.

Cross-border Transfers of Architectural Models and Display Principles

In the second chapter, *Cross-border Transfers of Architectural Models and Display Principles*, the focus is no longer on museum objects but rather whole museum stagings and architectures. Here, Stefanie Heraeus, Bénédicte Savoy, Sabine Skott, and Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel direct their attention to the actual framework within which objects are viewed; here, aspects such as the import or export of lighting systems, gallery installation, museographic tricks, and principles of presentation are investigated. Heraeus devotes her study to the short-lived, unfinished Picture Gallery in Kassel, which was opened to the public in 1775. As she explains, the innovative installation of a skylight, a feature which had not originally been planned, was the fruit of an international exchange in which the builder, Landgrave Wilhelm VIII of Hesse-Kassel and the Parisian collector Marquis Marc-René de Voyer d'Argenson were very active participants. The connections with Paris led to the suspension of the construction of the Kassel gallery. After this interruption, the decision was made to install the skylight, which took the form of a band of windows on the long walls just beneath the ceiling, allowing paintings to be hung on both sides. According to Heraeus, since the visitors were invited to compare the paintings surrounding them, an important step had been made in Kassel towards the appreciation of works of art for their own sake. Museum lighting as an import item: the largely homogeneous architectonics of many museums in and outside of Europe cannot be understood without the precise observation of such and similar transfers of technology.

About 150 years later, similar international connections and bilateral observations led to the building of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, opened in 1912 in Moscow. As Savoy and Skott make clear through an examination of the museum

founder's correspondence with his architect, his financial patron, and foreign colleagues, the Moscow museum developed into an amalgamation of West European museum galleries in terms of architectural design, interior decoration, and materials used, as well as in the staging of the plaster casts and the reproductions of antique sculptures and monumental architecture. It became a kind of walkable museum of European museum models. In Moscow, whole exhibition rooms and fragments of rooms from Vienna, Florence, London, Dresden, Paris, Munich, Strasbourg, or Berlin were copied and recomposed in new combinations. In the middle of a global boom in the founding of immense museums, the intention was – with the help of established museum forms, as Savoy and Skott make clear – to create a national monument that would be internationally impressive.

Unlike the founding director of the Moscow museum, the art historian Guglielmo Pacchioni had no personal contacts to colleagues beyond the boundaries of his own country when he began introducing modern staging principles into the museums of Fascist Italy. He was able to make use of the journal *Mouseion*, published by the forerunner of today's ICOM, the International Museums Office, as a good source of visual information. Galizzi Kroegel describes Pacchioni's activities in her contribution on the reorganization of the Galleria Sabauda in Turin – a creative effort which has hardly been given recognition. Through the journal, the director was able to keep up-to-date on reforms that had been going on since the late nineteenth century in far-flung parts of Europe and the United States and that finally led both to a turning away from encyclopedic completeness in the presentation of objects and from the reconstruction of cultural-historical contexts in rooms evoking the style of the respective epoch (Epochenräume). Conversely, through the journal he was able to achieve international visibility for his own museographic innovations. Indeed, his new presentation guidelines, as carried out in Turin and also Novara and Pesaro, were certainly implemented in other museums in Italy. But, as Galizzi Kroegel points out, his ideas for modernization of presentation and exhibition practices found their greatest echo abroad.

Close Inspections of the “Other.” Commissions and Experts on Tour

Models for museum architecture and the staging and organization of exhibits always had circulated beyond territorial and political borders in Europe – the above-mentioned examples from Turin, Moscow, and Kassel show this clearly. Often this circulation was the result of purposeful, personal networking, and, yes, sleuthing on both sides, on the part of individual art historians, museum officials, or even commissions. The activities and goals of museum actors are at the center of interest in the chapter *Close Inspections of the “Other.” Commissions and Experts on Tour*. In the opening

contribution, Thomas Adam describes the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as being the result of a transatlantic network of dilettantes, in which members of the elite Union League Club were involved. In its administrative and organizational structure as well as in the make-up of its collection, the Metropolitan Museum was based to a large degree on the models of the Leipzig Kunstverein, the South Kensington Museum in London, and today's Altes and Neues Museum in Berlin. After 1900, Adam argues, the transfer of models progressed into being a professional business. An example of this development is the investigative journey through almost 100 (!) European museums embarked upon by a commission of experts under the assignment of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, when a new building was being planned in 1904. A study, like Adam's, of the transatlantic exchange makes clear that the administrative and didactic concepts were just as much the objects of appropriation as were the museographic models. But the transfers between Leipzig, Berlin, London, New York, and Boston also show that a differentiation between the culture from which impetuses originate and the beneficiary of such impetuses is hardly possible – transfers of ideas were always reciprocal.

Arnaud Bertinet investigates the inner-European give-and-take of observations by museum representatives with a special emphasis on the imperial museums in France, namely the Louvre during the Second Empire. The staff of the Louvre, whose collection was considered exemplary, was the recipient of innumerable inquiries from curators, diplomats, and trustees from London, Venice, Madrid, Vienna, and Copenhagen. As Bertinet shows, their questions were usually of a practical nature and concerned the optimization of organizational processes in the respective museum operations or the improvement of the quality of the holdings through systematic lending activity and professional conservation methods. Staff and emissaries of the imperial museums were sent on trips through Europe to reap information from foreign collections in the hopes of maintaining the presumed high ranking of their national museums in the international competition. The defeat of the French army at the Battle of Sedan on September 1, 1870, the lost German-French War, and the Paris Commune – crises which, as Bertinet has researched, were the occasion for a systematic evacuation of the cultural heritage from the Louvre – put a sudden, if temporary, end to these mutual consultations.

In the aftermath of the painful crises, France's preoccupation with the political, economic, and cultural developments east of the Rhine grew strong. The bilateral relations between the two nation-states continued to be strained and were nationalistically loaded, as Lieske Tibbe's paper on the investigations of art historian and critic Marius Vachon, also carried out in Germany, demonstrates. Vachon conducted several European trips commissioned in the 1880s by the French Ministry of Education and Arts. Through his excursions, he hoped to transmit his recommendation for the realization of an educational museum of the industrial arts in France. His ultimate goal was the revival of French national design, which, though it had held a leading position in Europe at one time, was now limping behind the German and English

production. As Tibbe shows, Vachon rejected the cultural-historical staging of the industrial arts that was beginning to prevail all over Europe. Instead, he preferred the chronological presentation of objects, which alongside the originals might also comprise less valuable reproductions, in combination with a display that allowed a comparison with art historical artifacts on the basis of their similar material and function and would thus be edifying for the producers of such objects. Though Vachon achieved little success in the practical implementation of his ideas, his reports continue to be, as Tibbe emphasizes in conclusion, an excellent source of information in comparing the different ways of promoting industry in turn-of-the-century Europe.

Similar to Vachon's career, the professional path of the Russian artist, art historian, and museum aficionado Igor Grabar was marked by political upheaval and a strong emotional attachment to his country, a feeling devoid of any traces of nationalism, however. Roland Cvetkovski investigates Grabar's activities at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and in the central restoration workshops, also in the city, which the artist himself had founded. Grabar, in his writings on art history and his works of art criticism, attempted to demonstrate the value of Russian art and to transmit this idea to the public in other countries. He had been schooled outside of the tsar's empire, through visits to exhibitions and museums in western and southern Europe, where he also appropriated scholarly standards upon which he based his attempts to carry out reforms at the Tretyakov Gallery before and after the October Revolution. Especially the attention he gave to restoration and conservation met with international resonance in the late 1920s and early 1930s. A concrete occasion for this was the 1929 exhibition of Russian icons which Grabar co-organized, first in Berlin and subsequently in Paris, in which one section was devoted to the methods of restoration promoted by Grabar.

The example of Grabar once again demonstrates: 1. that increasingly, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, museum actors were naturally moving across borders between countries, cultures, and disciplines; 2. that these actors, thanks to their physical and intellectual mobility, and later with the support of specialized media, were moving knowledge, concepts, and ideas along with them; 3. that, aside from all of the national labeling and nation-related intentions, at the level of concrete activity the museums in Europe always had been a product of cross-border entanglements.

Reforming the Museum – A Supranational Project

The expansion of museum holdings and their repeated reorganization, the changes in the designs of the buildings and galleries, the experimentation with various staging models, as well as the efforts towards functioning administrative structures – all these aspects, discussed in the contributions shortly summarized here, show how mobile, vital, changeable, and indeed adaptable the institutions and/or their repre-

sentatives were from at least the eighteenth century onwards. Admittedly, above all in the discourses critical of museums, which around 1900 reached a first peak under the influence of cultural pessimism and with the avant-garde art movements, the charge was made that museums were antiquated, were nothing but dusty depositories, junk rooms and graveyards, in which treasures of cultural heritage were hoarded at the price of wearying the public and severing the works from their historical context.²³ But, in fact, actual museum practice was distinguished by continuing reforms and attempts at reform. These are the focus of the fourth chapter, *Reforming the Museum – A Supranational Project*. In the chapter's first contribution, Susanna Avery-Quash and Alan Crookham study the London National Gallery, which since its founding in 1824 has always been accused of inept management, an unsystematic collection and exhibition policy, as well as a flawed cleaning policy. The criticism is even known to have incited debates in the House of Commons, in parliamentary select committees, and the press. It peaked with demands for reform, whereby Avery-Quash and Crookham stress that the select committee of 1853, along with the Foreign Office, wanted to rely from the very beginning on a comparison with the principle European museums and the advice of foreign experts. Among other measures, the power of the trustees was curtailed and new posts were created, one of which was that of director, taken over by Charles Eastlake. Eastlake himself had developed his ideas about reform to a large degree outside of the national context, during his many years in Rome, on trips to different European collections, and in exchange with Gustav Friedrich Waagen, who for his part had provided evidence to various select committees. Not until the cosmopolitan Eastlake arrived as the principal conduit of foreign thinking – thus Avery-Quash and Crookham, was it possible to realize the reconstitution of the National Gallery.

Less the implementation of reforms than their propagation in the media is the subject of Andrea Meyer's contribution concerning the specialized journal *Museumskunde*, which was published between 1905 and 1924 by the art historian and museum director Karl Koetschau. With this journal, Koetschau created an organ for a broad discussion on reform-oriented approaches to museum work. It also included an astounding number of reports by foreign museum representatives, often those in leading positions – for the most part written directly in English or their core ideas indirectly reflected in reviews of German-speaking authors. Together with short announcements about current museum literature, accounts of new buildings, or particulars from all over the world, these reports – in retrospect – offer a view of a Eurocentrically organized topography of museums that reached far beyond the borders of Europe. The opening up of reporting to coverage extending beyond national boundaries had many

²³ See e.g. David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism. A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*, Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006; Marcus Andreas Habel, *Ein Jahrhundert Zukunft der Museen. Krisen und Kritiken – Pläne und Perspektiven 1900–2010*, Berlin: BibSpider, 2012, pp. 33–36; Anke te Heesen, *Theorien des Museums. Zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2012, pp. 105–11.

functions, not least of which was its decisive importance in the professionalization of museum work, which in turn warranted the competitiveness of German museums in the international arena.

Significantly, the article which opened the first edition of *Museumskunde* in 1905 was by Wilhelm Bode, who, in his double position, at that time, as general director of the Royal Museums in Berlin and director of the recently opened Kaiser Friedrich Museum, played a key role in the German museum reform movement. Xavier-Pol Tilliette sheds light on the close relationship between Bode and the staff and trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the New York museum was undergoing modernization of its administration and acquisition policies, which were very much geared toward expansion. The first contact between Bode and the director of the Metropolitan Museum can be traced back to the beginning of the 1890s. When the latter asked Bode to recommend an employee for the new department of decorative arts, the involvement between the two institutions became all the closer, since Bode named his own assistant, Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner. Valentiner acted as the curator of the department from 1908 until 1914, functioning basically as an extension of Bode, not only in implementing reform-oriented, museographic practices. Like Bode, he, too, cultivated relationships with collectors as a way to encourage them to make donations to the museum. He loyally kept his Berlin teacher abreast of the goings-on in the New York public and private collectors' scene, and, indeed, even of what was being reported about the museums in Berlin and Germany. With his focus on Bode and Valentiner, Tilliette identifies one striking node in the transatlantic museum network before the First World War.

While the collaboration between Bode and Valentiner, which took place over a great distance, was based on friendship, around 1900 there were increasing efforts made to institutionalize transnational cooperation between museums. The probably most significant initiative was taken in 1926 with the founding of the already-mentioned International Museums Office (IMO) within the sphere of the League of Nations. Conceptually and financially promoted by the French, the IMO set up highly diverse projects for the standardization of museum practices. Against the background of the diplomatic tensions between France and the German Reich, which did not join the League of Nations until 1926 and then announced its withdrawal in October 1933 after Hitler had come into power, Christina Kott illuminates the changing positions of German museum officials in relation to the IMO. In part, they took a reserved stance, in part they cooperated closely with the office. Finally, as a result of the *Machtübernahme* of the National Socialists, which laid the legal foundations for an anti-Semitic personnel policy in museums as well, no museum staff members took part in the international conference on museography in Madrid in 1934 – an event which according to Kott was the climax of the IMO's activities. Nevertheless, throughout the conference and in the conference journal, the German museums remained points of reference that can hardly be overestimated. Kott's explanation for this supposed contradiction is the careful organization of the event under general secretary Euripide

Foundoukidis. In order to present a paper at the conference on their assigned, precisely defined topics, the lecturers exchanged information and documents, ahead of time, especially frequently with the Germans, who were internationally recognized for their promotion of reforms.

Museums as Transnational Sites for National Identities

The interplay of national and transnational forces, with their respective logic, is a structural element in the processes, realities, and particularities of museum history. This becomes especially clear from the example of the stance – imposed politically and ideologically after 1933 – of German museum representatives towards the IMO and its conference in Madrid. Emília Ferreira, Ayse Koksal and Bärbel Küster, whose contributions comprise the last chapter, *The Museums as Transnational Sites for National Identities*, argue upon this very basis, but take it even further in that they describe the national and transnational interdependencies as being constitutive for the institution. Ferreira goes into the background history of the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon, which, compared to the national museums in other European countries was called to life quite late – not until 1884. The idea for this museum did develop in Portugal itself, within the circles representing the social elite. But its realization needed an external impetus, which came from the South Kensington Museum. On the occasion of the Special Loan Exhibition of Spanish and Portuguese Ornamental Art, organized in London in 1881, Portuguese members of the preparatory committee travelled through their country collecting appropriate objects which were then to be sent to London. Supported by the state and highly motivated, they were able to bring together almost 200 examples of ornamental art within a very short time. They made up ten per cent of all the objects that were shown in the South Kensington Museum. This ensemble formed the core of a much more comprehensive exhibit of Portuguese art that took place less than half a year later in the Lisbon Alvor Palace, which was reconstructed and modernized for this purpose. With the financial profits from this show – according to the number of visitors it was a blockbuster, Ferreira emphasizes – the project of a national museum could be realized in just a few years. The “non-national” roots of the “national” in regard to museum affairs could not be more clearly shown than by this example.

In her contribution, Koksal links two museums that each in different ways are marked by the enmeshment of the national and transnational features of their collections, their architectural settings, and their displays, and that were each subject to political functionalization. One of these is the Imperial Museum, which during the Ottoman Empire was initially located in the Hagia Irene, then in the Topkapı Palace, and finally in the building of today’s Archaeological Museum in Istanbul.

The other is the Painting and Sculpture Museum of Istanbul, which during the time of the Turkish Republic was housed in the Dolmabahçe Palace. The Imperial Museum was an instrument of the modernization efforts of the Ottomans. By falling back on their glorious cultural and military heritage, the Ottoman rulers wished to assert themselves as a hegemonic power over the newly organized European state system. In contrast, the republic spearheaded by *Ata Türk* desired to commend itself as a genuine part of Western society, or even, as *Koksal* formulates it, to put a transnational identity on display. Thus, the Louvre, with its similar history of transformation from a royal palace into a public museum, would serve as just one of several models rich with symbolism. As in Western European museums, works were exhibited based on their affinity with Western aesthetics and formal language, and displayed in chronological, historical order. In comparison, the Imperial Museum initially had the character of a cabinet of curiosities and was primarily accessible to select foreign diplomats and intellectuals, as well as the Ottoman elite of bureaucrats and officers. Western principles of display were consciously, as *Koksal* says, adapted and distorted in order to impress the visitors with a demonstration of power.

With the final contribution of the volume, *Küster* similarly takes a look at two non-Western institutions, which in contrast to the examples treated by *Koksal* and all the other authors, were products of colonialism. The Musée Léon Dierx on La Réunion was the result of an initiative of two literati, from the island's white upper class, who, in Paris in the years before the First World War, had moved in the circles of Symbolist artists sympathetic to Socialism. Out of this milieu they recruited supporters for their museum project, making possible the transfer of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Fauve works of art to La Réunion, where they were exhibited together with cultural-historical testimonies to French culture and plaster casts of French cathedrals in a private villa in the capital city Saint-Denis. As *Küster* establishes, it was the goal of the museum's founder to raise the general level of education by familiarizing the public with the French cultural heritage on La Réunion. The museum founders combined ideas of superiority, in keeping with the typical patterns of colonialism, with socialist-democratic conceptions of art as a universally comprehensible language. *Küster's* second example is the provincial Museum for Fine Arts in Algiers. Inaugurated in 1908, it was provided with a new building upon the occasion of the 100th jubilee of the French colony of Algeria in 1930 and simultaneously upgraded to the rank of national museum. This museum pursued a quite different collection strategy: as its name indicates, it limited itself to objects of art; furthermore, the holdings did not cover contemporary painting but ended at the nineteenth century with an emphasis upon academic Orientalism, the subjects of which, as *Küster* observes, were incommensurate with Islamic aniconism, to which the greater part of the population adhered. In final measure, in Algeria, too, the focus was upon the museal representation of the "leading" national French culture. *Küster's* examination of museums founded under colonialism lays open to view the asymmetrical power structure that

can also underlie the transnational constellations with their mostly positive connotations and practices.²⁴

All of this volume's contributions are related in that they analyze collection profiles, exhibition stagings, architectural elements, scholarly or didactic concepts, and administrative structures – in short, essential aspects of the museum – as results of intensive regional and national cross-border transfers. Though the studies in no way ignore the national or colonial context of the cases being discussed, they do give a lesser importance to the national pathos that has accompanied the founding of many museums since the installation of the Musée des Arts in the Louvre during the French Revolution. The focus on the interaction of the actors and the institutions, on the circulation and appropriation of ideas, practices, and objects of our material artistic and cultural heritage promotes a differentiated perspective on the formation and development of the institution museum and on how it has been and is now perceived, a perspective that goes beyond the mere establishment of analogies. As a popular European export item – a “hit,” so to speak – the museum always has been an entangled state of affairs, just like the European culture itself. But the consciousness of this fact and the museum-historical research on the subject have – strangely enough – been absent up to this very day. The present volume should now clear the path for a transnational historiography of museums.

Translated by Catherine Framm

²⁴ See Patel 2004 (as fn. 18), pp. 631–32.