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Entrepreneurship and Traditional Knowledge in Open-Air Museum Settings

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INVITATION for an ONLINE SIEF WORKING GROUP MEETING Friday 2 September 1 PM

(In-)significant stuff. Museums and the flipside of meaning making.

Organized by the SIEF Working Group Museums and Material Culture and the Research Group of the Reinwardt Academy (AHK) Amsterdam.

Museum professionals and ethnologists working in and researching cultural history and ethnographic museums have long been working on questions of who decides what ends up in a collection. In most cases, the focus is on relevance, value, significance and uniqueness. In this meeting, we will challenge ourselves to focus on those items that are highlighted or labelled as insignificant, or superfluous or unwanted. Which items (tangible and intangible) are considered as such, by whom, when and in which contexts? How do museum professionals and ethnologists approach this kind of 'stuff', conceptually, practically and ethically? And what kind of tools or toolkits do they use to respond to challenges they are confronted with in their daily work? We investigate the question of how museums deal with their role as storage sites for things that have (temporarily) lost their practical use. What are the challenges of museums' function as institutions deciding on the (often political) question of what is superfluous, what is 'waste' – as institutions deciding on whose legacies are insignificant?

Program of the workshop Friday 2 September 2022 1 PM, online

The program will be online. All presentations will be in English and contain of 15 min. speaking time plus 15 min. discussion. There's no participation fee, but attendees will have to register by sending an email to Tessa Verloren tessa.verloren@ahk.nl. After registration you will receive a Teams link.

13:00 Welcome and introduction by Hester Dibbits, Reinwardt Academy (AHK)

13:15 Presentation 1. by Stefan Hartmann, Augsburg University, Germany

(UN-)FORGETTABLE: WHAT REMAINS OF EXHIBITIONS?

Exhibitions are spaces of meaning-making and the production of 'Evidenz' - a term that might be loosely translated into English as obviousness - through the spatial as well as esthetical arrangement of objects, in addition to informational "framings" in various media, and presentations. At the same time, trying to analyze past presentations may turn out to be nearly impossible, since "props" are discarded, objects removed, and photographic or video-documentations - if they do exist - might not cover the whole exhibition.

13:30 Discussion

13:45 Presentation 2. by Uta Karrer, Franconian Museum Feuchtwangen, Germany

Just a white staircase? Building elements as liminal objects in museum collections

The white staircase of the former mikveh is out of view underneath the historic forge of the Franconian Museum in Feuchtwangen. Eye-catching for the public however are engraved stones from Feuchtwangen historic buildings which have been incorporated in the museum's walls. Currently both the white staircase of the Feuchtwangen mikveh and a relief depicting Jerusalem on the exterior wall of the museum have attracted increased public interest. This paper investigates the particular role and function (historic) building elements can have in museum collections and exhibitions.

14:00 Discussion

14:15 BREAK

14:30 Presentation 3. by Jana Reidla and Ene Kõresaar, University of Tartu, Estonia

Between 'heritage' and 'stuff': on the function of auxiliary collections in Estonian museums

This presentation takes up a recent trend in Estonian museums, namely that the growth of museum collections has significantly slowed down. At the same time, there is another interesting trend –growing auxiliary collections. These are artifacts which are not officially registered as museum objects, but are used in exhibitions and stored in museum rooms. The aim of the presentation is to analyse the ambivalent role of auxiliary collections in contemporary Estonian museum practice.

14:45 Discussion

15:00 Presentation 4. by Lizette Gradén, Lund University, Sweden

Entrepreneurship and Traditional Knowledge in Open-Air Museum Settings

This presentation bring to the fore the increased need for consultants in sustainable heritage preservation in museums. Three disparate farmhouses scattered across Sweden whose histories have very different trajectories. They are all buildings that are understood to be important expressions of Swedish cultural heritage with thatched roofs that have been laid by the same thatcher. Building upon interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, this presentation focuses upon a thatcher, and his role in raising questions about sustainability and maintaining a wider public interest in a fading craft.

15:15 Discussion

15:30 Wrap-up

15:45 End