



ETHICS IN MUSEUMS

HOW TO HANDLE REMAINS OF LIVING ORGANISMS

Collected Abstracts



Slovenian Museum Society and Slovenian Police Museum

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Editorial Board:

Darinka Kolar Osvald, Elizabeta Petruša Štrukelj, dr. Tanja Roženbergar, Irena Marušič

Editors:

Darinka Kolar Osvald, Elizabeta Petruša Štrukelj

Translated by:

Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, Translation and Language Editing Service and InDoc Library, Petra Kaloh

Design:

Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, Administrative Operations and Graphics Service, Ana Vidmar

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Urn with the remains of a deceased woman from a Roman cemetery (Ljubljana, Slovenska cesta). Photo: Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana

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INTRODUCTION

Ethics in Museums – How to Handle Remains of Living Organisms was the main topic of Muzeoforum, which took place at the Slovenian Police Museum in Ljubljana on 1 December 2014.

In the long tradition of this education event, which had been held since 1991 under the auspices of the Slovenian Museum Society, the topic of ethics had not been highlighted before. In 2014 a conference devoted to this topic was organised by the Slovenian Museum Society, followed by the publication of a compendium. Why then? Had the social climate changed? Had the attitude to this topic changed? Or the relationship to museum materials? It is no coincidence that Muzeoforum responded to the initiative of the Slovenian Police Museum for a discussion of ethical issues connected to the display of sensitive museum materials. Our museum faces this dilemma when it comes to its criminal collection, which is one of the fundamental collections of this specialized museum in Slovenia. It is no coincidence that the initiative also came from the Slovenian committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which at that time was preparing the publication of the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums* (which came out in 2015).

It seems fitting to quote Vida Škerjanc, a history teacher, who wrote: *»When we talk about sensitive museum materials, we also need to mention the right to personal dignity, which is not merely the right of man living here and now. Dignified treatment does not end with a person's death but transforms into a highly ethical attitude of the living to the deceased. The integrity of personal dignity is not just a legal category but predominantly a civilizational norm.«*

In the tradition of Muzeoforum as a dialogue of the Slovenian museums with contemporary museum developments in the world, we reached out to colleagues from the United Kingdom and were pleased to host David Fleming, PhD, Director of National Museums Liverpool and President of the Ethical Committee of the Museum Association of the United Kingdom, who in his opening lecture emphasized the key role and ethical stance of museums in the interpretation of heritage.

Experts from other Slovenian museums, teachers, researchers, artists also took part in Muzeoforum's debate and, each in their own way, defined the significance of ethical aspects towards heritage, environment and society in general. Presentations triggered meaningful discussions of a wide circle of museum professionals and other experts. It was suggested that the presentations should be compiled in a compendium, which would enable a more permanent access to reflections on how to treat remains of living organisms and on ethical dilemmas in connection with concrete examples of this sensitive heritage.

This is the first such compendium in Slovenia on this topic and we believe that it will be a useful tool for anybody with a professional interest in this type of heritage. The full text in the Slovenian language is accessible at http://www.smd-drustvo.si/5_dejavnosti.htm#drugo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At the publication of the compendium, which has achieved the goal of Muzeoforum, i.e. to enable a flow of knowledge by connecting different branches, we would like to thank everybody who contributed to its publication, especially the authors of articles.

Elizabetha Petruša Štrukelj, leader of Muzeoforum
Darinka Kolar Osvald, Slovenian Police Museum

David Fleming

ETHICS AND MUSEUMS

Ethical behaviour underpins the role of museums. Traditionally, museum codes of ethics have concentrated on the ethics of collections management, and that may have been entirely appropriate. However, as museums play an ever-more expansive role in society, it is necessary that we rethink what we mean by ethics and ethical behaviour.

The UK Museums Association in the new Code of Ethics flag up three main principles: public engagement and public benefit; stewardship of collections; and individual and institutional integrity. It is the first of these – public engagement and public benefit – which I shall address in this paper.

Inclusion and equality are becoming bywords for museum behaviour. All modern museums aspire to being inclusive and to being champions of equality. Being these things means confronting challenging issues, notably politics and bias, and the silences that have often characterised museums.

At National Museums Liverpool (NML) we challenge silences, we campaign, and we attempt to include all histories. Our Mission at NML is “to be the world’s leading example of an inclusive museums service”.

Key words: ethics, museums, public engagement, challenge silences, National Museums Liverpool

David Fleming, OBE MA PhD AMA is Director of National Museums Liverpool since 2001 and member of many Boards and Governing Bodies. He is President of the UK Museums Association, President of the Federation of International Human Rights Museums (FIHRM), President of the Social Justice Alliance for Museums (SJAM) etc. He has lectured worldwide on museum management and leadership, city history museums, social inclusion, human rights and politics, and museum ethics.

Darinka Kolar Osvald

FORENSIC MEDICINE EXHIBITS AT THE POLICE MUSEUM – ETHICAL DILEMMAS

This paper describes a museum curator's dealing with specific museum materials. Exhibits of human remains raised a number of dilemmas and questions for her and led her to the hypothesis that man is entitled to dignity also after death and therefore to a special status in the museum environment. All this, along with looking for ways to appropriately handle specific exhibits at the police museum, led her to research, and to look into the history of the mission of the police museum and its collections, observe responses of museum visitors and wider public, examine similar collections in other museums, research different fields (from law, criminology, victimology, forensic medicine to ethics, human rights, art and museology) and to initiate a debate in the wider museum environment. This idea came to life as part of Muzeoforum at the Slovenian Police Museum in December 2014.

Key words: police museum, mortal remains, human rights, museum ethics, forensic medicine

Darinka Kolar Osvald holds a Bachelor's degree in art history. She started working for the Ministry of the Interior/Police in 2000 as a criminal police inspector specialist for the investigation of crime related to the cultural heritage/works of art. Since 2011 she has been the curator and head of the Slovenian Police Museum.

Uroš Vidmar

BOUNDARIES OF HUMAN DIGNITY

With persistent development, professionalization and efforts to reach the set goals experts may unwittingly move away from their basic mission and also from the fundamental social norms – basic human customs, etiquette and respect for man. Through awareness of the importance and influence of every man's act and particularly acts of different experts and other social authorities, this paper emphasizes the greatness of man. Besides attempting to fathom man's special status and answer the questions what is man and why man is worthy of having basic dignity, when this begins and when it ends and similar questions, the paper delves into due respect as defined by different experts and people in positions, highlighting the depth of the human being and their right to respectful treatment even after death.

Key words: man, dignity, basic rights, society, respect of the dead

Uroš Vidmar hold a Bachelor's degree in political science. He is a teacher at the Police College, police inspector at the Research and Social Skills Centre of the Police Academy, where he covers the field of ethics, integrity and human rights, to which he devoted an extensive monograph: *Integriteta*, Ljubljana, 2013.

Alenka Pirman

A CASE. ART AND CRIME

As an interdisciplinary modern artist I created the exhibition A Case. Art and Crime in 2005 together with Biserka Debeljak, the curator of the Museum of Internal Affairs Authorities at the time, and Igor Zabel, curator of the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition was displayed at the Mala galerija in Ljubljana and caused outrage from the public but was well received by art critics.

As a starting point I used documents of a concrete criminal case from the museum collection of violent and sexual crimes. I wanted to find out what happens when they are transferred from the police museum to an art gallery. How does this process of recontextualisation work? Does the status of documents change and if so, how? How to display an exhibition to make visitors think about it, too?

Key words: contemporary art, crime, exhibitions, police museums, role of documents

Alenka Pirman holds a Bachelor's degree in fine arts and is a PhD student in heritology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, co-founder of the Domestic Research Society, etc. Her artistic and research work is linked to different methodological research and exhibition projects, which often stimulate ethical questions connected to exhibiting.

Martin Horvat

FROM A BURIAL SITE TO A DEPOT

A consequence of any intervention or research at an archaeological site with an archaeological method is an acquisition of movable heritage. Excavation is undoubtedly the privileged element of archeologic research and for museums it represents the main, and for more ancient periods usually the only way of acquiring museum material. For the majority of museum artefacts obtained in this way it can be said that the transfer of the archaeological context into the museological context is of key importance for their interpretation. Special attention needs to be devoted to sites where the object of investigation is a burial ground. Regardless of the type of recommendations and codes of different international institutions (we have finally got the Slovenian translation and adaptation of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums), the paper is based on the cases where the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana encounter human remains obtained by means of the archaeological method.

Key words: archaeological excavation, burial site, mortal remains, ethical issues, museum material

Martin Horvat holds a Bachelor's degree in archaeology and is the Middle Ages curator and head of documentation department at the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana. He has led numerous archaeological studies and excavations and taken part in different archaeological projects.

Darko Knez

TRAPPIST, URN AND HEART

To exhibit or not?

The Department of History and Applied Art keeps a silver urn containing the heart of brother Gabriel Giraud, the founder of the Trappist monastery at Rajhenburg as part of its collection of sacral objects. In 2013 the National Museum of Contemporary History opened a permanent exhibition Trappists at Rajhenburg in what used to be monastic cells at the restored Rajhenburg castle. The author of the exhibition is Irena Fürst and the designer Mojca Turk Avsec. The exhibition tells the story of the Trappist order in Slovenia at the monastery, which was the only one of this order in Slovenia. On display are numerous original artefacts from the Rajhenburg monastery and documentary material, enabling broader understanding of the great spiritual and cultural heritage of the Trappists in the Brestanica area in Slovenia. By including the objects from the parent monastery of Domb the exhibition goes beyond Slovenian borders and acquires a broader, international significance. When the urn was discovered, the National Museum of Slovenia and the National Museum of Contemporary History agreed that the urn should be made part of the permanent exhibition Trappists in Rajhenburg. This means that brother Gabriel has returned to the castle, actually and symbolically. The National Museum of Contemporary History decided not to display brother Gabriel's urn due to reservations of the Slovenian museum professionals concerning the exhibition of human remains.

Key words: museums, mortal remains, urns, sacral objects, exhibitions

Darko Knez, MA, a historian, ethnologist, cultural antropologist is the head of the Department of History and Applied Art of the National Museum of Slovenia. He is responsible for the collections of religious objects.

Tajda Blazinšek, Rok Košir, Urška Nemic and Mateja Slovenc

DIFFICULT HERITAGE OF HUDA JAMA

The mine of ominous name Huda jama (nasty cave) became known all over Slovenia (and beyond) when a mass grave dating from 1945 was discovered in its shaft called Barbara in 2009. Huda Jama, near Laško, thus became synonymous with the wrongs committed on the Slovenian soil after World War II. Post-war events have almost entirely eclipsed the two-hundred-year mining heritage of this area. Students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts carried out a survey on the attitudes of locals to the mining heritage in 2014. While interviewing retired mine workers and their relatives, the students got involved in the rehabilitation of the said heritage. The aim of cooperation between the residents of Laško and the Department is to set up a community museum. Can you imagine what its message would be?

Key words: Huda jama, mass graves, ethical dilemmas, mining heritage, museums

Tajda Blazinšek, Rok Košir, Urška Nemic and Mateja Slovenc are post-graduate students of ethnology and cultural anthropology (research group mentored by Prof. Dr. Jože Hudales at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana), who participated in the project of surveying the mining ethnological heritage in the area of Rečica and Laško.

Pavel Jamnik

MUSEUM AND PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF HUMAN REMAINS AS CONSEQUENCES OF WAR CONFLICTS

The case of victims from post-war mass graves in Slovenia

This paper presents a reflection on the museum presentation of human remains of victims of war conflicts and post-war mass killings. It attempts to find ideological reasons for the differences in understanding and “using” of victims, which masquerade behind human integrity in different periods. The paper raises the issue of objective museum presentation, which is determined and at the same time determines and maintains the truth as is established in society. The paper asks when and to what extent presentations of human remains or parts thereof may be the most objective or even the only objective interpreter of past events and – regardless of a potential interference with a dead human body, which some consider excessive – still acceptable. Can such a boundary even be drawn nowadays?

Key words: human remains, mass killings, war, victims, ethics, museums

Pavel Jamnik is a senior criminal police superintendent at the Criminal Police Directorate of the General Police Directorate and a member of the Commission on Concealed Mass Graves in Slovenia.

Marjana Strmčnik

ON THE ETHICS OF DISPLAYING HUMAN BODIES AND REPATRIATION: EL NEGRO CASE

The question of repatriation of human remains, i.e. bodies and their parts, triggered a lot of interest from the scholarly as well as wider public three years ago. In mid 1980s some countries and different scientific circles adopted certain ethical principles on how to handle human remains displayed in different institutions or stored in depots. What the situation is like today can be seen at museums (also in Slovenia) where parts of bodies are still displayed in glass cabinets. This issue thus remains contentious.

According to reports by different authors, at the end of the 20th century institutions (museums, universities, societies and also private collections) kept thousands of human bodies and their parts. The causes and manners of the exhibits' death are subject to different repatriation discourses. The purpose of this paper is to present a case of an ethically contentious presentation and subsequent repatriation of remains of "El Negro", a member of the Tswana (Batswana) people from Africa.

Key words: El Negro, human remains, repatriation, museums, ethics

Marjana Strmčnik holds a Master's degree and is a doctoral student and assistant professor at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana.

Staša Tome

LIFE MISSION OF KAČON ČONE OR PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF DISPLAYING LIVE ANIMALS IN MUSEUMS

The mission of natural history museums is to preserve, study and present cultural heritage of natural origin and biodiversity. Museum workers in natural history museums are faced with a number of challenges having to do with handling and presenting biota, living or dead, as well as parts of organisms. Particularly sensitive is the handling of human remains or their parts. For this reason, after six years of research and coordination, ICOM's International Ethics Committee in cooperation with the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History ICOM NATHIST published its Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums, which was formally approved at the 28th ICOM General Assembly on 17 August 2013 in Rio de Janeiro.

The Slovenian Committee of ICOM recognised the importance of ethical guidelines for museum workers relating to work with biotic material since a number of Slovenian museums beside the Museum of Natural History keep such material as part of their natural history, anthropological and ethnographic collections. It established a group of experts in 2014, which prepared the Slovenian translation of the Code.

The Code covers a number of areas. It regulates the handling of human remains and sets the standards for collecting, displaying and storing live organisms and their parts as well as minerals, rocks and fossils. It also contains a good practice code for the preparation and storage of study collections.

At the Slovenian Museum of Natural History we encounter all the above areas. To discuss all of them would be too ambitious a task for this paper; therefore, we will only focus on ethical issues in connection with the presentation of

natural history contents in museums. More precisely, we will only focus on section 2, which also deals with the ethics of handling live animals in museums.

Key words: natural history museums, natural history material, displaying, animals, codes of ethics

Staša Tome holds a PhD in life sciences and is a museum adviser working at the Public Relations Department of the Slovenian Museum of Natural History. She encountered the issues of ethical collection, storage and presentation of natural history material during her research, numerous exhibition projects and workshops as well as other public programmes.

Tanja Roženberger

ICOM CODE OF ETHICS FOR NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

Awareness-raising on ethical contents and ways of museum work is one of the fundamental areas of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Its Code of Ethics for Museums, the fundamental document providing general ethical guidelines of museum activity and conduct, was published in Slovenian translation in 2005, just a year after the official adoption of the new amended and still valid version. Also the adoption of the special ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums, which was approved unanimously by ICOM assembly in 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, led to an immediate requirement for the Code to be provided to the Slovenian professional public in translation and thus become binding. Slovenia became one of the first countries to public the Code in its language and give it its rightful place in the Slovenian heritage and museum forum.

Key words: ICOM, code of ethics, museums, natural history museums

Tanja Roženberger holds a PhD in ethnology. She is Director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and she was president of ICOM Slovenia (2010-2017).

