



# INSIGHT

## JULY 2019

**This monthly newsletter brings together articles of interest and opinions from the world of art history and visual culture. This month we consider the role of the museum.**

### **ART OR ENTERTAINMENT?**

What do we really want from a museum, and what should museums of art really offer? A museum with a cafe/bar or a cafe/bar with a museum? Charles L Veneble, director of Newfields (the institution formerly known as the Indianapolis Museum of Art), has introduced some controversial and commercially-focused initiatives to boost visitors. <https://bit.ly/2QKjmeY>

### **SHOULD MUSEUMS BOW TO REPATRIATION PRESSURE?**

Director of the V&A, Tristram Hunt, thinks that, 'For a museum like the V&A, to decolonise is to decontextualise: the history of empire is embedded in its meaning and collections, and the question is how that is interpreted. A more nuanced understanding of empire is needed than the politically driven pathways of Good or Bad. For alongside colonial violence, empire was also a story of cosmopolitanism and hybridity: through trade, religion, war and force, peoples and cultures mixed, and, in many cases, expressed that exchange and interaction through the type of material culture now found in museums'.

<https://bit.ly/2KHgUSc>

### **WHY AND HOW SHOULD WE DECOLONISE MUSEUMS?**

Sumaya Kassim explains that museums are not neutral spaces, they often emerge from and continue to exhibit for a white audience, and with a privileged white gaze. Therefore, 'as interest in decolonial thought grows, we must beware of museums' and other institutions'

propensity to collect and exhibit because there is a danger (some may argue an inevitability) that the museum will exhibit decoloniality in much the same way they displayed black and brown bodies as part of Empire's "collection". I do not want to see decolonisation become part of Britain's national narrative...or, worse, for decoloniality to be claimed as yet another great British accomplishment...!

<https://bit.ly/2rfAhuU>

### **CAN WE CHANGE THE FATE OF CIVIC MUSEUMS?**

Many local authority museums are among the largest and most established museums in the country. They have long histories and vast collections, but are subject to extensive cuts and closures. 'what we're witnessing at the moment is not merely a bit of restructuring. It is a widespread retreat of local authorities from the delivery of museum services.' Meanwhile, in places like Leeds, civic museums are more popular than ever. It is less clear, however, who is responsible for the fate of our civic museums.

<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/local-authority-museums-cuts/>

### **WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?**

Should museums and galleries measure success by more than just numbers? Nicholas Cullinan, director of the National Portrait Gallery in London thinks that, "attendance is obviously important, and we should, of course, celebrate the exhibitions that welcome large numbers. But we should be very cautious not to make this the only way we judge success or to diminish the (necessarily) multifaceted achievements of museums and galleries and the different roles, remits and audiences, both large and small, they exist to serve".

<https://bit.ly/2D6jkWj>