



CALL FOR PAPERS

Unsettling the Museum: Thinking through Indigenous Entanglements

University of St Andrews

Dates: July 8-10, 2026

Introduction:

Indigenous reclaims for historical justice and agency in the heritage sector have led Indigenous and non-Indigenous curators to reimagine museum practice and purpose: expanding the interpretation of collections, engaging in restitution processes and fostering new forms of community participation. Pressured by social and political claims for reparation and the redistribution of authority in decision-making processes, some museums have recognised their entanglements with Indigenous cultures and the erasure produced by the appropriation of collections and the imposition of classificatory systems. In the present century, museums of different typologies, either ethnographic, natural history, science museums or art museums have made efforts to include a greater diversity of voices and representations, positioning themselves as institutions engaged with the transformation of societies. But how are they also being transformed by Indigenous agency and curatorship? What are the potential uses assigned to museums by Indigenous curators, creators and artists in the present? And what are the ethical challenges observed in these collaborations? These are some of the grounding questions constituting the basis of the debates we wish to undertake in the symposium *Unsettling the Museum: Thinking through Indigenous Entanglements*, at the University of St Andrews in July 8-10, 2026.

Conceived as part of the project EDGES: Entangling Indigenous Knowledges in Universities and with the support of ICOM's International Committee for Social Museology, SOMUS, and the International Committee for Museology, ICOFOM, the symposium will bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on museums reflecting upon the Indigenous entanglements that configure them as postcolonial institutions. By critically examining museum practice, methods and colonial legacies, our symposium is interested in unsettling established frameworks and perspectives based on the Western canon informing museum work. Contributions may look into the epistemological and political effects of Indigenous participation in exhibitions, the 'documentation legacy' (Turner, 2020) and the disputes involved in the co-construction of Indigenous contents and representation in exhibitions. Contributors are invited to reflect together on new ways of conceiving the museum through Indigenous entanglements and agency. This entails problematising the limits of 'indigenisation' (Roca, 2015) and recognising the possibilities of reconnecting and reconstructing after colonial situations. By reimagining museums as community spaces, or 'Indigenous territories' (Glicéria Tupinambá, 2022) reconquered through contemporary reparative processes, we aim to 'dislodge the authority of expertise' (Deliss 2020, 65) and re-focus the museum's core procedures on the goals of caring for and sharing with communities. For this purpose, we encourage contributors to propose new methods for dialogical research that will inform innovative cross-cultural museum practices and ethics. By examining case studies of collections linked to diverse Indigenous groups, this symposium aims to reconceive collections management from the perspective of those often deprived of the right to self-representation in mainstream institutions, and also considering their own interpretation of the museum in grassroots heritage organisations.

In the last few decades, the museum has expanded to new territories, including Indigenous lands, and it has become accessible to more diverse participants, but exploitative, imbalanced relationships have been maintained. *Unsettling the Museum* seeks to bring to the



surface of the contemporary museological debate a perception of museums as relational institutions entangled with marginalised communities through complex histories of appropriation and extraction. These social groups often feel excluded from museums and their reparative efforts, while they still grapple with colonial legacies of racism, social inequality, extractive economies and environmental crises. Building on previous analyses that considered ethnographic and world cultures museums as ‘powerful sites for thinking through colonial entailments’ (Modest 2019, 12), we will reimagine the ways of making museums from the perspectives of Indigenous communities. Bringing together a diversity of voices from communities, museums, academia, the art world and beyond, this symposium is a first step in the direction of forging new ways of penetrating museums with outside eyes and bodies, enabling curators to transgress their traditional systems of knowing, labelling and collecting.

Theme 1: Stories about and from Latin America: Indigenous Entanglements in Scottish Archives and Museums

This sub-panel explores Latin America Indigenous entanglements with Scotland. Diverse collections in Scottish archives and museums testify to the long relationship between both places. Scottish national, university and private archives, museums, repositories and galleries hold disperse and sometimes extensive accounts of the lives and activities of Scots in Latin America. In so doing, many also provide glimpses and insights into the multiple ways in which Scots and Scotland and indigenous peoples have encountered each other. They constitute importance sources for information on Scottish entanglements with indigenous knowledge and cultures.

Since the 17th Century financial endeavours to establish a Scottish colony in Panama under the Darien scheme, and 19th Century mercenary involvement in Bolivar’s liberation army, successive waves of Scottish ‘pioneers’ have left an imprint on Latin American history. Their legacies can be seen most notably in extractive industries and protestant mission but are not confined to these sectors. Less well known and less explored, is how records held in Scotland contest or cover gaps in the histories, materials and heritage (tangible and intangible) that indigenous people in Latin America hold about themselves. This situation raises important questions for imagining how to ‘Unsettle the Museum’ in ethical ways that are indigenously valid: How do indigenous people react to ‘finding themselves in the archives’? What responsibility do holders of knowledge about Indigenous peoples in Scottish sites have? And to whom?

This call for papers invites responses to these questions as well as submissions that explore the diversity of Indigenous entanglements that are revealed by Scottish collections more generally.

Theme 2: Decolonising Art History: Indigenous Entanglements in Art

How can art history be rethought, rewritten, and decolonised through Indigenous perspectives, agency, and knowledge systems? How do Indigenous artists articulate their roles as transmitters of cultural, spiritual, and community-based values? We invite contributions that examine how artists, communities, and art historians have asserted and defended Indigenous authority within academia, museums, galleries, collections, and art markets, and how they negotiate interpretive frameworks to ensure that Indigenous meanings are respected, accurately conveyed, and understood.



Proposed topics may include, but are not limited to:

- * Ways of reimagining art history as a discipline from Indigenous perspectives
- * How Indigenous art history is written today in comparison to the past
- * The integration of Indigenous art into the art history classroom and curriculum
- * Artistic practices that unsettle Western canons, denounce enduring colonial structures, or reclaim Indigenous voices in spaces dominated by colonial narratives
- * Artistic strategies for resisting misinterpretation and ensuring cultural meaning through academic, curatorial and interpretive practices
- * Artistic responses to erasure and challenges of visibility, accessibility, and representation
- * The integration of community voices, bodies, and values within artistic practice
- * Political and social challenges faced by Indigenous artists

We welcome submissions across periods, media, and regions, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous voices and Latin American researchers.

Theme 3: Care and Repair in the Curation of Atlantic Worlds

This sub-panel explores reparatory cultures as practices of care and repair in the making, remaking and curation of Atlantic worlds. How do, and should, scholars, and institutions engage intellectually, aesthetically and morally with the *longue durée* of displacement, enslavement and extraction in the Atlantic oikumene, while taking time to learn *carefully* from the people and communities involved—their ways of understanding and orienting themselves in, and reasoning about, their personal and collective histories? Here we foreground practices of worldmaking that have in different forms evaded, escaped or otherwise exceeded imperial, colonial and nation-state framings; that have cultivated tactical citizenships in contexts of non-sovereignty or of exclusion-by-definition from the rights and protections of liberal (and illiberal) states and imperial governance.

Hence, we invite papers that examine subaltern processes and practices of cultural and social care and repair—material, aesthetic, symbolic, cosmological and epistemic. We will explore examples where these appear within new approaches to the curation of culture in official museum and heritage projects, but also case studies where unfranchised works of care and repair go about coopting, reservicing and rehumanising ‘timed out’, politically and economically de-institutionalized spaces, or non-places. Contributions may address the cultural atmospheres and ecologies that support shared restitutive and reparatory practice; or the kinds of ethical and artistic (proto-)citizenship that grows from them. Likewise, how colonial and post-colonial national settlements are perturbed, while new relational ethics of interdependence, co-dwelling and conviviality are fostered in Atlantic worlds.

Terms of Submission

Abstracts are expected to be received before the conference. The approved abstracts will be formatted and distributed for discussion in workshops during the symposium.

- Contributions should be concise (500 words maximum, notes and references included) and must be sent **by April 10, 2026** (at the latest). Applications can be submitted via this link [Unsettling the Museum: Thinking through Indigenous Entanglements Call for papers – Fill in form](#). The proposals will have to integrate one of the proposed axes of analysis. Proposal



should be submitted in English or Spanish and following APA guidelines for style and format. Notice of acceptance of proposals will be given within two weeks after submission deadline.

Presentations can be in Spanish but accompanied by slides in English.

- Collected and formatted texts will be circulated among the authors and symposium participants, in electronic format on 2 June 2026.
- The symposium scientific committee may recommend some of the presenters for publication in one of the EDGES upcoming publications. In these cases, authors will be invited to develop their articles in a longer format for publication as a peer review article in a special journal issue or in an edited book.

For further questions please contact us at edgessymposium@gmail.com.

Submit here: [Unsettling the Museum: Thinking through Indigenous Entanglements Call for papers – Fill in form](#)

Basic References:

Ames, Michael. *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992.

Boast, Robin. "Neocolonial collaboration: Museum as contact zone revisited." *Museum Anthropology* 34, issue 1 (Spring 2011): 56-70.

Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Deliss, Clémentine. *The Metabolic Museum*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2020.

Glicéria (Célia) Tupinambá. (2022). An Indigenous Woman Troubling the Museum's Colonialist Legacy: Conversation with Glicéria Tupinambá. *Museum International*, 74(3-4), 10-23.

Modest, Wayne; Thomas, Nicholas; Prlić, Doris; & Augustat, Claudia (eds.). *Matters of Belonging. Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*. Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019.

Roca, Andrea. Acerca dos processos de indigenização dos museus: uma análise comparativa. *Mana*, 21(1): 123-155, 2015.

Thomas, Nicholas. *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999.

Turner, Hannah. *Cataloguing Cultures: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020.