

# Transnational Island Museologies



Materials for discussion

Edited by  
Karen Brown, Jamie Allan Brown  
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**ICOFOFOM** ICOM  
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**ICOFOM Materials for Discussion**

# **Transnational island museologies**

## ICOFOM MATERIALS FOR DISCUSSION

This publication brings together papers submitted for the 47th symposium organised by ICOFOM under the theme Transnational Island Museologies, to be held at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, 5-7 June, 2024.

The Materials for Discussion collection brings together, in an inclusive spirit, contributions selected for the symposium in the form of short articles, to prepare the ICOFOM Symposium. This publication has been made available before the symposium, in a very short time frame. In spite of the care given to the publication, some mistakes may remain.

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## **Introduction:**

# **Transnational island museologies**

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While islands are conventionally associated with romantic ideas of local distinctiveness and isolation, many small islands share the growing problems of coastal erosion through rising sea levels and storm intensification, as well as economic recession, depopulation and unsustainable tourism development. The Transnational Island Museologies conference being held at the University of St Andrews in Scotland 5th to 7th June 2024 takes its cue from the theme of the research project Shared Island Stories between Scotland and the Caribbean: Past, Present, Future, and the Call for Papers for which grew out of a strategic meeting with our project research team and advisors that took place on the Isle of Arran in March 2023. The conference and this issue of Materials for Discussion have since grown into a generative collaboration between the project and the International Council of Museums museology group committee – ICOFOM – working together to deepen the discussion on ways to unearth hidden stories and entangled spaces in emerging transnational island museologies.

Shared Island Stories between Scotland and the Caribbean: Past, Present, Future investigates relationships between the archipelagos of Scotland and the Caribbean. Drawing on history, heritage studies, sustainable development, art history and memory studies, the project asks:

- Which collections from the islands tell unfinished stories of empire?
- What is the role of heritage communities in sustainable development?
- How can island community museums partner with NGOs, policy and local organisations and businesses for climate action?
- How can health and well-being be understood in relation to community heritage, traditional ecological knowledge and island life?
- What does this new knowledge bring to debates on climate justice, especially as they relate to the role of youth?

In this way, the Transnational Island Museologies conference is seeking to reflect on the role of museum practice and theory with regard to some of the most pressing ecological issues of our times by sharing knowledge from around the globe on the realities that affect remote, island and coastal communities.

This volume is organised around two main axes:

(Part 1) Indigenous and traditional knowledge, environment and intergenerational transmission;

(Part 2) Hidden stories, entangled spaces: thinking through transnational coastal and island museologies.

Internationally, there is growing recognition of the wisdom of Indigenous and native knowledge in relation to climate resilience and the preservation of human and biodiversity. However, while Indigenous biocultural diversity is increasingly valued, it is also being eroded at alarming rates. The essays in Part 1 are dedicated to building knowledge around relationships between traditional ecological knowledge and museology, recognising the value of museums and heritage sites in remote, island and coastal communities as the loci of research and encounters for understanding adaptation to climate change through time.

Through them, we seek to better understand ways in which such traditional knowledge is influencing academia and public policies from a global perspective. At the same time, intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge helps to safeguard identities and memories at risk of being lost, and museum and heritage sites can be focal points for this work by offering opportunities for people from different generations to engage with their heritage, thus strengthening their sense of identity and place. In seeking to move towards an ecological museology in times of climate emergency, we consider the research questions:

- What is the role of community heritage in achieving local sustainability?
- How can global well-being be understood in relation to community heritage?
- How can rural, island and coastal community museums partner with NGOs, policymakers and local organisations and businesses for climate action?
- What can Indigenous heritage and traditional knowledge in rural, coastal and island areas teach us about resilience in the face of climate change, biodiversity loss and coastal erosion?
- In what ways can museums and heritage sites work with local biodiversity, language and the unique nature of places towards local resilience?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in engaging with the sustainability debates from an environmental humanities perspective, notably oceanic theories?
- What does intergenerational transmission of Indigenous and traditional knowledge bring to debates on climate justice, especially as they relate to the role of young people?
- How can the elderly be best valued as a resource for preserving memories of environmental and cultural change? How might their memories be used?

Bringing together the disciplines of history, art history, museum and heritage studies, memory studies and sustainable development, we seek to make sense of land ownership, extraction and innovative community-based governance on archipelagos that are intertwined through oceanic travel and troubled shared histories.

Part 2 seeks to acknowledge the power differentials between different islands, such as Scotland and the Caribbean, which were subject to rapid ecological change through colonialism or clearances. For this theme, we have welcomed new scholarship that pushes the boundaries of museology through cross-disciplinary approaches, including by re-reading Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*, and by asking:

- How can island collections tell lesser-known transnational stories, nuancing the formation of such complex relationships?
- How can we contest histories through relevant archives, such as revealing hidden histories through stories of everyday life?
- What agencies are entangled with mobility and displacement, for example sharing knowledge transnationally, using exchange as a form of resilience?
- In what ways can island life and creativity probe how the margin can act as a space of creativity and resilience, and how has this been done in the past (including by eco-feminist approaches relating to care and healing practices)?

This volume opens with articles that stress the urgency of sustainable museum practice and offer guidance through case studies based on various national and institutional contexts. Holly Bynoe presents *Sanctuary After a Storm*, a collaborative, psychosocial healing initiative organised by the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas in Nassau, New Providence, to address some of the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Dorian (2019). In her article, Heloisa Helena F.G. da Costa analyses the preservation of Indigenous and African peoples' traditions in the Ilha dos Frades in the Bay of All Saints, and the islands of Grande and Porto do Campo in the Bay of Camamu, Brazil. Ana Katurić concentrates on the Croatian Coral Centre Zlarin's efforts to protect the island's fragile marine ecosystem and the endangered red coral. Patricia Lopez-Sanchez Cervantes reflects on her role as Director of Museum Na Bolom, in Chiapas, Mexico. She discusses the museum's endeavour to preserve the natural heritage of the highlands and the Lacandon Jungle, particularly through growing trees in local school nurseries. This paper highlights the importance of adopting a circular knowledge model in museum practice. Alexandra Bounia considers three small museums in Lesbos, Greece, as she investigates their micro-museological practices and the essential part these play in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and the cultural sustainability of the islands' communities. Leilani Wong's case study of the ecomuseum Te Fare Natura in the Moorea volcanic island of French Polynesia explores the museum's bottom-up, place-based approach, its support for the recovery, preservation and transmission of the community's traditional environmental knowledge and culture and the participation of young locals as guides.

Issues of tangible and intangible heritage preservation are central to several contributions. Carolina Guerrero Reyes and Jairzinho Panqueba Cifuentes examine the current practice of the ancient Mesoamerican rubber ball game and its significance to the players' sense of cultural identity. Fiona Mackenzie's article offers insight into folklorists John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Fay Shaw's lifework dedication to preserving Gaelic song and story. Mackenzie considers issues of access to their private sound archive, owned by the National Trust for Scotland and the legacy of Diuram, a transatlantic Gaelic lullaby. The following article by Laura Felicitas Sabel Coba, Peter Rawitscher and the Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona del Pueblo Kággaba delves into the material cultural heritage of the Tairona's descendants in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia and its dispersion across European and North American museums. Their study concentrates on the significant epistemological consequences of the objects' translocation and argues for a museum shift towards planetary protection. Javier Pereda, Alexander Sanchez Diaz and Patricia Murrieta Flores's article presents their efforts to improve Nahua codices digital accessibility and decolonise

computational processes. They elaborate on their research project's development of various tools and the challenges of integrating complex cultural knowledge with computational workflows.

Another group of articles addresses climate change from various perspectives. Cinzia Calzolari considers the threat it poses to historical buildings in New Caledonia. Jamie Allan Brown's contribution presents collaborative research initiatives that respond to youth-led movements' demands for museums to address the existential threat of climate change. He discusses the Shared Island Stories project's transnational youth exchange, ICOFOM's youth workshop series and the co-development of a youth-focused toolkit, all of which empower young people to become changemakers for cultural protection in the face of the climate crisis. Althea Davies, Nina Laurie, and Tania Mendo's research focuses on communities on the north coast of Peru and their perception of El Niño Southern Oscillation as an opportunity to make use of the water available for their farming and fishing (in contrast to dominant disaster narratives). Their article presents their project's use of intergenerational storytelling and a student-led school museum to foster communities' awareness of their climate resilience heritage and disaster preparedness. Plant blindness is Hannah Reid Ford's central concern as a significant challenge to sustainable development in the Cayman Islands. As an antidote, her article underlines the need to increase plant awareness by reactivating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The final article in this section, by Sharon Pisani and Alan Miller, explores the use of digital cultural landscapes to preserve and promote Mediterranean heritage. Pisani and Miller advocate a collaborative approach and propose digital exhibition design components, such as the recreation of the landscape, digitised artefacts and oral traditions and recorded traditional practices.

The second part of this volume begins with several contributions that consider contemporary art interventions in museum spaces. Karen Jacobs examines the display of artwork by Teresa Regina and Yuki Kihara in Oceanic regional museums holding historical collections. She argues that the artists' perspectives have extended the scope of their host institutions to address climate injustice. Calling for a reappraisal of the periphery as a productive space, William Helfrecht's article explores the cultural significance of maps for Caymanian artists dealing with issues of identity. Clémence Foisy-Marquis analyses the curation of *Like ships in the night* by Caroline Monnet, a filmmaker and artist of Anishabe and French ancestry from the island of Montreal, Canada, presenting the installation's journey through several European and North American institutions and looking into decolonial curatorial strategies that encourage encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. The following essay by Clémentine Debrosse concentrates on recent exhibitions of the work of George Nuku, an artist of Māori and Scottish-German ancestry, at the Musée Hébreu de Saint Clément in Rochefort, France, and the Weltmuseum Wien in Vienna. Debrosse discusses Nuku's reworking of a series of taonga ('ancestral treasures') and illustrations from nineteenth-century expeditions and his critical retelling of entangled Māori and European (hi)stories. The contribution by Amanda Guzmán investigates how archipelagic thinking may inform collection-based work in Puerto Rican museums. Drawing from Pablo Delano's site-specific installation series, *The Museum of the Old Colony*, Guzmán proposes a reparative framing of museum spaces. Another perspective on Puerto Rican museum practice is offered by Alejandra Núñez Piñero, who examines the relationship between public awareness of Aboriginal heritage and the institutions' display of human remains.

Some participants have chosen to scrutinise collecting practices. Sarah Longair examines colonial collecting from western Indian Ocean Islands under British imperial control. By presenting two key examples – Maldivian woven mats and water carriers from the Seychelles – she elucidates the intersections between Indian Ocean insularity, connectivity, and colonial knowledge production. Briony Widdis and Emma Reisz focus on the contested legacies of empire in private and public collections across Ireland and Northern Ireland. Their study sheds light on how these legacies reflect the island's divisions but also surface other unexpected and shared narratives. Marion Bertin and Marianne Tissandier's object of study is an inventory of Kanak heritage from New Caledonia dispersed in museums around the world. This article presents the inventory (IPKD) as a case study to address the issue of transnational entanglement.

Another shared topic that emerged from the participants' submissions is the concern with collective memory and difficult knowledge. Heather Cateau's article investigates the economic interconnections between the Scottish islands and highlands and the Caribbean between the 1750s and the 1830s. By reassembling the fragments of a shared history, Cateau illuminates the changed lived reality of working and middle-income communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Henry Harding's essay focuses on a museum on the island of Delma in the United Arab Emirates, considering communities' selective shaping of their collective memory. While the island's involvement in the pearling industry during the 19th century is acknowledged as significant to the coastal community's identity, this case study explores debt patronage and slavery as forgotten or hidden stories within the museum's narrative. Hsu Chuchun concentrates on the commemoration of White Terror in Taiwan. This paper provides insight into the landscape and environment of Lü Dao (Green Island) and explores alternatives that do not rely on monuments. The following article by Inmaculada Real López addresses the preservation of intangible heritage related to severe human rights violations. Her study draws attention to the limitations of the #MemoriasSituadas project proposed by the CIPDH-UNESCO to visualise how different communities deal with their traumatic pasts. Real López examines the remembrance of slavery in different museum contexts on the island of Curaçao, a small island territory of the Netherlands. Similar concerns arise in the essay by Gönül Bozoğlu, focused on the memory and heritage of Greek communities of the Turkish Island of Gökçeada. She examines the heritage and memory practices amidst the negotiation of tense geopolitical relations, a history of displacement and suppression, and the contested conditions of return. Lisa Williams examines Scottish galleries changing approach to issues of race, class and violence, and grapples with museums' ill-defined concepts of 'political', 'free speech' and 'anti-racism'. She discusses recent examples, including Alberta Whittle's large-scale solo exhibition *Creating Dangerously* at the National Galleries (2023) and its policy of care, extended to the artist, museum staff and audiences. Branko Šuštar then investigates museum narratives that transcend national and linguistic boundaries in the coastal towns of northern Istria, Slovenia, some of which deal with politically sensitive histories.

Several authors investigate current ecological challenges. Indrani Battacharya offers insight into the Sundarbans, a coastal delta in West Bengal, India. Her article presents an overview of the mangrove forest's rich biodiversity (best known as the home of the royal Bengal tiger), the area's cultural heritage, and the impact of climate change. Sakshi Jain focuses on museum practice in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Jain's article presents the Zonal Anthropological Museum as a case study devoted to the local tribal communities, colonial history, and cultural interaction.

The following case study by Ayesha Keshani presents the Sarawak Museum in Malaysian Borneo. Keshani considers archipelagic museology to discuss the museum's historical engagement with turtles during a transitional period that marked the beginning of vast deforestation. This second part of the Materials concludes with the essay by Ary Sulistyono, M. Ismail Fahreza, Teuku M. Rizki R., Nofa Farida Lestari and Sriwulantuty Rizkiningsih. Their research highlights the need to sustainably preserve archaeological remains in Onrust and its surrounding islands in Jakarta Bay, Indonesia, as they are facing natural abrasion due to rising sea levels. The authors propose adopting an ecomuseum approach to respond to these current challenges, which will form the basis of a discussion in-conference led by Peter Davis.

This year (2024) marks the 80th anniversary of Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*. On this occasion, Heather Cateau has invited Lorna Steele Mc Ginn, Stephen Mullen, Diana Paton and Henderson Carter to respond to the book and consider, in particular, the perspectives from which history has been written, preserved and presented. The think pieces compiled here provide a preliminary framework for a more extensive discussion on current issues of historical representation and heritage preservation.

In this transnational volume, the authors share their unique insights into some of the most pressing issues in museology today. Not all participants at our upcoming conference, including some keynote and invited speakers, have contributed to this publication, but the Materials for Discussion is meant to foster in-depth and inspiring conversations between participants who will be meeting at St Andrews. We hope these thought-provoking articles will also reach a wider audience of museum professionals dealing with shared concerns, especially those working in island contexts.

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