



Universeum Pre-Conference Workshop

3-4 July 2022

Maison des Arts – Solbosch Campus – Université libre de Bruxelles

Decolonisation and restitution – The role of university museums in provenance research and its impact

Following the debates around the world over the last years concerning the ethics about cultural heritage collections, universities across Europe have been re-examining the history, provenance and nature of their academic heritage and collections. In this process, they have been facing the critical issue of their own colonial history and engaging with the origin of their collections in new ways. So far, there appears to be no clear consensus among the European university community as to what should be researched, documented, and especially restituted or repatriated, as well as on how to best include source communities into the process.

As these challenging questions underpin key areas of operation of university museums and the way we manage and engage with collections, it is important to keep an open dialogue and critically examine them as a community.

We therefore invite early career professionals and researchers (PhD students) to participate in this workshop on Decolonisation and restitution which will be organized prior to the Universeum annual conference in Belgium in July 2022.

Workshop structure and focus

This workshop will focus on the issues related to provenance research which have been at the front of priorities for museums worldwide including university museums and collections. It will consist of two sessions coordinated by cultural heritage professionals and academics from the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), as well as by members of Universeum and researchers closely working on this topic. Prior to the workshop participants will receive an information pack on the subject and will be asked to reflect on the publication *Ethical Principles for the Management and Restitution of Colonial Collections in Belgium* (June 2021).

The workshop will start with a lecture by a specialist in these matters having direct experience in dealing with restitution cases.

Workshop participants will then work in groups, selecting objects from the collections of the ULB to work on, which will provide the basis for further reflection. The workshop will involve closely examining the type of information and records available about the selected objects and their origin, the challenges raised, as well as discussing appropriate steps to manage these moving forward.

Some questions addressed at the workshop will be:

- What does provenance research involve and why is it important?
- How are the origin, role, and interpretation of university collections documented and presented on institutional websites and databases?
- How are sensitive topics handled in our collections and documentation?
- How do we deal with objects from a colonial context?
- Whose heritage is it? When should it be restituted or repatriated, and how does this work (legally and practically)?
- How can we include source communities and other people concerned?
- Which ethical principles can we look at to best guide these processes?
- Should we limit ourselves to colonial contexts or enlarge the debate?
- What is the best way to communicate these issues to the public?
- How can we invite others to be part of the conversation?

Participants will be encouraged to bring and relate to their own experiences when contributing to the discussions, as well as relate these to their points of interest and specialisms.

At the end of the workshop, the groups will meet to present their findings and recommendations and discuss their approach. Participants will be invited to present the workshop results during the following Universeum annual conference (5-8 July).

Who is the workshop for? The workshop is aimed mainly at early career professionals working in university museums, archives, libraries, special collections, as well as PhD students and early career researchers working with/on university collections.

Registration fee: There is no fee for attending the workshop

Other costs: Lunch and coffee/tea during the day will be provided by Universeum. Participants, or their organizations, will be expected to cover their own travel and accommodation. Information and suggestions for these are provided on universeum2022.be website.

Maximum number of participants: To allow for hands-on and behind-the-scenes sessions and work in small groups, the workshop is limited to **20 participants**

Grants: The Universeum Board is able to offer 10 travel grants up to 400 euros each to cover travel within Europe and accommodation.

Workshop dates: 3-4 July, 1.5 days before the main Universeum conference which will take place 5-8 July. Workshop participants are expected to also attend the main Universeum conference.

Venue: Maison des Arts – Solbosch Campus – Université libre de Bruxelles
56 avenue Jeanne, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Eligibility:

- Participants should be researching or working with a university collection, museum, archive, or library (either as part of their work or PhD or post-doctoral studies/research) at the time the workshop will take place.
- Participants should be fluent in spoken and written English.

Overall selection of applicants will consider gender balance, as well as the diversity of their backgrounds, age, country, and museum/collection(s).

Participants should be ready to do preliminary work before and during the workshop (e.g. readings and assignments), participate in its evaluation, and prepare a presentation for the main conference.

Application process: Applications should include:

1. Completed application form (from the website universeum2022.be)
2. A letter of motivation from the applicant explaining why they wish to participate and what they expect to gain from the workshop (1 A4 page)
3. A short CV (up to 1 A4 page) indicating studies, training, work experience, publications, and current work responsibilities

Applications should be sent by email to universeum2022@ulb.be with the title: "application for Universeum pre-conference workshop 2022" before **31st March 2022**.

Contact: If you have any questions about the workshop, please send an email to universeum2022@ulb.be