



Collecting to Shape and Reflect the Nation: Changing Museum Strategies from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century

22 – 24 October 2026

Hochhauser Auditorium, Learning Centre,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Full Programme



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Introduction

The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM) are collaborating to organise a pair of conferences exploring the relationship between museums' histories and their future missions. This first conference examines how large-scale museums with national remits can critically engage with their own institutional pasts to inform their present-day identities and considers how these institutions can contribute to fostering social cohesion in increasingly diverse twenty-first-century societies.

Focusing on the formation, interpretation, and display of national collections, the conference takes as its point of departure a range of major museums and memory institutions founded or fundamentally reshaped amid the political and historical transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Bringing together an international group of scholars and museum professionals, it explores how these institutions have shaped—and been shaped by—changing ideas of nationhood, identity, empire, and public responsibility.

Speakers will address questions including:

- How were museum profiles and their claimed roles in society continually redefined throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
- How did museums communicate ideas of nationhood, nationalism, and imperialism within changing political and intellectual contexts?
- How have museum professionals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries sought to confront historical legacies in order to redefine, stabilise, and legitimise their institutions' missions?

About the Organisations

V&A Research Institute

The V&A Research Institute (VARI) leads the V&A's research programmes and partnerships across the V&A family of sites. We aim to develop new approaches to the understanding of material and visual culture, to explore how our collections can be brought to bear on pressing contemporary challenges, and to inspire future generations through teaching and training. We collaborate with museum professionals, academic scholars, creative practitioners and members of the general public.

<https://research.vam.ac.uk/>

If you have any questions about VARI, please contact: vari@vam.ac.uk

Germanisches Nationalmuseum

The Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM) is Germany's most comprehensive museum of cultural history. Founded in 1852, its collections range from prehistory to the present day, including material objects from all areas of human life. The GNM is one of eight research museums within the Leibniz Association, and the only one of these with a focus on arts, humanities and cultural studies.

If you have any questions about the GNM, please contact: info@gnm.de.

Event Information

Location: Hochhauser Auditorium, Level 1, Learning Centre, V&A South Kensington

Date and Time:

Day 1: Thursday 22 October, 14:00-16:45

Day 2: Friday 23, 10:15-17:15

Day 3: Saturday 24, 10:15-13:15

The conference will start at 14:30 promptly with registration starting at 14.00 on Day 1. You will be asked to leave your large bags in the public cloakroom near the shop before coming to the conference.

Online

Please use the links below to join on each day. Online attendees will be able to join the Teams from 14.30 on the first day. If you haven't already downloaded [Teams](#), please do so before the event takes place. We recommend using desktops and laptops to join the event.

If you experience any technical issues before or after joining online, please email collectingtoshapethenation@vam.ac.uk with a subject line 'Technical Support' and describe what support you need. If you need support during the conference, please use the Q&A feature to request support.

Catering

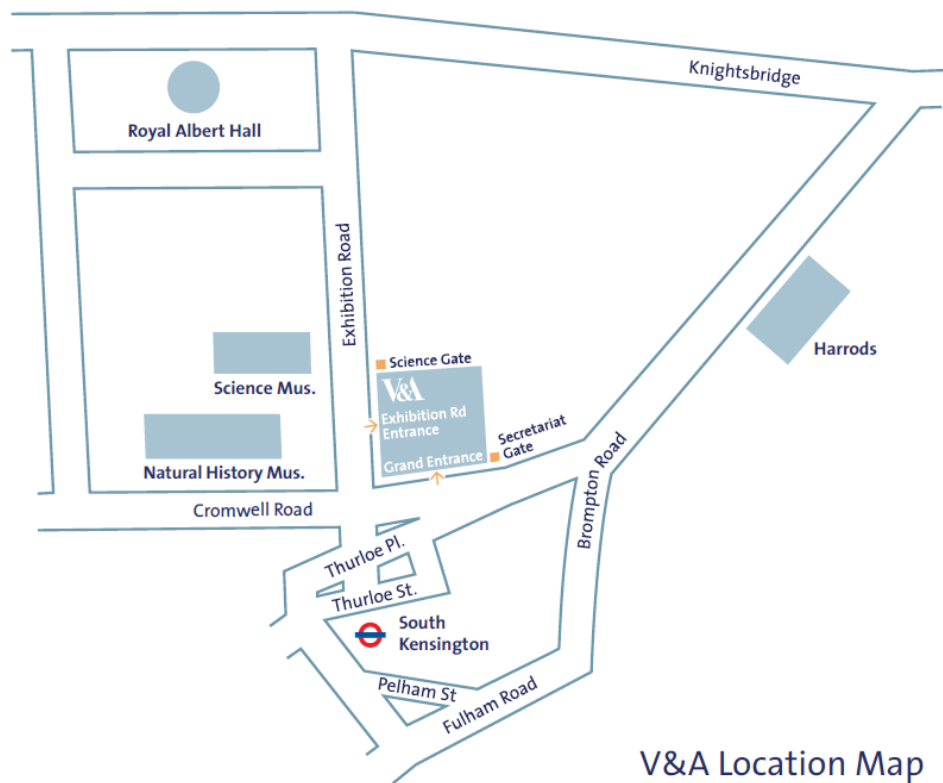
There will be tea and coffee served throughout the day outside the lecture theatre.

Access

If you require step-free access or have any further questions regarding accessibility, please email accessibility@vam.ac.uk. We ask that requests for step-free access be made at least 24 hours before your visit. If you would like more information about accessibility at V&A South Kensington, please visit <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/disability-access>.

If you require a quiet space during any part of the day, please let any members of staff know. You will be directed to a quiet space.

The nearest public entrance and exit, which opens between 10.00 – 17.45 is the Exhibition Road entrance. It is step-free and has an automatic opening door at the bottom of the walkway. Lifts are available to access the Hochhauser Auditorium, on Level 1, from the Learning Centre on Level 0. Accessible toilets and a gender-neutral toilet are located on Level 0.



Conference Programme with Abstracts

Day 1

Thursday, 22 October 2026

14.00–14.30 Registration and refreshments

14.30–14.45 Institutional welcome from V&A and GNM

14.45–15.15 *Introduction* (Joachim Berger, Darja Jesse and Simona Valeriani)

15.15–16.45 Panel 1: *Legacies: museums, empires and the postcolonial*, Chair: Richard Espley (V&A)

Damiana Oțoiu, University of Bucharest (Bucharest, Romania)

The Nation in the Museum: Postcolonial Collections and Repatriation Debates in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1970–today)

My presentation attempts to reconstruct the image of the nation as it emerges from the collecting practices and repatriation projects of the Institut des Musées Nationaux du Congo (IMNC) in Kinshasa. Founded in 1970, the IMNC is the institution responsible for the conservation, study, and management of the Democratic Republic of Congo's cultural heritage.

How were objects collected by IMNC curators from the 1970s onwards? What was collected, and why? And how do IMNC museum professionals today select artefacts from specific ethnic groups and regions for provenance research, in collaboration with the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren? These projects are carried out in the context of the Belgian legal framework for the restitution of colonial collections adopted in 2022.

Taken together, what do these collecting practices and repatriation projects reveal about the ways in which the museum – and the nation it represents – is (re)created? Do they privilege particular communities, or do they seek to reflect the country's ethnic diversity?

The presentation is based on long-term anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Belgium.

Diệu Ly Hoàng, University of Oxford (Oxford, UK)

Collecting the Nation under Colonial Rule: The Musée Khai-Dinh in Vietnam

In August 1923, a museum called Musée Khai-Dinh was founded based on two decrees by the Résident Supérieure d'Annam as well as by the royal court of Huế, the then capital city of present-day Việt Nam. The set goal of this museum was to bring together artworks representative of the social, ritual and political life of Đại-Nam. While Emperor Khải Định and his ministers justified the establishment of this museum with a nationalistic approach, French colonial regime took this opportunity to legitimize its presence in so-called French-Indochina. Within the complex history of the Musée Khai-Dinh, this paper seeks to critically explore its role of representation. Based on archival records of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and published sources by the Association des Amis du Vieux Hué among others, I want to reconstruct the museum collection in its early years, while challenging the colonial narrative of national representation. How was Đại-Nam or Annam, a loosely defined term, represented in the collection of Musée Khai-Dinh? How can the Vietnamese national idea embodied by the museum be reconciled with the real, historical context of a French protectorate? And lastly, whose representation did the museum really serve?

Ewa Manikowska, Institute of Art Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw, Poland)

Restitution and the Making of National Museums after 1918: The Polish–Soviet Case

This paper examines post–First World War restitution as a formative moment and a crucial factor in the development of national museums. Taking the Polish–Soviet negotiations following the Peace Treaty of Riga (1921) as a case study, it analyses the process of reclaiming and reorganising former imperial collections as a redefinition and institutionalisation of national heritage within differing state frameworks. The Riga Treaty constituted the most far-reaching programme of cultural restitution after the First World War, unprecedented in both scale and chronological scope, as claims reached back to the first partition of Poland (1772) and reflected the scale of imperial looting.

In Poland, a newly reconstituted and multiethnic state, restitution contributed to the construction of increasingly exclusive and coherent national (Polish) museum narratives. In Soviet Russia, by contrast, these processes must be situated within the broader transformation brought about by nationalisation policies and the emergence of a new property regime governing cultural and memory institutions.

The restitution commissions brought together experts – many trained in the imperial era and previously connected through scholarly and institutional networks – who were now tasked with renegotiating collections. In doing so, they drew on shared professional norms, including provenance, the integrity of collections, and the tension between universal and

national value. This paper argues that the Polish and Soviet “national” museums emerged through such negotiated encounters rather than in isolation.

16:45 Day 1 ends

Day 2

Friday, 23 October 2026

10.15–11.45 Panel 2: *Art collections and the construction of national identities*, Chair: Diana Unterhitzenberger (GNM)

Kamila Kłudkiewicz and Aldona Tołysz, Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań, Poland) / Office of the Provincial Conservator of Monuments in Warsaw (Warsaw Poland)

The strategy of a young state on the periphery of Europe. The establishment of a national museum in Poland during the interwar period

Poland gained independence in 1918. Like other countries in Central Europe, the young state faced many challenges, including organising a museum system. Until the outbreak of the First World War, only private museums or institutions managed by municipal authorities and associations had been established on Polish soil. Some of these institutions (in cities such as Kraków and Warsaw) aspired to national museum status, even if these aspirations were purely symbolic. Meanwhile, the institutions themselves struggled with accommodation issues and a lack of strategy for building collections.

During the interwar period, there were numerous discussions in Poland regarding the organisation of the museum system and strategies for managing museums. Against this backdrop, the activities of two institutions stood out: the State Art Collections and the National Museum in Warsaw (which was then city-owned). These institutions were intended to fulfil the role of national museums in the young state, not merely in name.

This paper will discuss the characteristic features, modes of operation, collection-building practices and exhibitions of these two institutions. Particular emphasis will be placed on how these institutions shaped the concept of Polish national identity through their collections. In the case of the State Art Collections (a state institution that manages historic buildings of particular value, primarily the Royal Castle in Warsaw), this strategy was based on references to bygone eras and the collecting practices of Poland’s last king,

whilst simultaneously attempting to establish a National Gallery of contemporary Polish art. The National Museum in Warsaw initially adopted a 19(th)-century concept of a national museum, which evolved into a knowledge-based presentation of the development of Polish art in a modern, modernist building constructed specifically for this institution.

Marie Tavinor (London, UK)

Doubling Size and Changing Remit: the Tate Gallery's Shift from National to International Collection in the 1920s

The Opening of the Modern Foreign and Sargent Galleries at the Tate Gallery on 26 June 1926 by King George V was a magnificent occasion, lavishly recorded by artist John Lavery. On the surface, it mirrored the opening of the museum on 21 July 1897 by the Prince of Wales, after sugar magnate Henry Tate had donated part of his collection of British art and money to erect a building. Yet in fact, after a mere 30 years in existence, the new galleries completely changed the remit and identity of the museum originally called 'National Museum of British Art', to encompass artworks by foreign artists. Such a shift intervened in a troubled period of the UK history, during which Ireland had become an independent Republic, which forced the kingdom to reassess its understanding of national identity. While the new galleries had been first promised during the First World War in 1916 to house the Hugh Lane Bequest, their gestation and opening took place in a politically explosive context. The proposed paper aims to investigate the Tate Gallery's changing role and mission, and to contextualise the gift of the Modern Foreign and Sargent Galleries during the crucial decade 1916 to 1926.

Ulrike Müller, University of Antwerp (Antwerp, Belgium); Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels, Belgium)

From National Monument to Museum Satellite: The Meunier Museum and the Contested Notion of Nationhood in Belgium

This paper examines the transformation of Constantin Meunier's (1831–1905) studio into a satellite of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB), revealing how artists' estates negotiate and challenge concepts of nationhood through their institutionalization.

Internationally celebrated by 1900 for his realist sculptures of modern laborers, Meunier's legacy sparked debates about its preservation already during the final years of his life: should his works be displayed in a traditional museum setting or presented as public monuments, accessible to broader audiences beyond institutional walls? These discussions reflected tensions between elite cultural institutions and the democratization of art, set against the backdrop of Belgium's evolving social and political landscape.

This paper traces the Meunier Museum's complex trajectory, from a family lieu de mémoire to its integration as a RMFAB satellite in the 1970s-80s, a period marked by growing pressure on national narratives amid Belgium's administrative decentralization following the State Reforms from 1970 onwards. While the museum's incorporation into the RMFAB ostensibly solidified Meunier's status as 'national artist', it paradoxically coincided with his declining public recognition and relevance.

By analyzing the evolving reception and institutional framing of Meunier's work, this paper explores how musealized artists' estates both reflect and contest narratives of nationhood. The case of Meunier's legacy thus offers a critical perspective on how national museums negotiate – or fail to negotiate – their historical legacies in the 20th and 21st centuries. It reveals how an individual artist's estate can become a site of contestation, where national identity is not only performed and reimagined but also destabilized amid changing social and political realities.

12.00–13.30 Panel 3: *Reinterpreting objects in transnational encounters*, Chair: Darja Jesse (GNM)

Susanne Boersma, Centre for Regional History (Brixen/Bressanone, Italy)

The significance of the Hindeloopen room: A transnational history through provenance, museum strategies and practices

Museum collections, once compiled to perform a concept of nationhood and since then displayed as part of a larger narrative, reflect changing museum strategies within national and international contexts (see: Buchczyk 2023). Connecting curatorial strategies and epistemologies with places and their histories (O'Hanlon and Welsch 2001; Shelton 2001), museum collections serve as a historical legacy worthy of a more thorough transnational study. Rather than reviewing the national agenda reflected by a single museum collection, this paper examines the Hindeloopen room(s) across museums and their (inter)national contexts. The room was first reconstructed to be exhibited in the Dutch city of Leeuwarden in 1877, only to be displayed at the Paris world exhibition a year later, after which few additional versions were created and collected. Various iterations of the room were acquired by Dutch and German museums—amongst which the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM)—which considered it a product of Dutch or Germanic culture respectively (Schneider 2017; Selheim 2008). Practices of collecting, presenting, interpreting, expanding and deaccessioning the Hindeloopen room reflect changeable national ideals and institutional strategies. Through a transnational study of various

iterations of this peculiar museum object, this paper reveals its significance for, within and through different collections.

Azar Emami Pari, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (Florence, Italy)

Persia in Fragments: Safavid Carpets and the Museum Imagination

During the nineteenth century, European museums increasingly positioned themselves as institutions capable of shaping national cultural narratives through the collection and display of objects. Among the artefacts that entered these collections were Safavid carpets, many of which arrived not as intact works but as fragments detached from architectural and devotional settings in Iran. This paper examines how such fragments were transformed within European museums into canonical representations of “Persian” artistic heritage.

Drawing on approaches to the cultural biography of objects associated with Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai, and on scholarship that understands museums as sites of knowledge production developed by Tony Bennett and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, the paper treats Safavid carpet fragments as material agents whose circulation and reclassification participated in the formation of art-historical categories. By tracing the trajectories of these textiles from sacred and architectural contexts into museum collections and exhibitions, the study analyses how collecting practices, curatorial frameworks, and display strategies stabilised the category of “Persian art” within emerging narratives of decorative and Islamic art.

In dialogue with recent transcultural art histories advanced by Finbarr Barry Flood and Avinoam Shalem, the paper argues that fragmentation and recontextualisation were not incidental outcomes of collecting but key mechanisms through which museums constructed coherent images of cultural identity and artistic tradition.

Iñigo Salto Santamaría, Universität Zürich (Switzerland)

Weaving Histories of Deaccession in the 1930s: A Byzantine Textile between Düsseldorf and London

In 1937, the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Düsseldorf deaccessioned a Byzantine silk textile, which then entered the art market and was swiftly acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum. The textile’s disposal formed part of a larger collection policy pervasive in German museums of the time, where “non-Germanic” works were routinely liquidated to obtain foreign currency and refine collections along racial-nationalistic lines. For institutions like the V&A, such deaccessions meant the appearance of rare pieces well-fitting their mandate as custodians of universal artistic heritage.

The paper reveals how German museum officials actively fed this pipeline and argues that the Düsseldorf-London textile forms part of a larger network. Successful exchanges encouraged German museums and dealers to push for more deaccessions, which were willingly absorbed by foreign collectors and institutions. No work of art entered the Düsseldorf collection in exchange for the textile now in London, exposing a pattern that actively eroded the conservation mandate of German institutions. By focusing on the object biography of this textile, the paper traces patterns of deaccession from the decision of their loss to the arrival in its new home, highlighting the asymmetries and powerful transnational interconnects of museum cultural policy in the late 1930s.

13.30–14.45 Lunch break

14.45–16.45 Panel 4: *Delimiting the nation and negotiating multiple belongings*, Chair: Simona Valeriani (V&A)

Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel, Natural History Museum Vienna; University Vienna (Vienna, Austria)

Re-reading the Naturhistorisches Museum Vienna: Revising Architectural and Curatorial Narratives

This paper examines the Naturhistorisches Museum Vienna (NHM) as both a product of transnational networks and a site for the articulation of imperial identity, focusing on its architecture and collections at the time of its opening (1889). Conceived as a monument to scientific authority, the museum integrated exhibition design, iconography, and spatial sequencing into a “walk-in textbook” that conveyed scientific alongside patriotic narratives. While drawing on British architectural models, the NHM diverged from them by rejecting religious references in favor of a strictly evolutionary framework.

By integrating anthropology, ethnography, and prehistory into a natural science collection, its first director, Ferdinand von Hochstetter—a staunch advocate of Darwinism—sought to surpass contemporary institutions through an ambitious evolutionary synthesis, asserting the scientific leadership of the Habsburg Empire. Although the empire lacked overseas colonies, the collections' international scope signaled a global presence intended to rival that of Britain or France.

Furthermore, in attempting to consolidate diverse nationalities under a German-dominated administration, the NHM enacted a form of internal colonialism, framing the natural sciences as instruments for the economic exploitation of the Crown lands. Re-reading these narratives through contemporary research and curatorial practice opens space for critical reassessment and modern understandings of cohesion.

Gerrit Verhoeven, University of Antwerp (Belgium) / Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (Belgium)

Belgique Ancienne: Antoine Schayes and the Collection of National Archaeology in Brussels (1835–1859)

Founded in 1830, Belgium was a fragile state marked by deep internal divisions. Political संघर्ष between Liberals and Catholics, persistent regionalism, rising social inequality, and emerging tensions between French- and Dutch-speaking communities all challenged national cohesion. Supported by Leopold I of Belgium, the government launched ambitious initiatives to foster a sense of shared nationhood. History became a crucial instrument in this effort, as historians such as Henri Pirenne and Théodore Juste traced the origins of Belgium back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, emphasizing enduring national characteristics such as a love of liberty, industriousness, and Catholicism.

Archaeology extended this narrative even further into the past. In Brussels, Antoine Schayes, curator-in-chief of the “Musée royal d’armures, d’antiquités et d’ethnologie”, played a central role in assembling a collection of “national” antiquities. He organized some of the first state-subsidized excavations and actively published his findings, contributing to the materialization of the national past within a museum context.

This paper examines how such collecting practices intersected with broader nation-building efforts. To what extent did early archaeological collections function as instruments of national propaganda? And how did museum practices shape—and complicate—the construction of a Belgian national narrative?

Patricia Allerston, National Galleries of Scotland (Edinburgh, UK)

National Baggage: The National Gallery of Scotland’s ‘on-off relationship’ with its Scottish collection, c. 1920–2020

Laying its foundation stone in 1850, Prince Albert expressed the hope that the new National Gallery of Scotland would help to ‘refine and elevate the national taste’. Yet the Gallery’s relationship with Scottish art has been neither fixed nor straightforward.

Between 2013 and 2023, research undertaken to inform the development of new flagship Scottish art galleries at the National Galleries of Scotland examined how this relationship has evolved. This research coincided with a moment of renewed national self-scrutiny due to the 2014 independence referendum and the UK’s 2016 vote to leave the European Union.

The research reveals that, at key moments in the twentieth century, the Gallery’s curators actively differentiated Scottish art from its European holdings, assigning each distinct

roles and cultural status within the national collection. Far from being a neutral reflection of taste, display became a means of negotiating identity.

This paper argues that in the 1920s the Gallery's Scottish displays articulated a particular vision of cultural nationalism, while after 1945 its collecting and display strategies shifted decisively towards an internationalist framework. In tracing these shifts, the paper explores how the Gallery has continually redefined the relationship between national and European art.

Christopher Wilk, Performance, Furniture, Textiles & Fashion Department, V&A (London, UK)

Creating the V&A's British Galleries 1500–1900 during an era of UK devolution and fervid Euroscepticism

The British Galleries 1500-1900, opened in 2001, was the V&A's largest project since the reinstallation of the museum between 1947-1952. Larger than most museums in the UK, it displays nearly 3000 objects over two floors of the museum. Funded by the relatively new and high-profile Heritage Lottery Fund, they marked a radically new approach to gallery design, interpretation and audiences, and also to how the museum organized a gallery project.

The beginning of the project in 1995 was a moment of fierce debate in the UK around the meaning of the word British and the following years of work coincided with crucial stages in the ceding of powers from central Westminster government to the UK's nations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, alongside a rise in English nationalism. This strengthening of national identities also raised the question of how emigrants from the former British empire or their British-born children perceived themselves in terms of such identities. All of this played out against sometimes virulent Euroscepticism arising from an imploding Conservative party that in 1997 would cede power to Tony Blair's New Labour. This talk will explore the coming together of contemporary museological practice with an especially turbulent political scene that was ultimately reflected in the gallery displays.

16.45–17.15 Coffee/Tea

17.15 Day 2 ends

Museum stays open until 22:00

Day 3

Saturday, 24 October 2026

10.15–12.15 Panel 5: *Shaping national profiles through multilateral collaboration and conflict*, Chair: Joachim Berger (GNM)

Susanna Avery-Quash and Alan Crookham, National Gallery (London, UK)

A National Museum in an International Network: The National Gallery London and Transnational Cultural Exchange in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Founded in 1824, the National Gallery was conceived as a public institution serving a national cultural mission. Yet after its reconstitution in 1855, the Gallery's evolution was informed by important and transformative international artistic, scholarly and institutional exchanges. This paper examines why and how the Gallery pursued its 'national' mission through bilateral and transnational encounters. It will highlight the particular international networks it came to operate in and the ways they shaped the UK's nascent national collection.

Drawing initially on the report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery of 1855, the paper argues that the reconstitution of the Gallery was embedded in European museum and art-market networks. Further archival evidence will show that the Gallery's acquisitions post-1855 relied on international collectors, dealers, and advisors, while its first Director, Charles Eastlake, and his new staff attended to continental institutional models for ideas concerning financing and staffing, as well as the display, cataloguing, access, and the educational role of the collection.

Particular attention is given to Anglo-German exchanges, and the key relationships that Eastlake enjoyed with German scholars and museum directors, notably J.D. Passavant and Gustav Friedrich Waagen. By situating the National Gallery within these encounters, the paper shows that the creation of a 'national' museum depended on international collaboration.

Sebastian Willert, Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow (Leipzig, Germany) / NYU Berlin (Germany)

Collecting Antiquities as an Imperial Mission. German and Ottoman Museum Strategies during the late 19th and early 20th century

During the 19th century, the Ottoman realm became a primary source for European and US-American museums focused on collecting and displaying antiquities. German scholars,

diplomats, political and economic figures sought to collect archaeological objects from Ottoman provinces to transfer them into the collections of the Königlische Museen zu Berlin (Royal Museums of Berlin). By incorporating these antiquities into museums, they were not only considered Prussian cultural property but also served to materialize and legitimize Berlin's claims to be a continuation of the Roman imperial traditions. Berlin's museum collections formed the foundation for defining the empire and legitimizing the collecting institution.

Istanbul embraced this notion with the establishment of the Müze-i Hümayun (Imperial Museum). In response to the seizure of objects, the Sublime Porte enacted antiquities laws that defined Ancient and Islamic Art as state property. Consequently, German-Ottoman disputes arose over who had the rightful claim to incorporate these objects into their museum collections.

This paper, based on archival material from Türkiye and Germany, explores how cultural property was constructed through the incorporation of antiquities into museum collections in Berlin and Istanbul during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It examines how bilateral and international encounters and networks influenced the development of museums amid international rivalries and investigates the role of collections in shaping concepts of nationhood, colonialism, and imperialism. Eventually, it analyses the self-images of museums collecting during the age of empire.

Moya Tönnies, Technische Universität Berlin (Germany)

British Mandate Palestine at the V&A: Ernest Tatham Richmond's Donation of Watercolours of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, 1924

The focus of my paper is a series of 26 watercolors by the architect Ernest Tatham Richmond (1874–1955), which he donated to the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1924. These works depict tiles on the facade of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which Richmond drew on-site in 1919. As a member of the British administration in Palestine, he politically supported the Palestinian cause and their aspirations for an independent nation. Consequently, he viewed the Dome of the Rock as the most significant national symbol within the burgeoning Arab nationalism of that era.

In my talk, I will address the unique circumstance that the V&A did not proactively collect these artifacts. On the contrary, it was Richmond who acted on his own initiative. His donation was a strategic effort to institutionalize the Arab cultures of Palestine as 'legitimate,' 'valuable,' and 'worthy of collection.'

Given the ongoing and escalating conflict in Israel/Palestine, I am acutely aware of the complexities involved in discussing this topic. My extensive research on the British Mandate period—presented in my monograph “Colonial Diplomacy through Art: Jerusalem 1918–1926”—relies exclusively on archival sources and avoids passing judgment. Accordingly, this presentation adheres strictly to the existing records concerning Richmond’s watercolors at the V&A, which I have analyzed in my study, „Ernest Tatham Richmond’s Watercolour Studies of the Dome of the Rock Tiles, 1918–1919,“ forthcoming in the journal *Muqarnas* in 2027. At the V&A Dundee’s conference “Thread Memory: Embroidery from Palestine” on April 21, 2026, I will give a presentation on C. R. Ashbee’s gift of a Palestinian garment to Mary, Princess Royal and Countess of Harewood (1897–1965) on the occasion of her wedding in 1920. Like Richmond, Ashbee sought to institutionalize artifacts from Arab Palestine within British collections. In this respect, the paper on Richmond proposed here builds directly on and continues my presentation in Dundee.

Rebecca Welkens, Heidelberg University (Germany)

Expertise, Forgeries, and National Positioning: The International Museum Association (c. 1898–1939)

This paper argues that the International Association of Museum Workers in Defence Against Counterfeiting and Unethical Trade Practices (Ger.: Internationaler Verband von Museumsbeamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren), founded in 1898 by Justus Brinckmann and Heinrich Angst, functioned not merely as a cooperative network, but as a strategic arena in which museums negotiated expertise, institutional authority, and national positioning. Drawing on research conducted within the ongoing DFG-funded project “ForNet – Forgeries and Networks” (<https://forgeries-and-networks.github.io/ForNetWeb/about-the-project.html>), it examines how the association brought together leading museum directors from across Europe, including Gustav von Bezold among its earliest members. Through its exclusive internal publications, the *Mittheilungen* and the *Verhandlungen*, it facilitated the identification and circulation of knowledge on art forgeries.

Members not only addressed problematic objects in their collections but also used the association to assert institutional authority and position themselves within national contexts, thereby shaping collecting strategies and institutional profiles in relation to national frameworks. Judging other nations’ abilities to detect forgeries was a key means of establishing authority. Brinckmann, for example, described how so-called “Indian porcelains” gained prominence because English experts eagerly sought them, overlooking

their inauthenticity. The exposure of forgeries thus became a means of asserting epistemic authority and cultural prestige internationally.

At the same time, English members played a key role: Charles Hercules Read was personally invited to join the association, and after the First World War Eric Maclagan proved crucial in re-establishing international ties. Focusing on Anglo-German connections, the paper highlights how international cooperation and national competition were intertwined, with the association's internationalism, especially in the 1930s, emerging as an ideologically charged strategy within shifting political contexts, contributing to the redefinition of museums as national institutions.

12.15–13.15 Final remarks

13.15 *Conference ends*

About the convenors

Joachim Berger

Dr Joachim Berger is currently conducting a research project at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM) in Nuremberg, titled “Museum, Politics and Society. The GNM in the Transformations of the 19th and 20th Centuries”. For this project, he is on leave from the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG) in Mainz where he has worked since 2004. Joachim Berger has published, amongst other topics, on the internationalism of civil society movements (with reference to Freemasonry), on the history of European historiography, on aristocratic women in the 18th and 19th centuries, and on hero worship from the early modern period (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4809-9033>).

Darja Jesse

Dr Darja Jesse is art historian and research associate at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM) in Nuremberg in the research project “Museum, Politics and Society. The GNM in the Transformations of the 19th and 20th Centuries”. She worked at the Deutsches Historisches Museum and in the DFG Research Training Group “Identity and Heritage” at the Technical University in Berlin. In her research Darja focusses on art policy under National Socialism as well as dealing with the Nazi past after 1945 in the fields of art production, art history and museums.

Simona Valeriani

Simona Valeriani is Acting Head of Academic Programmes at the V&A Research Institute, and co-leads the V&A/RCA History of Design Postgraduate Programme. She studied architecture at the University of Genova (Italy) and earned her PhD at the Technische Universität Berlin. Her current research interests include the historical legacies of museums and the ways in which these histories continue to influence contemporary displays, while also requiring critical consideration in shaping how memory institutions engage with diverse audiences and represent their heritage.

Recent publications include *The Royal Albert Hall: building the Arts and Sciences* (Brepols 2025), and *Mosaics and Micromosaics, Art Craft and Identities* (co-edited with A. Minter, V&A publishing, 2026)., ‘Technology Is Global: The Useful & Reliable Knowledge Debate’, special issue of *Technology and Culture*, 6.2, 2021 (co-edited with D. Schäfer).

Short biographies of speakers and chairpersons

Patricia Allerston

Dr Patricia Allerston is Head of European and Scottish Art and Chief Curator at the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS), where she recently co-directed a major capital project to deliver ten new galleries of Scottish art. Previously, she served as NGS Head of Education and was a Lecturer in European History at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Recent publications include 'Scottish Art in 100 Works' (2023) and 'A Guide to the National: National Galleries of Scotland' (2025), and she is completing a book on that Gallery during the Second World War. She is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Susanna Avery-Quash

Dr Susanna Avery-Quash is the Senior Research Lead: Partnerships, Networks and Initiatives at the National Gallery. She is in charge of pre-1900 objects in its Contextual Collection, and responsible for activities associated with its research strands, 'Buying, Collecting and Display', 'Art and Religion', and the Women and the Arts Forum. Her research focuses on the study of important private and public art collections, trends in artistic taste, and the historical art market. She has published extensively on the first collection of the National Gallery amassed by John Julius Angerstein (1738–1823) and on the directorship of the Gallery's first Director, Sir Charles Eastlake (1793–1865).

Susanne Boersma

Dr Susanne Boersma is a curator, exhibition designer and researcher, currently working at the Centre for Regional History in Brixen/Bressanone, Italy. From 2018 to 2024, she completed a PhD and worked as a curator at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) in Berlin. Her doctoral thesis on participatory museum work with forced migrants was published in January 2023. In her curatorial role at the MEK and as a postdoctoral researcher at Leiden University thereafter, she investigated the histories of museums through the (trans)national history of the Hindeloopen room at the MEK and in other museum collections, amongst which the GNM.

Dr Alan Crookham

Dr Alan Crookham is the Chief Librarian and Archivist at the National Gallery. He oversees the Library and Archive's world-class collections relating to the history of painting, including an important array of rare books, institutional records created over the course of the National Gallery's 200-year history, and significant private archives such as those of the art dealers Thos. Agnew & Sons. His research interests focus on the relationship between archives and objects within the museum context, in particular the use of archives as display items. He is the author of 'The National Gallery: An Illustrated History' and has written extensively on the history of the Gallery.

Azar Emami Pari

Azar Emami Pari is a pre-doctoral fellow in the Lise-Meitner Research Group Coded Objects at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max Planck Institute. She teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and previously taught at the University of Passau. She was a scholarship holder at the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin. Her research focuses on Safavid and Qajar visual culture, Persian aesthetics, manuscript studies, and the material histories of carpets and textiles. Her doctoral dissertation at Technische Universität Berlin, 'Fragments of Continuity: Unraveling Lives and Museological Journeys of Safavid Carpets in European Museums', examines the global trajectories of Safavid carpets through histories of collecting, fragmentation, and museum display.

Diệu Ly Hoàng

Diệu Ly Hoàng is an art historian whose research focuses on museums, collecting, and the entangled histories of art and colonialism. She studied at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Technische Universität Berlin and is currently a first-year DPhil candidate in History of Art at the University of Oxford. Her research examines museums and heritage in colonial contexts, particularly Vietnam and the Musée Khai-Dinh in Huế, addressing classification, cultural governance, national representation, and transimperial encounters. She has presented her work internationally and is supported by the Clarendon Fund, the European Scatcherd Scholarship, and the Trinity College Graduate Scholarship for the Humanities. Her publications include a contribution to the volume 'Atlas der Abwesenheit: Kameruns Kulturerbe in Deutschland' and an article in the French journal 'Histoire de l'Art'.

Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel

Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6790-9249>): Art and museum historian, curator at the Natural History Museum Vienna and university lecturer in museum studies at the University Vienna. TheMuseumsLab Fellow 2025, Leibniz Research Alliance Value of the Past: Fellow 2025/2026. Research focus: intersection of history of science, museology, and visual culture with special emphasis on the role of the Habsburg Empire between the 18th and the early 20th century; epistemological role of museum architecture, especially natural history museums of the 19th century, as forms of mass media and producers of visual communication; science visualizations; object histories; colonial and marginalized narratives in museums.

Kamila Kłudkiewicz

Kamila Kłudkiewicz, PhD, graduate of law and art history at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Author of academic books (in polish): 'Choice and necessity. Collections of the Polish aristocracy in Wielkopolska at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries' (Poznań 2016) and 'Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Poznań (1904–1919). A museum in the German and European province' (Poznań 2021) and numerous articles in scientific journals (RIHA Journal, Museum History Journal, Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen) and collective monographs. Since 2021 Head of the Audiovisual Archives of the Faculty of Art Sciences at the Adam Mickiewicz University. Her research interests include the history of collecting, museology, visual archives in the broad sense, and material culture in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Currently the manager of two research projects: 'Iconography, Knowledge and Entertainment. Collection of prints by Charles de Montalembert' (funded by the National Science Center in Poland) and 'Polish museums in the interwar period. Documentation and scientific elaboration of materials for the history of Polish museology in the years 1918–1939' (funded by the Polish Ministry of Science). The contractor for this latest project is Aldona Tołysz.

Ewa Manikowska

Ewa Manikowska is associate professor at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where she leads the Centre for Heritage and Provenance Research. She has also worked for various museum institutions, including Galleria Palatina in Palazzo Pitti in Florence (Italy) and the National Museum in Warsaw. Her research interests focus on the history of collecting, survey photography, cultural heritage, and provenance research. Among others, she is the author of the book “Photography and Cultural Heritage in the Age of Nationalisms: Europe’s Eastern Borderlands (1867–1945)”, published by Bloomsbury in 2019.

Ulrike Müller

Ulrike Müller is assistant professor in Heritage Studies at the University of Antwerp and postdoctoral researcher at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. Her research focuses on the history and theory of collections, with a particular focus on the origin, current challenges, and future potential of house and artists' museums. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1787-3919>.

Damiana Oțoiu

Damiana Oțoiu is a Political and Legal Anthropologist (PhD, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2010), and an Assistant Professor of Political Anthropology at the University of Bucharest. Damiana currently leads a research project entitled [How to Engage with / Repatriate 'Artefacts' – Ancestors? A Multi-Disciplinary Dialogue Around Collections of Ancestral Remains in German and French Museums](#), funded by the Franco-German Provenance Research Fund and hosted by [inherit. heritage in transformation](#), Käte Hamburger Kolleg, at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research examines how property rights over museum collections are (re)defined and contested in postcolonial contexts, alongside the “social and political lives” of museum objects and ancestral remains. She has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, France and Belgium since 2010.

Iñigo Salto Santamaría

Iñigo Salto Santamaría is a postdoctoral researcher at the Universität Zürich, where he is researching the circulation of early medieval ivories. He completed his dissertation on the transnational history of museums of medieval art in the World War II Era at TU Berlin in 2024, for which he received the Willibald-Sauerländer-Preis from the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte. Iñigo's research on Nazi-era deaccessions has been published in the 'Journal of Art Market Studies'. He held fellowships from the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes and the Getty Research Institute and currently serves as vice-president of the Richard Schöne Society for Museum History in Berlin.

Marie Tavinor

Dr Marie Tavinor is a freelance educator and consultant. Previously, she held academic roles at The Royal Academy of Arts and Christie's Education. She specialises in the history of collecting and the history of the art market. Her research has focussed on the development of collections in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and she wrote her PhD on the early years of the Venice Biennale (1895-1914), obtained from the Royal Holloway, University of London in 2017. She has since published regularly on the subject. Marie is a founding member of the international Society for the History of Collecting.

Aldona Tołysz

Aldona Tołysz, PhD, PhD, graduate of art sciences at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Author of several articles in Polish scientific journals and collective monographs, grant holder of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and of the Warsaw Municipality. 2015–2019 member of the team implementing the Project entitled 'Museum in the Polish Memory Culture until 1918'. Since 2020 member of the of the Academic Council of the series 'Monuments of Polish Museology', since 2021 member of the Editorial Staff of the yearbook 'Museology'. Since 2024 Head in the Office of the Provincial Conservator of Monuments in Warsaw. Her research interests include the history of museology, museums, protection of heritage, material culture in the 20th centuries, modern and contemporary art.

Moya Tönnies

Dr Moya Tönnies, art historian and faculty member of the Institute of Art History at Technische Universität Berlin. She researches the role of British artists in Palestine during the British Mandate period. On this subject, she has published the monograph 'Colonial Diplomacy through Art: Jerusalem 1918–1926' (Brill, 2024). Moya Tönnies is currently conducting the research project 'Colonial Art Topography: C. R. Ashbee's Inventory of Arab Palestine, 1918–1922.' Current DFG-Project: 'Colonial Art Topography. C. R. Ashbee's Inventory of Arab Palestine, 1918–1922'.

Diana Unterhitzberger

Diana Unterhitzberger is an academic trainee at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (GNM) in Nuremberg and co-curator of the upcoming "Schätze"-exhibition. She has recently defended her PhD thesis titled 'Checkpoint Charlie – The changing values of a Cold War heritage site' at the University of York. Diana's research focuses on cultural heritage management and cultures of remembrance in 20th- and 21st-century Germany.

Gerrit Verhoeven

Gerrit Verhoeven is an associated professor in heritage studies at the University of Antwerp (Belgium), where he teaches courses on museum history, archives, and heritage tourism. He also works as an archivist and research fellow at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels. Museum history is one of his primary research interests, with a particular focus on processes such as democratization, modern management, nationalism, and professionalization within the museum sector in the interwar period.

Rebecca Welkens

Rebecca Welkens has been a research associate in the DFG-funded project 'ForNet – Forgeries and Networks' at Heidelberg University since November 2024

(<https://forgeries-and-networks.github.io/ForNetWeb/about-the-project.html>).

Previously, she worked in the archives of the ZERO Foundation in Düsseldorf (2020–2024) and at the German Art Archive (Deutsches Kunstarchiv) at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (2012–2018). She studied art history and cultural heritage conservation at Bamberg University, where she also earned her PhD in 2023. Her doctoral research was funded by a Hans Böckler Foundation scholarship (2017–2020). In 2025, her dissertation *The Printed Tronie* received the Wolfgang Ratjen Prize. It was published by Böhlau in April 2026.

Sebastian Willert

Sebastian Willert received his Ph.D. from the Technical University Berlin in February 2022. His book 'Kulturbesitz. Konflikte um archäologische Objekte in der deutsch-osmanischen Politik 1898–1918' was published in 2024 (Wallstein). He participated in the Ph.D. program 'Ancient Object(s) and Visual Studies' at the Berlin Graduate School of Ancient Studies and was a Doctoral-Fellow in the Research Cluster 'Translocations. Historical Enquiries into the Displacement of Cultural Assets' at Technical University Berlin, Boğaziçi University's Department of History, and the Orient Institute in Istanbul. Sebastian was a Fellow of the Leibniz Research Alliance 'Value of the Past' at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam. He is a Research Associate at Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow in Leipzig. Since 2022, he has been teaching 'Ancient Art in Berlin: Discovering the Collections of Museum Island' at NYU Berlin.

Christopher Wilk

Christopher Wilk was Chief Curator of the project to create the British Galleries 1500-1900 and co-edited and contributed to *The British Galleries: a study in museology*. His V&A exhibitions have included 'Fornasetti: Designer of Dreams', 'Modernism: Designing a New World 1914-1939' and 'Plywood: a material story'. He authored exhibition-related publications on Modernism and on Plywood, as well as monographs on Marcel Breuer, the Thonet company and Frank Lloyd Wright's Kaufmann Office (on view at V&A East Storehouse). He previously worked at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Brooklyn Museum.

About the organiser

Amber Kim

Amber is Research Events and Communications Coordinator at V&A Research Institute, National Art Library and Archives. She facilitates the effective management and delivery of V&A's diverse portfolio of research events and associated public programming, as well as internal and external communication of project outputs and other activities arising from the cross-departmental collaborations. She has organised the Restitution, Repair and the Memory Wars lecture, Great Mughals Conference, Go for Kogei Symposium, and Great Expectations Conference at the V&A. Through V&A/RCA MA History of Design, she investigated the role of cultural institutions in educating the public about environmental and social sustainability through fashion exhibitions and learning programmes.