

Visions and Trends of Private and Public Collections: Confronting Changing Values

Christina Linsenmeyer

Abstract

This paper encourages reflection about how our ideas of the value of collections have changed over time, and how current demands may impact the value and preservation of this cultural heritage. Many private collections became the foundation of public museums. Despite clear and evident trends in the history of private musical-instrument collecting, a closer look uncovers a diversity of individual and personal visions. In the new museum context, the objects took on a different meaning; this paper acknowledges a crisis that resulted, and confronts how museums are changing as a result, including de-emphasizing the value of collections and expertise in light of new demands that prioritize service to society. This paper considers the inward-outward shift and developments in collecting and exhibiting objects, such as interactivity, new narratives, and public engagement. Further, it explores selected aspects of key crucial issues for the mission of musical-instrument museums, including education, provenance and documentation, that are closely intertwined with our understanding of the value of our collections today.

In museum work today, practices of collecting and displaying musical instruments raise a number of key questions. What comprises our current collections? How do we exhibit them? And what are the crucial issues for best practices? I was asked by the conference organizers to discuss collections, contemporary exhibit display, and three crucial issues – value, education, and provenance – in order to spark discussion in the following panel session.¹

¹ I am grateful to Matthew Hill, Ignace de Keyser, and Darryl Martin for discussions about this write-up, though the views may not be theirs.

Trends und Visionen privater und öffentlicher Sammlungen: Gegenüberstellung sich wandelnder Werte

Der Beitrag soll zur Reflektion darüber anregen, wie der Wert unserer Sammlungen sich über die Zeit veränderte und wie aktuelle Anforderungen sich auf den Wert und die Erhaltung dieses kulturellen Erbes auswirken. Zahlreiche Privatsammlungen bilden die Grundlage öffentlicher Museen. Trotz offensichtlicher Trends im Sammeln historischer Musikinstrumente gibt sich bei näherer Betrachtung eine Vielfalt individueller Vorstellungen und persönlicher Visionen zu erkennen. Im neuen Museumskontext nahmen die Objekte eine neue Bedeutung an; dieser Beitrag bestätigt eine Krise, die sich daraus ableitet und Museen mit dieser Veränderung konfrontiert; damit einher geht eine Entwertung von Sammlungen und Sachkenntnis zugunsten neuer Anforderungen, die den Dienst an der Gesellschaft in den Vordergrund rücken. Die Verschiebung von Innen nach Außen sowie die Entwicklungen in Bezug auf Sammlungs- und Ausstellungsobjekte wie Interaktivität, neue Narrative und besucherorientiertes Engagement werden in den Blick genommen. Weiterhin geht es um ausgewählte Aspekte von Schlüsselaufgaben von Musikinstrumentenmuseen, darunter Bildung, Provenienz und Dokumentation, die eng mit unserem heutigen Verständnis vom Wert unserer Sammlungen verbunden sind.

Private Passions: Diversity

Many *public museums* today were founded and built on, and are still largely comprised of, the collections of historical private collectors, particularly of the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Despite the importance of these collectors for museums, historians tend to focus on *institutions* as collectors, while much less research has concerned these individuals and the earlier lives of their collections.

Much about historical private collectors remains unknown, which is the motivation for a book currently in pre-

paration.² The chapters, each on an individual collector, tell personal stories of collecting and collections. The book asks: who were the collectors professionally and personally? What were their »reasons and means« for collecting?³ And, how did they use their collections? The contributing authors provide thick descriptions for 21 collectors active during a boom era in private collecting, from the mid-19th century to the Second World War, and investigate the *whys* and *hows* of collecting. The book aims to uncover why collectors kept *certain* objects but not *others*. By better understanding these collectors and their reasons and means, we can better understand our collections today.

We tend to hold stereotypical views of historical collectors, however, as Alphonse Maze-Sencier, in 1893, wrote: »The variety of collections is infinite, following the fortune, taste, character and eccentricities of individuals.«⁴ Indeed, a closer examination uncovers a diversity of personalities, aims, preferences, and practices. Historical private collectors were of different genders, nationalities, and social statuses. Their professions were as varied as their interests, and they held unique visions for their collections. Their collecting practices embraced a number of aims: nationalist, evolutionist, scientific, historical, humanistic, and aesthetic. And, they documented, researched, restored, played, and exhibited their collections. We find collectors interested in everyday objects as well masterpieces, and in objects from close to home and from far away. We see those who idealized the past, were discontent with contemporary culture, and who thought of the future as they collected. Some collected things *other* than musical instruments, some collected everything they could, while others were more specialized and carefully upgraded their collections. We find collectors who acquired old instruments as well as contemporary ones, and those who commissioned or made instruments themselves to fill gaps in, or otherwise enhance, their collections.

2 Christina Linsenmeyer (Ed.): *Through the eyes and ears of musical instrument collectors (c. 1850-1940)*. London. Forthcoming.

3 »Reasons and means« was inspired by the focus of the 2014 ICOM-CIMCIM (International Council of Museums – International Committee for Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music) meeting: »Collectors at music museums: reasons and means«.

4 »La variété des collections est infinie, suivant la fortune, le goût, le caractère et la bizarrerie des individus.« Alphonse Maze-Sencier: *Le livre des collectionneurs*. Paris 1893, p. 33. Thanks to Jean Michel Renard for bringing my attention to this source.

The delineation between private and public, however, is somewhat blurred. Numerous private collectors organized public concerts, for both new and early music, and some made their instruments regularly available to musicians. More often than not, collectors publicly exhibited their objects, from the academic classroom to the commercial industrial exposition. Notably, we must remember the numerous private collectors who participated in the 14 »retrospective« exhibitions of ancient musical instruments from 1872 to 1904 in London, Vienna, Paris, Brussels, Milan, Bologna, Chicago, and Boston. Even the act of collecting itself blurs the line between private and public when, for example, private collectors acquired instruments intended for particular public institutions.

The degree to which private collecting takes an object out of use and circulation clearly varies depending on the individual collector. Knowledge of collections use challenges the stereotypical belief that the value in collecting for historical private collectors was the excitement of the chase, or simple possession. Evidently, collecting was purposeful and meaningful for these collectors beyond the act of collecting. What has been collected and survived, of course, does not reflect the whole historical picture. But perhaps we can amass enough evidence so that, within this diversity, we can observe not only trends but also gain a more nuanced understanding of historical collecting and its narratives.

Museum Crisis and Change

Charles Saumarez Smith writes: »The original intention behind the establishment of [public] museums was that they should remove artefacts from their current context of ownership and use, from their circulation in the world of private property, and insert them in a new environment which would provide them with a different meaning.«⁵ In this new environment, the object's value would not depend on a private owner, but on a public institution. The modern museum was instituted for the advancement of learning (as with Elias Ashmole's donation in 1683 to the University of Oxford, which became the Ashmolean Museum) and an institution acquired collections with a »sense of perpetuity« (as with the British Museum's establishment in 1749 from the collections

5 Charles Saumarez Smith: *Museums, artefacts, and meanings*. In: *The New Museology*. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint: London 2006, p. 6.

of Sir Hans Sloane) so that they would not later be dispersed.⁶ It became a museum's *public responsibility* to collect material culture and preserve it in perpetuity.

By the end of the 20th century, museum collections had grown so exponentially that they became a burden. Operational resources of space, finance and time were limited. Stephen Weil places a critical turning point during the 1960s, concurrent with the introduction of more modern museum-management methods, as well as increased legal rules particularly concerning objects of foreign origin that strained museum resources.⁷ Collections growth and these other developments happened at an inopportune time. As the social-scientist Harry Collins explains: a general crisis of expertise began in the 1960s when a climate of citizen sceptics began to question expert scientists and researchers. The public challenged the attributes for which institutions, including museums, had once been known – trust, virtue, intellect, and expertise.⁸ In this vein, Smith notes: »One of the most insistent problems that museums face is precisely the idea that artefacts can be, and should be, divorced from their original context of ownership and use, and redisplayed in a different context of meaning, which is regarded as having a higher superiority.«⁹ What Weil describes for natural-history and history museums seems generally applicable: rather than being morally ennobling, museums promoted Western Caucasians as the »pinnacle of society« and employed problematic methodologies of the »great man – great works« and hagiographic traditions.¹⁰ This logistical, ideological, and methodological crisis instigated a changing relationship between the public and the museum – a fundamental »revolution«; the museum's role »will have been transformed from one of mastery to one of service«,¹¹ with a museum's collections no longer its »end« but its »means«.¹² This revolution confronts the fundamental role and practices of the collections-based museum.

In reaction to this crisis, museums have been shifting their focus from being collections-centered, *inwardly*-focused re-

search institutions to being public-driven, *outwardly*-focused museums.¹³ In 1974, ICOM's (International Council of Museums) definition of a museum changed, as Bernice Murphy has noted, to include the phrase »in the service of society and its development«,¹⁴ signalling a new, social-orientation objective. We have responded, in part, by adding more exhibit context, including stories, audio, video, images, related artefacts, etc. All things once thought to distract from the supremacy and singularity of the object itself now make up what Smith calls a »spectrum of strategies«, ranging from the most abstract to the recreation of an »original« setting, enacting an enhanced and artificial visitor experience.¹⁵

With this outward turn, institutions are judged on their impact, outcomes, and measurables, and expected to improve the public's well-being. As such, museums have become institutions for history, identity, and memory, for both history's winners and victims.¹⁶ To make ends meet financially in light of limited resources, museums have increasingly cut staff, resulting in fewer curators, fewer in-house conservators, and in some cases dedicated directors serving from higher levels of the administrative umbrella. Specifically, in light of new outward demands, we see more public-engagement specialists, and budget emphasis sometimes shifting from collections care and interpretation to marketing. Ironically, these trends come at a time when museums need specialist historians and curators to critically contextualize collection objects and, in some cases, to de-colonialize an institution's collections interpretation, exhibit designs, outreach programs, and even its architecture. These changes also affect museum assessment. While the institutional worth of inward museums (of the past) was based on accepted faith and trust, an outward museum is (now) required to demonstrate its competence and render a positive account of its achievements.¹⁷ Quantitative methods, such as those that track visitor numbers, are problematic when they do not sufficiently consider *qualitative*

6 Smith 2006 (note 5), p. 7.

7 Stephen E. Weil: Making museums matter. Washington 2002, pp. 141-142.

8 Harry Collins: Are we all scientific experts now? Cambridge 2014, pp. 18-27.

9 Smith 2006 (note 5), p. 9.

10 Weil 2002 (note 7), p. 204.

11 Ibid., pp. 195-196.

12 Ibid., p. 148.

13 For more on the inward-outward (also »external«) shift, see Weil 2002 (note 7), particularly Chapter 7: Transformed from a cemetery of bric-a-brac, pp. 81-90; and Chapter 19: The museum and the public, pp. 195-213.

14 Bernice L. Murphy: Charting the ethics landscape for museums in a changing world. In: Museums, ethics and cultural heritage. Ed. by Bernice L. Murphy. London 2016, p. 24.

15 Smith 2006 (note 5), p. 20.

16 E.g., Edward Lindenthal: Preserving memory. The struggle to create America's holocaust museum. New York 1995, 2nd ed. Columbia 2001.

17 Weil 2002 (note 7), p. 90.

impact. This quantitative emphasis is especially troublesome for smaller institutions and historic homes that are important for communities and the heritage they preserve.

The Inward–Outward Shift: The New Rock Museums

Since 1995, the new establishment of three rock museums demonstrates this transformation. Established in 1996, the Rock Hall (Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, <https://www.rockhall.com/>), in Cleveland, consists largely of a very heavily *object-based* museum, exhibiting an astonishing plethora of musical instruments, equipment, costumes, and memorabilia. Established in 2010, Rockheim (the Norwegian national museum for popular music, <https://rockheim.no/>), in Trondheim, is experience-focused, emphasizing interactives and recreated environments over collections. Most recently in 2016, RagnaRock, a museum focusing on music and youth culture (<http://museumragnarock.dk/en/>), opened in Roskilde, Denmark. It self-describes as a public-focused experiential »adventure«, which is delivered via audio and video installations; and it has no objects on display. It is more of an interactive monument that cooperates with the Roskilde music festival. Does the 10-year progression of these three institutions demonstrate an increasing disinterest in collections?

Museum of the Near Future? Scenkonstmuseet, Stockholm

On 11 February 2017, Scenkonstmuseet (<http://scenkonstmuseet.se/>), the Swedish museum of performing arts, opened in Stockholm. It has three floors of galleries, each dedicated to dance, theatre, and music respectively. It aims primarily at a family audience, and its exhibits do not place objects and history at the forefront, but *people* and their stories. In place of curators, their self-termed »museum insiders«, that is, museum workers who have museum-activities expertise, tell stories and stimulate responses without taking their own stance; they aim to be ideologically neutral, act as a partner, and let the visitor make the decision. Exhibits concern ephemerality, embodiment, and creativity. Traditional object labels are almost completely discarded. At times, it

is even difficult to tell if something is a collection object or simply a prop created for the exhibit.

The Scenkonstmuseet could be what Weil calls a »museum of the near future«, which is »emerging from the worn and hollowed-husk of [the] old museum«¹⁸ and, by his definition, is »an ideologically neutral organization.«¹⁹ Scenkonstmuseet does not champion hierarchies, canons and masterpieces, but tells non-celebratory stories, for example, about racism and social injustice. The exhibit texts tend to highlight rule-breaking, breaking with tradition, and standing up against the establishment. The stories that are told definitely leave room for the visitor to imagine that they have power to change the world and make a difference. The cultural-historical message, however, may often get lost. For instance, an avant-garde production of Swan Lake is presented, though children today may have no familiarity with Tchaikovsky's music, or any experience of classical ballet in order to provide meaningful context. The presentations do not make judgments about what is beautiful or how an object should make someone feel, but it is *not* ideologically neutral. The very act of deciding what stories and objects to include (and not to include) makes it political. Although, at times, the presentation embraces history, it repeatedly undermines traditional historical and museological practices. In the end, the vast majority of the state collections, representing a century of collecting and containing about 50,000 objects, with the oldest dating from the 1500s, is in storage.

This *new* museum makes a statement against *old* museum culture. This statement is particularly manifest in the museum's first temporary exhibition entitled »...and it's gone.«, which »interprets the impossibility of entirely preserving, and thus exhibiting, the performing arts. For after all it is only the memory of the experience that remains«; performances are »Gone without a trace.«²⁰ The installation is dusty and dark, with dysfunctional, blinking lights; room after room are filled with shelves stacked high with empty archival boxes and folders; a sound montage of historical recordings of spoken voices and music seem to come from nowhere, and one can listen to additional archival sound excerpts via outdated

18 Weil 2002 (note 7), p. 196.

19 Ibid., p. 200.

20 Carina Reich and Bogdan Szyber: »...and it's gone.« Installation (opened 11 February 2017), Scenkonstmuseet, Stockholm. English Summary [Exhibition handout, dated March 2017].



1 Temporary installation »...and it's gone.« at the Scenkonstmuseet, Stockholm. Photo taken 29 March 2017. Permission: Christina Linsenmeyer

corded rotary-telephones hung throughout the space, but of course there is no one living on the other end. The experience culminates in a spooky, haunted, empty work station surrounded by sacks, folders, and boxes that move on their own by invisible automatons (fig. 1).

»Rapid Response« Collecting: Engaging in Current Issues

In 2013, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A) spearheaded a new, successful strand in their collecting activity – their »Rapid Response« initiative, where:

»Objects are collected in timely response to major moments in history that touch the world of design and manufacturing. Each acquisition raises different questions about globalisation, popular culture, political and social change, demographics, technology, regulation or the law. This ongoing display, which changes each time a new object is collected, shows how design reflects and defines how we live together today.«²¹

²¹ Victoria and Albert Museum: Design and public life. Rapid Response collecting, URL: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/designandpubliclife/projects/rapid-response-collecting/> [1.5.2017].

The Rapid Response website invites you to contribute by tweeting your Rapid Response ideas with the hashtag #rapid-responsecollecting. The public can read more about the items on the program's blog and attend dedicated gallery talks that introduce new acquisitions. Since the single exhibit changes each time the team acquires something new, it has a different rhythm from the other exhibits, and is more in tune with the rhythm of what is going on *outside* the museum. In her review, Rose Etherington explains how this is »radically different from traditional methods for curating design and manufactured objects. [...] Whereas the museum has traditionally collected objects that have already earned their place in design history over time through their inclusion in books and exhibitions, this new strategy allows the curators to respond immediately to contemporary issues«. ²² Not only does this strategy engage the public in unique ways, it reflects a change in what kinds of objects are valued and collected.

On 28 April 2017, V&A Curatorial Research Assistant Zara Arshad presented the initiative in a gallery talk at the Design Museum in Helsinki. She explained that generally, the Rapid Response team decides on an idea or an event, and then determines its material object – that is, what to collect and keep. Collected objects have included: the first 3D-printed gun, a burkini, a pussy hat, a refugee Olympic flag, wearable tech, and an app called »Flappy Bird«. The app, exhibited on a phone in display mode, is challenging, she noted, since there is not yet a solution for how to keep digital material usable long term.

Although Arshad's presentation emphasized material culture and collecting, the first invited commentator, from an ethnographic museum, stated that her institution is doing something along the lines of Rapid Response collecting, but without the objects. Rather, they are collecting »something else«: stories, which are told in an exhibit with text and reproduced images. At the end of the session, the moderator noted what she found surprising in the discussion, specifically that »in taking objects in, the first thing is not to preserve them but to create discussion [...] to engage« and to »interact with the audience«. ²³ Despite Arshad's focus on material collecting,

the comments that followed reflect the weakening stance of collections primacy.

Critical Issues: Persistent Questions

Education vs. Entertainment?

Education has become somewhat of a bad word in the museum world. To counteract this, many museums emphasize the visitor experience and aim to be fun. This trend is echoed in a recent campaign by »Museum Hack«, a business that promotes »hipper« and cooler museum experiences. It provides »unconventional tours« where customers »are taken to the best parts [of the museum] and any chance of boredom is swept away«. Their mottos include: »This isn't your Grandma's tour«. ²⁴ But how did a divide between education and entertainment arise? For an answer, we can turn to an institution that greatly influenced modern museums: the international industrial fairs and exhibitions.

Paul Greenhalgh explains that the most important ideological structure for designing the English fair sites was the insistence on a strict divide between education and entertainment: »one was inextricably bound up with work, the other with pleasure«. ²⁵ The moral tradition that education was a social duty and could therefore not be pleasurable, even if Puritanical, had significant consequences for the reception of the numerous museums that opened between 1890 and 1920. ²⁶ At the 1871 fair, entertainment elements were initially introduced to attract the public to the educational Arts and Sciences exhibits; by 1906, their success was *funding* the educational exhibits, but, as Greenhalgh demonstrates, the amusement rides and sideshows won in the end. From 1871, the size and scope vastly overshadowed the 1851 Crystal Palace, and it was the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition that was arguably the single most important event between 1870 and 1914. ²⁷ The success of this World's Fair was due greatly to the creative design of Imre Kiralfy; its »White City« was constructed with what would become London's first purpose-built amusement park, as Josephine Kane writes:

22 Rose Etherington: V&A acquires Katy Perry false eyelashes as part of new »rapid response collecting« strategy. In: *dezeen* (18 Dec. 2013), URL: <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/12/18/rapid-response-collecting-victoria-and-albert-museum-kieran-long/> [1.8.2017].

23 Rapid Response Collecting at the V&A. Gallery talk with Zara Arshad. 28 April 2017. Design Museum in Helsinki. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/designmuseum/> [22.6.2017].

24 <https://museumhack.com/about/> [22.8.2017].

25 Paul Greenhalgh: Education, entertainment and politics: lessons from the great international exhibitions. In: *The New Museology*. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint London 2006, p. 82.

26 Greenhalgh 2006 (note 25), p. 88.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-77.

»The amusements at White City had been conceived as a light-hearted sideline for visitors to the inaugural Franco-British Exhibitions, but proved just as popular as the main exhibits. Its spectacular rides towered over the whole site [...] it was the amusement park which captured the public imagination and made a lasting impression.« (fig. 2).²⁸

Despite the fundamental dichotomy of education and entertainment at the English Fairs, Greenhalgh points out that from 1878, the French were highly passionate and successful in unifying education and entertainment in their expositions:

»More than anything, the Exposition of 1878 finally established the idea that reconstructions and working displays were the natural way to educate. If it was considered needful to tell the public about Ancient Gaul, Egypt, steam pumps, Louis XIV, tropical diseases or chair design, the best way to do so was by creating the exact environment in which those things occurred and letting the audience watch them happen.«²⁹

The dichotomy between education and entertainment was almost absent, owing largely to the organizing influence of Raymond Le Play who »made educational idealism a permanent ingredient of the Expositions Universelles«.³⁰ Greenhalgh attributes the success of the French expositions to spectacle; their immersive, participatory, celebratory, and almost hedonistic nature; and the merging of popular and high culture. Although Greenhalgh cautions today's museums about taking lessons from the international exhibitions,³¹ his words about purpose are inspiring:

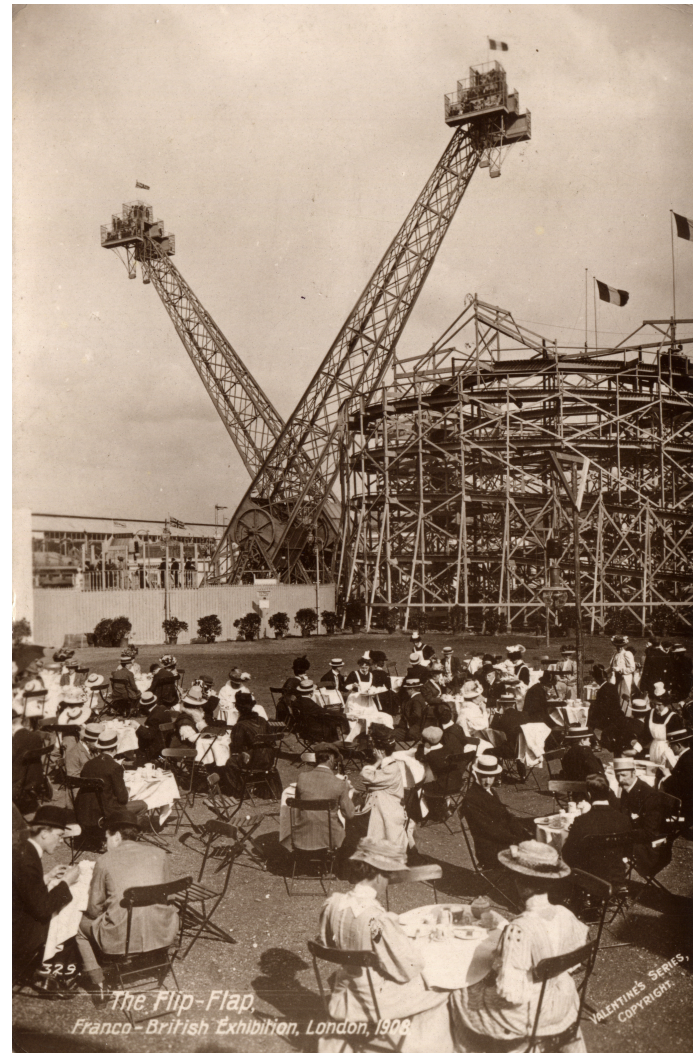
»Regardless of the skills displayed, the calibre of participants, or any other factor, an event having overt energy of purpose will always be more interesting than one which is lacking in it. This is the real key to the popular triumph of the international exhibitions: not only were they not neutral, but their organisers had little idea of what neutrality meant. Domestic and foreign policies were presented, the audience was wooed, propagandised, and shocked [...] Because of this, the exhibitions mattered in ways which went beyond the sum of the objects they presented.

28 Josephine Kane: *The architecture of pleasure: British amusement parks 1900-1939*. London 2013, p. 18.

29 Greenhalgh 2006 (note 25), p. 91.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.



2 Postcard of the Flip Flap and spiral railway, White City, London, 1908. Image courtesy of Josephine Kane

[...] In short, the international exhibitions recognised the socio-political climate of their time and they responded to it. They existed because of it. This placed them at the centre of the populations they served.«³²

The success of the French exhibitions, compared to the dichotomous English fairs, lay in their sometimes-provocative stance, as well as their successful merging of education and entertainment (fig. 3). Greenhalgh goes on to argue how these different English and French traits are evident still in their respective museum cultures.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.



3 Photograph of the 1900 International Exposition, Paris, including the Eiffel Tower and the Celestial Globe. Exposition Universelle de 1900. La Tour Eiffel: n° 647, Inventory number ENSBA: PC 31019. Photograph by frères Neurdein (Étienne and Louis Antonin). Courtesy of Service des collections de l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Permission: Public domain. URL: <http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/11538> [6 May 2017]

What for Provenance?

Documentation is critical for determining provenance. Limited or no documentation requires us to rely on connoisseurship for information and knowledge about an object, including attribution – who made it and where it comes from – and a sequence of past owners. Methods of acquisition may have circumstances that are ethically and legally problematic. We might see instances of theft or human-right's abuses, and the need for restitution or repatriation. For cases

of stolen and illicit objects, as well as those whose ownership transferred in the context of war and colonialism, documentation and provenance may intentionally be obfuscated, or entail the policy of *Don't ask, don't tell*. With old acquisitions, there may be sensitive issues, as policies and practices are more conscious and standardized today. Issues may include delicate museum-donor relations, internal museum conflicts, or national-level conflicts that continue to inhibit the identification or history of an object from being openly embraced.

For new acquisitions, insisting on substantial documentation or conducting field work can avoid provenance problems. Best practices today, however, still leave us with issues, including pre-existing knowledge gaps for historical collections. Typically, we do not know how a collection has changed over time. Sometimes we only have a collection-inventory at the time a museum acquired it, or upon the collector's death, or from a historical exhibition-catalogue. In such limited cases, we have a static snapshot of a singular moment, rather than any dynamic picture.

Historically-speaking, connoisseurship has limitations. Much of what we base attributions on today was instigated in the early to mid-19th century when the history of great makers and their works was being rediscovered, and the discourse of expertise was formalized. Unfortunately, this leaves much about instrument origins and ownership before that time still unknown. In the last two to three decades, connoisseurship has developed greater knowledge and skills as well increased transparency. Nevertheless, it remains a largely subjective practice based on style, and much relevant documentation remains in private hands. There is still much work to be undertaken. Despite a plethora of scientific tools and procedures to aid attribution and study, many of these practices entail subjective data interpretation, such as with dendrochronology. Although dendrochronology, like medicine, is a science, its interpretation involves much art. On a positive note, recent literature more often addresses construction techniques, for example, and that has facilitated a boost to our knowledge base.

Despite advancements in connoisseurship knowledge, skills, and tools, our system is problematically based on canonical formations, which have perpetuated outdated hierarchies of value, and limited our interest in learning about marginalized makers. Researching makers outside of the canon and more closely studying unattributed instruments would reap great benefits – not simply for expanding our knowledge-base of makers and their works, but for recognizing and embracing the historical diversity of practices and traditions beyond the canon and its transcendent masterpieces. Historically, museums have, in particular, lacked in-house violin expertise like that found in the commercial arena, whereas this is generally not the case for keyboard or wind instruments, for example. Increasing current levels of cooperation between museums and commercial experts, e.g. dealers, would greatly improve this situation. In the case of

viols, a similar situation is exacerbated by the small number of extant examples as well as limited possibilities for attribution.

In exhibits, provenance is often included on object labels, which typically cite the last owner before the object entered the museum's collections. Some types of museums tend to offer more information about historical collectors. For instance, the ethnographic Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) has display cases dedicated to Captain Cook's expeditions; the antiquities Altes Museum (Berlin) has at least one gallery with historic display cases, each dedicated to a collector, such as Wilhelm Dorow (1790-1846); and the National Archaeological Museum (Naples) organizes select galleries to reflect historic private collections, for example the 16th-century Farnese collection of antique sculptures that was displayed in the family's gardens on the Palatine. In addition to acknowledging these important pre-museum histories of collecting, such presentations offer visitors different ways to see, contextualize, and understand the objects. As Murphy has observed:

»Provenance research is no longer the preserve of connoisseurship or pedantry. It is one of the most important, revitalized and progressive areas of museum work currently. This is not only from an ethical perspective but also through the new issues and expanding fields of knowledge being stimulated by intensified research into the complex itineraries that attend to illuminate understanding of the life of the objects, and to whom or where they have belonged, or might ultimately belong today. Provenance research thereby underpins museums' interpretive contract with the public, and feeds into the most innovative work of exhibitions and publications.«³³

Whose Authenticity?

Documentation may also relate to what we know about how an instrument has been handled and used. A big challenge is to uncover discoverable layers, particularly of alterations and restorations, in order to learn not only what an object's original state was, but also its various states throughout its past so that we may better understand the dynamic histories of objects (and collections). Repairs and other changes often cover previous states, and almost always entail lost material and information. Museums have not always valued documen-

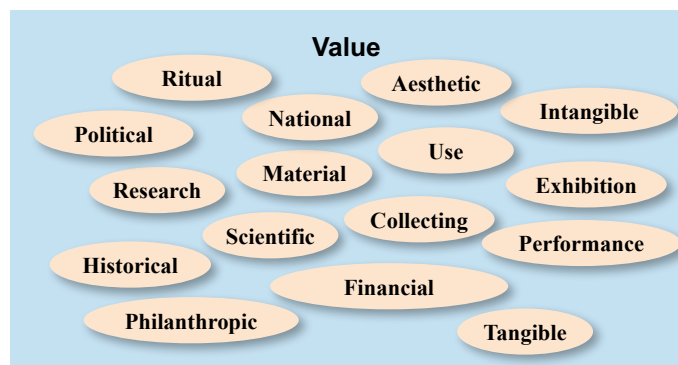
33 Murphy 2016 (note 14), pp. 30-31.

tation the way we do now. And there are competing ideas of value, for instance, the original state of an object is generally championed, while the life-cycle of an instrument has been less important. Much remains to be uncovered of past musical and museum practices and values. In certain cases, increased access to archives that were once private has opened possibilities. One example for continued work that would greatly impact our field is re-opening the book on the antique dealer and notorious forger Leopoldo Franciolini's (1844-1920) practices, in order to investigate the extent of his activities and influence, and build on Edwin Ripin's work.³⁴

At what point is an instrument no longer *authentic*? With violins and pianos, for instance, a number of parts can be replaced without seeming to affect what we consider its *authenticity*. And how do we address these issues in exhibits? It is striking to compare practices for antique sculptures with those for musical instruments. Object labels at the National Museum, Palazzo Altemps (Rome), for example of Apollo with his lyre (inv. no. 8590), include not only the name, material, date, and specific collection of an object, but also name the primary 17th-century restorer, and cite the model that inspired the restoration. Further, a diagram clarifies which parts are not original. The Museum of Musical Instruments in the Grassi Museum, Leipzig has an exemplary exhibit of violins and viols that highlights adaptations and changes to the instruments over time. The object labels cite, for example, changes of necks and heads, and in the number of strings, demonstrating important historical preferences.

Which Values?

Based on context, we recognize different kinds of value (see fig. 4).³⁵ Further, the *same* value can be *different* for different people, depending on perspective. For example, a specialist and a non-specialist museum visitor will likely have very different priorities and interests. A maker may want to look at many examples of the same type of object, including broken fragments, while a non-specialist visitor may be more focused on an object's luxurious decoration or be intrigued by spectacular shapes. Further, exhibition value can depend on disparate factors from the condition of the object to the type of mu-



4 Different kinds of value. Christina Linsenmeyer

seum. What an art museum chooses to exhibit, for example, can be quite different from what a science and technology museum might select. To what degree should we address Ludmilla Jordanova's plea that »we must lose our childish awe of ›treasures‹ and ›wonderful things‹ in order to replace it with a measured appreciation of the awkwardness, the limitations, the downright intractability of objects that, for whatever reason, we endow with value« (fig. 4)?³⁶

Relative to other museum objects, musical instruments are especially valued for their use potential: to be played and make music. There is a driving public demand that musical instruments in museum collections be played and heard, with some proponents even falsely claiming that an instrument's health depends on it. One of the most persistent questions – To play or not to play? – may not be a topic we want to visit in the panel. But I will offer the recognition that, despite some individually created museum practices to determine if an instrument should be played or not, no formalized standard exists for the decision-making process. This is one of the topics for the WoodMusICK (WOODen MUSical Instrument Conservation and Knowledge) meeting this October that focuses on conservation.³⁷ In favor of collections preservation, we can recognize that there are many instruments outside of museums that are playable. For non-playing collections, our activities are sometimes controversially haphazard,

34 Edwin M. Ripin: The instrument catalogs of Leopoldo Franciolini (Music Indexes and Bibliographies 9). Hackensack NJ 1974.

35 Thanks to Florence Gétreau for the additions of »ritual« and »aesthetic« to the types of value included in fig. 4.

36 Ludmilla Jordanova: Objects of knowledge. A historical perspective on museums. In: The New Museology. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint London 2006, p. 40.

37 WoodMusICK, 4th Annual Conference, COST FP1302 WoodMusICK. Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels, 5-7 October 2017. Proceedings available at: http://woodmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/Proceedings_WoodMusICK_BRS.pdf [4. 10. 2017].

»sacrificing« an instrument to be designated as playable, sometimes with the unspoken hope that this choice depends on other institutions not playing their example. Sometimes the most iconic examples are highlighted in concerts, including the oldest, the most famous, or a unique example selected more for popular appeal than demonstrated cultural merit. Museums are the place to preserve historical testimony and the tangible and intangible heritage that objects bear, yet playing instruments always involves risk and wear and tear. At the same time, copies are possible; they can teach us about the original, and will likely sound closer to the original when it was new. Why have we not made the practice of playing copies more universal? Does our current practice conflict with ICOM ethics?³⁸

Conclusion

Are collections and research taking a back seat to other priorities and losing their foothold in the museum? If collections lose their status, what will be our justification for keeping them at all, as public support seems to continually decline. Beyond more obvious challenges of money, space, time, and energy, there are critical issues – such as provenance, expertise, and authenticity – that lie close to the heart of our collections' meanings. How we address these issues, update our approach, and which historical and current values we choose to acknowledge and invest in are critical for understanding our collections today.

Today, we may share fewer and fewer values with historical collectors, though many similarities are still evident. Though there are new ways of exhibiting, we continue to highlight spectacular objects owing to their size or shape, as well as canonical masterpieces, and organize new galleries in old ways, by classification, chronology, or in spectacular, decorative patterns. Do we persist in substantiating outdated historical trends in our collecting and exhibit practices, though they might no longer serve us today? Whether private or public, past or present, deciding whether to play or not play – all our scenarios have something in common with historical collectors and museums: while beliefs and interpretations change, preserved objects of material culture remain relatively constant in an important, *evidential* way, linking us to

the meanings of the past as well as the present. Should we be flexible with museum ethics and best practices, which are in place to protect the collections through changing times?

Our values are reflected in our actions, including what we collect, care for, and how we create exhibits. By bringing historical collectors and collecting history to the fore, we connect with the meaning of the object before the museum acquired it. How can we better bridge the gaps in our practices and understandings to realize collections' full, complex histories? How will we justify research and expertise? How can we enliven museums to be in line with current trends while supporting the physical and cultural value of collections?

List of References

- Collins, Harry: Are we all scientific experts now? Cambridge 2014.
- Etherington, Rose: V&A acquires Katy Perry false eyelashes as part of new »rapid response collecting« strategy. In: dezeen (18 Dec. 2013), URL: <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/12/18/rapid-response-collecting-victoria-and-albert-museum-kieran-long/> [1.8.2017].
- Greenhalgh, Paul: Education, entertainment and politics: lessons from the great international exhibitions. In: The New Museology. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint London 2006, pp. 74-98.
- Jordanova, Ludmilla: Objects of knowledge: A historical perspective on museums. In: The New Museology. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint London 2006, pp. 22-40.
- Kane, Josephine: The architecture of pleasure: British amusement parks 1900-1939. London 2013.
- Lindenthal, Edward: Preserving memory. The struggle to create America's holocaust museum. New York 1995, 2nd ed. Columbia 2001.
- Linsenmeyer, Christina (Ed.): Through the eyes and ears of musical-instrument collectors (c. 1850-1940). London (forthcoming).
- Maze-Sencier, Alphonse: Le livre des collectionneurs. Paris 1893.
- Murphy, Bernice L.: Charting the ethics landscape for museums in a changing world. In: Museums, ethics and cultural heritage. Ed. by Bernice L. Murphy. London 2016, pp. 19-42.
- Museum Hack, URL: <https://museumhack.com/> [15.4.2017].
- Reich, Carina and Szyber, Bogdan: »...and it's gone.« Installation (opened 11 February 2017), Scenkonstmuseet, Stockholm. English Summary [Exhibition handout, dated March 2017].
- Ripin, Edwin M.: The instrument catalogs of Leopoldo Franciolini (Music Indexes and Bibliographies 9). Hackensack NJ 1974.
- Smith, Charles Saumares: Museums, artefacts, and meanings. In: The New Museology. Ed. by Peter Vergo. London 1989. Reprint London 2006, pp. 6-21.
- Victoria and Albert Museum: Design and public life. Rapid Response collecting, URL: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/designandpubliclife/projects/rapid-response-collecting/> [1.5.2017].
- Weil, Stephen E.: Making museums matter. Washington 2002.

38 The 2017 edition of ICOM's (International Council of Museums) Code of Ethics for Museums is available at: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/> [22.8.2017].