

### **Mars & Museum. European museums during the First World War**

**Veranstalter:** Christina Kott, Centre Marc Bloch / Université Panthéon-Assas Paris 2; Bénédicte Savoy, Technische Universität Berlin, Petra Winter, Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin

**Datum, Ort:** 18.09.2014–20.09.2014, Berlin

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The international conference „Mars & Museum“ held in the Bode-Museum on the Museum Island in Berlin from 18 to 20 September 2014 focused on one particular „stage“ of the Great War: the museum. It was part of the commemorative centenary of the First World War in 2014, that the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) frames with numerous exhibitions and events under the collective title „1914. Awakening. World breakup“ („1914. Aufbruch. Weltbruch“). As a turning point in world history the outbreak of the First World War also meant a caesura for museums and led the conference to raise several questions: How did museums confront the war, how did museum curators react or adjust to the war, how was the war presented museographically and what where the consequences of the war for the institution of the museum?

In a first-time collaboration the Centre Marc Bloch, the Technische Universität Berlin as well as the Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin convened in the Gobelin Hall of the Bode-Museum to give first answers. During the three days 16 speakers addressed in four panels and three languages (English, French and German) the relation between war and museum. It was the explicit wish of the organisers Christina Kott (Centre Marc Bloch), Bénédicte Savoy (Technische Universität Berlin) and Petra Winter (Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin) to allow each participant to speak in their first language. Between the poles of „intellectual appropriation“ and „material property“ the four panels addressed distinct expressions of the „front“ in the museum: the spatial, institutional, material and personal dimension.

JOHN HORNE (Dublin) opened the conference with an overarching keynote speech demonstrating how the story of museums comprises key themes of the cultural history of the Great War itself. Horne drew the bow from an insight into museums at war over their self-perception and self-display after the war to today's new challenges of „reconstructing“ the Great War in museums. Museums were not only institutions but actors of the war. As agents of cultural and political mobilization their „functions“ or „impulses“, as Horne termed it, revealed national or imperial intentions. Horne showed how the Great War posed a challenge to the contemporary: while the war was fought at the front, the museum simultaneously „re-staged“ its own version of the conflict. During the war museums collected trophies, exhibited these selectively and publicly while also serving as aesthetic or spiritual space of contemplation. Presenting the „assets“ of the enemy in the museum – the stage for victors and victims – was yet another form of warfare.

The second day of the conference began with a first panel chaired by Emmanuel Droit (Berlin) focussing on world-class museums during the Great War. ALAN CROOKHAM and ANNE ROBBINS (London) traced the establishment of a national collection of modern foreign art in the National Gallery. Despite the turmoil, it was just between 1914 and 1918 that the National Gallery came in possession of central artworks by Manet, Monet, Renoir and Gauguin reshaping its identity. The functional and spatial transformation the museum experienced in Western Russia during the war was demonstrated by ROLAND CVETKOVSKI (Cologne). The situation of the war provided the Hermitage with new functions: from a czarist repository of world art at the outbreak of the war soon evacuated to Russia, to a military hospital in 1915, then to public property and seat of government, and finally to the utopia of a „sovjet worldmuseum“. The script of WENCKE DEITERS (Vienna) on the director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna was presented by Lukas Cladders (Basel), providing additional comments and historical notes. For the director of the museum, Gustav Glück, wartime put an end to his innovations in display and ac-

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quisition policies. Despite the stop in new exhibitions and the intermittent closing of the museum, Glück finished his new refurbishment and generous donations made new acquisitions possible. In Berlin the situation was not quite the same: PETRA WINTER (Berlin) discussed the significant impact the outbreak of the war in 1914 had on the museum landscape. Numerous employees were drafted and sent to the front, so a staff shortage forced the museums to close. However two major acquisitions were made (Titian's „Venus and the Organ Player“ and an antique „Enthroned Goddess of Tarent“) serving as evidence for the power of the nation. But not only did the museum itself function as substitute front („Ersatzfront“), the dislocation and evacuation of objects was cultural policy. ARNAUD BERTINET (Paris) focused on the Louvre and its shelter in Toulouse as well as reprises of reflexes from 1870/71. Objects were assigned to boxes (chronologically or according to their „value“), guarded by soldiers and secured with a sophisticated password-system.

The second and shorter panel chaired by Andrea Meyer (Berlin) continued this focus on the material objects and their displacement during the war with an opening paper by JULIEN BASTOEN (Paris) on the Luxembourg Museum in Paris. In contrast to the Louvre with its evacuations, the Luxembourg Museum remained open and even promoted artistic exchanges between allied countries. Its main curator Léonce Bénédict had hoped to transfer the museum to another place (Senate St. Sulpice, later Musée Rodin, Jeu de Paume), but his plans were prevented by the war. JAANIKA ANDERSON (Tartu) highlighted a very different scene with the University of Tartu Art Museum, which was evacuated in 1915 to Russia. The evacuation of the princely Czartoryski-collection as an example of Polish-German cooperation was presented by AGNIESZKA GASIOR (Leipzig). After the outbreak of the First World War the famous collection of princess Maria Ludwika Czartoryska was brought to the Dresdener Zwinger. Here its masterpieces from Leonardo da Vinci to Raphael, until then unknown to the German public and scholars, were displayed in the Grünes Gewölbe, the Kupferstichkabinett and the Münzkabinett.

The third panel chaired by Eva Troelenberg (Florence) was devoted to case studies in Eastern Europe, Berlin and Paris. The example of the Kurländisches Provinzialmuseum formerly at Mitau (Jelgava, Latvia) with a special focus on the German protestant theologian and historian Otto Clemen presented by CHRISTOPH FRANK (Mendrisio) drew the attention to the nationalistic, ideological and material consequences of the problematic triad Germany, Latvia and Russia. SZYMON PIOTR KUBIAK (Szczecin) delineated a discussion on how to deal with the war, which dominated the municipal museum Szczecin. The weapons of this debate reaching beyond the First World War were different approaches to art: while the director of the museum, Walter Riezler, considered modern art to be suitable for a museal remembrance of the war victims, his opponents insisted on their conservative or völkisch-nationalistic point of view culminating in the repainting of a fresco by Karl Hofer in 1938. Following the central thoughts of the keynote speech, THOMAS WEISSBRICH (Berlin) presented exemplary wartime exhibitions in the Berlin Zeughaus. Having been a military museums since 1881 it was the perfect place for the army to present itself and the war through material objects. In an attempt to mobilise the civil society for the war, trophies were presented in the atrium of the Berlin Zeughaus. The war was historicised as an epoch-making event in the cultural memory while it took place – as John Horne had called it „in future retrospect“. Although there was no direct staging of the trophies, the location of the objects in the well-lit atrium with its keystones above round-arch windows („Masks of dying Slaves“) designed by Andreas Schlüter was by itself a mise-en-scène. How an intentional new presentation of objects in a museum during the war could become historical propaganda was demonstrated by FELICITY BODENSTEIN (Paris): While the collections of the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques of the National Library in Paris were evacuated to Toulouse during the war, the director Ernest Babelon prepared a reinstallation of the museum spaces. When the museum opened again in 1919, it revolved around two central objects. Through these „masterpieces“ Babelon intended to promote

the territorial legitimacy of France in terms of the Rhine-question and curated a genealogy from antiquity to a glorious French victory.

The last panel chaired by Dorothee Wimmer (Berlin) attached importance to the effects of the war onto the profession and work methods of the museum curators with a first overarching presentation dedicated to France. GÉRALDINE MASSON (Paris) underlined that the First World War greatly influenced museum work. Conservation and presentation were reconsidered in a „phase d'apprentissage“ for museum curators. An insight into the effects of the First World War on the Ethnographic Museum in Vienna was given by CHRISTIAN MARCHETTI (Tübingen), who clearly demonstrated how the war opened up new pools of resources, spaces of action and areas of presentation. Modern warfare had a mobilising effect on the material world and the practice of collecting: a novel array of objects from the front as well as the museums of the occupied countries was studied and exhibited. The museum staff thereby became a „useful tool“ for the Habsburg Empire, which wanted to realise its expansion in Southeastern Europe. Collecting from the occupied territories was a mean of emphasising a claim to power. In the last paper LUKAS CLADDERS (Basel) rounded off the conference with a look at the relationships of European Museums in the after-war period. Although the Great War had marked a break in personal and institutional relationships, the common professional and art historical interest as well as sometimes personal ties reawakened the wish for cooperation. After the 1921 congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA) in Paris, the Office International des Musées (OIM) was created in 1926 connecting the museum professionals with a set of joint guidelines. With the creation of the United Nations system in 1946, UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) this post-Great War museum association ceased its functions.

In the final discussion Christina Kott and Bénédicte Savoy underlined that the Great War marked not only a turning point for European museums in a „before and after“, but even more importantly a shift to a „space of experience“. The papers of John Horne,

Roland Cvetkovski and Christian Marchetti demonstrated explicitly how the museum became a „player“ in the Great War through the practice of collecting and exhibiting. Acting in the name of memory museums further nourished national ambitions and, in some cases, constituted a dislocated, compensatory or substitute front. The methodological concern of how to „read“ the language of the museum during the First World War was a common theme of all lectures. Instead of relying mainly on written sources, the actions of the museum might be more telling than its words. To put it another way: the mute sources, like exhibitions and displays, are essential to decoding the vocabulary of the museum during wartime.

Summing up, this conference shed light on a hitherto neglected space of war experience on the home front during World War I – the European museum. In this context the museum serves as a prism to study the effect of war on society. International participants from diverse disciplines including history of art, the history of war experience and remembrance or material heritage added a comparative dimension to the study of European cultural history of the Great War. Further research will pick up on the questions raised and in doing so deepen our understanding of the cultural impact of the First World War, and in particular of the museum's role in European culture.

#### **Conference overview:**

Stefan Weinzierl / Patrice Veit / Bénédicte Savoy (all Berlin), Opening Remarks

Christina Kott (Paris), Introduction

#### *Keynote*

John Horne (Dublin), From Museums in the Great War to Great War Museums

Julien Chapuis (Berlin), Opening Remarks

Christina Kott (Paris) / Bénédicte Savoy (Berlin), Introduction

*Panel 1: World-class Museums during the Great War*

Chair: Emmanuel Droit (Berlin)

Alan Crookham / Anne Robbins (London), Confronting modernity – the establishment of

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the British National Collection of modern foreign art 1914-1918

Roland Cvetkovski (Cologne), World Art, World War, Sickbay. Metamorphoses of the Hermitage during the First World War, the Revolutions and the Civil War 1914-1921

Wencke Deiters (Vienna) (talk held by Lukas Cladders (Basel)), Die Wiener Gemäldegalerie des Kunsthistorischen Museums in der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs

Petra Winter (Berlin), Inter arma silent musae? Die Königlichen Museen zu Berlin im Ersten Weltkrieg

Arnaud Bertinet (Paris), Du Louvre à Toulouse, Paul Jamot gardien des collections évacuées

*Panel 2: Displaced Museums – Protection and evacuation of collections*

Chair: Andrea Meyer (Berlin)

Julien Bastoen (Paris), The Luxembourg Museum during the First World War

Jaanika Anderson (Tartu), The University of Tartu Art Museum before and after the First World War

Agnieszka Gasior (Leipzig), Von Krakau nach Dresden und zurück. Die Czartoryski-Sammlung im Ersten Weltkrieg

*Panel 3: Seize the moment – propaganda, loot and war tribute*

Chair: Eva Troelenberg (Florenz)

Christoph Frank (Mendrisio), Otto Clemen und das Kurländische Provinzialmuseum in Mitau

Szymon Piotr Kubiak (Szczecin), Walter Riezler – Karl Hofer – Ludwig Gies. Der Große Krieg im Stadtmuseum Stettin

Thomas Weißbrich (Berlin), Trophäenkult und Leistungsschau. Das Königliche Zeughaus zu Berlin während des Ersten Weltkriegs

Felicity Bodenstein (Paris), Ernest Babelon, historical propaganda and reinstalling the Cabinet des Médailles

*Panel 4: The effects of the Great War on the profession and work methods of museum cu-*

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Chair: Dorothee Wimmer (Berlin)

Géraldine Masson (Paris), Prévenir les risques de guerre: les réflexes professionnels des conservateurs de musées de province français et leurs implications

Christian Marchetti (Tübingen), Das Museum für Österreichische Volkskunde in Wien: Kriegserfahrung und museale Sedimente

Lukas Cladders (Basel), 1919 und die Folgen: Europäische Museumsbeziehungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg

*Final discussion*

Christina Kott (Paris) / Bénédicte Savoy (Berlin)

Tagungsbericht *Mars & Museum. European museums during the First World War*. 18.09.2014–20.09.2014, Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult 06.11.2014.