

March 30, 2016

## Call for Chapters

A New Book on **Museums and Activism** edited by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell

Museums<sup>1</sup>, as many commentators have observed, are rarely (if ever) as neutral, objective and dispassionate as their rhetoric might suggest. Indeed, the highly political character of the museum – the influences, interests and agendas that impact their management, governance and everyday working practices, as well as the numerous biases that shape their approach to collection, interpretation and display – has received increasing professional and academic scrutiny over the past three decades. Despite this, thinking and practice remain powerfully constrained by the myth of museum neutrality. Institutions, whose practices are subject to critique by political and environmental campaigners, have often been unwilling to engage in dialogue, resistant to public accountability and slow to change. Most museum practitioners and their governing bodies are cautious about their engagement with contemporary issues and wary about being perceived to be biased, or to be lending support to particular moral or political standpoints.

However, recent years have seen a small but growing number of museums, galleries and heritage organisations experimenting with new ways of working that seek to not only engage with and explore, but also to *act upon* social inequality, the marginalization of Indigenous peoples, political injustice and the causes of environmental destruction. These institutions are key intellectual and civic resources, as well as uniquely trusted public spaces where substantive issues can be explored, debated and acted upon, and where ethical behaviours can be modelled (Janes 2009, 2016). This work can be

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<sup>1</sup> Potential authors should note that the use of the word “museum” here includes galleries, science centres, and heritage sites.

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understood as a form of *activist practice* (Sandell and Dodd 2010) that seeks to harness the museum's unique resources towards more sustainable, fair and just societies.

***Museums and Activism*** will examine this emerging trend in thinking and practice, exploring the idea of the museum as a staging ground for efforts by a variety of different groups with wide-ranging (sometimes conflicting) agendas and interests to bring about social and political change, or to advance and elicit broader support for a particular standpoint. Although there is a close relationship here with ethical, socially-engaged and socially responsible work, *Museums and Activism* is concerned with practice that seeks to effect societal change above and beyond the dictates of traditional priorities and internal museum agendas. Collectively, the contributors to this volume will highlight a moral imperative related to museum priorities and practices, and explore how the institution's unique resources and capabilities might be harnessed and repurposed to create a new, caring and more conscious future.

***Museums and Activism*** will elucidate the largely untapped potential for museums as key intellectual and civic resources to address inequalities, injustice and environmental challenges. Contributors will present new research, thinking, and practice from around the world that explores the efforts of museums, individuals and organisations to bring about social, environmental and political change. The focus here is on the relationship between museums and activism – campaigning, action and advocacy by both practitioners and external organizations with activist goals and ambitions that both engage and impact museums.

### **Chapters**

Selected chapters (4,000 to 8,000 words) will be original and previously unpublished. We are interested in writing which presents, examines and critiques real life examples of best practices in the field. We are seeking research and writing that is lucid and inspiring, scholarly and accessible, contextualised in relation to academic and

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professional literature and debates, and which will appeal to an international readership of museum practitioners, researchers and students.

Contributors will examine a range of topics including:

- Critical case studies of museum work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that seeks to effect broader social, environmental or political change – including the challenges, opportunities and key lessons for museum practitioners. These contemporary cases may be historicised in relation to broader debates surrounding museum neutrality, impartiality and bias;
- The use of museums by activists as staging grounds for protest, past and present;
- The increasing collaboration between museums and organisations with activist goals and ambitions, including the opportunities and challenges that accompany such practices;
- The growing openness amongst museum practitioners to engage with and support particular viewpoints, campaigns and causes within exhibition narratives and public programmes;
- The impact of societal issues and stressors, such as the fossil fuel divestment movement and human rights, on museums' management, governance and activities;
- The role and meaning of unorthodox museum organizations with an activist agenda on mainstream museum practice.
- The role of museums as agents of public policy in addressing key societal issues, such as climate change and disruption, migration, environmental destruction, the well-being of Indigenous peoples, prejudice and discrimination.

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### **Selection and scheduling**

Please send a two page, double spaced abstract of your proposed chapter and a brief author biography to both Robert Janes at [r.pjanes@telus.net](mailto:r.pjanes@telus.net) and Richard Sandell at [rps6@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:rps6@leicester.ac.uk) by September 30, 2016. Successful authors will be notified by Friday, November 18, 2016. Final manuscripts are due on 28 July, 2017. It is anticipated that *Museums and Activism* will be published by Routledge in the *Museum Meanings* series in 2018.