

Foreword

Welcome to issue 27 of *Museological Review*. ‘What if we could trust the ground under our feet? Museums as places of rootedness and response-ability’¹.

When we chose to consider the question for which this edition is titled, we had no idea just how much more urgent it would become in the intervening months. The continued rise in far-right ideology and nationalisms; the repeal of rights once thought to have been decisively realised; the growing wealth disparity and instability of economic circumstances; the continued spectre of health crises like COVID-19: all of this, and so much more, has led us back to the question of care time and time again.

What if we could trust the ground under our feet? We find ourselves asking this in the face of political unrest. **What if**, we ask in the shadow of war and genocide. **What if**, as we are confronted daily with the effects of a changing climate that has left many of us mourning the environment and life rhythms we once knew.

In the face of such change and loss it might feel impossible to foreground connectedness, care, sustenance, concern, responsibility and response-ability. It does not feel out of place to point out that we, the editors of this issue are two women and a non-binary person talking about care and community in a time of deep uncertainty, a time in which it is harder and harder to envisage— or even understand— what it means to be rooted in something.

Or does it? There are as many ways to be rooted as there are functions of roots in the natural world from which we draw imagery, vocabulary, metaphor, and meaning. Roots dig deep—to anchor a plant against harsh conditions, to seek out nutrients, to grab the substrate of dirt and rock and strengthen it against erosion. Roots spread wide—to connect plants to one another, to build an environment for others, to carry messages and resources far beyond what an individual plant could achieve on its own. When we think about roots, we think about the first ones— the plants whose fungal partners, the mycorrhizal organisms with whom they live and grow to this day, allowed them to live on land. Roots bear evidence to the truth that no one has ever survived alone. Rootedness is to be in community.

¹The inspiration for this provocation came from the book “What if the ground under your feet cannot be trusted” published by the Chilean artistic collective Border Agency. It is both a meditation on the recklessness of modernity and capitalism, and an urgent call to focus on the need to rehabilitate and rediscover those places and temporalities hijacked by the rhythms and mechanisms of modern science.

It makes sense, then, that the words 'root' and 'radical' both stem from the latin 'radix', their shared etymology a testament to their shared qualities. Rooted, as in far-reaching. Radical, as in deep and fundamental. We set out to find museological practices that are both rooted and radical— practices that nourish and sustain, that take but also give, that happen in alliances for modest recuperations for living in the ruins of capitalism while doing the situated work of composing and sustaining new futures. We began searching for responses and response-ability, reaching out as if with roots of our own.

What if. This issue contains examples not only of how the wounds of the past live on, but how they can be repaired. How we can remain response-able to each other in the present. And how we can continue to secure the ground future generations will live on. The variety and diversity of contributors exemplify that the call for care, the call for hope, is also a call to action. As Rebeca Solnit so eloquently put it "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency. Hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal" (Hope in the dark, the untold history of people power).

What if we could trust the ground under our feet?

Each entry within this journal asks this question in some way or another. How are museums recomposing the commons, engaging in the kind of place-making that can make it possible to trust the ground under our feet?

As we considered ways to categorise and organise the submissions for this issue, we noticed how each piece communicated a feeling or a sense of "past", "present" and "future". We approach these temporal conditions fluidly, detached from a conventional, linear understanding of time and space. While some papers reference specific chronologies or periods in the past, their concerns remain as pressing and urgent as ever. Other contributions reflect on our present moment and imagine possible futures, all while honouring and acknowledging diverse histories, cultures, and legacies. All of these articles speak to our "past", "present", and "future". Rootedness, then, becomes transtemporal. Here, it encompasses everything at once: archive, memory, experience, caring, learning, and hope.

Starting the section dedicated to the **PAST**, **Magali Wagner** presents an interview with Margaux Schwab, creator of 'foodculture', a platform founded in 2017, in Vevey,

Switzerland, aiming to share and build knowledge around food as a medium for convivial practices of nourishment for all species. **Poornima Sardana's** paper reflects on the role of community-based museums as spaces of resilience and reciprocity in India. She considers these museums both as responses to institutional challenges and as catalysts of further change.

While **Angelo Rafael da Luz** explores the expansion of Centre Pompidou to Brazil alongside the wider contexts of art in South America and the exoticising or othering of South American art in a global context. The author places these alongside an institutional history of Centre Pompidou to ask questions about value and agency in the contemporary art world, **María Eugenia López-García** writes about the value of community-led organisations in preserving memory and creating new ways of interacting with contested heritage, as seen with regards to Museo Mayachen on the border of Mexico and the United States.

Towards the end of the section, **Dr Sampurna Chakraborty** examines how Rabindranath Tagore's vision for Kala Bhavana, the fine arts institute of Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, created a unique educational space that functioned as both a living campus and an organic museum. Through its innovative architecture, outdoor sculptures, murals, and integration with nature, the campus challenged colonial models of art education and museum display, creating an environment where art was experienced as part of daily life rather than through formal exhibition spaces. This approach is now being negotiated as the site gains UNESCO World Heritage status and increasing tourist attention.

Finally, **Arya Adityan** presents research on how ritual objects from Bhūta Kola, an annual festival in India's Tulu region, are transformed when displayed in Western museums. Through analysis of collections at major US and European museums, the author explores how these sacred objects—masks, breastplates, and anklets used in spirit possession rituals—lose their original religious and cultural context when exhibited primarily for their aesthetic value, raising important questions about how indigenous religious artifacts should be curated and interpreted in Western museum spaces.

As part of the **PRESENT**, **Anna Helfer** reflects on the history of Senegalese paintings through an interview with Ken Aicha Sy, a Senegalese-French curator based in Dakar. Ken Aicha Sy's curatorial research project, SurvivalKit, aims to create a special tool for approaching the history of contemporary Senegalese art from the 1960s to the 1990s, **Muriel Damien** considers museums as therapeutic spaces in a world where crises of time and attention are increasingly prevalent. The author interrogates museums'

therapeutic potential through a pilot project conducted with Musée L in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, and **Isabel Collazos Gottret** shares her review of the community museum of Traditional Medicine of Huancollo, Bolivia, by approaching rootedness through three different approaches. In her account, this community museum weaves together Indigenous knowledge with contemporary heritage-making strategies.

Marie Dewey critically examines the physicality and architecture of museums. The author asks if ICOM's recent definition of museums is realistic or aspirational— and considers how museums can grow into the definition while inhabiting their current architecture. **Weiling Deng, Sara Velas, Ruby Carlson, and Jonathan Banfill** examine how the garden behind LA's Velaslavasay Panorama museum represents a "feral" approach to museum-making that challenges traditional institutional models. Through its organic development, repurposed materials, and collaborative community engagement, the garden functions as both a living archive of local history and an experimental space that blends art, nature, and neighborhood life. The authors argue that this "more-than-panorama museum" offers an alternative to Hollywood's corporate spectacle by fostering grassroots connections and embracing the messy, collaborative process of creation.

Dr Laia Anguix-Vilches's article examines the evolving relationship between museums and fossil-fuel industry sponsorship, highlighting how climate activism and public pressure have led many institutions to end long-standing partnerships with oil companies. While some major museums still maintain these controversial relationships, there is growing recognition that fossil-fuel sponsorship may damage institutional credibility and conflict with museums' increasing focus on environmental responsibility and sustainability. Concluding the **PRESENT** section, **Dr Luise Reitstätter** and **Karolin Galter's** paper examines how a citizen board initiative with five Viennese museums revealed the gap between museums' aspiratory mission statements of dialogue and inclusion, and visitors' actual experiences, highlighting the importance of developing institutional listening skills to better serve diverse public needs through a series of accompanied museum visits and post-visit surveys.

Arantxa Ciafrino and **Pedro Gonçalves'** article examines the complexities of decolonial initiatives in Brazilian museums, focusing on the exhibition "Decolonial Brazil: Other Stories" at the Museu Histórico Nacional. While the museum attempts to address its colonial history through textual interventions and reinterpretations of objects, the author argues that true decolonization requires more than narrative revision. Drawing on Nêgo Bispo's concept of "counter-colonization" and experimental museology, the