

## Book Reviews

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**Lara Perry, *History's Beauties: Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856-1900*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, hardback £55, pp.220**

The National Portrait Gallery (NPG) is a strange institution, half art gallery, half history lesson. It has never quite seemed to have a clear *raison d'être*, and it is quite gratifying to find from Perry's fascinating and thoughtful book that this has always been the case, or rather, that its *raison d'être* has been disputed and hijacked right from the start. It seems, from her analysis, that the strangeness comes from the fact that it was an aristocratic institution in a 'middle-class' age; that though Victorian, it drew on earlier ideas of 'the nation', and that the vision of the Trustees was disputed by curators and artists. The treatment of class is more sophisticated than this bald summary might suggest, and the determination to set the NPG within a longer time frame than just that of the years studied is very valuable.

The book aims to 'elaborate the role accorded to women in the Gallery's representation of the nation's history' (p. 1), and argues that the model of female virtue most often shown was a civil one, drawing on eighteenth century and aristocratic ideals of womanhood, rather than the expected Victorian 'angel in the house', or anything more modern. Portraits of suffragists such as Lydia Becker were not accepted; neither was a group portrait including women's rights campaigners Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. This may seem like a foregone conclusion, but women did not in fact have to fit a particularly strict moral model in order to be included; they just had to stay away from the masculine realm of politics. The women whose portraits made it into the NPG were authors, queens, and mistresses, by and large, but there were quite a few of them. It is surprising that a Victorian institution could devote so much of its collection of portraits of women to Restoration beauties, with their taint of decadence and immorality; but, as Perry shows, women's importance to the nation rested largely in their relationship to kings - as wives, daughters, mothers and mistresses. Perry's analysis at times is so subtle as to be hard to follow - she distinguishes between representations of 'good' Restoration royal mistresses and 'wanton' ones, on the basis of very small differences which I am not convinced make a pattern. However, the strength of the book is its valuable emphasis on the contested nature of all gender ideals, and of museum representation itself. This is an important corrective to analyses which see museums and galleries as transmitting a coherent ideology to an undifferentiated audience.

It is interesting to note (though it is not central to Perry's argument) that very early in the history of the NPG, as curatorial authority grew, there was a shift from portraits selected for the historical importance of their sitter, to ones chosen for their significance as works of art. This parallels a tendency in museums of all sorts for authority to move away from amateurs towards a professionalising body of curators, leading to increasingly specialised criteria for accessions.

The question of what the audience made of displays is a terribly difficult one for the nineteenth century, and while acknowledging this, Perry also makes a good job of making at least suggestive points about how some female audience members reacted to it. As a gallery overtly concerned with the nation, Perry shows that there was an expectation that NPG visitors would be male and middle class, which is a distinction between it and the new municipal museums and art galleries of the time which had a much more missionary zeal to educate the working class, and to provide a leisure activity that men and women would visit together. It is clear, though, that in all types of nineteenth-century gallery middle-class women were an important constituency, visiting them as part of a new leisurely lifestyle. But Perry shows that

middle and upper class women 'read' the museum on a variety of levels, from taking a serious historical or artistic perspective to a very superficial one. More interesting are the examples of visitors who actively clashed with the behaviour and interpretations expected of them; such as when 17 paintings were damaged, it was believed by three girls, and later, in 1914, when a suffragette attacked a portrait of Thomas Carlyle. Perry does not overstate the significance of these incidents but she is undoubtedly right to see them as suggestive. Women as artists are also studied, and their treatment is seen to be consistent with Victorian views of women artists displayed in other settings, according to which they are accomplished and contribute to the civility of the nation, but are not real artists in the way men can be.

In sum, then, this is a useful exploration of the ways in which women could be publicly represented and form part of a national discourse during a period when we have come to believe that they were excluded from the public and the nation. Clearly it is not as simple as that, and this book not only tells us more about the construction of femininity, but about women's own agency, and about the public and the nation in the nineteenth century.

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**Vicki Cassman, Nancy Odegaard, and Joseph Powell (eds) *Human Remains: guide for museums and academic institutions*, AltaMira Press: Lanham, MD, USA, 2006, hardback £39, pp. xix+310.**

It is common in Western cultures to excavate human remains from (pre)historic cemeteries, study them, and then place them in museum/research collections. Despite such common practices, people have begun to contest what had been taken for granted for years. As a result, many articles and books published in the past two decades have focused on the legal and ethical issues surrounding these practices. These tend to address the challenges of balancing the concerns and needs of descendent groups against the desires and legal obligations of researchers and museum professionals. However, few publications present both theoretical and practical guidelines with true global appeal.

With the publication of *Human remains: guide for museums and academic institutions*, this problem has been resolved, for it is the first comprehensive volume that specifically addresses curatorial issues related to human remains. This 17-chapter volume addresses everything from management documentation, curation, conservation, and research implications to values and respect, fieldwork, and legal considerations. As such, it should be of general interest to collections managers, curators and conservators, descendants and other stakeholders, biological anthropologists and archaeologists, students, and many others. The information is presented with holistic intentions, thus 'stimulating improved preservation, management, and attitude(s)' (p. 2) toward the curation of human remains.

The book is noteworthy for its range of topics and its interdisciplinary approach. Along with the discussions and case studies, the chapter inserts provide valuable examples, glossaries, web resources, and other reference materials, including reference for a free downloadable software program designed to catalogue and inventory human remains collections. All of this makes the book an invaluable reference for professionals. It is internationally applicable as most of its contents are specific to human remains. However, several sections are biased more towards United States experiences and have limited application elsewhere owing to their connection to US law or particular to tribal perspectives.

As with any multiple-authored volume, each chapter reflects the authors' perspective and experiences. This is clearly a strength of this book. However, the sequencing of the chapters is not necessarily intuitive, nor do the chapters interconnect and flow as do most single authored texts. Therefore, a reader may be inclined only to examine topics (i.e. chapters) of interest, forgoing a read of the entire book. Reading the book in total, however, is highly recommended because it shows the interconnectedness of actions related to human remains management. This is particularly insightful given the complex and often changing social and political concerns of managing human remains.

The editors correctly argue that 'human remains are substantially different from any

other type of collection' (p. 1). Human remains represent people who were once alive and, for some, they are still living and maintaining personhood in their current condition. The way we view them and how we treat them is complex and bound up in our belief systems, our life experiences, and other conscious and unconscious feelings.

This book does not engage in the debate about retention, a topic thoroughly examined elsewhere in the literature, but rather centres on actually managing human remains collections. The authors embrace the unique status of human remains and provide practical examples for addressing various interests whilst maintaining respect for them.

Alfonso and Powell's essay (Chapter 2) deserves special mention in its discussion of challenges within anthropological ethics. In noting the lack of a code of ethics for biological anthropology, they identify the difficulties the discipline faces when it comes to the development of one, and they offer a model from which to start. They also provide 19 web citations for relevant codes of ethics and standard practices.

In Chapter 3, the editors recommend management documents that are specific to human remains, stating that 'mission and vision statements, policies, and procedures are at the heart of improving curation standards for institutionalized human remains' (p. 21). To this end, they identify what should be included within each of these document types and cite a dozen websites with sample policies to assist in the construction of facility-specific documents. One is sure to find helpful suggestions in this chapter whether starting from scratch or working with established documents.

Teague's essay on respect (Chapter 16) states, 'consultation with biologically and culturally affiliated groups and with other interested parties is the cornerstone of any reasonable treatment plan, whether at the point of discovery, curation, or repatriation' (pp. 249-250). Therefore, consultation is a critical step in the development of a code of ethics and management documents. At first glance, the reader may think the essay is limited to consultation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and United States state law and not applicable outside the US. However, this is not the case. It covers consultation basics and provides helpful tips for fair and respectful interactions.

A weakness of the book, however, is the failure to examine the variable perspective of multiple descendant groups and/or claimants. Sadongei and Cash present indigenous values on, and minimum guidelines for, the treatment of human remains, but their approach is limited to collections from the Americas. A chapter that looked at the full array of claimants and their concerns would have been useful. Nevertheless, claimants will appreciate the underlying emphasis of respect for human remains that runs through the book and will find the array of topics covered informative.

A substantial and valuable aspect of this book is its thorough discussion of curatorial and particularly collections management practices associated with human remains. In this sense, it functions as a compendium of key issues. In a number of chapters, Cassman and Odegaard discuss concerns such as condition assessment and its nomenclature, cast and photographic reproduction, destructive sampling and analysis, the documentation of invasive actions (e.g. cleaning, consolidation, adhesive repairs, the use of pesticides and the use of fixed reconstructive materials), and storage standards. These chapters will be helpful to anyone working with human remains. In a similar vein, Arriaza and Pfister in chapter 14 systematically address the health risks involved with handling human remains. This synthesis will be of practical interests to excavators, collection managers, and researchers as it underscores the most common threats and addresses commonly asked questions about contracting diseases from the dead. In a field dominated by debates about the ethics of practice these contributions about the mechanics and protocols of practice (although these too are frequently interrelated with ethical positions) are welcome and enrich our understanding of the management (in all senses) of human remains.

Some of the other topics covered are as follows. Peters, Cassman, and Gustafsson discuss and present three case studies on the value and diversity of information obtainable from preserving the funerary connection of body and associated artefacts. Morris discusses the importance of documenting collections, whether it is to document where human remains come from to data recovery and storage. Militello, Pulliam, and Drew use the Kennewick Project to exemplify the need for management of associated records and introduce the benefits of archival procedures. Hutt and Riddle summarise universal common law, international laws, and United

States state and federal laws governing archaeological resources, many of which pertain to human remains and burials. Brooks and Rumsey identify the increasingly complex issue of displaying human remains through two case studies and a call for open debate in order to 'negotiate appropriate policies and procedures for human remains in different collection' (p. 283).

Overall, the chapters work together to provide a relatively complete overview of curatorial issues specific to human remains. The 2006-edited volume by Lohman and Goodnow, *Human Remains and Museum Practice*, is complimentary to this Cassman *et al.* book. Its dust cover states that it 'explores fundamental issues of collecting and displaying human remains, including ethics, interpretation and repatriation as they apply in different parts of the world.' Anyone with an interest in human remains is well advised to pick up both these volumes.

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### References

Lohman, J. and Goodnow K. (eds) (2006) *Human Remains and Museum Practice*, Paris and London: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Museum of London.

**Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard (eds) *The Responsive Museum: working with audiences in the twenty-first century*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, hardback £55, pp296.**

This edited group of papers, by highly experienced writers coming to the field from a range of different viewpoints, is a timely contribution to literature on the relationship between museums and their audiences.

The editors state the purpose of the book in the preface: 'This book has emerged from our experience of working in museums through a period of dramatic transformation... We aim to capture what we think are the significant drivers for this change... while it is still relatively recent and relevant.' They have deliberately sought 'to have varied voices, mixing theory, policy and practice' and have used the innovative concept of commissioning a 'Response' from other practitioners to most individual chapters, 'to encourage a forum for debate', with some offering alternative views and others expanding on particular points. It is an approach other authors and editors should consider.

But the very ambitions for the book are also responsible for its central weaknesses. Much of the content reflects current UK agendas rather than covering a wider remit and, whilst it is relevant today, the book's shelf life may be limited. Equally, by trying to cover so much, many of the chapters – and particularly the 'Responses' – are too short to be truly meaningful, and there is a lack of even recent historical underpinning for the book as a whole.

The book is broken down into four 'Parts'. Part one, written by the editors, explores 'Understanding Audiences: Theory, Policy and Practice' – examining the context for the rapid transformation in museums that they have defined. Part two covers 'Developing Audiences', and focuses on what they see as new means of developing and working with audiences. Part three examines 'Managing the Responsive Museum', concentrating on the management and organisational components they believe to be essential in creating a responsive museum. Part four, the 'Conclusion', consists of one chapter of eleven pages, written by the editors, looking at the question 'Where do we go from here?' The book is completed by three appendices (on UK visitor figures, the Inspiring Learning for All framework developed by the UK's Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and targets for the development of museum learning in *A Common Wealth*, originally published by a predecessor of the MLA, the Museums and Galleries Commission). There is a useful bibliography at the end of each chapter and another at the end of the book, but there is no explanation as to why some references appear in both and others do not.

The shortage of space is most obvious in Part one. For example, chapter one, covering 'Influences on Museum Practice', is given nine pages of text and a four-page bibliography. Space given to individual 'influences on museum practice', such as two thirds of a page on 'education and learning' and half a page on 'visitor studies', leaves the reader with little more than a list of references.

As an example of the broad statements which the shortage of space causes, the first line of the introduction to Part one states 'UK society and culture changed almost out of recognition from the 1960s onwards', with no further discussion. The paragraph goes on to say that museums as a whole were slow to respond to this change, remaining 'part of a deferential, expert-led culture that was increasingly under attack', and that 'it took a Labour government... from 1997, to bring culture and museums right up the agenda...'. It is not that I deny that there is truth in these statements, but oh for some acknowledgement of, for example, the dynamic growth in the independent museum sector in the UK that occurred from the 1960s–1980s, the innovations this brought, such as open-air museums and living history, the wide audiences to which these museums appealed and their links to the new social history with its commitment to represent multiple perspectives and to enable the voices of the working class, women and ethnic minorities to be heard. This is not the only occasion when the lack of an historical context weakens the arguments in the book.

In Part 2, the book comes to life with Blackwell and Scaife's discussion of 'Building Capacity for Sustainable Audience Development' (chapter 5), supported by Eithne Nightingale's case studies from the V&A (chapter 6), but Izzy Mohammed's two-page response to Nightingale leaves the reader wanting a much fuller discussion again. Part three recognizes that, to be sustainable, audience development must become a core element of the museum mission and management structure but, once more, there is a real need to recognise that good work was done in the past and to question how we are to prevent current audience development work in the UK disappearing as political agendas change. I enjoyed Alec Coles' two-page response to chapter 9, which mentions '...committee reports from the early 1900s which log the hundreds of young children who turned up at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on Saturday mornings...'. An early commitment by UK museums to broaden audiences was later lost across much of the sector and we need to study this to help stop it happening again – and we also need to learn from the experiences of other countries.

In their conclusion, in Part 4, the editors define what they see as the features of a responsive museum; it should be: audience-centred across the whole organisation; in dialogue with its audiences and potential audiences; accessible; learning focused; innovative in exhibition programmes, design and interpretation; innovative in focused programming, targeting priority audiences; creatively using ICT; securing sustained and varied funding; promoting professionalism. Today, few working in museums would disagree, but do not the authors need to go further? This concluding section needs to be much longer, and perhaps the Responses might have been more effectively located here?

Despite my concerns about inadequate space being given to the various topics, there are still some key gaps – for example on the impact of the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund; on the pressures to raise revenue; on what we are learning from the complex visitor studies research now being carried out; on the increasing importance being given to visitor services; and on innovative interpretation.

No other single text covers the full range of this book. The following are a few suggestions of alternatives that the reader might explore. Kawashima (1997) provides an essential analysis of the factors driving museum change in the UK before New Labour and their impact on museum management – still highly relevant today. Corsane (2005) includes chapters by Harrison, who uses examples from Canada, the USA and the UK to look at challenges faced by museums in the 1980s and 1990s and the new ways of thinking and practices that they stimulated, and by Stam who focuses on the 'New Museology' that has emerged – with the museum seen as a social institution – and the impact this has had on approaches to museum structures, staffing, learning and display development. Black (2005) explores the current demands being made of museums before examining how an approach based on knowing and stimulating audiences, old and new, providing quality visitor services, focusing on learning and using innovative interpretive approaches can come together to engage visitors. The work of Sandell (e.g. 2002) provides an

essential positive framework for audience development, but must be balanced by Newman & MacLean (e.g. 2004), while EMLAC (2005) provides an effective outline of how to produce an Audience Development Plan. There is remarkable work on visitor studies taking place at present. Readers should certainly explore the *Inspiring Learning for All* website, but I would also point to the Australian Museum Audience Research Centre (AMARC), for example Kelly *et al.* (2002), and to the Museum Learning Collaborative in the USA, for example Leinhardt & Knutson (2004). Diamond (1999) provides a good practical introduction to evaluation.

Yet, through introducing such a wide subject area, the book would be of benefit to museum studies students coming to the discipline who are unaware of recent developments, and could also assist those outside the profession who need to know about current agendas within it. At £55, however, it is a text more suited to the university library than to the individual.

Finally I would emphasize that the authors set out to encourage thought and debate and, as I hope this review shows, with me they succeeded.

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