



# Crossing Borders

Connecting European Identities in Museums and Online

Simon Knell, Bodil Axelsson, Lill Eilertsen, Eleni Myrivili, Ilaria Porciani, Andrew Sawyer and Sheila Watson

EuNaMus Report no 2







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Cover photo: Simon Knell. Museum of the Romanian Peasant.



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# Summary

1. The museum is deployed as a malleable technology in Europe. It is not a singular instrument to be adopted and applied but rather an institution that is made to bend to national and local needs. The largely invisible soft architecture of the museum – the workforce – is the most important element in realising the possibilities of the museum.

2. In no nation does the national museum holistically define or represent that nation. Its performances, like those produced in architecture, monuments and spaces in the capital, aim to represent the nation in its international cultural context, and may also establish overarching artistic, historical, scientific, technological and cultural narratives. However, all European nations also possess regional and local museums which contribute, in the form of a mosaic of identities, a more nuanced understanding of the nation and its regional character. But just as there is little to distinguish between the interior performances of the national museum, and the museological displays of the capital city, so regional museums merge into landscapes littered with 'objects' which resonate with the past and with identity. Museological performances of national and European identity should not simply be thought of as carefully curated and intentional narratives.

3. In national museums Europe manifests itself not as a subject but as a connective material language through which nations express their internalised and competitive identities. The existence of this language produces an implicit sense of Europe in visual acts of nation-making. The ability of nations to present themselves

in this European language, adds to a sense of national security and well-being, and increases the potential for international dialogue.

4. This language, which developed in Europe and has been exported globally, continues to evolve. New forms of representation, such as in art, permit new nations and nations lacking established art collections, and other forms of representation established in more territorially secure and wealthier nations, to participate inclusively in these pan-European cultural negotiations. Contemporary art shows, for example, have not discriminated between established art centres and countries and cities only now considering the cultural and symbolic uses of art. It does not rely on acts of possession, only opportunities for performance.

5. The recognition of this shared language has underpinned collaborative, loan and travelling exhibitions. However, a preference for high art, and for representations of established themes and actors in art, can produce an exclusive engagement, which selects against smaller and newer nations. As yet, the full border-crossing potential of these shared forms of representation is not fully realised, and this is particularly so in those parts of Europe where nations feel least secure, and political tensions exist between neighbours.

6. The danger in such border-crossing, however, is increased European cultural homogenisation which risks eroding the cultural diversity celebrated in Europe's museums. The existence of a shared material language suggests the long-term operation of this cultural process. The problem has the potential to be exacerbated by the globalising effects of pervasive English and the Internet. If cultural policy is to activate national museums as instruments of greater social cohesion, it must, in parallel, introduce actions which ensure the resilient cultural difference. National museums, which have been founded on the principle of differentiation, even if in a shared European language, are well positioned to participate in these double layered negotiations.

7. Conceptions of Europe are polycentric; Europe, its definition and cultural representation, is nuanced by the national viewpoint. Countries on the Atlantic coast have viewed the continent in the context of global internationalism. Those in the centre and east, have seen Europe as a westward dimension to a wider geographical territory centred on the nation that also admits dialogue with non-European territories and influences to the east and south. Many nations express a defining sense of 'inbetweenness'. There are no sharp boundaries to the deployment of Europe's representative language. Within Europe architectural styles and other forms of representation show particular patterns of adoption. At Europe's borders, they merge with other styles and forms of expression.

8. Some nations, such as Germany, Italy and the UK, hold a confederated sense of nation and national culture; a joining together of disparate elements. It is, however, also possible for small nations to confederate culturally so as to increase their cultural power. National art museums in the Nordic countries have repeatedly worked together to develop and exploit these transnational commonalities in art exhibitions. These countries provide a model for other regions in which the relatively small size of nations disempowers them in European cultural dialogue.

9. National art museums implicitly, and unavoidably, present narrow and exclusive traits of Europeanness. Christian symbolism is inevitably dominant in Western art history but it is also implicit in possessions from the ancient Middle East. It is also present in historical paintings, particularly in national museums in central and south-eastern Europe, which, for example, celebrate the overthrow of the Ottoman Turks. While some museums engage in the uncensored display of national art, others appear to engage in concealment believing such works embody outdated political ideologies. These acts of selection permeate more widely national art museums which actively determine what should be the modern telling of the story of art. There is work to be done here to find new narratives that discuss these past moments of art making, and which reflects upon modern day concerns

and implications of events represented in this art. These objects perform today primarily as national icons; they have the potential to be points of dialogue.

10. European national museums possess a wealth of objects which have crossed national borders. While these have produced much contestation, these objects have undoubtedly performed an ambassadorial role. Pan-European elevation of ancient Greek and Roman artefacts, and Italian and Dutch paintings, for example, owes much to the movement and foreign possession of these objects. This object mobility has produced national museums which in the sheer diversity of material they hold also represent Europe; both because the objects represent a spread of geographical territories but also because this eclectic aspect is a peculiarity of the European museum model. It is not found globally.

11. Regional museums play an important role in the production of distinctive national identities which nuance national stereotypes. In these museums, national identity becomes faceted, and attached to a mosaic of histories and material cultures. If Europe is polycentric in terms of national perspectives, then the nation, too, is capable of exhibiting polycentricity according to the thematic (religion, class, industry, nature, and so on) and regional lenses through which it is viewed.

12. The history of museum development in Norway reveals the multi-faceted ways in which regional developments construct new forms of representation, strengthen rural identities, give weight and emphasis to particular events and regions, and even draw the centre of the nation away from the capital. It reveals the 'inventedness' and inventiveness of these national identities.

13. Coordinated attempts by Swedish museums to record contemporary society reveal the influence of socio-intellectual fashions on the visualisation of the nation. Like other institutions at national and European level, these investigations have developed from broad studies of social categories to more focused and

problematized engagements with human experience. Rather than a trajectory of improving practice, these changes reflect broader transformations of value and perception. As these perceptions change so do ideas about how the nation should be interpreted and remembered. The nation is, by this means transformed; our understanding of what it is, and how it is to be composed and imagined, has been radically changed.

14. In England, class division became embedded in the production of heritage in the late twentieth century. Parallel acts of preservation of aristocratic and working class lifestyles were not, in any overt sense, politically driven, and certainly not by these classes. The heritage produced – romanticised, neutralised and aesthetised – was the product of middle class vision. These representations of Englishness do not speak with an aristocratic or working class voice but through a middle class interlocutor and to a largely middle class audience.

15. In Italy, civic museums, in particular, have replaced the national museum in the task of representing the nation. Each, like a jigsaw piece, contributes to the national whole. The richest country in Europe in terms of its visual culture, this fragmented realisation of the nation ensures a particularity and specificity of representation. It has meant that Italy's cultural richness has not been homogenized.

16. In online spaces, citizens are empowered to become curators, to arrange objects and narratives for their own ends. While this would appear to open up possibilities for new transnational museum-like engagements, this potential remains as yet largely unrealised. This is one of the frontiers of museology, and opens up the possibility for museologists and museum practitioners to train citizens in the production of personal and democratic online museums which realise deep benefits from the soft architecture of the museum without experiencing the short comings of institutionalisation.

17. Online activity around Great Lake Prespa on the borders of Albania, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM), exposes two quite distinctive transnational acts of representation. Official institutions have increasingly adopted a conciliatory and cooperative approach both to the indigenous population and in cross-border relations. In these online worlds, objects and the objectified, such as the local environment, become bridges between nations. The counterpoint to these attempts to re-imagine these borderlands can be found in the blogs produced by private individuals. These tend towards xenophobic nationalism in which history and territorial objects legitimise particular views. These engagements suggest a need for professionalised institutions.

18. Online activity around objects associated with the Cold War give some indication of the possibilities for citizen-led cross-border engagements. These reveal that émigrés and incomers are important in online transnational conversations that produce memories and new constructions of the nation. Both groups are usually silent in more formal museum making acts. Here, on Flickr, the full potential of the online, citizen-led, museum remains primitive and barely realised.



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# Introduction

This report presents key findings of research undertaken by the Eunamus consortium in its attempts to understand the 'museology of Europe'. This notion is used here to describe activities which are peculiar to museums and which result from the manner in which museums assemble and deploy objects. This idea can also be used to understand the museological aspects of the city, in which architecture, buildings, monuments, parks, piazzas and boulevards become curated objects. The museological aspect explored here also acts as a counterpoint to the narrative tradition in museums, explored elsewhere in the work of Eunamus.

This research investigated the ways in which the city, online museum-like spaces, and national, regional and local museums produce opportunities for connecting identities. A study of national art museums and capital cities, for example, sought to understand how acts of nation making also produced a sense of Europe and of a shared European identity. This aim addressed a central purpose of Eunamus research: to understand how the portrayal of history in national museums could contribute to greater European social cohesion. National art museums in London, Brussels, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Istanbul, Warsaw, St Petersburg, Stockholm, Oslo and Madrid were included in this survey. Art museums formed a particular focus for this aspect of the study because national conceptions of art are particularly useful for understanding interpretive, rather than narrative-driven, exhibitions. National galleries of every kind (international survey collections, national art, modern art and contemporary art) were visited as time permitted. Of primary interest were national galleries of paintings, but where possible museums displaying classical,

medieval and decorative art collections were also visited. Our aim was not to understand institutional culture, constraints or intentions, but to reflect on the material culture made available to European publics.

In our studies of local and regional museums, we explored how the grand narrative of national identity, developed by national museums, is nuanced at a local level. National museums perform particular roles in the construction of national identities, often with the intention of speaking to other national publics rather than their own. Local and regional museums converse within the nation, revealing the nation as a mosaic of historical performances. There are, however, no firm distinctions between national, regional and local roles but rather subtle variations in the way the nation is explored and expressed.

The final section of this report takes us beyond acts of representation under the control of institutions of national and provincial governments. It considers the democracy of the web, where citizen and institution can have equal prominence. Here we have searched for museum-like encounters in contested or formerly oppositional histories, in the hope of finding new kinds of transnational debate. Our focus has not been on museum websites but on citizen-led encounters. While these developments have yet to recognise the museological potential of the Internet, they do reveal some of the possibilities and limitations of such citizen-led encounters. At times, professional or government mediation appears to be required in order to permit communities to escape their difficult pasts.





# The museum unbounded

A philosophical position is adopted by the authors of this report, that might contradict popular, professional and political understandings of the museum. Here the museum is not to be understood as a singular and particular readymade instrument that is then universally applied by cities, nations or communities. In every nation the museum has been adopted as a malleable technology that can be adjusted to local need. The museum developed as a European technology to serve European needs, including the negotiation and materialization of regional and national identities, and to establish societies based on knowledge, culture and education. Political, militaristic and economic challenges to these identities catalysed museum development and called for a range of museum responses. Museums continue to be shaped by local and momentary forces.

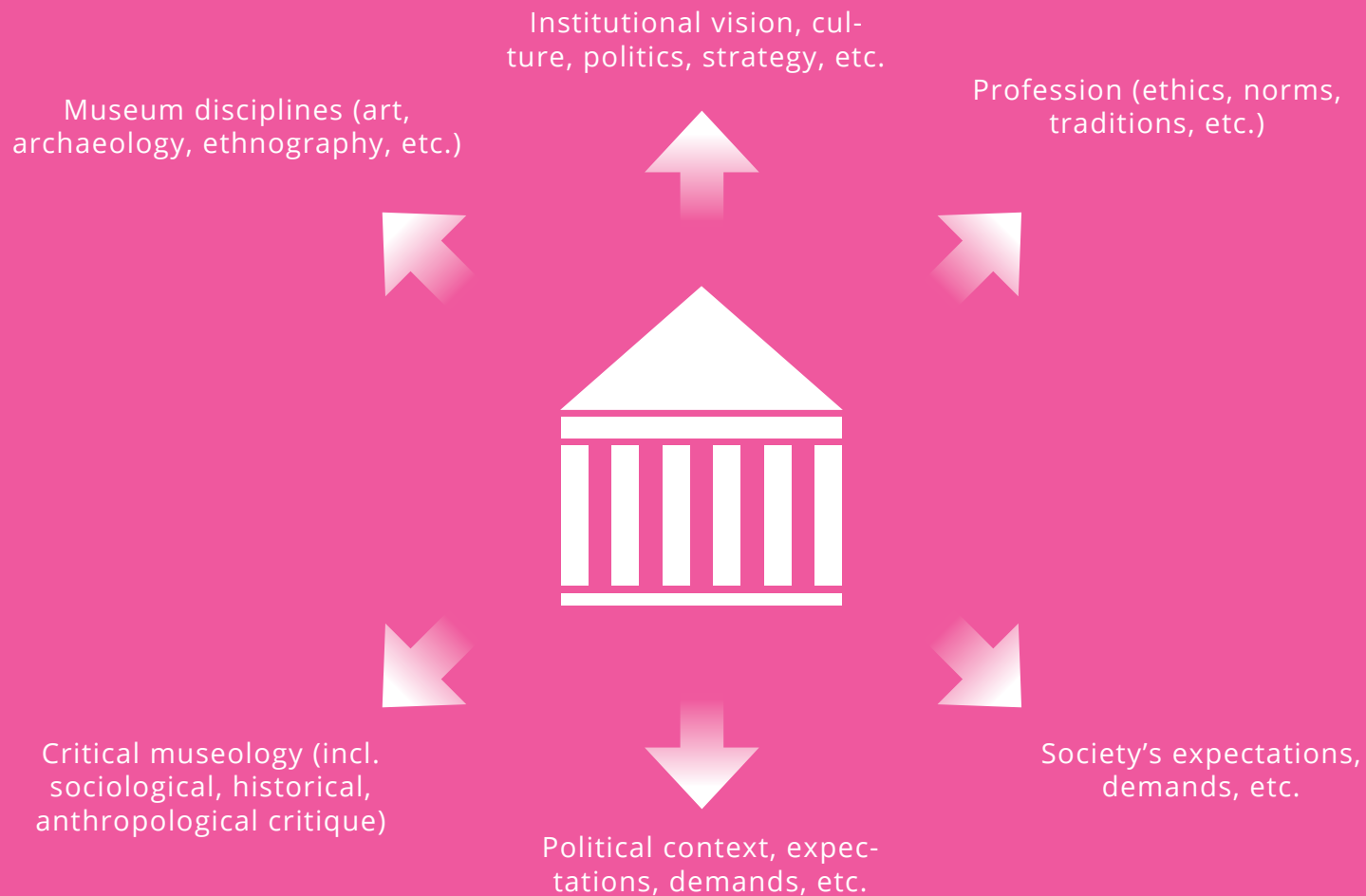
The museums in Stockholm can be used to illustrate some of diverse possibilities of the museum. The museums in this city are amongst the most sophisticated, and at times avant garde, in Europe, though sometimes quite subtly so. 1950s Stockholm gave birth to Moderna Museet, a national museum of modern and contemporary art. The child of the Nationalmuseum, a fairly conservative national gallery of international and Swedish art, the new museum was conceived as engaging with, and effectively filtering, contemporary art prior to its admission into the elite collection. However, Moderna Museet soon posed a major challenge to the established form, nature and activities of European national galleries. Under Pontus Hultén, it embraced art performance, which when enthusiastically consumed by the Stockholm public seemed to endorse a new social need quite different from that met by the Nationalmuseum. In the vanguard of the new galleries of contemporary art, Moderna Museet help shape their invention. It shifted the

museum emphasis away from material memory and towards performance; away from the museum as mausoleum and towards the museum as theatre.


At Historiska Museet, a fine but fairly traditional gallery of prehistoric archaeology embeds all the assumptions that to an outsider seem to define archaeological interpretation: magic, the sacred, kingship, and so on. Beyond this gallery, however, a space modelled on a departure lounge deconstructs the underlying assumptions, revealing archaeology as a cultural response: a reflection of the values of its own time. This space serves to connect the past to everyday modernity, from a world of disciplinary authority to a realm of understanding in which all visitors possess expertise. Nowhere else in Europe can this kind of openness be found in a national museum; in almost all others, authority is applied unhesitatingly and without question.

Nordiska Museet inserts an ethnological lens between the visitor and objects representing the present-day and Nordic past. The effect is to remove historic distance – always a starting point for historical interpretation – and focus attention on the experience of being human. This produces an interesting effect, making the normal seem strange, the bland appear odd, and the very act of living a subject worthy of contemplation. By these means, the museum removes that barrier frequently situated between audiences and objects.


Each of these museums has its own institutional philosophy and yet shares values that arise from disciplinary backgrounds, the city and the nation. Across Europe, museums reveal an extraordinary diversity of practices. This gives these museums an unparalleled cultural richness which must be protected.



A number of forces shape local conceptualisations and implementations of the museum. These include museum disciplines, such as art history, which shape thinking about particular categories of object. Critical museology arises from academic communities that deconstruct the institution. Politicians, and society more generally, impose expectations and requirements on the museum. Professions constrain and delimit the institution but also give it its essential professionalism. The institution itself possesses a particular leadership and working culture that shapes a response or develops its own strategy.



PART 1  
Europe as a language



European cities speak proudly of the nation but they do so in a European language. Here, the Arcul de Triumf in Bucharest references Paris – Bucharest aspired to be a 'Paris of the East'. Paris, of course, built its arches in imitation of those in Rome.





# Silent Europe

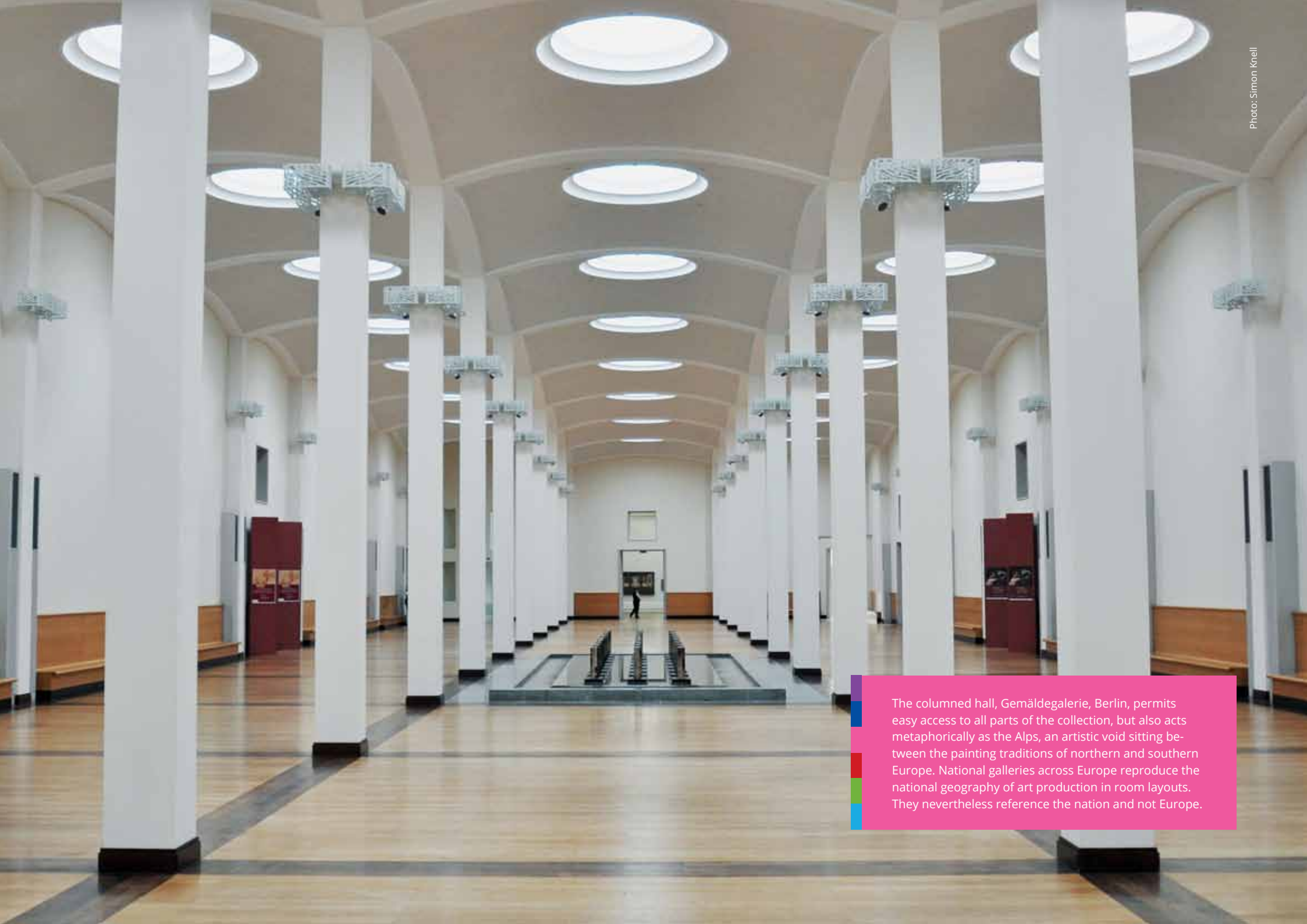
Europe is rarely a subject for national museums. Perhaps surprisingly, given a British pre-disposition to view Europe as a landmass beginning with the French and Belgian coasts, of those national museums surveyed, only the British Museum and V&A in London used Europe as an important geographical concept in their exhibitions. They did so inclusively; Britain was an integral part of the European culture they explored. In both museums, Europe was used to interpret the medieval period. This permitted these exhibitions to avoid reference to arcane European territories which no longer existed. In the case of the universalising British Museum, it also encouraged visitors to focus on art, creativity and other humanistic aspects of the past, and thus overcome the perception that a starting point for understanding these objects was national provenance. It separated the creativity of a foreign and historic people from petty nationalism. Indeed, the newest displays seemed to argue that great art resulted from the mobility of objects and ideas. Medieval art has long been interpreted as holding pan-European influence. Nevertheless, in most other national museums, similar medieval artworks serve national needs, such as in Sweden and Romania, or an undefined notion of universal taste, as in the Bode in Berlin.

This silence on Europe is an inevitable consequence of the era of nationalism which gave birth to the national museum. Inevitably, nations defined themselves through competition with other nations. The nation became the unit through which other cultures could be understood. National museums were also very selective, in rather complicated ways, in the material they used to represent the na-

tion. Of the foreign material culture that might be included, those cultures which left remnants of their former occupation, were joined by objects of high art from Italy, and Greece, and Mediterranean territories which connected to a Christian past. The powerful museum-making nations competed in high art and archaeology that could be plundered or acquired from weaker territories or cultures which had as yet to discover a purpose for the museum. It did not matter whether these source nations were European, only that they possessed treasures of the ancient world.

It should also be noted that 'Europe' was conceptually too low a resolution at which to interpret material culture. National galleries of European art soon adopted a taxonomy of national schools, and were selective in those nations considered to have participated in the production of European art history. Nineteenth century art, by contrast and with relatively few exceptions, was produced in an era of rising nationalism and for the most part remained in the national galleries of the nations in which it was produced.

The decorative arts museums founded in this period, which were built to develop national tastes, did acquire foreign objects but again the nation of manufacture was important, and no distinction was made between European objects and those from further afield. This practice continues today with contemporary art, which aspires to global coverage and yet also shows an awareness of national contexts.



The columned hall, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, permits easy access to all parts of the collection, but also acts metaphorically as the Alps, an artistic void sitting between the painting traditions of northern and southern Europe. National galleries across Europe reproduce the national geography of art production in room layouts. They nevertheless reference the nation and not Europe.



# The silent object

National and transnational identities have been in active construction in European national museums for more than two centuries. For much of that time, however, interpretation in these institutions has not centred on the telling of illustrated stories. The recent articulation of national narratives, such as in the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, Historiska Museet in Stockholm and the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, still remains a minor phenomenon, though of profound significance to the future role of national history museums. This storytelling mode of interpretation, which reflects the power of linear thought, has repeatedly been introduced into museums in imitation of the book.

The interpretive museum, which starts with the object and what we might learn from its observation and study, relies, in its effectiveness, on the creativity of the workforce – the soft architecture of the museum. This interpretive approach does not rely simply upon labelling. Selecting and placing an object in a space, perhaps next to other objects, opens up interpretive possibilities. By these means, museum workers have instrumentalised material culture to construct particular performances which imbue the visitor with implicitly understood – rather than rationally articulated – beliefs and values.

Aspects of identity that might come into being through these interactions play upon our receptivity as well as our rationality. Objects seem to speak to us in a language which we implicitly understand, but they only seem to do so because we have learned their language through lived experience. While we may not be able to articulate in precise language the phenomena we experience, we nevertheless adjust our understanding to them. Objects become naturalised in our thoughts, they lose their strangeness and in so doing they form part of our identities.



Photo: Simon Knell

Objects seem to speak to us, but these are only thoughts, activated by our accumulated learning and lived experience, and by looking and touching.



# Europe as a material language

In national museums, Europe appears not as a subject but as a language through which the nation is performed. Nations seeking to express their identities to other nations have done so using borrowed symbolic forms. These forms of representation, which manifest themselves in made or chosen objects, in architecture and in the form of the capital city, have been regularised so as to function as a language European citizens can implicitly understand. This permits objects, which include buildings and city spaces, to act as words, expressing a nation's creativity, resilience, power, civilisation, history and political relationships.

This language has evolved and developed through performances which have become associated with nationhood. And while the development of many of these common understandings and acts of production are easily located in the European history of art, with its trans-European movement of artists and styles, this language transcends these arcane disciplinary taxonomies. Art history's invented concepts and terms only go so far in delimiting styles in art practices which have sought to transgress borders and blur boundaries. The European public which engages with this material language has no need of such notions as classicism or the baroque, much as users of spoken and written languages rarely need to understand their etymology. The material language discussed here is not to be understood as manifested in speech but rather as a visual language which, through a familiarity of contexts and uses, seems to speak implicitly of Europe; or rather it speaks of the nation but in an inclusive European language. By these means

Europe becomes a concrete cultural entity, real and particular.

As with all elite culture, these symbolic representations have been orchestrated by political and professional elites interested in the international standing of the nation and national fields of interest. Embedded in transnational negotiations, not least in silent visual encounters, this language was produced in a climate of emulation and competition. And despite its use in attempts to elevate one nation above another, it has perhaps ironically, contributed to a sense of Europeanness.

This pan-European medium has been constructed for the purpose of producing illusions, and nowhere more completely than in the museum. The classical form of so many national museums was an attempt – largely successful – to imbue these institutions with a manly (as it was then imagined) seriousness and civilising status. The exterior of the building is invariably joined by an interior performance of space and display that enhances a sense that as an institution it is beyond question, as real in its form and purpose as it is in its objects. So effective is this performance that the public rarely perceives the museum's theatrical intent though they undoubtedly experience its effects.

This performance of illusions, which creates objects that signify, and can be cherished by, a nation, was developed over many decades. Although not part of their vocabulary or sensibility, museum makers understood that architectural space and object positioning produced a mythological effect.





Budapest makes repeated reference to London in its national symbols. Here Heroes' Square (top) with its Millennium Monument, statues of national heroes, and adjacent Museum of Fine Arts, seems to echo London's Trafalgar Square, its Nelson's Column, Landseer's Lions and the National Gallery. Both are, however, speaking a shared European language and they continue to do so inside these two great art museums.







The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (right), and the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest barely disguising their theatricality.



# Speaking of nation

The national museum permits more subtle negotiations of national identity than is possible beyond its walls, in the monumentalism that typifies national capitals. The European national museum is, nevertheless, engaged in giving such identities essentialised, evidenced and concrete form, and a political hand is frequently present. The Louvre, for example, possesses a long history of direct political intervention. Architecture and cultural objects are made to work with other aspects of the cityscape, to enhance the status of Paris as a model for the cultural capital.

In Oslo, where a new national museum infrastructure is in development, there is public debate about whether politicians or citizens should be responsible for constructing Norwegian identities. The scale of the planned development suggests a fundamental rewriting of all forms of representation in a single stroke. Unlike the long and organic process of development which has ensured that Paris is a multi-authored project, the Oslo development delivers unparalleled power of cultural representation to governments of a single period.

In the Netherlands, contentious political attempts to recover and promote an essentialised Dutchness in a new Dutch Museum of National History failed. The museum project closed at the end of 2011.

In Bucharest, museum professionals appear to act as political activists. The Museum of the Romanian Peasant promotes an indigenous identity centred on the stoicism of a part of the population that has been converted into a national treasure. MNAC, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in that city, in contrast, attempts to internationalise Romanian identity. In the globalised world of contemporary art, there is no place for parochialism. Yet another basis for Romanian identity is developed at the National History Museum, which remained

for the most part closed in 2011. Here only the most essential manifestations of the nation were on display: the nation's treasures (crown jewels) and casts of the scenes depicted on Trajan's Column, in which are said to be portrayed the origins of the Romanian people.

In Budapest, national identity has been rehearsed in the national museums and at sites across the city for more than a century, where it is essentialised into a number of defining and uniting attributes. Both in the cityscape and the museum, material objects (including buildings and monuments) operate not simply as treasures and icons, but also as materialized beliefs in which are vested the values and ideals, achievements and genius of the nation. These thoughts are, of course, merely the product of political impositions and negotiations; object and idea exist only in imagined relationships, though the illusion that the two are one holds considerable potential for political manipulation.

In Warsaw, a similar sense of nationhood is produced in museums and across the cityscape. Here, too, it is a nationalism of recovery, of resilience and other defining attributes. The politics of some of the national museums here is not concealed; some museums are considered necessities in the production of a nation possessing debts and tragedies.

The Military Museum in Istanbul openly identifies its modern-day enemies and threats. Visitors to this museum understand that songs are also national objects, as the museum offers a militaristic induction to the nation.

In these kinds of national museum performances the sentiments of nationalism become objects to be preserved and materialised. In this form they appear immutable, though in the hands of curators and politicians they are easily manipulated.

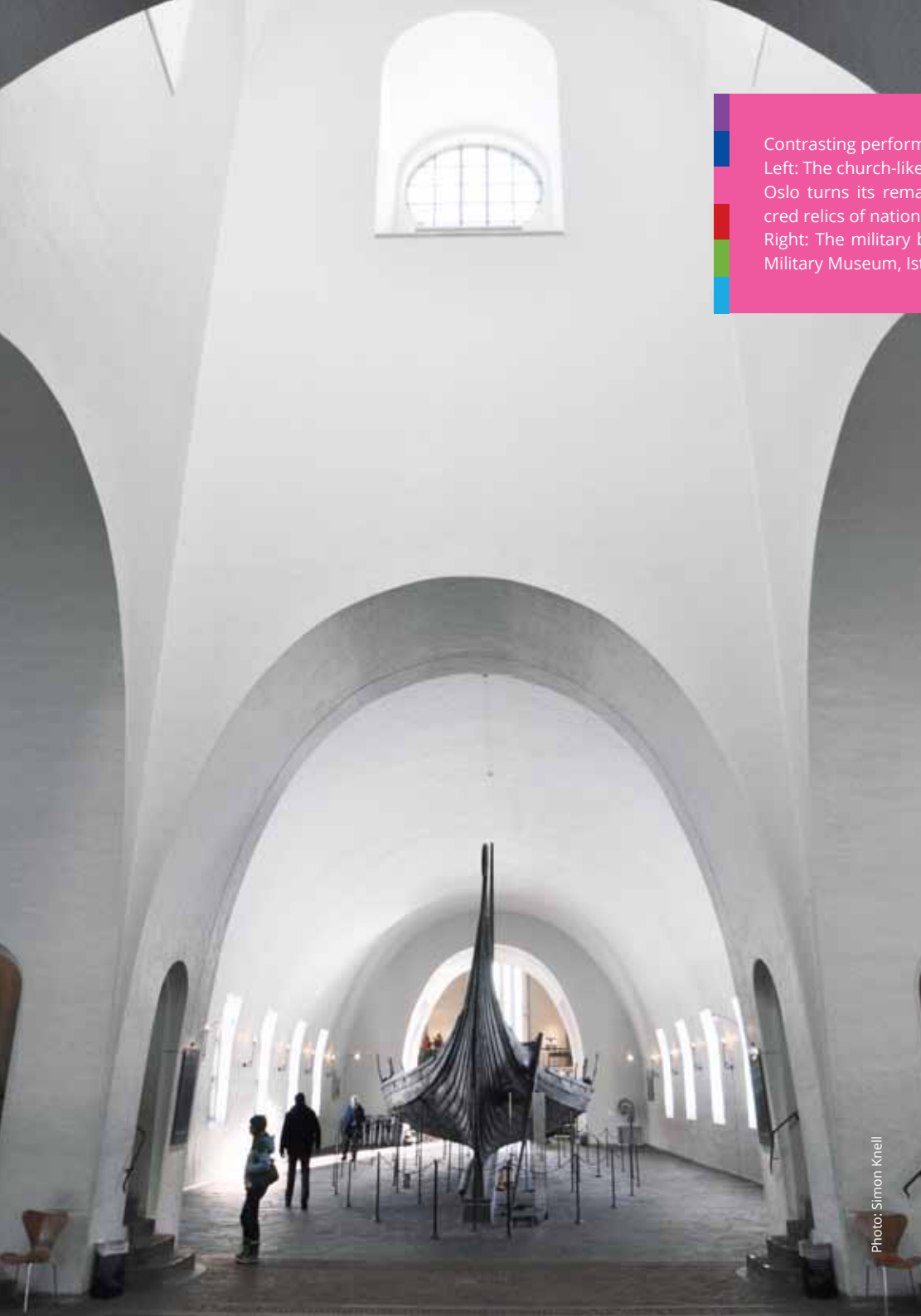


Photo: Simon Knell

Contrasting performances of nationhood.  
Left: The church-like Viking Ship Museum in Oslo turns its remarkable objects into sacred relics of nationhood.  
Right: The military band performing at the Military Museum, Istanbul.



Photo: Andrew Sawyer



# Saying different things

The existence of this common language might give the impression that each nation is expressing the same values and ideas if adopting the same architectural or object vocabulary. Local and national contexts, however, shape the national museum performance. An examination of common categories of material culture is, in this regard, quite revealing. Collections of classical sculpture from Greece and Italy, and the territories they once controlled, have formed a foundational resource for many nations attempting to establish themselves as similarly elite civilisations. Amongst those institutions which participate in deploying these symbols and exploring their artistic merits, those possessing only casts use them as a training resource or, as in the case of the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, as set dressing. In other museums, such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, Roman statuary is clearly seen as secondary to the Greek originals which inspired it.

The British Museum, which with the acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles was believed to have acquired the epitome of art, continues to give these objects sacred space. Their significance remains unmatched by other objects in the collections, even if the museum now attempts to adopt a more balanced appreciation of the world's various cultures. Here the institutional performance is permeated with a moralistic universalism, which shuns narrow nationalistic desires in order to promote common humanistic values. This post-national and post-colonial disposition possesses theological depth and, one might argue, Christian sensibilities, and is played out not just in interpretative panels, but in admission-free access (very rare in Europe's national museums), on its website, and in generous permissions to use images.

The Pergamon Museum in Berlin might be considered second only to the British Museum in terms of the monumental Greek treasures it possesses. In many respects its theatrical vocabulary is much more impressive. The Pergamon Altar has long been compared to the Parthenon Marbles, the latter being a class of objects to which all nations aspired. Like other the great museums on Museum Island, the Pergamon lacks the British post-colonial angst. The German context for museum development here – the march towards German unification in the late nineteenth century – was entirely different from that which produced Britain's national museums. The German development was one of emulation – a desire to catch up in status and symbolism – with Paris and London. The institutions on Museum Island were established to house great art, and aside from the more imperial expressions that later shaped museum developments here, this exclusive role as the site of the nation's treasure houses has been jealously protected. The Pergamon Museum, today, expresses no doubts or regrets about one nation making itself in the treasures of another. With World Heritage status awarded at the end of the twentieth century, the island's combination of imperialistic classicism and assembled treasures are once again in the ascendancy. It remains one of Europe's most remarkable museological acts.

In Munich, in the now decoratively naked Glyptothek, classical sculpture is given its own temple. Itself an element in a classical ensemble of buildings, this museum became the starting point for a museum landscape which, through a succession of Pinakotheks, tells the story of art. In many respects this Munich landscape conforms to the idealism that had fuelled the development of museums in Berlin before these were subverted by unification and imperialism.

This earlier artistic ideal achieves its most splendid realisation at the Hermitage in St Petersburg, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Louvre in Paris. In each case the museum blends the sumptuous architectural motifs of the palace with the more perfected style of display found in the nineteenth century museum. In each of these museums, classical objects are elevated by their surroundings. Here the theatre of the museum has reached the level of a high art, producing object-spaces which astound. Yet while the language deployed in these



Classical Europe through the lenses of the various national museums. From top left, clockwise: The Parthenon Marbles at the British Museum, the world's artistic treasures belong to all humanity; the Pergamon Altar at the Pergamon Museum, monumental treasure befitting a great nation; the Glyptothek, Munich, the foundations of art history; the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, culture for the everyman.



museums bears great similarity, with its focus on individual art objects, each of these museums nevertheless differs in its context and philosophy.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum, for example, is a grand, but by comparison to the other two, contained, art house. The Louvre outstrips the Hermitage in the sheer diversity of its holdings and its modernity. It has perfected the art of directing visitors to key treasures which, in objects like the Venus de Milo have great celebrity. The Louvre appears active, forward moving, an instrument through which French culture is expressed. The Hermitage, by contrast, is a Faberge egg; its richness an inheritance of an earlier era of museum making which, particularly in its Leo von Klenze building, perfected in opulent form the nineteenth century art museum. While St Petersburg remains undoubtedly one of the great European cities, it and its museums can be no more than a facet of this large, complex and diverse nation, which extends beyond Europe. Nevertheless, with building of the Hermitage in Amsterdam, for example, there is also the beginnings of that cultural-political thrust that has so defined the Louvre.

A counterpoint to these perfected realisations of the aesthetic symbolism of classicism can be found in Copenhagen, in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Not a national museum in the formal sense, it retains the private collector's unrefined eclecticism. Very popular with the Copenhagen public, it possesses an everyman aesthetic which seems to connect with city centre's popular amusement park, Tivoli Gardens. Carl Jacobsen, its founder, feared this association but the result is a museum that is something of a people's palace, which lacks both the sophistication and pretence of a national museum but which is nevertheless in possession of a considerable quantity of Roman and Greek sculpture.

Across Europe, in this way, using materials similar to those found in other nations – shared elements in a common language – national museums nuance their performances to local needs. They do so intentionally but also unavoidably. Another, rather different, manifestation of these local acts of deployment can be found in national galleries possessing works by the nation's artists. One of the best examples of this genre of museum in 2011, was the Hungarian National Gallery in Buda Castle. This portrayed the significance of Hungarian painting in a

number of ways: as pictorial records of the historical past and of national icons, as allegorical representations of the state of the nation, and as illustrations of national artistic genius and influence. The success of these galleries depended on the aesthetic and narrative judgements of the curators but also, in part and more generally, on the isolation of this nation's art from others. In this respect, the Hungarian National Gallery is like every other nation-facing gallery in Europe. Here, as elsewhere, a resonance is developed between the art and the city, and the nation, in which it is displayed.

Similarly, and perhaps inevitably, one might believe that to experience a painting by Monet in Paris is rather different from experiencing that same painting in Oslo or Rome. The Orangerie Museum in Paris, a national museum which came into being as a result of presidential intervention but which began with Monet's wish to donate paintings to the nation to commemorate the end of the First World War, offers an experience of Monet's work like no other.

Top: The Hungarian National Gallery. The national was visualised in paintings of military victories, Christian foundations, artistic genius and, as here, in national romanticism and allegory.  
Bottom: Musée Orangerie, Paris. Monet as he is found nowhere else in Europe.







# Categories of object and museum

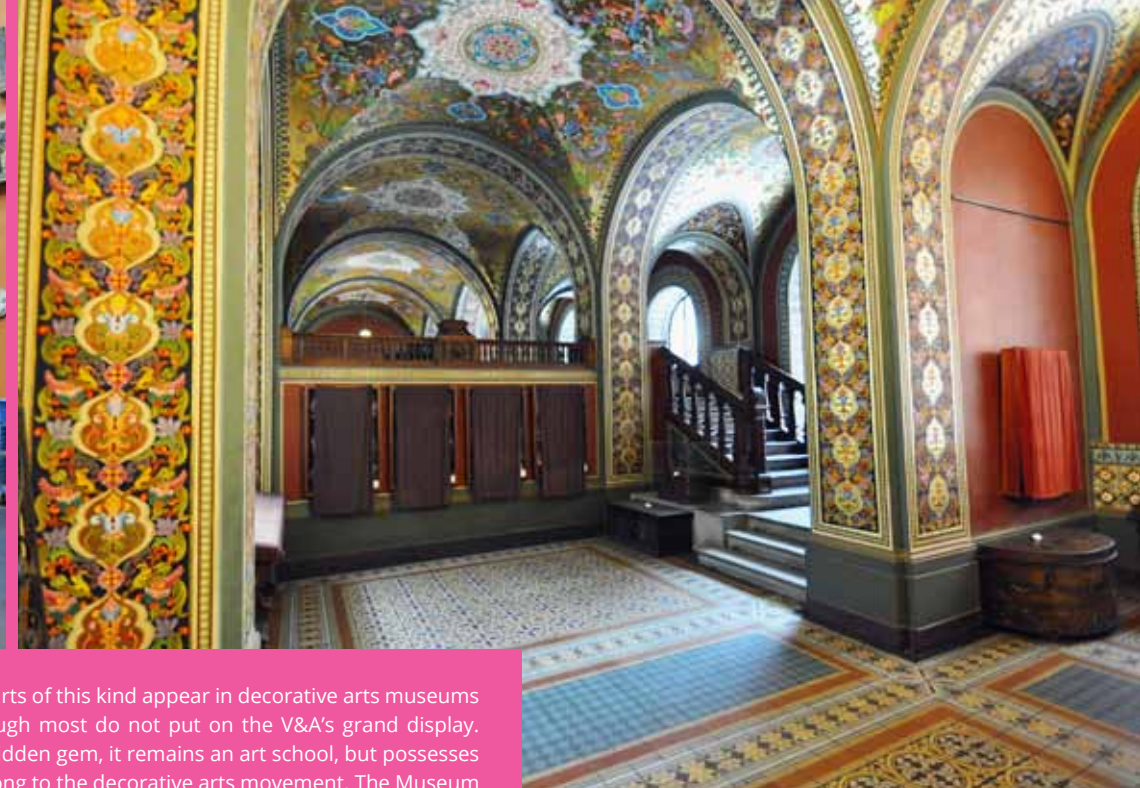
The categories of object, that make up Europe's cultural vocabulary, have evolved over more than two centuries. They have during this time been naturalised; there seems nothing strange in gathering together in internal spaces sculptures, for example, produced for external display. Similarly, across Europe artistic fragments of Christian churches have been assembled into galleries and labelled as foundational moments in various national stories of art. National museums themselves have partially conformed to categorisations produced with the establishment disciplinary knowledge, which they helped construct. National museum buildings, however, demonstrate no long term attachment to particular collections. The Bode Museum, for example, once displayed Old Master paintings but today exhibits only decorative arts. Indeed, the institutions on Museum Island have seen considerable movement of treasures backwards and forwards, creating new associations with other objects and different spaces. The Louvre continues to be an elastic entity, its ever expanding capaciousness nevertheless rejecting total universalism in favour of an expression of the arts. The collections making up the Hungarian National Gallery, and indeed the gallery itself, seem to be in permanent movement and assembly. The V&A retains elements of the eclecticism on which it was founded, though its birth was nevertheless reliant on the loss of certain categories of objects held in its earlier guise.

Beyond the impermanence of many of these institutions there are also associations of objects that are peculiar to each nation. The Kunsthistorisches Museum, for example, combines Old Master paintings of the first rank, with decorative arts,

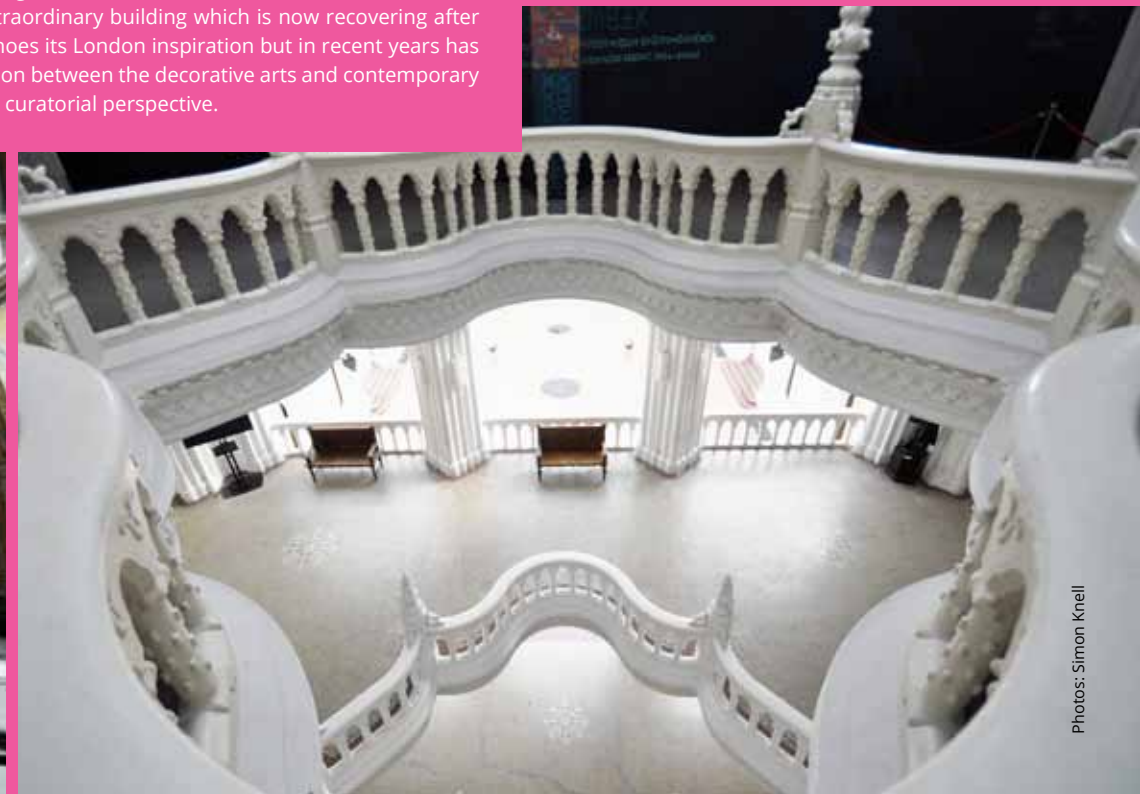
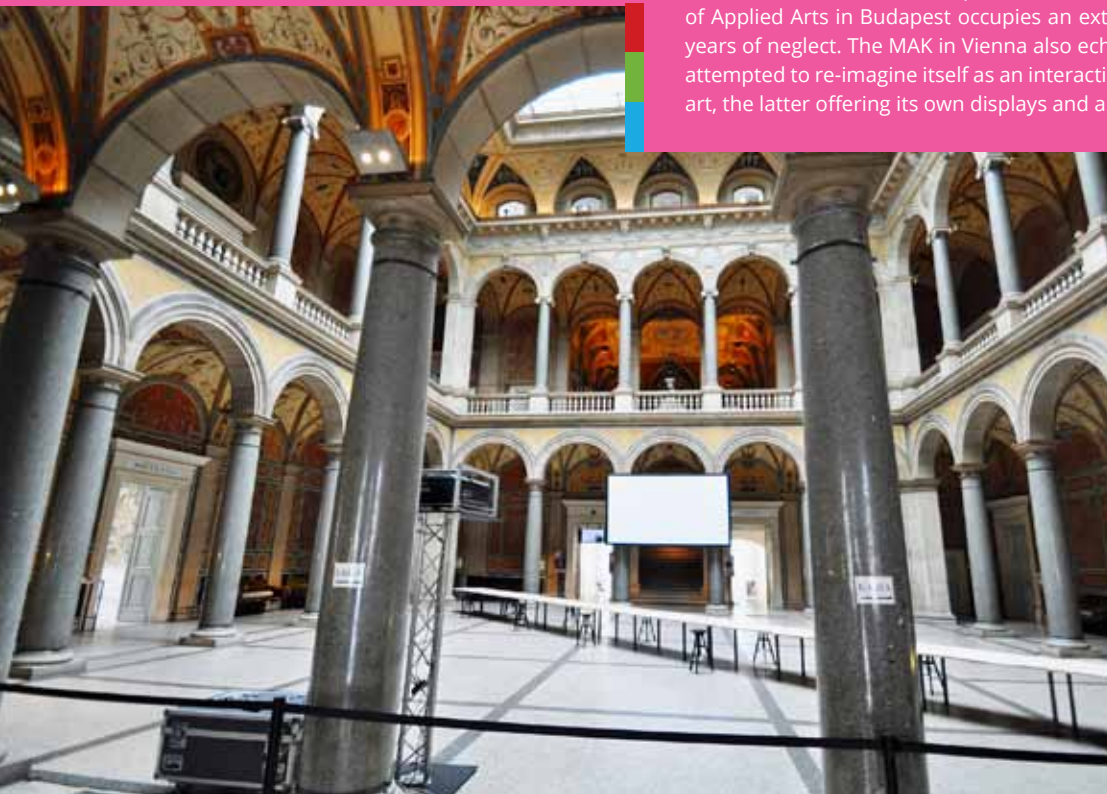
numismatics, and Egyptian and classical collections. In London, these categories of object extend across three very distinctive museums. In Budapest, the Museum of Fine Arts displays an equivalent collection of paintings, which nevertheless extend the story to a more recent period. It displays classical collections but not the decorative arts. This lack of identity of association of different collection components is apparent across Europe. In each case, history, pragmatism and contingency determine these associations.

Aside from natural history museums, the most regularised museums across Europe deal with the decorative arts. Their origins lay in the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, and the subsequent development of the South Kensington Museum, later the V&A. This event and museum placed Britain in a dominant position as arbiter of taste. To other European nations this new genre of museum was both striking and disconcerting. Other nations and principalities immediately began to build similar, almost identical, institutions, often following the architectural motifs and spatial arrangements found in the London museum. Today, the V&A remains pre-eminent amongst these museums, hugely popular and holding a wealth of material. Its imitators have fared more variably.

In these acts of emulation there was a sense, also seen in other national museums, that the possession of art permitted the development of the controlling narrative that would accompany it. Taste was, after all, not an absolute but something made up, indeed, something on which a nation could have an opinion. In an era when art history relied upon black and white images supplemented by painted copies, possession of real artworks rewarded the nation with exclusive knowledge and power. Acts of institutionalisation and promotion sought to elevate these possessions and thus the power and status of both the institution and the nation. The most profound achievement in this respect perhaps belongs to the Prado in Madrid and its contributions to the making of a universally admired Spanish Tradition in painting. The Prado retains the vast majority of paintings belonging to this national school.



Clockwise from top left: V&A Cast Court. Courts of this kind appear in decorative arts museums across Europe dating from this period though most do not put on the V&A's grand display. The Stieglitz Museum in St Petersburg is a hidden gem, it remains an art school, but possesses ornate interiors and hidden spaces that belong to the decorative arts movement. The Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest occupies an extraordinary building which is now recovering after years of neglect. The MAK in Vienna also echoes its London inspiration but in recent years has attempted to re-imagine itself as an interaction between the decorative arts and contemporary art, the latter offering its own displays and a curatorial perspective.





# The soft architecture of national museums

Wherever possible nations have sought express their cultural identities in the internationalising language of art, and particularly in the names of revered artists. Rembrandt, for example, who along with Rubens and his contemporaries, forms a mainstay of Europe's national galleries, is often set centre stage. At the Hermitage, a room is dedicated to him. In Stockholm, he provides the Nationalmuseum with its greatest treasures. Almost without exception, Rembrandt is seen as defining; his works being national treasures which speak of national maturity and cultural elevation as much as they do the history of, and the genius in, painting. The prominence of Rembrandt is, regardless of the significance of the works themselves, a curatorial decision, but one the public and politicians alike now demand. Curator and audience are in this way locked in a kind of positive feedback loop; each is the catalyst for the other. In the case of Rembrandt, however, it is now impossible to imagine anything different.

Such curatorial agency goes largely unrecognised by the public who perhaps assume that galleries hold and display the natural order of art. The intellectual and aesthetic vision and creativity of these staff members is here more important than their trained professionalism. The achievement is not one of designers but of those staff who work with and understand the objects in the museum's possession. Curatorial acts of display, positioning, juxtaposition, as well as supplementary written, audio and audio-visual interpretation, give the object weight and purpose that is so easily lost in less capable hands.

Repeatedly, across Europe's national art museums, the movements and attentions of visitors reveal the effectiveness of this curatorial work. By such means, artworks peripheral to the international project of art history find themselves elevated and the subject of adoration in museums of the nation's art. Examples

include Adolph Tiedeman and Hans Gude's *Bridal Voyage in Hardanger*, and Eric Werenskiold's *Peasant Funeral*, which both hang in the National Gallery in Oslo. Fine examples of national romanticism, school groups on entering the gallery are sat down before them, and instructed in these artistic manifestations of Norwegianness.

In other settings, great works find themselves overlooked. The sheer scale of the Louvre means that crowds indulge in the pursuit of celebrity objects beginning with the obsessively admired Mona Lisa. On departing this large, crowded, room, visitors re-enter the remarkable Grande Galerie, and in doing so immediately walk past Leonardos and Raphaels that rank amongst the most revered works in Western art history. Elsewhere in the Louvre, and not least in galleries displaying influential French artists of the nineteenth century, the lack of crowds reflects the difficult logistics of visiting such a colossal museum. In London, an equivalent number of visitors are distributed and focused across a number of smaller institutions.

This elevation of particular works is also seen in Madrid, where rather more thoughtful crowds assemble before Velázquez's *Las Meninas* at the Prado and Picasso's *Guernica* at Reina Sofia. The significance of these works is undoubtedly enhanced by the curatorial skills of those who have possessed and interpreted them. A museum possessing nothing of the scale of the Louvre, the Prado's galleries are arranged to make possible the experiencing of the Spanish tradition in totality beginning with Velázquez.

However, a national museum does not need to possess internationally-valued symbols to succeed. It can create its own icons and it can do so in a sophisticated manner. The multi award-winning Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest is a prime of example this, demonstrating that creative ingenuity and vision can transcend the culture of emulation and competition that has shaped so many of Europe's national museums. Here the exhibits rely on an artistic eye and simple display technologies of the kind found in village museums across the continent. It is an extraordinarily confident expression of national identity, which shuns the normalising and aestheticising technologies of professional museology and high art. While it is still possible to connect this performance to the aesthetic tastes of the middle classes, this is, in every respect, a vernacular rendition of the national museum; an expression in Europe's more vernacular cultural language.



Photo: Simon Knell

*Mona Lisa*, The Louvre, Paris. Nowhere else in Europe does a museum object produce such fanaticism.



The Grande Galerie, The Louvre. Its first task is to astonish. Viewing the extraordinary paintings is a secondary consideration.



Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest.



# The distribution of words and expressions

The art of Europe is distributed unevenly. Small nations across the continent, nations of Eastern Europe beyond Western markets, and nations which found themselves under the rule of foreign empires, all suffer deprivations in terms of the internationally-recognised art they possess. Those nations at the centre of large empires or home to the major European royal dynasties, which have engaged in confiscation and looting during periods of conflict and revolution, or which grew sufficient economic muscle to participate in the early art market, remain the beneficiaries of Europe's artistic wealth. This is particularly true of the distribution of Old Master paintings. The Prado and Kunsthistorisches Museums, for example, both exhibit the wealth and inconsistencies of royal inheritance. The international art collections in Berlin and St Petersburg were founded on the payment of debts in pictures. Industrial wealth permitted London and later Berlin to become major players in the art market. Revolution enriched the Louvre, tax incentives have enriched the London nationals. In pre-unification Germany royal patronage helped develop a distributed network of art collections and academies that had Europe-wide influence.

These are, however, only some of the factors that produce this distribution. The language by which nations represent themselves is constantly evolving; 'words' – artistic black boxes which embody certain values – are constantly being added. Of those shared articulations that are already established in European national galleries none is more extensively deployed than Rubens. While the proliferation of his works reflects the scale of his workshop and the manner of his work-

ing, as well as his travels, diplomatic activity, patronage, and sheer artistic talent, in national art museums there is rather more to his adoption than his significance as an artist or the availability of his works.

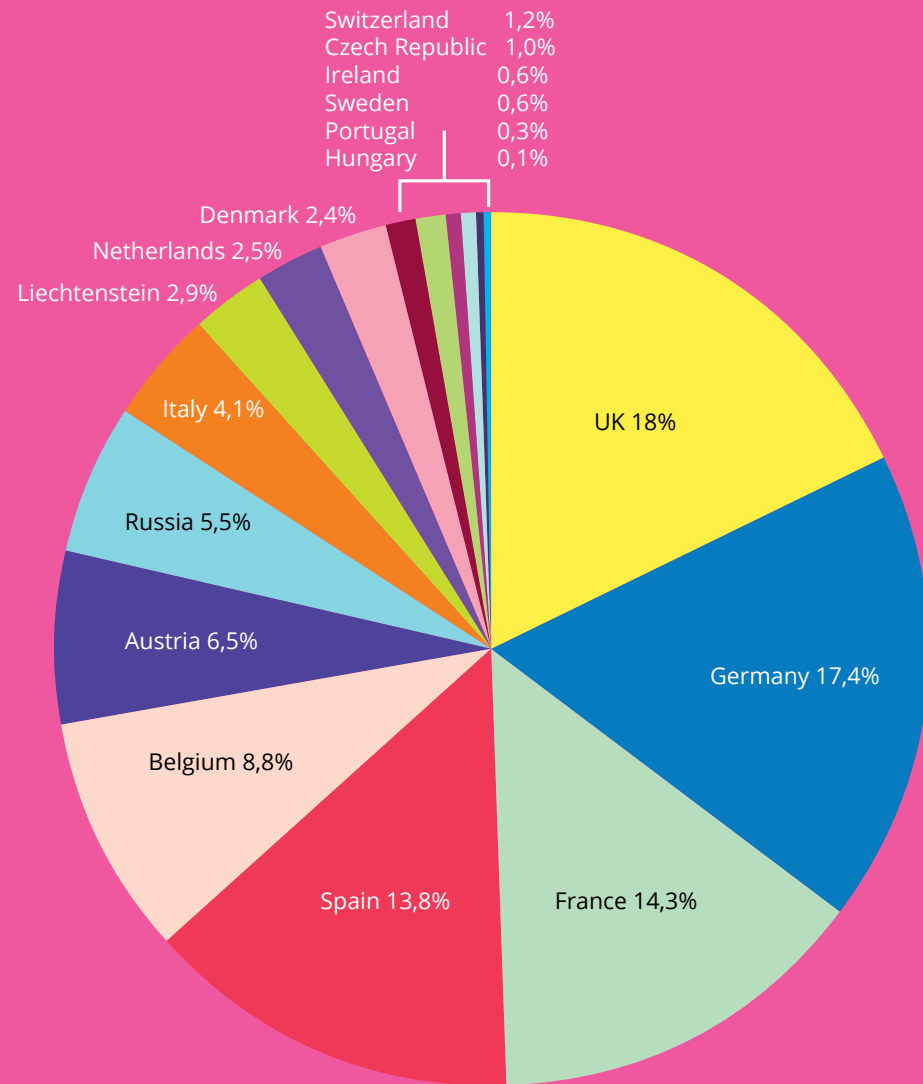
There is also, in the culture of competition and negotiation which comes with each national gallery's desire for distinction, and which echoes the personal desires of professionals and governments, a particular cachet in the works of artists who have transcended art criticism and which occupy a central position in the established story of Western art. The positioning of Rubens in this story has been negotiated and attributed, to the point that his place is uncontested. Of course, all the museums possessing works by Rubens support his elevation and benefit in multiple ways. Like birds displaying their plumage national museums across Europe give Rubens their most prominent spaces, and room after room of dedicated display space. Even the Prado, which does so much for Spanish art, gives over its largest gallery to this artist.

Yet despite Rubens' repeated depiction of certain models and subjects, his works are nevertheless distributed in a particular way. The same Rubens is not displayed everywhere. Perhaps surprisingly, in Madrid, Rubens is a painter of rather frivolous large-scale female nudes. In Brussels and Vienna, by contrast, Rubens is recorded primarily as the painter of religious works. Rubens is, however, simply one word, one readymade icon. He is a useful measure of the relative wealth of different nations in collectable, international, Old Masters which form a foundation of national cultural expression.

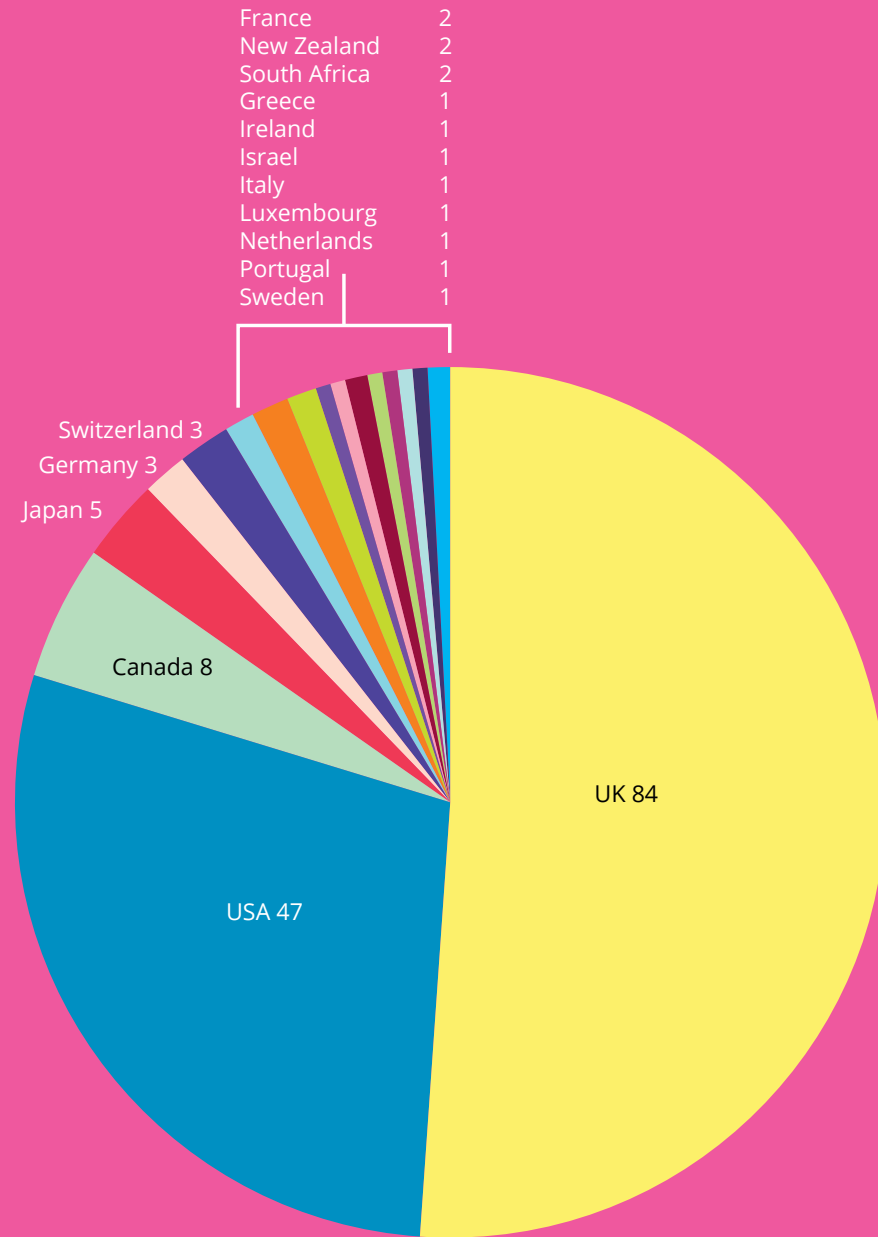


Imagining the distribution of European artists. Statistics tend to distort the representation of artists, often concealing the distribution of great works. These three pie charts visualise artists differently.

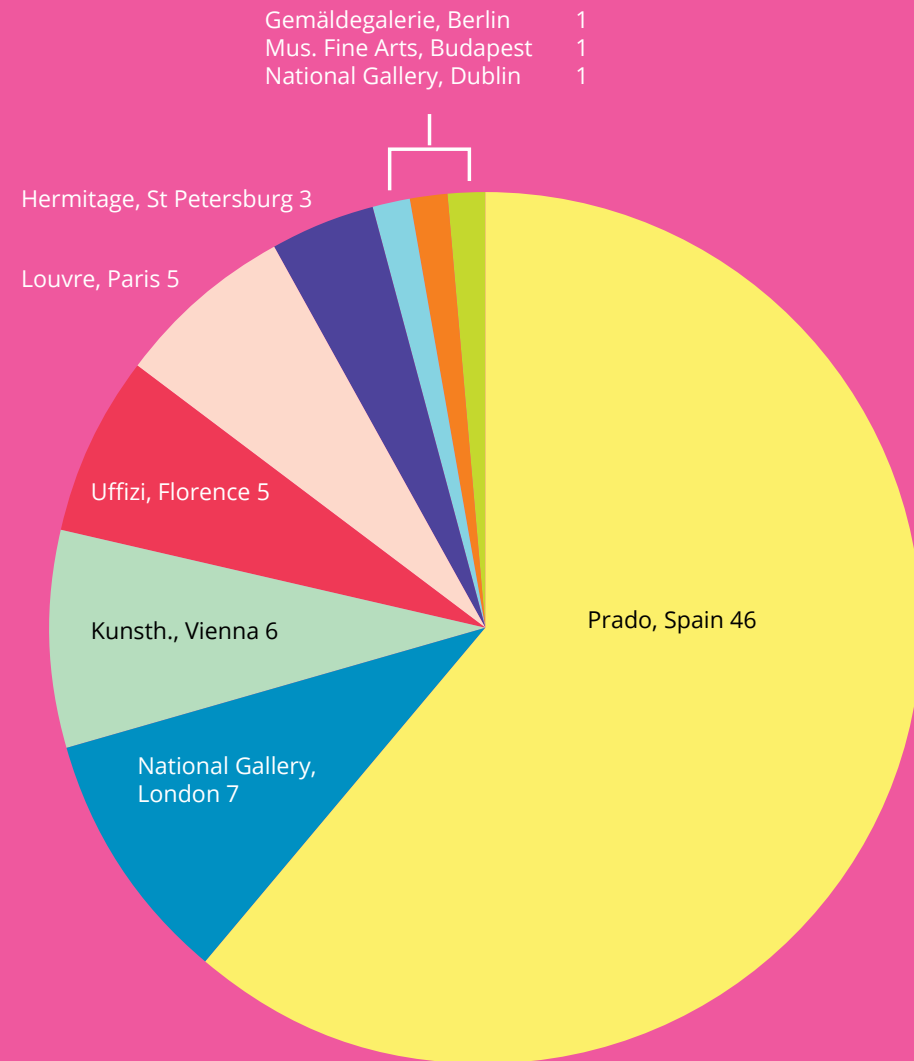
A) Oil paintings by Rubens in public museums. In many of these countries his work is widely distributed across provincial institutions. This chart gives no indication of where Rubens makes his most impressive displays in huge oil paintings in the major national galleries.



B) This chart shows the distribution of works by Turner according to the number of institutions in each country possessing them. His massive bequest to the Tate in London dwarfs all other collections; more than 99% of his more than 30,000 surviving works are in the UK. His major works are barely represented in continental Europe despite widespread appreciation.



C) The distribution of paintings and drawing by Velázquez in national museums. His major works are quite rare outside Spain, and the greatest concentrations are in national museums.





# An evolving, inclusive, language

Since the mid nineteenth-century national art galleries have had the boundaries of their representative practices tested. One of the first national museums in Europe to buy into French Impressionism, for example, was the (Alte) Nationalgalerie in Berlin. Ironically, this gallery began its life as part of the nationalistic enterprise that responded to the French occupation of German territory. Even today, a visitor can experience in this museum, more than any other, the luminosity of the new French art simply by walking from the adjacent gallery containing the works of German contemporaries. It marked an end for the dominance of the German academies, which had become mired in conservatism, and the rise of Paris as the capital of European painting. In this museum, which is largely dedicated to the national story, this French art remains an astonishing counterpoint.

Unknowingly, the Berlin museum had, with these acquisitions, extended the vocabulary through which a nation might express itself. The Louvre and the French state remained resistant to this new art, only managing to assemble the now celebrated collection at the Musée d'Orsay later and through private patronage.

As the availability of Old Masters diminished so national galleries turned their attentions to Modern works. Today, major collections of paintings and sculpture dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continue to be transferred from private hands into those of the state. The Museum Berggruen was, for example, established as a national museum in Berlin in 2000. In Madrid, the acquisition of the private Thyssen-Bornemisza collection and its conversion into a museum represented a considerable extension of the state's cultural assets, both of Old and Modern Masters. With the concurrent establishment of Reina Sofia, a national museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Madrid claimed that

it possessed a 'Golden Triangle of Art' unparalleled in Europe. The two younger museums in this triangle promoted themselves as addressing the weaknesses of the Prado. The Prado, of course, has no need for these younger siblings.

The boundaries of the art establishment are pushed both by established galleries seeking to continue to collect in a field of diminishing opportunity and by nations promoting their own indigenous artists. The National Gallery in London, for example, which acquires few paintings, in 2010, obtained an oil sketch by the Norwegian painter, Peder Balke. Promoting this acquisition the gallery referred to the artist as 'forgotten' and a 'Scandinavian rediscovery'. But Balke is fairly prominent in the Norwegian history of painting and at the National Gallery in Oslo. He is also prominently displayed in the Norwegian collections of the Louvre. If this was in any sense a discovery, then it was an institutional one, or rather a perception that a boundary that had formerly been in place might be transgressed.

Nordic painting more generally has undergone a resurgence of interest in recent years. The national galleries in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland have formed a collaboration through which to exhibit Scandinavian paintings from a nineteenth century Golden Age. Small nations, on the periphery of the story of Western art, as collaborators they have the potential to act as large nations, and by suggesting commonalities in their national performances they also shape the idea of a major genre of painting which has perhaps not been adequately explored by the major galleries. It is inevitable that these latter national galleries must constantly reconsider past boundaries which resulted in the present collection. Nordic art is pushing from the other side. At Moderna Museet, to take another example, the boundary being transgressed is that of gender bias; there is a commitment to gender balance the artists represented.

In Budapest, both in the collection of national art in the Hungarian National Gallery and in the international collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, the push is being made in favour of national artists from a golden era in the history of that nation's literature and arts. Here the Hungarian Fauves and The Eight are in active construction as an internationally significant group of Hungarian artists. Their artworks are regularly on international tour where the relatively obscure Hungarian

names associated with familiar styles of French painting have caused audiences a little confusion. Hungarian art historians, however, argue that these artists, who displayed their works in Paris alongside those of their now more famous French contemporaries, have simply been excluded from history. They argue that the story has been distorted by contemporary French critics who focused their verbal assaults on French painters, ignoring their Hungarian contemporaries.

If the relative cheapness and availability of Modern Art opened up new opportunities for the making of national galleries, which has permitted smaller nations to participate in international art, the present era has extended these possibilities in Contemporary Art. The challenging nature of much of this work also builds a rather new form of national representation, which can also hold political commentary as part of its dialogue. Framed by some of these galleries as a break from the Modern, and defined by its reflection on contemporary society, this new art is largely experienced at national galleries in temporary shows. Along with national patronage of art fairs and biennales, this art has been notable for its entry into cities and countries beyond the established art centres.

In most European national galleries, however, if contemporary art is collected then it is generally incorporated into a modernist progression. Indeed, the same process which assures Rubens of a place in expressions of the nation in art, now positions established contemporary artists, like Richard Serra, in a similar role. Serra's work has been normalised, its significance determined. It is, like Claude's landscapes, work that is often performed within a circumscribed vocabulary, such as an intersection between steel and space. It is as identifiable as Rubens' wife, depicted in so many of his paintings, and Claude's columns. Such ordered motifs have long appealed to national museums which have grown used to thinking in types.

Contemporary Art, nevertheless, opens up the possibilities for realising the polycentric nature of Europe. The natural disposition of the nation, and institution, is to draw the map of the world with it at the centre. Each nation consequently views Europe uniquely. Each national museum is, then, a viewpoint on Europe, a centre possessing its own notion of periphery. Yet across Europe the strength of

the established vocabulary is such that museums rarely cross boundaries in their conceptual thinking. The natural disposition of these institutions is conservative. This conservatism only serves to strengthen the power of the European vocabulary that in art unites these institutions but which also enslaves them.

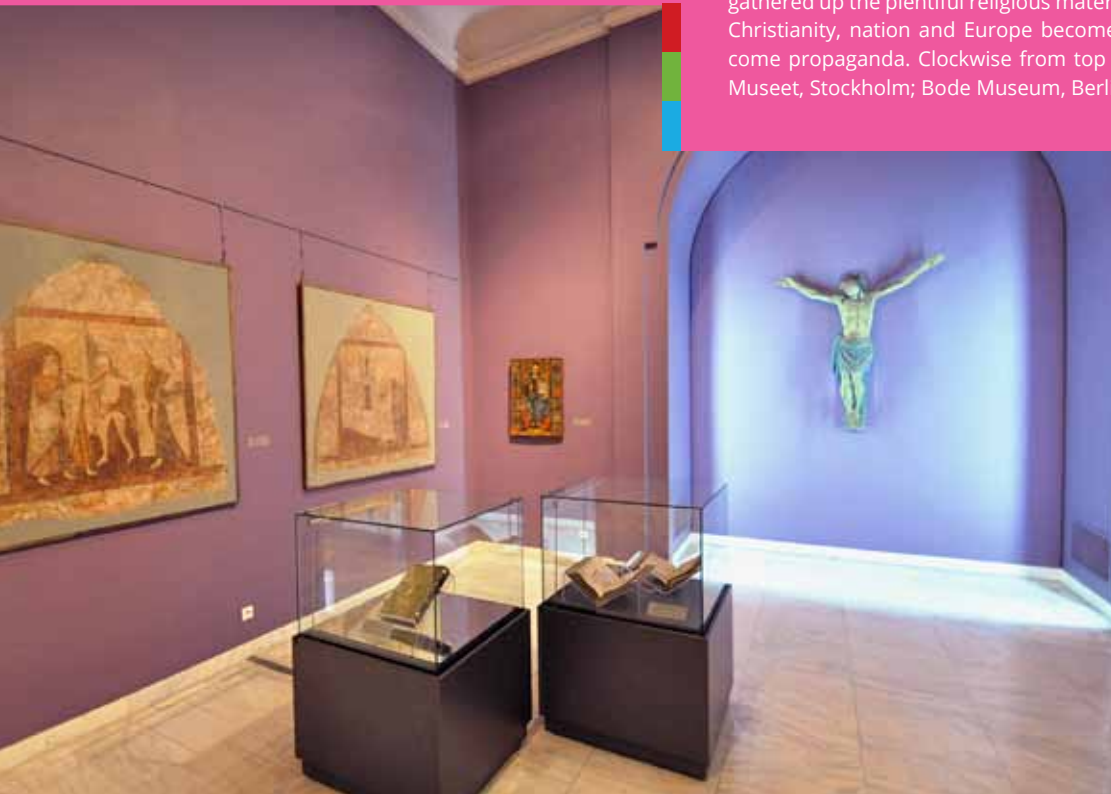


Photo: Simon Kneil

Richard Serra at  
Reina Sofia, Madrid.



Nations across Europe have repeatedly reached back into medieval Christian Europe in order to locate their roots, particularly if subsequently occupied by another nation or finding aspects of modern society unsatisfactory. National museums have gathered up the plentiful religious material culture of this period. In these museums, Christianity, nation and Europe become inseparable. One might imagine they become propaganda. Clockwise from top left: National museum, Warsaw; Historiska Museet, Stockholm; Bode Museum, Berlin; National Museum of Art, Romania.





# Material borderlands

The presence of an inherited language materialised in museum collections has created bounded forms of representation imbued with past values and concepts. This produces a peculiarly European mode of expression implicitly surrounded by performances which are exterior, non-European and 'Other'. Based on long-term acts of accumulation, the Europe represented in national museums may conform to old ideals and demographic distributions.

To take one example: Christian theology and symbolism have underpinned much European collecting and interpretation of the ancient world. They also form the single most important source material for European art, from medieval church survivals to baroque expressions of Catholicism; they are prominent in artworks from the Renaissance through to the late nineteenth century. So central is Christianity to acts of representation found in European national museums, a non-Christian European might doubt the secular nature of these institutions, and particularly so in the present era of resurgent pro-Christian political rhetoric. These museums tend to presume that visitors will share a core understanding of Christian stories and perhaps that they will also understand the historical circumstances which made Christian symbolism so important in European art. Some national museums publish interpretive guides that permit the visitor to view collections through the lens of the Bible. Alongside these representations, and only in a few museums, it is also possible to view historical paintings depicting the slaughter of Islamic Ottoman Turks. The Austrian painter, Bartolomeo Altomonte's *Patrona Hungariae sending St Michael to fight against the Turks* (1739), in the Hungarian National Gallery, simultaneously records a master of baroque allegory, religious division once thought to define Europe, and a historical and political po-

sitioning of the nation.

There are many other ways in which national art collections might be considered material borderlands, particularly in relation to class and education, but also with regard to the treatment and representation of the body. The censorship (even if on the grounds of taste) which keeps many artworks, of the kind displayed at the national gallery in Budapest, locked away, is a problematic solution for national art museums. The task with these objects, as with others that are no longer fashionable, is to perceive the interpretive possibilities that might transcend the barriers to their display. The Salon art of the late nineteenth century, for example, is variably displayed across Europe. In some settings it is ridiculed, in others it is a context in which to understand more innovative developments, elsewhere it forms an important component in the national story, and in other galleries it is absent, presumably in store. This art also occupies a borderland, one that has proven mutable, marked by taste, acceptability and significance.

Modern day sensitivities to these inherited objects and dispositions result in the kind of philosophical transformation which has recently taken hold of the British Museum in London. It now projects an indiscriminating respect for all culture, and in doing so extends the parameters of 'great art'. The question remains, however, whether such attitudes, in an institution like the British Museum, really do extend the vocabulary through which Europe can be understood, or rather serve to undermine Europeanness in the same way that nationalism is shunned. Like the nation, Europe can be considered both a moral and immoral basis for judgements.

The role of national museums in implicitly producing external 'Others' is significant but complex. An oriental carpet might be considered a Western possession, a statement of taste, wealth and status. Alternatively, it might show respect for non-European arts and crafts. It might also, more neutrally, record a history of trade. Particularly in the non-narrative interpretation explored in this report, the meaning inferred from the display of these objects largely resides in the heads of visitors, though setting and arrangement are fundamentally shaping. The mutability of meanings that might be associated with museum objects means that such

objects as, for example, Greek material culture in the possession of northern European institutions, act diplomatically to render a positive image of Greek culture, in some ways defining of Europe, and yet at the same time perform as contested objects that stand between nations. What lies beneath these contradictory positions, however, is a failure to distinguish between possession and exhibition. It is debatable, however, whether Greek, Roman or Italian material culture more generally would be so revered if these northern institutions had been denied its possession and all the creative opportunities that gave them to render it supreme. Without its national museum making would surely have followed a different course, and adjusted its European vocabulary.

Temporary displays of Islamic art in St Petersburg, Vienna and Madrid, in 2011, acted as a counterpoint to European norms of representation in art, as a form of cultural diplomacy. Within Europe there has been a tendency for this European material language to be used primarily in acts of distinction and discrimination, to elevate the institution and therefore the nation. The mobility of collections, in temporary and travelling exhibitions has nevertheless been important in crossing borders. Since 1954, the Council of Europe has produced collaborative exhibitions on thematic aspects of European art. And while the Council has, since its establishment, shifted its focus to matters of human rights, these exhibitions of high art remain as contributions to European unity. It is, however, in a more expansive and inclusive material culture, at more difficult border-crossings, that efforts to build bridges through culture have yet to be fully realised. These points of tension, and the possibilities for new cultural dialogues, are very much in tune with the Council's present day concerns.





PART 2  
The Distributed Nation





# The distributed nation

Beyond the capital city, another kind of nation is performed. Unlike the grand institutions of the capital city which so often seem to be speaking to the world, regional and local museums play internal roles in nuanced negotiations of nationhood. There is, however, no single model for the manner in which regions contribute to the musealisation of the nation. There are no universalising notions at play here, and in terms of constructing national identities, no distinction between the great national museums and their regional and local counterparts.

Examples in this section concern the seemingly inevitable regionalization that arises from Norway's difficult geography, harsh climate, and great north-south extent. Here, as in Italy, there is no centralising national historical museum. Sweden provides a rather different example focusing not on fragmentation of the national narrative but of the efforts of collaborating regional museums to record and represent the nation. England, which, like Sweden, possesses numerous significant national museums, shows a kind of regional museum enterprise which echoes that in Norway. In the period discussed here, however, a defining feature is rather less concerned with regionalism, instead locating distinctions in class. The final example concerns Italy. The last of these countries to obtain unified independence, Italy possesses the richest and longest museum history in Europe. It has, however, pursued and continues to pursue a programme of musealisation that is centred on the city and on identities which reach back to medieval Europe and beyond.





Skansen, Europe's first open air museum occupies the hill to the left, with cathedral-like Nordiska Museet in the distance. These Stockholm museums encourage the visitor to imagine the nation as a cultural mosaic.



# Norwegian regionalism

Nationalization and regionalization are deeply entangled in Norway. During the nineteenth century, the project of nation building led to the exploration and mapping of topography and natural resources, and to a growing sense that the Norwegian people's national character should be sought in rural districts. Towards the end of that century regional and local forces craving their part of the national narrative challenged cultural institutions in the capital. Liberal educators and language reformers argued that the cultural identity of Norway was best defined and interpreted by the Norwegians themselves. Language debates became especially embroiled as radical nationalists claimed that regional dialects preserved elements of the Old Norse Saga language and thus ought to serve as basis for a new official Norwegian language. These met with objections from continentally-orientated conservatives speaking and writing in Danish.

With the breakup of the union with Sweden in 1905, responsibility for the nation's archaeological heritage was distributed among five regional museums in Kristiania (Oslo), Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø. This act of decentralization of Norwegian historical and cultural identity ensured that Norway would never have a formal national museum. Indeed, the country became a pioneer of local democracy, decentralization and regionalization, particularly in the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s.

The construction of regional identities accelerated in the following decades, with regional committees establishing cultural programmes and encouraging the

production of local and regional histories often authored by museums. These regional narratives supplemented, articulated with, and sometimes challenged, the national story. In this period, the identity of the Sámi people was 'rediscovered' and strengthened, and ideas of a separate nation – Sápmi – developed. The national ideals of egalitarianism developed in the 1950s, which had fuelled this regionalization, now became increasingly confounded by regional separatism and self-cultivation.

Museum reform in 2001 reduced around 800 separate museum units to a hundred, and all museums were invited to become part of a national museum network. The role of regional museums in establishing, confronting, questioning, enhancing and complicating the nation was by then firmly established. A nation that can only be understood as the sum of its parts, the nation's identity appears mutable, the product of negotiation. Norway's acts of regionalization, which have placed the museum centrally in acts of community self-definition and identity, indicate the ways in which regional diversity is developed in the larger national narrative.

The case studies explored below reveal how institutions, pressure groups and individuals have mobilized the power of knowledge and the past in different configurations and with different moral purposes in order to construct regional identities. They reveal how the indigenous qualities of the nation have been materialized through regional acts of possession and interpretation of the past. Many of the museum developments explored here developed over long periods of time and reveal an interrelationship between social transformations, the evolution of identities and the changing institutions required in regional articulations with the centre. Norway offers a profoundly non-centralist example of the production of the nation and of the nation's cultural identity. From a European perspective it is a useful model for understanding the operation of free enterprise and its impact on the geography of identity.



Photo: A. B. Wifse © Norsk Teknisk Museum

A woman blowing a lur, a tubular wooden Norwegian instrument used by dairy maids while tending the herd on summer pastures.

Bergen Museum, Norway.





# Bergen and the power of knowledge

The division of the nation's archaeological heritage between five regional museums in 1905 was pre-empted by eighty years of activity at regional level, which produced a network of museums and laid the foundations for the regional country's universities. Established in 1825, under the leadership of the President of the Norwegian Parliament, Wilhelm Christie, Bergen Museum was the country's first museum. A component in Christie's nation-building project, which opposed a union with Sweden, it would later become a force for decentralization. It could achieve this because it became an important centre for knowledge production.

The museum started out as a research organisation, challenging the hegemony of academic institutions of the capital. Its interests evolved, and it soon turned its attention to everyday objects from the recent past, seeking to present the history of 'taste, art, fabrics, customs, zeitgeist and culture'. It was an epochal initiative both for Norway and Europe. Its fine ethnographic collection opened to the public in the mid nineteenth century, anticipating the nationally-motivated mapping and collecting of 'folk culture'. Setting high standards for the collections, the museum aspired only to the very best objects, worthy – historically and aes-

thetically – of attention for the young nation.

With the establishment of major institutions and laboratories across the natural sciences, the museum's interests continued to diversify, and to embrace all scientific, historical and cultural knowledge. Occupying a monumental building, completed in 1927, the museum established itself as an important centre for research and nurtured a number of the country's leading scientists, historians and antiquarians. In 1946, the museum and its associated institutions became the basis for a new university, the second oldest in the country. In 2011, the museum was renamed Bergen University Museum.

Although established as a national project, Bergen museum epitomises the inevitable regionalization that would result from the division of the nation's historical material culture between regional museums. The capital never would control the knowledge that defined the nation. The museum as a foundational institution in practices of local knowledge production acted as a seed from which a knowledge-centred regional identity could grow. It would be repeated elsewhere in Norway.



# Maihaugen and the production of the indigenous

The early folk museums played a distinctive role in the national movement, strengthening national sentiment and presenting regional culture as variants of a unifying national whole. A romantic nationalist movement emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, mediating between conservatives and radicals and to a certain extent uniting them in common educational perspectives. Maihaugen Open-Air Museum has its origins in this period and today portrays the rural community in Gudbrandsdalen over the past 300 years, as well as life between the World Wars in the inland town of Lillehammer. Originating as the private initiative of Anders Sandvig it developed into an institution of considerable significance to regional identity.

Sandvig had been brought up on a coastal farm some distance to the north-west of Lillehammer and had been introduced to museums during his education in Oslo and Berlin. In the early years of his working life as a dentist, he became aware that objects associated with the old farming culture were disappearing – decaying or being bought by foreign collectors, including the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. Around 1886, Sandvig began a collection of his own, which included re-erecting old buildings in his garden.

Sandvig's collection was purchased by a community organization, the Association for the Benefit of the City of Lillehammer, which also bought Maihaugen (May Hill), an area used by the locals for picnics and celebrations, not least for the annual Constitution Day – 17th of May. A new museum was established there and Sandvig soon became its director.

A skilled storyteller, Sandvig used the museum to reproduce experiences for people to remember, in so doing presented ideals from the past, which he con-

sidered still suitable for building a safe and effective local community. Drawing on recollections from his own childhood, Sandvig created a moral universe on Maihaugen, which was recognizable and appealing to ordinary people. Yet he seemed to possess no social or political stance, just a respect for traditional values: home, work, godliness and patriotism. Sandvig wanted to display 'complete homes for visitors to enter' which expressed the personal tastes of their owners. He sought to engage with the lived experience of the past rather than produce a rational historical or ethnographic encounter.

Sensitive to the rapid changes irreversibly affecting the rural landscape, Sandvig's concerns were echoed in heritage movements in other parts of Europe, and were acknowledged as pioneering by contemporary cultural scientists and resulted in many awards. His approach to this material heritage was rather different from the semi-scientific methods adopted at the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo, though even here there was a desire, realised rather slowly, to present vivid scenarios of the everyday life and work of forefathers.

Sandvig became an advocate for regional museums, asserting their value in relation to national institutions, and became a central figure in the Norwegian Museums' Association, established in 1918. Maihaugen Museum remains a pioneering example of how the present – a traditional and continuous present – was captured as it turned into the past. Musealized not as a scientific project, but as living memory at a time of national consciousness, it laid the foundations for establishing a notion of, and a respect for, indigenous Norwegian culture. Tied to local conditions, this ensured a place for the local and regional diversity in the portrayal of the nation.





Photo: Brian McMorrow



© Maihaugen

Left: Vigstad at Maihaugen.  
Right: Bjornstad, a large  
farm dating from the 1700s  
relocated to Maihaugen ap-  
proximately a century ago.



# Tromsø and the politics of the North

Northern Norway possessed a long history of domination and exploitation by central authorities. Characterized by brutal climatic conditions, long distances, widely dispersed settlements, its inhabitants possessed no common consciousness, no common sense of identity or of a shared struggle. This began to change when, in 1862, the first regionalist association, Nordlændingernes Forening, formed in the capital. This association gave the city a growing cultural, political and historical consciousness of, and connection to, the northern regions, to Nordland, Troms and Finnmark.

The formation of this association in the south resulted in corresponding institutions being established in the North. The northern regions were, however, slow to adopt the new cultural forms of representation, and not least regional museums. Only in Tromsø did cultural development find an early foothold. This, too, began as a project from the capital: Chamberlain Christian Holst, the king's advisor, proposed a research institute located in the polar regions. It was understood that such a museum would serve the nation as a whole, and facilitate the national project of mapping Norway's natural and cultural resources. Established in an era of rising nationalism, the remote north was becoming part of the national myth, proving the existence of a proud and tenacious people. The mapping and collecting activities of Tromsø Museum gave this myth a material and factual basis.

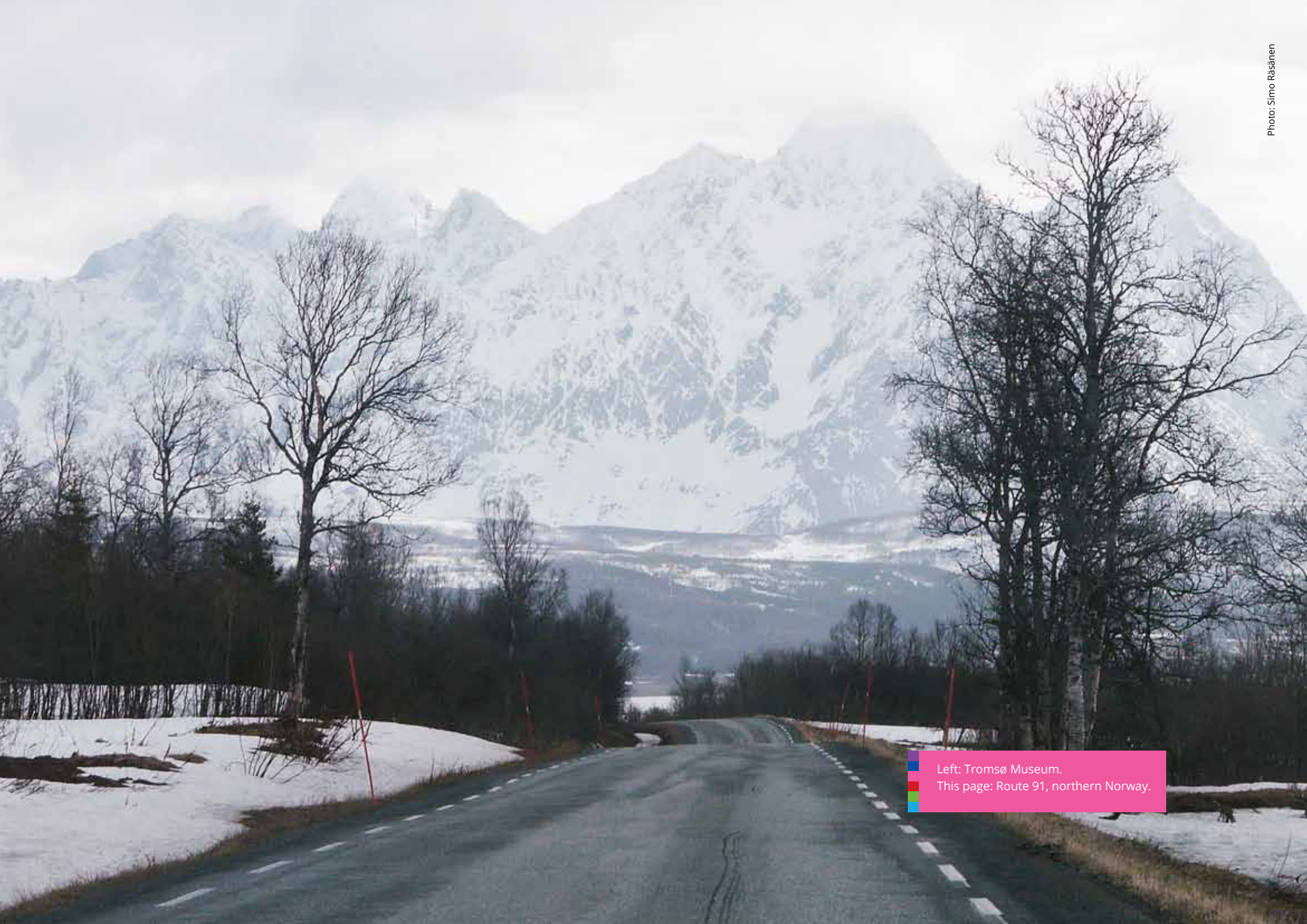
Tromsø Museum became a university museum in 1976, and had by then been engaged in transnational arctic research for more than 100 years. Tromsø University had been established in 1967 as the world's most northern university, as a kind of 'regional political experiment'. Today it is the leading university on Cap of the North, an institution in the transnational Arctic zones of Norway, Sweden,

Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia.

This transnational aspect is also developed in the museum's representation of Sámi culture in an exhibition entitled 'Sápmi – becoming a nation'. The arctic Sámi gained the status of an indigenous people in 1989, having suffered in the past as a consequence of their unique language and religion, which were seen as incompatible with the earlier project of nation building. In the museum's displays, a Sámi perspective is adopted. Sápmi is here not merely a cultural region but a transnational nation. It reflects the Sámi's recent adoption of other forms of national symbolism: a National Day, Anthem and Flag. The museum is not a southern outpost in the north. It is a voice from the north.



Photo: Lill Eilertsen



Left: Tromsø Museum.  
This page: Route 91, northern Norway.



# Bodø and the defence of livelihood

The Fishery Museum was founded in Bodø in the late nineteenth century by Jens Dahl, a man engaged internationally in exhibiting and promoting new tools and preservation methods to the fishing industry. The museum was initiated partly as a result of a large exhibition held in Bodø in 1889, at which Nordland Fishery displayed historical material.

The museum gained important regional significance, however, during the 'Battle of Trollfjord' the following year. Rising tensions between smaller fishing boats and larger industrial vessels came to a head when 600 local fishermen attacked steamboats barricading the narrow fjord. The battle later became emblematic of fights between smaller independent fishing boats and companies in Norway.

Having failed to break the grip of the five regional museums in control of the nation's archaeological heritage, the museum has – despite name changes and wavering aims – retained its central focus on the fishing industry. From the outset the museum became a vehicle for regional resistance and an expression of local perspective. Its modern narrative is one signalling a self-sufficient and self-centred region. Despite this independence of outlook, however, the museum must also be understood as contributing an important facet of national identity, even if in some respects non-conformist.



*The Battle at Trollfjord*  
by Gunnar Berg.



# Sverresborg and the cult of the Saint King

An independence of thinking produced by the extreme geography and climate of Norway frequently manifests itself in the regional identities represented in the country's museums. There are, however, other regional developments, which seem to challenge more fundamentally the centrality of the capital in the story of the nation. One example of this can be seen in the development of the Sverresborg - Trøndelag Folk Museum in Trondheim.

Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim (which was once called Nidaros) is the only ancient cathedral in Norway. It was built on the burial site of the converted Viking King, Olaf II Haraldsson, who died in 1030 and was subsequently canonized. Across Europe, and most notably in Hungary, Saint Kings have been mobilized in the development of national identities, and with the return of independence to Norway in the early nineteenth century so it was for St Olaf.

Sverresborg, the ruined fortress in Trondheim of slightly later date, was home to St Olaf's protector and thus also finds a place in the national memory of the king. The establishment of Trøndelag Folk Museum ensured the survival and cultural elevation of Sverresborg. One of the largest cultural historical museums in Norway it also surrounded the ruins of Norway's oldest stone fortress with a huge collection of rural and urban buildings.

Fuelled by a patriotic spirit, the museum's very competent founders identified, preserved and communicated a national treasure to great effect. Unlike at Maihaugen Museum, here a strong historical perspective shaped the museum from the early twentieth century. By then the city had already become a site of pilgrimage for Norwegian Catholics. With their encouragement the annual celebrations of Olsok, the day on which Saint Olaf died, were re-introduced in 1930. This be-



Photo: Alan Ford

Sverresborg - Trøndelag Folk Museum in Trondheim.

came an important fixture in the calendar of Norway's folk museums, with the centre of these national celebrations taking place to the north of Trondheim.

The re-awakening of these cultural traditions has been supported by a developing cultural heritage industry established to aid the pilgrimage. One of the most important stops along the way remains Sverresborg - Trøndelag Folk Museum. With calls to see Nidaros Cathedral affirmed as the head of the Church of Norway, the development of heritage sites, facilities and experiences in the region continues to shape conceptions of the region's historical significance and its centrality to the nation's sense of itself.



# Nordvegen and national origins

A final example of regional makings of nationhood also concerns the desire to establish medieval, and older, foundations of the nation. It does so by appealing to the internationally iconic symbolism of the Vikings. The grand narrative of proud and independent Viking chieftains and medieval kings was constructed in Norwegian history books and museum literature during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially in Oslo when three extraordinary Viking ships were found and excavated in part of the Oslo fjord at the end of the nineteenth century. Housed in the church-like Viking Ship Museum at Bygdøy, Oslo, the association of Viking material culture with the nation is here given religious resonance.

Nordvegen History Centre was established on the island of Karmøy, on the west coast of Norway, 2005, as part of a larger archaeological project that had been running for more than a decade and which sought, explicitly, to strengthen the local identity of the island and develop the area of Avaldsnes. These excavations were inspired by earlier finds as well as by the sagas of Snorre Sturlasson, and earlier legendary sagas and historical documents, which indicated that Avaldsnes was a royal seat. Associated with the conquering King Augvald and several other central Norwegian kings, Avaldsnes is now positioned as 'one of the central royal manors in Western Norway during the late Viking Age and parts of the

Middle Ages'. This is a view further accentuated by rich archaeological finds and traces of three long ships from the late 700s. St. Olaf's Church – situated on the presumed royal seat – was a royal chapel some centuries afterwards.

Run by a tourism-oriented company, the History Centre and the nearby Viking farm on Bukkøy possess a commercial aspect, and are run in co-operation with the Archaeological museum in Stavanger. The farm was built 'as part of an experimental archaeological research programme', and includes Iron Age buildings inspired by regional archaeological finds. It is also the site of an annual Viking festival and is used for corporate and private events.

Nordvegen History Centre is not a museum in the traditional meaning of the term and holds no collections besides copies of archaeological finds. The centre's name, 'Nordvegen', addresses the coastal route, which allegedly gave Norway its name. The centre's narrative develops an alternative to an older 'Cradle of Norway' story placing the centre of the nation close to Oslo. In its conception of origins, the centre of the historic nation is now here, in the west, and connected to Viking communities in England, Ireland, Scotland and even Russia. Here people probably experienced the dawn of Christianity in northern Europe. Here advancing historical knowledge is being used, in the manner of modern heritage production, to re-centralise the story of national origins; to make the periphery the centre.



Top: Nordvegen History Centre.  
Bottom: Bukkøy Viking Farm.





# Swedish studies of contemporary society

Samdok is an organisation connecting museums and other heritage institutions throughout Sweden. When it was established, in 1977, its aim was to coordinate the documentation of Swedish society as it evolved. Formed in an era of decentralization, Samdok has, like the discipline of ethnology which informs its activities, changed with the times. Its early preference for rational taxonomic empiricism evolved into more problematised qualitative studies of social change. Today, the organisation's members collaborate in projects, and share their knowledge of fieldwork methods, public engagement and emergent thematic areas of study.

Admired the world over, Samdok has never been emulated. Inspired by field work traditions in anthropology as well as documentary filmmaker's, journalist's and writer's problem-based records of everyday life, its members have adopted a variety of fieldwork practices including interviews, field notes, photography and filmmaking, as well as the collecting of artefacts. Its thoughtful, active and strategic approach to recording and collecting forms a marked contrast with activity in other European nations.

In 2011, Samdok was composed of around eighty member institutions, mostly museums. These make up thematic working groups, called 'pools', which today address broad areas of interest, such as Manufacture, Services, Local and Regional Spheres, Management of Natural Resources, Society and Politics, which reflect patterns of production, consumption and social life. The Pool for Sámi life was

introduced in 1991. A crosscutting Group for Cultural Encounters was introduced in 1993 to bring together matters relating to migration and ethnicity arising in society and politics.

In some respects, Samdok is a diffuse organisation, in which collaborative ventures arise on a voluntary basis, member museums balancing and adjusting their engagement in Samdok according to their own means. More formally Samdok has relied on a secretariat hosted and financed by Nordiska Museet. Samdok's council was headed by that museum's director.

In 2011, Nordiska Museet's funding was withdrawn. In the face of economic pressures at that museum and in the regions, Samdok is striving to survive as a result of the support of individual professionals rather than as a collaboration of museum authorities as the latter turn their attentions to other concerns.

This is, however, simply the latest challenge of many to an organisation regarded by many as a model of museum practice and which holds potential for more rational museum engagements elsewhere. Sweden possesses a hierarchical, non-centralised, non-strategic population of museums much like that in other nations which have been affected by centralizing, decentralizing, idealizing and rationalizing political developments. The establishment of an informal collaborative partnership stretching across the whole country and maintained for some 35 years is a remarkable, and unparalleled, achievement.





# The geography of belonging

Historically, Swedish cultural history has been shaped by a cultural imaginary dividing Sweden into natural provinces, 'landskap', which are cultural regions that overlap the administrative boundaries of counties, and places of belonging, 'hembygder'. The notions provided the inspiration for much museum development around the turn of the twentieth century, including the building of Nordiska Museet and Skansen, and county museums representing distinctive provincial characteristics.

In recent decades, provinces such as Skåne (Scania) and Jämtland have used these cultural distinctions to express their resistance to the centralizing tendencies of government. Others have exploited their own particular characteristics to foster heritage economies and regional identities and even to encourage re-population of the countryside. These acts of regionalization are similar to those discussed above in relation to Norway. For the Swedes, however, these regional traits and customs are for the most part treated playfully as components in a national cultural mosaic. They were explored in Nordiska Museet's original displays of folk costumes and interiors, which exposed visitors to the geography of Swedish culture. Similarly, Skansen was organized as a miniature model of Sweden, permitting visitors, walking from one building to the next, also to pass from one province to another.

In the early twentieth century, Nordiska Museet invited museum professionals to be part of the Nordiska Museet's research excursions to study and collect

cultural historical material in the provinces. The ethnology deployed by these researchers also originated in the previous century in the national romanticism that also gave birth to Sweden's first cultural history museums. In the new century, it was applied to collect and map rural folk cultures threatened by the advent of industrialisation.

As ethnology developed in the twentieth century so the focus of its attention and its methodological approach changed. Initially mapping of rural cultures in pursuit of folkloric traditions and cultural diffusion, in time it turned its attentions to the cultural analysis of contemporary society. By then it had become fully attuned to postmodern rhetoric. Nevertheless, change never quite dislodged earlier approaches, it was rather that certain new areas gained emphasis and seemed more relevant to contemporary interests and concerns.



Nordiska Museet's early exhibitions were structured topographically. This is an interior from the province of Halland.



Torsten Lenk collects objects on behalf of Nordiska Museet in the province of Halland in 1918.



# Cooperative rationalism

In the 1970s, Samdok developed a rational systematic approach to collecting in the modern era of mass consumption and disposability. To meet this challenge and collect systematically on a national scale, it was proposed that the task be divided into thematic areas and distributed between museums across the country. Each museum was to be a cog in a collecting machine. Each museum was to remain a separate entity and yet also part of a mutually interdependent network. The museums which had, in an earlier era, come into being as a kind of cultural mosaic were now interacting machine components. To compliment this engineering vision, a rational, almost scientific, approach was taken to establishing hierarchical sampling criteria which considered an object's frequency (how common it was), innovation, development, function, association and style. Museum objects at this time were considered to possess metaphysical powers capable of funnelling the spectator into the past.

Adopting a national, rather than provincial, viewpoint, the project sought to collect objects which could represent essential aspects of society. Statistical methods were suggested to ensure that the objects collected were typical. There was, however, a tension developing between the desire merely to collect and the aspiration to use discrete ethnographic studies to capture life in the home and workplace. The first pools focused on the world of work, including the textile industry, forestry, mining, agriculture, food production, building construction and the service and public sectors. One pool dealt with domestic life.

Statistical methods were used to establish the distribution of these industries and the potential role and specialism for museums. The *Outline of Cultural Materials (OCM)*, a classification system used by anthropologists, was then applied to categorize objects for collection.









Photo: Birgit Brånvall, Nordiska Museet



## Studies of domestic life

The Pool for Domestic Life had been the first to be established and it, more than any other pool, followed most closely Samdok's initial plan to gain a national perspective in terms of geography and social structure, social class and ethnic group. Member museums in this pool alternated their involvement between large- and small-scale projects. The large-scale projects targeted so-called complete families composed of two grown-ups (a man and a woman), and (ideally) two children. It was believed that such nuclear families provided museums with the best possible opportunities to represent the home environment. Small-scale projects tackled a wider range of household types, including the homes of pensioners and single people.

The pool's investigations created full inventories of homes. Objects were catalogued room by room and entered on punch-cards. Floor plans were made and the contents of drawers and cupboards summarised. This information was combined with qualitative interviews which captured the family's way of life and routines. Some field studies acquired, or reconstructed, rooms in their entirety, such as a kitchen or living room. Other studies purchased parts of rooms.

The complete kitchen and all the objects belonging to it, as well as information about the crucial role of the kitchen in the everyday life of a Swedish family was collected by one of the member museums in the Pool for Domestic Life. Here the Magnusson family visits a replica of their kitchen at the Nordiska Museet in 1991.



# Studies of Swedish working life

The various pools used different fieldwork techniques to gather their data and through a process of self-reflection and critical evaluation Samdok's approach overall underwent radical change. The Pool for Domestic Life meticulously listed and photographed homes. The pools for working life and production, in contrast, tended to employ short-term ethnographic studies. By the early 1990s, however, the systematic empiricism that typified both these approaches was being challenged. It was suggested that it resulted in reports describing idyllic working conditions based on a few weeks of field work. Conflict and poor working conditions went unrecorded. The design of the pool system also positioned the individual abstractly as a producer of goods and services rather than engaging more holistically with individual lives. Indeed, studies of contemporary working life had turned into a genre of their own, which uncritically described material settings, structural arrangements, staff categories and work-related tasks.

It was difficult, however, to find common traits or themes between reports which described the everyday life of forest workers, farmers, fishermen, founders,

saw mill workers, chauffeurs, and nurses.

Samdok's work did, however, capture Sweden's transition into a post-industrial era and its implications for industry and the workforce. The Museum of Work (Arbetets museum) opened in 1991 with a focus on stories and archives relating to working life, rather than the collection of objects. The museum became a resource for the 1400 or so local museums of working life in Sweden which emerged as de-industrialisation produced a wealth of sites for conversion into heritage.

At this stage, however, the interest in working life studies was beginning to wane. Museums in the working life pools had struggled to find the time and resources to participate, and many pools simply could not keep up with the speed of social and economic change. It was also recognised that the focus had been almost entirely on the ordinary worker in particular areas of work, with a consequent under-representation of women, company leaders and white collar workers.





# Re-imagining Swedish society

The descriptive and factual approach to the study of contemporary society was challenged by more analytical and problem-based perspectives around 1990. Theory, together with recent developments in the academic field of ethnology, began to enter Samdok's thinking.

In 1997, the pool system was restructured into broad thematic areas, and members began to adopt more problem-based and analytical approaches. The organisation also adopted a more inclusive idea of the range of people that would form its subject of study. In this way, a new level of sophistication was added to Samdok's work; a new lens through which its members could see issues of ethnicity, gender, social group, work, lifestyle, generation, consumption, the body and space.

Now museums were to direct their attention to urgent societal issues including unemployment and the new poverty, racism and xenophobia, digitalisation and information technology, environmental issues, regionalism, nationalism and globalism, cultural heritage and tourism, and so on. A rather different kind of ra-

tionalism and idealism took hold, as the organisation shifted from a quantitative empirical paradigm to critical and qualitative research agenda as practised by the university-trained ethnologists in the network. This shift is illustrated particularly well in the changing contributions of Jönköping County Museum (Jönköpings länsmuseum). Here, early studies of a village concentrated on class and the village's relationship to an industrial plant. Later studies saw greater heterogeneity in the village, which was now composed of a mix of commuters, villagers and summer guests. And rather than focus on a recently established workers' collective, fieldworkers chose to examine local self-employed female entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.

Three examples follow which illustrate these new collaborative ventures, which frequently involved partnerships with the public. All three projects are designed to connect different parts of the country. They also reveal how Samdok has moved from, what was imagined to be, the neutral documentation of society into explorations of difficult and complex areas of social life.



# Difficult matters

**D**ifficult Matters: *Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect (Svåra saker: Ting som upprör och berör)* 1998-2000, was initiated with an appeal from Samdok's secretariat to the network's member museums. It asked them to choose an object from their collections which carried with it an aura of trouble or danger; things that 'had become frightening or aberrant as a result of people's actions and ideas, things that had provoked resistance, things that were not what they seemed.' A series of seminars, a touring exhibition and a book followed. Visitors to the exhibition were encouraged to contribute with objects and stories of their own choice.

This project explored the idea that the meanings of objects were socially and culturally contingent. It exposed the partial acts of remembering, recording and explaining bound up in the production of cultural heritage and asked whether museums should have a role in negotiating the aftermath of tragedy or preserve the memory of less acceptable aspects of post-war Swedish society.

The initiative connected Samdok to contemporary debate in the international community which reflected on the moral purposes of museums as spaces for existential reflection and critical engagement. Samdok's reformulated vision had replaced a pursuit of the most popular objects in general areas of social and economic practice with an approach which favoured the symbolic significance of things in an inclusive worldview.

Images from the book of the touring exhibition *Difficult matters (Svåra saker: ting och berättelser som upprör och berör)*. Top left: package of a prescribed medication causing miscarriage or permanent damage to the unborn child. Lower left: WWII ration cards handed in by two visitors. Right: Portable kerosene stove handed in by a visitor representing the closing down of a plant and the insecure future for a Swedish village.



Photo: Olof Wallgren Riksställningar



Photo: Britta Johansson/Carolyn Östberg, Riksställningar



Photo: Britta Johansson/Carolyn Östberg, Riksställningar



## Rituals and places of Death

**R***ituals and Places of Death in a Culturally Diverse Sweden (Dödens riter och platser i mångfaldens Sverige)* was initiated by the Group for Cultural Encounters in 2000. Bringing together professionals from various types of museums, university-based researchers, undertakers and religious figures and others involved in funeral rituals, it engaged in seminars and lectures, and discussions of field work practice. These led to the production of a booklet which showed member museums how to engage in field studies, collecting and the production of exhibitions in this area of social practice.

One of the outcomes of the project was an exhibition produced by Mångkulturellt Centrum in Botkyrka, a foundation located in, and financed by, a municipality on the outskirts of Stockholm. Part of its exhibition of photographs, artefacts, poetry and personal reflections moved to Nordiska Museet during the National Year of Multiculturalism in 2006. Most of its materials had been produced in field seminars and via interviews, undertaken by a trained ethnologist, with priests, imams, spiritual leaders, undertakers and others.

The project reconceptualised multiculturalism and cultural diversity by directing attention to places and activities where people meet and interact rather through mapping particular ethnic groups, as had been undertaken in earlier studies of immigrants. Cultural difference, ethnicity and origin were here looked upon as things constantly produced and reproduced through social interaction which were shaped by class, gender, sexuality and religion.



## Warning

**W***arning (Varsel)*, displayed in Swedish museums and as a touring exhibition in 2010-2011, refers to the experience of having been given notice of being laid off due to a shortage of work or the closing down of a factory. The project comprised interviews and portraits of people from across the country. It was initiated by Virserums Konsthall, an art gallery with ambitions to tell stories of everyday life in contemporary Sweden, and involved eight other museums and workers' organisations.

Participating museums produced their own exhibitions out of a database of interviews and photographs, adapting them to the local context. There was also a Web forum and a tabloid newsheet. Exploiting the power of individual stories, 37 men and women of all ages were made to represent a population of more than 400,000 unemployed workers in Sweden. It is interesting to note that this mode of representation was chosen at a time when the issue of unemployment was more generally shifting from a topic of collective engagement to one of individual experience.



# Studying today for today

Samdok's studies of contemporary society continue to develop both in method and conception. New technologies have provided new ways for Swedish museums to engage in social research, and have opened up new possibilities for public participation. There is also a conceptual expansion in the notion of the contemporary with some projects now engaging in reminiscence and reflection on the recent past such as in the Museum of Work's exhibition *The Industrial Country: When Sweden became Modern*.

Samdok and its member museums have also become involved in international collaborations looking at social practice across Nordic countries and even in a pan-European project entitled *The Taste of Europe*. Indeed, Samdok's Pool for Sámi Life demands international collaboration but it has also been innovative through its level of public engagement. *Sámi Youth (Samisk ungdom)*, for example, sought to address this group's sense of a lack of involvement in society. Young Sámi became active members in the project and as a result changed its aims quite profoundly. They were not satisfied with recording and collecting contemporary culture for future generations but wanted also to publically dismantle contemporary stereotypes. This pool uniquely explores identity politics and rights of a people within the nation.

With the re-imagining of Samdok, the organisation was opened up, and membership of the pools has become more flexible and less centralised. The organisation embraces a Swedish inclusive democratic egalitarianism and sophisticated

interest in everyday life. These sensibilities are played out in projects which seek to build social connection and empathy, and which demonstrate a shift in thinking from believing the task is to record the present for the future, to recognising that contemporary studies are a powerful resource for present day engagements.



# English manipulations of class

This report examines the development of English museums in the late twentieth century which appear to record class division and in so doing produce counter narratives of the national story. Constructed in independent and local government-run museums, in various museum buildings and open air museums, and in stately homes, they deliver a national story nuanced by local and regional perspectives, and such thematic foci as transport, manufacture, and lives spent in domesticity, rural settings and the factory. A few of these claim a national role, though are not national museums in the traditional sense, such as the National Coal Mining Museum near Wakefield. Some, like the museum-rich World Heritage Site at Ironbridge, aspire to even great significance. Others, including some stately homes, are not museums at all – at least according to any national definitions but they nevertheless fall into that important family of museum-like institutions through which English identity is currently negotiated.

These museum developments, which peaked during the 1970s and 1980s, were driven by a complex and powerful set of circumstances. A ‘perfect storm’ of events conspired to produce one of the most significant acts of identity-focused musealisation in the history of museums in England (and Britain). Factors included a new post-war politics and the longer term impact of the Second World War upon society. Fundamental social changes brought about the collapse of heavy industry and the aristocratic lifestyle. Science and technology, and the repositioning of British markets, led to the rapid industrialisation of agriculture and the transformation of the English countryside. New levels of public mobility, the expansion of leisure time, a rise in the general standard of living, and improved education, contributed to new engagements with the national past.

These events, and the museum boom they fostered, gave new opportunities for the educated middle classes to pursue careers in these institutions. They brought with them new intellectual perspectives and professional vigour.

The two strands explored here relate directly to the matter of class, which dominated the politics of the nation for much of the century. The heritage produced in this period seemed to reflect this national division for their focus was, on the one hand, the stately home, country house, estate and garden, and on the other the preservation and interpretation of rural and industrial settings associated with the working classes.

As the follow sections seek to demonstrate, this division of the national narrative did not wholly represent contested interpretations of nation, so much as facets in the middle class conception of the past. The middle classes had long been populated from above and below, and consequently felt connections beyond their class in both directions. But while it cannot be suggested that a single middle class view shaped this heritage perspective – and certainly the political desires of professionals and the authorities which employed them cannot be dismissed – there is nevertheless a sense of an empowered middle class patronising and interpreting both external communities (the aristocracy and the working classes). The narratives they produced concerning privilege and subordination thus reveal aspects of the middle class imagination rather than attempts by political interest groups to materialize the history of their class. Indeed, in many of these acts of heritage making, it is difficult to locate political narratives of class at all. New middle class professionals were only too ready to manufacture romantic English identities on the basis of taste, domesticity and stoicism.



# The rise and fall of class distinction

Class had developed into a national obsession with coming of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. England (and Britain) became the testing ground for the economic migration, urbanisation, deprivation, exploitation, social reconstruction, and so on, that would soon be exported to much of Europe. In England (and elsewhere in the UK), these sweeping changes did not result in a social or political revolution, though such an event was frequently feared. Instead, the country underwent incremental change over an extraordinarily long period. Repeatedly, different elites found their power tested. The much celebrated era of reform in 1830s, for example, simply broke the grip of inherited wealth in the institutions of power. It made way for the rise of the middle classes which through acts of institutionalisation and the growth of government, sought to produce a meritocracy that did not rely on private wealth. It was in the prelude to these reforms that the foundations for Britain's provincial museum culture were established in learned societies which acted as informal 'local parliaments' for negotiations between middle and aristocratic elites.

It was only after the First World War, in 1918, that all men got the vote, tripling the size of the electorate, and turning the established elite into a political minority. For the first time, this elite needed to win the votes of the common people. Women under thirty got the vote ten years later.

The establishment of the Labour Party disrupted a system of rival conservative interests, becoming the dominant party for the first time in 1929. The stage was now set of a new era of adversarial politics centred on polarised class positions. This period of a growing state, of health and welfare reform, met its denouement in the failed Miners' Strike, 1984-1985. With political assistance of the Thatcher



Photo: Sheila Watson

Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, was donated to the National Trust in 1969 as there were no heirs. This is typical of the medium size stately home.

government, the country struggled into a post-industrial era. As political power in the country became radically altered, both the left and right strove to occupy the centre ground. The rise of minority politics further weakened the politics of class; social deprivation could now be separated from political persuasion.

It was in this context that upper and lower class culture was turned into heritage. In the 1960s, such a development had simply seemed impossible.








# The stately home under attack

That the country house might become an important symbol of Englishness and admired by disparate social groups did not seem likely after the Second World War. Despite arguments to the contrary, this development had little to do with the machinations of estate owners wishing to enshrine their values and cultural institutions in the national conscience. The old aristocracy was no longer well-served by either political side. During the course of the twentieth century inheritance tax and estate duty led to the sale and break up of many country estates. Some owners voluntarily relinquished these to the National Trust, an independent charity, while others, worn down by the expense of unsuitable buildings in an era of successive slumps in the farming industry, sold up with the hope of retaining what remained of the family wealth.

There was no political will to protect these buildings and estates in an era of post-war austerity, high taxation and welfare reform. Grand historic houses continued to be demolished without comment or protest.

The National Trust, today seen as such a key protector and promoter of an Englishness rooted in rural estates with great houses and ancient traditions, only began to remodel itself as an amenity society attractive to a modern audience in 1939. Its membership grew slowly but steadily. This was to change, in the 1950s and 1960s, with a general rise in disposable income, a rapid increase in car ownership and greater leisure time. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, a period in which Britain led the world in pop culture and fashion, and wished to be seen as modern, the stately home remained deeply unfashionable. Some owners, however, adopted this new outlook, the most radical being the introduction of lions at Longleat, Wiltshire, in 1966. The lions, symbols of England (and later Britain) in the first era of 'cool Britannia', tapped into the prevalent fashions.



Blickling Hall, Norfolk, epitomises many of the characteristics of the stately home in England. It is associated with Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII who lived there as a child. Later rebuilt, it now sits within a formal English garden, set in a traditional romantic landscape complete with lake.



# The loss of old ways

Interest in working class life styles and production methods was driven by a sense of grievous loss. Post-war society saw industrial decline. With the exploitation of British oil and gas from home and in the face of overseas competition, coal mining began a rapid demise. From the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s, more than 600 pits closed and jobs were reduced by almost two thirds to 246,000. While Britain would retain much heavy industry into the 1980s, factory production in many areas that had boomed during the Industrial Revolution now fell into decline in the face of cheap overseas imports.

The rural landscape was also under assault with many traditional methods disappearing with increased mechanisation and consequent depopulation. While this removed much of the toil of the agricultural labourer it took with it key aspects of rural life and decimated traditional craft culture. In the 1960s, it was felt that traditions dating back to the *Domesday Book* (1086) were now being lost wholesale and that the future would be an alien world.

Mining communities in particular possessed a strong sense of identity but this was rooted in the working mine and the community life that produced. The con-

version of such an industry into mere heritage was anathema. Rural labourers and landowners, similarly, were interested in work and business. They did not generally possess a romanticised view of their industry and showed little interest in turning it into a museum or collecting and preserving those technologies which were rapidly becoming defunct. The middle classes, however, looked at these changes more aesthetically. They knew nothing of the toil, but they valued the past, and the romantic qualities of older industrial and rural landscapes.

These transformations in agriculture and industry, and in elite country living, produced a nation littered with the remnants of old ways, ripe for re-invention as heritage or to be turned into museums once the intellectual tide turned in their favour.



# The new social history

**E.P.** Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, first published in 1963, considered the rise of English radical movements and was greatly influential in illustrating how politics was not the private domain of the privileged. These intellectual trends fuelled a more general interest in ordinary people's lives which was stimulated not only by reading but also by radio and, from the late 1950s and early 1960s, by television. England's growing affluence and the success of the Labour Party in the 1964 General Election led to greater interest in social inequalities in the past and in the present.

By the 1970s, social history was established in English universities as a respectable and popular subject and many curators began their careers trained in new thinking about the importance of 'ordinary' lives and the everyday. Social history was attractive to Marxist historians, whose work is often described as 'labour history' and relates specifically to a political attitude adopted by its adherents, though the notion of labour history is a fluid one.

At the same time, the conservative type of history beloved of Trevelyan and his followers continued to be produced, whose influential and popular text was

very much a history of enduring values with benign social relationships between all classes. This conservative, somewhat nostalgic approach was popular and hugely influential with its focus on progress and 'a healthy national life, in which town and country, agriculture, industry, and commerce were harmonious parts of a single economic system.' Ironically, perhaps, all these genres of history were nostalgic in their own way.

This nostalgic type of history did not disappear with the emergence of the Marxists and other types of social historian. It permeated rural life and local history museums in the 1970s and 1980s where class tensions were ignored and working men and women were often presented through a nostalgic lens, and where the focus was more on the exoticism of the past than on its harshness. Economic and social inequalities tended to go unquestioned. In the stately home the lives of servants often remained invisible, with emphasis placed on fine furniture, decoration, and the political lives of the gentry and aristocracy. If kitchens and sculleries were open to view then the interpretive text referred to the capaciousness of the ovens or the number of courses in a typical meal.



# A new love for old houses

The rise of the country house in the last quarter of the twentieth century has been described as an attempt by the old elite, the landed aristocracy, to promote their status and power, to gain funding to maintain their lifestyle, and to convert themselves into symbols of the former greatness of a nation then in decline. A counter argument, however, persuasively suggests that this old elite only reluctantly promoted their private houses and estates as attractions and cultural icons.

The 1960s had produced a new sense of public consciousness concerning man's impact on the environment, and this included the built environment. By the early 1970s, the voices of conservationists, who deplored the destruction of town centres and grand buildings in the 1960s planning boom, were beginning to find a sympathetic public hearing. Threats to the country's great houses now began to capture the public imagination. Economic recession, and a capital gains tax on estates making inheritance almost impossible, coincided with a report by the British Tourist Authority which argued that the country house was a socially desirable aspect of national life that should be saved. In October 1974, the V&A put on an exhibition entitled *The Destruction of the Country House 1875 - 1975*. The following year, Save Britain's Heritage was established and landowners found themselves recast as guardians of the nation's great treasure houses. The government responded by introducing tax concessions and making it possible for properties to be protected as charitable trusts.

In the 1980s, public enthusiasm for the country house and its garden and estate boomed. The National Trust doubled its membership in that decade to two million. Unlike museums, an important dimension to these houses was an immer-

sive sense of authenticity; they remained former homes, composed of objects and spatial associations that connected with a real past. Visitor research found that visitors were more interested in the atmosphere of the domestic setting rather than the aesthetics of their surroundings.

These houses displayed aristocratic or upper class life. Democratisation of the interpretation of the country house, also to show life 'below stairs', was a relatively late phenomenon, developing in the 1990s, and still relative rare today, particularly in privately owned houses. In 2010-11, 16.8 million visits were made to National Trust properties and numbers are rising year on year. What visitors continue to see and appreciate on these visits is a society constructed within clear class boundaries even if interpretation tends to focus on architecture, art, design and landscape rather than how people lived in the past.

Nothing within the historical development of English society over the last seventy years suggests that visitors are deferential in their attitudes to the families and power structures that once supported these houses. Instead research shows that visitors are relaxed and feel at home in such an environment. They might well feel, as paying members of and visitors to the National Trust, that they are now the owners.



# Museums of rural and industrial life

The period of museum expansion coincided with this pervasive sense of loss. The 1974 oil crisis, led in turn to an economic recession and loss of national confidence, culminating in the Winter of Discontent in 1978-9 and the collapse of the Labour Government. With entry into the EU in 1973, Britain repositioned itself in the world. Robert Hewison, writing towards the end of the boom in museums, in 1987, condemned this so called 'heritage industry' as a product of economic and social ills that encouraged people to look back to the past as a 'safer place'. As another commentator remarked at the time, 'The twentieth century has seen the destruction of the evidence of the past on an unprecedented scale, and in this destruction the bombs of warfare pale into insignificance compared with the efforts of developers and government agencies.'

A narrative which imagined England as a lost pre-industrial idyll had been in almost constant construction and reconstruction since the nineteenth century by poets, scientists, archaeologists and others, and particularly so in the interwar years. Hoskins harked back to that era in his influential *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955). There were, then, diverse forces at play, some aspiring to recover and conserve nature, others to uncover a deeply buried pre-industrial past, and others still interested in preserving a more recent industrial heritage.

In 1951, the University of Reading had established the Museum of English Rural Life to capture a record of rural society as it moved from horse to tractor power. This museum felt it was acting in the national interest, but many other developments reflected regional identities. The Sheffield Trades Historical Society, for example, was instrumental in having the former scythe works at Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet given to the city as an industrial museum which opened to the



Photo: Sheila Watson

Gressenhall farm and workhouse museum in Norfolk (formerly Gressenhall Rural Life Museum) represents a regional rural identity. It demonstrates how Norfolk farming developed over time and refers to regional customs and practices.

public in 1970. The museum focused on Sheffield's long steel making traditions which had given the city a worldwide reputation. England was understood as a patchwork of contrasting landscapes, accents, customs and specialist industries. There was a desire to preserve these regional identities which were often attached to particular trades then disappearing. Museums often exhibited the particulars of place rather than the nation as a whole.

The middle classes, who had in the previous century captured the working classes in art and literature, had no difficulty in now preserving the sites and instruments of working class labour. While there was an attempt to preserve a realistic interpretation, the aesthetics of defunct objects and old buildings, separated from working class toil, could not help but create a sense of romance appealing to middle class visitors. In time this nostalgic mode would gain more critical interpretation.



# From a nation of classes to a classless nation

The representation of working class histories in the 1970s and 1980s have been understood to have been controlled in England by elites, who have tended to downplay the social costs of industrialisation in favour of a narrative of progress. It has been suggested that museums are about forgetting the past as much as remembering it, particularly in relation to difficult class histories. Some counter such accusations with the benefits of democratised history. Others also point out that many independent heritage ventures, such as railway preservation, involve a wide range of individuals, many from the working classes.

On the whole, more formal museums tended to be middle class creations, increasingly professionalised throughout the last four decades of the twentieth century, where working class antecedents and material culture were incorporated into a national story by curators who followed trends in social history and who were encouraged, by the development of new media such as portable recording

equipment, to add stories in working class voices. However, these voices and the film recordings that sometimes accompanied them were curated by others. These curators often found those who had worked these industries indifferent and even openly hostile to their preservation. Official bodies could be similarly indifferent to the preservation of the industrial past. A farm worker talking in late 1960s remarked, 'I don't want to see the old days back. Every bad thing gets to sound pleasant enough when time has passed...Working at graft sapped people of their strength to live their lives decently...I'm definitely happier than I was years ago and I'm sure most farm-workers are. We had depressing jobs which lasted so long... It made life seem worthless.' However, within the middle class imagination these lives of grinding poverty and deprivation alongside narratives of both aristocrats and servants in the stately home, were made symbols of a domesticated old world with traditional values, an imagining that articulated a nation in material culture.



# Unifying Italy

Italy does not possess a national museum that represents the nation in totality; it is, rather, a paradigmatic example of a 'distributed nation'. This is due both to the different regional histories that make up the peninsular and the extraordinary richness of the heritage distributed across the country.

The Italian 'Kulturnation' has a history dating back to the early modern age. Its museums are, in pan-European terms, ancient and foundational. The Uffizi, established in 1582 as a gallery, has, for example, been claimed by some scholars, as the first 'modern' museum in the world. The division of the peninsula into many states has helped develop, maintain and re-invent particular regional traditions and identities, which have continued to have significance in the post-unification nation.

In those very difficult years surrounding unification in 1861, when the process of nation-state building began, this sense of regional difference showed little sign of disappearing. The new state introduced a national army and the progressive construction of a national school system especially for the upper and middle classes, which only served to aid the persistence, reconstruction, and even the construction, of regional identities. These latter identities did not, however, necessarily compete with the idea of the nation. More often, they complemented it. Objects of art and historical documents, and the institutions which aimed to collect and publish them, as well as monuments, became a crucial part of this effort which helped to recognise the local within the new national identity, and, indeed, build the nation out of the component regional (and particularly civic) identities.

The civic identities were dominant components of regional identities in this distributed nation making; the regions themselves emerged quite slowly as being

significant in the geography of national representation. After the conquest of the South it became necessary to establish central control, and where necessary use the army to control disorder. An earlier liberal aspiration for a decentralised state based on the regions had quickly disappeared. The regions nevertheless persisted or were created at least as cultural units. Powerful regions, such as Tuscany, drew upon a significant pre-unification history. Other regions, such as Sicily and Sardinia, could claim the geographical integrity of the island, each with its own specific and somewhat detached history. Umbria was, by contrast, a post-unification invention which needed to fashion its own identity, key words and brand. Thus Umbria became 'green' Umbria, a region of saints, which claimed St Francis of Assisi, the soon to be named patron saint of Italy. This process of regional definition began after unification and was virtually completed by 1911, the year of the Jubilee to celebrate 50 years of the Italian State.



Photo: Simon Kneil



# Regions and cities

One image from the Jubilee year is particularly telling. It is an allegorical depiction of Italia as a woman composed of a series of postcards. This image – this body representing the nation – could only be recomposed by piecing together the individual cards. Each part of her body was printed on a postcard which carried important symbols in its background, such as the monuments, representing the most important cities. In some cards the background also brought together the heroic deeds of patriots and well-known battles connected to the cities which were at the time celebrated in the Risorgimento museums in several Italian cities. The Italian feminine allegory at the centre of the picture was often dressed in medieval, and more rarely Roman, costume.

In 1911, major exhibitions celebrating the nation state brought together and musealised different aspects of regional identity such as architecture, dresses, crafts, often with a strongly gendered aspect. Yet the artificially constructed nature of the region as a cultural unit was all too apparent in the idealised buildings erected for these exhibitions, which were to be taken as regionally typical; they were composed of an eclectic and sometimes mismatched assemblage of architectural elements.

At the centenary celebrations of the nation-state, 'Italia 61', the regions again

offered a point of focus, even though it would be another decade before they would acquire administrative status. In the 2011, at 150<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebrations, however, this regional discourse was downplayed if not silenced. By then Lega Nord, or simply Lega, was pursuing a federalist agenda focused on increasing regional power at the expense of the central government.

Considerably more important than these regional identities, were those associated with the major Italian cities. After 1861, it was not uncommon for the country to be referred to as 'Italy of the 100 cities'. In northern and central Italy, the identity of these civic cultures originated in the city republics of the middle-ages. In the south, it was the strong identities of former capitals, such as Palermo and Naples, that persisted. And these identities were as much rooted in living dialects, traditions and culinary dishes as they were in heritage and memories of military and other conflicts with neighbouring cities in pursuit of prestige and public resources.

These identities, and the conflicts which shape them, as well as tensions between smaller towns and the regional capital, have been mirrored at museum level since the first decades after unification.





# Museum making before unification

The history of Italian heritage, its distribution and representation in different museums, has been shaped by a number of forces over a long period. One significant event was the closure of many convents under Napoleon. Their collections were sold and, in danger of being dispersed, a number of literati – men of erudition and male and female members of the nobility and middle-classes, as well as members of the church – bought them, founding collections that would, some years later, be used to establish civic museums.

The Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice was created by Napoleon in 1807 to host paintings coming from the religious institutions which were not to be sent to Paris or to Milan. It opened in 1817 within the new Austrian-ruled Lombardo-Veneto. Krisztof Pomian classified this as a revolutionary museum.

Libraries and museums across the country were sold for almost nothing in the period of political crisis after the Napoleonic Wars. Almost all the museums created in Italy at that period had a pronounced didactic aim.

Other museums were established as private gifts. The Museo Correr, hosted in the Piazza San Marco opposite to the basilica, originated from the private collection of Teodoro Correr, a Venetian patrician born in 1720. Correr opened his

house to Italian and foreign visitors on working days, and later turned it into a public museum under the supervision of the government. In the city of Treviso, canon Rossi had also collected various works – mainly books – after the suppression of religious orders under Napoleon, and had given them to the city. That museum opened in 1836. In Venice, the Querini Stampalia Gallery and the Franchetti Gallery at the Ca'D'oro were also founded as gifts to city.

Galleria d'Arte Moderna comunale and Museo orientale statale a Ca'Pesaro were, by contrast created through the purchase of art objects.

Other museums and collections were founded in academies, learned societies and universities. However, reports on these often contrasted the richness of the collections with the inadequacy of their keeping and display. They remained relatively unimportant aspects of Italian museum culture from the late nineteenth-century. Science museums more generally reflected the polycentrism of Italian culture and the long history of their production and keeping. An attempt to establish a central Italian museum of natural history failed; the first inventory of scientific collections did not occur until 1960.



# Unification and the protection of local identities

In 1859, when most of the regional states acquired independence from Austrian rule or from past kings, and shortly before the plebiscites which approved the annexation to Piedmont which led to the formation of the new Kingdom of Italy, a number of regional elites who had promoted annexation launched cultural activities which aimed to record and delineate local identities. The fear of being absorbed into the new nation-state and thus losing these identities was very great. From 1859 onwards historical associations and commissions were established and collections of historical sources published. These publications were often called 'archives', and the documents labelled as true 'monuments' to the different regions of the new Italian nation. The provisional government in Emilia proposed explicitly to set up specific commissions for the preservation of dialects but also for inventories of crucial elements of material culture, such as methods of baking bread.

This policy of protection and enhancement of local identities often became a tool in the bargaining with central government in order to get resources, schools

and universities, consistent parts of the army, and last, but not least, museums to support a burgeoning tourism industry. The elites of the regional capitals did not go as far as to imagine new regional museums which might replace the local ones, but in some cases they came very close to this.

In the period after unification, and particularly after 1866 when a new wave of suppression of religious orders forced the sale of church properties, museums again experienced an extraordinary period of acquisition of precious artefacts, paintings, and statues. At first, the State aimed to create 'points for gathering of the assets and artefacts acquired by the state' (punti di raccolta del materiale in-camerato) in the most important museums which were usually in the regional capitals. But soon those cities excluded from these benefits, and largely deprived of their own heritage, mobilized a strong opposition, which resulted in the establishment of new 'civic museums' (musei civici), where all the heritage coming from dismantled monasteries and convents would be concentrated.



# Polycentrism

Major cities, however, continued to push for the centralization of paintings and sculptures at least at regional level. In Tuscany, shortly before the unification plebiscite, in 1859-60, the provisional government decreed the creation of a special museum for Tuscan antiquities in the Palagio del podestà along with an elite university and research institution (Istituto di Studi Superiori). It aimed to protect and restore important churches, which were anyway almost the equivalents of museums. These included Santa Maria Novella and San Lorenzo. Later, Santa Croce, containing the national pantheon, was restored and received a new façade.

Similarly, in Umbria, the Perugia élites supported the creation of a single regional museum in order to keep together the confiscated items. However, in most cases the strong competition between cities made it impossible for museums to be described as 'regional'. Moreover, regions were not recognised as administrative units.

The Archaeological Museums of the Marche (Museo archeologico delle Marche) started gathering artefacts from all the other provinces, with the idea of representing the heterogeneous identity of that region. Likewise, in Abruzzo, L'Aquila Museum aimed to enlarge its collection with items coming from other Abruzzo cities. Other provincial capitals already rich in collections followed the same path, pretending to take the lead role in protecting, presenting and representing heritage and thus the culture of the province (or in some cases of the region).

In Tuscany, the civic Museum of San Gimignano, established in 1852, became one of the richest in Tuscany. The Galleria di Palazzo Pretorio in Prato, established

in 1858, acquired such wealth as to be able to match its major Florentine neighbours. So it was for the Museo civico of Montepulciano (1861), and the cathedral museums in Siena (1870) and Florence (1891), the latter already recognised by connoisseurs from all over the world as one off the most important museums of Renaissance art. Today, Florence has now 65 major art museums. Antonio Paolucci has defined it as an admirable 'monstrum'. Probably, no other part of the world has such a density of important museums per square mile.

Giandomenico Romanelli, an expert of Venetian museums, has written that in various parts of Italy civic museums have a common character and can be considered part of the 'Italian model' which fits like a sock on the leg – or on the Italian 'boot'. They all have similar characteristics: they are quite generic, and eclectic in items they contain, from the Palaeolithic to the present. It is here – at regional level – that one can find that palimpsest, that layered accumulation of objects, so central to many European national museums.



Photo: Simon Kneil

Santa Croce in Florence. Rich in art, and enclosing the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli and other national heroes, the connections between building, art, history and nation is profoundly different to those to be found in national museums.



# The fragmented national museum

Few Italian museums attempt to adopt a national perspective, and all that do were formed after unification. Most of these do so from a specialist perspective. These include the Industrial Museum in Turin (1862), the Regius Artistic Industrial Museum in Rome (1873) and the Pigorini Museum also in Rome (1875).


The central museum of the Risorgimento in Turin was created with the aim of representing the history of Italian unification.

Another national, or rather 'imperial,' museum was Mussolini's idea of the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, which after the Second World War developed into the Museum of Roman Civilization. However, museums labelled as national (i.e. state museums) usually represented the distributed nation. This is the case with the Sardinian National Museum in Cagliari and the Archaeological museums in Tuscany. Both the Sardinian and Etruscan artefacts were perceived as parts of the nation.


Salvatore Settis has suggested the use of the web for exalting the specificity of the Italian case in order to create virtual museums of the territory connecting objects present in museums with musealized items present in churches, villas and so on. One could argue that this virtual option of representing such a complex and rich reality as the Italian one, with its Greek and Etruscan, Roman, medieval and Renaissance pasts, not to mention the Baroque and nineteenth- and twentieth-

century art, had, in a way, been established in an earlier era. One could argue that the true national museum was the one represented by the photographic inventory of Italian heritage promoted by the private firm of the Alinari Brothers which collected and to some extent made visible, at home as well as abroad, paintings and sculptures kept in museums together with monuments. These pictures were not only for Italians, but for foreign tourists and art connoisseurs. It is not by chance that by 1870 the Alinari Brothers had sold 70% of their pictures abroad. Their rich archive has now been transformed into a real museum: the Alinari National Museum of Photography is now located in Florence, where the Alinari company has always been active.

One could even go so far as to say that another virtual museum of Italy was Pellegrino Artusi's cookbook, composed by bringing together recipes from different Italian areas, translating them into the Italian national cuisine, with the help of a very sophisticated national language. The extraordinary success of this cookbook in its different editions has made it ubiquitous in Italian homes and contributed, at family level, to a strong feeling of different culinary traditions but at the same time made the Italian imagined community real. Cara Artusi in Forlimpopoli has also become a museum, hosting Artusi's rich library and correspondence.



PART 3  
Transnational,  
museum-like, online



Wrecks or museum exhibits? In the online production of museum-like engagements a private individual can curate landscape objects like these into their own exhibits, without ever worrying about physically moving, or even preserving, them. Isle of Mull, Scotland.





## Transnational, museum-like, online

The national museum is constrained by a range of national, institutional and European expectations that make it partial in its acts of representation, incapable of articulating the rich diversity and grounded specificity of identities. Regional and local museums reveal a rather different kind of museological response, often rising from the grassroots, from individuals and groups who by their own action empower themselves as museum makers. These produce nuanced renditions of the nation, though these too also feel the effects of institutionalisation and change. It might be imagined, then, that in the community-led online world we might also find citizen-made museum-like performances, which here overcome institutional constraint, that work primarily in the soft and ephemeral architecture of museological negotiation.

In this, the third section of this report, we explore online groups of multiple national backgrounds engaged in acts of representation and narrative construction online. The subject matter that forms the basis for these online assertions and negotiations exists in the real world as a contested space of the present or recent past. Is there evidence here that citizen-led, museum-like, online entities might offer new, truly democratic, forms of representation, or are professionalised institutions essential to bridge-building transnational museological negotiations?



# Cross-border communications at Lake Prespa

The Prespa Region is a mountain plateau shared between Albania, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM) which holds Great and Small Lake Prespa. The ecology of the Prespa lakes supports a unique natural flora and fauna and several dozen village economies. Three national borders and multiple ethnicities meet at Prespa Lake, making it a revealing object through which to understand the complexities of Balkan relationships and particularly to ask if citizen-led museum-like online spaces really do permit new kinds of transnational dialogue.

The findings, however, reveal two competing paradigms for online engagement. One calls for a traditional nationalist stance: Prespa is a border region and engagements focus on 'expressing the self' through narratives of national belonging. Identity and authenticity are critical discourses here and best expressed in blogs. In these engagements, history is the object most often deployed or exhibited. The other interpretative approach, which reflects non-governmental organizations, as well as government and professional positions, offers a counter perspective though not as an oppositional dialogue with nationalistic bloggers. Rather this second online perspective diminishes the prominence of nations and borders. Space and power are here multiplied and fragmented, subjective and networked, and subsidiary to the greater good. This perspective is expressed particularly in official websites and in more nebulous ways in online image collections.







Greece looking towards Macedonia (FYROM).  
Bean fields and the thin strip of land separating  
the Small and Great Lakes Prespa.



Photo: Eleni Myrivilii



# A confluence of ethnicities

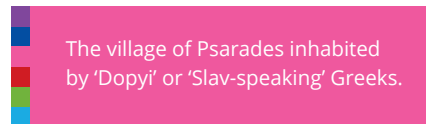
The ethnic component at Prespa – people’s affiliations to different traditions, languages and religions – not only exhibits great complexity but also ambiguity and fluctuation. Ethnic difference is heavily politicized and the secrecy, ambiguity and variation involved make it difficult to delineate ethnic categories clearly.

All three nation-states, at one time or another over the last century, have oppressed or discriminated against particular ethnic minorities. They have also attempted to change the ethnic composition of the Prespa border region by depopulation and relocation. Successive conflicts, together with long periods of great poverty, famine and emigration, have resulted in lasting ethnic tensions within the Prespa communities as well as sizeable overseas diasporas.

The Christian Orthodox Slav-speakers constitute the national majority in Macedonia (FYROM). In Albania they form an ethnic minority with limited rights.

In Greece they are not recognised as an ethnic minority and are referred to as ‘Dopyi,’ or ‘Slav-speaking Greeks.’ Muslim Albanians live mostly on the Macedonian (FYROM) and the Albanian sides of Prespa; a few can also be found in Greece working as seasonal immigrants. Christian Orthodox Vlachs (Arumanians), who speak a Latin-based language, live on both the Greek and Macedonian (FYROM) sides of the lakes and are the most assimilated ethnic minority in the area. Muslim Turkish-speaking populations make up a few villages in the Macedonian (FYROM) part of Prespa. Both Muslim and Christian Orthodox Gypsies (Romani) can be found in small numbers in all three national territories. Finally, the Pontiaiks consist of Christian Orthodox Greek refugees from the Pontos region of the Black Sea who retain elements of a distinct identity within Greece.

This diversity plays out in complex patterns of language and religion which are developed differently in each national territory.





# A national borderland

It was only in the 1990s that Prespa became easily accessible. Before this time there was little or no access to official maps, and personal and national histories of the region were either kept secret or heavily debated among the different ethnic groups and the three nations. Very few books or articles were published.

This inaccessibility, which is still somewhat characteristic of the Prespa region, was caused by the brand of ethno-nationalism prevalent in the Balkans. Balkan nationalism, and the kinds of nation-states and identities it engendered and defined, has been determined by the notion that enemy nations are situated at the borders. Consequently, borders have been important and highly differentiated. They have associated with them expectations of high surveillance, movement control and a strong police and army presence.

While a sense of space and movement, identity and belonging in this part of the world is very much centred on the idea of nation-state territoriality, the borderlands give an unsettling sense of threat which is exacerbated by the historical contingency that has placed the borders in their modern positions. These brittle

borders undermine a sense of territorial stability which in turn serves to strengthen nationalistic mentalities. Borders have become places where the rule of law can be suspended at any time and unsanctioned violence applied.

The complexion of the various populations living around these borders is the result of displacement and forced exodus, ethnic cleansing, discrimination and oppression. It is as if the nation-state sits on the shoulders of every citizen, observing and responding to his or her every move. Even though politics in the region have changed in recent years, a culture of mistrust, secrecy and dissimulation vis-à-vis the nation-state persists. Within the confines of nationalistic discourses in the Balkans, borders guard against difference and the threats this poses to the nation's ethnic purity. However, in this border area, these ethnic aspirations are compromised, and populations bear witness to the region's multi-ethnic complexity and non-homogeneity.





# Prespa Transboundary Park

These political difficulties contributed to the Greek government's treatment of the Prespa region as a nationally 'sensitive zone'. Just after the borders were drawn (roughly around the 1920s) and for a very long period of time (1930s-1970s) the Greek part of Prespa increasingly became under-populated, under military surveillance, and eventually a prohibited zone. These restrictions were still in place under the military junta which ruled Greece in the 1960s. Then, in 1967, two French ornithologists recognized the wildlife potential of Small Lake Prespa. The resulting campaign, not least by Greek naturalists, resulted in the declaration of the area as a National Park in 1971 (ratified by Presidential Decree in 1974). However, it remained a highly controlled territory. Indeed, the notion that Prespa was 'pure nature' played into the hands of a government which wished to see this as a space outside culture and human activity. Nature and the indigenous human population of the area were now treated as competing interests, with nature given official sanction and a number of long-established practices prohibited.

With the return of a democratic government in 1974, the region became ripe for economic development and projects, often subsidised by EU funds, to counteract poverty and depopulation. Implementation was, however, ill-conceived causing damage to the environment whilst at the same time failing to counteract the

social and cultural harm done to the region by past governmentally-sanctioned conservation strategies. Radicalised conservation activity now confronted government-imposed management plans, and continued to alienate local populations, producing hostility in the park well into the 1990s.

From the mid 1990s onward, the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP), established in 1991, assumed an increasingly important role as an umbrella organization. In time, the SPP sought collaboration with Albanian and Macedonian (FYROM) Prespa. This culminated in the Albanian, Greek and Macedonian (FYROM) Prime Ministers signing a declaration for the establishment of the Prespa Transboundary Park in 2000. Through the collaboration necessitated by the implementation of the Transboundary Park processes, conservationists on all sides progressively retreated from nationalist rhetoric, values and practices in order to achieve a greater good. Given on-going local tensions, this was a remarkable event.

In 2004, the SPP established a research and documentation centre, Prespa Centre for Nature and Anthropos (PCNA), which aimed to collect, archive and make available a definitive collection of material relating to the natural and cultural history of the region. Culture, as an inalienable part of 'nature', had at last returned to official perceptions of the Prespa landscape.



# A culture of online discord

Increased access to Prespa in the last 15 years has been shaped by the Internet and by environmental discourse, the two being intertwined here. Both have, in different ways, defied national borders and challenged the dominance of ethno-nationalistic discourse. Today, conservationism and sustainability are inseparable from all kinds of border-crossing cultural or political dialogue in the region.

These developments are, however, quite alien to the traditional Balkan context. Since the 1990s, Prespa has been a subject discussed online by Greek and Macedonian (FYROM) nationalists. Invariably these represented the views of ethnic minority organizations and émigrés. Exhibiting highly charged nationalist propaganda, the sites were packed with national symbols, flags, and historical references supporting this or that nation. Today, nationalistic bloggers continue to sow discord. These emphasise national borders, national identities, ethno-political conflicts and difference. The borderland, far from being an opportunity for shared boundary crossing developments, is an imagined battleground where ethnic and nationalistic tensions are played out

These blogs are subjective individual expressions which, if we consider their museological attributes, show a preference for deploying the past in order to affirm or define the individual's identity, or to legitimise a particular partisan political position. Despite their individualism, these blogs often form important components in extensive networks.

Even fairly innocuous Albanian-, Greek- and Macedonian-language blogs foregrounding the beauty of the area, very often contain references to ethnic or national identities. Idioms of language, issues of citizenship, contested memories and histories, narratives of hardship, war, political and economic devastation, difficulties with unemployment and migratory seasonal work ensure that the Prespa

blogosphere mirrors the mosaic of identities in Prespa today. The Web here does not homogenise or neutralise these underlying differences. Tensions mostly appear in the form of place names, and in issues of language and citizenship.

The transient nature of national borders in this region, which have moved within the memory of the majority of the inhabitants, repeatedly bring to the fore notions of dispossession. This is a profound aspect of Great Lake Prespa, where views across the water make these changes visible. An English blogger living in the Greek part of the lakes observed a Slovenian friend look to a nearby village, lying across the border, who remarked that that territory was once her country, in the days of Yugoslavia. Other, more nationalistic blogs, look forward to 'the next Balkan war' and a rearrangement of territories.

Passionate blogger rhetoric surrounds the formation of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and possession of the name 'Macedonia', contested particularly by the Greek Macedonians who claim to be the indigenous Macedonians of the Prespa region. Macedonian (FYROM) bloggers, on the other hand, complain that their nation has been forcibly divided by Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs. The Greek Communist Party is also a salient actor in this debate, as it still cultivates rich associations with Prespa online.

Albanian identity and minority issues became more prominent in the blogosphere after the Kosovo War in 1998. Treatment of minorities is a well developed theme in the Prespa blogs. Even Bulgarians have entered this debate claiming a right to protect, what they see as, the Bulgarian minority living in the Albanian villages in the Prespa region. Macedonian (FYROM) bloggers claimed this minority as their own. Similar demands come from the Greek side.



# Prespa online and transnational

This discordant Balkan blogging, which reflects national insecurities in the Prespa region, is countered by transnational or non-national conceptions of Prespa. Perhaps the simplest manifestation of this can be found on websites that gather together images of objects, artefacts, sites, monuments, practices and landscapes. In this form Prespa is a heterogeneous, ephemeral and volatile entity. It consists of a barely curated collection held together by personal folksonomies; little more than a raw assemblage. Increased access to Prespa has coincided with the growth of the Internet, its relative obscurity and extraordinary natural beauty making it an obvious subject for photographers. What gets curated online often reflects the region's unspoilt aesthetics. On sites like Google image search, superior coding by commercial and official organisations, ensures that aesthetic images from the websites of tourism companies and agencies gain prominence. Consequently, Prespa appears largely in the form of beautiful landscapes.

The affecting nature of landscape and the aesthetic aspirations of photographers ensure that Prespa is represented in this way. Other subjects are not entirely invisible but they do not establish themselves so easily as a visual category.

Of greater interest are those websites that attempt to interpret or represent Prespa in a more organized way. This genre of representation is dominated by environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Their websites are prominent, objective-descriptive, soft-scientific and policy related. They adopt an authoritative position on modern Prespa, actively attempting to shape external perceptions of its identity. The data displayed has been gathered by professionals who possess personal and institutional agendas, and the website of SPP provides

a particularly important online hub.

The establishment of Prespa Transboundary Park in 2000 produced online reports and articles on the various NGO sites which sought to realise the transnational possibilities of the park and at the same time bridge the gap between nature and culture that had opened up in an earlier era of conservationism. The SPP's Myrsini Malakou recalled, 'We had to make the locals as well as the conservationists realise that we were fighting in order to preserve the beauty of life in Prespa and not just a rare species.' These Web materials document to a lesser extent the difficult history of the region and the abuses of the local population, while pronouncing, articulating and promoting its future trajectory towards cross-border cooperation.

The shared sense of identity materialised in the formation of the park is also played out online. In a strange way, Prespa has been re-imagined as a special place, its environmental uniqueness and fragility replacing its importance to national security. A rather different kind of monitoring and control is necessary, reliant now on engendering cross-border cooperation rather than separation. A post-modern perspective is now at work, stretching beyond binary oppositions and exclusive identities, creating new types of representation and discursive position for the area.

This sense of transnational connection online, however, merely parallels and in some senses disseminates and embeds, the ideal of trans-border action embodied in the real world park. The easy border-crossing aspects of the Web produce an irresistible medium which overcomes secrecy and partisanship. Real world cooperation, by contrast, has had to struggle with different laws, policies, regimes, political and administrative structures, matters of sovereignty, problems of terrain, culture and language, and last but not least, actual borders, which cannot be crossed (as there are no checkpoints in the Prespa region).

What vanishes from these sites, or is at least given diminished significance, are indeed the real national borders, as well as notions of ethnicity, cultural and religious diversity.





# Transnational possibilities

The opening up of Prespa to an online public has rendered Prespa into a digital object that is interpreted and circulated among official and unofficial institutions, individuals (both inhabitants and visitors) and social networks. Prespa is reproduced through photos on blogs which express affective memories and creative impulses. It is converted into data, values, science and rhetoric. It forms the subject of audiovisual projects uploaded to the Web by students and young video activists. Online, Prespa is an eclectic and disaggregated entity, an assortment of electronic spaces, objects and stories where memories, experiences and identities are exhibited, exchanged, engendered. The Prespa object is variously aesthetic, scientific, cultural or political. Prespa as a subject has been democratised, and in some respects wrenched from the nationalistic politics that had kept it hidden. While the nation is still there, it often lies beneath the surface.

Official stances on Prespa, which invariably enter the region from outside, have started to pursue the boundary crossing epitomised in the formation of Prespa Transboundary Park. At the time of its ratification, in 2010, Nikola Gruevski, the Prime Minister of Macedonia (FYROM), visiting the municipality of Pustec-Liqenas in Albanian Prespa stated: 'the Macedonian government will help the people of this area [...] to preserve the Macedonian language and culture and to develop it even further. The members of the Macedonian minority in Albania should be bridges of friendship between both nations.' These sentiments, while they can be played out through political diplomacy in the real world, can also be performed online. The real park and a virtual Prespa share this transnational potential and in doing so they have the potential to deploy the same kinds of objects in building bridges between people.



Photo: Eleni Myrivili



# Cold War connections on Flickr

The Cold War was a phenomenon experienced differently across Europe, from the relatively remote but militarily strategic island nations of the west, across the German borderland, to the occupied states of the centre and east. Today objects derived from, and resonating with, that difficult past exist as images online. These are usually representations of, or surrogates for, physical objects, but may also include 'born digital' objects. These exist in the post-institutional transnational milieu of the Web, and in the example explored in this report specifically on the image hosting site, Flickr. Here individuals find themselves generating and curating content; the audience is curator. Situated outside the politics of nations and the negotiations of post-Cold War relations, though certainly holding the potential for nationalistic discourse, these acts of representation, which also perform as spaces of negotiation, permit new insights into the connective possibilities of museological practice. They act as a counterpoint to government-funded, politically-constituted, bricks and mortar national museums, engaged in acts of international negotiation. On these sites citizens of one nationality talk to

another around objects that once united them as a political force, or which belong to a pre-history before an individual's personal recollections, or which join in debate individuals that once occupied oppositional positions.

These online engagements indicate the existence of shared, pan-European memories, that are not situated within any explicitly nationalist, or even European, context. They reveal that users spontaneously adopt museological behaviour which parallels the actions of memory institutions, and particularly museums. They also suggest that the political and geographical divisions, and associated experiences, of east and west, are retained in these acts of remembering a past Europe, long after much of the political and material evidence of that period has evaporated from contemporary life. Finally, these examples reveal the resilience of knowledge produced in democratic networks. National museums possess no such resilience and the objects they possess are easily made to speak other political messages.



# Flickr

Hosting websites allow users to upload digital images and video material and control the distribution of that material. Images can remain private, but they can also be shared with specific groups or users, or made publicly available. They can be made available to search engines and incorporated in external websites such as Facebook. In the context of research into museums, but also in the language of digital media, these images may be considered 'objects' in their own right but also as surrogates for material objects.

Flickr combines image hosting with social networking. In 2010, it held 5 billion images. 3,000 images were then being added every minute. With the development and proliferation of smart phones and other portable devices, interactions with Flickr have moved from the constraints of the desktop to the everyday. The site continues to retain certain features which appear to parallel or mimic museological structures and practices.

Flickr was created and developed by Ludicorp in Vancouver to serve a gaming community. The company was purchased by Yahoo! in March 2005 and its servers are now based in the United States (and are therefore subject to US law). The site makes available a large amount of data permitting researchers to analyse statistically on-going social interactions.



# Museums and Flickr

A number of archives and museums use Flickr's 'The Commons', a formal resource developed to expose the content of public institution photographic archives much more widely. These photographs are now being viewed, commented on, and often re-used in new ways: selected, interpreted and integrated into new user-generated contexts. Simultaneously, user-generated information is enriching the institutional data associated with the images (and objects).

Another approach to using Flickr was adopted when the Staffordshire Hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold and silver was discovered in the English midlands in 2009. A website went online almost immediately, with the images hosted and also publicly accessible on Flickr, where they received half a million views in five days. The National Maritime Museum and Royal Observatory at Greenwich, London, have used Flickr in connection with astronomy, to reach new visitors, to support competitions, to develop 'astrotagging', and to produce user-generated gallery content. Museums have also turned to the user-generated 'folksonomies' of Flickr (which contrast with the formal taxonomies central to the management of museum collections), to make their online collections more 'user friendly' and accessible.



# Flickr groups

Any Flickr user can set up a group, for which they become the Administrator, setting certain basic parameters and appointing moderators to help run it. Administrators and Moderators have the power to remove images from the 'group pool' and delete or close 'discussions' among members. Most groups are formed around themes and users build relationships with each other around Flickr content.

Only about 8% of Flickr users are members of groups, though this still generates sizeable participation levels. These, in November 2011, varied considerably according to theme, though in line with the generality or global appeal of the topic: 'Paris' had 26,000 members; 'Brussels', 2,500; 'Cold War', 556; 'Statues and Sculptures', 17,500. These figures, however, pale when compared to groups dedicated to photography itself: 'Black and White', over 200,000; Canon DSLR User group, over 100,000.

Another measure of the activity of groups can be seen by comparing the total number of images tagged with a particular phrase, such as 'Cold War' (37,572), and the number of images actually submitted to the Cold War group (5,457). This suggests that comparatively few users are deeply engaged with groups.

Through the addition of titles and comments users created interpreted exhibits in which objects are gathered together, labelled and reflected upon, sorted into taxonomies and laid out as galleries, by individuals collaborating without hierarchical institutional structures. Can Flickr provide a medium within which individuals can negotiate into existence a democratic museum? Terras found the best groups were 'accurate, authoritative, objective, current, and gave such coverage of a collection that it became a unique information source.'

One of the constraints, however, is the uncontrolled tagging nomenclature which holds meaning for a particular user and generates freeform 'folksonomy', but which can inhibit the curation of objects more widely. Also it has been suggested that the idiosyncrasies of Flickr functionality which produce technological solutions to storing and finding images – 'remembering' – form a particular kind of 'technological unconscious', shaping the development of human memory. Van Dijk argues against the idea that Flickr is a memory institution, reporting that users 'described their Flickr collections as transitory, ephemeral, "throwaway", a stream, not an archive'.



# Locating the Cold War

The Cold War refers to the period between 1946 to 1991 in which the division between the Soviet Empire, with its occupation of central and eastern European states, and the West fundamentally affected global politics. Military technologies developed in the Cold War standoff survive in a number of European and Russian air and military museums, but in other respects the period is not widely interpreted. In the West, it can be described as a war won, but in occupied countries of the Soviet Bloc the period is marked not by this standoff with the West, or any relationship to the West, but primarily by occupation.

In November 2011 a simple search of Flickr in multiple languages, revealed that 100 groups included the phrase 'Cold War', on the title page of the group, either in the title itself (as in the group, Cold War Kids) or in the description of the group. The idiosyncrasies of user-generated descriptions here revealed themselves as the term appeared in many contexts which were not directly related to the Cold War, while other groups, such as Das geteilte Berlin 1945-1990 (on the divided city) did not show up in the search.

Those concerned with the Cold War period appeared to fall into three categories which, paralleling museological notions, might be termed heritage sites, art and design, and technologies.

What might be thought of as heritage sites, though they were only conceptually so within the Flickr group, included buildings hardened against nuclear attack (bunkers, command posts and civil defence stations), troop accommodation and other 'soft' buildings, particularly in former Soviet Bloc, the Berlin Wall, Berlin and

East Germany, and in some cases industrial sites associated with Soviet rule.

Urbex groups (urban explorations usually in off-limits, remote or inaccessible locations) find imaginative potential in Cold War facilities. The group, Urbex behind the Iron Curtain!, documents urban landscapes, buildings and objects which are rapidly disappearing, though locations tend not to be identified. The desire to create a visual effect, also means these images form a genre around the abandoned buildings of the Cold War.

Art and design objects are supported by the group, Communism Illustrated, which collects communist mosaics, frescoes, graffiti drawings and other illustrations. The focus is on the former East Germany, but there are also contributions from China, North Korea and Cuba.

The Red Menace [VINTAGE] - Fears of Communism & the Cold War group offers a counter narrative of anti-communist propaganda largely from the United States. Other groups are concerned with exploring the style of Cold War spy films. The groups themselves show ephemeral activity, although they possess the potential to evolve and merge. Membership can indicate the existence of private collections: Sperrgebiet (with over 1100 images) has a significant collection of fifty-three Soviet murals. Such individuals and groups preserve images of installations, artworks and objects which are rapidly deteriorating or no longer exist.

Technologies groups include: Cold War Aircraft; Avro Aviation Company; COLD WAR AIRCRAFT; Cold War Jets and Bunkers; TSR2; CF-100 Canuck; and Cold War Air Power.



Clockwise, from top left: A Flickr Heritage site, the Berlin Wall, taken from the west side in the 1970s, © uncle.capung (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); Flickr art and design, a mural from an ex-Soviet barracks in Germany, by Sperrgebiet, © Sperrgebiet 2012, used with permission; Flickr technologies, 'MiG-19' with Polish Air Force markings posted to COLD WAR AIRCRAFT, © czop-er (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); and a typical image of the Urbex behind the Iron Curtain! group, © CmdrCord (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).





Clockwise, from top left:

'Death Tower/Veža smrti' shows part of the uranium mine at Jachymov, where political prisoners worked during Soviet rule, ©amneziak (CC BY 2.0)

The monument, by Croatian Ivan Sabolić, is in a former Second World War death camp and protected by the Republic of Serbia as 'of great importance', © marko\_zivanovic07 (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

S-Bahn station at Köllnische Heide. The Berlin Wall cut the line just beyond the station, © m.joedicke (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0), of Berlin; 'Spomen park Bubanj', in the partizanski spomenici group.





# Cold War groups

The Cold War group is one of the largest addressing this period: 'Remember the Cold War? Rockets, signs and symbols of the dark days'. Of the administrators, one is probably German or Dutch, the other is based in Scotland. The top five contributors are: 'x-ray delta one' in Kent, Ohio (780 images), who has a background in photography and a very high presence in groups featuring Cold War propaganda; 'the new trail of tears' probably UK based (278 images); 'atraskoda' from Gainsborough, England (269 images); 'khoogheem' in Minneapolis (200 images); and 'f0rbe5' in London (177 images). The group seems largely the work of Anglo-Americans, but the first thirty members listed by Flickr included contributors from Belgium, Brazil, China, the Netherlands (2), the Philippines and Sweden.

The IROH CURTAIN group claims to be 'a relatively safe place to post your images of gloom and decay of the dreary side of post-communist societies'. It is in some respects more political in its outlook and darker in tone.

The top five tags are 'russia', 'ukraine', 'soviet', 'hungary' and 'communism'. Of the top five contributors, the most prolific is from Gelnhausen, Germany; one is based in Salt Lake City but blogs in Hungarian; one is based in Bucharest but counts as his/her hometowns Saigon and Toronto; one is a Californian who worked in the Peace Corps in the Ukraine in the 1990s; and one is based in Rebstein, Switzerland. However, the tags used in the group are heavily tilted towards eastern Europe, the first thirty members include Austrian, Brazilian, Dutch, French, German, Estonian, Norwegian, Russian and Serbian contributors. As far as can be ascertained, a significant proportion of the top five contributors (and some other members) reside outside their country of birth. This suggests that incomers and émigrés may play significant and perhaps different roles in respectively illuminat-

ing and remembering.

The Berlin Wall group, with over 1000 members, is 'for images of the Berlin Wall and the era in Berlin and Germany's history that defined it.' The group curates more than 7,000 images including many early documentary pictures, as well as historic images such as protestors sitting astride the Wall in November 1989. With the Wall all but demolished in Berlin, these Flickr images, often displaying contemporary graffiti, form a digital surrogate. This particular collection also includes wider contextual images which blur the group's interests both in time and space. Most of the top five contributors are German and comments sometimes reflect on the shared hardships of the German people at this time. Das geteilte Berlin 1945-1990, a German-language group, is in this respect similar. It is about Berlin and Berliners, and intended primarily for Germans.

The connections constructed in these groups sometimes reflect national or regional memories, rather than pan-European engagements. The following, for example, permit reflection on the Cold War period within narrowly bounded thematic areas: East Berlin and East Germany; Ost-Reste/GDR remains; Orford Ness; Lincolnshire's Cold War; Manchester at War; Berlin the War and the Wall; Prague Spring 1968.

For some groups addressing the 1940s to the 1990s, the Cold War is barely mentioned, the focus being on other aspects: ex-USSR, created by Sevastopol (from Sevastopol, Ukraine) is for 'Photos shot by ex-Soviet Republics photographers ... and visitors'. The tags used and the nationality of some of the members suggests a strong representation from the ex-Soviet Bloc.

In another view, a small group, partizanski spomenici, collects images of Partisan memorials in what was Yugoslavia. Although the memorials are – ostensibly – about events in the Second World War, the group claims that 'these memorials are interesting regarding Yugoslavia's special position between the eastern and the western block. The form of the monuments shifts from socialist-realist to modernist abstraction which reflects the development of the cultural sphere after Yugoslavia's break with the Soviet Union.' In this part of the Balkans, the Cold War is not so easily detached from other histories.



# Flickr – a democratic museum?

While these examples reveal activities that parallel those of local and national museums, the groups are in all senses unstructured and freeform, 'flat', democratic, de-centralised. The functionality of Flickr does not favour narrative, compared, for example, with blogging platforms. Narrative would impose a form of authority on these images which runs counter to the collaborative nature of these groups.

Some have used Flickr's gallery function to exhibit images on a theme, sequencing them and adding comments and descriptions which replace – in this view – the data tied to the objects themselves. The result is merely a vertically scrolling sequence of objects and associated texts. Galleries are also difficult to locate, resulting in a Flickr Galleries group who effectively take on the role of museum managers listing and collating the various displays.

Thus Flickr is designed for, and remains, largely a resource for the individual. This prevents the realisation of the ideal of a post-national/transnational museum. Flickr was never designed to emulate the museum but many users structure their knowledge there in museum-like ways, but given the volatile nature of the Web, the collections there might be further developed in new ways in future.

As in other social media, there remains a tendency to build relations within familiar communities – local contexts and common regional or national understandings of the past. Yet there was also openness: the groups managed to transgress national borders and in none did nationalism itself form a significant component of understanding. Furthermore, incomers often express their own readings and fascinations with the country into which they have migrated, while émigrés appear to use such resources to retain contact with a former part of their lives.



## Eunamus – the project

### European National Museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen

EuNaMus research project explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented by European national museums. The focus in our project is on understanding the conditions for using the past in negotiations that recreate citizenship as well as the layers of territorial belonging beyond the actual nation-state.

This project is one of the few humanistic projects supported by the Seventh Framework Programme, run by the European Commission. It has grown out of collaboration between university partners connecting starting with a network of young and senior cultural researchers supported by the Marie Curie programme, and will for three years (2010–2013) proceed by a series of investigations beyond the stereotypical ideas of museums as either a result of outstanding heroic individuals, exponents of a materialization of pure Enlightenment ideas or outright ideological nationalistic constructs disciplining citizens into obedience.

The research is pursued through multi-disciplinary collaboration between eight leading institutions and a series of sub-projects studying institutional path dependencies, the handling of conflicts, modes of representation, cultural policy and visitors' experiences in national museums. Understanding the cultural force of national museums will provide citizens, professionals and policy makers with reflexive tools to better communicate and create an understanding of diversity and community in developing cultural underpinning for democratic governance.

The major results will be available via Open Access, but a series of books will also come out of the efforts. The best way to keep up is to follow [www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu).

#### **Areas of research:**

Mapping and framing institutions 1750-2010: national museums interacting with nation-making

Uses of the past: narrating the nation and negotiating conflict

The museology of Europe: the language of art, the local nation and the virtual Europe

Museum policies 1990-2010: negotiating political and professional utopia

Museum citizens: audience identities and experiences

National museums, history and a changing Europe

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This report presents key findings of research undertaken by the EuNaMus consortium in its attempts to understand the 'museology of Europe'. This notion is used here to describe activities which are peculiar to museums and which result from the manner in which museums assemble and deploy objects. This research investigated the ways in which capital cities, national art museums, online museum-like spaces, and national, regional and local museums produce opportunities for connecting identities.

The report is produced within the three-year research programme, EuNaMus – European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, coordinated at Tema Q at Linköping University ([www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu)). EuNaMus explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented at European national museums to the world, Europe and its states, as an unsurpassable institution in contemporary society. National museums are defined and explored as processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values and realities. Questions asked in the project are why, by whom, when, with what material, with what result and future possibilities are these museums shaped.

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