

Un-Disciplining the Museum? Changing Practices of Care, Knowledge and Display

The Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG) Conference and AGM will take place at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, 18-19 April 2023.

The MEG meeting will coincide with MAA's special exhibition *COLOUR: Art, Science and Power* (26 July – 23 April), which integrates insights from anthropology, the arts, humanities and sciences and draws on the collections of the eight University of Cambridge Museums.

This conference explores the museum as a bringing together of different academic and professional disciplines, and the tensions and confluences emerging in between. We will think about practices of care and knowledge production, and how these are changing or need to change.

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge is an institution that proclaims its connection to two distinct but related academic disciplines. But emerging before or alongside the academic disciplines of archaeology and anthropology in Britain, this relationship has not always been evident or indeed comfortable. Scholars, practitioners and knowledge-holders from all disciplines and diverse backgrounds contributed to the collections and our institutional understanding of them. Over the course of its history the anthropology museum has been at the heart, on the periphery and cut adrift from its parent disciplines, their networks and their preoccupations. In an era where not only specific disciplines but the structures of academic disciplinarity more broadly are being challenged, what is the position of academic disciplines in the museum now, and vice versa?

What new practices of care and curation are demanded of the contemporary museum ethnographer? How does our work draw on multiple disciplinary traditions and ways of knowing? How does disciplinary inheritance shape, support or inhibit what is possible now and in the future?

Themes to be explored in the conference papers and discussion could include:

- ***Changing and Challenging Documentation:*** how is cataloguing developing in response to external pressures, greater visibility or internal drivers?
- ***Democratising Care; Democratising Knowledge:*** examples of how decisions about collections care or interpretation are being opened up, shared or democratised, from community engagement and coproduction to structures of governance
- ***Confidence and Comfort:*** exploring and critiquing professional confidence in knowing and caring for ethnographic collections. Thinking about comfort and confidence in talking about issues for staff, governing bodies, audiences or communities. Accommodating discomfort, making safe spaces
- ***Practice within and beyond disciplines:*** examples of trans-disciplinary or non-disciplinary approaches and the insights or innovations they can bring
- ***Histories of Change:*** Change and crisis are not new! A space for researchers and practitioners to present on historical research on transforming practice.

We welcome proposals for presentations (up to 20 minutes) and short updates (5 minutes) on current projects. Please send to megconference@maa.cam.ac.uk by Tuesday 31st January 2023 at 5pm.

Conference Bursaries:

MEG aspires to make the group and the Conference accessible to all involved in this field, and to diversify the membership.

Two UK bursaries are aimed at people working (paid or voluntary) or wanting to work in UK museums, without institutional support to attend the Conference, with up to **£250** each for Conference fee, travel, accommodation and food. Applications are especially welcome from those underrepresented in the cultural sector and those on a low income.

If you are interested in applying for a bursary please send a short paragraph on how attendance at the conference would benefit you, to chair@museumethnographersgroup.org.uk