

The Museum is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750-1940.* Andrea Meyer and Benedicte Savoy, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. 280 pp.

Reviewed by Brooke Penaloza Patzak

The Museum is Open was released in hardcover by Walter de Gruyter in January 2014.¹ Edited by Andrea Meyer, art history professor at both the Technische Universität and Bard College in Berlin, and Bénédicte Savoy, Chair of Modern Art History at the Technische Universität, also in Berlin, this is the first volume in the “Contact Zones” series edited by Savoy, Lars Blunck and Avinoam Shalem.² Subtitled *Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750-1940*, and touted as aimed at an academic audience of art historians, museologists, historians, cultural scholars, and historians of science, the volume seems to promise a museological panograph that is sweeping not only in terms of geography and chronology, but also in addressing the variety of museums that burgeoned during those nearly two hundred years.

Suffice to say, such a range would be a tremendous task for a volume twice its size, and what this work lacks in breadth due to a high concentration on art institutions could leave some readers unsatisfied. This limited concentration on art is also somewhat mirrored by the geographic scope of the contributions. While there are notable forays into Russia, North Africa, and the United States, the majority of focus on communications within continental Europe and England. Take heart, however: in and of itself the volume marks a worthwhile step toward integrating transnational approaches into museum studies and—more broadly therewith—nearing an understanding of the transnational development of the arts and sciences in institutional contexts. Meyer and Savoy present the collection as an attempt to flesh out the previous generation of museum literature that identified museums first and foremost with nationalistic agendas,³ and have chosen 17 works that “suggest that European museal reality includes the existence of another, more complex, multi-faceted level—one that is marked by transnational cross-fertilizations” (1).

The first of the five chapters is dedicated to museums and transnational circuits. While Charlotte Schreiter’s essay on the circulation of early 19th century plaster casts offers a detailed trajectory, the analysis could be enriched by a glance forward that included the place of these networks in the inter-museal exchange of scientific plaster casts in the later 19th century. Dorteia Peters’ praiseworthy contribution offers a sweeping analysis of the development of photographic catalogs in museums. Beginning with the 1852–62 campaign to document Raphael’s works strewn across Europe initiated by Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Peters delineates the role of the newly established Photographic Society of London in creating networks that allowed 12 photographers to document hundreds of works in dozens of collections across Europe. In addition to two other case studies that, “laid extremely important groundwork for the newly establishing field of art history, and decisively influenced its methods” (57). Peters also describes the development of the professional relationship between photographers and museums across Europe and the role of the British as a role model in sense.

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Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel's contribution to the second chapter, devoted to cross-border transfers in architecture and display, offers an enticing direction for future studies through its concentration on not a museum, but a journal, as a portable facilitator for transnational exchange. She discusses Guglielmo Pacchioni in the context of his limited acquaintance with international colleagues and, conversely, intense engagement with the French journal *Mousion*.⁴ The author asserts that journal acted as a promoter of, and organ for, an international dialogue on museums that ranged from theory and practice to architecture.

Chapter three, "Close Inspections of the 'Other.' Commissions and Experts on Tour," is easily the volume's strongest overall. Thomas Adam's contribution offers an informative discussion on the development of the membership selection at New York's Metropolitan Museum, which was based on a combination of the New York social club and the German *Kunstverein*. His is furthermore one of the few contributions to take on a truly transatlantic perspective.⁵ Adam chronicles not only the assimilation of German museum practice in the United States but continues on to the systematic analyses of American museums then carried out by German institutions, and then the reverberations of those results on U.S. museological practice. Lieske Tibbe's lively contribution focuses on Marius Vachon's international research trips undertaken in an effort to establish a museum of industrial arts in France in the wake of the industrial revolution. Of especial interest here is her discussion of the Orientalisches Museum of Vienna, which was affiliated with a trade agency, and displayed objects of Austro-Hungarian manufacture as well as from Turkey, Persia, India, Japan and China along with their prices, methods of production, and routes of sales, packaging, and payment. Roland Cvetkovski, meanwhile, takes on the belated advent of, and challenges to, Russian museology in the wake of the October Revolution using artist and intellectual Igor Emmanuilovich Grabar as a case study. Cvetkovski traces Grabar's international travels, education and influences, and discusses his role in making Russia a leader in restoration, as well the international spread of Grabar's reputation as a result of his work and publications on the subject.

Chapter four, which deals with museum reform, includes Andrea Meyer's noteworthy analysis of the German journal *Museumskunde*. Her wide-ranging piece works from a systematic analysis of the journal's publication to establish its position in transnational communications, nods toward the challenge facing internationalism during war, and investigates the potential of international alliances to further editorial interests. Xavier-Pol Tilliette's contribution is also distinguished by a transnational perspective that lends richness and broader relevancy to the 1908 re-working of New York's Metropolitan Museum as assisted by Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner (previously of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin) as well as Valentiner's role in relaying information about his work back to his mentor in Germany.

With a concentration on museums and national identity, the final section presents the widest geographic scope in the volume. Contributions here discuss international collaborations that led to, among others, the 1882 establishment of the National Museum of Fine Arts and Archeology in Lisbon, the 1869 establishment of the Imperial Museum in Istanbul, and the 1913 establishment of the Musée Léon Dierx in La Réunion. Emília Ferreira's piece on the Lisbon museum offers an especially engaging and detailed account of the international agreements and activities undertaken to realize Portugal's first national museum, while Bärbel Küster's is an interesting inclusion by virtue of her perspective on transnationality in museums—namely that museums in and of themselves are not necessarily transnational. Like the strongest of the contributions in the volume, this piece reminds us that in as much as

museums do present as transnational, this in fact the result of laborious work undertaken by the very human agents operating within those institutions.

Notes

1. Contributions to this volume were gathered from papers given at the Transnationale Museumsgeschichte 1750–1940 conference held at the Technischen Universität, Berlin, in 2012.
2. The full name of the series, “Contact Zones: Studies in Global Art,” clarifies the concentration on the arts but does not appear in the publication at hand. The second title in the series, *Echoes of Exile: Moscow Archives and the Arts in Paris 1933-1945*, was released in December 2014 (Berlin: De Gruyter).
3. The literature within which the editors situate the volume is again more oriented toward art than the humanities, with a focus, for example, on the work of Dominique Poulot, Andrew McClellan, Gwendolyn Wright, and James Sheehan.
4. In this sense it is relevant to note that Pacchioni’s work was met with little support from his own government in Italy. *Mousion* was established by the Office International des Musées in 1927.
5. The author notes his contribution is essentially a summary the first chapter of his *Buying Respectability. Philanthropy and Transnational Perspective, 18402 to 1930s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

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