

***Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations.* Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, with Gustavo Buntinx, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Ciraj Rassool, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 632 pp.<sup>1</sup>**

Reviewed by Shelley Ruth Butler

*Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* is an ambitious collection of essays addressing the relationship between museums and globalization. The idea of museums is broadly conceived to include a variety of display settings ranging from a mischievous microbus in Peru and a kitsch bathroom in Mexico City to the corporate Guggenheim in Bilbao. *Museum Frictions* does not replicate the logic of a universal museum and attempt to survey the world; rather, the method here is one of case studies, many of which are excellent in their use of vivid detail.

Increased mobility of people, objects, knowledge, and capital, new technologies of communication, and transnational forms of governance are aspects of globalization that are germane to museum developments. Increased mobility of people translates into a rise in cultural tourism, which is a central subject in *Museum Frictions*. Mobility is also linked to the creation of new publics for museums, such as diasporic communities who make return journeys to Ghana to visit sites associated with slavery (Kraemer), and community museums in Mexico that use cultural display as a way of affirming their identity and solidarity with migrants in the United States (Camarena and Morales).

*Museum Frictions* is the product of a transnational network of scholars, artists, and museum professionals who met in New York, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, and Bellagio over a period of six years, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. *Museum Frictions* follows two seminal volumes supported by the same foundation, *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991) and *Museums and Communities* (1992). Ivan Karp has an editorial presence in each of these books, and there is much continuity between them. Each book deals with intersections of cultural representation, identity, and power. While *Museum Frictions* focuses on globalization, it recognizes that museums are implicated in historical legacies, such as that of colonialism (itself an expression of globalization). Resisting an urge to overestimate the newness of globalization to the museum world, Tony Bennett notes that many display sites today are less globally ambitious than their nineteenth-century counterparts. Museums are also less monolithic than in the past; their public spheres are pluralized, as are their modes of address. The “exhibitionary complex”—which Bennett used to analyze the historical development of European museums as part of a self-regulating civic public sphere—is being refashioned.

Frictions, contradictions, and tensions are a guiding metaphor for exploring this process. A number of essays show how globalization is an uneven process that results in new inequalities. For instance, residents of Bilbao rarely visit the (their?) Guggenheim and work in low paying service sector jobs (Fraser). In post-apartheid Cape Town, residents of the peripheral township of Lwandle experience frustration over the development of a local Migrant Labour Museum in light

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of their immediate need for housing (Witz). And in Cambodia, a stale National Museum is resolutely non-global, showing no evidence of engagement with critical and reflexive museology of the 1990s. Most residents of Phnom Penh have limited mobility and access to new media, and the packaged meat aisle in the Lucky Market may create more of a sense of wonder than the National Museums (Muan). These are stories of people and institutions that are displaced or left out of triumphalist accounts of globalization.

Globalization creates paradoxes and ironies in relation to display worlds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's fine essay on global heritage as a mode of cultural production offers a theoretical vocabulary for addressing such paradoxes. She analyses the process by which UNESCO chooses, codifies, and preserves tangible, intangible, and natural heritage in an effort to create a global cultural commons. Emphasizing the metacultural and arbitrary nature of such authoritative and universalizing operations, she argues that the discourse of heritage is diplomatic and celebratory, and that it prioritizes the rights of consumers to be able to access global heritage over the needs of those whose habitus is transformed into heritage. David Bunn's historical account of border control in Kruger National Park works with this insight, showing how colonial and apartheid era border control hid impoverished rural black communities from tourist routes, or incorporated them as model villages for tourist consumption. Bunn evokes a sense of "hollowed-out, ahistorical, and spatialized ghostliness" that is experienced by descendents who have lost a meaningful connection with their land. No reversal of this situation is in sight as Kruger Park prepares to become incorporated into a transnational ecological zone.

A subtle aspect of *Museum Frictions* is the tracing of impacts of museological conventions on related social domains such as heritage sites and media productions. Television documentaries about slavery have made use of museum artifacts and archives to confer authenticity and gravity (Ruffins). African art in the lobby of Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge offers a sign of authenticity and distinction to elite visitors (Hall). And in Cape Town, commercial enterprises such as restaurants, shops, and casinos poach upon visual material (real and virtual) owned or created by the District Six Museum, which commemorates forced removals under apartheid (Rassool). Such examples show museums and collections to be actors in the social world, rather than simply being affected by globalization.

Two essays on the commemoration of slavery in the United States and Ghana are important since their subject is inherently transnational and relational. Fath Davis Ruffins examines a shift in the last twenty-five years in American museums, from a virtual silence about slavery to exhibitions about post-slavery achievements and civil rights to the recent emergence of an international perspective on slavery including the Middle Passage. Finally, her essay addresses U.S. cultural politics, as Ruffins identifies competing paradigms—one stressing interracial reconciliation and the other Afrocentrism and reparation—that inform popular and academic discussions of slavery. Christine Mullen Kreamer, in her work on the Cape Coast Castle Museum in Ghana, discovers contests over meaning that pit local Ghanaian hosts against African-American roots tourists.

*Museum Frictions* offers a sense of ongoing negotiations in the world of exhibitions. Disjunctures between museums as leisure zones and possibilities for critical reflexive museology (and tourism) are often surreal. "We are in a time of transition," writes Hall (p. 98). What is striking is the extent to which minorities, especially in postcolonial societies and post-apartheid

South Africa, are able to use museums as vehicles for self-representation, cultural production, activism, and to create exchange and alliance relationships with outsiders. In commenting on this, Fred Myers notes that he is at “risk of sounding like an optimist” (p. 504). Cultural critics and practitioners involved in critical museology may find optimism unfamiliar, but this book makes the case that the museum world is enabling constructive debates and visual conversations across cultures, in ways that challenge dominant and inherited power relations.

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