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# AAA/CASCA ANNUAL MEETING

NOVEMBER 20–24, 2019 IN VANCOUVER, BC

**Abstract Title:** The Post-Anthropological: Convergences Across Museums, Art, and Colonialism

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## ABSTRACT PREVIEW

Abstract ID: 663970

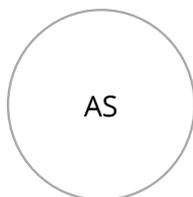
[Edit The Post-Anthropological: Convergences Across Museums, Art, and Colonialism](#)

Submission Period: Council for Museum Anthropology

Submission/Session Type: Oral Presentation Session

Abstract Status: Active

## Participant(s)



### Anthony A. Shelton

**Position:**

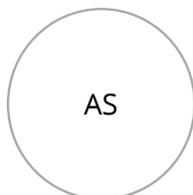
Director

**Organization:**

Museum of Anthropology

**Role:**

Paper Discussant



### Arnd Schneider

**Position:**

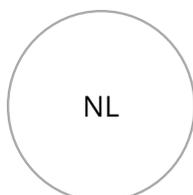
Professor of Social Anthropology

**Organization:**

University of Oslo

**Role:**

Paper Presenter



### Nicola Levell

**Position:**

Assistant Professor

**Organization:**

University of British Columbia



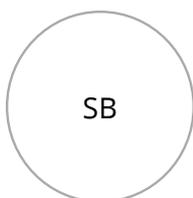
## Christopher Green

**Position:**  
PhD Candidate

**Organization:**  
University of Pennsylvania

**Role:**

Paper Presenter



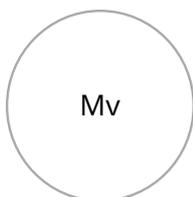
## Sowparnika Balaswaminathan

**Position:**  
PhD Candidate

**Organization:**  
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**Role:**

Paper Presenter



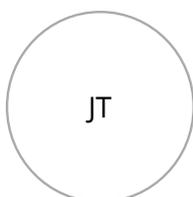
## Margareta von Oswald

**Position:**  
Research Fellow

**Organization:**  
Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage

**Role:**

Organizer;Chair;Paper Presenter



## Jonas L. Tinius

**Position:**  
Research Fellow

**Organization:**  
Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH)

**Role:**

Organizer;Chair;Paper Presenter

### Keywords

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1. Art and Material Culture
2. Colonialism and Post Colonialism

## Session Abstract

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### Abstract

In recent years and especially across European postcolonial contexts, the renaming, reform, and even reconstruction of anthropological museums is embedded within and reinforced by a fierce broader debate about the legitimacy, location, and expertise of anthropology itself. This 'climate' is marked by multivocal struggles including challenges to the institutions of anthropology from within, as well as by different communities and (indigenous) activists. Fundamentally, therefore, particularly regarding issues of restitution and ownership, this debate is not just about institutional change, but about transnational and transcultural reparation, repair, and justice. These climates of change have, however, also facilitated new kinds of collaborations and translations, such as between museums and artists, activists and scholars, that have, we observe, taken the debate about the legitimacy of anthropology beyond itself. In this panel, we interrogate the meaning and consequences of this, as we call it, 'post-anthropological' dynamic.

Inflected by our own research of these developments in anthropological museums, and their convergences with contemporary art and debates on colonialism in Europe, we have observed that three areas of debate – current transformations of anthropological museums, contemporary art, and postcolonial critique – have arguably become the most productive and vibrant 'post-anthropological' fields. We take the tension implied in the 'post' not to represent a crisis of identity for anthropology, but a productive moment that may open up new ways of negotiating anthropological representation beyond itself. This debate is thus not just one within anthropology, but also and perhaps more significantly, about the elsewhere and otherwise of anthropology.

The discussion on the post-anthropological is situated in current debates in museum studies, anthropology, and curatorial studies as well as linking discussions on colonial legacies with those on contemporary art. This panel responds to and challenges the notion of the 'post-anthropological' and the fields and debates associated with it: current transformations of anthropological museums, contemporary art, and post-colonial critique. It does so in particular by exploring case studies, both contemporary and historic, that extend this debate beyond European institutions and fields. In particular - and by way of a discussion led by Anthony Shelton (director of the Museum of Anthropology at UBC), we link these debates on the post-anthropological grappling with the legacies of the European colonial project with the changing climates in Canadian, Indian, and South Pacific contexts. These contributions also reflect on the ongoing struggles, and the limits as well as possibilities, afforded by calls for the decolonisation of anthropology and its related institutions.

## Themes

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### Primary Theme

Decolonization | Décolonisation

### Secondary Theme

Visual | Visuel

## Additional Review Section(s)

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### Second Review Section

Society for the Anthropology of Europe

### Third Review Section

## Session Logistics

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### Estimated Attendance

50

This poster would be of particular interest to

(P = Practicing and Applied Anthropologists; S = Students):

P

S

Please select YES if you are requesting a Media Intensive Room

No

## Individual Paper Abstracts

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### [Art/Anthropology Interventions in Post-Colonial Rome](#)

#### Individual Abstract

This paper discusses a recent “art/anthropology intervention” (Schneider 2016) where Arnd Schneider, together with artist Leone Contini, investigated collections of the former Italian Institute of Africa and the Orient / African Colonial Museum (as part of TRACES [www.tracesproject.eu](http://www.tracesproject.eu) /EU Horizon 2020). These collections are now in storage in the National Museum of Ethnography L. Pigorini (Museo delle Civiltà), and other institutions in Rome – still inaccessible to the public, and equivalent to a ‘Scattered Colonial Body’. Ongoing fieldwork also includes work with former settlers of Libya (a former Italian colony), and the critical artistic representation of family memories and practices (e.g. food) against a more general background of amnesia around this period in Italian society. A central focus of the research (and featured in an exhibition in 2017) were the facial plaster masks, executed during expeditions by Italian anthropologists to Libya, in the 1920s and 1930s, often with an agenda of scientific racism. In a series of performances, and installation devices these masks are critically examined, constructed and reconstructed in the exhibition, and like other elements of research and exhibition open up the discussion of this kind of contested, indeed neglected heritage and museum institutions in today’s post-colonial context in Italy and beyond.

### [The Song of an Anthropology Museum: Post-colonial Aspirations, Multiversity and Contemporary Art](#)

#### Individual Abstract

When the UBC Museum of Anthropology reopened in 2010, following a \$56 million Partnership of Peoples project, over 10,000 objects were concentrated in the Multiversity Galleries. Articulated as a new hybrid space, the underlying philosophy of multiversity is grounded in postcolonial theory inspired by Paulo Wangoola and Claude Alvares. Their ideal intertwines with the discourses of democratizing, collaborating, decolonizing or indigenizing the anthropology museum, which have gathered momentum over the past three decades. Multiversity embraces the notion of other worldviews—multiple ontologies, epistemologies, languages and terminologies—it champions diverse ways of knowing or ‘decolonizing the mind’ to use the powerful phrase of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.

Yet, visiting the Multiversity Galleries still entails disciplining the body, privileging the eye: standing in front of vitrines, looking at the objects and reading the texts within. Sensory engagement remains rooted in a Western epistemic mode of museological purification. This bias is illuminated in the 2019 installation of the new acquisition, *This Song is a Museum* (2011) by the artist Peter Morin, a member of the Tahltan First Nation. His artwork consists of five elk-skin drums, whose paint-splattered surfaces speak to the performance that gave them meaning. Their silence resounds loudly in the Multiversity Galleries, where the displays are devoid of audible voices and singing. Although Morin’s artwork is assimilated into the aesthetics of display, it actively resists and critiques the museum’s history of silencing. This paper explores how contemporary artworks can create an interference, a noise that provokes critical reflection that unsettles aesthetic and sensory hierarchies.

In 1998, a new museum in New Caledonia opened as a partial fulfillment of the terms of a 1988 peace agreement between the local Indigenous peoples, Kanaks, and the French colonial government. This new museum, the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, was created in addition to a well-established ethnographic museum that centered on traditional Kanak culture; however, the Centre rejected any citations of the past in favor of contemporary art installations. Thus, the Centre has become a haven for contemporary Kanak and Indigenous artists from throughout the Pacific. This research investigates the reasons why the Centre was necessary, rather than an adaptation of or investment in the local ethnographic museum. It addresses the question: how does the anthropological museum confine cultural identity such that political violence is leveraged to break these confines? Using ethnographic data collected in 2018 and 2019, this paper seeks to use Indigenous recognition of the identity constructing—and constraining—authority of the museum-form as social theory that can inform decolonizing approaches to institutional practices. Moreover, this recognition is an explicit meta-commentary regarding the limits of anthropological representation, especially as popularly imagined. This provides anthropologists and museum researchers opportunities to consider how their engagements might “matter” to the political realities of those communities they represent.

### [The Postcolonial Nation and the Museum: Two Cases of Museum Disruption in India](#)

#### Individual Abstract

Scholars have theorized museums, art and anthropological, as ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1971; Bennett 1995) and technologies of subject-formation (Foucault 1986, 1995). Presently, US and European museums are striving to decolonize their collections and narratives by negotiating with source communities. Museums in postcolonial nations are different. As bulwarks of recently awoken nationalisms, governmental museums in nations like India cannot allow themselves to be disrupted by source communities or have their discourses challenged. This paper examines two cases where the National Museum in New Delhi, India was challenged on its hegemonic status as the keeper of South Asia’s cultural past and a political apparatus of the ruling Indian government. Taking the case of a contemporary art installation that was denied a place in the museum because of its anthropological critique of religion and society, and that of a museum object that was denied an opportunity to perform as a religious “use” object, I examine how the anthropological, understood as the everyday entanglement with the human condition, is itself disallowed in the postcolonial governmental museum. In this paper, I contend with post-colonial critique as the post-anthropological, querying where the Indian museum can go when neither contemporary art nor anthropology is allowed to intervene. I am especially interested in the temporality in which the government museum operates and I ask what and whose work such museums perform. Finally, I posit the provocation that museums in postcolonial nations, by being stable, static, and “invisible”, and performing as governmental apparatuses, operate as infrastructures (Larkin 2013).

### [Fissured repairs. Remaining within the ‘cultures of the ethnological’ at the Humboldt Forum Berlin.](#)

#### Individual Abstract

One reaction to the anthropological museum’s contested legacies of exhibiting cultures has been to develop counter-narratives to the museum’s historically-grown, stereotypical representations. The exhibition plans for the permanent exhibition of the Humboldt Forum on ‘Africa’ will here serve as a case study to discuss what I frame as attempts to ‘repair’ former modes of misrepresentation. Among these, I focus on three practices of reframing: (i) engaging a *countercanon* to figurative collections by focusing on East Africa; (ii) reacting to ahistorical and homogenizing narratives about societies with a *deep, globalized, and entangled history* of the Indian Ocean aiming at ‘provincializing Europe’; and (iii) opposing ‘eurocentrism’ by developing an immersive, ‘synaesthetic’ exhibition experience drawing on *Southern perspectives* beyond optocentrism. Drawing on these plans, I show how certain, persistent modalities, or as I call it, ‘cultures of the ethnological’ challenge these curatorial ambitions. Mobilizing the notion of ‘culture’ to emphasize the routine character of exhibition making in such contexts, I develop an analytical typology highlighting authoritative, research-based, and collection-centred types of working cultures. These exhibition-making climates, as I will discuss, render innovative exhibition work difficult – indeed to the point of risking that such attempts at repair instead repeat or create new kinds of fissure, split,

## Art, Otherness, and the Curatorial. Fieldnotes on the negotiation of anthropology beyond itself

### Individual Abstract

This paper describes and reflects on the collaborative involvement of anthropological research and theories of alterity in the context of a contemporary art exhibition space. More specifically, it draws on fieldwork conducted on the restructuring of the public district gallery of Berlin's northern migrant district Wedding. In 2015, the gallery shifted its focus and theoretical framing from a community-based local gallery with district-based artists to showing international contemporary artists. The change of curatorial climate went hand in hand with the creation of a two-year overarching exhibition framework called 'post-otherness wedding' conceived in collaboration by the new curatorial team with a Humboldt-University based anthropologist. The concept set the tone for a visual engagement with theories and practices addressing articulations of alterity and otherness originating from anthropology, but it also coincided with my own research on and in the gallery. Echoing the format of edited field notes that I contributed to the gallery catalogue on the post-Otherness programming, this paper offers a double view on the negotiation of art, anthropology, and otherness in the framework of the "post-anthropological".