



On the Properties of Things: Collective Knowledge and the Objects of the Museum

PROGRAM

Thursday October 25

Arts and Letters Club – 14 Elm Street

8:30 – 9:00: Registration

9:00 – 10:30: Plenary Speakers – Great Hall

- Ruth Phillips (Carleton University), Making Fun of the Museum: Curiosity, Heterogeneity and Multidisciplinarity in the Twenty-First Century
- Paul Smith (Oxford University Museum of Natural History), Visions of Nature: Art meets Science

10:30 – 10:45: Coffee

10:45 – 12:15: Problematizing Properties – Great Hall

Chair, Sophie Thomas (Ryerson University)

- Silke Ackermann (Oxford University Museum of the History of Science), Science in the Service of Religion?
- Robbie Richardson (University of Kent), The Antiquarian's Indian: Indigenous Material Culture and the Discovery of the British Past
- Audrey Rochette (University of Toronto), Indigenous Voices, Language, and Ceremony in Museums
- Ailsa Barry (Canadian Museum of Nature), Designing the Canada Goose Arctic Gallery

12:15 – 13:15: Lunch

13:15 – 14:30: Openings (Parallel Sessions)

15-minute presentations followed by discussion.

Many-sided Objects – Studio

Chair, Janine Rogers (Mount Allison University)

- David Pantalony (Ingenium: Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation), Many Worlds in One Artifact
- Chiara Salvador (University of Oxford / British Museum), One Object, Many Stories: Exploring the Life of an Egyptian Statue
- Felix Sattler (Humboldt University, Berlin), Theatre of Knowledge and Object Lab: Five Years of Research in Display

Programming and Publics – Great Hall

Chair, Naomi Hamer (Ryerson University)

- Samuel Gessner (Dresden Museum), The Most Complex and Beautiful Machine of the Renaissance; Enhancing Public Engagement with Baldewein's Clock
- John Holmes (University of Birmingham) and Ellena Grillo (Oxford University Museum of Natural History), The 'Visions of Nature' Year at the OUMNH
- Jennifer Wallner (University of Ottawa), Students in the Museum: Politics, History, Art

14:30 – 14:45: Coffee Break

14:45 – 16:15: Histories / Stories (Parallel Sessions)

15-minute presentations followed by discussion

Collection Histories – Great Hall

Chair, Alison Matthews David (Ryerson University)

- Myriam Couturier (Ryerson University), Bringing Fashion Home: The Collection and Communication of Dress in Twentieth-Century Toronto
- Erich Weidenhammer (University of Toronto), University of Toronto Scientific Instruments Collection Project (UTSIC)
- Jordan Kistler (Keele University), Imaginative Reconstruction in the Museum
- Ingrid Mida (Ryerson University), Unpacking the Library: A Brief History of the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection

Literary Objects / Objectives – Studio

Chair, Sophie Thomas (Ryerson University)

- Alix Main (Mount Allison University), Literary Resources for Climate Change Education at Joggins Fossil Cliffs
- Emma Peacocke (Queen's University), Romantic Literature, the Medical Humanities, and Paranoia in the Museum
- Naomi Hamer, (Ryerson University), Don't let the Pigeon Curate this Exhibit!: Interactive Exhibits, the Children's Story Museum, and the Picture Book.

16:15 – 16:30: Coffee Break

16:30 – 17:45: Workshops

1. Object Interrogations: Stories of Velvet Telescopes, Sow Bladders, and Paper Sectors

Led by Michael Korey (Dresden State Art Collections) - **Studio**

This workshop offers a few case studies as a starting point for a wide-ranging discussion about the ‘messiness’ of artifacts, focussing on strategies for engaging museum visitors with objects that are hard to get one’s hands around (literally or conceptually), don’t meet expectations as to how they should ‘behave,’ or may be bordering on a state of ruin, as well as of displays that are inevitably a little ragged around the edges. Participants are encouraged to come armed with an example (an image or illustration) of a ‘messy’ artifact or display that could be readily shared.

2. Hanging Dinosaurs: Mesozoic Life as Museum Art

Led by Will Tattersdill (University of Birmingham) – **Great Hall**

Drawing on the experience of organizing a small exhibition on the history of dinosaur art at Birmingham’s Lapworth Museum of Geology, this workshop invites participants to reconstruct extinct animals, to examine earlier, professional attempts to do so, and to think together about the processes through which dinosaurs have come to be imagined as one of the star attractions of natural history museums. A few organized activities derived from exhibition items will give way to a general discussion about the role art plays in museum presentations of dinosaurs, as well as about the curatorial implications of inviting people to think about art-historical questions in a natural-historical space.

17:45: RECEPTION (with Cash Bar)

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Friday October 26

CDH/Ryerson Library and Archives, LIB405 (4th floor) – 350 Victoria Street

Coffee and Pastries from 8:30

9:00 – 9:45: Cultural Literacy and Museums (Presentation and Information Session)

Funded by a federal Partnerships Engage Grant, Mount Allison University and the non-profit ABC Life Literacy Canada have come together to explore low-literacy learners’ museum experience. This project aims to define “Cultural Literacy” within museum, scholarly, and non-profit communities, to gain an understanding of the museum experience of barriered Canadians, and develop a pilot curriculum to support their engagement. ABC and MTA researchers will outline the project in this information session and explain how it intends to initiate larger conversations on engaging barriered communities in para-public institutions such as museums.

10:00 – 11:15: Intersections and Interventions

15-minute presentations followed by discussion
Chair, Rebecca Dolgoy (Carleton University)

- Paolo Del Vesco (Turin Museum of Egyptian Antiquities), “Statues also die” in Museums
- Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel (Natural History Museum, Vienna), The Art Historian in the Attic: Humanities Research in the Natural History Museum
- Anita Hermannstädter (Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin), The Museum as Research Field

11:30 – 12:30: Digital Model(s) for Collective Knowledge

Chair, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Ryerson University; Co-Director, Centre for Digital Humanities)

At this session, we plan to present the digital platform we have begun to model as one of the outcomes of the event. It is very much a work in progress! The brief for our project, a model online exhibit, is that it will be structured around objects and texts selected by event participants, with a view to engaging with the “properties” and “poetics” of objects in museums as the loci where various forms of meaning—arising from different disciplinary and cultural affiliations, such as scientific, artistic, religious, Eastern, Western, Indigenous—intersect. The design of the exhibit is intended to layer and intertwine those knowledge categories in creative and scholarly ways appealing to specialist and public audiences alike. We will be seeking to solicit ideas, and to hold an open discussion around shared principles and practices, past experience, and possible future contributions.

12:30 – 13:15: Lunch

Coach leaves the Ryerson Campus at 13:30 – Mutual Street south of Gerrard Street

14:00 – 18:00: Tour and Afternoon Workshops: The Aga Khan Museum

The afternoon workshops at the Aga Khan Museum invite participants to explore the shifting and multiple properties of things, and to collaboratively discuss issues and challenges in museumship and material culture studies.

While the workshops will involve close engagements with Aga Khan Museum objects and temporary exhibitions, participants are encouraged to make connections that derive from their own institutional and disciplinary contexts. The central question for each workshop will be: how do we access, recover, and communicate the various meanings of an object, in the broader context of democratizing the narratives of things?

With this in mind, each participant will have the opportunity to choose one of the following four themes to explore, in conversation with the Museum’s experts and collections:

- From Private Collection to Museum Display - Shifting Object Identities
- Beyond Materiality: Recovering the Intangible Dimensions of an Object
- Artefacts as Markers of Human Identities and Ideologies
- Tradition and Transformation