

Session Art Collections in Jeopardy: Looted art, Safeguarding, and Restitution

The archaeological archives and research of missing artifacts from Angkor and the provincial museums

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From the 1960s to the end of the 1990s, Cambodia faced several conflicts culminating with the violence of the Khmer rouge regime. During the civil war in the end of the 1960s, collections at risk from several provincial museums and from the archaeological storage of Angkor Conservation on were evacuated to the capital city, as well as the archives related to it.

Looting came to a climax throughout the years of turmoil following the Khmer rouge regime. Since the 1990, the EFEO, the Ministry of Culture of Cambodia and UNESCO led several works to recollect these archives to find out what was missing.

Picture This: Image-Making Iconoclasm and the Islamic State

Terne Thorsen, PhD fellow in Modern Culture, Institute of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen.

The paper explores, what it means to destroy images today. By studying the destruction of cultural heritage by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria from 2014 and 2016 and the images they have produced depicting their actions, Thorsen have examined the iconoclastic practices of the Islamic State and placed them within the history of iconoclasm.

The paper proposes that contemporary iconoclasm is more focused on the images it creates through destruction rather than the images it destroys. It further suggests that iconoclasm should be seen as a process of sign transformation and a struggle over symbolic meaning rather than simply the breaking of objects.

The Islamic State's attacks on and transformations of objects and sites proclaimed as cultural heritage by shifting powers of imperialism, colonialism, nationalism, and globalism, should then be viewed as a contestation of the differing meanings and purposes that over time have been projected onto such objects and sites. In this way, the study contends that

the very elevation of an object to the status of “cultural heritage” can indeed make it a target of iconoclasm.

Museums and the securitization of cultural heritage

Marie Elisabeth Berg Christensen, PhD in Critical Heritage Studies, University of Copenhagen & Secretary in the Danish Committee of the Blue Shield.

Over the last two decades cultural heritage has become a growing issue in human security, and the protection of it a transnational cross-sectoral topic. Cultural heritage is now recognised as part of military strategy and hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors in order to spread propaganda, to manipulate, escalate conflicts, gain international attention, and erase unity or national identity.

A clear expression of this development is in the increasing shift from protecting cultural heritage for its own sake to viewing its protection as connected to broader agendas of peace and security. This has established a politically platform with agreement on the need for protection of cultural heritage during conflict, yet institutionalized strategies for who is going to implement this protection lag behind.

This novel development and have a major impact on the museum sector - when cultural heritage is securitised, it expands the museum sector's place and role in society causing museum actors to act outside their traditional institutional field of work.

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