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Introduction

It is a pleasure to follow on from an editorial that was written by an art market connoisseur and is bolstered by optimism. More than twenty years passed between my work as a conservator at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin and the idea for this special issue of the *Journal for Art Market Studies*. In addition to conservation and restoration activities, the preparation of objects for visitors was one of my official tasks at that time. It proved to be a stroke of luck to be able to work for the North and South American collections. As these relations grew over time, they fostered continuous cooperation with indigenous groups.[1]

I was deeply impressed by the forward-looking view of the then curator for North America. As early as 1998, he concluded that, analogous to the restitutions to the First Nations in the US and in Canada through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), there would also come a time in Europe for ethnological museums when restitution demands would be made by societies of origin. The potential negative effects were also explained to me. It was not uncommon for such restituted objects to be repeatedly offered by indigenous people on the North American art market at relatively high prices. Such treatment of the cultural property thus recovered horrified me from a moral perspective at the time.[2]

In the course of many years of service, I repeatedly asked myself why, for example, so many arrows, baskets and hammocks were stored in the cupboards in the collection in my care. During my term of duty, nobody looked at the latter group of objects for scien-

1 Diana Gabler and Helene Tello, The knowledge of others. About the cooperation with indigenous people in conservation and restoration, in: *Beiträge zur Erhaltung von Kunst- und Kulturgut*, 2/2019, 104–115.

2 The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a federal law in the United States that serves to protect cultural property. Date of first publication: 16 November 1990.

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tific or other reasons. So why are all these inanimate things stored there and why aren't they being put to better use when there is often a lack of a fundamental facility such as adequate storage conditions? Why are objects not sold if they could serve a purpose for indigenous people by giving them means to bring their culture or parts of it back to life? This, too, would be a form of restitution. These questions ultimately replaced my horror and prompted my curiosity around this issue.

As a consequence, today I enquire about the historically, culturally, politically and economically aspects that have led to museum objects being assembled and have repeatedly given rise to collecting in general. What reasons were and are there to put collection items from museums on the market? And who were the collectors or the sellers?

Manuela Fischer, curator and head of the Archaeological Collections of South America at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, demonstrates that at the end of the nineteenth century, academic and commercial interests were fairly fluid in the process of the collection of objects and data from South America. For example, the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory (BGAEU) maintained worldwide relations with scholars who in turn involved local commercially oriented entrepreneurs in collecting. As natural history dealers, employees of these entrepreneurs traveled at the end of the nineneenth century to regions that were hardly known to anthropologists and brought not only art and cultural assets to a local, indigenous population, but also new academic findings. This "different perspective" influenced the selection of objects and also shaped the relationship with the communities involved.

How did this "white" collection policy develop in the further course of history, in which the exchange and separation of objects within ethnological museums also became part of standard collection policy? The ethnologist Beatrix Hoffmann-Ihde explores this question in her contribution and examines the history of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin between 1873 and 1973 under the aforementioned aspects. During this period of time, museum experts exchanged or deaccessioned museum objects as duplicates that were supposedly dispensable. Hoffmann-Ihde describes this as a detrimental loss of valuable objects, caused by the museum's economic and spatial restrictions. But private preferences of individuals as well as ignorance about the importance of such discarded collection items could also lead to sales.

What about the trade in works of art from cultural and art museums? The drastic political changes in Germany in the 1930s during the Nazi era caused changes in collecting policy that led to an ivory miniature, still known as the *Nuremberg Ivory*, being caught up in the maelstrom of political events. The buyers, an American couple, seized an unexpected opportunity and thus found a "bargain" on the art market. Was that immoral? In his article, Iñigo Salto Santamaría goes in search of clues. Equally politically motivated was the close cooperation of the art dealer Julius Böhler with the then director of the Bavarian State Painting Collection Ernst Buchner. Between 1933 and 1945, numerous museum works of art changed hands, including those with a provenance reaching back to the Royal Bavarian Collections. Today, they are owned by renowned international

public collections outside Germany. Birgit Jooss explores the path of two paintings by Jan Breughel the Elder and Frans van Mieris the Elder. During the National Socialist period, the exchange and sale of paintings was often the only way for museums to supplement and to expand their own collections in line with ideological requirements. No foreign currency was available, which meant that sales could be to the advantage of foreign buyers, when seen from today's perspective.

The same restrictions, under entirely opposite political auspices, were experienced by museum experts at the Nationalgalerie in former East Berlin during the Cold War period. The former director of the Central Archive of the Staatliche Museen Berlin, Jörn Grabowski, explores the tortuous story of the acquisition of the painting *Samson Blinded* by Lovis Corinth in his contribution. The change in status of the painting from a loan to the property of the Nationalgalerie in former East Berlin was not only spectacular, but also reads like a thriller from the museum archive. The entire transfer took a total of twenty-nine years.

What happens when the purchase and sale of objects is already inscribed as a requirement for curators in the statutes of a specially established museum foundation? This was the case for the collector Arthur Gilbert and *The Gilbert Trust for the Arts*. Alice Minter explains what this means for the Victoria & Albert Museum and its curators. This is certainly a unique case within European art museums. And what does "Structural Change in Art Museums" mean in the end? Christopher Bedford from the Baltimore Museum of Art and Thomas Köhler from the Berlinische Galerie discussed this recently, in a panel moderated by Dorothea Schöne from the Kunsthaus Dahlem. Their views could not have been more contrary: Bedford pleads for a "foundation of the future" and dispenses with the dogma that art museums must exhibit and keep their pictorial works for eternity. Köhler, on the other hand, considers it absurd to sell works of art from a museum in order to keep it alive.

It was highly important to me to record very different contributions from the point of view of the trade in works of art in this issue. I look forward with great excitement to further discussion in a time of change both inside and outside our museums with their art and cultural assets.

Helene Tello completed her PhD thesis on the use of pesticides in museum conservation in 2020. She holds a diploma in conservation and has worked as a professional conservator for decades. She currently teaches at Technical University Berlin.