

CFP: Decolonizing Museums, Collections and Archives in Postcolonial and Indigenous Literatures in English

For a special issue of *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*

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Considered now to be colonial institutions since their creation, museums have always followed European colonial aspirations and exhibited Indigenous cultures. As Barbara Black explains: “The museum served to legitimate Britain’s power at home and across the globe. It grew complicit with British imperialism, housing the spoils of colonization and guarding the growing perimeter of the British empire” (*On Exhibit*, U of Virginia P, 2000, p. 11). Colonial museums were perceived as shrines or mausoleums, used to preserve cultures that according to the developing discipline of anthropology were on the brink of extinction. Objects were collected and displayed as tokens of those cultures. They were studied by the European scientific community, hastening cultural dismantling and loss as objects were extracted from their communities of origin and deprived those communities of their material culture. What Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote concerning the archives in *Decolonizing Methodologies* can be extended to the museum and its collections: “The archive not only contains artefacts of culture, but is itself an artefact and a construct of culture” (*Decolonizing Methodologies*, Zed Books, 2021, p. 58). As “artefacts and constructs” of European culture in colonial times, museums and collections entailed the tokenization and commodification of Indigenous cultures and legitimized the European cognitive and epistemological empire.

Recent studies have explored representations of museums, collections, and archives in Victorian literature, but very few have focused on contemporary postcolonial and Indigenous literatures in English. This special issue of *ARIEL* examines how postcolonial and Indigenous writers have been writing about museums and collections and how they have been reinventing archival methods. Contemporary literature exposes and displays the museum’s colonial roots, while placing the original processes of alienation, displacement, trauma, and commodification at the centre of knowledge creation. On the one hand, these literary works investigate the museum as it was first conceived, highlighting its limitations, and, in some cases, its perduring coloniality. On the other hand, these literary works imagine the future of the museum, restoring Indigenous voices and narratives to the centre of curatorial practices.

We invite articles offering transdisciplinary, diachronic, or comparative perspectives on this topic. Contributors may want to consider literary works through the prism of visual studies, history, or even anthropology, while drawing strongly on museum as well as Indigenous and post/decolonial studies. Authors can consider a wide array of genres (novels, short stories,

comics/graphic novels, poetry, theatre). Possible topics of articles may include but are not limited to the following:

- The representation of museums/ collections/ archives in literature: diachronic representations from colonial beginnings to post/decolonial critique; from national and collective museums to individual or domestic collections and archives; collective or individual histories of loss and contemporary reappropriations and empowerment through literature; figures of the artist/ collector/ curator/ archivist in literature, or the author as a curator/ collector/ archivist.
- Literature as a museum: literature that displays the representations of the Other and offers a reflection on the colonial museum; literature as a historiographic method reinforcing or competing with museums; the contemporary rewriting of the Other as object or as specimen displayed in Victorian museums; contemporary critiques of museums and anthropology; Indigenous literature as an alternative to the colonial museum.
- The literature of display: the ekphrastic dimension of literature; the depiction of tangible and intangible heritage; the taxonomic dimension and curatorial practices of literature; inspiration from objects or texts held and stored in museums or in archives; the reappropriation of art practices in literature.
- A literature of multiple returns: literary depictions of the repatriation of objects, human remains, and stories; the dynamics of fragmentation, decontextualization and recontextualization of objects and archival texts in literature; commodification, construction of authenticity and remediation.
- Writing Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges: Indigenous or post/decolonial reappropriations in literature; literary representation as knowledge and political claim; the Indigenous or post/decolonial rewriting of archives; Indigenous archives and the question of counter-archive.

Please submit a 300-500 word abstract together with a short biographical note (no more than 100 words) to the guest editor, Laura Singeot at laura.singeot@gmail.com by **May 1, 2024**. **Full essays (6000-9000 words) will be due by November 1, 2024.**