

Civilizing Rituals Reconsidered

Museums as Ritual Sites in Interdisciplinary Perspective

Thirtieth anniversary

In 2025 it will be thirty years since Carol Duncan's seminal *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* was published. This book offered a groundbreaking perspective on the functioning of western art museums, by analyzing these through the theoretical lens of ritual. Duncan's ritual studies perspective offered a much-needed nuance to the (today still) popular trope of museums being the new churches. In doing so, she identified ritual scenarios as offered by various types of museums, ranging from national and municipal galleries to the donor memorial and modern art museums. The ritual scenarios Duncan identified predominantly concerned secular values and perceptions of progress, capitalism, nationalism, and gender.

Shifting museum landscape

In the twenty-first-century museum landscape, these museum types as well as values still have an important place. Yet, remarkable changes have occurred in the museum world itself and in the social roles museums have come to play. The ongoing debates about a new ICOM museum definition clearly signals these transformed expectations. Museum tasks are shifting from presentation to representation, from the formation of canonical narratives to the negotiation of histories and identities.

The project

If we are to understand the ritual functioning of museums in the twenty-first-century, we need to include and simultaneously move beyond the institutional perspectives and agendas Duncan studied in her book. In full acknowledgement of *Civilizing Rituals* achievements, these also deserve to be reconsidered in the light of the past decades' developments and future perspectives.

Crucial reconsiderations concern, but are not limited to:

1. the changing societal role – and societal or political demands – of museums;
2. visitor engagement with museums and visitor experience of exhibitions and displays;
3. how the museum world has become a globally operating world, urging cross-cultural scholarship that reaches beyond the formulation of a western perspective.

Such reconsiderations are encouraged, exchanged, and published in the project *Civilizing Rituals Reconsidered*, coordinated by dr. Lieke Wijnia (Museum Catharijneconvent/ University of Groningen) and dr. James Bielo (Miami University).

Participate!

Civilizing Rituals Reconsidered aims to present an interdisciplinary scholarly effort, which will take shape in an edited volume to be published in 2025, to honor the thirtieth anniversary of Duncan's book. In addition to this volume, we are convinced there are many more voices to be heard and perspectives to be shared. Therefore, in the years leading up to the publication of the volume, a project website will feature blogs, interviews, photo and/

or video essays in which you can present your thoughts and ideas about the ritual functioning of museums.

You are cordially invited to submit a proposal to participate in the project website. Please do so by submitting an abstract of your reconsideration of *Civilizing Rituals* (max. 300 words) and a short bio (max. 150 words) before August 15, 2020. Please indicate the type of contribution you'd like to make (blog, interview, photo essay, etc.). We are open to suggestions! Confirmations of participation will be sent out by October 15, 2020. Send your proposals via email to Lieke Wijnia: l.wijnia@catharijneconvent.nl

Timeline

This project is launched in 2020, the year that the COVID19-crisis is changing the face of the globe, including the way museums can (and wish to) operate. The future of museums is currently both unpredictable and open for transformation. Although at this stage it may be uncertain where the museum world is heading, what we have seen is that visual art, cultural expression, and heritage are of vital importance in human well-being and interaction. Therefore, this project is not only one of reflection but also one of anticipation.

By launching the project in this moment, a substantial period of time is available for the production of contributions. A schedule will be finalized once your contribution is confirmed. The project website will be launched in the fall of 2020 and be updated regularly; the publication date of the volume is aimed for spring 2025 – marking the conclusion of the overall project. Depending on funding opportunities, possibilities for an in-person or online conference towards the publication date will be explored as well.