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COVER IMAGE

Heather McLaren, *Self Portrait; For Remembrance*, 2016
Oil paint on board, 1290 x 680mm

Heather's work exists as a kind of self-portraiture exploring the world of memory, existence, identity, imagination, nostalgia, inner and real landscapes, what's seen and unseen. As conveyed in images in her paintings our lives are full of memories, disparate yet connected. She draws from her own early life as a child growing up in the late 1960s. She uses personal photographs and memories that have stayed vivid in her mind to explore painting, creating a kind of 'psychological landscape'. The idea of a painted surface being a world she can unfold as she likes engages her immensely. Her work harks back to ideas behind expressionism though rendered in a more realistic manner. She fractures conventional tendencies of the natural progression of foreground, midground and background in her work, preferring ambiguous compositions. Her style often sits on the edge of drawing and painting and seeks to reveal tension and personal vulnerability. She sees her work as a foil against our fast shifting increasingly technologically dominated impersonal world. In 2016 Heather completed a BFA from the University of Canterbury.

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Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage

Bernice L. Murphy ed.

New York: Routledge, 2016.

Chloe Searle.

Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage aims to explore ethics and museum practice from a range of international perspectives. With a particular focus on the contributions of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the book details the evolution of museum ethics before exploring aspects of present and possible future practices. ICOM is a network comprising over 35000 members from around the world. Members are primarily museum professionals. ICOM works closely with the United Nations and is the principal forum internationally for museum ethical issues. One of ICOM's key activities is developing the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* that then informs codes of ethics and in some instances legislation, at a national level. In this volume some chapters take the form of case studies while others chronicle the broader trends in museum ethics since ICOM was founded in 1946. The contributors include academics and museum professionals, many of whom have been involved in ICOM. While the book includes several strong chapters which closely examine ethical questions, especially in parts six and seven, overall I found the volume disappointing as it favours chronicling over debate.

Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage is divided into seven parts. Together, the four chapters that make up Part One are intended to provide an introduction and context. Their focus is on ICOM's commitment to ethics. The last of these, written by the editor, Bernice Murphy, provides a useful introduction to ethics and museums. None of the four introductory chapters introduce the book itself. This is a weakness, as the potential to write about the connections between the different chapters is missed and overall the book lacks a clear argument.

The second part continues the book's focus on ICOM, in particular the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. 'The *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* : Background and Objectives', usefully covers the development of the current ICOM Code and then discusses each of the eight principles of the Code. The Code itself is presented as an appendix. Part Three is focused on international efforts to protect heritage, and the work of UNESCO is prominent here. UNESCO and ICOM work closely together and share an origin in post-World War Two international peace-building efforts. The fourth part aims to present heritage care and ethics from the perspective of multiple cultures and regions. These five chapters include contributions from Japan, China, Poland, Germany and

Chloe Searle.

the United States of America. This part would have benefitted from a tighter focus on the ‘why’ of ethics rather than the ‘what’. Part Five is dedicated to evolving issues and covers a range of topics, including provenance research and deaccessioning. Chapter 21, on deaccessioning, provides nuanced discussion of this issue and raises an important question about whether all museums should follow the same rules given the differences in scale and purpose between different institutions.¹

For people working in public history, Parts Six and Seven of *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage* are the most relevant. Part Six is titled ‘Torn History’, Reviewing, Reshaping and Rebuilding an Integrated Heritage’. One theme that recurs throughout this book and is highlighted in Part Six, is the growing importance of museums working with the source communities that their collections have come from, and the ethical obligations that accompany this. Chapter 26, ‘Native America in the Twenty-first Century: Journeys in Cultural Governance and Museum Interpretation’, examines ‘the subject of ‘good Native cultural governance’’. In this chapter, W. Richard West, Jr. offers a sustained reflection on what working with source communities may look like in practice.² The author was the founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian and is currently the director of the Museum of the American West. West Jr. concludes with three main lessons, ‘that certain museum practices of the past’ are ‘indefensible in human, and humanistic, moral and ethical terms – that Native human remains do not belong in museum collections’, that ‘repatriation laws represented a seismic shift in museum paradigms and practice regarding ‘authority’’, and that ‘[t]he issue is not only whose stories are told in museums, but also who the storytellers are’.³ These are important thoughts for New Zealand practitioners as we work together with different communities.

Clearly argued, grounded in specific practice, and covering an important area for public historians, Sharon Macdonald’s chapter on exhibiting contentious

¹ François Mairesse, ‘Deaccessioning: Some Reflections’, in *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Bernice L. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 225.

² W. Richard West, Jr., ‘Native America in the Twenty-first Century: Journeys in Cultural Governance and Museum Interpretation’, in *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Bernice L. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 278.

³ *Ibid.*, p.287.

Chloe Searle.

and difficult histories is the standout contribution to this volume. Macdonald explores the trend towards increased representations of contentious and difficult history, with a focus on the impact of these histories on those who view them and whether they can prompt people to engage in ethical reflection. Her insights into both the value of exhibiting contentious and difficult histories and potential pitfalls should be essential reading for anyone contemplating a project focused on contentious history and/or 'difficult heritage', such as 'crimes committed by one's own nation or people'.⁴ These are histories that 'raise unsettling questions about the kind of people that we might be, as well as about continuing responsibility for the consequences of those historical actions'.⁵ In part Macdonald draws on her visitor research undertaken at the former Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg. A key finding was that for many visitors, visiting a site of difficult heritage was 'an opportunity to engage in ethical reflection'.⁶ This reflection was broad-ranging and drew not only on the history presented but also on current events and other histories. This is contrasted with other sites such as the Nanjing Massacre Museum, where the mode of presentation 'seems to leave little opportunity for moving beyond the atrocity itself'.⁷ This chapter also picks up on the importance of the ethical obligations to source communities. Museum collections themselves often include the spoils of contentious histories and addressing this in exhibitions is part of the ethical obligations to source communities.

Part Seven is dedicated to case studies and ethics training, especially highlighting ethical dilemmas. The final chapter, 'Ethics in Action: Situational Scenarios Turning the Keys to the Code of Ethics', is one of the more useful in the volume. The author has developed a technique using fictional scenarios to encourage all museum staff to take part in discussions about ethics and to use the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* as a resource in these discussions. The aim is to move people beyond seeing the Code as 'remedial authority' and instead realise that ethical conduct is part of the day-to-day role of all museum

⁴ Sharon Macdonald, 'Exhibiting Contentious and Difficult Histories: Ethics, Emotions and Reflexivity', in *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Bernice L. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.267.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.270.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.274.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.270.

Chloe Searle.

staff.⁸ While the scenarios presented are designed for ethics training in a museum context, they could readily be adapted to prompt consideration on ethical issues in relation to public history.

Overall, *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage* falls short of its goal of exploring ethics in light of museum practice; there is not enough discussion of ethics in the daily work of museum practitioners. The fictional scenarios outlined in the final chapter could easily have been expanded, with full chapters on how these types of scenarios have worked out in practice. The lack of an introduction or a conclusion to the volume itself means the chance was missed to develop some of the tensions that emerge across the different chapters. This also limits the space given to discussing potential future practices. While it succeeds in covering a broad range of topics and proving that ethics touches on all aspects of museum work, too much of the book is given over to detailing ICOM's achievements and too little to a critique of that work, or to strong case studies of museum practice. In places this book feels more like a record than a contribution to debate and discussion. Given the controversy that can surround museum activities and ethics — from contentious exhibitions, to deaccessioning, to arguments around funding and sponsorship — this book is unexpectedly devoid of debate, and is the poorer for it.

Chloe Searle is currently part of the team developing new exhibitions for the planned redevelopment of the North Otago Museum, Forrester Gallery and Waitaki District Archive. The facility is due to open in spring 2019.

⁸ Eva Maehre Lauritzen, 'Ethics in Action: Situational Scenarios Turning the Keys to the Code of Ethics', in *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Bernice L. Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.348.