



# Chester Beatty Annual Lecture & Symposium 2016



# Chester Beatty Library & Ireland 2016

## CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY & IRELAND 2016

During 2016, the Chester Beatty Library – as Ireland’s only museum with a primary focus on global artistic heritage – will explore themes around how its collections and programmes reflect contemporary cultural diversity and identity. The Chester Beatty Annual Lecture 2016 and Symposium will directly address these themes.

Our cultural heritage is part of our identity and museums play an important role in defining the identity of a nation. At any time in a nation’s history, someone decides what is, and what is not, part of our ‘national culture’. National museums are perceived as authoritative spaces with the potential to select what objects to display. Moreover, (while museums cannot alone create a sense of national identity), by using these objects to tell stories, they can influence the ideas and values that contribute to our sense of national culture and identity.

With contributions from a range of speakers from Ireland and abroad, the papers will move from international examples to reflect on how Irish museums respond to complex issues around nationalism and multiculturalism; and how they negotiate national identity.



# Chester Beatty Annual Lecture

## MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, MEANING: IDENTITY POLITICS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

by James Cuno, President and CEO, J. Paul Getty Trust

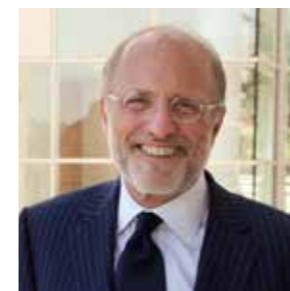
Thursday 11 February 2016 at 6pm

Venue: Dublin Castle Conference Centre

In the modern era, cultural heritage has been seen as integral to cultural and even national identity. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) developed the concept of the pre-eminence of history and culture and the link to one's national soil as a kind of almost physical attachment, giving rise to the affiliation of the *Kulturvolk* with the *Kulturstaat* and to the idea that cultural nationalism is at the root of cultural identity. Irish Statesman Edmund Burke (1729–1797) was even more explicit, stating that “Next to the love of parents for their children, the strongest instinct both national and moral which exists in man is the love of his country.”

With the end of empire and the rise of nationalism, identity claims on cultural heritage have only increased. In the current case of Iraq and Syria, and the damage to and destruction of cultural heritage within its modern borders, we read statements like the following from an Assyrian writer (Assyrians are a minority population with Iraq and Syria): “When you watch the footage [of the destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS fighters], you feel visceral pain and outrage, like you do when you see human beings hurt,” and that “while the Islamic State is ethnically cleansing the contemporary Assyrian populations of Iraq and Syria, they are conducting a simultaneous war on their ancient history and the right of future generations of all ethnicities and religions to the material memory of their ancestors.”

Dr Cuno's lecture will explore the sources and implications of identity politics and cultural heritage, and the manipulation of the latter in pursuit of the former. He will raise the spectre of nostalgia as a sentimental construction of the past in the service of present, as when a group of antiquities were returned to Italy from American museums and put on display in an exhibition called “NOSTOI: Recovered Masterpieces”; *nostoi*, from the Greek, *nostos*, meaning return, from a lost epic recounting the return of Ancient Greeks from battle in the Trojan wars and alluding to Aeneas and the founding of Rome. In all, a deliberate and imagined construction of origins and national identity cast in the shade of nostalgia.



**James Cuno** is President & CEO J. Paul Getty Trust. He took his PhD degree in Fine Arts (history of art) from Harvard University. Most recently he has served as Director of Harvard University Art Museums, Director and Professor of the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and President and Director of the Art Institute of Chicago. He assumed his current position as President and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust in August 2011. He has lectured and written widely on museums and cultural and public policy. Since 2003, he has published *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public's Trust* (author and editor, Princeton University Press 2006), *Who Owns Antiquity: Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton University Press 2010), *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate Over Antiquities* (author and editor, Princeton University Press 2012) and *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum* (author, University of Chicago Press 2011). He is a Fellow and International Secretary of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.



# Chester Beatty Symposium

## THE ROLE OF NATIONAL MUSEUMS IN (RE)NEGOTIATING NATIONAL IDENTITY

**FRIDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2016**

**Venue:** Lecture Theatre, Chester Beatty Library

The once homogenous national culture of Ireland in the twentieth century now co-exists as one strand of a multicultural fabric. This multiculturalism now opens new debates about culture and identity. One hundred years on from the Easter Rising, do the national museums in Ireland truly reflect Irish identity in 2016? The symposium will reflect on the origins of our museums and the narratives they promote; ask whether they are relevant to Irish citizens today; and suggest what might improve in the future.

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**0900 – 0930**

**REGISTRATION**

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**0930 – 1000**

**FRIDAY 12 FEBRUARY**

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

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**1000 – 1030**

**THROUGH THE LENS OF THE COLLECTIONS:  
CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY AND IRELAND 2016**  
**Fionnuala Croke**, Director, Chester Beatty Library

In 2016, as we commemorate the centenary of one of the defining events in the creation of the State, it is apposite to consider the contrast in the make-up of Irish society then and now; the consequences for our national identity; and what contribution our national museums should be making in this regard. The Chester Beatty Library plays a distinct and unique role among Ireland's national cultural institutions. While it does not hold 'Irish' material, the Library's displays and activities reflect – and promote – the growing multicultural nature of Irish society. As an arena for creativity and discourse, the Chester Beatty provides the opportunity for shared emotional experiences; and consciously uses its rich collections from countries across Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe to make cultural and societal links between diverse communities. In this way, the Library has become a trusted gathering space for the newer members of Irish society and it leads the field in intercultural dialogue and learning. How does this mission contribute to the re-definition of Irish identity in 2016?

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**1030 – 1100**

**NATIONAL MUSEUMS AS CULTURAL CONSTITUTIONS**

**Peter Aronsson**, Vice-Rector for Societal Engagement, Dean Faculty of Art and Humanities, Linnaeus University, Sweden

What is a national museum and how do they interact with the making of nations and states? In this talk Professor Aronsson will argue that the contribution and function of a national museum in negotiating national identity is a decisive part of creating a *cultural constitution* working as a decisive counterpart to the political constitution of the nation. This complex work can be pursued with more or less success. Failure has potentially disastrous consequences for states and nations. For the purpose of this investigation he defines national museums as those institutions carrying collections and displays claiming, negotiating, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities. It is not the name of the museum that decides who acts as a national museum. The process of imagining, discussing, establishing and reforming the institution



on the political arena is as much a part of its production of meaning as the actual collecting, exhibiting and visiting experience. The argument is based on the findings of the Eunamus – *European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen* – a research programme comparing 37 European nations, funded and supported by the European Commission between 2010 and 2013 ([www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu)).

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1100 – 1130

**COFFEE BREAK**

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1130 – 1200

**MULTIPLICITY AND HYBRIDITY: INCONVENIENT IDENTITIES IN NATIONAL MUSEUMS**

**Alan Chong**, Director, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

As highly politicised institutions, national museums must balance archaeology, art history, and national history. Ancient cultural diversity is easier to display than more recent multiplicities which complicate if not contradict national myths. Even more challenging are hybrid communities which lie outside standard identities and which frequently cross over borders. Important art histories are often overlooked or effaced. This talk examines the challenges faced by several recent museum projects in Asia especially in emerging nations, with discussion of new institutions in Singapore.

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1200 – 1230

**IRELAND'S NATIONAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: CRYSTALLISING NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ACKNOWLEDGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**Pat Cooke**, Director MA Programme, School of Art History and Cultural Policy, University College Dublin

This paper will briefly trace the ideological history of Ireland's principal national cultural institutions (Gallery, Library and Museum) from their imperial origins in the nineteenth century. Following independence in 1922, successive governments sought to transform these cultural bodies into places that served the values of a more prescriptive idea of Irish nationality. Eventually, the enthusiastic embrace of Chester Beatty and his collection by Irish governments in the early fifties, culminating in the opening of the Library in 1953, seemed to haringer a more pragmatic approach to the role of cultural institutions as vehicles of 'soft power'. However, despite the country's rise in economic prosperity from the 1950s to the 1980s, the national institutions continued to suffer from governmental neglect and under-investment. Finally, in the 1990s, significant levels of capital investment at last promised to deliver transformational change for these institutions, just as the country was undergoing an unprecedented economic uplift and a parallel change in its composition from virtual homogeneity to multicultural society. Over barely a decade, from 1996 to 2006, immigrants and their families came to constitute one-eighth of the population. So how have our cultural institutions been coping with such recent changes in the light of their previous history, and to what extent have their efforts in this regard been supported by wider changes in the government's cultural policy?

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1230 – 1400

**LUNCH BREAK**

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1400 – 1430

**COMMEMORATION, CHALLENGE AND CHANGE: A REFLECTION ON THE DECADE OF CENTENARIES AND THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM**

Elizabeth Crooke, Professor of Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Ulster

In light of the Decade of Centenaries, this paper is a consideration of the purposes and politics of remembrance. It looks at the attempts of State agencies to mould an approved method of remembering that will 'make safe' a past that is rife with controversy. By doing so the focus has been on a contained consideration of the individual, the local and the shared experience. Often expressed through public talks, collecting projects, exhibitions and drama, national museums have been both the resource and staging ground for such work. Given the diversity of histories, identities and opinion in modern Ireland, this paper will share some thoughts on the rationale for a more challenging and constructive exploration of the Decade in and with museums.

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1430 – 1530

**WORKSHOP: COLLECTIVE CONVERSATIONS: EXPLORING A KALEIDOSCOPE OF IRISH IDENTITIES AT IRISH MUSEUMS**

**Alan Kirwan**, Learning and Education Co-Ordinator for the House of European History, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium

**Jenny Siung**, Head of Education, Chester Beatty Library

"People have always migrated, whether to fulfil their needs or in search of a better way of life. Their movements have had an impact on how they see themselves and their relations with others. Their journeys and new settlements have changed the places left behind as well as their new locations.

Such movements and changes have affected the consciousness, feelings and practices of migrants and their new neighbours. Memories of the past remain important for both groups. Thoughts about what lives were once like and how places used to be still linger, at the same time as new paths are being forged. This sense of the importance of both past and present, home and away can lead in creative directions and to new relationships. But it can also cause anxiety and animosity.

These innovations and challenges are experienced by all societies with dynamic and diverse populations. They are central for understanding migration, identities and diasporic communities and their cultures." From *Moving People Changing Places* project [www.movingpeoplechangingplaces.org](http://www.movingpeoplechangingplaces.org)

This workshop proposes to look at the dramatic changes in Ireland through migration in the past fifteen years and how Irish museums can address new and existing migrant communities. Key themes including migration and identity will be addressed. Participants will work with a number of museum objects and resources to explore how these complex themes might be developed in different museum contexts. Participants will have the opportunity to work with: Oral histories; Tried and tested learning resources from the House of European History; and European, Islamic and East Asian art historical material from the Chester Beatty Library.

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1530 – 1630

**ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION**

Chair: **Sheila Watson**, Programme Director Heritage and Interpretation, Director of Flexible Learning, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK  
Panellists: Peter Aronsson, Alan Chong, Pat Cooke, Fionnuala Croke and Elizabeth Crooke, will be joined by Ragnall O'Floinn, Director, National Museum of Ireland



## BIOGRAPHIES



**Peter Aronsson** (b. 1959) is Professor of History at Linnaeus University since 1999; and Dean of Art and humanities and vice rector for societal engagement at Linnaeus university since 2013. His recent work is on the role of historical narrative and consciousness in directing action, in regard both to historiography and the uses of the past in historical culture at large. Recently he has performed leading roles in a number of international projects exploring the uses of the past (coordinating [www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu) funded in FP7, steering committee of [www.histcon.se](http://www.histcon.se)). The projects on museums and use of history has established a new comparative approach and first set of systematic knowledge assessing the role of museums in the making of nations and states. Among his recent publications are *National Museums. New Studies from around the World* (Routledge 2011); *Performing Nordic heritage. Everyday practices and institutional culture* (Ashgate 2013); *National Museums and Nation-building in Europe 1750-2010. Mobilization and legitimacy, continuity and change* (Routledge 2015).



**Alan Chong** has been director of Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum since 2010. The museums are dedicated to exploring the visual arts of Asia, especially the connections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world. The museums have developed a cross-cultural collection that reflects Singapore's history as a port city as well as its diverse ethnic makeup. The Asian Civilisations Museum opened new wings and galleries in November 2015. In 2016, the museum will present Christianity in Asia; and The Port Cities of Asia: Cultural Exchange on the Maritime Routes. Alan Chong completed his PhD at New York University, and previously served as curator at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Cleveland Museum of Art.



**Pat Cooke** is Director of the MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management since 2006. Previously, he worked for Ireland's state heritage service for over twenty years, where he was Director of both Kilmainham Gaol and the Pearse Museum, Dublin. As a heritage sector manager, he pioneered the use of museums and historic properties in Ireland as sites for major art projects. His experience in the heritage field includes producing cultural and historical exhibitions and audio-visual presentations, and the management of historic sites in line with best principles of conservation practice. He was Chairman of the Irish Museums Association (2002-06). He is an assessor for the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland and is currently a member of the Advisory Group charged with overseeing and revising standards for that programme.



**Fionnuala Croke** is an art historian and, Director of the Chester Beatty Library (CBL). Since September 2014, she is Chair of the Asia Europe Museum Association (ASEMUS) Executive Committee. Since joining the Chester Beatty, she has worked on developing strategy and has sought to re-position the role of CBL within the museum sector. Increasingly the CBL is engaging with new audiences both domestically and overseas through its exhibitions and multicultural programmes. She has published on a wide range of art-related subjects and has organised and curated numerous exhibitions, most recently *Chester Beatty's A to Z: from Amulet to Zodiac* (2015). She has a research MA from UCD; and an International Executive MBA from the Smurfit Business School. She is also a graduate of the Getty Museum Leadership Institute in Los Angeles. She is an Adjunct Professor in UCD in the School of Art History & Cultural Policy, and a member of the steering committee of the International Exhibitions Organisers group (IEO).



**Elizabeth Croke** is Professor of Heritage and Museum Studies at Ulster University where she is also Course Director of the established MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies (Belfast campus) and MA Museum Practice and Management (distance learning). She has published *Museums and Community* (Routledge 2007 Museum Meanings series) and *Politics, Archaeology and the Creation of a National Museum of Ireland* (Irish Academic Press 2000) as well as many book chapters and journal articles. Her most recent paper is 'Artefacts as agents for change: commemoration and exchange via material culture' in the journal *Irish Political Studies* (2016). In 2015 she was elected Chairperson of the Board of Directors Northern Ireland Museums Council. Prior to Ulster University, she was a lecturer at the School of Museum Studies University of Leicester. She is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and the University of Cambridge.



**Alan Kirwan** is the Learning and Education Co-Ordinator for the House of European History, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium. He has over 18 years' experience of developing learning programmes for museums and galleries in Ireland and the UK. He received his PhD from the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies in 2013 for research titled 'Museums in the Construction of a Diverse and Inclusive Ireland'. He has lectured and written on Irish interculturalism with publications including 'Constructions of Irish identity and its representation at the nation's museums' (University of Nottingham 2012) and 'Postcolonialism, ethnicity and the National Museum of Ireland' (Routledge 2011). Recently he spoke in the European Parliament to Members of the Pre-Accession countries' parliaments on the important role played by museums in fostering intercultural dialogue as part of the seminar 'Youth and Education in the Balkans'.



**Ragnhail O'Floinn** was appointed Director of the National Museum of Ireland in 2013. He joined the Museum in 1976 as Assistant Keeper in the Irish Antiquities Division, and in 2003 he was appointed Head of Collections. A graduate of University College Dublin with an MA in Celtic Archaeology, Dr O'Floinn was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1996 and as a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 2005. He was recently elected as a Vice Chairman of the Society for Medieval Archaeology, London. His research interests lie primarily in the medieval period with a particular focus on reliquaries and the cult of relics; decorated metalwork; the archaeology of the early medieval Irish Church, antiquarians and the history of collections. He has lectured widely and is the author of numerous papers and has co-edited a number of books, including *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (1998) and *Treasures of the National Museum of Ireland - Irish Antiquities* (2002). A co-authored monograph entitled *Viking Graves and Grave-Goods* appeared as part of the Museum's Dublin Excavations Series in 2014.



**Jenny Siung** is Head of Education in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland. She commenced her post in 2000 and has developed the first multi and intercultural learning programme in an Irish museum. Her work involves engaging with the Islamic, Asian, North African, East Asian and European collections of the Library, devising numerous programmes including intercultural projects for schools, cultural festivals, and creating links with local multi-ethnic communities. She has been invited to sit on a number advisory boards; Dublin City Council Chinese New Year Festival (2008-2015), the Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS) Museum Education Exchange Programme, Cultural Diversity Policy of the Arts Council and the European Open Method of Coordination on Intercultural Dialogue (2010-2015). She has studied art history, arts administration, adult and community education, a MLitt exploring Japanese influence on twentieth-century Irish art, intermediate level in Mandarin and participated in the Getty Next Generation programme for museum leaders in 2012 and Learning in Museums, ICOM China in 2014.



**Sheila Watson** is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Museum Studies at Leicester University. She joined the department in 2003 and was formerly a school teacher and then a museum practitioner. She is currently Programme Director of the Heritage and Interpretation MA and Director of Flexible Learning. As a historian by training she is fascinated by how the past is understood and used in society. Dr Watson's current research interests include emotions in museums, community participation in heritage, museums and national identity and the construction of histories in heritage sites.

