

Third Annual Mosse Lecture at Deutsches Haus, Columbia University

Thursday, March 27 from 6:00 to 8:00 PM

This event is free and open to the public. [Registration](#) is required.

Skulls, Sculptures and the Kaiser's Museums: Global Entanglements, Colonial Race Science, and German Memory Culture (c. 1900 - today)

A Lecture by Mirjam Brusius

What can museums tell us about a nation's self-image? How does Germany approach its colonial past in light of the Holocaust? Berlin's national museums have become the focus of current debates around repatriation and colonial collections—most visibly those now housed inside the contested Humboldt Forum. But the Humboldt Forum is just the beginning. This talk moves beyond the ethnological collections inside the resurrected Prussian castle in the center of Berlin. It ties recent discussions to other, hitherto neglected sites, such as the seemingly unproblematic antiquity collections from the former Ottoman Empire on Berlin's Museum Island, and collections of human remains from 'German East Africa' held in the storage facilities on the city's periphery. How were all these collections entangled not only with each other but also with global networks of trade, material extraction and exploitative labor? In the late nineteenth century, these collections were furthermore exploited to consolidate triumphalist narratives of 'Western civilization' and human history – not least by providing the raw materials for a new form of 'scientific' antisemitism and racism that developed around 1900 onwards: with fatal consequences in the twentieth century. Despite these problematic legacies, however, Berlin's urban center still reflects an imperial mindset in the wake of an affirmative monumentalization of the Wilhelmine era. This tells us as much about race and memory politics in Germany today.

Following the lecture, Mirjam Brusius will be joined in conversation by Professor Avinoam Shalem, Riggio Professor of the History of the Arts of Islam (Columbia University). A reception will conclude the evening.

Mirjam S. Brusius is a cultural historian with a PhD in the History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Cambridge and an MA from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Currently, Mirjam is a Research Fellow in Colonial and Global History at the German Historical Institute London.

Each year the annual Mosse Lecture, presented by the Columbia Department of Germanic Languages, seeks to honor the legacy of the progressive Mosse publishing house founded by Rudolf Mosse, which helped to shape the democratic public sphere during the German Weimar Republic. Descendants of the Mosse Family include Prof. George L Mosse, the acclaimed historian of fascism, Dr. Hilde L. Mosse, a distinguished child psychiatrist who worked with Harlem children suffering from reading disabilities, Hans Strauch, an accomplished architect, and Roger Strauch, a successful high technology entrepreneur and venture capitalist. Hans and Roger co-lead The Mosse Foundation's efforts to sustain and promote the Mosse Family's philanthropic legacy to support distinguished educational, research, health, and arts institutions and progressive causes.