

The Art Museum as Space of Hope: Affective, Useful, and Collaborative Action in Times of Uncertainty

CraftWorks Symposium, 2-4 June 2025

Trapholt - Museum of Modern Art, Craft and Design, Kolding, Denmark

ABSTRACTS

Keynotespeaker

Alistair Hudson

Chairman of the ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, DE

Fellow Travellers - the Museum as an Open System for Social Transformation

The cult of leadership has hijacked our political economy and we have ended up with the shitshow we're seeing unfold before our eyes. It is hard to see a way out, but what if we imagined the museum as a place to model new alternative operating systems for the world we live in. What if we supplemented the dependency of leadership culture, with a collectivised and empowered neural network of fellowship? Then could we use the public site of the museum to model the world otherwise, and start making our cultural institutions the place to make a better culture to live in?

Bio

Alistair Hudson is the artistic and scientific director of the ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Media) Karlsruhe.

With his concept of the 'useful museum', he sees art and cultural institutions as tools for social and political transformation. From 2014 he was director of the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, which he fundamentally redesigned in collaboration with the city's residents. From 2018 to 2022, he was director of the municipal Manchester Art Gallery and The Whitworth, part of the University of Manchester, where he was also appointed Professor of Arte Útil (Useful Art).

Anne Mette W. Nielsen

Associate Professor, Danish Centre for Youth Research, Aalborg University, DK

Art Museums as Sites for Imagined Elsewheres in Youth Lives

The presentation shares insights from a recent study of young people's interactions with art museums through creative and collaborative encounters at five Danish art museums. I will present a model, that makes visible how the young people both encounter the museums' works and are themselves engaged in larger and smaller productions of works, and how these two elements interact with each other. The presentation will emphasize the hopes arising from these encounters as well as pay attention to the actions they call for.

Bio

Anne Mette W. Nielsen is Associate Professor at the Danish Centre for Youth Research, Aalborg University. Her research focuses on young people's participation in art, culture and community projects. She has been part of a number of research projects involving new theoretical and methodological approaches with a special focus on vulnerable young people, participation and agency.

Anthony Schrag

Researcher, Queen Margaret University Edinburgh, UK

Kill Your Darlings: Hope From Fire

This talk takes as its starting point a practice-based research project with the Perth Museum and Art Gallery where he asked the public to choose a single item from the public collection to destroy. The provocation of loss resulted in a complex response from both the Museum and the Public which - while difficult - was ultimately highly productive, and for which the museum has admitted has changed their behaviour for the better: teaching them to be braver and to not sit in a safe professional comfort zone. This short talk will therefore present the materially-grounded and affective practice of 'pro-social conflict' that can perhaps intuitively result in more engaged, hopeful museum spaces.

Keynotespeaker

Bernadette Lynch
University of London and
Manchester, UK

Bio

Dr Anthony Schrag is a practicing artist and researcher, and Reader at Queen Margaret's University (Edinburgh). The central focus of his work examines the role of art in participatory and public contexts, with a specific focus on social conflict, agonism and ethics. The artist Nathalie De Brie once referred to his practice as 'Fearless'. The writer Marjorie Celona once said: 'Anthony, you have a lot of ideas. Not all of them are good.'

"Oh My Brain, I Got to Complain. Well, You Can Complain, but I'm Gonna Do Something." (Patti Smith, 1997) Polycrisis as Opportunity for Collective Resistance in the Museum

Taking the global polycrisis as opportunity, Lynch outlines the systemic change needed in museums to clear the way towards collectively upskilling for democracy, solidarity and social justice. In other words, refusing the stasis of hopelessness and taking up the social responsibility of actively practicing as she puts it, 'what love looks like in public'.

Dr Lynch traces the recent shift in the museum's relations with others from charity to collaboration, beneficiary to active-agency towards the next necessary stage: an institutional and personal politics of solidarity based on an ethics of interdependence and a strategy of local, national and international networking and resistance. Lynch provides examples of how and where in museums this is beginning to take place.

Bio

Dr Bernadette Lynch is an internationally known writer, lecturer and researcher on museum theory and practice, with experience in senior management in UK and Canadian museums. Author of the influential 'Whose Cake is it Anyway? Report (2011), she leads the Solidarity in Action Network, with international museum professionals, academics and grassroots organisations. She publishes widely and is currently editing a book on Museums and Solidarity in Action for UCL Press, with contributions from around the world.

Birgit Eriksson

Professor, Aesthetics &
Culture, Aarhus University,
DK

Relational Agency and Hope in and Beyond CraftWorks

Based on CraftWorks' research (2021-25) into Trapholt's collaborative art projects, I will compare the outcomes of Data Mirror's and Things Matter's ways of establishing new forms of interaction and collaboration with 'the world'. My premise is that art, museums, and participants are always already entangled in a web of manifold relations. Therefore, the question is not autonomy or relational interdependencies but rather: What kinds of relations (do we practice and need now)?

My answer is based on theories of relational agency (Burkitt) and pragmatic/diagnostic/prefigurative aspects of art (Kester), in which I find encouraging theories of change and grounds for hope.

Bio

Birgit Eriksson is Professor at the Dep. of Aesthetics & Culture, Aarhus University. She researches citizen participation in arts, culture, and society – and particularly how these relate or not. She likes working on and with participatory methods. Empirically, her recent work focuses on cultural centers, social housing areas, and museums.

Camilla Jalving

Deputy Director of
Collections and Research at
SMK, DK

A Sustainable Collection – Hope at the National Gallery of Denmark

Taking SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, as a case, I aim to explore how a complete collection rehang, planned for the coming years seeks to bridge past, present, and future through collaborative practices, partnerships, and a strong focus on sustainability. Museum work inherently involves caring for the past for the sake of the future. In this way, hope is always at stake in what we do.

My paper will address how we can make hope not only a theme to be explored in a work of art or revealed through interpretation, but also something that lies at the very core of how we, as a museum, work with our collection.

Bio

Camilla Jalving (b. 1972) is the Deputy Director of Collections and Research at SMK. She has written extensively on contemporary art and what art does when we encounter it. She is the

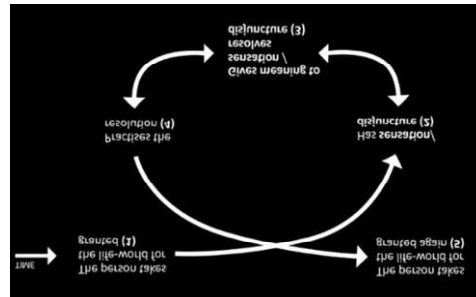
author of *Forskellen er ens: En monografi om Albert Mertz* (2020), *Værk som handling: Performativitet, kunst og metode* (2011), and *Nybrud: Dansk kunst i 1990'erne* (2006, co-authored with Rune Gade).

Emilie Sitzia

Associate Professor, Cultural Education, University of Maastricht, NL

Developing Strategies to Practice Resolution: Closing the Gap in the Transformative Learning Cycle to Promote Change and Foster Hope

In my work, I have been collaborating with and studying activists in cultural institutions to let invisibilised issues emerge and help foster action. Unfortunately, research has shown that such projects don't allow for sustainable societal and institutional changes: they do not close the gap in the transformative learning process.



Transformative learning according to Peter Jarvis, design Bullitt identity

Cultural institutions need to go beyond disjuncture and meaning making, and promote practicing resolution, which implies an affective practice and a stimulation of imaginaries, projecting participants into potential futures. Our team wants to use fiction as a tool to free the imaginaries of our participants and ourselves and explore the close future, reinvesting this cultural site with hope. We are now working on a fictional documentary, based on role play in collaboration with citizen participants, a sci-fi writer, a filmmaker, a song/spoken word artist and researchers and practitioners.

Bio

Associate Professor Cultural Education at the University of Maastricht. She specialises in museum participatory practices, the impact of art on audiences, word/image interdisciplinary studies, and digital and sensory education. In 2022 she co-edited the volume *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage: Learning Through and from Collaboration*.

Fatos Ustek

Independent curator and writer, UK

Instilling Cultural Humility: Building a Learning Art Institution for a Resilient Future

This presentation outlines the founding of a new contemporary art institution that I am currently developing, grounded in the principles of cultural humility and organisational learning. Drawing on theories of learning organisations and improvisational systems, I explore how we are embedding adaptability, reflexivity, and continuous development into the institution's core structure. This emerging model seeks to balance action and research, fostering a culture of inquiry and growth across all levels—from internal teams and artists to audiences, supporters, and the wider public. The presentation proposes an inclusive, future-facing framework for institutional resilience through training, upskilling, sideskilling, and collective self-development.

Bio

Fatoş Üstek is an independent curator and writer with over two decades of international experience in contemporary art. She is the author of *The Art Institution of Tomorrow: Reinventing the Model* (Lund Humphries, 2024) and serves as curator of *Frieze Sculpture* (2023–2026) and curator of *Cascading Principles Expansions within Geometry, Philosophy and Interference*, Mathematical Institute, Oxford University (2022–2025). She is the Co-founder and Director of *FRANK Fair Artist Pay*, advocating for fair practice in the arts in the UK and currently associate fellow at the Warburg Institute, London. Her curatorial expertise spans biennials, exhibitions, festivals, and public art commissions, shaping critical discourse and institutional transformation within the arts. She writes regularly for exhibition catalogues, artist monographs

and art magazines, sits on multiple advisory and jury roles in Europe and the UK, and nominates artists for awards and residencies.

Hans Dam Christensen
Professor, Cultural
Communication, University
of Copenhagen, DK

Art Museums' Post-neutrality

First, I present the research project Post-neutrality in Libraries, Archives and Museums (LAMs), which examines the transformation of LAMs from being "neutral" institutions to actively addressing societal issues. Indeed, LAMs have never been neutral. "Neutrality" always succumbs to hegemonic logics, so post-neutrality means something else happens now. With this bird's-eye view, I then focus on the connection between hope and art museums, both conceptually (is "hope" an empty signifier?), historically (has this connection not been addressed before?), and, as the invitation asks, how to proceed in the future considering the tensions between neoliberal economy and public engagement.

Bio

Hans Dam Christensen is Professor of Cultural Communication, the University of Copenhagen. He holds a PhD in Art History. Research areas include museums and cultural policy. Current research projects are "Post-neutrality in Libraries, Archives and Museums", "Libraries, Archives and Museums as Key Pillars of Modern European Democratic Societies?" and "CultureSustain".

Karen Grøn
Director of Trapholt -
Museum of Modern Art, Craft
and Design, DK

Crafting Hope: Collaborative Art as Resistance and Resonance in Times of Neoliberal Culture Politics

Since 2014, Trapholt has explored the power of collaborative, craft-based art to cultivate voice, agency, and community through large-scale collaborative art projects like Data Mirror (2022) and Things Matter (2023). Despite the museum being situated in the neoliberal attraction economy Trapholt initiates these participatory works, that challenge dominant blockbuster strategy and creates new museum narratives by blending intimate, embodied practices with socio-political reflection. This presentation discusses how these collaborative craft projects enable dissonant yet constructive public engagement, offering affective, material, and polyphonic spaces of hope and action. It asks: how can museums resist commodification while empowering citizens as creative, critical co-authors of culture?

Bio

Karen Grøn is Director of Trapholt Museum of Modern Art, Craft and Design in Denmark. She leads innovative, large-scale participatory art projects that explore the museum's role in society. Her work focuses on democratic practices, craft-based collaboration, and the transformative potential of museums as inclusive and affective public spaces.

Katve-Kaisa Kontturi
Senior Lecturer in Art History
and Docent of
Contemporary Art Studies,
University of Turku, FI

Practicing and Articulating More-Than-Human Collectivities

In this presentation, I argue for the importance of perceiving any work of art as always *more-than-human*. In other words, art is never a product of human intention or actions only; rather, it co-emerges with materialities that themselves have agentic qualities. For me, this is the key to more sustainable futures within the museum context). This is also what I wish to put in pedagogical practice following artist and philosopher Erin Manning's latest trilogy of books that articulates the powers of more-than-human by way of research-creation. The presentation will outline workshops where more-than-human collectivities can be practiced while also calling for articulating them in written material such as labels.

Bio

Katve-Kaisa Kontturi is a Senior Lecturer in Art History and Docent of Contemporary Art Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. Her research engages with affective, more-than-human materialities of making and encountering art, artistic labour, and feminist activism. Her most recent publication is *New Materialism and Intersectionality: Making Middles Matter* (2025)

Louise Fabian
Professor, Philosophy and
History of Ideas, Aarhus
University, DK

Museums, Plural Epistemologies and the Politics of Hope

Museums has the potential to be unique spaces for fostering a more plural, inclusive and just understanding of knowledge production, epistemology and ontology.

Museums have long served as institutions of cultural preservation and education, but their role in promoting epistemic justice—ensuring equitable access to an expression of diverse ways of knowing and understanding—has gained increasing attention in recent years. Historically, museums have often been shaped by dominant cultural narratives, marginalizing the perspectives and knowledge systems of e.g. minority groups, and marginalized communities. However, there is a growing movement within the museum sector to actively challenge these imbalances and create spaces that honor diverse epistemologies. This shift is amongst others manifested through collaborative exhibitions, community-led projects, decolonial curatorial practices, and a commitment to hand over the microphone to underrepresented voices. The talk will critically explore some historiographical and political potentials in this curatorial turn in the museum sector, and in connections to this draw on some recent examples from Fabians own collaboration with different museums in creating explorative learning spaces for university students.

Bio

Louise Fabian, Professor in Philosophy and History of Ideas, University of Aarhus

Marzia Varutti

Dr. University of Geneva, CH

Hope and Emotional Engagement in Museums

I will draw on snapshots of museum practices that illustrate how emotional engagement with museum spaces, objects, and fellow visitors may open up opportunities for individual and collective transformation.

I will then put forward two suggestions / hopes:

1. Dealing with our own and others' emotions is a skill, known as emotional competence. Emotional competence is routinely deployed by museum professionals (as such, it should be made visible and acknowledged) and can also be fostered in the public in order to nurture emotional resilience.
2. This kind of museums practices can become the breeding ground for forms of hope devoid of naive optimism, and rooted instead in first-hand (collaborative) experience in museums, informed by an ethics of care and accountability.

Bio

Marzia is a museologist currently based at the Center for Affective Sciences, University of Geneva. In her work, she is investigating the connections between museums, emotions and ecology. Drawing on environmental humanities perspectives, she is exploring topics such as ecological grief and mourning; the affective dimensions of glaciers (and their disappearance); and ecopoetry as environmental communication – and the role that museums may play in these eco-affective endeavours.

Mette Houlberg Rung

(PhD), Head of Collections and Exhibitions, Museum of National History, Frederiksborg Castle, DK

Nostalgia, Creative Power and Hope

In this short presentation the concept of nostalgia (Davis, 1979, Boym, 2001) will be used as a framing for debating the art museum's potential for evoking collaboration, community and hope in a time, where the world is changing. The concept of nostalgia can be used to enrich the understanding of how museums can offer new ways of reflecting on identity and belonging and thereby hold the potential as a site for imagining alternative futures. I will argue that art museums through nostalgia can be seen as spaces for hope. Not grand or utopian hope, but a subtle, grounded kind—rooted in the cracks of memory and the quiet possibility of change. Museums, in this view, are not just custodians of heritage but hopeful spaces, where critical reflection, emotional resonance, and visions for the future can coexist.

Bio

Mette Houlberg Rung (1974) holds an MA and a PhD in Art History and Museology and is Head of Collections and Exhibitions at Frederiksborg · Museum of National History. She has previously worked with exhibitions and research at the National Gallery of Denmark. Her research areas include not only art historical topics but also museology, exhibitions, and aesthetic experiences.

Milda Ivanauskienė
Director of MO Museum in
Vilnius, LT

From Polarisation to Belonging Through Cultural Education

Art museums can foster emotional wellbeing, spark critical and creative thinking, and strengthen civic resilience. These goals have guided MO Museum's educational work for over five years, aligning with the recently adopted UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education. We are starting to evaluate our social impact through a dedicated framework that captures shifts in thinking, trust, and participation. Today, we are piloting programmes we believe could become systematic – integrating cultural education into formal education and lifelong learning can lead to a more connected society ready for the future.

Bio

Milda Ivanauskienė is Director of MO Museum in Vilnius, Lithuania. With a background in international law as well as management (LL.M, EMBA), she transitioned from a legal career to leading Lithuania's most visited private art museum, focusing on strengthening the role of art in contemporary society.

Sabine Dahl Nielsen
Assistant Professor,
Department of Arts and
Cultural Studies, University
of Copenhagen, DK

Building Alliances of Solidarity Within and Beyond the Art Institution

This talk aims to explore how contemporary institutional practices can respond to the transformative and highly contested impact of migration. Reflecting on the cultural pluralization of today's European societies, it will examine how a central conflict line in today's societies concerns the definition of 'who we are'. As social scientist Naika Foroutan has pointed out, negotiations are currently being played out between a nativist and a pluralist definition to 'who we are'. She therefore argues for the importance of building new intersectional alliances of solidarity struggling for equality in today's migration-induced societies. Taking its analytical point of departure in the exhibition project *documenta fifteen* (2023) in Kassel, Germany, the talk will reflect on how the art institution might become a site of hope by creating such alliances of solidarity, by experimenting with collective, process-based, and socially engaged activist practices, and by proposing alternative infrastructures based on commonality and resistance.

Bio

Sabine Dahl Nielsen is assistant professor at University of Copenhagen and principal investigator of the research project *Transcultural Contact Zones: The cultural pluralization of art institutions in today's migration-induced societies* (2023-2027). She has developed exhibitions and research at the intersection of curatorial practices and contemporary social urgencies including the struggles around migration, decolonisation, and anti-racism.

**Tafadzwa Nomphanelo
Makwabarara**
Curator of Cultural
Empowerment at the
Sainsbury Centre, UK

The Living Art Museum

Co-creation, a collective term used to describe collaboration, co-curation and co-production has become a buzz word in museums. While the importance of working with different communities and ethnicities in promoting the understanding cultural diversity cannot be disregarded, there is a danger of museums using the term as a tokenist claim to tick the diversity and inclusion box. How do museums ethically engage and collaborate with minority and marginalised communities? Fair representation and compensation, giving them agency, listening and incorporating their suggestions and ideas are some albeit not all the ways to ensure the establishment of an ethical and sustainable relationship. My presentation will draw from my experiences and observations as Curator of Cultural Empowerment at the Sainsbury Centre highlighting the advantages of co-creation as well as its challenges

Bio

Tafadzwa Nomphanelo Makwabarara is the Curator of Cultural Empowerment at the Sainsbury Centre. Her role is focused on encouraging critical thinking, cooperation and collaboration on universal contemporary issues through the inclusion and re-engagement of minority and marginalised groups in society.

Tina Louise Hove Sørensen
Assistant Professor, Aarhus University, DK

Hope in the Making: Affective and Material Practices in the Art Museum

In a time of converging crises, belief in one's ability to influence the world is often overshadowed by feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and fatigue. Drawing on CraftWorks' research (2021–25) into Trapholt's collaborative projects *Data Mirror* and *Things Matter*, I explore how art museums can become spaces for practicing hope and collaborative action by renegotiating this emotional economy. Building on the affective and material turn, I investigate how museums might foster encounters—between bodies, materials, and non-human agents—cultivating new forms of collaboration and agency. What might a materially grounded, affectively attuned practice look like—and how might it help us imagine new futures?

Bio

Tina Louise Hove Sørensen is an assistant professor at Aarhus University, working at the intersection of media, culture, and aesthetics. Her research focuses on the affective and democratic potentials of creative and participatory practices. As part of the CraftWorks research collaboration with Trapholt Museum, she explores how craft and material engagement can support more inclusive, affective and transformative museum experiences.

Trine Friis Sørensen
Assistant Professor,
Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, NL

The (Design) Museum as a Parahost of Civil Action

This presentation brings together two ideas: parahosting and the 'civil sequence'. Parahosting is an institutional practice of hosting external initiatives beyond the main act of curating exhibitions (O'Neill, 2020). The civil sequence outlines how an emotion (e.g. frustration or fear) can be recognized as a shared urge to change something and organized as civil action (Lijster, Otto and Gielen, 2018). I propose that the museum becomes a parahost of civil sequences that address shared, societal problems. If we consider design as a problem-solving method, it would be particularly suitable for a design museum to take on this role.

References: Lijster, Thijs, Hanka Otte and Pascal Gielen. 2018. "Towards a Cultural Policy of Trust: The Dutch Approach from the Perspective of a Transnational Civil Domain." In *25 Years Dutch Cultural Policy Act: Cultural Policy in the Polder*, edited by Edwin van Meerkerk and Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen. Amsterdam University Press. O'Neill, Paul. 2020.

"How Institutions Think – Thinking like a Parahost." *Mustekala* 79 (Teema #3).

<https://mustekala.info/teemanumerot/instituutiokritiikki-3-2020-vol-79/how-institutions-think-thinking-like-a-parahost>

Bio

Trine Friis Sørensen is an Assistant Professor of Media and Arts Curation at Utrecht University. Her research considers the entanglement of objects, people, spaces, concepts and institutions in curatorial contexts. She was previously a postdoc fellow at Aarhus University and Kunsthall Aarhus and holds a PhD from University of Copenhagen.

Junior researchers

Christiane Særkjær
Dr. / Postdoc, Communication & Culture, Aarhus University, DK

Kristian Roland Larsen
Curator / Postdoc, Trapholt, Museum of Modern Art and Design, DK

Petra Vackova
Dr. / Postdoc, Museology, Communication & Culture, Aarhus University, DK

Sara Staunsager
Curator, Trapholt, Museum of Modern Art and Design, DK

Xenia Brown Pallesen
Ph. D. Fellow, Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, DK

CraftWorks is funded by

VELUX FONDEN