



the Ethics Centre of South Australia



Ethics Centre of South Australia

Central Seminar Series 2008

Tuesday 9 September 2008

3.30pm – 4.30pm

Scots Centre (*next to Scots Church*)

Cnr North Terrace and Pulteney Street, Adelaide

Who owns world heritage?

Presented by

Ms Moira Simpson

University of South Australia

The return of the Parthenon Marbles from England to Greece has been passionately debated since Lord Elgin removed them from Athens over two centuries ago. Yet the subject of repatriation has become one of the most hotly contested aspects of contemporary museum practice only in the past four decades, driven largely by the discourse surrounding Indigenous cultural property issues. As a result, the focus of museum repatriation policies has shifted from purely legalistic arguments concerning ownership, to accommodate moral and ethical perspectives concerning the original methods of acquisition by collectors and the values of cultural objects for contemporary societies.

In parallel with this, since 1972, an international UNESCO Convention has provided the mechanism for designating certain sites and monuments as 'World Heritage' in recognition of their historical, cultural and aesthetic significance and their universal value as sites which "belong to all the peoples of the world". The World Heritage concept has also been cited by the directors of some of the world's leading museums to support their retention of objects such as classical antiquities, overriding the claims of individual nations. Yet, the principles embodied in the UNESCO World Heritage program can also provide a counter-argument supporting calls for repatriation. What responsibilities does the concept of World Heritage place on the international community? Does this offer a potential solution to the long-running debate concerning the Parthenon Marbles? What are the implications for museums and their functions in the 21st century?

Moira Simpson is Senior Lecturer in Arts Education at the University of South Australia. She has a BA in Art and Design, a Masters Degree in Museum Studies, and is completing a PhD at Flinders University of South Australia that deals with the impact of Indigenous knowledge systems on contemporary museology. She is the author of numerous publications including 'Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era' (Routledge, 1996) and 'Museums and Repatriation' (Museums Association, 1997). Her work has influenced repatriation policies in the UK and elsewhere. Research conducted for the Museums Association in the UK led to the publication of Restitution and Repatriation: Guidelines for Good Practice (Museums and Galleries Commission, 2000) providing national guidelines for UK museums.

Please RSVP to Vicki Hattam, Centre Coordinator
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