

HERITAGE IN FOCUS

THURSDAY

6 NOVEMBER

2025

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL HERITAGE

HERITAGE IN FOCUS

SERIES OF EVENTS

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOETHE-INSTITUT ATHEN AND THE HUMBOLDT FORUM

GOETHE.DE/ATHEN/HERITAGE

GOETHE-INSTITUT ATHEN
14-16 OMIROU ST., 10672 ATHENS

HERITAGE IN FOCUS

The idea of “heritage” is currently experiencing a real surge in interest in academia, politics, cultural institutions, and the media. While in the past it was chiefly associated with aspects of private law, such as inheritance law, and, in the broader social context, with the preservation of architectural monuments, the word “heritage” has taken on a whole new range of meaning in recent years, and its use has expanded accordingly. This is partly due to UNESCO, which has redefined the term and not long ago has significantly extended the provisions that are in place to protect human “cultural heritage”. Cultural traditions, customs, and food were given protected status twenty years ago: from the Byzantine chants of Greece and Cyprus to Berlin’s club “culture”, which was once considered avant-garde and subversive but is now under threat.

In parallel to this and encouraged by public debates, there has, in recent years, been growing academic interest in “heritage”: the question of what is meant by “heritage” is now the subject of much discussion among history scholars and in the realms of cultural science, ethnology, and museum studies; this raises further questions about nation-building, restitution, and provenance, and about how to deal with (post)colonialism and the overexploitation of people and nature. To give an example: in connection with the climate crisis and postcolonial debates – relating, for instance, to non-human agency – do rivers, forests, and other natural landscapes have rights of their own, and shouldn’t they also enjoy protected status as non-cultural heritage? And don’t mineralogical and natural history collections also tell (cultural) stories of relationships of dependency and human exploitation? At the same time, there are also some early dissenting voices that are critical of an expansive focus on the past – which they regard as “nostalgic” – and in turn contribute to an analytical examination of the topic.

The *Heritage in Focus*, organised by Goethe-Institut Athen and the Humboldt Forum, looks at the question of “heritage” from four different angles, with a special focus on Germany and Greece. Based on the major shift in recent years in how the term is interpreted and a growing interest in the subject, there will be four panel discussions looking at topics such as intangible heritage and urban heritage and at the range of issues connected with nature and heritage as well as the question of nation-building as it relates to finds of antiquities and restitution. The results of this series will be presented in 2026–27 as part of the focus on “heritage” at the Humboldt Forum.

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL HERITAGE

For some years now, people everywhere have been discussing the restitution of cultural belongings – a debate that is by no means confined to the professional museum setting. The question of who owns, exhibits, or uses cultural heritage is pivotal in granting the authority to interpret culture, defining national and cultural identities, and – ultimately – bolstering political power.

The "Global South" has been a frequent focus of attention in debates of recent years. The return of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria from Berlin, where they had formed part of the collection at the Ethnologisches Museum, made international headlines – partly because they betokened, in condensed form, the structures of violence that were inherent in European colonialism and have long been glossed over. However, Greece's demands for the return of the Parthenon frieze (the so-called Elgin Marbles) from the British Museum show that stolen cultural properties can also be a source of controversy in European contexts. While this issue, which has been festering for years, has recently become more high-profile in Greece, both in the media and in society at large, the dubious acquisition history of ancient cultural artefacts in Germany has long gone unremarked.

What is the current status of the debate on cultural heritage? How do restitution claims relate to questions of national identity (or identities)? Do museums of ancient art need to address the same critical questions that ethnological collections, for example, are now faced with? And can the wrangling about plunder looted from the Global South during the colonial period enrich the debate on antiquities?

The fourth (and final) edition of the *Heritage in Focus* series homes in on cultural heritage. Where previous editions tackled intangible heritage, urban heritage and natural heritage, the thematic spotlight shifts this time to tangible "objects". The topic will be examined from a number of different angles during an evening featuring art, films and debates. Berlin historian Sebastian Conrad uses the example of the bust of Nefertiti, which originally came from Egypt, to show how a stolen artefact from antiquity can become a global icon and at the same time be an emblem of debates about looted property. Experts from Greece, Namibia, and Germany discuss the need for cultural heritage to be returned to its country of origin and consider the limits of such a process. Two artworks pose critical questions about the symbolism of the Acropolis and examine ways in which it is overused: Bill Balaskas's video work *Parthenon Rising (II)* looks at the touristification of the landmark, while Eva Stefani's film *Acropolis* explores the significance of the national symbol of Greece in creating a sense of national identity and engendering collective memory.

INTRODUCTORY KEYNOTE

SEBASTIAN CONRAD

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Conrad holds the Chair of Modern History at Freie Universität Berlin. He joined the faculty in 2010 after teaching for several years at the European University Institute in Florence. He was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study (Wissenschaftskolleg) in Berlin, a visiting professor at École des Hautes Études in Paris, a visiting scholar at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and at the New School, New York. Conrad is the director of the MA "Global History," a joint-degree programme at Free University and Humboldt University, Berlin. Among his recent publications are *Die Königin. Nofretetes globale Karriere* (Berlin, 2024); *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016); *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge, 2012).

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

CHRISTOS CHRISSOPOULOS

Christos Chrissopoulos (Athens, 1968) works in various genres of literature (prose, essays, chronicles), literary theory, and photography. He has published 19 books. He has been awarded the Academy of Athens Prize (2008), the Balkanika International Prize (2015), and the French Prix Ravachol (2013), and Prix Laure Bataillon (2014) prizes. In 2015, the French Republic awarded him the title of Knight of Arts and Letters. He is a member of the European Cultural Parliament (ECP), the Society of Authors, and an Iowa Fellow of the International Writers Program (IWP) (2007). He founded and directs the cultural organisation KAIROS POLITISMOU. He has given lectures and participated in dozens of festivals in Europe and the USA, and has edited collective publications and publishing series in Greece and abroad. His books have been translated into many languages. His photographic work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in Greece and France. He teaches Creative Writing in combination with Narrative Psychotherapy.

SEBASTIAN CONRAD

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"INTRODUCTORY KEYNOTE"

GOLDA HA-EIROS

Golda Ha-Eiros is a committed museum curator at the National Museum of Namibia (NMN), where she manages the ethnology collection and focuses on community research and decolonisation efforts. Her academic background in visual culture, postcolonial studies, and heritage conservation, demonstrates her commitment to addressing the legacies of colonialism in how cultural objects from Namibia are displayed and interpreted. Throughout her career, she has worked closely with various Namibian communities, to get a better understanding of their history and the importance of cultural objects from the perspective of the people associated with them.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

IRA KALIAMPETOS

Ira Kaliampetsos is a practicing lawyer and founder of the Hellenic Society for Law and Archaeology (www.law-archaeology.gr), a non-profit organisation established in 2006 that serves as a platform for all aspects of antiquities law. She earned her law degree from Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany, and pursued postgraduate studies in "Art and Law" at Karl-Franzens-University in Graz, Austria. Her professional experience as a practicing lawyer includes working for the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Embassy in Athens, and the European Union Delegation to Turkey. She is a regular lecturer on Greek antiquities law at Sigmund Freud University in Vienna, Austria, and has organised various research projects and conferences on the subject. In 2019, she served as a member of the Expert Committee of the Greek Ministry of Culture for the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION MODERATION

SOPHIA HANDAKA

Dr. Sophia Handaka serves as Curator of World Cultures at the Benaki Museum, Athens, and is Co-Founder and Host of the CoMuseum International Conference. In both capacities, she is dedicated to advancing collaborative practices and community empowerment, while advocating for the role of museums and culture as key drivers of sustainable development. She holds a DPhil in Social Anthropology from the University of Oxford, with a specialisation in museums and material culture, and has over twenty-five years of professional engagement in the fields of culture, heritage, and creativity. Her work encompasses a wide range of activities, including exhibitions, scholarly publications, public programmes, research and development projects, cultural partnerships, consultancy, and teaching. Handaka is Co-Founder of KOAEKTIVA, a non-profit organization for social innovation and culture; a member of the Bosch Alumni Network and of Culture for Change, and a 2019 fellow of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. In 2023, she contributed to a major research initiative commissioned by the think-tank diaNEOsis on the value of culture, co-authoring a collective study and extensive policy recommendations for the empowerment of Greece's Cultural and Creative Sector (*Απελευθερώνοντας τις δυνάμεις του πολιτισμού. Προτάσεις πολιτικής*). Her most recent curatorial project, *Africa Amongst Us** (Benaki Museum / Pireos 138, February-May 2025), was a community-based exhibition engaging more than forty members of the Greek Afro-diaspora – including artists, students, and activists. The project was appraised for its democratic procedures and innovative participatory methodology.

HERITAGE
IN FOCUS

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN
GOETHE-INSTITUT ATHEN
AND THE HUMBOLDT FORUM

GOETHE-INSTITUT ATHEN
06.11.2025

FREE ADMISSION

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL HERITAGE

19:00

SCREENINGS

PARTHENON RISING (II)
BILL BALASKAS, 2011, 2'45''

ACROPOLIS
EVA STEFANI, 2001, 25'
Q&A: EVA STEFANI

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE DIRECTOR
LANGUAGE: GREEK, WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

20:00

INTRODUCTORY
KEYNOTE

SEBASTIAN CONRAD

ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION

**CHRISTOS CHRISSOPOULOS, SEBASTIAN CONRAD,
GOLDA HA-EIROS, IRA KALIAMPETSOS**
MODERATION: SOPHIA HANDAKA

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH, WITH SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION INTO GREEK

THE AUDIOVISUAL WORKS

PARTHENON RISING (II)

BILL BALASKAS
2011
2'45"

Two centuries ago, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley claimed, on the eve of the Greek Revolution: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece." In the aftermath of the Eurozone debt crisis, however, the international climate became very different. As European politicians and media suggested that Greece should sell some of its most famous islands, or even, the Parthenon to pay back its debts, it became obvious that the nature of the economic crisis had come to question (even just nominally) fundamental elements of the Western world's cultural identity. It is this deeper cultural crisis that underpins *Parthenon Rising*.

The work functions as a visual "crescendo," which moves from total darkness and "perplexity" to total light and "clarity." The original footage, edited in the video, was filmed on the only night of the year that the Acropolis is open to the public. Thousands of locals and tourists climb the ancient hill on this occasion to capture the relics' images with their cameras. As all lights are off, all monuments, including the Parthenon, can be clearly seen only when the flashlights of the cameras momentarily illuminate them. It is a spectacle that illuminates an aspect of the monument significantly different from that of a familiar icon.

ACROPOLIS

EVA STEFANI
2001
25'

Eva Stefani's *Acropolis* is a poetic, contemplative film that explores the significance of Greece's national symbol – the Acropolis – in shaping of national identity and collective memory. Through a feminist lens, the work draws a parallel between the country's most emblematic monument – the Parthenon – and the female body, inviting us to reconsider established notions of Greekness and femininity, while challenging the ideologies that surround national symbols.

By weaving together Super 8 found footage with heterogeneous archival material – historical shots of state ceremonies and official celebrations at the foothills of the sacred rock, worn-out images from 1960s pornographic films, as well as newsreels, medical films, field recordings, radio clips, bourgeois melodies, and even a recording of the national anthem –

along with a confessional first-person voice-over, Stefani creates a subversive collage that illuminates how History, identity, and desire are intertwined in the way we see and remember. At the same time, it reveals how both the temple and the female body have been exploited for political, economic, and propagandistic purposes. Stefani intervenes directly in the film itself – colouring it, burning it, cutting it – perhaps to emphasise the material decay and fragile nature of memory, as well as the bodily traces of time.

Acropolis

A woman's body
Round
That is cut
Patched
Sewn
Constantly
A round breast
That is marked
With a compass
That opens
Is built
Is walked upon
A woman upside down
Round
Round
Round
Breast
Girl
Licking
The temple of saliva
I have a word in my mouth that won't come out
Life in the brothel
Every day in the brothel
Cicadas
Footsteps
Clamor
Mute
Dressed in white
Stuck in geometry
I struggle to break free
Megaphones and shoes
Unknown faces and languages
Interpreters
Officials
Faces
They carve into my history
My buttocks are sweating
I need to pee
If I were a body, would I have a voice?

THE ARTISTS

BILL BALASKAS

Bill Balaskas is an artist, theorist, and educator based in London. Originally trained as an economist in Greece, he went on to study art in the United Kingdom. Informed by this interdisciplinary background, his practice interrogates socioeconomic and political systems through the lens of contemporary utopias and dystopias. His works have been exhibited internationally, including at MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; BOZAR, Brussels; EMST National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid; Le CENTQUATRE, Paris; Transmediale, Berlin; John Hansard Gallery, Southampton; TENT, Rotterdam; Les Abattoirs, Toulouse; Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh; ARTIUM, Vitoria-Gasteiz; Whitstable Biennale; Almeida Garret Galeria Municipal do Porto; and the British Film Institute, London. Between 2012 and 2020, Balaskas was Editor of the *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* (MIT Press), and in 2020 he edited "Architectures of Education" on e-flux Architecture. In addition, his essays and articles have been published in *the Journal of Visual Culture*, *Third Text*, *OnCurating*, *Revista Arta*, *Times Higher Education*, and *Espace Art Actuel*, among others. His edited books include *Fabricating Publics: The Dissemination of Culture in the Post-truth Era* (Open Humanities Press, 2021), and *Institution as Praxis: New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research* (Sternberg Press, 2020). He is Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange at the School of Arts of Kingston University, where he founded the Centre for Practice Research in the Arts (CePRA) in 2022. He is represented by Kalfayan Galleries, Athens-Thessaloniki.

EVA STEFANI

Eva Stefani was born in the USA and lives in Athens. She studied at the Political Science Department of Athens Law School and then completed postgraduate studies in Film Theory and Anthropology at NYU, and film studies with a focus on documentary at the VARAN School in France and the National Film & TV School in the UK. Her doctoral thesis is on representations of Greece in ethnographic cinema (Panteion University, 1997). Stefani has directed over 30 films exploring a range of subject matter and genres from the ethnographic to the experimental. Notable titles include *Letters from the Albatross* (1996), *Housemates* (1999), *Acropolis* (2001), *The Box* (2004), *Athinai* (2007), *What Time is It?* (2007), *Bathers* (2008), *Manuscript* (2017), *Days and Nights with Dimitra K.* (2021). Her films have been screened in numerous international film festivals (Oberhausen, Cinéma du Réel, Fipresci, etc.) and have earned international accolades. Film festivals such as the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen and L'Europe autour de l'Europe (FEAE), as well as academic institutions such as New York University and Columbia University, have organised retrospectives of her work. Since 2000, she has participated in international visual art exhibitions, including documenta 14. In 2019, she represented Greece at the 58th Venice Biennale, with Zafos Xagoraris and Panos Charalambous. A professor of film studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Faculty of Media and Communication Studies), her latest film is *Bull's Heart*, a documentary about the celebrated Greek director, choreographer, visual artist and performer Dimitris Papaioannou.

THE HUMBOLDT FORUM

The Humboldt Forum brings together under one roof cultural world heritage, art and culture, advanced international research, and urban and architectural history. A critical examination of the eventful history of the site and the ethnological collection forms the basis for a programme of exhibitions, performances, concerts, readings, and workshops that crosses genres and involves international experts, creative artists, and culture professionals.

The Humboldt Forum is jointly organised by the Humboldt Forum Foundation (Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss), the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz) – with the Ethnological Museum and the Asian Art Museum, which form part of the National Museums in Berlin – the Stadtmuseum Berlin, and the Humboldt University in Berlin; its programme is designed in cooperation, on an equal basis, with Berlin's communities and partners around the world.

THE *HERITAGE IN FOCUS*
EVENT SERIES
IS A COLLABORATION
BETWEEN GOETHE-INSTITUT
AND THE HUMBOLDT FORUM



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**GOETHE-INSTITUT ATHEN
14-16 OMIROU ST., 10672 ATHENS**

