

CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgments vi

INTRODUCTION

**The Encyclopedic Museum: A Catchphrase,
a Concept, a History** 1

Donatien Grau

1

Origins and Practice of Encyclopedic Museums 16

- 1 Marc Fumaroli 17
- 2 Partha Chatterjee 19
- 3 Krzysztof Pomian 26
- 4 Mikhail Piotrovsky 34
- 5 Philippe de Montebello 39
- 6 Grayson Perry 46
- 7 Thomas Campbell 50
- 8 Kaywin Feldman 59
- 9 Mari Carmen Ramírez 68

2

Encyclopedic Museums around the Globe 75

- 10 Irina Bokova 76
- 11 Fiammetta Rocco 82
- 12 Zaki Nusseibeh 91
- 13 Michael Govan 101
- 14 Max Hollein 110
- 15 Sabyasachi Mukherjee 117
- 16 Henri Loyrette 126
- 17 George Abungu 134
- 18 Hamady Bocoum 140
- 19 Amit Sood 148

3

Methodologies and Potentials of the Encyclopedic Museum 156

- 20 James Cuno 157
- 21 Jean Nouvel 163
- 22 Bénédicte Savoy 169
- 23 Kavita Singh 178
- 24 Kwame Anthony Appiah 185
- 25 Homi K. Bhabha 196
- 26 Camille Henrot 204
- 27 Massimiliano Gioni 212
- 28 Bachir Souleymane Diagne 220

AFTERWORD

Unsettled Thoughts for a Changing Global Encyclopedia 230

Mary E. Miller

Biographical Note on the Editor 242

Index 243

PREFACE AND
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every book is a journey. This has definitely been one. From my initial conversation on the top of the hill with former Getty Research Institute director Thomas Gaehtgens, to the times of these many conversations, six years have lapsed. They have been occupied by writing and by interviews in person and on the phone, in many places across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It has been a marvelous experience and a privilege to gather the views of such distinguished thinkers and practitioners. From a personal standpoint, what it has brought me is invaluable.

This journey began six years ago, when Thomas Gaehtgens sent me on a mission: to question and assess the meaning of the encyclopedic museum. Its concept, its realities were at stake. At that point, James Cuno's book *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) was only a few years old, and the encyclopedic museum had become a motto of sorts. Over the course of the realization of this book, the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened and the topic of restitutions returned to the center of the discussion. The conversations in this book, which have been edited all the way to the present, gather words by specialists whose institutions and positions have sometimes changed in the span of these years. Yet, they present viewpoints that are still so relevant for today.

At this point, seeing the book realized, and the product of my travels and conversations materialized, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the participants who have given their time addressing a theme they knew to be of the utmost relevance for our worlds: the world of museums, the

world of ideas, the world of culture, our human world. I would like to thank Thomas Gaehtgens, who truly initiated this process, and Mary Miller, who embraced it at the GRI, as well as Andrew Perchuk, Gail Feigenbaum, and Michele Ciaccio, who have supported it and followed it all the way. Conversations with many colleagues have also proven of great importance, chief among them Laurence des Cars and Sébastien Allard. Peter Behrman de Sinéty has been an important contributor in making these conversations into a text. Mary Christian made this text into a book.

This book is, in many ways, a collective and collaborative endeavor. It would not have been possible without the work of scholars, thinkers, and museum staffers who every day serve the public and provide new, more complete ways of experiencing our world. It is dedicated to all of them.

Donatien Grau

Origins and Practice of Encyclopedic Museums

1

1

Marc Fumaroli

Professor emeritus, Collège de France

Donatien Grau: What's your position on the question of the encyclopedic museum?

Marc Fumaroli: I confess I don't very much like taking a "position" in public or even in private—particularly in this case, as the concept of the encyclopedic museum strikes me as neither sensible nor timely. The most ambitious museums, the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, have a hard enough time managing their visitor flows and adding to their collections, which cover a vast area (though not exhaustive, either geographically or historically) to want to grow further. Moreover, how would they find room for all the intellectual disciplines—literature, the arts, the sciences, technology? Fortunately, a mammoth "encyclopedic" museum is neither conceivable nor, above all, desirable. Imagine the Louvre supplemented by the Musée des Arts et Métiers, the Musée du Jardin des Plantes, the Planétarium, and so on. Imagine the Met in New York joining forces in a Central Park cleared of its trees with the Smithsonian Institution, Washington's Library of Congress, and other jewels of American museography.

The gap between the imaginary encyclopedic museum and the major museums with which we are familiar, which are generalist in only a very relative sense, was once filled by the universal expositions, which were ephemeral (in other words, the opposite of the museum), and emphasized the rise of Atlantic civilization between 1850 and 1937, each one representing the last word in modern progress everywhere and of every kind. Charles Baudelaire was not above publishing a review of the Paris exhibition of

Methodologies
and Potentials
of the
Encyclopedic
Museum

3

20

James Cuno

President and CEO, The J. Paul Getty Trust

Donatien Grau: Why is it that the encyclopedic museum matters today? Should we be content with the way it is, or should we try to improve it, update it?

James Cuno: Encyclopedic museums collect, preserve, exhibit, and research representative examples of the world's many cultures. Like encyclopedias themselves, they present evidence about the world and encourage investigation and interpretations. They encourage curiosity about the world. In this respect, encyclopedic museums should be encouraged where they don't exist today. The more encyclopedic museums there are, the more distributed—and safer—the world's cultural heritage will be.

As museums, encyclopedic museums serve a broad, general public. Unlike universities, they don't examine their visitors before they allow them entry and they don't test them when they leave. Given that, by definition, encyclopedic museum collections comprise examples of cultural difference, visitors to such museums confront cultural differences in their galleries and have their view of the world enlarged and enhanced in the process. Of course we acknowledge that regional distinctions do exist and that artists from the same region of the world often make things similarly and make things that look similar. But that's a matter of habit and convention rather than of nature or national spirit. Artists, like the rest of us, are victims of the limitations of their experiences. And encyclopedic museums argue against an essentialist view of culture.

Unsettled Thoughts for a Changing Global Encyclopedia

Mary E. Miller

Director, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

If you live in Los Angeles in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, you find plenty to think about with respect to the subject of this book, the encyclopedic museum. Our local exemplar, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), has been devoted to the encyclopedia for most of its existence, beginning with its roots in Exposition Park as the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art (LAMHSA) in 1913. LAMHSA's acquisition in 1950 of the collection of William Randolph Hearst, for example, included works from around the world, long before the doors opened to the William Pereira signature building of LACMA on Wilshire Boulevard, in 1965. There were both aficionados and collectors of Pre-Hispanic art in Southern California from the late 1930s onward, my own field of study, and today the two museums both host significant collections. Once established, LACMA grew its own collections in Pre-Hispanic, starting with major donations from Phil Berg in 1968, with exhibitions of the collections of Proctor Stafford following in 1970 and of Berg in 1971, establishing a major presence for the Arts of the Ancient Americas.¹

In this, LACMA beat America's best-known encyclopedic museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to the punch. Long dedicated to the arts of antiquity, broadly described across the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the arts of Asia, and the European and American traditions in painting and sculpture, the Met absorbed the contents of the Museum of Primitive Art in New York City to open the Rockefeller Wing in 1982, suddenly promoting the arts of Oceania, Africa, and the ancient Americas to the fore, and

re-animating the collection purchased from Louis Petich in 1900, which had spent most of the twentieth century out of sight, some pieces on view across Central Park, at the American Museum of Natural History, and others at the Brooklyn Museum, another encyclopedic collection.² Of course no museum can be truly encyclopedic: it is outside the realm of possibility to collect all art traditions of all times, and, simultaneously, to stay atop current traditions the way that both the Met and LACMA attempt to do. The two coastal anchors of the American museum, LACMA and the Met, are the two most encyclopedic of the nation's museums.

So let's step back a bit and sketch a quick, subjective picture, for which exceptions can be identified along every dimension. The museum, of course, is a particular artifact of the Enlightenment, and a descendent of the European—generally French, German, Dutch, and British—collections formed in the years after discovery of a world beyond Europe, in which the curiosities, from the shell or fossil or bone of natural history to exotic or ancient, usually three-dimensional, artifact of antiquity were grouped behind glass in a cabinet or gathered together in a room for private viewing; in some cases this is the ancestor to the natural history museum, sites for discovery about the planet, its context, and all of its occupants, from plants to humans. The market for paintings and other bourgeois accoutrements took off in Holland in the seventeenth century; elsewhere, paintings were commissioned by elites more than collected after the fact until the eighteenth century. Public collections and exhibitions of painting and sculpture, national academies, and a wealthy bourgeoisie all contributed to the rise of the art museum, theoretically open to some swath of the public. The truly encyclopedic museum, in which finely executed works invested with meaning, and executed anywhere and ideally everywhere in the world, and including the country where that museum exists, emerged in the twentieth century. The peoples of the world studied primarily through anthropology, rather than history—and in this one hears the echoes of nineteenth-century anthropology itself, the civilized, savage, and barbarian, the Cold War language of the twentieth century, in First, Second, and Third World—were the last to have their works gain entry to the encyclopedia. After 1982, at the Met, the encyclopedia still lacked some entries, especially for Latin America after 1534, but the concept was in full force.

For many museums in the United States and Canada, the move to the encyclopedia came to the fore in the mid-twentieth century, and particularly with the inclusion of African, Oceanic, and ancient American art. This is true for the Art Institute of Chicago; the de Young Museum in San Francisco;