



a.a. 2025-2026

Seminario Interclasse

“Difficult Heritage and Colonial Legacies: Reinterpreting the Former Colonial Museum Collections”

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Abstract

This seminar offers a critical reflection on the ongoing reinterpretation of the collections of the former Colonial Museum, now part of the Museum of Civilizations, highlighting the historical, political, and epistemological tensions that shape them. Starting from a reconstruction of the history of the Colonial Museum—caught between its propagandistic function and the subsequent oblivion following its closure—the presentation will explore the research trajectory, network-building, and collaborative practices initiated in 2017, when the collections were transferred to the museum.

Particular attention will be given to the exhibition project Museum of Opacities, conceived as a dynamic and processual platform, now in its second chapter. The project aims to critically re-signify the collections through dialogue with diasporic communities, researchers, artists, creative collectives, and activists. In this framework, the museum is envisioned as a space of negotiation and encounter, capable of hosting plural narratives and often marginalized perspectives.

The seminar will address key cross-cutting questions in contemporary museological debate: how can we engage today with collections marked by violence, dispossession, and coloniality? What methodologies can be developed to work with difficult and



contested heritage? How can institutions responsibly and ethically approach the restitution of objects taken during colonial occupations?

Through these questions, the seminar situates itself within the broader process of institutional transformation initiated by the Museum of Civilizations in 2022, foregrounding practices, challenges, and future directions for a museum committed to rethinking its role in light of colonial legacies and present-day urgencies.

Lecture preparatorie

G. Delpino – R.A. Di Lella, *Opening, Sharing and Collaborating. An ongoing process on the Colonial Collections of the Museo delle Civiltà*, Roma, “MUSEA. Journal for Museology, Museum Practice and Audience” 2 (2024), S. 141–158.

A. Mbembe, *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*, in: *Africa Is a Country*, n.d., 2015.

B. Falcucci, *A repository of colonial intervisuality and memory: the Colonial Museum in Rome. Un dépôt d'intervisualité et de mémoire coloniales: le Musée colonial à Rome*, *Revue d'histoire culturelle*, 6 | 2023.

Tutte le lecture preparatorie sono condivise nel canale Teams della Scuola di Studi Superiori “Giacomo Leopardi”.

Bibliografia essenziale

Delpino, Gaia - Di Lella, Rosa Anna, *Opening, Sharing and Collaborating. An ongoing process on the Colonial Collections of the Museo delle Civiltà*, Roma, “MUSEA. Journal for Museology, Museum Practice and Audience” 2 (2024), S. 141–158.

Falcucci, Beatrice, *L'impero nei musei. Storie di collezioni coloniali italiane*, Pisa 2025.

Hicks, Dan, *The British Museums: the Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, London 2020.

Modest, Wayne et al. (eds.), *Matters of Belonging. Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*, Leiden 2019 (<https://www.sidestone.com/openaccess/9789088907777.pdf>).