

Museums and Mental health: Mapping connections in Europe

Monday 1st December 2025

Online Symposium, Zoom

[Book your free tickets – Museums and Mental Health: Mapping Connections in Europe](#)

Organised by Dr Nuala Morse (University of Leicester) and Dr Margareta von Oswald (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Mental health is increasingly recognised as a global priority. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2030, mental health conditions will be the leading cause of mortality and morbidity worldwide. Recent discussions highlight the limitations of conventional treatments—psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy—and emphasise the importance of addressing broader social determinants of health.

Museums, galleries, and heritage institutions are increasingly positioning themselves as vital community resources that can contribute to mental wellbeing and help reduce health inequalities. This online symposium aims to deepen understanding of how cultural institutions across Europe are engaging with mental health through innovative practices and partnerships.

The event will feature case studies from Germany, the UK, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, and France, exploring the diverse social, cultural, and policy contexts that shape this work. Through shared learning, the symposium seeks to strengthen the role of museums and galleries in promoting mental health.

The day-long programme will be structured around three thematic sessions. Each will include short presentations from researchers and practitioners, followed by a respondent-led discussion and audience Q&A. All presentations will be delivered in English, with opportunities for participants to ask questions in their preferred language.

Programme

Museums and the Mental Health Policy Landscape: 10h00-11h45 BST

What is driving museum work on mental health? What institutions and actors are shaping this work? How are culture and mental health understood, organised and either separated or integrated in different European policy context? What cases of studies are available for evaluation?

Speakers:

- Nils Fietje – BCI Unit, WHO Regional Office for Europe and Jameel Arts & Health Lab
Title: 'Making culture and health policy'

The evidence for how artistic and cultural engagement can support mental and physical health and well-being has been mounting over the last two decades. In this talk, Nils Fietje will explore the WHO's role in converting this evidence into cross-sectoral policy and practice. The talk will end with a call to action to support a new policy brief on museums and health.

- Dr Katerina Mavromichali – Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Museums Exhibitions and Educational Programmes, Athens, Greece

Title: 'From Cultural Assets to Public Health Drivers: Developing the Arts & Health Policy Bridge in Greece'

This presentation examines the policy framework required for systemic Creative Health integration, drawing on Greek Ministry of Culture initiatives within the broader European and international context. Empirical evidence from Art-on-Prescription in Greece demonstrates significant reductions in anxiety and depression scores, revealing how creative engagement with cultural heritage operates through distinct psychosocial pathways to produce measurable health improvements. The discussion will detail how heritage collections prompt neuroplastic change by engaging the Default Mode Network through sensory-motor integration, symbolic expression, and collective meaning-making. These findings validate art as a vital form of care, supporting policy strategies that connect Culture, Health, and Education goals to achieve societal flourishing. Cultural institutions are uniquely positioned to activate wellbeing and forge pathways for change across complex systems, leveraging their role to fundamentally redefine the potential of museums in fostering long-term transformation, resilience, and health

- Prof Dr Ulrike Kluge –Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Tbc

- Jasmine Lebert – 3bisf Centre d'arts contemporains, Aix en Provence, France

Title: "Art, Care, Citizenship: a network to engage crossed policies between art and health"

Since the 2020 pandemic, there has been a growing sense of collective responsibility for mental health issues, reinforcing the approach of shared caregiving. Based on a concept of care that involves listening to users' voices and experiences, professional peer support is gradually making its way into hospitals in France. It helps to remove barriers to care pathways

and integration through social ties, and gives people with mental health issues back control over their lives, promoting full citizenship in whatever form the individual chooses. The experience of 3 bis f shows that places of artistic creation can also be conceived as places of care. The Art, Care, Citizenship network initiated by 3 bis f advocates for the intertwining of art and care spaces in a multifunctional and interconnected way.

Respondent:

Prof Dr Milena Bister, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Museums, Mental health and inclusion/exclusion: 13h00-14h45 BST

What barriers to access and engagement persist for individuals living with long-term mental health conditions? How can museums confront exclusive practices and use curatorial and participatory approaches to challenge stigma?

Speakers:

- Isabel Nottaris – Office de coopération et d'information muséales (OCIM), Université de Bourgogne, France

Title : 'La vulnérabilité en partage : le musée ou la clinique du commun' (in French)

Le musée est la quintessence possible d'un commun qualitatif. Dans un monde contemporain marqué par la désorientation, la santé se pense désormais à l'échelle du vivant. La notion de soin est questionnée au cœur des institutions muséales, non pas le soin comme une compassion de circonstance, mais comme structure constitutive de l'humanité. Le musée est traversé par la vulnérabilité : celle des objets qu'il préserve et des mémoires qu'il porte. Il s'agit de défendre l'idée que cette vulnérabilité n'est pas un déficit, mais qu'elle dit quelque chose du capacitaire de l'humanité. Le musée se conçoit alors comme un laboratoire de réparation du commun, où se réinvente la relation entre savoir, culture et humanité et à ce titre devient un lieu déterminant pour la santé démocratique.

- Bart Marius – Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, Belgium

Title: 'Psycho Jazz – Improvisation and Inclusion'

Museum Dr. Guislain collaborates since a couple of years with the artist collective Lucinda Ra to foster radical inclusivity and amplify the voices of people with lived experience of mental health challenges. Acknowledging the weight of our historical site, we extend our programming beyond institutional walls, creating shared spaces for dialogue and creativity. Our PsychoJazz-festival — a participatory event co-developed with all hospital departments, inspired by the 1970s Schizo-Culture Congress — merges art, music, and mental health activism to reimagine care as a cultural practice and to challenge the stigma surrounding mental vulnerability.

- Joan Seguí – l'ETNO, Museu Valencià d'Etnologia, Spain

Title: 'Well being at l'ETNO (Valencian Museum of Ethnology)'

As a museum of popular culture, L'ETNO, manages collections that easily accessible to anyone. Departing from this point, the museum has been developing several lines of work with the objective of helping different sectors of our society to achieve better well-being"

- Cécile Dumoulin – Musée des civilisations de L'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Mucem), Marseille, France

Title : 'Un musée de société, espace pour un « mieux-être » individuel et collectif ?' (in French)

Tous les musées sont des objets politiques, mais un musée de société contemporaine participe plus encore à la vie de la cité. Ainsi le Mucem, par les voix et identités multiples qu'il convoque, multiplie-t-il les expériences pour favoriser un « mieux-être » individuel et collectif : temps fort « Bien dans ma tête », microstructure éducative pour des jeunes présentant un refus scolaire anxieux, espace snoezelen ou formation aux premiers secours en santé mentale pour ses personnels.

Respondents :

Dr Nassim Mehran, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Charité
Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany

Echo Wichera, artist, Berlin, Germany

Museums and care work: 15h00-16h45 BST

What are the existing frameworks of practice and the current training available for museums and mental health work? What are the potential risks and harms associated with this work?

Speakers:

- Helen Wakely and Madeleine Kennedy – Wellcome Collection, UK

Title: 'From dignity and safety to a radical imagining of mental health'

- Injonge Karangwa – Faculty of Arts, KU Leuven, Belgium

Title: "Reprendre" for Cultural Continuity: From Extractive Museums to Places of Care'

This talk will focus on cultural continuity (a determinant of health) and the methodologies to investigate museum-artists collaborations in the cases of African artists accessing museum collections with colonial legacies.

- Prof Dr Manon Perry – Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Art and Culture, History, Antiquity, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands

tbc

- Dr Nathalie Bondil – Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France

Title: "There is no health without mental health » - Strategies for mental health in French museums

"There is no health without mental health," says the World Health Organization. However, people's mental health, especially for young people, has deteriorated since 2018,

both in France and internationally. In this year of national French mobilization, talking about mental health and raising awareness of this subject, which is still widely considered taboo, is a priority, because mental health is everyone's business. What can art and museums do? A scope about various strategies to discuss the role of art, museum and creativity in promoting mental health for all and destigmatizing mental disorders.

Respondent:

Christine Gerbich, Museum of Utopia and Everyday Life, Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany

Speaker and respondent biographies

Milena D. Bister (she/her) is substitute professor of environmental anthropology and science and technology studies at the [Institute of European Ethnology](#), curator of the [Laboratory: Anthropology of Environment | Human Relations \(LAEHR\)](#), and co-director of the [Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human-Environment Systems \(IRI THESys\)](#), all situated at Humboldt/Universität zu Berlin. Her research focuses on the linkages between more than human health, anthropogenic climate change, and urban living.

An internationally museologist and art historian, **Nathalie Bondil** has been Museum and Exhibitions director at the Arab World Institute (IMA) in Paris since 2021. French and Canadian, as Montreal Museum of Fine Arts director (2007–2020). In educational action and health research, she is recognized for a more inclusive museum like the first "medical museum prescription" in 2018. She teaches museotherapy as "sage" for the Université de Montréal, the École du Louvre and the Institut national du patrimoine, Paris. Vice-Chair of the Canada Council for the Arts (2014–2021), member of ICOM-France Board of Directors, she is recipient of various awards and doctorates.

After overseeing visitor policy at the Musée du Quai Branly when it opened in 2006, **Cécile Dumoulin** has been head of the cultural development and visitor department at the Mucem for the past fifteen years.

Nils Fietje is a Technical Officer focusing on Culture and Health within the Behavioural and Cultural Insights (BCI) Unit at the WHO Regional Office for Europe. With a background in English literature and the cultural history of medicine, he explores how cultural contexts influence health and well-being. Over the past five years, Nils has been leading the work on arts and health within WHO Europe.

Christine Gerbich is a sociologist and received her doctorate in museum anthropology from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research focuses on the influence of participatory practices on the futurabilities of museums and the question of how they can become mindful institutions. Since October 2025, she has been director of the Museum of Utopia and Everyday Life in Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany. Previously, she was co-director of the cross-departmental division of education, outreach, and society at the Dresden State Art Collections.

Injonge Karangwa is a global health professional and cultural practitioner with over a decade of experience designing and leading interdisciplinary programs across Sub-Saharan Africa and, more recently, in Europe. She holds a Master's in Global Health Delivery from the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) in Rwanda, where she founded the Hamwe Festival in 2019 to bridge the health sector and the arts. Her initiatives have included film and podcast productions as well as collaborations with museums. In 2024, she began a PhD at KU Leuven exploring the relationships between well-being and African artists' access to colonial collections. She is also a member of TheMuseumsLab academic committee and has supported the curatorial team for KU Leuven's 600th anniversary exhibition *The Pursuit of Knowledge*.

Madeleine Kennedy is a curator at Wellcome Collection, interested in the potential of anti-ableism to radically reimagine what exhibitions can be and for whom. Her experience varies from leadership roles such as Keeper of Art at the Hatton Gallery to project-based engagements focused on accessibility, strategic change and peer-to-peer support. She has curated over twenty exhibitions, formerly running the commissioning programme at the Laing and supporting curatorial teams at Tate Britain and Firstsite. She sits on the board of the Art

Fund and the British Council's Advisory Panel for Venice Biennale 2026. She is an alumna of Clore Leadership's disabled-led Inclusive Cultures programme.

Prof Dr **Ulrike Kluge** –Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin

After studying art history and museology at the École du Louvre in Paris, history and archaeology at La Sorbonne Paris IV university, and then cultural management, **Jasmine Lebert** began working in performing arts in 2003. Working alongside artists, she developed an open-minded approach to artistic creation, bringing together different creative and distribution networks (theater, contemporary dance, art in public space, visual arts...). Since 2020, Jasmine Lebert has been directing 3 bis f, a contemporary arts center of national interest (CACIN) and residence for visual and performing artists at the Montperrin Psychiatric Hospital in Aix-en-Provence. As part of a mixed art and healthcare team, she works on the 3 bis f project, a unique place of memory, art, and hospitality.

Bart Marius is Artistic Director at Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent, Belgium. For many years, he has curated exhibitions both within the museum and in external spaces, driven by a strong belief in the long-term impact of art. His work focuses on connecting culture, the arts, and heritage with care and wellbeing, fostering inclusive and meaningful encounters.

Dr. **Katerina Mavromichali** is an Archaeologist–Museologist and cultural mediator at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Her work focuses on driving systemic transformation and advancing sustainable development through cross-sector partnerships in policy and operational multistakeholder contexts. She specializes in bridging cultural heritage preservation and mental health interventions and advocates for integrating creative practices as vital, complementary tools in mental health policy to foster social thriving. Holding art therapy training by the British Association of Art Therapists, she launched *Outreach*, the first creative health programme in Thessaloniki in 2018 for the clinical and museum sectors. She is a research team member for the *Art-on-Prescription* initiative in Greece and serves as the Secretary General of the European Federation of Art Therapy.

Dr. phil. **Nassim Mehran** is trained as an architect and urban sociologist. She gained her doctoral degree at Humboldt University in urban sociology. Currently, she is a postdoctoral researcher at Charité–Universitätsmedizin Berlin. Committed to inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration, she critically engages with the ethical and methodological complexities of researching the social ecology of (mental) health and care in urban contexts. Her work focuses on vulnerabilities and inequalities as they are shaped by intersecting processes such as urban infrastructures and structures, environmental breakdown, and migration, with a geographical focus on Germany (Berlin) and the Middle East (in particular Iran).

Dr **Nuala Morse** is an Associate Professor in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, UK. Her research examines the 'care work' of museum professionals, the ethics of care in museum practice, and the role of museums and galleries in public health. This includes exploring the links between cultural participation, health, well-being and recovery, with a focus on stroke, mental health and dementia. Another strand of research is focused on workforce development and organisational change in the museum sector. She is the author of *The Museum as a Space of Social Care* (Routledge, 2021), and a Non-Executive Director of [the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#).

Isabel Nottaris est muséologue, elle dirige l'Office de coopération et d'information muséal (Ocim). Formée à l'EHESS et titulaire d'un master en géopolitique (Paris VIII), elle a exercé des responsabilités à Paris, Beyrouth, Bruxelles, Cayenne et Toulouse. Convaincue du rôle

émancipateur des musées, elle défend leur contribution à la citoyenneté, offrant à chacun la possibilité de devenir acteur d'autres possibles.

Joan Seguí is the current director of L'ETNO, the Valencian Museum of Ethnology. He has worked in the museum sector most of his professional life. He was a member of the ICOM Spanish committee between 2014 and 2018, and he is currently a judge for the EMYA awards.

Dr **Margareta von Oswald** is an anthropologist (PhD Paris, EHESS/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and works at the interface of academia, collections, and society, currently at the new Centre for Advanced Study *inherit. heritage in transformation* at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and as an associate researcher at the Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin. In her research and curatorial practice, she deals with negotiation processes around difficult heritage and the question of how museums can become truly democratic places. She curated exhibitions and published widely on these questions. In 2023, together with an international collective of researchers and heritage professionals, she initiated the programme [Académie des Traces](#), which opens up spaces for dialogue on colonial collections between the European and African continents.

Helen Wakely is Inclusive Collections Adviser at Wellcome Collection. She started her career as an archivist in local authority and specialist archives including Wellcome Library. In 2018 she became a founder member of the Wellcome Collection Access, Diversity and Inclusion team supporting colleagues to embed equity, access, diversity and inclusion across all work relating to collections. Her aim is to ensure that the collections at Wellcome Collection contribute actively to a more equitable future for people most affected by health inequalities.

Echo Wichera [PL] (they/them) is a trans and non-binary artist, researcher, and activist based in Berlin. Working at the intersection of sound, performance, and critical care politics, their practice explores how lives shaped by psychiatric and social violence can be re-imagined through collective processes. Their methodology, *Sonic Resistance*, uses sound as embodied critique and repair. Echo is a member of international networks for anti-psychiatric, queer, and trans liberation, co-edits the *Gegendiagnose* anthology series, and is currently developing the course *Sonic Mad Studies* alongside their PhD research at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

This symposium is generously funded by the MSH Paris Nord / Cette manifestation bénéficie du soutien de la MSH Paris Nord dans le cadre de son appel à projets annuel.